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The Autobiographical Project of Soveida Dosamantes in *Face of an Angel*, by Denise Chávez

Rio de Janeiro
2014

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

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DEDICATÓRIA

Ao meu marido Kleber Vinicius, meu parceiro há trinta anos e, sobretudo, de todas as horas, e à minha filha Maria Eduarda pela compreensão, paciência e suporte.

À memória de meus pais, também ex-alunos da UERJ, pelos valores que me transmitiram e que, de algum lugar e de alguma forma, zelam por mim e pela minha família.

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My grandmother’s voice was rarely heard, it was a whisper, a moan. Who heard?

My mother’s voice cried out in rage and pain. Who heard?

My voice is strong. It is breath. New Life. Song. Who hears?

Denise Chávez

RESUMO

ARAUJO, Lana Beth Ayres Franco de. *The autobiographical project of Soveida Dosamantes in Face of an angel, by Denise Chávez.* 2014. 122 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014.

O objetivo desta dissertação é investigar o viés coletivo da autobiografia ficcional de *Face of an angel*, da escritora estadunidense e de origem mexicana Denise Chávez. Desse modo, o trabalho pretende discutir a sociedade chicana descrita sob a ótica da narradora/protagonista, Soveida Dosamantes, investigando desde o processo histórico de que é resultado, passando pela iniquidade entre os papéis desempenhados por homens e mulheres até chegar ao discurso autorreferencial com que a narradora/protagonista representa o ambiente cultural em que se insere. Antes da narrativa propriamente dita, há a árvore genealógica da narradora/protagonista, assinalando que o que vai se descortinar ao longo da leitura é uma saga de família. Assim, Soveida Dosamantes utiliza a sua ambiência doméstica, bem como a comunidade da fictícia cidade de Água Oscura, sua cidade natal, como recorte de uma estrutura social maior. Fazendo uso do discurso autobiográfico, a narradora/protagonista criada por Denise Chávez expõe as mazelas de uma comunidade que, em virtude ser produto do colonialismo e do neocolonialismo, perdeu sua identidade cultural. Em *Face of an angel*, através do relato em primeira pessoa de sua narradora/protagonista, a autora Denise Chávez reproduz o universo em que nasceu e cresceu. Cedendo a Soveida Dosamantes componentes autobiográficos como complicadas relações familiares, personagens femininas nativas que funcionam como sentinelas de práticas ancestrais que o domínio europeu apagou, personagens masculinos que mascaram sua fragilidade por trás de uma força e de um poder aparentes, Chávez representa em *Face of an Angel* o microcosmos de uma comunidade que vem, aos poucos, subvertendo o discurso oficial e conquistando o seu terreno no panorama político e social estadunidense.

Palavras-chave: **S**ociedade chicana. Confronto de gêneros. Autobiografia ficcional e coletiva.

ABSTRACT

ARAUJO, Lana Beth Ayres Franco de. *The autobiographical project of Soveida Dosamantes in Face of an angel, by Denise Chávez.* 2014. 122 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014.

The present dissertation aims to investigate the collective hue of *Face of an angel*, a fictional autobiography by Mexican American writer Denise Chávez. Therefore, this research intends to discuss the Chicano society described under the lens of its narrator/protagonist, Soveida Dosamantes, investigating it since the historical process it resulted from, moving to the iniquity between men's and women's roles, and finally reaching the self-referential discourse with which the narrator/protagonist represents the cultural environment she is inserted in. Before the narrative itself, the reader is presented to the narrator/protagonist's genealogic tree, signaling that what is going to develop throughout the novel is a family saga. Thus, Soveida Dosamantes makes use of her domestic ambience and also the community of the fictional town of Agua Oscura, her homeland, as the cutout of a major social framework. Employing autobiographical discourse, the narrator/protagonist created by Denise Chávez exposes the ills of a community that, as a product of colonialism and neocolonialism, has lost its cultural identity. In *Face of an Angel*, by means of the narrator/protagonist's first person account, Denise Chávez reproduces the ethos she was born and grew up in. Endowing Soveida Dosamantes with autobiographical components such as complicated family relations, native women characters who work as gatekeepers of ancestral practices erased by European domination, as well as men characters who mask frailty underneath the appearance of strength and power, Chávez represents in *Face of an angel* a microcosm of a group which little by little has been subverting the official discourse and gaining terrain in the U.S. political and social panorama.

Keywords: Chicano society. Gender confrontation. Fictional collective autobiography.

