

A Sinful Reaction to Capitalist Ethics in *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006)

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María Celina Bortolotto,

"A Sinful Reaction to Capitalist Ethics in *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006)"

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Abstract: In her article "A Sinful Reaction to Capitalist Ethics in *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006)" María Celina Bortolotto analyzes how Lozada's characterization of the main character, La Loca, questions the ideals of free agency offered by consumerist capitalism and the urban gay male ideal under the promise of a liberating gay lifestyle in a social context defined by identity politics. The novel is a fictionalized autobiographical account of Puerto Rican author Angel Lozada's misadventures in the early 2000s gay scene in New York. This essay plays with the punitive sense of the word "capital" in the seven capital sins as a thematic thread to invite a reflection on the concepts of virtue and value constructed under U.S. Protestant capitalism: the former as emancipatory guilt; the latter as the specific status society grants to objects, practices and people creating, in turn, subjects whose value is purely economic versus those whose lives are deemed (morally) valuable in themselves.

María Celina BORTOLOTTO

A Sinful Reaction to Capitalist Ethics in *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006)

Puerto Rican author Ángel Lozada's second novel, *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* is a fictionalized autobiographical account of his misadventures in the early 2000s gay scene in New York. The novel takes the form of a Menippean satire, with a specific combination of Spanglish, *bolero* lyrics, commercial slogans, religious invocations, and business recipes whose goal is to expose prevailing discourses that impose rigid molds of being or identity in contemporary urban U.S. and Puerto Rico (Bortolotto, "With the Focus" 121). I suspect these are precisely what Lozada himself alludes to in an interview as those "efforts that pretend to make uniform and to subdue the minds of the people" (*Intellectuals*). Lozada's provocation against these efforts begins with the choice of name for his character, since "loca" is a particularly charged term that translates literally as "mad woman" and is used in the Spanish-speaking world to mean not only that, but also: "whore," "bitch," and "effeminate (male) homosexual." It is interesting to note that self-defined locas are not just effeminate men but those who have decided to assume the feminization imposed on them and to appropriate the term and use it as a weapon. This loca, then, tells his own story in the first and third persons, successively recounting his misfortunes as he tries hard to fit into the commodified mold of U.S. urban gay male desirability with narcissistic insistence. The novel begins by telling us he holds a rather promising new job in New York as a computer specialist, but in his failed attempts to belong to the urban gay scene, he falls into obsessive shopping and dating habits. La Loca then finds it increasingly frustrating to cope with life as an "ethnic" homosexual in the New York *barrio*. After a brief incursion in the U.S. Navy to avoid complete bankruptcy, la Loca shares some troubling memories of rejection and fears in his native Puerto Rico. Finally, at the end of the novel, we find him marginalized and poor, begging on the streets. In its rather tragic ending, then, it would seem that la Loca has become the victim of Lozada's fierce satire; although in fact, the Puerto Rican author uses the protagonist to recreate a problematic incarnation of consumerist capitalism's values and ideals as they alienate people through the promise of a subjectivity with agency awarded via targeted consumption.

