

“WHAT’S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?”: ANA LYDIA VEGA’S “CASO OMISO”

Writing out of an acknowledgment of “the distortions and contradictions of traditional values and the absurdities of colonialism and Puerto Rico’s consumer-oriented lifestyle,”¹ Ana Lydia Vega chooses a parodic intertextual foray into pop culture as it is practiced in urban Puerto Rico. Her novellas in the collection, *Pasión de historia*, are themselves parodies of popular genres such as the thriller and whodunit. The image of contemporary Puerto Rican society that humorously emerges from these stories is one of a multiplicity of “texts” pasted together reminiscent of the process of (post)colonialism itself. Due to Puerto Rico’s unique political, cultural, and economic connection to the U.S., its culture is the site of competing cultural discourses. Both social satire and thriller, the novella, “Caso omiso,” alludes to the confluence of various texts—pop culture in the U.S., the world of U.S. film, the genre of the detective novel, and the obscured, yet implicit, text of *boricua* culture still “present” in traces planted along the way in the story and suggested by its very “absence.”

According to Todorov’s description of the “thriller,” the recreation of the milieu itself constitutes the central interest of the story.² This is often presented through a no nonsense, vernacular use of language, images of violence and misery, and the depiction of a hard-boiled detective. An emphasis on the milieu is the case, too, in “Caso omiso,” Ana Lydia Vega’s mystery-slash-suspense story from the collection, *Pasión de historia*.³ In fact, the setting of Vega’s novella, “Caso omiso,” shares more in common with New York City life than with the *boricua* rural tradition of Puerto Rico or the Afroantillian Caribbean.⁴ The world Vega depicts in “Caso omiso” is that of a Puerto Rican

¹ Margarite Fernández Olmos, “From a Woman’s Perspective: The Short Stories of Rosario Ferré and Ana Lydia Vega,” in *Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America: Introductory Essays*, edited by Doris Meyer and Margarite Fernández Olmos, Brooklyn, Brooklyn College, 1983; p. 86.

² Tzvetan Todorov, “The Typology of Detective Fiction,” in *The Poetics of Prose*, translated by Richard Howard, 1971, New York, Cornell University Press, 1977; pp. 42-52.

³ My article, “The Reproduction of Ideology in ‘Pasión de historia’ and ‘Caso omiso,’” published in *Letras Femeninas*, 17.1-2 (1991), 89-97, focuses on “Pasión de historia” in conjunction with “Caso omiso.” In contrast, the present article concentrates exclusively on “Caso omiso,” and although it elaborates and expands on some of the statements made in the previous article, it constitutes a separate article. The present essay examines the interplay of voyeurism, pornography, and the effects of colonialism through the intertextuality of the novella.

⁴ Eliut D. Flores-Caraballo in his study, “Class-Bound Reductionism vs. the Multidetermination of National Cultures: An Essay on Puerto Rican National Consciousness,” in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 10 (1991), 25-58, warns against reductionist tendencies to define Puerto Rican’s national culture in an exclusionary manner. Even though the image of the jíbaro is “heralded as the symbol of the traditional Puerto Rican society in literature and in the national media,” the author points

society in which an original text has been modified and/or supplanted by a commercialized version of U. S. culture. The author demonstrates and critiques the cultural imperialism she finds in Puerto Rico by brandishing a parodic literary colonialism. Phillip Marlowe, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Hitchcock, Brian de Palma, *Playboy*, and *Penthouse* share the billing with Gabriela Mistral, Julia de Burgos, Daniel Santos, Sonia Braga, and Julio Cortázar. Minutiae of U.S. pop culture—Hawaiian Punch, Winston cigarettes, Scotch Tape, and Barbie dolls—proliferate and record cultural as well as political and economic colonialism.⁵ At the same time that Vega testifies to the success of U.S. colonialism, the artifacts of this cultural hegemony are ephemeral and insignificant. The very choice of these products as signs of the American way of life belittles such cultural imperialism.