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INTRODUCTION

If someone asks me why I chose Chicana literature as the topic for my dissertation, I can answer promptly that the first reason for such a choice dwells in my affective memory, where I keep some Mexican elements. As a little girl, back in the early 1970's, I used to listen to the sound of Carlos Santana's rock version of mambo musician Tito Puente's 1963 hit *Oye como va* on the radio. Even at so tender an age, I could perceive that his performance had a consistent differential: he managed to merge the Latino swing and the sound of the guitar, one of the most powerful symbols of the U.S. culture, pioneering what is currently called "Chicano rock". Another image that remains in my memory is that of Pelé wearing a sombrero on June, the 21st, after the final game of 1970 World Cup in Estadio Azteca, in the City of Mexico. At those moments, two of my senses – the hearing and the sight – informed me that there was a country called Mexico. Over thirty years later, during my second Letters' undergraduate work at UERJ, I had the chance to be introduced by Professor Leila Harris, currently my advisor, to Sandra Cisneros's *The House of Mango Street*, whose innovative narrative – content and form – signaled that the environment depicted in the novel could turn out to be a tremendous source for a probable post-graduation research.

A factor that also contributed for my choosing a novel written by a woman writer of Mexican background was the demographic aspect involving Latinos in the U.S. The number of legal and also illegal Latin-American immigrants in the States played an important role in the last presidential elections in the country:

> Since this is off the record, I will just be very blunt. Should I win a second term, a big reason I will win a second term is because the Republican nominee and the Republican Party have so alienated the fastest-growing demographic group in the country, the Latino community."
> President Barack Obama to the editor and publisher of the Des Moines Register, the leading Iowa newspaper. 2012
> (Disponível em: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/oct/24/obama-confident-immigration-reform-if-reelected/?page=all>. Acesso em: jul. 2013)

Over this alleged phone conversation, President Barack Obama depicted a new – and meaningful – U.S. political scenario: the Latino community's casting vote in his election in 2012. When attributing to the Hispanics the role of political counterbalance, President Obama conferred the power of decision-making to the most numerous ethnical minority in the States. What is interesting to observe here is that that very group, which has suffered prejudice from

the dominant culture, played such a decisive role in the re-election of the first black U.S. president. On the one hand, there was a political representative of African-Americans who experienced (and still experience) discrimination for more than a century. On the other, there were the Latinos who have been going through a similar process. It is clear that the discrimination processes are not exactly the same because the stereotypical identities of blacks and Hispanics created by those of European white ancestry are different. Nevertheless, the similarity both groups keep between them is that, along the U.S. historical process, they have been oppressed, offended, silenced. Nine years before the alleged statement by President Obama, as if foreshadowing Chicanos' current political weight as voters, Professor Leila Harris drew attention to the growth of Hispanics in the U.S. In her article "*Massacre of The Dreamers*: por um feminismo transnacional" (2003), quoting Roberto Suro [1], Harris pointed out that the U.S. people would need to rethink the question of race and find new ways to categorize people and talk about the differences between them. The statistical information mentioned in the introductory paragraph works as an evidence of the importance both Latinos and blacks have acquired over time. Before the election of the first African American president, Brazilian professor Sonia Torres had already signaled this aspect when, in November 1996, the Chicano segment of U.S voters helped elect Bill Clinton and Al Gore and foresaw that the importance of that community "should become even more remarkable in the twenty-first century" (TORRES, 2001, p. 9 – my translation). Moreover, this factor serves to explain why Chicana literature was chosen as the topic for my research. It is quite worth witnessing how an ethnic[2] group has shifted from the condition of subaltern to a position of agent. It is even more worth observing how the female portion of that devalued community has taken charge of their own destiny, their own life, their own discourse.

Those who come to read this essay might ask why, among so many famous Latina writers, like Sandra Cisneros, Helena Maria Viramontes, Julia Alvarez, Cristina Garcia, I have chosen the much less known Denise Chávez. In fact, it was not the author who introduced me to the character. It was Soveida Dosamantes, the fictional narrator engendered by Chávez, who led me to her creator. Having found a critical comment on the novel on a website that

[1] Director to Pew Hispanic Center – source: HARRIS, Leila Assumpção. *Massacre of the Dreamers*: por um feminismo transnacional. In: HENRIQUES, Ana Lúcia (org.). *Feminismos, identidades, comparativismos*: vertentes nas literaturas de língua inglesa. Caetés, Rio de Janeiro, 2003.

