# Rachel Carson
## *Silent Spring*

### *The Why & the Wherefore*

Let's begin with a simple question. Why read, study, and write about Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*? A number of reasons spring to mind, any one of which is sufficient to justify critical inquiry into this text. Critics have justifiably identified *Silent Spring* as one of the most significant and influential texts of the 20th century, not only comparing it to Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, but citing it as the origin of the modern Environmental Movement, for "planting the seeds of a new activism that has grown into one of the great popular forces of all time" (xviii). In his *Introduction,* Al Gore describes *Silent Spring* as a "brilliantly written argument that changed the course of history" (xv), noting that "in 1992, a panel of distinguished Americans selected *Silent Spring* as the most influential book of the last fifty years" (xxv) . As Gore notes, "the Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970, in large part because of the concerns and the consciousness that Rachel Carson had raised" (xx). The book led to the direct banning of DDT in America.

Over time, its influence continues to grow. Reading *Silent Spring* would be justified if for no other reason than the direct influence it exerted on Gore's own landmark environmental work. *An Inconvenient Truth*, which similarly sounds an urgent warning about a global environmental crisis, "plants the seeds of a [re]newed activism" that has similarly grown into a popular force worldwide, while garnering similar recognition for its critical influence on environmental policy (Academy Award, Nobel Prize).

Yet, if none of these things were true, *Silent Spring* would yet be eminently worthy of critical inquiry in the first-year writing workshop (and particularly in a course on writing the thesis-driven, research oriented paper) as a compelling model of argumentative discourse. *Silent Spring* is one of those rarest of all texts that merits and rewards critical inquiry by virtue of its singular blend of literary merit and scientific discourse. Its contents deeply inform the focus of multiple disciplines: literature, biology, chemistry, sociology, medicine, political policy, environmental studies, and agricultural studies, to name but a few. To the extent it informs these diverse disciplines, *Silent Spring* is a compelling and useful model of argumentation in the first-year writing workshop, not only introducing students to the best practices of argumentative writing, but to the knowledges, issues, and writing-practice specific to a range of disciplines.

If you would learn how to write an effective, thesis-driven, research-oriented, persuasive paper, I cannot think of a more compelling model to emulate.