

Diann Blakely



My earliest memories of the word are aural and biracial: I remember sitting under a glass-topped table in my grandmother's kitchen in Anniston and hearing this gorgeous polyphony of women's voices, black and white, call and response, with no real effort at answering the original speaker or the songs on the radio that often played.

Race has proved a natural constant throughout my work, and the vague, inchoate, and disturbing feelings on the subject were first reflected to me in two Alabamians' novels: *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Elise Sanguinetti's first book, *The Last of the Whitfields*. The latter was the more powerful influence, perhaps because of its humor, yet I find myself returning to Sanguinetti's more somber, subsequent three books.

The most recent and powerful experience I've had with the effect of my poems has come from a native Liberian, Patricia Jabbeh Wesley. We met on Facebook: since one of the three major characters presiding over my long-in-progress fourth manuscript, *Rain*

In Our Door: Duets with Robert Johnson, co-founded the American Colonization Society, it was natural for me to reach out to her. Months passed and emails crisscrossed. What seemed silence on Wesley's part made me sure she despised me because of my race and my family's very peculiar history: One of my forebearers, a member of the Virginia Commonwealth legislature, built a plantation for freed slaves in Alabama's Black Belt. For his praise of Nat Turner's rebellion, he was beaten to death in the streets of Richmond. But the lack of communication between Wesley and myself was due to nothing more than cyber-vagaries. Poetry itself knows none, once it finds a willing reader, and thus Wesley and I have become sisters in the genre, and much more.

Blakely is the author of three books of poetry as well as an editor, essayist, and reviewer. She has taught at Belmont University, Harvard University, Vanderbilt University, Watkins Arts Institute, and served as senior instructor and poet-in-residence at the Harpeth Hall School in Nashville, Tennessee. Her awards include Hurricane Walk listed among the year's ten best by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; Farewell, My Lovelies, named a Choice of the Academy of American Poets' Book Society; and, Cities of Flesh and the Dead won the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America and the 7th Annual Publication Prize from Elixir Press. She lives south of Savannah with her husband, the author and music writer Stanley Booth.

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