[2] Professor Carla Portilho points out the incompleteness of the term "ethnic", misleadingly used to refer to "non-white" peoples, while "white" is also ethnic.

focuses on literature, I was intrigued by the *fictional life writing*[3] woven by a waitress from the U.S. state of New Mexico, who worked at a Mexican food restaurant curiously named as El Farol[4]. Therefore, it was searching for a first person narrative which portrayed a social and cultural scenario that I found Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel*: a fictional autobiography, whose narrator is a common woman who seeks to reproduce, under her own lens, the ethos she belongs to. Actually, considering the Brazilian literary criticism towards foreign literature, all so-called Chicanas, even those whose works were – and still are – best sellers in the U.S., are practically unknown. Thus, acknowledging this fact, it seems advisable to give some information about the author of the fictional – and collective – autobiography that caught my eye.

Despite having written over twenty plays, Denise Chávez is best known for her works of fiction and is widely considered as one of the leading Chicana writers. In *The Last of the Menu Girls*, her first book to be published in 1986, seen as a collection of short stories by some critics and as a novel by others, Chávez narrates the maturing process of the protagonist, Rocio, goes through. Seven years after the tremendous success of *Face of an Angel*, which rendered her three literary prizes in 1995 – Premio Aztlan Award, American Book Award and Mesilla Valley Writer of the Year Award – Chávez wrote *Loving Pedro Infante*. In her second novel, she tells the story of a schoolteacher who nurtures a platonic passion for a Mexican film star, who died in 1957 and who embodied the image of the Latino *macho*. In her latest long fiction, launched in 2006 and entitled *A Taco Testimony*, Denise Chávez weaves a memoir in which she draws together once more culture and autobiographical elements, having food as the "main course"[5] of her writing.

Born in the U.S. state of New Mexico, in 1948 – the same birthplace and year of birth as the narrator's in *Face of an Angel*, and also a hundred years after the Mexican-American War/La Invasión was over – Denise Chávez, like many other Chicana writers, brings autobiographical elements to the fictional ambience she creates. The domestic environment inhabited by simple Mexican women who not only took care of the house, but also helped raised Denise and her two sisters seems to be recreated in *Face of an Angel*. Like Denise Chávez's, Soveida Dosmantes's household is impregnated with the sound of two coexisting languages, which is so common in border regions:

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[3] From here on, other terms will be used to refer to the genre of *Face of an Angel*, but all of them bear the three fundamental features Chávez's novel contains: the fact it is fictional, the fact it is told in the first person and the fact it represents a whole collectivity.
[4] "El Farol", significantly meaning "The Lighthouse".
[5] A pun with the expression widely used in menus.

> The bilingual backdrop of the Southern New Mexico town and the presence of Mexican help within the Chávez home helped to forge an appreciation for the art of bilingualism in Chávez. Her childhood was filled with the oral tradition of storytelling which was a tremendous influence on Chávez, and is the reason that she refers to herself as a "performance writer" (Disponível em: <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/chavezDenise.php - p. 1>).

Despite the presence of autobiographical elements, it is important to underscore here that *Face of an Angel* cannot be read as Denise Chávez's disguised autobiography. In this respect, Smith and Watson point out:

> Many postcolonial women writers elect the form of first person fiction in writng personal stories. The deflection of confessional and self-exposing inquiry into imaginative forms of the novel in bildungsroman form takes experimental history as the ground but not the route of narration. This detour from life writing to novel renders postcolonial women writers less vulnerable to exoticization by metropolitan readers or to shaming within their own cultures (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 129-130).

Taking into account that *Face of an Angel* has over four hundred pages, I do not propose to discuss in this dissertation all the issues raised in the novel. Throughout the reading of Chávez's fictional autobiography, some important topics are easily detected such as: sexuality – discussed not only in many stages of the narrator/protagonist's development but also by other characters in the novel -; humor – present in many situations chronicled by Soveida and, mainly, in critical comments and descriptions of characters; religion, in turn, it goes without saying, pervades the whole narrative, starting from the title up to the criteria taken to structure the novel; and orature, which is a legacy of pre-colonial cultures, present in the stories told by some of the women characters in the novel, especially Mamá Lupita, the narrator/protagonist's grandmother and the coaxer[6] of Soveida's fictional life writing. However, the line of thought I decided to follow is one that seems to work as the backbone of the novel: the clash between women and men characters. Thus, in my evaluation, what stands out in *Face of an Angel* is the way Chávez makes the women in her novel subvert the concepts of Machismo[7] and Marianismo[8], so typical of the Chicano society, the complementary aspect of which Javanese lecturer Ni Luh Putu Rosiandani (2006) outlines:

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[6] "[A]ny person or institution or set of cultural imperatives that solicits or provokes people to tell their stories" (SMITH;WATSON, 2010, p. 64).

