

Matching Skin: A Spoonfulla Southern Sass

When one reads *Matching Skin*, it becomes apparent that words and music are inseparable for poet Shirlette Ammons. Carolina Wren Press published *Matching*, Ammons' second poetry collection, in 2008 with her *John Anonymous* EP CD included in the back of the book. It can simply be described as a hodge-podge of homegoodness. And if that description is too abstract for readers, perhaps naming bards that Ammons resembles both in form or spirit will securely ground Ammons in a literary tradition. She sits comfortably alongside greats such as Sonia Sanchez, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Audre Lorde, but comparing Ammons only to poets would be too one-dimensional. I honestly believe the best person to compare this young poet to is Me'shell NdegeOcello. While NdegeOcello isn't a poet, she is a unique lyrical musician who constantly places her ear to the ground listening for both native rhythms and also contemporary ones that enthrall her as an artist. Ammons does the same for the written word; she keeps her ear to the ground telling us about all she's seen and heard. *Matching Skin* is a mélange of forms, styles, and topics, but from these Ammons forges a unity that makes this book stand out among recent offerings from other young writers. It essentially posits Ammons as a necessary voice among poets everywhere.

One of the many things that makes *Matching Skin* crucial is the spoonfulla Southern sass Ammons constantly weaves throughout these poems. Even in the title of her first book, *Stumphole: An Anthology of Bakwoods Blood* (Big Drum Press, 2002), her signature dose of the South is present. There are poems like "Roberta is Working Clergy" that include astounding similes like this one: "they gather, the fishes and the loaves,/at the feet of her cock-slit pulpit/eager to be dismantled,/like the gizzard from the giblet." Ammons' Southern roots also emerge through her morphology. Constructions like "she fireant-pissed," or in "Gramma Thunder" when she mentions "foottub-load-a ashes." While these sayings may be foreign to readers, they are commonplace to Ammons and allow her to pay tribute to her Southern roots.

While Southern origins are one aspect of Ammons's subjectivity, she does not forget to honor another part of herself—her sexuality. Her unflinching examination of her own homosexuality is yet another way that *Matching Skin* becomes memorable. In her poem "Closeted," she talks of an early-age crush but says "we cannot pretend we were friends." This type of introspection is a testament to her strength as a writer. In "Boy Clothes," Ammons' imagery is simple yet meaningful: "a harmless dildo flung thigh left." And although her approach to lesbianism is honest, readers know that poems like this do not come easy. Exposing oneself is never easy, but the freedom that comes from the exposure can be invaluable. Ammons must know this since she handles the complexities of being both black

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