

# BISEXUAL

Fanny Felixine

ENGL 4010 Advanced Poetry Writing  
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## Soucouyant

We have been misunderstood.  
They called us dangerous,  
as soon as they stepped on our island.  
As if another color of skin was inherently a trap.

They looked at us with fear in their eyes and saw the creature.

We're scary like the folklore skin-shedding vampire,  
drinking the perfect value  
and perfect drop of blood,  
staining their peerless snow-white skin.

They called it savagery.  
They called it salvation.  
They called it a mission from God—  
while they were the ones shedding skin,  
at the hanging trees.  
Arriving as explorers,  
leaving as owners.

Eyes like beads, looking envious.  
but maybe,  
we were just watching them stealing our land.

## La vraie éducation de martinique

They came to Madinina,  
island of flowers, as the *Kalinago* called her.  
They knew this island the best,  
long before anyone came to take it away.

Fourteen degrees north, sixty-one degrees west.

Columbus, 1502, placed it on his map and just like that,  
sold a people's whole world to someone else's gain.

Two shores getting hit by the Atlantic all day,  
*Pelée* still smoking, one volcano, one sea,  
hummingbirds, breadfruit, sugarcane in the ground and the *fer-de-lance*—

Endemic to this specific soil.  
shaped by this specific heat,  
slithering through the undergrowth,  
knew more about being free than we ever have been.

It did not ask permission to exist.  
It did not wait to be discovered.  
It simply moved through its own island  
with the confidence of something  
that has never been told it does not belong here.

Cardinal Richelieu, Captain d'Esnambuc and all of them were afraid of it.  
Of course they were afraid of it.  
They were afraid of everything on this island  
that had not yet been renamed, reorganized,  
made pure in their language.  
So they stomped it out.  
Crushed out the snake.

Brought in the mongoose to hunt it down —  
imported a predator to erase a native.  
Called it progress.  
Called it safety.  
Called it civilizing the wilderness.  
They always call it that.

Traded like sugar. Like rum. Like cargo.

When our rum is older than their flags,  
their maps, their treaties, their pride.

*Aimé Césaire*, our poet, mayor and speaker was born here  
and he already knew that everything they came to teach was a lie  
they tied around a place that never needed their point of view.

The concept of *Négritude* says it all.

The colonizer came to teach, and found  
he was the one who'd never left his cave.

Madinina was never the cave.  
Madinina was always the light outside of it.

## **La danse de mes origines**

They took the language from our mouth,  
the name, the land, the open sky  
but couldn't take the body's knowledge,  
the way the feet remember why.

Born in the fields, born in the fire,  
danced at night when work was done  
not just a dance, a way to gather,  
a way to say "we are still one,"

And we will still be.

The body bent all day for others,  
stooped and pulled and cut the cane  
but when the night came down like mercy,  
the body learned to speak again.

Feet low because the earth is sacred,  
every stomp a conversation  
with those who came before in chains  
and built this nation.

They danced because they had to mourn,  
they danced because they had to fight  
they danced because the drum still breathing  
meant something made it through the night.

Resistance wearing joy as cover.

May 22, 1848, the drum was banned.  
Romain was defeated,  
The population rose.  
Same date, the abolition.  
The drum came back.

There is nothing to hide from,  
only everything to be found.

Shame is just a borrowed feeling, handed down  
by those who feared what happens,  
when people remember everything

they tried to make disappeared.

So when you see *bèlè* now,  
the slow turn and the open hand  
know that every step is carrying  
the weight of all that had to stand.

It is not performance, it is proof  
that you can break a people's chain,  
strip everything down to the bone,  
and still the body will remain.

## Beke

We named every river before you drew what you called maps.  
We moved through our island free of apologies  
because this ground was already ours, before you stole it.

From Madinina to Martinique.  
you renamed everything to your taste, your pleasure, your copy-paste brand.  
You didn't ask. You just took it.

In 1848, you said you freed the nation  
but left it well supervised. Under your own hands.  
You own the supermarket, the land, the distributor.  
Forty cents of every dollar on this island  
passes through your fingers first.  
Always watching, always checking,  
making sure we never forget who decides the price.

You abolished slavery and got paid for the loss, really?  
The Eiffel Tower, "what a beauty, they say."  
If only they knew it was built over the blood of our people.

We got freedom.  
You kept everything else.

## Madras

Red and yellow, green and gold  
*le madras* moves before the drum,  
 tied on the head, a story told,  
 of islands where the rhythms come.

*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak.*

Every knot has got a voice,  
 Dancers step and the earth replies,  
 call and answer, never recoil.  
 people standing, people's freedom.

