# Ana Cristina's Ecstasy: Angélica Freitas's Poem "Ana C." and the Question of Queer Influence

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**Abstract**: This article takes Angélica Freitas's poem "Ana C." as an entry point for reconsidering the narrative of Ana Cristina Cesar's life. Animated by Freitas's questions, I go back to Cesar's archive in search of traces of the poet's queerness to propose that Ana C., both as a real person and as the character in Freitas's poem, helps to create what José Esteban Muñoz has conceived of as queer futurity. Through the questions that Cesar herself posed in poems, translations, letters, and other archival material, I seek to establish a dialogue between her work, composed mainly during the 1970s and 1980s, and contemporary discussions on queerness, using Freitas, as suggested by Heloisa Teixeira, as a possible "link" between Ana C. and our times.

**Keywords**: Brazilian poetry, contemporary poetry, anxiety of influence, queer studies, women writers

Ana Cristina Cesar (1952–1983) is most likely the first name that comes to mind for Brazilians when asked to think of a woman poet from the 1970s and 1980s. Or perhaps I think of her because, as a poet, I was educated at the same institution and immersed in similar cultural references. While these conditions may be quite specific, I am not alone in considering Ana Cristina Cesar one of the most important poets of her generation. Heloisa Teixeira (formerly Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda) opens her introduction to the recent edited anthology *As 29 poetas hoje* (*The 29 [Woman] Poets Today*) with the following:

> I've heard that it all started with Ana Cristina Cesar. The statement is a bit radical, but it recurs in almost all the testimonies of the

> poets who succeeded her. The attraction that Ana C. aroused and arouses is a long thesis, full of hypotheses and subtexts. (9)[1]

In this new anthology, Teixeira revisits the seminal gesture she made in the 1970s, when her first edited anthology, titled *26 poetas hoje* (*26 Poets Today*), came out. The first edition, which was published in 1976 and featured poets like Ana Cristina Cesar, Roberto Piva, Torquato Neto, Ricardo Chacal, and Leila Miccolis, made available to a broader audience—and future readers—a selection of the vast poetic production that at the time was circulating mainly in homemade or independent publications, eventually helping to establish what become known as the mimeograph generation.[2]

In the preface to the 2021 selection, Teixeira (who had a close friendship with Ana Cristina Cesar and was at the same time her professor, editor, and interlocutor) positions Cesar as a foundational figure, a bedrock for what she terms the "young canon of women's poetry" in Brazil (11). This canon, according to Teixeira, would include Angélica Freitas (b. 1973), Alice Sant'Anna (b. 1988), Ana Martins Marques (b. 1977), Marília Garcia (b. 1979), and Bruna Beber (b. 1984). But before presenting the works of the new edition's twenty-nine poets—a group mostly born after 1990, writing in the current moment, and not yet part of any named canon—Teixeira goes on to investigate the relationship that exists between that "young canon" and Ana Cristina Cesar. Of those five names, Teixeira identifies Angélica Freitas as the "*elo*" (link) between Cesar's generation and the new generation of feminist poets in the current anthology.

[1] "Já ouvi dizer que tudo começou com Ana Cristina Cesar. A afirmação é um pouco radical, mas é recorrente em quase todos os depoimentos das poetas que a sucederam. A atração que Ana C. despertou e desperta é um assunto longo, cheio de hipóteses e subtextos." All Portuguese-English translations in this article are my own.

[2] As Frederico Coelho demonstrates in his most recent book, *Infraturas* (2025), the anthology made a decisive contribution at the time of its publication by calling attention to a body of work that had not yet been critically considered (213).

***"Ana C." by Angélica Freitas***

To illustrate this connection, Teixeira draws a parallel between Freitas's 2012 poetry collection *Um útero é do tamanho de um punho* (*A Uterus is The Size of a Fist*) and Ana Cristina Cesar's 1982 collection *A teus pés* (*At Your Feet*). Both are touchstones for their respective generations, allowing for the treatment of certain "women's themes" in new, singular ways. Their forms, too, seem to reverberate in the work of other poets, especially work by women and queer authors.

To investigate Ana Cristina Cesar's influence on the "young canon," Teixeira reproduces Freitas's account of her first time reading Cesar: "it was as if a bomb had been dropped on me."[3] Although Freitas somewhat downplays Cesar's influence on her own poetry, she affirms that reading Ana Cristina Cesar as a teenager "opened [her] eyes and ears to other possible registers of poetry" (21).[4]

The power of such an encounter becomes even more compelling when Freitas treats it poetically in "Ana C.," published in *Canções de atormentar* (*Songs to Torment*; 2020) and offered here in my tentative translation:[5]

ANA C.

ana c. saved me from being an electronics technician
at sixteen
when dressed in red
she entered my life
and left me
at her feet

I had no choice
it was a huge flash
a punch in the throat followed
by a speck in the eye

who is she

[3] "Foi como se uma bomba caísse sobre mim."
[4] "Me abriu olhos e ouvidos para outros registros possíveis de poesia."
[5] I thank Jamille Pinheiro Dias for her insightful suggestions on an earlier version of this translation.

what is this
who am I

in 1989 we didn't have google
libraries were swarms for preparatory classes

knowing about ana c. and then
about her suicide
made me one of the youngest
widows of ana c.