As well as the references to specific American products that saturate the urban Puerto Rican market, the Spanish language itself that Vega imitates in the novella most obviously displays and registers the impact of American life on the Hispanic, Indian, and African traditions of the island. The first-person narrator's speech is peppered with English—"aquella sala middle-class boricua," "con la adrenalina en high," "leyendo el *San Juan Star*," "les dije que se quedaran stand-by."⁶ The pattern of superimposed languages is emblematic of the superimposition of multiple texts within the Puerto Rican culture. Intertextuality itself (especially the proliferation of references to popular films and magazines) constitutes the principal metaphor for the hybrid culture of modern day industrialized Puerto Rico that Vega parodies in several of the narratives in this collection.

This hybridity is readily apparent on the level of genre. "Caso omiso" is constructed as simultaneously a thriller and "whodunit." Using the basic framework of the detective story, portrayed as inherently metafictional—story embedded within story—, Vega develops an intertextual narrative that comments humorously and pointedly on the superimposed text of the "American way of life" peculiar to Puerto Rico. In the "whodunit," the first story, the crime, is absent and the second story, the memoirs or the book that reconstruct the crime and constitute the solution, mediates between the original events and the

out that this is in spite of the complexity of subcultures including the varying allegiances to Spain among the 19th century elites, the afroantillian popular base, and U.S. colonization. His article shows that "within any given country there is more than one culture, and that the so called national culture of any given country is, in fact, a collection of subcultures produced by all the social classes" (26). Vega's novella underscores the complexity of heterogeneous cultural images within the urban culture of middle-class Puerto Rico and focuses on mass media as one of the crucial factors in achieving a cultural hegemony.

⁵ Ana Lydia Vega, "Caso omiso," in *Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones de la Flor, 1987; pp. 80, 84, 79, and 82.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 73, 74, 76, and 78.

reader.⁷ In the case of Vega's novella, the "whodunit" is the supposed crime that Dalia insists on solving. Vega's female detective suspects that her next-door neighbor, Don Danilo, has murdered his wife and concealed the body in a life-size statue on display in his front room. However, Vega's novella is not a classic "whodunit." In the standard "whodunit," the narrator/detective is a voyeur, a witness and collator of other voyeurs'/witnesses' reports, a mediator, not a participant.⁸ Vega's model is, like the cultural setting itself, hybrid. From "whodunit," the story passes to "thriller" in which, according to Todorov, the main interest is not derived so much from a past event to be reconstructed as from the action taking place in the present (47-49). In addition, the detective is now one of the characters and has lost her immunity (51). Although this means that the crime is in the making, Vega complicates the story by including aspects Todorov associates with the "whodunit." There is still a mystery in "Caso omiso," a first story which has already transpired, to be unraveled and reconstructed by our sleuths (48).⁹ Vega adds yet another twist to the model: The mystery becomes not who is the murderer, but rather who has been murdered? To add further to the complications, two characters vie for the position of detective—Dalia and the young narrator. The complications of generic category suggests the uncomfortable coexistence of various cultural allegiances as well in the island nation.

Vega continually upsets generic expectations, refusing to allow the reader an easy and definitive identification of the text. The text, and indeed the culture it evokes, continually slips away, defying the reader's attempt to fix it. The narrator, a young Puerto Rican on his way soon to Georgetown in the States, presents himself as the detective who has come to Dalia's rescue. Instead of accepting the young male narrator as our hero-detective, Vega creates a female detective, Dalia. Although our adolescent narrator often suggests that he is the investigator, we note that it is Dalia who first suspects the crime, searches for the evidence, and contrives the trap to catch the criminal. The narrator, in contrast, reluctantly follows Dalia's instructions. The principal story, then, is Dalia's pursuit of the crime and the criminal. The narrator, in turn, often passes into the role of scribe-recorder *a la Watson* to Dalia's Holmes. The narrator only reluctantly participates in the investigation, his attention more on seducing Dalia than on catching a murderer. In many ways, the narrator simply mediates Dalia's search for a crime.

⁷ "Detective fiction has various manifestations—from "whodunit" to thriller. Todorov discusses two stories in the "whodunit." The initial crime—which often has already occurred—is the pretext for the second story—which is the investigation and reconstruction of the original crime—(*op. cit.* 44). Interestingly, Todorov points out that this second story is simultaneously the story of a story—hence its metafictional nature—; it is the explanation of how the narrator has come to know the first story (*op. cit.* 45).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-51.

