

Sample Student Paper on Style-Analysis

The following is a sample paper by a student comparing and contrasting the writing style in two books by Rachel Carson: *Silent Spring* and *The Edge of the Sea*.

Rachel Carson as Author, Scientist, and Environmentalist

Comparative Analysis of Writing Style

Kristine Metzger

Think globally act locally. This familiar saying is used by environmentalists and grass-roots activists in an attempt to change the minds of persons who act in a nonloving manner toward the earth. Thinking globally is letting one's mind wander outside of the suburbs and into the macrocosm of the universe. Acting locally is using what one knows about the macrocosm and applying it to the suburban microcosm. Rachel Carson was concerned about the macrocosm within the microcosm. She was one of the very few writers who could connect with ordinary people in a way that convinced them to think globally and act locally.

Rachel Carson was a marine biologist and writer who was in love with nature. Her passion for the seas was intense, as was her passion for wildlife, particularly birds. It was Carson's love for birds that prompted her to write her controversial book *Silent Spring*, and her love for the waters of the earth that prompted her to write *The Edge of the Sea* and other books about marine biology. *The Edge of the Sea* came before *Silent Spring*. This paper is an attempt to compare and contrast the two books. According to

Bruce Watson, a writer for the *Smithsonian*, Rachel Carson wanted to write about pesticides before writing her sea books. Watson writes:

A month before World War II ended, a relatively unknown writer named Rachel Carson proposed an article for *Reader's Digest* about the effects of the pesticide DDT on what she called "the delicate balance of nature." The shy woman assured the editors that "it's something that really does affect everybody." They turned her down. Perhaps they felt a story about pesticides would be too depressing. Or maybe it was that DDT, then widely used in the United States, had likely saved thousands of American Marines and soldiers by killing disease-carrying insects on far-off beachheads. Carson filed the subject away and went on to write best-selling books on the wonders of the sea. A dozen years later, she decided to take up the topic again. This time would be different. (115)

What we know from this information is that the passion Carson had about pesticides came before her diagnosis of cancer.

Two events prompted Carson to write *Silent Spring*—and write it with a vengeance. The first event was the letter that her Massachusetts friend wrote to the *Boston Herald* in 1958. The letter begged officials to stop spraying poisons to combat mosquitoes, because there had been the death of seven birds right in her own yard as a result of the spraying. Carson decided that the time was now right to write her book concerning pesticides. The title of the book was tentatively *Man Against the Earth* (Watson 115). Perhaps this title seemed too apocalyptic. Whether it was changed by Carson herself or her publishers is unclear, but I would wager on the latter. The second

event that may have influenced Carson in writing her book was her diagnosis of cancer in 1960. The book was then published in 1962, two years before she died.

Carson wrote the sea books in a fairly casual tone, not overbearing or condescending, but the need to write the DDT book itched her brain. While *The Edge of the Sea* refers to the past almost constantly, *Silent Spring* sets a doomed mood as it reminds us of the destruction of future generations unless the evil pesticides are stopped. Both books are written eloquently and artistically. Regarding their style, Carol Gartner writes:

Some passages [in *Silent Spring*] may remind us of Carson's earlier books—her superb description of the formation of soil and the interaction of creatures within it, for example, recalls descriptions of the minute denizens of the sea—but the expository demands in *Silent Spring* are far greater. Carson must explain complex material to nonscientists. (113)

This style is what made Carson so successful. This style is what encouraged everyday people to take action. This style is what makes Carson an environmental hero. Her ability to relate scientific data in a way that is understandable to a general population has not been repeated as successfully by another writer.

It is true that the information in *Silent Spring* is more technical and therefore harder to read, but it may also be harder to read because of its controversial nature and its tone. The bitterness and sarcasm that sometimes drips from the pages of *Silent Spring* can not be found in *The Edge of the Sea*.) As an example, here is how she responded after quoting a trade journal that “cheerfully reported” on the fire-ant program as a lucrative money-maker for the pesticide industry:

Never has any pesticide program been so thoroughly and deservedly damned by practically everyone except the beneficiaries of this “sales bonanza.” It is an outstanding example of an ill-conceived, badly executed, and thoroughly detrimental experiment in the mass control of insects, an experiment so expensive in dollars, in destruction of animal life, and in loss of public confidence in the Agriculture Department that it is incomprehensible that any funds should still be devoted to it. (162)

The emphasis on *never* at the beginning of the passage; the words *deservedly damned*, *ill-conceived*, *badly executed*, and *thoroughly detrimental*; and the quoted “sales bonanza” in reference to the benefits accruing to the chemical companies—all together these choices of style contribute to an angry tone that achieves an angry reaction from its readers. And it was not just the chemical companies and the Department of Agriculture that were angered by the book, it was the general population as well. This is part of what made the book so rhetorically effective. Anger is evoked and action follows. Actions which angered the chemical companies even more.

But why did Carson suddenly show her anger in *Silent Spring*? Why was *Silent Spring* not written in the same manner as *The Edge of the Sea*? Carson’s sea books were not demanding and challenging, and she made them more personal with the frequent use of the pronoun *I*. Could it possibly be that she knew she was not going to live much longer, that the chemicals may have been at least partially to blame, and that she had nothing to lose by speaking out?

Carson gets us hooked into reading *Silent Spring* with the first intriguing chapter. Here she uses a fable and—with phrases like “to live in harmony,” “prosperous farms,”

“places of beauty,” and “shady pools where trout lay”—paints a picture of a utopian environment. The reader is ready to move there. But the tone changes abruptly as we begin to read phrases like “strange blight,” “evil spell,” “shadow of death,” and “strange stillness.” Then we find out that the town does not exist, and we want to learn why.