I wondered
but why, why, why
did you kill yourself
as if the existence of this weird girl
myopic, disheveled
at the end of the bottom of the country
would make any difference
in her life or yearning for continuity

but this was how it happened in 89
and I dropped out of electronics
because until ana c. I didn't know one could
write like that and I wanted to write –

to this day we young and not so young widows of ana c.
restrained or already half-crazy are looking
for a night of love in her poetry lines

praying for that biography to finally come out
to let us know what else happened
to give our love a new perspective
and our desire new horizons

dying to know what other lips she kissed

because after all they are always ours

and after all it is our hands she takes
to this day when we write a verse, for love—[6]

Ana Cristina Cesar, the poet, becomes here the character "Ana C.," Cesar's "*nom de guerre* adopted for good" since 1979 (*Correspondência incompleta* 40), by which many refer to the poet today.[7] Ana C.'s appearance in the poem happens in the first line, saving the poem's protagonist (referred to henceforth as Angélica) from a future in which she, Angélica, would have become an electronics technician. To the sixteen-year-old Angélica, Ana C. appears dressed in red and leaves the teenage soon-to-be-author enthralled, "at her feet," in a reference to Cesar's 1981 poetry collection *A teus pés*. By entering her life and making Angélica submissive to her, Ana C. subsequently turns Angélica into a poet—almost as a vampire would—and, simultaneously, into one of her *widows*. We will return to the image of the widow below.

The precise moment of the encounter is never witnessed by the reader. Was Angélica *reading* Ana? Did Ana C. enter her life *as a ghost*?[8] Such details are unknowable. All we know is what Ana C. was wearing and the after-effect of such an apparition: "it was a huge flash / a punch in the throat followed / by a speck in

[6] *ana c. me salvou de ser técnica em eletrônica / aos dezesseis / quando entrou de vermelho / em minha vida / e me deixou / aos seus pés // não tive escolha / foi um baita clarão / soco na goela seguido / de cisco no olho // quem é ela / o que é isto / quem sou eu // em 1989 a gente não tinha google / as bibliotecas eram enxames pré-vestibulares // saber de ana c. e em seguida / de seu suicídio / fez de mim uma das mais jovens / viúvas de ana c .// eu me perguntava / mas por quê por quê por quê / você foi se matar / como se uma guria toda errada / míope descabelada / no fim do fundo do país / fosse fazer qualquer diferença /em sua vida ou anseio de continuidade // mas foi assim que aconteceu em 89 / e eu larguei os estudos de eletrônica / porque até ana c. eu não sabia que se podia / escrever assim e eu queria escrever —// até hoje nós viúvas jovens e nem tanto de ana c. / sóbrias ou já meio loucas estamos procurando / uma noite de amor nas linhas de seus poemas // rezando para que saia enfim a tal biografia / que nos conte o que mais houve / para darmos visões novas ao nosso amor / e novos cenários para o nosso tesão // torcendo para saber que outras bocas ela beijava / porque afinal é sempre a nossa // e afinal são as nossas mãos que ela pega / até hoje quando escrevemos um verso, pelo amor—* (76-77)

[7] "Adotado de vez o nome de guerra." For a more in-depth discussion of this gesture, see Di Leone, *Ana C: As tramas da consagração*, 15. During my archival research at the Instituto Moreira Salles in January 2025, I found a passage in a text by Hélène Cixous ("Le sexe ou la tête?," 1976), in which the author discussed the gesture of dropping the paternal surname. In the margins of this passage, Ana Cristina had written the letter "C."

[8] In *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1995), Terry Castle argues that the figure of the lesbian has persisted in literature precisely as a spectral apparition.

the eye." The effects on Angélica's body include momentary blindness (but also a sort of enlightenment), an attack to her throat (does this modify her voice?), followed by a speck in the eye. I read this as a type of ecstasy: it initially disorients the teenage Angélica, proceeds to attack her, and is, ultimately, a transformative experience. But who is punching her in the throat? Is it Ana, dressed in red, or does the poem itself deliver the blow?