[7] Ana Castilho has a particular view towards the concept of machismo while asserting that machismo cannot be seen as an effect of neocolonialism, as the battering of women occurred in ancient societies. (CASTILHO, 1995, p. 70).

> [M] achismo is not merely about men's superiority, instead, it is also about the exploitation of men's power through customs, traditions, and norms designed to create restrictions over women. [T]he concept of marianismo, recognized as the ideology that shapes and controls women' way of thinking and conduct, fulfils the requirement to be inferior as required by the concept of machismo (ROSIANDANI, 2006, p. 29).

Having the clash between gender roles in the Chicano society as the cutout of the ethos the narrator/protagonist describes, I divided my dissertation into three chapters. In the first, I insert Soveida's life writing in a historical context, or rather, I promote a dialog between the narrator/protagonist's account and history. For this purpose, three historical moments were selected: the late nineteenth century, the 1960s and the 1980s, for their importance not only in the novel but also in the Chicanos' historical process. In order to develop the chapter based on the interconnection, or rather, the "intertext" between history and literature, I used as theoretical sources the works by Rodolfo Acuña, Linda Hutcheon, Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger, Edouard Glissant and others. In the second chapter, I focus on the inequality of gender roles which characterizes Chicano society, having as samples some of the most relevant couples in the narrative: the narrator/protagonist's great-grandparents, who are the founders of the Dosamantes family, the narrator/protagonist's parents, and Soveida's own relationships. My option for this line of research was not occasional or purposeless: the question of family is crucial for this society and for Chicana writers who seek, through writing, to desecrate[9] the smallest unit of an androcentric social frame. For the investigation I propose in the second chapter, I used the works by Gloria Anzaldúa, Ellen McCracken, Alvina Quintana, Paula Moya, Phillipa Kafka and others. In the third and last chapter, I proceed to investigate the collective hue Denise Chávez imprinted in *Face of an Angel*. Throughout this chapter the encompassing work by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson was used as the main theoretical source. Given the complexity and the length of the third chapter, I saw fit to divide it into four subdivisions, in order to encompass all the aspects I identified in Chávez's fictional autobiography. The first deals with the concept of autobiography, the second talks about the importance of autobiography for minorities, the third discusses how the Chicano society was individually depicted by the narrator/protagonist and in the last subsection I analyse the formal structure Denise Chávez chose for *Face of an Angel*.

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[8] The concept of marianismo is currently devoid of the Manichean traditional view that polarizes it with either the image of the prostitute or the saint. While discussing the concept of Malinchismo, professor Carla Portilho draws attention to the dichotomy between the traditional view of La Malinche as a betrayor or as a survivor (PORTILHO, 2004, p. 34-38).

[9] The verb "to desecrate" is being used here in the following sense: "to violate the sacredness of" (source: thefreedictionary.com/desecrate), as family is seen as a sacred social institution, and as such, must be unquestionable and kept under protection.

Therefore, before looking into Soveida Dosamantes's fictional self-referential account, I found appropriate to introduce the concept of autobiography as a theoretical topic itself, by giving an evolutionary view of life writing using as samples the autobiographical projects by Michel de Montaigne, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Roland Barthes, as discussed by Elizabeth Muylaert Duque-Estrada, who posits those works as representatives of the genre in question. In sequence, I decided to examine the relevance of autobiographical discourse to Chicana writers as a minority group, since life writing turned out to be a powerful tool for oppressed communities to subvert official historical discourse and, consequently, to represent themselves. As theoretical references for the second subsection, I used the works by Lourdes Torres, Susan Egan, Gabriele Helms, and other critics already mentioned. In the third subsection of the last chapter, I examined how this communal feature manifests itself in *Face of an Angel*, that is, how a whole cultural group is represented by a fictional narrator/protagonist. For such research, I had as critical support the works by Carine Mardorossian and Joan Scott, not to mention others referred to here. Tying up the last chapter, I decided to examine what sort of textual shape Denise Chávez endowed Soveida Dosamantes's self-referential discourse with. Since the author gave her novel a particular structure – divided into parts which were named after categories of angels – I could not ignore this factor in my project, as I immediately identified a connection between format and content in *Face of an Angel*. In order to develop this subsection, taking into consideration the specificity of its content, the theoretical material I had access to was Linda Naranjo-Huebl's article "Faith, Hope and Service in Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel*". In her article, based on a bibliography devoted to Catholicism, Naranjo-Huebl identifies the names of each part an evolutionary sequence which can be interpreted as the maturing process the narrator/protagonist goes through. Using Naranjo-Huebl's line of reasoning, I discuss each part, discussing some of the chapters I considered important in Soveida Dosamates's development. In short, I hope to have succeeded in forming a general picture of such a rich and long novel through which its author intended not only to represent a "slice" of Chicano environment but also to dismantle some stereotypes about the Chicano culture.

