NEWS

"My world's on fire, how 'bout yours?/ That's the way I like it and I'll never get bored"
ALL STAR SMASH MOUTH

Writer reflects on Rachel Carson's legacy and prophecy at lecture

BY EMMA SHIN
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Writer, activist and conservationist Terry Tempest Williams reflected on the life and legacy of acclaimed environmentalist Rachel Carson at a Tuesday lecture.

The talk at the Yale University Art Gallery, titled "Rachel Carson: Prophecy, Oracles, and Omens," was designed to be in conversation with the exhibition "Silent Springs, Windswept Seas: Rachel Carson's Environmental Vision," which is on view at the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library through Oct. 4.

"I so honor Yale's place in this country of environmental confusion. This feels to me like a place of environmental commitment," Williams said during the lecture.

The curators of the exhibition, Yale librarians James Kessenides GRD '03 and Carla Baricz GRD '13 '17, gave introductory remarks.

Baricz said that when learning about Williams' work, she "became convinced that this was someone whom I needed to meet, someone who should be present as we celebrate, and think about the life and work of Carson, and who would speak in Carson's spirit and example."

Williams is "in deep dialogue with place, and its human and nonhuman inhabitants," Baricz said.

Williams, a writer-in-residence at the Harvard Divinity School, began her talk by describing her experience at the Beinecke Library in the past three days.

"Full disclosure: I came with one talk, and I'm leaving with another," she said, referring to the experience she had encountering two newly discovered boxes of Carson's notebooks related to Silent Spring.

The book, which is Carson's seminal work, exposes the harmful ecological effects of pesticides such as DDT, which was commonly used in the 1940s.

She said it was emotional to be able to view Carson's list of endangered birds alongside her own, along with a picture of her and her husband, at the Beinecke display.

"If I'm unduly emotional, it's because I just feel like I've been with a beloved," she said, tearing up.

To begin her lecture, Williams discussed Carson's technical research on the effects of chemical war on human and ecological health, highlighting the significance of Carson's investigation into the causes of cancer. Carson herself was diagnosed with breast cancer in the 1960s.

"So she was not just talking about the earth's body, but also investigating her own," Williams said.

The speaker also spoke extensively about Carson's character.

Despite being attacked by "the industries," William said, Carson persistently wrote letters to government agencies, writers, spiritual leaders and readers of her work. She said Carson "dared to touch bone with her pen," writing about the consequences of widespread industrial pesticide and chemical use.

"A Pandora's box of troubles has been let loose," she said, referencing a note Carson left in one of her journals. "But she refused to close the lid."

According to Williams, Carson's work led to the establishment of environmental agencies and regulations including the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Environmental Policy Act, the precautionary principle, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Turning to current events, Williams criticized the current political climate surrounding environmental conservation and the policies of the Trump administration. The federal government has been reported to have undone years of environmental activism by redefining "harm" under the Endangered Species Act, a change blasted by Yale faculty.



EMMA SHIN / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Acclaimed writer and environmental activist Terry Tempest Williams spoke about the biologist Rachel Carson, who wrote the influential 1962 book Silent Spring. She reflected upon her experience viewing boxes of Carson's notebooks at the Beinecke.

"This is the cult of death that we are facing with this administration," Williams said, asserting that "violence toward nature is no less an evil than violence toward fellow man," quoting Carson.

Williams described growing up in Salt Lake City, Utah, and lamented the retreat of the Great Salt Lake over her lifetime, which has resulted in approximately 1,000 square miles of exposed land.

"Our governor, our legislature, our congressional delegation, and our president view it as new land for the taking," Williams said, criticizing proposals by the local government and the Trump administration for the construction of detention centers, a data center and a national repository for nuclear waste.

"If Great Salt Lake disappears, so do the eared grebes and phalaropes. And three million human residents will be displaced along with migratory birds," she said.

Williams said the solution to the issue is not turning away from pressing environmental issues of today, but "turning toward and embracing that which both breaks our hearts and opens them."

"Don't acquiesce; ask questions," Williams urged, encouraging the audience to turn to Carson as a relevant source of guidance and wisdom.

"Rachel Carson carries both the prophetic voice, the voice of revelation, prediction. She holds the voice of the oracle," she said.

"We are of privileged minds and opportunities, education, means," she continued. "We cannot be afraid."

Williams also expressed her gratitude to Yale for the housing of Carson's and her own work in archival collections, as well for faculty environmental advocacy.