It is after the shock of this encounter that Angélica begins to ask: "who is she / what is this / who am I?" These are existential questions, formulated by someone who has been disoriented. As a result of the punch—caused by Ana C. and/or her poetry—the poet resurfaces to question not only the person who did this to her (the first question) but also who she herself is (the final question). The middle question ("what is this") asks both the poet and the reader to question the poem itself. Their encounter unfolds violently: Angélica is knocked out by Ana C., falls in love with her, submits to her, and is finally abandoned by her. In the aftermath, Angélica becomes Ana C.'s widow and the poet who would produce *Um útero é do tamanho de um punho*—a book that would proceed to "knock out" other "*garotas todas-erradas*" ("weird" or "off-putting" girls).

I understand their encounter, as formulated in Freitas's poem, to be the epitome of the experience of reading Cesar, one that is shared by many others who, like Freitas, consider themselves "*todas-erradas*." After all, might we think of *toda-errada* as one possible way to translate *queer* into Portuguese?

I also understand theirs as a queer encounter in the sense that it happens on a queer timeline: Freitas would have actually been ten years old when Cesar died in 1983, not sixteen, a fact that renders their described encounter unlikely to have happened in real life—that is, in a "straight," chronological timeline (we will discuss the opposition between queer and straight time in greater depth below). This encounter also unleashes other events that put into motion what José Esteban Muñoz has conceived of as "queer futurity"—that which is always coming into being as "a warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (1).

***The Queer Archive of Ana C.***

> We all know there is another story to be told
> (Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision")

Animated by Angélica Freitas's invocation of Ana C., I propose a revision of the scholarly narratives of Cesar's life, which frequently overlook her erotic relationships with other women. By contrast, I investigate what I understand to be a collection of queer gestures in Ana Cristina Cesar's archive, which will help us create an alternative account of the poet's life—a response to Freitas's prayers "for that biography to finally come out." I pay special attention to moments (images, footnotes, passages in letters, gossip, and anecdotal accounts) in which one can find traces of Ana C.'s queerness. As we will see, on many occasions, these are formulated precisely as questions.

I also take into consideration another queer poetic encounter: the relationship between Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, as reflected in the latter's poem "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore." What interests me about the two—described by Muñoz as a "queer dynamic duo" (188)—is the way their cross-generational bond subverts traditional notions of influence, as theorized by Kathryn R. Kent. Kent's work shows us how Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence—the struggle between poets and their literary fathers, whom the son must kill and incorporate to be able to create his own poetry—was reworked by the 1970s feminist literary critics. Envisioning an alternative frame to account for the relationship between female authors, they stated that women writers would suffer an "anxiety of authorship" rather than one of influence. Their alternative model was based on the relationship between mothers and daughters: under this system, in order to become authors, women would need to find literary mothers. Kent, however, takes Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore as a paradigm for a different kind of poetic influence. Addressing the desires she imagines might have had circulated between Bishop and Moore, she infuses past theorizations with eroticism, accounting for the give-and-take present in the bond between these two authors. Thus, their relationship—previously read as one between daughter, the orphaned Bishop, and mother, the older Marianne Morre—is perceived by Kent as having, actually, an element of mutual affection and playfulness: "Moore and Bishop's relationship offers another, prominent example of the ways in which queer subjects reproduce or transmit queer identifications and desires, as well as in some cases refuse them" (170). In this sense, it is remarkable that, in "Ana C.," Freitas sees herself not as the poet's daughter but as her widow, as someone haunted by loss but also by ecstasy. It is equally remarkable that she extends this position to a collective *we*: the readers of Ana C.

### *Posing the Queer Question*

Even if Ana Cristina Cesar showed some resistance during her lifetime, as expressed in letters, to joining what she termed the "gay colonies"[9] and had doubts as to whether "happy lesbians" existed, she was undeniably thinking about homosexuality and gender in her own terms. In the posthumously published poem "Haikai" ("Haiku"), for instance, she asked, "Hm? Hm? How about / being Orlando / in real life?" (*Poética* 422).[10]

As an attentive look at her archive reveals, both her life and her writings are punctuated by indications that relationships between women were a recurring preoccupation, and that questions related to gender and sexuality were themes of vital importance, not just intellectual interests. Many of these thoughts, however, seemed to be shared in safe spaces and with selected interlocutors (though, of course, we are limited to those who chose to make the correspondence public), such as Caio Fernando Abreu (1948–1996), a fellow writer and close friend who died of complications related to HIV/AIDS thirteen years after Cesar's suicide.
In his comprehensive study of Cesar's work, Michel Riaudel has shown how two forces were at play after Cesar's death. On the one hand there was Abreu, who in 1995 published a controversial letter "outing" Ana Cristina Cesar in *O Estado de São Paulo*; on the other was the poet's family, who believed that these matters were a private affair and who, reportedly, went as far as to remove most mentions of the theme in her published letters, *Correspondência incompleta*, edited by Teixeira and Armando Freitas Filho in close dialogue with the family. Tellingly, the only mention that remained in the publication was precisely the question: "Do these happy lesbians really exist (let no one hear us) because if they do, I want to know what it's like?"[11] (47).