*Tak PiTak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak.*

They turns slow, then turns again,  
*madras* skirt spinning toward the sky  
 the textile breathing like a flag,  
 worn by those who chose to rise.

*Tak PiTak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak.*

Now It's not just fabric, don't be fooled  
 it's memory worn up high,  
 the whole *archipel*, bright and jeweled,  
 stitched into a part of history.

*Tak PiTak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak Pitak Pitak,*  
*Tak.*

## A society definition

What about our behavior?

What about our definition?

What does it even mean, to be defined?

To be categorized, labeled, judged by everyone?

*Black, Woman, and Bisexual* — which one goes first?

Does it really matter, actually?

All of them are enough of a reason.

All of them arrive before I do.

**Black** /blæk/ *adj.* — *Belonging to a group of people who have dark skin, especially people who come from or whose ancestors came from Africa; connected with Black people.*

Black.

They see it before I open my mouth.

Before my hands even reach for the door.

Before I am anything else,

I am already suspicious.

**Woman** /'wʊmən/ *n.* — *An adult female human being.*

Woman.

They expect my silence to be a gift.

My ambition to be modest,

my body to be careful,

my anger to be quiet

**Bisexual** /,baɪ'sɛkʃʊəl/ *adj.* — *Sexually or romantically attracted to people of more than one sex or gender.*

Bi.

They say it like a curse.

Like a door they get to close

on the body God chose to give me.

The church teach us that the body is a temple

— but only certain bodies.

Mine was already sinful before I knew my own definition.

**Black Bisexual Caribbean Woman** — *my own definition* — *A child who grew up where the sea doesn't apologize for being loud. A woman part of a generation who was handed silence like a dowry and spent her whole life learning to give it back. Who loves other women the way the ocean loves the shore, with pull, with devotion, with the willingness to return even after being pushed back. A body shaped by expectation and yet always escaping it, like water through a fist. A girl who sat in the pew every Sunday and still found God insufficient, because no God worth worshipping would ask this much quiet of a person this full of sound. Not a category. Not a footnote. Not the version on the mantle. The definition they forgot to write, the one that was always already there, in the space between the silence and the sea.*

I think I am the word that exists  
before the dictionary was even created.

## Taboos - Swimming both ways (1)

I was raised on an island

salt in the air,  
stories in the water,  
names swallowed whole  
before they reached the shore.

The sea remembers everything,

but no one tells you  
what it feels like  
to be remembered by a wound.

Because this water, *my paradise*,  
this same blue sold on postcards  
once closed over bodies  
that never got to choose.

Now I stand at the beach

dreaming of elsewhere,  
booking flights over graves,  
and elders call it leaving  
like it's betrayal  
like the ocean isn't the same road  
our ancestors were forced onto,  
just going the other way.

Both our escape and imprisonment.

So like usual, I learned how to split myself in *two*.

one part anchored,  
one part already gone

I love this place

the way you love *someone*

that has hurt you  
without meaning to.  
The way you stay soft for them,  
even when they asks you  
to be smaller.

Because here,  
Love comes with instructions.  
*choose right.*  
*stay close.*  
*don't say too much.*  
*don't want differently*

And I God, I tried to make my heart obedient.  
but it kept reaching  
in more than one direction.

So I learned to do both,  
Loving this island deeply  
and still dreaming of escape.  
Wanting one thing in daylight  
and another in the quiet.

Because the sea taught me that you can carry two currents  
in the same body,  
one pulling you home,  
one pulling you away,  
and both  
still called love.

## **Calmness**

*Calmness = Nymph*

Calm by nature, you let the world  
flow like a clear and quiet stream,  
While, you take me onto your boat  
and guide me through the twilight  
toward horizons softer than thought.

That horizon feels so far,  
yet so close I can almost touch it.  
Everything is held by your soul,  
while ocean waves keep breaking  
against the thin wall inside my mind,  
still learning how to be like you.

I want to be a nymph...  
light, drifting, untouched by noise,  
wrapped in the pastel colors of your rocks,  
your sky, your flowers, your endlessness.

And like a dove, free to fly and simply be,  
I let anxiety fall out of time,  
while nature, like a quiet book,  
lead me through this hazy foam.

Maybe you lives at Les Salines,  
where the sand is so white  
it looks like He forgot to finish the sky  
and let it fall softly to the ground.

Here, the sea is gentle. It's calm.  
You floats on her back  
and lets the sky be her only ceiling,

learning what it means  
to take up space without apology.

