

Frank N. Stein
Carson Analysis Essay
24 February 2017
Word Count: 1062

A plane flies low to the ground over a vast, flat field covered in thousands of dollars worth of produce. As it glides overhead, a misting of chemicals is released from its undercarriage, covering the vegetation in a thin coating of death. For decades farmers have been trying to protect their livelihood from being sabotaged by unwanted pests, which includes the relatively recent introduction of pesticides. Carson describes the overwhelming and deadly effects of pesticides on both wildlife and people while denouncing society's decision to accept pesticides as an ethical management tool.

First, Carson describes (Paragraphs 1 and 2) the disastrous effects of poison control on wildlife, ranging from misinformed management to ruthless and unrestrained slaughter. Carson refers to America's unbridled use of eradication as a "habit of killing," indicating that the practice has become so common that those who use it no longer consciously consider its potential risks nor recognize other, less dangerous alternatives. She points out that poison control is irrational by juxtaposing the strong word "eradicating" with the weak words "annoy or inconvenience" to highlight the massive difference between the two, suggesting that it is a gross overreaction to kill an entire population for mere convenience. Carson even mocks the vocabulary commonly used to refer to poison usage by placing the word "control" in quotation marks, implying that the term is a euphemism for the killing of countless innocent animals. In addition to being widely overused to the point of misuse, Carson argues that poison control is catastrophic to all wildlife, not just the intended targets. Carson quotes the Fish and Wildlife Service calling poison control a "hazard to humans, domestic animals, and wildlife" to enhance her Ethos and indicate that poisons are a serious national problem by referencing a powerful and respected federal organization. Throughout the piece, Carson even compares America's pest management to a war, describing an aerial application as "planes on their mission of death" and referring to the dead animals as a "casualty list," thereby emphasizing the damage caused by poisons. Carson also explains that poisons are not specific to their target but are a "universal killer," destroying any and all wildlife that comes into contact with them. In fact, Carson uses a metaphor describing the unintentional victims of pesticides as "doomed by a judge and jury" who did not know or care of their existence, suggesting that poison control kills without morals or specificity. The comparison to a judge and jury creates an ethical analogy as well, explaining that it is unfair to kill species that have done no harm to the farmer who poisoned them.

Second, Carson castigates (paragraph 3) the use of these poisons by detailing the effects that they have on the lives of people who come into contact with them or who may come across them. She uses rhetorical questions to introduce her arguments in this section, such as asking "what of human beings," whether or not Indiana still raises kids who "roam through woods or fields" and who may "explore the margins of a river," and "who guarded the poisoned [areas]?" Carson also provides the example of California orchard workers who had handled foliage which had been treated with parathion "a

month earlier” and had “collapsed and went into shock,” only to “[escape] death... through skilled medical attention,” with much of the emphasis placed on the fact that the foliage had been treated weeks before the workers had handled it; this shows that the effects of deadly poisons can have a lasting effect on the area that it was sprayed in, whether it affects the animals, plants, or humans of the area. Carson then goes on to say that, despite of all this, “the farmers... [wage] their needless war” against the animals that are simply an inconvenience to them without thought of how their war tactics may affect everything else in nature. In this paragraph, Carson questions the use of these poisons by showing the possibility for human harm with the way they are currently used.

Finally, Carson objects (paragraph 4) to the fact that such serious decisions regarding the use of pesticides are made without any formal considerations for public interest. She asks a series of hypophoras on who makes the horrible decision to use pesticides, which she answers with a single sentence. She fills her questions with metaphors and imagery. First, she calls the use of pesticides an “ever-widening wave of death,” comparing its consequences to ripples in a pond in order to elucidate the ways in which the detrimental effects of pesticides spread and multiply. The next question compares making the decision to weighing the scales, saying that on one side, the one that is apparently more important, is the crops saved by pesticide use, but the trade off is the destruction the pesticides will cause: the “pitiful heaps” of gorgeous bird feathers which are the “lifeless remains” of the birds that fell prey to the “unselective bludgeon” of pesticides. Carson then poses her final question, which implies that no one has the right to decide for the people what the best world is. Carson argues that if the public were consulted, then the people would come to the decision that pesticide use is not worth it, for it creates a world that is “sterile” and “ungraced,” uninteresting to inhabit. Her answer to these questions of “Who?” is that those who have chosen to use pesticides are “authoritarian[s],” seizing power and making decisions against public interest. Carson knows that, if the public were allowed to have a say, if there was some uniform regulation, then pesticide use would not be allowed, as most people still believe that nature is sacred, and that its beauty and purity have a “deep and imperative” significance in the world.

While the pesticides Carson described so powerfully in her passage have changed, and some agricultural practices have undoubtedly improved, we’re still confronted today by the fundamental dilemma she pointed out: how can the members of society have a meaningful voice when it comes to protecting their land, sea, and air? How can unelected authoritarians answer those questions for us, without us? Until we have those answers and until we demand those answers, all life--from insect to human will remain in danger, threatened by chemicals we neither understand nor control.