Even though "Caso omiso" presents itself as a "whodunit" or thriller, the model for the novella is not so much the detective novel as it is cinematic variations on the detective story—*film noir*, suspense movies, and the horror film—much in keeping with the films of Hitchcock and De Palma, *auteurs* directly alluded to in the novella. In particular, the plot of Vega's novella evokes Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). Hitchcock's film takes place in an urban setting among apartment dwellers whose windows face each other in a pretense of privacy mockingly revealed as illusory when Jimmy Stewart's character, a photographer, witnesses the murder of a wife across the courtyard in a facing apartment. The husband kills his wife, cuts her into parts, packs her in suitcases, and ships her off by train.

In "Caso omiso," as in Hitchcock's film, there is an actual crime and the neighbor, Dalia, is correct in her suspicions. However, her investigation partially runs astray: The victim is not the wife, but young female strangers that Don Danilo photographs and murders. Not adverse to parodying even feminist concerns, Vega depicts a female detective quick to assume misogyny as the crime of significance. Dalia at first believes that Danilo has concealed his wife in the lifelike plaster statue in his living room, exemplifying what Dalia calls "la 'cosificación' de la mujer a través del arte." After all, according to Dalia, Don Danilo wanted to "convertirla en estatua, en parte de la decoración."¹⁰ (75). The statue is a false lead, but Dalia's feminist analysis of the crime and its motivation, albeit humorously hyperbolic, is precisely the case. The narrator, our scribe, does not understand the importance of the clues he and Dalia have found until the conclusion of the story, but they corroborate Dalia's suspicions of the misogynist nature of Don Danilo's crimes. One of the last pieces of the puzzle, "una colección de fotos de mujeres jóvenes desnudas," is found hidden beneath Don Danilo's mattress.¹¹ These still photos turn out to be macabre souvenirs of Don Danilo's victims.

Not only does Vega allude to and parody several aspects of the Hitchcock plot in "Caso omiso," offering the reader a roadmap for at least a double reading, a reading of the novella and a re-reading of the Hitchcock film, but she also appropriates and changes the motifs of photography and the gaze. Photography and voyeurism in the aforementioned Hitchcock film—although not completely innocent—work together in the service of the amateur detective, played by Jimmy Stewart, to reveal the pathetic sufferings of the middle class, as well as the evils lurking behind closed doors. There is an implication in the film that we have lost our souls because we pretend not to see our neighbors, and that the invisibility of contemporary urban life leads to isolation and victimization. In this context, the photographer is a metaphor for the one who sees and

¹⁰ Vega 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

recognizes and thus saves his neighbor from disappearing, *i.e.*, death. Taking a different slant on the gaze, photography, film, and ultimately art itself, Vega problematizes the gaze when she transforms the photographer-hero into the voyeur-murderer who, through photography and murder, as synonymous aggressions, fixes and objectifies his victims.

The visual motif—photography and sculpture—in “Caso omiso” discloses the mentality behind the crime, what Susan Griffin terms the pornographic mind. This mentality is made explicit in Don Danilo’s photographs. These images signify the objectification, silence, and in the extreme case deaths of the women. As one would expect, Dalia’s investigation reveals the pathology of the pornographic, “an expression not of human erotic feeling and desire, and not of a love of the life of the body, but of a fear of bodily knowledge, and a desire to silence eros.”¹² The metaphoric death of woman in imagery constructed by the pornographic mind is literalized in Vega’s detective stories through the motifs of photography, voyeurism, and murder. But there is more than one crime in Vega’s novella, and at the root of each of the crimes is sexual aggression and violence, not *eros*.

