ARTS

"Friday night and the lights are low."
DANCING QUEEN ABBA

Yale Review editor samples poetry from new anthology on illness

BY THOMAS MULUGETA AND MEKHI GARDNER
CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS



KIMBERLY ANGELES GUTIERREZ / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

At the Tuesday event, which was held on the Yale School of Medicine's campus, Meghan O'Rourke '97 discussed the impetus for and hopes surrounding her poetry anthology, published last month and titled "The Story of the Body: Poems of Illness & Recovery."

Poetry and physicians crossed paths on Tuesday in celebration of a new poetry anthology by Meghan O'Rourke '97, the editor of The Yale Review.

The panel discussion, held on the Yale School of Medicine's campus, was hosted by The Review and the Program for Humanities in Medicine and moderated by Sarah Cross, an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the medical school. O'Rourke and Laura Kolbe, a medical ethicist at the Cornell Medical Center, read selected poems from the anthology, titled "The Story of the Body: Poems of Illness & Recovery." It was published last month and samples work across four centuries, from Emily Dickinson to contemporary poets.

"Really, there's an enormous amount of uncertainty in medicine," Cross said during the event. "And I do think poetry can help us be more comfortable with that."

The Program for Humanities in Medicine, which is housed at the Yale School of Medicine, leverages the humanities as "a springboard to raise critical consciousness" at Yale and enrich lives in medicine, according to the program's website.

O'Rourke began the panel with a reading of her poem "Idiopathic Illness," which she said explores the complicated experience of living with illness without a formal diagnosis. She said writing the poem was difficult and recalled the fatigue that motivated her to research undiagnosed illness through literature, ultimately culminating in the anthology.

"The poem, as a reader, teaches us to be available in response," O'Rourke said. "I really felt like the truest thing I can say about the experience of being chronically ill, both without a diagnosis and then with one, was that it's this constant exercise in trying to be available in response."

Kolbe also read her poem "Buried Abecedery for Intensive Care," highlighting the work's alphabetical form. After her reading, Kolbe walked the audience through how she employed complicated medical language to show how a patient's experience might be distanced from the reality of their body.

The panel sought to reflect broadly on the relationship between poetry and medicine. Kolbe said the craft has "absolutely" made her a better doctor.

In an interview after the event, Anna Reisman '86, the director of the Program for Humanities in Medicine and professor at the Yale School of Medicine, said the panel offered an important perspective.

"You can think of a poem like a patient, and sometimes we look at a poem and it's difficult," Reisman said. "I have no idea what's going on, right?"

O'Rourke said that her 2017 poetry collection titled "Sun in Days" received feedback from people wrestling with illness. She said this feedback inspired her to put together the new anthology, in the hopes that poetry could offer people alternative means of thinking about illness.

"I've been really touched to see the reception to the book and see the ways people are kind of giving it to one another," O'Rourke said in an interview after the event. "That has been really interesting, and just thinking about the way the poem is a kind of democratic object, really, I really did want to kinda bring the poems back to the people."

"The Story of the Body: Poems of Illness & Recovery" was published by W. W. Norton & Company on Oct. 20, 2026.

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Yaledancers to return to competition after second-place debut last year

BY LAURENTIA WOO
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Yaledancers, the University's oldest dance company, is preparing to return to a competition stage this Sunday with a new routine, a larger team and hopes of improving on last year's second-place finish.

Last winter, the group competed at the World of Dance competition held at East Providence High School in Rhode Island and placed second out of six collegiate teams. Tyler Ou '28, a co-artistic director of Yaledancers, said the team hopes to improve on last year's finish but that the competition also represents more than an opportunity to win.

"We would love to win, but our primary mission remains to have a good time, meet dancers from other schools and to help put Yale on the map in terms of dance," Ou said in a phone interview. "The dance scene here at Yale is so beautiful, and we think World of Dance is a good stage to showcase that."

Nineteen members of Yaledancers are part of the competition team this year, compared to the 17 who competed last year.

Kate Yang '28, the treasurer of Yaledancers, said the group's positive experience last year made returning to the competition an easy decision. The team officially decided to compete again in September, after Ou and fellow co-artistic director Carly Thinfen '28 proposed the idea at the start of the academic year.

"Everyone really loved competing last season, so I think there was an understanding that competing this year was nonnegotiable," Yang wrote in a text message to the News.

The group used funds raised through its Student Organization Resource Allocation campaign last year to help cover competition expenses. The dancers are also covering their own transportation and registration fees.

Cai-Alexis Williams-Lovell '29, a member of the competition group, described the competition as a particularly meaningful experience for Yaledancers.

"I think it's a great bonding moment for the team," Williams-Lovell said. "We put so much effort into it, and we're not a competition-based group, so it's really a special, once-a-year sort of thing that we get to be involved with."

Preparations for this year's competition began over the summer when Ou and Thinfen began selecting music and developing an original routine. Titled "Terra Somnia," or "Land of Dreams," the piece explores the tension between individuality and conformity, Ou said. The group debuted the choreo at its recent showcase.

Ou said the music and choreography reflect both of their experiences growing up and approaching the end of their time dancing as college students.

"The choreography is a reflection of our time dancing at Yale and serves as a reminder to never forget this love and passion for dance, even as we step into what seems a more uniform, corporate, and rigid next chapter of our lives," he said.

The new routine also marks an artistic departure from last year's performance, Williams said.

"Last year was very lyrical and beautiful, and I feel like this piece that we have this year has a more contemporary edge, definitely some hip-hop influence in there," Williams said.

Beyond the choreography itself, the group is also approaching the competition with a better understanding of what to expect. Having competed last year and learned the ropes, the group now has a better sense of how it should be rehearsing, Williams said.

Yaledancers was founded in 1973.

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RYAN LO / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Yale's oldest dance company will return to the World of Dance competition in Rhode Island this Sunday after placing second last year. Members said their routine will reflect the tension between individuality and conformity, with a contemporary edge.