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## **Diaz Book *The Lessons* Takes Gerald Cable Award**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – “Under water/ leaves are paws, ferns are wings/ and your mother’s skirt is an orange flame/ melting the sap from the pool’s pine edge.” So reads a line from Joanne Diaz’s first published book of poems, *The Lessons*.

Published last month, *The Lessons* won the Gerald Cable First Book Award from Silverfish Review Press, and is listed as one of Poetry Foundation’s Small Press Distribution February Best Sellers.

Many of Diaz’s poems weave a tale that place the reader in the middle of the narrator’s thoughts, as if the reader is capturing a personal moment. A native of Massachusetts, Diaz uses her poems to explore her Boston upbringing. The book’s title poem, “The Lessons,” recalls childhood swim lessons, complete with the instructor calling the children “*Back to the watah!*” Influences also infuse the poem “Epigram for the Boston Accent,” which brings together Diaz’s love of ancient Roman writer Martial and her love of Boston – even playing off playwright Oscar Wilde’s reference to the city as a ‘paradise of prigs.’

“*The Lessons* is driven by the poet’s passion.... The risks Diaz takes in this beautiful first book are the profound risks of art and of love,” said poet Gail Mazur.

Joining the Illinois Wesleyan English Department in 2008, Diaz teaches courses in creative writing and literature. She earned a doctorate in English literature from Northwestern University, received a bachelor’s degree in 1994 from Tufts University and a master’s degree creative writing in 1999 from New York University, where she was a New York Times fellow.

In her scholarly work, Diaz explores complaint poetry in the English Renaissance. Her poems have been published in various literary journals, including *AGNI*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Missouri Review* and *Quarterly West*, and she was the featured poet in the most recent issue of *The Spoon River Poetry Review*. Diaz also gives pre-show lectures at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

Diaz’s work has been honored with several grants and fellowships, including a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 2009, an Arts Fellowship from the Illinois Arts Council in 2005 and a Mellon Fellowship for her research at the Huntington Library in California.