Rachel Carson died from cancer in 1964 at the age of 56, at her home in Silver Spring, Maryland.

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In Jackson talk, Iraqi citizen journalist describes time under ISIS

BY BEATRIX LOZACH
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Iraqi author Omar Mohammed visited the Jackson School of Global Affairs on Wednesday to discuss his book, "Mosul Eye: A Scholar's Clandestine War Against ISIS," which recounted his investigative blogging while living under the Islamic State.

In the talk, which came on the same day the last United States troops left Iraq after two decades of involvement, Mohammed discussed how the absence of free speech from his childhood carried over into his adulthood, from the American invasion beginning in 2003 to life under Al-Qaeda to ISIS's domination. Mohammed was a Yale World Fellow at the Jackson School in 2018.

"It's that constant advice we get from our parents or grandparents telling us, 'be careful, the walls have ears,'" Mohammed said during the talk. "And then you live in the constant fear that you're going to say something wrong and get your family killed. You've got to care about today only — tomorrow is not part of your planning.

The talk was moderated by Emma Sky, founder of Yale's International Leadership Center and lecturer at the Jackson School.

Mohammed was born in 1986, during the regime of Saddam Hussein, amid economic and political turmoil. He described his childhood as one marked by sanctions, embargoes and warfare. He recounted one anecdote of his grandmother telling genealogical stories to his family during the Gulf War.

"In the 90s, during the Gulf War, there was six weeks of bombing, and we were hiding in a basement," Mohammed said. "My grandmother, she began to tell stories of who we were, our origin, our family lineage. Years later, I realized that after one month, all that history would've disappeared."

Mohammed said one year after he entered college to study history in 2004, Iraq entered a civil war, due to growing radicalization from Al-Qaeda. Then, in 2011, the United States largely withdrew from Iraq. The United States had first invaded in 2003 as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"It was a mistake," Mohammed said, referring to the 2011 American withdrawal. "The situation completely deteriorated," describing the power vacuum that emerged which he said set the stage for ISIS's complete takeover of Iraq.

In 2014, Mohammed began the blog Mosul Eye to provide a source of accurate information for Iraqis and the international community on his city, Mosul. During the talk, Mohammed explained that he was forced to conceal his blog from his family to ensure their safety and his own.

"I found my rule of, 'Trust no one and document everything,'" Mohammed said.

After the United States-led Operation Inherent Resolve, which started in 2014, struck blows to ISIS, Mohammed decided to reveal his identity as Mosul Eye in 2017 through the Associated Press. Mohammed then became a 2018 Yale World Fellow after Sky recommended he apply via email.

"The most important thing here is that I got to meet with people who were policymaking," Mohammed said, referencing visits to Congress and meeting General David Petraeus. "I got to meet people who, for the first time, were able to answer questions I had in Iraq. It started filling up gaps in the historical record I had."

Mohammed also said he hopes his book will spark conversations about when militarization is necessary to establish peace.

"It's not because I'm against the military," Mohammed said. "I need the military to feel safe in my home. But also, the task of an intellectual is that we never need the military to go fight, because we can solve our issues with diplomacy. I want to make war the very, very last resort."

Syrian journalist and 2026 Yale World Fellow Lina Sinjab attended the talk and said she appreciated Mohammed's detailed descriptions of life under ISIS.

"It's important to have people from the country owning the narrative of their own countries and their own stories," Sinjab said. "For someone to have lived under the atrocities of ISIS for years and be able to tell their own story is powerful."

Sinjab said she also resonated with Mohammed's experiences on a personal level, as a Syrian, and articulated broader existential questions relevant to contemporary counterterrorism efforts.

"We already had ISIS in Syria and they committed atrocities," Sinjab said. "There are still lots of pockets of radicalism in Syria that could emerge at any moment. But the big question we need to answer, and that I'm not sure we have an answer to, is, 'How do we learn from history?'"

Hannaneh Akbarpour GRD '29 said getting the opportunity to speak with Mohammed after the book talk was a revelation. One of her main takeaways from the talk was the contrast between what she described as the extraordinary nature of Mohammed's reporting and his demeanor.

"I found him a very modest person as someone who has done so much sacrifice for the sake of saving human lives," Akbarpour said in a voice message to the News. "He was very approachable, which was wonderful."

The Iraq War officially began in March 2003.



GAURI GUPTA / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
At a book talk hosted by the Jackson School of Global Affairs, Omar Mohammed described his experience running the clandestine news outlet Mosul Eye, which reported on conditions under the Islamic State.

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