Perhaps Cesar's family was as progressive as they could have been at the time, but such efforts at promoting an image of Cesar that aligned with their heteronormative beliefs nevertheless seem to have enduringly marked readings of the poet's archive. At a minimum, their efforts influenced how researchers have

[9] "Não sei direito (tem que?) entrar para colônia gay, mas desejo mais escracho." Letter to Caio Fernando Abreu, Nov. 17, 1982, Archives of the Centro Cultural Delfos (1486/47078).
[10] "*Hem? hem? que tal* / *ser Orlando* / *na vida* real?"
[11] "*Será que existem mesmo essas moças lésbicas felizes (que ninguém nos ouça) porque se existir, quero saber como é?*"

dealt with the theme, treating her queer relationships as a taboo topic until very recently. Italo Moriconi—a contemporary writer, Cesar's friend, and the author of a proto-biography of her titled *Ana Cristina Cesar: O sangue de uma poeta* (*Ana Cristina Cesar: The Blood of a Poet*)—speculates on the possible causes of the apprehension that prevented her friends from revealing the names and details of Cesar's personal life:

> It must be the fear of betraying the image of a well-behaved Ana that to this day leads her friends from later in life to a polite silence regarding names and details. Brazilian public life is not built for gossip. Maybe it's an advantage. The Anglo-Saxon style of total frankness, which ends up leading to cheap sensationalism, greatly shocks the sensibilities of our intellectuals and politicians. Is this really an advantage of our culture? To feed the secrecy, the hypocrisy, the half-truths, the subtexts that accompany the complicit and dismissive looks of the "few who know." Silences that protect the corrupt. Looks that marginalize rebels and drive the "inept" insane. (131–32)[12]

By offering a queer revision of Ana Cristina Cesar's biography, my intention is not so much to impose a lesbian identity on a woman who resisted such categorization as it is to shed light on a part of her subjectivity that has been treated either as potentially sensitive or as an insignificant, uncomfortable detail. Recognizing the enduring impact of her poetry on readers—who, as Freitas notes, have all become her "widows"—I revisit Cesar's history with this hypothesis in mind: if her texts continue to be so resounding today, could it not be in part due to the queerness of their *form*?

In *Queer Forms* (2022), Ramzi Fawaz writes about the power that queer forms have in our collective psyche and how they allow us to feel and experience gender

[12] "*Deve ser o medo de trair a imagem de uma Ana bem-comportada que até hoje leva seus amigos dos últimos tempos ao silêncio decoroso quanto a nomes e detalhes. A vida pública brasileira não está habituada a mexericos. Talvez seja uma vantagem. O estilo anglo-saxão da franqueza total, que acaba levando ao sensacionalismo barato, choca muito a sensibilidade de nossos intelectuais e políticos. Será que isso é mesmo vantagem de nossa cultura? Alimentar o segredo, a hipocrisia, as meias-verdades, os subentendidos que acompanham os olhares cúmplices e excludentes dos 'poucos que sabem'. Silêncios que protegem corruptos. Olhares que marginalizam rebeldes e enlouquecem "ineptos.*"

and sexual nonconformity in new and surprising ways. As an example, he writes about his own experience of watching the movie *Thelma and Louise* (1991), which provided him with an effective vocabulary for queerness *before* he was able to articulate it politically. The movie, Fawaz writes, "projects women into new social, psychic, and geographical contexts, reimagining what they can be or become" (3). Queer forms, Fawaz adds, can alter, enlarge, or retune the sensorium:

> To form something is to give it shape and hence make it accessible to perception, but also available for meaning making and reinvention from different perspectives. Queer cultural forms are those aesthetic or creative figures that concretize aspects of gender- and sexual-nonconforming life so they become conceivable in the mind's eye. (5)

We can find a similar idea in Freitas's account, reproduced by Teixeira in the anthology's introduction, in which Freitas states that reading Cesar *opened eyes and ears to something new*. Isn't this "something new" identified by Freitas—an openly lesbian poet who became, in a certain sense, symbolic of what a poet can be and do in Brazil—ultimately a form that allowed her, too, to envision and create a different future? A queer form that, in the end, was capable of giving "our love a new perspective / and our desire new horizons"?