From one case we pass to another, from one text to a less obvious one. Each supposed crime leads the reader and our detectives to another crime. Implicit in the novella, “Caso omiso,” is the investigation of the pornographic mind which American pop culture inscribes, and the story of that investigation is actually found in the story of the education of a young man, *i.e.*, our narrator, not exclusively in the story of the crime of Don Danilo. The investigation of the alleged crime leads to an inspection of middle class Puerto Rican society, that is, the milieu itself. The narrator makes this connection when he perceives the similarities between his own parents’ apartment and Don Danilo’s, “ésa hubiera podido ser . . . la sala de mi propia casa. . . . Reconocí el tomo gordote de los cuentos de Poe en traducción de Cortázar, el mismo que tenían los Viejos en su cuarto.”¹³ In “Caso omiso,” the female detective reveals the seeds of misogyny overtly and covertly nourished by her middle class milieu. The crime becomes an “event” that is continually shifting. The novella propels the reader from concern for Don Danilo’s wife and her assumed murder to the discovery of the victimization of young strangers and by extension to the recognition of the social milieu as a determining factor in the creation of the pornographic mentality.

The title of the novella forces us to consider that which is left out, the deed not done, the crimes of omission. One such crime is the reluctance, on the narrator’s part, to pursue the case of Don Danilo. At first he refuses to believe

¹² Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture’s Revenge Against Nature*, New York, Harper & Row, 1981; 1.

¹³ Vega 73-74.

that a crime has been committed. Dalia's protestations are only begrudgingly heeded. Throughout the investigation, the narrator's reasons for pursuing Don Danilo are self-serving and deceptive. Initially not interested in issues of justice, the narrator seeks to ingratiate himself to Dalia. The more significant crime of omission, however, is the narrator's failure to recognize and confront the abusive ideology within his own society.

There are then two stories running concurrently in "Caso omiso"—Dalia's investigation of the whodunit and the narrator's seduction of Dalia. It is, for my purposes, the latter that is the principal story. Dalia is the prize at the end of the game for the narrator. To avoid becoming the butt of his friends' jokes, he plans to lose his virginity before he goes off to school in the U.S. Dalia, a divorcée in her thirties, is seen as a dream come true, a dream culturally fabricated that the narrator shares with his two friends, who taunt the narrator with his slowness in seizing the prize. They challenge him, "si no lo hacía antes de que me empezaran las clases en la universidad, uno de los dos me iba a confiscar el turno y a lo mejor hasta los dos a la vez."¹⁴ The implication is that his friends are proposing a "gang bang" for Dalia.

The narrator refuses to admit that he shares his friends' ideology toward sex and gender roles (both male and female), but the reader will probably note the irony that, although the narrator sometimes criticizes his friends, he is constantly with them. Indeed, he is with them when he first sees Dalia in the Parque Central, evidently a hangout for the youths, "fue que la vi por vez primera . . . la tarde que me fui con Vitín y Pucho a yoguear en la pista y a tasar las tipas. . . . la miraba y la miraba y la miraba y no podía dejarla de mirar."¹⁵ It is through the visual that the narrator constructs Dalia as desired object, having learned to desire Woman through mass media such as American cinema. Evidently the narrator is no less a voyeur than Don Danilo, and Dalia is no less fetishized than are the images of women in Don Danilo's hidden photos or the models in pin-ups from girlie magazines that our narrator enjoys.

Dalia's seduction is not an end in itself either. The adventure will only be complete once the narrator recounts his victory to his friends: "los enfermitos del Vitín y el Pucho pullándome para que acabara de tirarme de una vez y, claro, les diera a ellos la exclusiva."¹⁶ Dalia's seduction, then, is potentially a shared experience among the youths, the rite of passage only formalized in the form of a narrative to be exchanged. Therefore it is significant that the young man be our narrator in the novella, for essentially the novella turns out to be his depiction of the erotic adventure with Dalia that he will share with his friends. Ironically, throughout the text the narrator is telling the events to an

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

unknown interlocutor: "Manguen bien la situación," "óiganse esta conversacioncita," "Confórmense con saber que fue chévere."¹⁷ The narrator directly addresses the readers (in the plural), implying an intimacy of complicity. The trace of the interlocutor somewhat diminishes the narrator's supposed discretion in the end of the novella after he has spent the night with Dalia. For, although he does not reveal details, he spends quite some time in innuendoes that titillate perhaps more than a boldfaced report. Vega mimics the voice and style of the adolescent who offers the narrative of the novella as if it were itself a "movie." Her narrator repeatedly sets the scene for the action in visual, almost filmic, terms: "Pero aquella noche era La Noche. Manguen bien la situación: ella se había acostado bocabajo en el sofá, con la cabeza en un cojín y los ojos cerrados y una actitud de si-algo-pasó-yo-no-estaba-aquí."¹⁸ The description of Dalia, prone and "absent," recalls standard poses of women in pornography. In this way, Vega superimposes one plot (the murders) upon another (the seduction and objectification of Dalia).

