

## **Artistic Paths to Social Justice Environmental Advocacy & Farm Workers' Struggles**

### ***Introduction***

In most cases, matters of social justice entail advocacy of laws that enforce similar treatment to all people. Outspoken people have expressed their views on social justice by using literature as a tool to bring to attention issues related to the environment and politics. Regarding the weight of such issues in society, Mark Hamilton Lytle writes about the story of Rachel Carson, an environmentalist who wrote "The Silent Spring" with the goal of addressing the use of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) insecticides and their effects on the environment. Another creative work by Catherine Ming, in the form of community-based theatre, addresses the farm workers and family farmers in *Of Farms and Fables*. A keen review of the two sources provides a deeper insight into how the theme of social justice may be explored via an analysis of the creative and performing arts.

### ***The Gentle Subversive: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, and the Rise of the Environmental Movement***

Mark Lytle writes about Rachael Carson forty years later after she came out strongly critiquing the corporate world of agriculture as well as the United States Department of Agriculture on the use of DDT. Although the relevant authorities assured the public that the group of pesticides posed no threat to the health of human beings, she built a strong case against the use of the chemical. She accused the agricultural experts and scientists of subjecting nature as well as humans to chemical sprays that were toxic. Carson stated that the methods of controlling insects should not destroy human beings together with the insects.

Carson's work came out at a time when America was dominantly a patriarchal society, which was faced with hostility from many sources. She was criticized for advocating for diseases and vermin on the planet. Others, such as George Decker, an entomologist who was an economist, saw her as unqualified to bring out such remarks, and the readers were neither supposed to access such information. Her work was regarded as science fiction by the then Secretary of

Agriculture, Ezra Benson, who wondered how a spinster without a child would be worried about a pesticide that would affect future generations.

Carson maintained her argument about the detrimental effects of the DDTs with composure and dignity. Before she met her death in 1964, she was able to hear the report by the science advisory committee commissioned by the then president of the US, John F. Kennedy. The committee validated her allegations that, indeed, there were persistent DDT residues in the environment. This report was the basis for millions of Americans to come out on the streets to celebrate Earth Day, seven years after the committee's report in pursuit of Carson's dream.

### ***Farms And Fables: Cultivating Difference In Community-Based Theatre***

The creation of this work comes in collaboration with the farm workers and family farmers through embodied research to bring out a picture of the local agriculture in the community. The theatre work takes the artists to act as farm workers to tell a story of the differences in the community. In the work, actors participate in community-based acting where they interact with the local farm workers in Maine to understand their culture and bring it into a play.

In the course of interaction between the real workers and the actors, the intention of the engagement is realized: the issues affecting the farm workers. The theatre production company realizes that the social issues affecting these farmers in Maine are mainly the uncertainty of holding the ownership of the farms they till. Within the play, a narration is given about two farms. One of the farms is owned by a family that has been cultivating it for generations, while the other one belongs to a family that is both new to Maine as well as farming. The first farmer laments about how to maintain his family's upkeep while faced with increasing debt, while the second farmer struggles to adapt to the new environment.

Throughout the play, the two farmers depict a repetitive endurance in their labor as well as other issues being faced by migrant farmers. Different storylines are drawn by interspersed movements within groups that show various activities on the farms, such as seed planting and

vegetable harvesting. The play is staged in Scarborough, Maine, in a historic barn named Camp Ketcha, where the actors comprise the professionals as well as the community. At the end of the play, the audience is left with a clear picture of how farm workers toil on their farms, as well as their fears due to unprecedented uncertainties.

## Conclusion

The two creative works are effective in shedding more light on the issue of social justice from the environmental perspective. They take the audience back to real-life situations that occur in everyday life. Notably, the works are crafted in a manner that enables the readers to relate to the authors and the characters. In the first literature work, although inspired by another author's story, it is evident that women face various challenges in men-dominated social setups.

Although Carson has a valid point that is supported by science, being a woman makes her hostile. Through perseverance, her argument is validated, and it leads to the formation of a movement to safeguard the environment. In the second creative work, the farmers' plight is brought into light by the play in a quest for the government to address their issues.

## References:

1. Lytle, M. H. (2007). *The Gentle Subversive: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, and the Rise of the Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press.
2. Carson, R. (1962). *Silent Spring*. Houghton Mifflin.
3. Ming, C. *Of Farms and Fables: Cultivating Difference In Community-Based Theatre*.