The analysis that follows deploys the Christian punitive concept of the seven capital vices or cardinal sins that plague the protagonist as a thematic thread to unveil some of the traps of the Protestant capitalist value paradigm for those vulnerable individuals who are struggling to delineate a visible social identity in a social context organized around the practices of identity politics. For this, it becomes relevant first to briefly reflect on the origins of the word "capital" in English, both as an adjective and a noun. The adjective "capital" is related to the head (Latin *caput*) as in "capital punishment" (beheading) ("Capital"). As a noun, root of the word "capitalism," "capital" came into use from the idea of debt. "Capital" was the principal sum of a money loan, and this etymology that ties having with owing, as well as the one that relates capital to life-threatening, both become very relevant to a reflection on debt as the means of the pursuit of a seemingly emancipatory ideal, an idea that is deeply questioned by this novel. Lozada creates the main character as the ultimate narcissistic sinful antihero who indulges in the seven capital vices: he is lazy and envious, eats too much fat, lives obsessed with his image and with sex, wants to own more and more, and has fits of rage when he cannot have it all. This would not have major consequences in a modern supposedly secularized environment; except that in the West, as Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini argue, this "secularism was linked at its origins to a particular religion and a particular location, and it was maintained through a particular set of practices" ("World" 1). The authors' reference to market-reformed Protestantism as the animating religious structure that lent its particularities to the growing freedom of the market is echoed by Max Weber in his seminal study of the intricate relationship between Protestantism and capitalism. As he argues, the "spirit of capitalism" (Weber, *Protestant Ethic*) acts as a system of ethics per se, driven by the ideal of the honest man of recognized credit and, above all, the idea of a duty of the individual to increase his capital as an end in itself. Returning to Lozada's novel, in the Protestant capitalist environment of contemporary U.S., la Loca fails repeatedly to live up to both capitalist and moral standards.

La Loca's comic attempts to alternatively adapt to or resist the system serve to unveil its inherent contradictions. And here I refer specifically to the paradox that finds the idea of the freedom of the market as vehicle for increased freedom of sexuality and of secular values in fact getting materialized into quite rigid and controlling systems for the domestication of subjectivities. As Jakobsen and Pellegrini point out, when referring to the supposedly emancipatory modernization brought about in the West by the principles of the Enlightenment and its faith in reason and secularism:

These novel, specifically modern disciplines of the body have served to connect the laboring body at once to new forms/practices of capital and new forms/practices of religious life and, importantly, to do so in ways that naturalize the disciplined body, the market as secular site of freedom, and religion as morality. ("World" 2)

In this U.S. urban context where *la Loca* tries desperately to gain social visibility, capitalist and religious discourses overlap and inform one another, equating moral virtue with financial or physical sacrifice and control while at the same time selling impossible ideals of commercial and sexual endowment. These double standards of indulgence and restraint appear ultimately driven by capitalist practices of consumption. As the novel begins, then, we find *la Loca* to be a completely alienated person whose life is dictated by television and compulsive shopping. He cannot stop spending money he does not have, blaming it all on the system. He confesses that he does not seem to be able to hang on to any job or to defend himself when accused or chastised or when phoned by bill collectors demanding pending payments. The protagonist finds himself drowning in debt, incapable of resisting the strong impulse to stay ahead of the times, because if he does, he may end up feeling "incompleta" (17). He quickly loses interest in the new and buries *passé* novelties in some obscure drawer that will never again be opened. Even culture, in the form of books, is acquired compulsively by *la Loca* to be stored with no other purpose than to be owned. *La Loca* here exemplifies Lendol Calder's belief that in modern U.S., "culture is overwhelmingly organized around the practice and meaning of consumption" (7).