Like most young men his age in Puerto Rico, the narrator's education is steeped in media images from the U.S., such as *Blow-Out* (De Palma, 1981) and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), films the narrator mentions as common currency of his peer group.¹⁹ "Caso omiso" intersects with many texts from American pop culture, specifically movies that appeal to the male teenage spectator. A clue to the importance of American film is found in the epigraph to this novella: Vega quotes horror-suspense writer Stephen King, "One's generation [*sic*] nightmare is the next generation's sociology." Much in keeping with Robin Wood's definition of the horror film genre as a collective nightmare,²⁰ Vega proves Stephen King's assertion to be valid for contemporary middle class urban Puerto Ricans. Through the language and the plot of her novellas, she documents a trajectory of violence from what once was considered abnormal and horrific—the meat of horror—to the commonplace—

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64, 83, 86.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67, 77. Flores-Caraballo's analysis of sample studies in San Juan regarding cable television confirms Vega's emphasis on the presence of U.S. mass media images and their significance in particular for young viewers: "English-language television is most pervasive through VCRs and cable. It seems that renting American movies has become a new weekend VCR-family ritual in San Juan." Some of his conclusions are pertinent to an understanding of the "representative" nature of Vega's young narrator: "the findings in terms of media use suggest that cable TV may be an instrumental force in the alienation of urban Puerto Ricans from their own national media. The youth exhibited strong United States-oriented media culture consumption patterns. Further research is required to validate whether a continued dominant presence of American media would pull this youth further away from its Puerto Rican roots toward assimilation to American media and ideological cultures" (*op. cit.* 47). Obviously, Ana Lydia Vega strongly suggests in her novellas that such media saturation has had and continues to have ideological consequences on urban middle-class youth culture(s) on the island.

²⁰ Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *American Nightmares: Essays on the Horror Film*, edited by Robin Wood and Richard Lippe, Toronto, Festival of Festival, 1979.

statistics of modern sociology. Stephen King's assertion is born out by the fact that many of the crimes of present day society (in the U.S. and in Puerto Rico) are grotesque facsimiles of the violence which passes for entertainment in Hollywood films. For example, *Psycho* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are loosely connected to the same case of a Wisconsin mass murderer, gruesomely repeated by more recent cases such as the mass murderer Jeffrey Dahmer. In a gruesome circle today's headlines describe horrors that the U.S. entertainment markets scramble to re-stage in based-on-true-events mini-series and movies. Hence our collective nightmares may well share more in common with a study of society than we would like to admit.

Unfortunately, another aspect common to violence in our societies and in American cinema is the victimization of women. Laura Mulvey discusses in her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," referring to narrative film of a much earlier and less violent period, the spectator is constructed as having power over the image of woman. As Mulvey explains, "Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order." In an examination of the perspective of the camera and the construction of the image in mainstream film, Mulvey contends that the spectator is constructed as masculine, and the look is associated with

that of the spectator in direct scopophilic contact with the female form displayed for his enjoyment (connoting male fantasy) and that of the spectator fascinated with the image of his like set in an illusion of natural space, and through him gaining control and possession of the woman within the diegesis.²¹

The subtle aggression against women implicit in narrative film that Mulvey discerns is overt and literal in most of the horror and suspense films of Hollywood, specifically the slasher film variety. In this context, the narrator's depiction of Dalia in several sections of the novella functions in a similar way as the camera's focus on the female actor in the movies. The narrator objectifies and fetishizes Dalia's image for his own repeated enjoyment and as an object to share with the reader.