1 **THE INTERTEXT OF HISTORY AND LITERATURE IN *FACE OF AN ANGEL*, A FICTIONAL POSTMODERN/POST-NEOCOLONIAL MEMOIR BY DENISE CHÁVEZ.**

America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with **brotherhood**
Katherine Lee Bates (my emphasis)

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of Exiles. […] [claims].
"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, […]
Send these, the homeless, tempest-lost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"
Emma Lazarus

Originally a poem, the lyrics of the song "America the Beautiful", written in 1893 by Katherine Lee Bates and regarded as the second U.S. anthem, describe a country which, besides being inhabited by a virtuous people, will surely receive from God the blessing of fraternity, as the lyrical-I suggests. The country portrayed in Bates's poem is one that possesses multiple virtues and, by the divine power, will promote solidarity and neighborly love. The nationalistic hue Bates's verses are imbued with seem to have found in Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus", written ten years before "America, the beautiful", which describes a nation that was born to receive all unfortunate people who could not find the proper shelter in their own homelands. Not by chance, the verses included in the epigraph are part of the stance engraved on a plaque under the Statue of Liberty, the epitome of the libertarian and also welcoming spirit the U.S. nation embodies. Would this feeling be really encouraged among all American citizens? Would any individual born on the U.S. soil or drawn to it in search of its "generosity" be included in this **brotherhood**? Would "Mother America" grant all "her" children that benevolence, without discriminating against them by ethnical heritage, social condition or gender? Historical facts, whether they be officially documented as such or reconstructed in literary works, have proved that "Mother America" has not been so indistinctively welcoming. It is just this filial distinction that the Mexican American writer Denise Chávez represents in her novel *Face of an Angel*. In her memoir, written in response to her grandmother Lupita's request, the narrator/protagonist Soveida Dosamantes makes use of self-referential discourse to recall the trajectory of some of her family members. In fact, despite directing her narrative focus on women, Soveida includes the men who took part of her life experience and who, some way or other, played a role in her

development process. Chávez then conceives a fictional autobiography, in order to give voice to a woman character who, like herself, is American by birth, but labeled by her Mexican heritage. Throughout her novel, Denise Chávez establishes a dialog between history and literature. Whether it be a reference to the historical character Billy the Kid, the gunman who participated in the Lincoln County War that took place in 1878, in the U.S. state of New Mexico (chapter 26) or an indirect allusion to the Brown Berets, a 1960 Chicano activist group (chapter 38), history is sprinkled along Soveida Dosamantes's life writing. Taking into consideration that *Face of an Angel* is a fictional work, this section intends to discuss the intermingling of history and fiction in Denise Chávez's novel. For the sake of internal organization, the present section is divided into three parts, each referring to a historical phase that serves as the backcloth to passages which are meaningful in Soveida Dosamantes's coming-of-age narrative: the late nineteenth century and the aftermath oh the American Civil War; and the 1960's *campesinos*'s political struggle led by Mexican American farm worker Cesar Chavez and the ideological division of the world in two halves, a result of the Cold War started right after the end of the World Was II; and, finally, the 1980's, which were expected to be the "decade for the Hispanics". These periods were selected, as each of them has a particular importance within the novel: the late nineteenth century, identified by Soveida Dosamantes as her genesis in her hometown Agua Oscura; in the sixties, marked by a political and cultural effervescence, the narrator/protagonist hears for the first time the term "Chicana"; in the late eighties, Soveida, already a mature woman in her forties, has access to her own cultural heritage through academic studies.

