

Skin Castles

Gina Athena Ulysse

I. Contact—

In the castle of my skin,

In the castle of my skin,

In the castle of my skin,

Look!

Look!

Look!!! A negro...

On that island, the offspring of a white man and a black woman is a mulatto; the mulatto and the black produce a samba; from the mulatto and the white comes the quadroon; from the quadroon and white comes the mustee; the child of a mustee by a white man is called a musteffino; while the children of a musteffino are free by law and rank as white persons, for all intent and purposes. And further up north, there was the one-drop rule. All—it—took—was—one—d-r-o- p.

II. Bleeding—

Mwen di Feray'o m'blésé. Feray'o m'blésé. Gade'm blésé Feray. Mwen pa we san mwen. Mwen di Feray'o m'blésé. Feray'o m'blésé. Gade'm blésé Feray. Mwen pa we san mwen
In the castle of my—

Editor's note: see liminalities.net/12-3/skincastles.m4a for the accompanying audio performance of "Skin Castles."

III. Dying—

The strong black woman is dead

The strong black woman is dead

The strong black woman is dead

*Saint Philomene vierge martyre
Accorde nous miserecorde
Saint Philomene vierge martyre*

In the castle of my skin

IV. Being

*Saint Philomene vierge martyre
Accorde nous miserecorde
Saint Philomene vierge martyre
Saint Philomene vierge martyre
Accorde nous miserecorde
Saint Philomene vierge martyre*

Her silence killed her last night

She never ever apologized for who she was. With her there was no pretense. There was no shame. What you saw was what you got. She was a peasant, so what. She was illiterate, so what. She was a street vendor, so what. She had a lot of children, so what. She smoked a pipe, chewed tobacco and was a heavy drinker, so what. She was a Vodouist who loved to serve her spirits, so *fucking* what.

V. Embracing

I dwell just beyond your logic. I dwell just beyond your logic. If I didn't define myself, for myself, I would be crunched up into other people's fantasies for me and be eaten alive. I exist as I am and that is enough. I exist as I am and that is enough. I exist as I am and that is enough.

VI. Living

In the castle of my skin,

In the castle of my skin,

In the castle of my skin,

I dive

Gina Athena Ulysse is a feminist artist-anthropologist-activist and self-proclaimed Post-Zora Interventionist. She earned her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She is also a performance artist, poet and multi-media artist. Her most recent book is *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post-Quake Chronicle* (2015). She is currently Professor of anthropology at Wesleyan University. Inspiration and shout outs for this poem include Frantz Fanon, George Lamming, Audre Lorde, Natasha White and Walt Whitman. Also represented: Georges Henriques [1953] 1968. *Family and Colour in Jamaica*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.



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