

# Grieving a Silent Spring

21 January 2026     Alison Innes   [ainnes@Brocku.ca](mailto:ainnes@Brocku.ca)   [podcastologist.ca/2026/01/19/silent-spring](http://podcastologist.ca/2026/01/19/silent-spring)

## 1. Women and Nature from (Plumwood 19)

- Woman is a violent and uncontrolled animal. (Cato)
- A necessary object, woman, who is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink. (Thomas Aquinas)
- Howe’er man rules in science and art/The sphere of women’s glories is the heart. (Thomas Moore)
- A woman is but an animal and an animal not of the highest order. (Edmund Burke)
- I cannot conceive of you to be human creatures, but a sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey. (Jonathan Swift)
- Women are certainly capable of learning, but they are not made for the higher forms of science.... (G. Hegel)
- Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilisation has become more and more men’s business. (Sigmund Freud)
- Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality of faith and madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes.” (Plumwood 19–20)

## 2. Ecofeminism

- Ecofeminism links endemic patriarchy to the destruction of the environment—that man’s ‘right’ to exploit and mistreat women parallel’s man’s ‘right’ to exploit and mistreat the environment for profit. (Joseph 119)

## 3. Grievability

- Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of life appear. Thus, grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters. (Butler 14)

## 4. Frames

- The frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality.... This means that the frame is always throwing something away, always keeping something out, always de-realizing and delegitimizing alternative versions of reality, discarded negatives of the official version. (Butler xiii)
- The implicit or explicit framing of a population as a war target is the initial action of destruction. (Butler xvi)

- Under the philosophy that now seems to guide our destinies, nothing must get in the way of the man with the spray gun. The incidental victims of his crusade against insects count as nothing; if robins, pheasants, raccoons, cats, or even livestock happen to inhabit the same bit of earth as the target insects and to be hit by the raid of insect-killing poisons no one must protest.” (Carson 85-86)
- Incidents like the eastern Illinois spraying raise a question that is not only scientific but moral. The question is whether any civilization can wage relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right to called civilized.” (Carson 99)
- By acquiescing in an act that can cause such suffering to a living creature, who among us is not diminished as a human being?” (Carson 100)

## 5. Balance of Nature

- It is not possible to add pesticides to water anywhere without threatening the purity of water everywhere. Seldom if ever does Nature operate in closed and separate compartments, and she has not done so in distributing the earth’s water supply. (Carson 42)
- Man, however much he may like to pretend the contrary, is part of nature. (Carson 188)
- In some quarters nowadays it is fashionable to dismiss the balance of nature as a state of affairs that prevailed in an earlier, simpler world—a state that now has been so thoroughly upset that we might as well forget it. (Carson 246)

## 6. Indigenous Knowledge

- It is never a matter of *whether* the land is being used. It is *how* and *who* that matter—that prioritize one set of uses over all others and give one group the right to push aside another. (Krawec 42)
- Our connection to the land is in our relationship with it, not our ownership of it. When we make it a thing we can buy and sell, we not only sever our relationship with it; we sever it from its relationship with the Creator. (Krawec 140)

## 7. Excerpt from *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Today, the land where the Peacemaker walked and the Tree of Peace stood isn’t land at all, but beds of industrial waste sixty feet deep. It sticks to shoes like thick white school paste used in kindergartens to glue cutout birds onto construction-paper trees. ... It has been said that the waste beds made new land, but that is a lie. The waste beds are actually old land, chemically rearranged. This greasy sludge used to be limestone and freshwater and rich soil. The new terrain is old land that has been pulverized, extracted, and poured out the end of a pipe. It is known as Solvay waster, after the Solvay Process Company that left it behind.

The Solvay Process was a chemical breakthrough that allowed for the production of soda ash, an essential component of other industrial processes such as glass manufacturing and making detergents, pulp, paper. Native limestone was melted in coke-fired furnaces and then reacted with salt to produce

soda ash. This industry fueled the growth of the whole region, and chemical processing expanded to include organic chemicals, dyes, and chlorine gas. Train lines ran steadily past the factories, shipping out tons of products. Pipes ran in the other direction, pouring out tons of waste....

I can too easily imagine what it must have been like, those first ejections from the pipe falling in chalky white splats like the droppings of an enormous mechanical bird. Splurting and pulsing at first, with air in the mile-long intestine that stretched back to the gut of the factory. But it would soon settle into a steady flow, burying the reeds and rushes. Did the frogs and mink get away in time to avoid being entombed? What about the turtles? Too slow—they wouldn't be able to escape being embedded at the bottom of the pile in a perversion of the story of the world's creation, when the earth was carried on Turtle's back. (313-314)

## Discussion

- Kramer (1995) provides us with eight breakable rules of literary journalism. Focussing in particular on her chapters on water, how does Carson use or break these rules to frame human relationship to the environment?
- Using the Marland and Glotfelty readings from last week, what would you include in the eight rules of ecofeminism or ecocriticism? Would there be rules that would be included in ecofeminism but not ecocriticism (or vice versa)?
- Kramer says “the defining mark of literary journalism is the personality of the writer” (1995, 29). In what ways do you see Carson's personality emerge (or not) in these chapters? How does this compare to Robin Wall Kimmerer's writing?
- Robin Wall Kimmerer wrote her exploration of the environmental destruction of Onondaga Lake in New York state fifty years after Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*. What threads or themes does Wall Kimmerer continue? What new threads does she pick up (or what threads does she lay down)?

## Selected Sources

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso, 2016.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Mariner, 1962.

Joseph, Sue. “Silent Spring: The Rise of the Environmental Movement.” *The Literary Journalist as a*

*Naturalist*, edited by Pablo Calvi, Palgrave Macmillan, an imprint of Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025, pp. 111–31. Palgrave Studies in Literary Journalism.

Krawec, Patty. *Becoming Kin*. Broadleaf Books, 2022.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. 1993. Routledge, 1993.