Although *Face of an Angel* cannot be regarded as a historical novel in the canonic sense of the term, it is undeniable that the historical process involving Chicanos in the U.S is present in Chávez's novel and intermixes with fiction to form the ethos the readers are provided with. Canadian scholar Linda Hutcheon opens her essay "Historiographic Metafiction – Parody and the Intertextuality of History" by quoting two important French thinkers, Michel de Montaigne and Michel Foucault, who, although set apart by a chronological gap of four centuries, share the same view towards the separation between fiction and history. By quoting Foucault, Hutcheon ratifies that it is impossible for a fictional work to be conceived in isolation, since "[…] a book […] is [always] caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a **node** within a **network**" (FOUCAULT *apud* HUTCHEON, p.3). Borrowing the words employed by the French philosopher, it seems legitimate to state that *Face of an Angel* is a *node* within Chicano cultural/literary/historical *network*, a literary piece of work that is not isolated from the

historical process that has brought it into being. Thus, as Chávez locates her novel within the Chicano historical context without trying to cut the bonds between history and fiction, it seems appropriate to affirm that *Face of an Angel* fits Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographical metafiction, as the following quotation attests to:

> The **postmodern** relationship between fiction and history is an even more complex one of interaction and mutual implication. Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that effects both aims: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel (though not equal) status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the 'world" and literature (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 4 - my emphasis).

Considering the previous passage in which Hutcheon identifies the complexity and the interaction between fiction and history as a defining characteristic of postmodernism, it seems correct to attribute to Chávez's novel such a classification. As the Canadian theorist affirms, postmodernism is more of "a poetics or an ideology […] [that] clearly attempts to combat […] [the] modernism's hermetic, elitist isolationism that separated art from the 'world', literature from history." (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 28). It is exactly this blend of history and literature, this blurred boundary between art and historical research, this "intertext of history and fiction" – one of the most distinguishing features of postmodernism – that is detected in *Face of an Angel*. Although it is clear that it was not the author's intention to discuss history in her literary work, historical events give her fictional narrative a contextual flavor and work as a situational marker which guides the readers through the novel's chronological development. In addition, the Chicano universe made up of fictional and real elements is not described by a rich landowner or someone belonging to a privileged social class, respectful enough to have the authority to tell his/her story. Rather, *Face of an Angel*'s narrator is simply a humble waitress, from a small town in New Mexico, who decides to share with her readers her private universe, chronicling it in a humorously critical way. This individual account of history is aptly described by British professor and theorist Susannah Radstone (2000):

> Histories of autobiography locate individual autobiographies within historical epochs and their aesthetic, formal and thematic concerns – concerns which are inextricably tied to the historicisation of the ontology of the subject [and] [t]his is […] the case […] of marginal autobiographies – women's, working-class or ethnic autobiography, for instance (RADSTONE, 2000, p. 203-204).

Still discussing – but never trying to set firmly – the limits between fiction and history, once more, Canadian scholar Linda Hutcheon helps clarify the issue. In the seventh chapter

of *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Hutcheon discusses the Hungarian thinker Georg Lukács's concept of historical novel. As Hutcheon points out, Lukács sees the fictionalization of history (or would it be the use of history in fiction?) as the construction of a microcosm, the representation of a macro reality that generalizes (as it consists of a recreation of types and life scenes) and yet concentrates (since it squeezes that general panorama within a fictional realm). In *Face of an Angel*, this microcosm is Agua Oscura, the narrator/protagonist's hometown, a fictional space which generalizes the Chicano universe that holds inside it (stereo) types. This microcosm is built by Chávez who endows her narrator/protagonist with the authority to describe it. The character's main mission is, thus, to provide the readers with a portrait of a minority group which is outlined in a diachronic axis. In fact, Soveida Dosamantes, makes use of her narrative to offer her readers an alternative reading of the Chicano universe unlike that imbued with prejudice furnished by the white U.S. establishment. Therefore, Chávez's fictional autobiography seems to fit Lúkacs definition of historical novel as a cut-out of reality, since it embodies the representation of a larger picture.

The role of literature as a tool for minorities to subvert the historical mainstream discourse is addressed by Finnish professor Kuisma Korhonen (in the introductory chapter of *Tropes for the Past* – Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate, 2006), who concludes that, by using literary creativity, those who were not given the chance to speak for themselves can provide another version (or other versions) of historical facts unlike the fossilized one granted by the official historical discourse:

> [A]rtistic imagination is an essential supplement to historical discourse when the intention is to give voice to those who are marginalized from the centralized production of knowledge, or those who are silenced forever [..] Literature is not only nostalgic entertainment, but serious research on world-making language, and their multifaceted relationship. (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 18-19).

