

The Literary Taste of The First Chapter, ‘A Fable for Tomorrow’ Of Silent Spring by Rachel Carson: A Literary Analysis

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Abstract— If how an individual one’s idea can change the notion of the whole world is taken to be an example, then one of the best examples must be the idea of Rachel Carson’s ‘Silent Spring’. Her idea against the indiscriminate use of pesticide by greedy profit-making industrialists compelled the whole world to take note of it seriously and thereby making international laws to protect our environment from the bad repercussion of pesticides. She can be considered as a champion of ecocriticism in the literary field of ecocriticism. So, this paper tries to bring out the literary taste of the first chapter of the Silent Spring, ‘The Fable for Tomorrow’ with the help of some common features of literature and at the same time the paper also tries to promote the reading of the book, at least the first chapter, worldwide, so that one can get inspiration from it and can give new ideas to solve the current environmental problems the world is facing now.

Index Terms— Literary Taste, Literary Features, Environmental Problems, Pesticides, Fable, Short Story.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rachel Carson’s ‘Silent Spring’ is a world celebrated book published in 1962. It has 17 chapters in all total and the first chapter is titled ‘A Fable for Tomorrow’. Though the book falls under environmental science genre, one can get the literary taste of the first chapter of the book by applying some common literary features on it. (Although throughout the book there are many facts which are described in literary style, even some chapters are given a kind of literary title such as chapter no.3- Elixirs of Death, chapter no.7- Needless Havoc, chapter no.9- Rivers of Death, chapter no.12- The Human price, chapter no.13- Through a Narrow Window, chapter no.15- Nature Fight Back, chapter no.17- The Other Road, etc. The main title of the book ‘Silent Spring’ itself is an example of transferred epithet, a figure of speech which is used generally in literary composition.)

The first chapter goes:

A FABLE FOR TOMORROW

“THERE WAS ONCE a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields. In autumn, oak and maple and birch set up a blaze of color that flamed and flickered across a backdrop of pines. Then foxes barked in the hills and deer silently crossed the fields, half hidden in the mists of the fall mornings.

Along the roads, laurel, viburnum and alder, great ferns and wildflowers delighted the traveler’s eye through much of the year. Even in winter the roadsides were places of beauty, where countless birds came to feed on the berries and on the seed heads of the dried weeds rising above the snow. The countryside was, in fact, famous for the abundance and variety of its bird life, and when the flood of migrants was pouring through in spring and fall people traveled from great distances to observe them. Others came to fish the streams, which flowed clear and cold out of the hills and contained shady pools where trout lay. So it had been from the days many years ago when the first settlers raised their houses, sank their wells, and built their barns.

Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death. The farmers spoke of much illness among their families. In the town the doctors had become more and more

puzzled by new kinds of sickness appearing among their patients. There had been several sudden and unexplained deaths, not only among adults but even among children, who would be stricken suddenly while at play and die within a few hours.

There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example—where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh.

On the farms the hens brooded, but no chicks hatched. The farmers complained that they were unable to raise any pigs—the litters were small and the young survived only a few days. The apple trees were coming into bloom but no bees droned among the blossoms, so there was no pollination and there would be no fruit.

The roadsides, once so attractive, were now lined with browned and withered vegetation as though swept by fire. These, too, were silent, deserted by all living things. Even the streams were now lifeless. Anglers no longer visited them, for all the fish had died.

In the gutters under the eaves and between the shingles of the roofs, a white granular powder still showed a few patches; some weeks before it had fallen like snow upon the roofs and the lawns, the fields and streams.

No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves. This town does not actually exist, but it might easily have a thousand counterparts in America or elsewhere in the world. I know of no community that has experienced all the misfortunes I describe. Yet every one of these disasters has actually happened somewhere, and many real communities have already suffered a substantial number of them. A grim specter has crept upon us almost unnoticed, and this imagined tragedy may easily become a stark reality we all shall know.

What has already silenced the voices of spring in countless towns in America? This book is an attempt to explain.”

According to Marriam-Webster dictionary, literature means, “Writing in prose or verse especially: Writing having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of pe of permanent or universal interest.” After reading this first chapter, one can, no doubt, see that it has the permanent and universal interest to protect environment for tomorrow.

Generally, to a common man, literature means poems, plays, novels and short stories. The first chapter of ‘Silent Spring’ is written in short story form and the starting line, ‘THERE WAS ONCE a town...’, indicates that. Besides, in the title, the world ‘Fable’ says the chapter is a fable which is a popular genre of short story. According to The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory, ‘fable’ is “A short narrative in prose or verse which points a moral”. So, the moral of the first chapter can be- If the people mistreat or harm Nature, Nature will mistreat or harm then directly or indirectly; a kind of ‘Tit for Tat’.

The first two paragraphs of the chapter give the natural description of a natural landscape in a literary style which can be similar to the natural descriptions given in the short stories by the two world famous writers, Oscar Wilde and Ruskin Bond. In the end section of the chapter, there is a sudden twist of the story, the author admits, “This town does not actually exist, but it might easily have a thousand counterparts in America or elsewhere in the world. I know of no community that has experienced all the misfortunes I describe.” This style of ending short story with a sudden twist or a ‘surprise-ending’ can remind us of the world-famous American author, O. Henry’s ending style of short story.

Some common features of literature are-

- I. Using figures of speech like simile, metaphor, irony, hyperbole, personification, transferred epithet etc.
- II. Using symbol.
- III. To present real facts in indirect way.
- IV. To use idioms and proverbs.

In this 1st chapter, we see phrases like, 'white cloud of bloom', 'the flood of migrants', 'a shadow of death', which are good examples of metaphor. The lines- "The roadside, once so attractive, were now lined with browned and withered vegetations as though swept by fire" and "Some week before it (a white granular powder) had fallen like snow upon the roofs and the lawns, the fields and streams", are examples of simile. 'a white granular powder' symbolizes the pesticides like DDT.

The lines- "Along the roads, laurel, viburnum and alder, great ferns and wild flowers delighted the traveller's eye through much of the year", and "It was a spring without voices"- are good examples of personification.

The portion- "No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves."- is a good example of irony. The third line from the end of the chapter, "A grim specter has crept upon us almost unnoticed, and this imagined tragedy may easily become a stark reality we all shall know", is a kind of literary statement.

One of the interesting characteristics of literature is that it helps to present real fact in indirect way. The author of the book asks a kind of rhetorical question in the penultimate line of the chapter- 'What has already silenced the voice of springs in countless towns in America?' In response to this direct question the author does not give any direct answer. Instead, the author says in the last line of the chapter- 'The book is an attempt to explain', which is, no doubt, a kind of indirect answer to the question.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

From the above discussion it can be obvious that the first chapter of the silent spring: Fable for Tomorrow certainly possesses some literary taste which can be enough for the consideration of its inclusion into school syllabus. All the school syllabus making committees across the globe can consider this first chapter and include it into school syllabus along with other literary topics so that school students can be motivated to think for the welfare of our environment. Beside school student, anyone who loves to read only literary books can read at least the

first chapter of the 'Silent Spring' to enjoy its literary taste.

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