### *Mansfield by Cesar: Ecstasy as a Queer Theme*

One of the defining moments that makes Cesar's ideas on queerness more apparent occurs during her time in England, when the poet worked on a translation of Katherine Mansfield's short story "Bliss." Facing the impossibility of an exact translation for the title, Cesar differentiates hers from other translations by choosing not to use *felicidade* ("happiness"). Instead, after reading Christopher Isherwood's work, she argued that *felicidade* was better suited to heterosexual relationships. *Êxtase* ("ecstasy"), on the other hand, would more accurately convey the feeling one looks for in homosexual relationships:

> I believe it's important to establish the difference between *ecstasy* and *happiness*. *Ecstasy* suggests the sensation of a kind of supreme, paradisiacal joy, which can only be felt on very special occasions: in moments of satisfaction in the baby/mother relation; in other "primitive" passionate relationships; in homosexual

> fantasies; in religious ecstasy; and, very rarely, in "real life," in adult relationships. One could say that *ecstasy* is, basically, an imaginary emotion full of force and of the power proper to the imaginary. An interesting quotation from C. Isherwood establishes the difference between bliss (*êxtase*) and plain happiness (*felicidade*). The narrator begins to feel that the term *happiness* is more closely related to heterosexual relationships, whereas ecstasy, which is more violent and "sensational" and not merely a feeling of happiness, is what a person seeks in homosexual relationships (something that is not exactly of this world?). (*Escritos da Inglaterra* 50)[13]

Establishing a difference between a "supreme, paradisiacal joy" and "plain happiness," Cesar argues that ecstasy is rarely felt in what she calls real life. Unlike happiness, ecstasy could only be felt in very special relationships, such as the one between a mother and baby, in "primitive" and passionate relationships, and, according to her reading of Isherwood, in homosexual fantasies. Ecstasy would also point toward desiring "something that is not exactly of this world." This footnote, the first of eighty, is highly suggestive: the justification for the title distances the short story from the heterosexual world, shifting it toward a queerer one by bringing attention to the alternative coupling between the two women in the story (and not the married, heterosexual, official couple that would correspond to ideas of "happiness"). Through this choice, Cesar foregrounds the question of homosexual desire, which was not as explicit before and which would have been even less present under the title *felicidade*.

The choice of *Êxtase* and its justification are hyperattuned to current discussions in the field of queer theory: both Jack Halberstam and José Esteban

[13] "Creio que é importante estabelecer a diferença entre êxtase e felicidade. *Êxtase* sugere a sensação de uma espécie de suprema felicidade paradisíaca, que só pode ser sentida em ocasiões muito especiais: em momentos de satisfação bebê/mãe, em outras relações apaixonadas, 'primitivas', em fantasias homossexuais, no êxtase religioso e, muito raramente, na 'vida real', nos relacionamentos entre adultos. Poder-se-ia dizer que o êxtase é, basicamente, uma emoção *imaginária* cheia de força e do poder próprio do imaginário. Uma citação interessante de C. Isherwood estabelece a diferença entre *bliss* (êxtase) e *plain happiness* (felicidade). O narrador passa a ter a sensação de que o termo *felicidade* está mais relacionado com relações heterossexuais, enquanto êxtase, que é mais violento e 'sensacional' e não apenas uma sensação de felicidade, é aquilo que uma pessoa busca em relações homossexuais (alguma coisa que não é propriamente deste mundo?)."

Muñoz have written about the idea of ecstasy as a queer feeling. Muñoz, toward the end of *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, affirms that the time of queerness *is* the time of ecstasy and that ecstasy *is* queerness's way (187). Drawing from Lacan's reading of Bernini's Ecstasy of Saint Teresa, Muñoz argues that ecstasy represents a move outward—from the self. Such usage, he adds, resonates with the Greek origin of the term, meaning "to stand" or "to be out outside of oneself" (186). According to Muñoz, it is with Heidegger that the idea of time is introduced: "Knowing ecstasy is having a sense of timeliness's motion, comprehending a temporal unity, which includes the past (having-been), the future (the not-yet), and the present (the making present)" (186). Thus, it is precisely what Muñoz calls a "temporally calibrated idea of ecstasy" that can help us get to a queer temporality, different from "the linearity that many of us have been calling straight time." Evoking the multiple meanings of the word *ecstasy,* the author invites the reader to engage in "a collective temporal distortion," pointing to the need to step out of the "rigid conceptualization that is a straight present" (185). Muñoz centers his book on the idea of queerness as something that is always located on the horizon, and it is precisely by feeling *ecstasy*—and its temporality that includes the past, future, and present—that we reach the potential to find a queer temporality. Muñoz also draws from his own feelings upon listening to the song "Take Ecstasy with Me" by the Magnetic Fields: it is by hearing *something else* in the song that he is also able to *feel* something else. Could it be the same type of "something else" that Cesar described as "something that is not exactly of this world," and the "something new" found by Freitas in Cesar's poetry?

