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**JUDGE CARL PHILLIPS CHOOSES
DESIREE C. BAILEY AS
2020 YALE YOUNGER POETS WINNER FOR
WHAT NOISE AGAINST THE CANE**

New Haven—Yale University Press is pleased to announce a winner in the 2020 Yale Series of Younger Poets competition. The judge, prize-winning and critically acclaimed poet Carl Phillips, has chosen Desiree C. Bailey’s manuscript, *What Noise Against the Cane*.

Series judge Carl Phillips says: “Desiree C. Bailey’s *What Noise Against the Cane* opens in the immediate wake of 18th-century Haitian slavery and revolution, and the poems go on to enact the psychological, very visceral quest for an understanding of the self apart from the colonization that the historically colonized are forever being reborn into. ‘I want to say I am from nowhere and everywhere. But that feels coy like I am lifting my skirt for the empire’s gaze,’ says one speaker, from the exile that always contains, within the word itself, the Yoruba word for home – what’s forever just out of reach. Bailey wrestles with how history can make of the self an exile from itself; the poems here work like shifting maps, each an attempt to make a way back to that self, and then past it – which is to say, the poems argue for hope and faith equally, despite fears that ‘I will always be/out of body, I will always fall//outside the lines,’ despite realities like the fact ‘that Trayvon [will] not be avenged.’ These are powerful poems, indeed, and they make a persuasive argument for the transformative powers of steady defiance: ‘I will not go mad. I am vessel,’ Bailey insists; ‘my

hands are the scarlet ibises/soaring the salt-washed dawn/cleaving the sky open like a blade.”

Of her recent win, Desiree C. Bailey remarks that “It’s an honor for my work to be selected by one of the most astounding poets writing today, for one of the most prestigious first book poetry prizes. Over the five years of writing this book, very few people in my life, maybe two, had read it in its entirety. I had no idea who it would reach, or if it would even be possible to complete it.”

“The prize presents a wonderful opportunity,” she says. “These poems of diaspora, of saltwater, of the call towards freedom could reach out and be a balm or a companion for someone who may need it. I’m grateful to those who have encouraged me along the way, and I’m delighted by the incredible vehicle of Yale Younger Poets.”

Yale University Press will publish Bailey’s book in April 2021. The manuscript is Phillips’ tenth selection as judge and the 115th volume in the series. Carl Phillips’ ninth selection, Jill Osier’s *The Solace Is Not the Lullaby*, will be published by Yale University Press on March 17, 2020.

Poet, writer and teacher Desiree C. Bailey was born in Trinidad and Tobago and is the author of the fiction chapbook *In Dirt or Saltwater* (O’Clock Press, 2016). Her work has also been published in *Best American Poetry 2015*, *Callaloo*, *Washington Square Review* and *The Rumpus*, among other publications. Bailey has a BA from Georgetown University and MFA from Brown University, in addition to receiving fellowships from the New York State Council on the Arts/New York Foundation for the Arts, Poets House, Kimbilio Fiction, The Conversation, the Norman Mailer Center, Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop and Princeton in Africa. She is a recipient of the 2013 Poets and Writer’s Amy Award.

Awarded since 1919 by Yale University Press, the Yale Series of Younger Poets celebrates the most prominent new American poets by bringing the work of these artists to the attention of the larger public. Earlier winners of the prize include such talents as Adrienne

Rich, John Ashbery, and Robert Hass. It is the longest-running poetry prize in the United States.

Yale University Press will also continue its partnership with The James Merrill House. Winners of the Series will receive one of the five writing fellowships offered at The James Merrill House in Stonington, CT. The fellowship provides a furnished living space and daily access to James Merrill's apartment for a writer in search of a quiet setting to complete a project of literary or academic merit.

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