Note that Korhonen deconstructs the myth that literature, as an artistic manifestation, should be opposed to the rationality and impartiality of the historical discourse blessed by academic authority. As Korhonen argues, literature, in spite of having the purpose of entertaining, develops its body of writing based on research about the so-called reality and all the aspects it encompasses. Korhonen's position appears to find support in U.S. historian Hayden White's essay "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing", also included in the collection of critical articles edited by Korhonen himself. White attributes to literature the badge of "history's other" and argues that literature, besides having found out a magnitude of reality that history has never acknowledged, had built up "techniques of writing that

undermined the authority of history's favored realistic or plain style of writing" (WHITE, in KORHONEN, 2006, p. 25). White exposes "the other side of the coin" by discussing the interfacial relationship between literature and history by exposing the mainstream differentiation of both fields of study:

> History is one of the "others" of literature inasmuch as literature is understood to be identifiable with fiction. Because history wishes to make true statements about the real world, not an imaginary or illusory world. Secondly, history is literature's other inasmuch as literature is understood to be identifiable with figuration, figurative language, and metaphor, rather than with literal speech, unambiguous assertion, and free or poetic (rather than bound) utterance. (WHITE, in KORHONEN, 2006, p. 25).

This interaction that White spots between history and literature is grounded on two levels. The first refers to the content both areas intend to develop – history and literature deal with the "tangible" reality. The second, in turn, relates to the way this "palpable" world is textually dealt with: while the so-called historical discourse has an impartially **descriptive** and **analytical** feature, the literary writing **recreates** it by means of linguistic devices. In sum, if history describes and analyses events which are determinative for the development of society, literature relies on imagination to reproduce the same world history objectively depicts.

In his collection of essays entitled *Caribbean Discourse*, Martinican historian Edouard Glissant also aligns literature with history, as he sees them as sorts of narratives that have the "world" as their work field. If history presents a narrative which is endowed with discursive authority, literature, as its counterpart, takes over the task of defying it. Glissant establishes a binomial relationship between the historical research and discourse and its artistic correspondent, which is the recreation or reconstruction of reality carried out by literature. The interlink between the historical and the literary discourses, as Glissant defines it, is characterized by complexity and ongoing transformation, given the many sides it assumes not only synchronically, but also diachronically. The historian then states that:

> [H]istory […] is the "reflection" of a collective consciousness today […] concerned with the obscure areas of lived reality […] History (whether we see it as expression or lived reality) and Literature form part of the same problematics: the account, or the frame of reference, of the collective relationships of men with their environment, in a space that keeps changing and in a time that constantly is being altered" (GLISSANT, 1992, p. 69-70).

As the focus of this research is a novel whose plot is intended to recreate Chicano society, it is not possible to disregard its Mexican roots, and, much less, to think of Mexican history without discussing that country's past as a Spanish colony and its present economic and political dependence on the United States. Considering Mexico's relations with Spain and the U.S., it is correct to conclude that, from the sixteenth century onwards, the reign previously run by Montezuma II started a long, gradual and continuous process through which it gradually lost its national and cultural identity. Since 1521, when Spain conquered the former Aztec empire, it started suffering, like any other colony at the time, the most emblematic effects of colonialism: the exploitation of its natural resources and the process of acculturation. In the name of imposing what was thought to be "civilization", obviously based on the white European pattern, the Spanish crown through the colonizers not only depleted the empire's gold and silver but also tried to erase its indigenous past. The traces left by the Aztecan culture were swept away for the sake of putting an aboriginal people on the "correct" frame of modern society. After all, the "savage" people needed to be "tamed" to give way to "civilization". From 1521 onwards, the indigenous people were blended with its colonizer, gradually losing its ethnic identity.

This gradual loss of racial/ethnic/cultural characteristics did not have only the Spanish conquest of Mexican lands and civilization as its cause. In the mid-1840's, with the invasion of Texas by the U.S., Mexico underwent a "new" colonization process, that is, two hundred years after the Spanish domination, it was again subjected to an economically powerful nation. This time, however, the historical moment was another one: by the nineteenth century, thanks to "an early start in mechanization production […], [it was possible for the U.S. to accumulate] capital and [dominate] New World markets" (ACUÑA, 1988, p.2). This advantageous position made things easier for the U.S. to advance over Mexican territory and start a neocolonial relation with another former colony which had gone through the usual exploitative colonial process. These two phases of economic domination affected Mexico not only in terms of finances but also of national self-esteem, causing Mexican people to see themselves as inferior. It is this scenario of economic, social and cultural limbo that Soveida Dosamantes rebuilds in her first person narration, sharing with her readers particularities of the Chicano culture. Subject to a past of oppression, Mexicans and Mexican Americans learned that *mestisaje* was a drawback. Over centuries, they were taught that, due to their dark skin, their "unrefined" culture and, consequently, their "short cognitive reach", they should be kept under the tutelage of the "more intellectually privileged" Anglos, whose "superiority" was legitimated by their white European background.