In a similar way, for Halberstam, ecstasy is intertwined with a queer temporality. Halberstam analyzes how the queer band Lesbians on Ecstasy, through their act of covering lesbian anthems as if they had taken the drug ecstasy, reimagines an alternative temporality that recasts the past (Muñoz 186). In Halberstam's words, while there is nothing necessarily queer about covering a song, "the performance of covers can be queered, and, in the process, new modes of thinking about time and generational transmission and memory can be opened up" ("Keeping" 52).

In "Keeping Time with Lesbians on Ecstasy" (2007), written when the theme of temporality had "recently become a hot topic in queer theory" (52), Halberstam claims that queers "inhabit time and time-bound narratives in necessarily different ways from straight people." The notion that queer people experience a different

temporality arises from the fact that they tend to live outside of the somewhat straightforward logic, oriented toward the future and to reproducing a specific form of living (in which you are born, go to school, get a job and/or get married, have babies and raise them, etc.). Historically, queer people have not always been able to enjoy the same temporal markers, or have refused to, especially those milestones pertaining to marriage and children.

It is also interesting to revisit Halberstam's idea of covering songs as an inherently queer act: during a cover, the singer inhabits someone else's persona, body, or voice. Like a drag act, "it is a way of doing so while self-consciously registering the performance rather than merely blending into the original" (53). I propose that we think of Cesar's translation of Mansfield as another queer gesture: it is arguably her most important translation, one for which she extensively researched and wrote about another woman who lived in the past (who might today also be understood as a queer person). Cesar not only translates (covers) the text (song) but also registers this performance in the act of annotating it (in eighty footnotes). By doing so, she ends up making perceptible, in Portuguese, the queerness of Mansfield's text.

As for her choice of title, "Êxtase," I see the translation as a way of inserting the text into a queer genealogy: a gesture in a sequence of other gestures that the writer makes toward a queer futurity. *Queerness*, though it of course already existed at that time (as Muñoz wrote, "we were queer before we were lesbian and gay" [127]), was not discussable in the same ways it is today. The repressive military dictatorship did not encourage open discussions on sexuality, and homosexual movements in Brazil were only just beginning to be organized in that era. At that time, these debates were mainly framed as a political issue,[14] which did not seem to appeal to Ana Cristina. Her ways of thinking about gender and sexuality can sound sometimes dissonant to the main discussion of her time

[14]Augusta da Silveira de Oliveira, scholar of lesbian history, provides a more nuanced understanding of this moment: in an unpublished article in which she investigates a similar question regarding Brazilian singers Maria Bethânia and Gal Costa, Silveira de Oliveira discusses the act of "coming out of the closet"—an act grounded in notions of acceptance and social liberation—as the political gesture that ultimately prevailed. She notes, however, that this performative act also fixes desire within a rigid sexual identity, potentially reinforcing a more normative and prescribed sense of self. Thus, while "coming out" was useful for the political movement, it was not uncommon for public figures to avoid it, whether because they did not wish to subscribe to those identity prescriptions, preferred not to politicize their personal lives, or feared potential harm to their public careers (particularly in the case of singers and other public figures).

(claiming, for instance, that "no one here was born gay once and for all"). However, through texts such as *The Annotated Bliss*, the poet/translator found a way to articulate her own thoughts on those themes, which would end up becoming part of the contemporary debate in queer theory.

***Ana as Hockney***

Such a position, however, might have been a solitary one. Cesar wrote to Caio Fernando Abreu about her girlfriend at least twice, and it seems that Italo Moriconi might have been another interlocutor with whom Cesar felt at ease sharing her thoughts on queer themes, as one might infer after reading *O sangue de uma poeta.* Cesar's work as a translator for *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* might have been a source of information in this sense, as well as her wanderings through the corridors of Sisterwrite, a bookshop in London with a vast catalogue on feminism and lesbianism. But these are only conjectures, and we cannot really know what she thought or how she felt about her own sexuality. What we do know is that as she wrote to Abreu in 1982, she did not want to be the "news of the summer" because of her new partner; that she was "dying of fear and courage."[15] And that, according to rumors, one of the reasons she had to move from her apartment in Gávea was her neighbors' discomfort regarding her living situation (i.e., with another woman). As in Angélica Freitas's poem, we can only imagine, and pray "for that biography to finally come out / to let us know what else happened." Besides praying, one can also actively look for traces of this untold story and try to extract some meaning from them.

With this task in mind, I propose we look at the picture below, taken in England in 1980:

[15] "E pinta também o medo da novidade, de que sejamos a novidade do verão carioca"; "Estou morrendo de medo e coragem" Letters to Caio Fernando Abreu, 1982,Archives of the Centro Cultural Delfos.