In *The Edge of the Sea*, Carson tells us a true story about a utopian environment and we are ready to go there as well. She writes:

And so I knelt on the wet carpet of sea moss and looked back into the dark cavern that held the pool in a shallow basin. The floor of the cave was only a few inches below the roof, and a mirror had been created. . . . In the moment when I looked into the cave a little elfin starfish hung down, suspended by the merest thread . . . it reached down to touch its own reflection, so perfectly delineated that there might have been, not one starfish, but two. (120)

This beautiful image will forever be imbedded in my brain. However, it is the images that are the scariest which I will forever remember from *Silent Spring*. One book is a beautiful dreamscape, the other a horrible nightmare.

This contrast must have been a choice that Carson was willing to make. She already had success from her sea books, so people familiar with her name probably went out and bought *Silent Spring*. Interest in the book soon spread like wildfire, burning through the United States like a ferocious chemical burn. Quite possibly it was the fierce tone that acted as a wake-up call to Americans. Thank goodness for women with strength and a warm heart.

Despite the differences in tone and intent, many similarities exist between *Silent Spring* and *The Edge of the Sea*. One obvious similarity is her ability to patch the world

together into one quilt. In both books, Carson brings up the bigger picture and how everything is woven or patched together. In *The Edge of the Sea* she writes:

The blackness of the night possessed water, air, and beach. It was the darkness of an older world, before man. . . . In that moment time was suspended; the world to which I belonged did not exist and I might have been an onlooker from outer space. The little crab alone with the seas became a symbol that stood for life itself—for the delicate, destructible, yet incredibly vital force that somehow holds its place amid the harsh realities of the inorganic world. (14)

Carson's superb magic paints the picture and conveys the message. In this paragraph she uses words and phrases that can be found often in *Silent Spring: before man, delicate, and harsh*. But the tone of the paragraph is not overbearing or strident. By putting herself as "an onlooker from outer space," Carson removes herself from direct involvement and gives us an overall sense of light and floating, beauty and life. We do not feel threatened.

The "floating feeling" is not present in *Silent Spring*. The tone there is heavy and apocalyptic. Carson wants us not to be bystanders watching from afar but participants ready to take action before we are hit by the threatened explosion. An example in *Silent Spring* makes this point evident:

For mankind as a whole, a possession infinitely more valuable than individual life is our genetic heritage, our link with past and future. Shaped through long eons of evolution, our genes not only make us what we are, but hold in their minute beings the future—be it one of promise or threat. Yet genetic deterioration through man-made agents is the menace of our time, "the last and greatest danger to our civilization." (208)

The continued repetition of *our* (plus *we* and *us*) leaves no doubt about whose genes are at risk. Those average people who read *Silent Spring* were convinced. Even the chemical companies were convinced and perhaps frightened of their own power and contribution to the inevitable downfall. If the book had been written any other way I am not sure it would have been as effective.

Carson's sea books were beautifully entertaining and scientific, but they also seemed to give a hope for life. This hope can also be understood as a hope to *learn* about life, all forms of it, and to have a respect for life. This is the kind of hope we find in *Silent Spring*—but in an angry and sometimes sarcastic and offensive tone—as in this paragraph:

The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of its life. (6)

Material like this is hard for some people to read. I believe that Carson was only trying to offend the bad guys, but it sure would have been nice if she could have been a bit more optimistic about the future. I suppose that given the circumstances—the cancer, the dying birds, etc.—this may not have seemed all that possible to Carson at the time.

A comparison of the two final chapters of each book tells us more. In *The Edge of the Sea* Carson writes, “And so we come to perceive life as a force as tangible as any of

the physical realities of the sea, a force strong and purposeful, as incapable of being crushed or diverted from its end as the rising tide” (215-216). To me this sounds as if she thinks the earth can endure anything. Before writing this book, Carson was aware of pesticides and their effects, though they had yet to affect her friends and herself. But once they did, this is what she so passionately wrote about them in *Silent Spring*: “As crude a weapon as the cave man’s club, the chemical barrage has been hurled against the fabric of life—a fabric on the one hand delicate and destructible, on the other miraculously tough and resilient, and capable of striking back in unexpected ways” (297). These are words that Rachel Carson lived by—as well as died by.

Works Cited

Carson, Rachel. *The Edge of the Sea*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1955.

———. *Silent Spring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962; 2002.

Gartner, Carol B. “When Science Becomes Literary Art: The Success of *Silent Spring*.”

In *And No Birds Sing*. Ed. Craig Waddell. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2000. 103-25.

Watson, Bruce. “Sounding the Alarm: Forty Years Ago Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*

Forever Changed Our View of the Environment.” *Smithsonian*. <http://90->

[web3.infotrac.galegroup.com.libproxy.stcloudstate.edu](http://90-web3.infotrac.galegroup.com.libproxy.stcloudstate.edu) (27 November 2003)

Student Essay Samples. Visual Analysis of Botticelli: Another student paper which does a nice job with using the format of explaining how the historical period and life of the artist is related to the meaning of the painting as well as discussing the visual aspects. How to Describe Images. Don't have an art background? Thank you so much for your article. It is very helpful to me as I am writing a paper on visual analysis, and my professor doesn't go into too much detail. Keep up the good work. Good luck To fully understand what information particular parts of the paper should discuss, here's another research paper example including some key parts of the paper. A study of infant feeding practices was carried out on a sample of 100 mother and infant pairs. The results revealed that only 20% of mothers in the study currently exclusively breastfeed their babies. It also shows that socio-economic factors like mother's work status, marital status and educational attainment had direct bearing on these practices. A few of them are still students. While majority of them were married, a lot were still in a status of live-in and are single. More than half of the mothers did not have previous children before the current one.