## Taboos - Carnival (2)

Ash Wednesday arrives and you're innocent.  
Like last week never came.  
Like you weren't dancing half undressed,  
Like we all don't play that game.

That game, where last Lundi Gras  
cross-dressing passed as laughing,  
like wanting both could hide itself  
beneath bare skin and beads.

One week the body is a party,  
sequins, rum, skin and *sin*.  
Next week pull your dress down, girl,  
cover up that *sin*.

I watch everyone move so free,  
so loud, so unafraid  
and wonder why that freedom only  
lives inside a parade.

We borrow liberation for a season,  
hand it back at dawn  
I'm just trying to figure out

Weren't we out of slavery?

## **We have a really interesting relationship with death in my family.**

You know something?

Then you shut your mouth.

My uncle died by suicide.

I didn't know until I got older.

My grandpa died before I was born.

I know almost nothing about him.

My little cousin died at four.

I wasn't supposed to know that either.

Everything is taboo.

Everything is scary.

Everything is supposed to stay silent,  
and that is how we are raised.

Do not talk about emotion.

No one needs to know.

Do not talk about your ambition.

No one needs to know.

Do not talk about your failure.

No one needs to know.

But

Speak up when your sister is pregnant.

Speak up when you have good grades.

Speak up when there is something beautiful enough  
to make the family look whole.

Something you can point to and say,

*see? we are doing fine.*

as if broken things

become prettier under the right lighting.

Will they speak up

when I give them my three definitions?

Actually, maybe only two

will be worth saying out loud.

The other one  
will probably be buried  
with the rest of the bodies  
in the family tomb.

Black woman and ga—

*Shhhh...*

It's taboo.

### **Taboos - Makrel (3)**

Everybody knows your name,  
you're the daughter of the deacon, the CEO, the ladyman...  
Though nobody knows your mind.

The street talks loud,  
The grandma side-eye bigger than their forehead  
Though your house goes mute,

The truth gets left behind.

Gossip travels fast as wind,  
crosses fences, jumps the gate

*Did you see her on this bike with that guy?  
I heard that she is not that innocent?  
How could her parents be proud of her?*

Though no one knows how your house is inside.

The neighbor knows your business cold,  
your auntie knows your shame,  
We talk around the thing, not to it,

Like the in hurricane'eye  
Here we circle it like rain

But when the wind goes through,  
no whispers, no truth is eager to come behind.

## Fourth Candle

I was in middle school  
 when it happened,  
 old enough to understand the word *dead*  
 but not old enough to believe  
 it could come from inside a house  
 with *toys* on the floor.

My cousin was no more than four.  
 Not more than that.  
 She had the soft voice of a child  
 who still was replacing the letter *r* in “Citron” by *w*  
 even when she tried as hard as she could.  
 Her mother held her too long.  
 That’s the cleanest way to say it.

They said she was tired.  
 They said she had just broken up  
 with a man who wasn’t *even* the father.  
 As if exhaustion could be measured,  
 as if *Love* had an expiration date  
 that, once passed, allows a body  
 to stop breathing.

Her real father was in France.  
 My cousin.  
 A police officer.  
 At work.  
 His boss called him in, closed the door,  
 used the voice reserved  
 for accidents and bodies.  
 He handed over his gun,  
 his badge, and then flew home  
 with nothing in his hands.  
 Nothing in his name.  
 Nothing in his heart.

The funeral smelled like flowers  
 that didn’t belong to anyone.  
 The casket white,  
 representing the innocence of a *toddler*.  
 Not even a child.

Adults spoke softly,  
as if whispering could rewind time.  
Someone said *prison*.  
Someone said *pills*.  
Someone said *bipolar*,  
a word that tried to explain  
what explanation cannot touch.

Later we learned  
her mother had known.  
Her own mother had known.  
Mental illness passed quietly  
between women like a secret  
too heavy to name,  
too inconvenient to stop.

No one told me right away.  
They waited a week.  
They said they wanted to protect *me*.  
Though, the day my aunt told my father,  
he stood on the balcony,  
the one outside my room.  
I heard his silence before I heard  
the words.  
Mouth shut,  
I didn't say anything either because I wanted to protect *them*.

The mother's name was *Cassandra*.  
Daughter of Priam and cursed prophetess:  
the one who predict the future  
but is never believed.

I think about that sometimes.  
About knowing.  
About not being heard.  
And I think about the almost four-year-old,  
how she trusted the arms of her mother,  
how the world ended quietly,  
without sirens,  
without prophecy,  
without anyone stopping it  
in time for her to blow her *fourth* candle.