In it, we see a woman in white clothes, leaning against a white picket fence, with a suitcase at her feet. The background reads as a landscape that is not Brazilian. Perhaps even the person in the image could be seen as a foreigner or at least a traveler—someone who belongs to the landscape momentarily and who simultaneously is about to leave.

We could go even further and ask: Do we really see a woman? We know it is a woman, but what exactly, in the scene, responds to what is expected in the performance of femininity? It is a staged picture, of course, and Cesar's nonchalant pose is totally calculated: She stands with her feet crossed, hands in pockets, wearing a white suit and tilting her head. I read this as a dialogical gesture, even inquisitive—as if the poet were asking: What do you think?

Besides the suitcase, there is another important prop in this scene: the white picket fence, which in the collective imagination often symbolizes the ideal middle-class suburban life lived by a heterosexual couple and their offspring. And then positioned in front is Ana Cristina, inquisitive, wearing clothes that we wouldn't immediately associate with a feminine presence. In a letter, she describes

the intention behind the photograph: this was an imitation of the English painter David Hockney,[16] whom we might remember was a gay man in a moment when male homosexuality was still a crime in the United Kingdom. Cesar crosses her legs, hides her hands, and looks at us. The suitcase, the emblem of the traveler, is also the symbol of a poet who was always in transit—and for whom, according to one of her poems, "happiness is called a means of transport" (*Poética* 120).[17] The picture, although taken in England, would likely be seen in Brazil. In the present, her clothing might not be so objectionable. During that time in Brazil, however, the sight of a woman purposefully dressed in menswear would have been received differently, at best with apprehension and at worst with reprehension.

In *Making Girls into Women*, while discussing Marianne Moore's style of clothing, Kent observes how the process of self-transformation is often linked to gender. Wearing clothes "on the loose side implies not only a need for comfort but also may signify a need to conceal or, less pejoratively, to modify one's body" (180). The author notes how women have often resorted to loose-fitting clothes to "'flatten' out or diminish signs of a 'feminine' corporeality"; so, too, did Marianne Moore, who would appear in photos and in public wearing "mannish" suits, often accompanied by a black bowtie. Moore's clothing, in fact, was a primary means through which she would establish her "eccentric reputation" (183).

Even though Ana Cristina Cesar's emulation of David Hockney is only one of the multiple poses she embodied during her lifetime, it is worthy of attention. In "The Politics of Posing" (1998), Sylvia Molloy, drawing from José Martí's account of seeing an image of Oscar Wilde, argues that in Latin America, after Wilde, "posing will become increasingly suspect, will be read more and more as advertising sexual deviance" (147).

In Brazil, the perception of proper feminine behavior was of course weighted differently for different classes. Elizabeth Bishop is one example of someone who lived with a woman, but by inhabiting the circles of higher power and leaving the country before the most repressive moments of the dictatorship (even sympathizing with it at certain points in her life), she seemed to escape most (if any) reprimands for that behavior. One of Cesar's contemporaries was not so

[16] In the notebook *Portsmouth 30-6-8 Colchester 12-7-80* (posthumously published in facsimile), Cesar copied Hockney's quote, which reads, "I assume people are always inquisitive and nosy, and if you see a little poem written in the corner of a painting, it will force you to go up and look at it."
[17] "Felicidade se chama meios de transporte."

lucky. Starting in 1981, the singer Angela Ro Ro was beaten repeatedly by the military police:

> Coming out as a lesbian cost me one and a half eyes and half of my hearing. I was beaten four times by the military police and once by the civil police. I suffered physical assaults in 1981, in 1983, twice in 1984, and in 1990 with brass knuckles, iron bars and truncheons. It was a dictatorship, but I don't think there is a direct connection. (Rocha 122)[18]

One example of the association between homosexuality and public presentation at the time and place, still close to Cesar's cultural milieu, can be found in Christopher Dunn's book *Contracultura*. Quoting from reports filed by a military official, Dunn describes how singers Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, recently returned from their exile in London, were seen in the 1970s as provocation to a regime that drew a parallel between homosexuality and subversion. Veloso's and Gil's ambiguous performances on stage, including their clothing, indicated a "liberal attitude towards homosexuality" according to an official report. A liberal attitude that was learned, according to the author of the report, precisely in London where this devious behavior was "fashionable" (Dunn 176).

[18] "Me assumir lésbica me custou a cegueira de um olho e meio e metade da audição. Fui espancada quatro vezes pela Polícia Militar e uma pela Polícia Civil. Sofri agressões físicas em 1981, 1983, dois episódios em 1984 e em 1990 por soco inglês, barras de ferro e cacetete. Era ditadura, mas acho que não tem ligação direta."