La Loca's greed, "the inordinate love of temporal or earthly things" (Frank 103) is nourished and fostered by the apparently endless lines of credit that he continually opens. Having received his first credit card as a student, *La Loca's* spending sprees rapidly qualify him for approval to a Master Card Gold with a 5,000 dollar line of credit all of which he spends at a Hugo Boss store. *La Loca's* outrageous spending based on rapidly mounting debt is not unique. In his study of installment credit spending in the U.S., Calder explains that "[t]he story of consumer credit since 1940 can be summed up in a single word: *more*" (291, original emphasis). *La Loca* appears immersed in the U.S. shift to an ethic of leisure and consumption characterized by the rigors of highly routinized deskilled work with the sole purpose to have access to a certain "lifestyle." It is not mere coincidence that the emergence of this word as a key term in American culture in the 1960s and 1970s coincides precisely with the bank credit card becoming widespread, because a certain lifestyle rather than things is precisely what the credit card purchases. When initially we read about *la Loca's* extravagant tastes on an IT salary, the idea that capitalism, through wage labor, has created an escape route from heterosexual family life for homosexuals seems to ring true, proving the foundational relationship between capitalism and contemporary homosexual identity as some critics like John D'Emilio and Donald Lowe discuss it to be. D'Emilio sees homosexual identities as a direct consequence of the "ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one's own sex" (242). Two considerations render this genealogy problematic, however: not fully accounting for the tense and contradictory process that remains embodying a homosexual identity in capitalist societies, and also the assumption that "modern homosexuality" has smoothly emerged solely because of favorable economic conditions under capitalism, without taking sufficiently into account the fact that the creation of an identity based on sexual orientation transcends the sphere of the individual choice and becomes a social label that names as well as classifies. Jakobsen investigates some of the tensions always at play in a U.S. society that still claims to protect the traditional heterosexual family against sexual difference. She looks closely at the powerful influence of Protestant family values in the United States, and she concludes that, as the flux of capital and material resources becomes more and more globalized, the state needs a new means of mediating between transnational capital and the "American" nation ("Can" 55). The response to this is shifting the site of the nation away from the state and onto the family ("Can" 56). Thus, the U.S. family becomes both the idealized image of buffer against the grudges of economic production, as well as the indispensable stable structure to maintain capitalism. That is how, according to Jakobsen, capitalism and patriarchal heterosexism need and reinforce each other, given that capitalism works on the denial of alternative value options in the value chain ("Can" 59). The question of values underlined by Jakobsen is particularly relevant in the sense that, as proved by some of the circumstances in these texts, in a free-market economy there is a crucial distinction between people who have economic value, and those who have values and therefore are empowered to be agents in relation to the market ("Can" 61).

Ann Pellegrini further investigates the deep alliance between patriarchal heteronormativity and capitalism. She affirms that, ideologically, "capitalism drives people into heterosexual families and keeps them there (or tries to)" ("Consuming" 137). This bond, however, is nowadays weakened by changes in material conditions, so that "capitalism knocks the legs out from under the family, by reducing the family's capacity to be self-sufficient, and thus weakens the bonds that formerly kept families together"

("Consuming" 137). More difficult material conditions aside, consumerism targets everyone, those within the structure of a traditional family and those who are not. Pellegrini explains that, as in the case of alternative sexualities, "corporations have calculated the benefits of pitching to gay and lesbian consumers may outweigh the risks of enraging conservative groups and their constituents" ("Consuming" 139). Pellegrini alludes to the fact that, as the circumstances of various characters in these texts show, cultural configurations in the United States – as well as around the world – are now increasingly subjected to the (meta-) narrative of consumerism, in which "identities and citizenships are more and more defined by consumption" (García Canclini 5). Capitalist consumerism, however, is not the only dominant narrative within which *La Loca* is trying to delineate a subjectivity with agency. In a society that recreates itself as multicultural, the U.S. still maintains its multiple parts discretely differentiated by the taxonomical discourse of U.S. identity politics.

Michael Warner explains that the "frame of identity-politics itself belongs to Anglo American traditions and has some distorting influences" (xvii). In the case of alternative sexuality/affection/family configurations, he goes on to clarify that, since "the default model for all minority movements is racial or ethnic," an alternative ("queer") culture cannot "fit this bill... [because] whatever else it might be, it is not autochthonous" (Warner xvii). Similarly to some other authors, like José Quiroga or Juana Rodríguez, Warner appears suspicious of identity politics as long as it persists in "reducing power to a formalism of membership" (Warner xix). Quiroga maintains the flexibility of the concept of identity, and expresses his distrust of identity politics: "I see this identity politics as an oppressive and oppressing mode of social articulation" (232). Critic Juana Rodríguez also questions rigid ideas of "identity," describing the interaction of a subject and dominant narratives thus: "The subject brings to the encounter her own set of decoding practices that are mediated by the regulatory power of a particular discursive space, but not wholly determined by them" (5). Rodríguez points out the necessity to articulate identity as something fluid, "situatedness in motion," an "embodiment and spatiality" (5) which appears at the intersection of multiple configurations of the self in which other "markers" also bring their own energies, such as race, ethnicity, class and gender. The reality remains, though, that identities are articulated within the confines of prevailing narratives and deviations from certain markers of identifiable options becomes highly problematic. The novel parodies these tensions with acute insight. *La Loca* struggles to belong to that urban male homosexual minority with sufficient income which has, according to Lowe, transformed an interiorized sexual identity into the gay lifestyle. But we soon read in the novel that he cannot afford the gay lifestyle, so what now? Can he live the lifestyle on consumer credit? Does spending grant you the same status as having?