## What's Next After the Fourth Candle: Another one?

*What's next?*

No one says it out loud.  
The question walks barefoot  
through our gathering  
so it won't wake the past.

We fold the story small,  
tuck it inside drawers  
with documents and baptism photos,  
label it *fragile* over our heart  
but never open.

We have mastered  
the art of not naming.

At family dinners (*whenever they happened now*)  
we pass the rice,  
the salt,  
the laughter that stops  
one second too early.  
Her name floats above us  
like steam from the *Pâté en pot*  
visible, warm,  
untouched.

Grief became etiquette.  
Silence became tradition.  
Love became careful.

When my sister said  
she should tell them,  
her brain was reeling  
like a poorly oiled engine.  
She waited months.  
Months.  
Almost the third of *its* time  
As if joy needed permission  
from *ghosts*.

A baby, she said finally.  
A boy.

My aunties smiled the way people do  
when they are afraid  
their teeth might shatter.

Because somewhere,  
deep in the marrow of our bloodline,  
lives a whisper:

*The first children don't stay.*

I hate that whisper.  
I hate how it is in our language.  
I hate how it sits beside me  
(*Mostly me actually...*)

I watch my nephew sleep.

He is not four yet.  
Not yet.  
Still, the clock exists.  
Still, the memory exists.  
Still, the silence exists.

I will buy him all the *Time* he needs.  
I will earn  
I will trade  
I will steal,  
For his digital clock to never ever stop.

We do not speak of curses.  
We do not speak of fear.  
We do not speak of her.

*Is that okay, tho?*

Sometimes I think  
silence is just grief  
holding its breath.

And what's next—  
what's next is this:

one day  
someone will say her name  
at full volume,

and the house  
will probably collapse.

## **Taboos - Hidden desire (4)**

I kept my dreams a little quiet,  
fold them small, put them away  
not because I didn't believe in them,  
but because of what they'd say in my back.

*Why would you go there? To the United States?  
Is there not enough for you here?  
Don't you want to stay on your island?  
You're planning on coming back, right?  
She thinks she's better than us now,  
she always wanted to leave,*

True.

But I've heard it said about the others,  
So I learned early to deceive.

I smiled and nod and stay small,  
shrank myself to fit the frame  
pretending that I wanted the same things,  
pretending my attraction was the same.

Jealousy wears a friendly face here,  
judgment comes dressed up in love  
or disguised respect.

*I know I should be proud of my culture, but why can't I do both?*

So I learned to want in secret,  
like the sky forgets the dove.  
To bury half of my wanting  
and only name one love.

## After the movies at the ‘Place de Schoelcher’ - Martinique

Starlight overhead,  
our feet move across the warm pavement.

Our laughters bounce off—  
the sea wall,  
the palm trunks,  
the open air.

Between land and water:  
this square became our.

Our paradise at 18 and more.

Basketball arch through dark  
the chain net sings with the wind.

We leave pizza grease on folding chairs,  
cardboard boxes tilted on benches  
and the last slice almost fall as we argue about it  
more than school ever did.

Our games go late—  
dominoes slapping,  
cards shuffling,  
dices skittering,  
our voices rising.

The tender places:  
left side, right side  
where we lean into the sea and the air.

The refraction of light on water,  
the reflection of who we were.

These innocent souls,  
innocent high schoolers.

Kindness lives here in the simplest ways.  
The friendships we build on this plaza  
sweaty, loud, imperfect  
are the ones that keep holding.

This place hold it all—  
the saved moments  
the near-misses  
the soft landings.

# Appendix

**Aimé Césaire:** A writer and politician from Martinique, co-founder of the Négritude movement.

**Fer-de-lance:** A highly venomous snake found in the Caribbean, especially feared in Martinique.

**Kalinago:** The Indigenous people of the Caribbean, also known as Caribs, who inhabited islands like Dominica before European colonization.

**Makrel:** A Creole word referring to gossip or someone who spreads rumors.

**Madinina:** The Indigenous Kalinago name for Martinique, often translated as “island of flowers.”

**Madras:** A brightly colored, patterned fabric traditionally worn in Caribbean clothing, especially in cultural dress.

**Négritude:** A cultural and literary movement founded by Black writers, promoting pride in Black culture and identity.

**Pâté en pot:** A traditional Caribbean dish, often a rich meat stew baked in a pastry crust, commonly served during special occasions.

**Pélée:** Mount Pelée, the volcano in Martinique known for its devastating 1902 eruption.

**Soucouyant:** A figure in Caribbean folklore, often described as a shapeshifting old woman who sheds her skin at night and becomes a fireball to suck people’s blood.