### *Bishop's "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore"*

In Muñoz's conclusion, after suggesting that taking ecstasy with someone "in as many ways as possible" could perhaps be the "best way of enacting a queer time that is not yet here but nonetheless always potentially dawning" (187), the author turns to Elizabeth Bishop's poem "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore." This poem, which pleads to Marianne Moore to come flying over the Brooklyn Bridge, enacts the "spectacle of queer transport made lyric" (Muñoz 188). It is its temporality, again, which might help us escape from the quagmire that is the straight present (the timeline that would lead Angélica, in "Ana C.," to become an electronics technician). In Bishop's poem, to fly over the Brooklyn Bridge (understood by Muñoz as a place of queer encounter vital to many other poets' ghosts, like Walt Whitman and Hart Crane, whose temporalities meet there), to cross the river *both ways*,

> represents the possibility of queer transport, leaving the here and now for a then and there. Thus, I look at Bishop's poem as being illustrative of a queer utopianism that is by its very nature additive, like the convergence of past, present, and future that I have discussed throughout this book. This convergence is the very meaning of the ecstatic. (Muñoz 189)

### *Conclusion: Desire (and Influence) Going Both Ways*

We might imagine ourselves haunted by ecstasy and not just by loss
(Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*)

Going back to Ana Cristina Cesar's writings today, we find unexpected questions, such as whether the Brazilian singer Angela Ro Ro and the Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman were "*chatas*" ("annoying") (*Correspondência incompleta* 61–62). It could be a coincidence that the two women Cesar asked about being *chatas* were lesbians, but this preoccupation also allows us to entertain the possibility that the term could have been part of a shared, secret language.[19] In any case, although

[19] The idea of "annoyance" being associated with homosexuality reappears in Cesar's *Luvas de pelica*: "no one notices, except, maybe, a closeted old man leaning toward the *chato* [annoying man]

Cesar has been the object of many dissertations in Brazil, much remains to be unpacked from these overlooked moments in which something akin to a queer sensibility emerges. From the present, I can only imagine what would have happened had Cesar survived the 1980s to discover that happy lesbians and queer joy do exist. As I finish this article, writing from the University of London in the heart of Bloomsbury (London being, to her, "the heart of the world," as the poet wrote in another letter), I imagine Ana C. turning seventy-three and entering these queer bookstores around the world. What would she think about the titles on display? *No Modernism without Lesbians*; *The Bloomsbury Group: A New Queer History*.

Freitas's invocation of Ana C., her clamor for a biography that tells us "what really happened," Ana Cristina Cesar's place in Freitas's own trajectory, the queerness of such an encounter and all that it generates reflect an alternative form of influence. For instance, it was the poem itself that helped me to go back to Cesar's history and try to tell a different story. As their queer encounter marks the younger generations, it also asks us to care for Ana Cristina Cesar's story in return. As Kent and Muñoz have theorized from the cross-temporal bond between Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, we can see Angélica Freitas and Ana C.'s relationship, as portrayed in Freitas's poem, as one of queer influence: the intensity of its affect ends up not only transforming the influenced, who finds herself marked by the older, influencing poet, but it also transforms the influencer, whose history the poets invite the readers-turned-widows to redo—with desire going both ways. By doing so, Freitas's poem also points toward a future in which a queer history for Ana Cristina Cesar has yet to be written.

Elizabeth Freeman, in "Time Binds," discusses the turn to loss and other negative affects in queer theory (such as shame and failure). Heather Love (160) notices how Freeman encourages us to switch the focus and pay attention to the residues of positive affects: erotic scenes and utopias "might be available for queer counter- or para-historiographies (66). When Freeman suggests that we might prefer to be haunted by ecstasy, this seems to mirror exactly what Freitas does in

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that gets me from far away and insists on winking and showing me he gets it. I forget the old men and, steadfast, everything passes on my mind, all the possible scandals and wobbly legs" (*Poética* 61).
["ninguém_percebe, exceto talvez um velho enrustido puxado para o *chato* que_ me_saca longe e faz_ questão de piscar o olho e mostrar que saca; esqueço o velho premature e de batom inabalável tudo me passa na cabeça, todos os possíveis escândalos de pernas bambas"]

"Ana C.": in her account of their encounter, even if it encompasses loss, it is also generative, and full of ecstasy. By reading Ana C., it is as if Angélica had been really touched by her—much like Walt Whitman's famous verses, transferred to Portuguese by Ana herself: "Love, this isn't a book, it's me, it's me you're holding and it's me who's holding you."[20] At the end, we are left with something in our hands, too: this inheritance, and the duty to create, together, a collective biography that acknowledges Ana Cristina Cesar's queerness.

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[20] The English is my own rendering of Cesar's Portuguese translation: "Recito WW para você: Amor, isso não é um livro, sou eu que você segura e sou eu que te seguro" (*Poética* 68).

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