Ultimately not, because U.S. capitalism is imbued, explains Weber, with its own hierarchical organization of values, sacrifices and rewards that blend quite effortlessly with those of Protestantism. What Weber finds most interesting in this "peculiar ethic" of capitalism is not only the "ideal of the honest man of recognized credit, but above all the idea of a duty of the individual towards the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself" (*Protestant Ethic* 113). In this capitalist moral configuration, Weber reflects, moral attitudes become deeply utilitarian in the sense that appearances are of the utmost importance for good credit standing, which in turn assures solid moral stature through the increase of one's own capital assets. The accomplished capitalist gets little out of his fortune for himself and lives with a certain ascetic tendency, only retaining, in Weber's words: "the irrational sense of having done his job well," because the "making of money, so long as it is done legally, is the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling" (*Protestant Ethic* 56). Greed, then, gets inverted from vice into virtue and according to the Protestant ascetic ideal, salvation is guaranteed by ethical fitness obtained through respectability in business. That is why, concludes Weber about Protestantism, "such a powerful, unconsciously refined organization for the production of capitalist individuals has never existed in any other church or religion" (*General Economic* 368). In short, the capitalist Protestant ascetic ideal supposes that the better you are, the richer you should get and the less you should show it.

La Loca is no ascetic. He resists the mechanisms "of discipline, authority, and control" (Wickberg 81) exercised by mass consumer credit and starts writing checks without a balance, but does not stop buying art, furniture, and home décor (Lozada, *No quiero* 80). He is bored and needs more and more material possessions to keep up with the latest fashion. With a new line of credit of \$2,500 freshly opened, he decides to get a new wardrobe right away (Lozada, *No quiero* 78). His obsession with social status and how this can be implied from the quality and style of his clothes justify all kinds of dangerous financial maneuvers, and *La Loca* soon becomes bankrupt and homeless. With *La Loca*'s rapid descent from a stable job and a nice apartment to dire poverty, the satire uses *La Loca*'s irrational narcissistic consumerism to target the discourse of consumer credit finance in the U.S. Presented as the door to new and boundless opportunities, credit card finance appears different from older, more morally

questionable forms of money-lending in the U.S. when in fact it frequently preys on those most susceptible to default. As Karin Braunsberger, Laurie A. Lucas and Dave Roach explain in their study of credit card regulations and vulnerable consumers in the U.S., in a market saturated with options for credit card financing, "credit card issuers have begun to target non-traditional consumers, including college students and other low-income populations, who may have little or no experience with credit cards and often no credit" (358). This starts a vicious cycle where credit card companies punish those who are tempted by consumerist promises but fail to comply with the rules of this strict regimen of external controls by stigmatizing them further with newer, impossibly taxing, lines of credit that can never be paid back. Braunsberger, Lucas and Roach's study shows that apart from causes directly related to the state of the U.S. economy at the time of their research, the most important factor that impacts debt repayment is a generalized lack of financial literacy. In an economy so dependent on consumer credit, they believe in educating the young and vulnerable on how to sensibly manage debt. Towards this end, they even suggest "that credit card issuers should develop campaigns that make it fun and exciting to learn about financial issues" (Braunsberger et al. 368).