Hollywood is only one of various texts that Vega insinuates are constructing an image of woman at the service of an aggressive and violent masculine ego. The image is static, displayed, absent. Not agent, but object such an image of woman invites the male's aggression. Significant is the narrator's own naive confession, "escribía poemas eróticos en libretas Composition que escondía debajo del mames con la rica paca de *Playboy* y *Penthouse* que alegran las

²¹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989; pp. 16, 19, and 21. In a later article, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)" of the same collection, Mulvey elaborates on her initial article to explain how the female spectator is masculinized by the camera.

noches de todo chamaco decente."²² From the still photos of the girlie magazines to the elaborate fantasies of American film, the narrator draws the fuel for his own concept of woman as desired object. In her study of the representation of women and sexuality in photography, Annette Kuhn likens the woman displayed to an "object of investigation-by-scrutiny," a term similar to Mulvey's "to-be-looked-at-ness." As an image so constructed, the photographic representation of woman "speaks to a masculine subject, constructing woman as object, femininity as otherness."²³ Here then is an implicit link between the narrator's girlie magazines and erotic poetry and the "cosificación" perpetrated by Don Danilo in his series of macabre photographs of his female victims. In a similar fashion, the narrator displays Dalia's body for the delight of his interlocutors and the reader.

Like Griffin, Vega discerns the traces of the pornographic mind inscribed in contemporary, urban Puerto Rican culture. It includes the ways in which women are fetishized, the ways in which masculinity is constructed, the structures that model behavior such as movies. Through intertextuality and parody, Vega constructs a damning portrayal of the legacy of U. S. colonialism in Puerto Rican society. Not only does the narrator admire and consume American pop culture through film, magazines, and other products, but he also has been formally educated in U.S. ideology: "Ya yo me estaba preparando para bajarle con un sermonazo sobre la presunción de inocencia en el sistema democrático, tema del informe que había dado el semestre pasado en Historia de Estados Unidos."²⁴ Indeed the novella begins with the fact that our narrator is soon to leave for the U.S. where he will continue his education at Georgetown University. Our appraisal of the narrator then underscores the situation of Puerto Rico as a cultural and commercial colony of the U.S. The novella also suggests through the motif of the student, novitiate, apprentice (the narrator) that culture is learned and that mass media functions hand in glove with the educational system to inculcate, in this case, masculine aggression.²⁵ The narrator is

²² Vega 67.

²³ Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*, Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985; p. 31.

²⁴ Vega 70.

²⁵ In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Contemporary Critical Theory*, edited by Dan Latimer, New York, Harcourt Brace-Jovanovich, 1989, Louis Althusser argues that the school has replaced the Church in capitalist social formation as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus. "In fact, the Church has been replaced today in its role as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus by the School. It is coupled with the Family just as the Church was once coupled with the Family" (83). Vega gives her own humorous spin on the situation by greatly diminishing the significance of the family in the narrator's eyes and underscoring the impact of peers and mass media in its stead: "Los viejos estaban encantados de tenerme otra vez en la jaula. A ellos no les basilaba demasiado que su nene, roquerito estofón de San Ignacio, se la pasara parriba y pabajo con unos cocos de la Gabriela Mistral. Mami llegó a los extremos de ponerse con un flan de coco, lo que hacía siglos luz. Y Papi me hizo la increíble concesión de sentarse a ver *Blow-out* conmigo, aunque se la pasó criticando a John

a student with many teachers including Dalia.

Although Vega's novellas are in some ways self-contained—in that they are an intricate weave of texts evoking and questioning other texts such as the “whodunit” and the thriller—they also constitute a commentary on her own culture. Even as she reconstructs the traditional whodunit and thriller and recalls other cultural texts of contemporary society in Puerto Rico, she offers us an opportunity to rethink culture and the texts of popular literature and their role in the construction of the masculine and the feminine. Vega's microcosm of the individual continually evokes the macrocosm of colonialism and the complicated intertextuality of cultures in contemporary Puerto Rico.

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¹⁰⁰ *Travolta la mitad del tiempo y diciendo que era una loca tapá*” (Vega 67). This constitutes one of the few references to “family life” the narrator affords us; most of his “conscious” life occurs elsewhere.