

**Review: Courage for the Earth: Writers, Scientists, and Activists Celebrate the Life and Writing of Rachel Carson**  
Peter Matthiessen (Ed.)

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

Matthiessen, Peter (Ed.). *Courage for the Earth: Writers, Scientists, and Activists Celebrate the Life and Writing of Rachel Carson*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007. 208pp. ISBN: 978-0-618-87276-3. \$14.95, paper.

Peter Matthiessen and the other famous assembled writers here remember and celebrate the impact of the influential environmentalist Rachel Carson. Included are pieces by famous writers and environmentalists E.O. Wilson, Jim Lynch, Sandra Steingraber, Al Gore, John Elder, John Hay, Janisse Ray, Terry Tempest Williams, Freeman House, Robert Michael Pyle, and Carson biographer Linda Lear.

The assembled do attest to the multi-faceted success of Rachel Carson, with each writer dwelling on different aspects of her achievement. Rachel Carson was so influential because she was many things. This work will make this obvious to college students and the general public, and may also provide new insights to scholars who already know a great deal about Carson. Peter Matthiessen writes that she was foremost a writer, not a crusader. E.O. Wilson found her multifaceted and credits her with helping inspire the creation of United States Environmental Protection Agency. John Elder found her writing grounded in the poetic tradition. John Hay writes about how wondrous of a writer and explorer she was. For Terry Tempest Williams she was a sacred warrior. Freeman House reminds that she was an ecology teacher before the word ecology became famous. Robert Michael Pyle remembers her as a naturalist who could also write eloquently about the natural environment, entertaining readers who missed the sea. Carson biographer Linda Lear bookends the assembled writers mapping Carson's journey from a sense of wonder about the natural world (as illustrated in her ocean book trilogy), to despair over what we were doing to the environment (*Silent Spring* (1962)), to hope that we could change ourselves.

New Englander Rachel Carson died of breast cancer in 1964. She was only 57. *Courage for the Earth* covers the major details of her life, and also shows how she influenced in different ways so many of the influential environmental writers of our day.

It is clear from the book that the environment may have been a lot better in this country, and in the world, if she had lived longer. She wrote that we needed to be concerned about global warming more than 40 years ago.

While suffering from cancer, Carson bravely took on the petrochemical industry, calling into question the role of science and technology in our society in *Silent Spring*. There have not been environmental giants like her since her day, but instead environmental groups representing hundreds of thousands, all who would attest to her influence, putting her up there with the likes of Muir, Leopold, Brower, and others.

Carson was a knowledgeable and eloquent writer who wanted to share the wonder she found in nature, in the process she fostered concern. Her struggle goes on. Janisse Ray's chapter on endocrine disrupters shows that Carson was right to be concerned about the many chemicals we release into the environment. We are still learning about the deleterious impact these chemicals are having on the environment.

The reader interested in Rachel Carson or environmental history will find this work insightful, inspiring, and eloquent, but maybe not enough. The reader is likely to want more, and may want to read Rachel Carson or read her again. Her ocean books are wondrous, and *Silent Spring* is still a powerful indictment of our shortsightedness. Her literary offspring, the assembled writers here, are also inspiring.

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