La Loca has evidently not received such training, but he is still savvy enough to realize that he is continually assessed according to his "purchasing power," which is identified in expensive stores around New York by asking customers about their "zip codes" (Lozada, *No quiero* 21). That is why he avoids feelings of shame and inadequacy by never acknowledging that he lives in Washington Heights, because if he does, the store attendant "won't treat me as I deserve" (21, translation mine). By showing La Loca's reluctance to give away his physical location so as to maintain social (and moral) status before others, the narrative also acutely exposes the telling overlap, in contemporary U.S. culture, of moral and economic vocabularies as detected by Calder, in the frequent use of terms such as "value," "trust," "worth," "productivity," "confidence" and "merit," all of which are not only economic but moral terms. This becomes particularly ironic in contemporary Western contexts, which have historically struggled to abandon the shackles of organized belief to become supposedly secular given that the "basic Enlightenment narrative [is one] of liberation, and the primary point of liberation is freedom from religious dogma (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 4). The novel recreates these contradictions by satirizing the validity of such direct exchange between economic and moral discourses by showing La Loca's stubborn tactics to resist that descriptive and quantitative terms be directly and naturally used as normative and qualitative ones, producing instant value judgments based solely on material assets. His failed efforts to afford the urban gay lifestyle, in their humorous extreme form, serve to expose the absurdity behind equating social visibility (in this case, as a professional urban gay man in New York) with perceived consumer status. This helps also to bring to light the problematic assumption, well formulated by Ann Pellegrini where "in the discourse of heteronormativity, gays have lifestyles...everyone else has lives" ("Consuming" 142).

Michelangelo Signorile affirms that in the U.S. it has been mainly "ignorance inspired by homophobia" (xix) that has contributed to the creation within the heterosexual mainstream of the unilateral gay lifestyle stereotype marked by hedonism and excess. He nonetheless finds that the "gay scene" (white, upper-middle class segment of urban gay life) exerts great influence through its highly commercialized gay sexual culture, particularly its rigid and objectifying ideal of physical perfection. La Loca believes strongly in the promises held by this ideal and dreams of a perfect body: "When he saw the models in *International Male*, he said to himself: I want to have my body just like this, and he squeezed tight both his butt and his curls" (53, translation mine). He plans to start at forty with a "rigorous weightlifting plan to become lean and attractive and lift my butt with squats so that the new generations check me out and want me. I will even pay for butt implants in California" (54, translation mine). La Loca has clearly succumbed to the impact of U.S. urban gay ideals of physical perfection—particularly as constructed and promoted by the media in what Signorile calls "the Cult of Masculinity," a term he borrows from psychotherapist Charles Silverstein. This rigid set of beliefs imposes the veneration of a certain ideal of masculinity: muscular, active, healthy, and financially successful. When discussing the implications of these rigid standards of masculinity, Signorile makes a parallel to feminine impossible beauty standards contained in the "Beauty Myth" as explored by Naomi Wolf in her seminal feminist book of that name. According to Signorile, the force behind the impossible ideals for gay men in the Cult of Masculinity is "a highly commercialized gay sexual culture [that] sells a particular physical aesthetic to us and demands that we conform to it, much in the same way the fashion, film, and beauty industries affect the image of the average American woman" (xxv). These images of the well-built, bronzed sculpted body with perfect hair and an immaculate smile are "played back to us again and again in gay porn, on safer sex posters, and in dozens of gay newspapers and several glossy national magazines" (Signorile 25). That is why, according to Signorile, there is practically no way to effectively ignore or neutralize them, reinforcing the objectification of men by men. Not even minorities escape this

stereotyping. La Loca feels he is not noticed or desired in ethnic gay night clubs because "I am white and do not have it big" (22, translation mine). Against the masculine ideal of the Hispanic/Latino male body as "hard and immobile, and the penis...as long, broad, solid, and potent" (Girman 91), la Loca falls short on various fronts. He is therefore trapped as not being fully white (he is Puerto Rican, after all), but also as not complying with the necessary attributes to become visible as a truly exotic body.

Rigid and pernicious as it may seem, though, this ideal of masculine attractiveness imposes on young gay men rigors and disciplines which appear infused with moral, even religious values, strongly evoking the Protestant practice of worldly asceticism, "those processes of body regulation... body disciplines, that emerged in modernity" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 1). In the context of religion, this set of practices in the pursuit of individual salvation is rigid and its rules are not to be bent by sin. In the pursuit of the commodified ideal of gay desirability (and, ultimately, belonging), there is likewise no room for laziness or sloth. As one of the young gay men interviewed by Signorile explained: "I want to be physical perfection in the eyes of gay men, and I am happy I got to where I am. It just meant a lot of hard work and discipline. I had to get my biceps to sixteen inches and my pecs to forty-three, that was my goal that I set for myself. And I realized that having goals like that is a good thing" (36). The (moral) self-validation obtained through hard work and restraint as exemplified in this testimony brings the Cult of Masculinity very close to the Beauty Myth for women, as described by Naomi Wolf in the early nineties. She interestingly analyzes how religious rituals, vocabulary and imagery come together to impose on women an impossible ideal of beauty to occupy them in its attainment and forget about the newly gained spaces in—traditionally male—power spheres like business and the media. Analyzing a TV ad for a collagen cream, for example, Wolf picks up on the specific religious imagery and vocabulary used, as when the women in it advise "follow[ing] the steps religiously" or when they testify "I wasn't a believer at first, but look at me now... It's changed my life" (36). Wolf further cites several book titles since the 1950s such as: *Pray your Weight Away* (1957), *God's Answer to Fat - Loose it* (1980), *More of Jesus and Less of Me* (1994), as clear examples of how religious discourse has been used to infuse what she considers a market construction with moral and ethical, and ultimately, religious values. In the highly commodified context of the first two decades of the 2000s, the ongoing relevance of Wolf's observations becomes easily apparent as studies related to the boom of cosmetic surgery and dieting all over the world show that ideals of physical perfection have not lost any of their commercial power but rather have dramatically increased it (see Un (2007) and Edmonds (2007) as just two examples).

In a manner analogous to how beauty as an absolute value has been imposed on U.S. or even most women around the world, the Cult of Masculinity, according to Signorile, has pervasively spread across the whole U.S., becoming the main impulse that drives most aspects of many gay men's lives. Both Signorile's testimonies and Lozada's fiction prompt an investigation into the motivation for these young men to subject themselves so devoutly to the deeply narcissistic domestication of their bodies and lives to become ideal objects of desire. In a previous published article about this novel, I discuss in detail the intricate relationship between rigid narcissistic ideals and shame (Bortolotto, "With the Focus"). In it, I cite shame theorists such as Susan Miller and Warren Kinston as they explain that the objectification of the self that characterizes many forms of narcissistic behaviors and attitudes frequently has its roots in an early sense of (shameful) rejection or invisibility from primary carers. These connections seem reaffirmed by Signorile as he attempts to uncover the causes for the popularity of the Cult of Masculinity among young urban gay men in the U. S.. He hypothesizes that "perhaps, being afraid to access other avenues and still unsure of themselves and vulnerable, they simply join the alluring and seductive cult of masculinity. It defines them and guides them, offering meaning and purpose" (Signorile 32). The need for self-validation through a community, which is described by theorists as what makes humans social, is reinforced in the case of "people for whom traditional religion, the family, and other institutions have failed" (Signorile 32). Says Miller, "minorities abused by a dominant social group will have difficulty jettisoning shame-based identities"; this difficulty, according to Miller, stems from the fact that "the effort to discard a shame-based identity likely will provoke feelings of danger" (184). Thus, when these young gay men in big cities around the U. S. see the scene with its parties, clubs, and bars, they may read this as the most obvious space where to include themselves, assuage their fears, and start living the fantasy. This fantasy of social visibility and validation, which could be read as a powerful narcissistic response to repression and shame, is very hard to uphold and impossible to sustain, as la Loca's gradual submersion into desperation shows in Lozada's novel.

La Loca is presented by Lozada as a laughable narrator who is full of contradictions, weaknesses and miseries. His worst sin, "the inordinate desire for honor, recognition and distinction" (Broderick 490-91) drives a life marked by disaster. It is not his pride, however, what Lozada is targeting in the novel. The text uses la Loca to further investigate the narratives within which he is so desperately trying to gain and sustain visibility and agency, however futile his attempts are. Furthermore, the novel also serves

to bring to the forefront the multiple material ways in which ideals become internalized and invested with positive affect, which in turn powerfully motivates individuals to pursue them and to feel frustration and shame when they cannot make them a reality. As Sara Ahmed explains, "If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate an ideal that has been given to us through the practices of love" (Ahmed 106). Our pursuit of ideals, however pernicious or impossible these may be, confirms our emotional investment in what they promise, creating, in turn, powerful feelings that attest to this strong relationship: "my shame confirms my love, and my commitment to such ideals in the first place" (Ahmed 106). Emotions develop in the continual contact of the self with others, situating the self because "what moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place" (11). This potential of prevailing narratives generally realizes itself on people's lives at the cost of some kind of dynamic of domination/oppression. These (meta-)narratives, or discourses that organize feeling and experience (Žižek's "ideologies"), have been, most of the times, crafted so as to offer as well as careful cartographies of meaning from which the whole sets of values and ideals, as well as material conditions for distribution of power are to be derived. Thus, these "stories" that aim at interpreting and explaining human dynamics, also act as sources of rules, prescriptions, laws, and social practices which work to establish a "norm" for the perpetuation of the narrative. This strong connection between ideals, emotions and identity, as we see in the novel, can alienate individuals when ideals are less a construction of values that represent fulfilment and empathy and more solely commodified images that intend to persuade us to consume.

In the angry and funny recounting of la Loca's misadventures, Lozada lets the reader have a closer look at oppressive, rigid discourses within which shame can act as a form of normalizing control. The character of la Loca may appear condemned by his sloth, anger, greed, vanity, gluttony, envy and lust, especially when we see him at the end of the novel resigned to poverty and destitution. The moral of this satire, however, is that he is no different from any of us in the prevailing context of consumerist capitalism. The character actually acts as a literary incarnation of the profitable use capitalism makes of our conflictive relationship with self-definition and restraint. As Lisa Frank humorously reflects, in relation to our perception of the seven capital sins in our contemporary lives:

We have come to understand the power that each of these vices holds...Advertising agencies and marketing firms know this and have taken full advantage of it, selling each of the seven deadly sins in record numbers and encouraging us to work with what we've got (while still holding focus groups on the development of sins eight, nine, and ten. (97)

Also, going back to Pellegrini's argument on the changes upon gay identity under commodity capitalism, the novel helps unveil the contradictory messages from a society that proclaims the benefits of capitalist secularism while still maintaining a clear difference between its consuming subjects and its full social ones. La Loca's tragicomic demise paints a detailed portrait of a context which offers the capitalist freedom of the market as the site for other freedoms, like of sexuality and of secular values but which still maintains a clear and strong differentiation between those persons whose lives are inscribed only in economic value (like those with lifestyles for ex.) and those who have (moral) values and so are empowered to be agents in relation to the market, those with lives.

Ángel Lozada's literary (and life) project is one of knowledge through study, sharing through critical discussion and healing through understanding and belief (Bortolotto "Conjurados"). The activists from Queer Nation declare: "We are here, we are queer, and we're not going shopping." This novel can be read as a humorous warning by an insightful satirist to those who are.

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