Postcolonial studies, however, came to question the superiority of those who entitled themselves as such and to raise the pride of mix-raced people. It is interesting to observe what Denise Chávez's herself said in this respect during an interview to U.S. journalists Debbie Blake, Doug Anderson and Rosalva Ray:

> We have to remember where our roots are. Remember that the Chicanos are this mestizaje. We are a mixture of several worlds; a mixture bubbling up to form some kind of new nourishment. We are new beings that come out of all those old ways of being and existing. **We are the new stock from the old soup** (Denise Chávez during an interview to Debbie Blake, Doug Anderson and Rosalva Ray – my emphasis).

Note that Denise Chávez defines Chicanos as "the new stock from the old soup", reminding us of what "Arabian-Jewish" – as she defines herself – theorist Ella Shohat (2008) says about the terms "hibridity" and "syncretism" in her critical article "Notes on the Post-Colonial". In an attempt to problematize the miscegenated trace of postcolonial subjects and cultures, Shohat mentions the concept of cultural anthropophagy proposed by Brazilian modernism and tropicalism:

> The culturally syncretic protagonists of the Brazilian modernists of the nineteen twenties […] might be seen as "postcolonial hybrids" *avant la lettre*. The cannibalist theories of the Brazilian modernists, and their elaborations in the Tropicalist movement of the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies, simply assumed the New Worlders were culturally mixed, a contentious amalgam of indigenous, African, European, Asian, and Arab identities (SHOHAT, 2008, p. 109).

Both Chávez and Shohat interpret the postcolonial ambience as a "contentious amalgam", that is, an indistinct mixture whose components are in permanent state of confrontation and/or transformation. The individuals involved in this clash, however, do not fight in equal conditions. Those who have always enjoyed a privileged social position and believe in their "racial purity" cannot accept others they identify as of different ethnical heritages. What lies underneath all that is the concept of cultural identity that has been developed since the advent of the national states in the seventeenth century and the political and economic power they started exerted on their colonies.

In short, the present section does not intend to discuss in depth the historical panorama of each of the three stages chosen to be talked about. What is targeted here is to see how history imbricates with fiction, functioning as a factual reference to Chávez's narrative. Other historical periods could have been chosen such as the 1950's, which worked as the backcloth

to Soveida's childhood or even the 1970's, for example, when she met her second husband, whose death deeply affected her life. However, regarding the Chicanos' historical process, the late nineteenth century, the 1960's and the 1980's seem to have been crucial for the development of Chávez's narrative. Therefore, in the next three subdivisions we will discuss the historical conditions that concurred to the Dosamantes' origin (late nineteenth century), the hustling 1960's, during which the first seed of ethnic awareness was sown in Soveida's mind and the 1980's , when she, mature enough to do so, decides to cultivate that very seed.

1.1 **Manuel Dosamantes's Trajectory: from Dominated Mexico to Appropriated New Mexico.**

In the very beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to Soveida's genealogical tree, which clearly shows that she not only aims to develop a chronologically organized memoir, but also to establish a cause-consequence relation between past and present. As U.S. professor Francine Richter states about Chávez's narrator/protagonist, "[m]uch of what makes up Soveida's present, everyday existence has its origins over the border in Old Mexico" (RICHTER, 1999, p.277). Therefore, it seems appropriate to examine the historical and political panorama that pushed Manuel Dosamantes, the narrator/protagonist's great-grandfather, out of Mexico and towards the border between Mexico and the United States.

The first waves of American merchants arrived in what is now the U.S. state of New Mexico around 1820 and, during the following two decades or so, they paved the way for the invasion that took place during the 1840's. With a predominantly agricultural economy, New Mexico was dominated by American landowners who expelled local poor peasants and sheep raisers, establishing then a monopoly not only in agriculture but also in cattle raising. According to Soveida Dosamantes's narrative, her great-grandfather Manuel arrived in New Mexico around 1875, when "[t]he railways ushered in the industrial period, accelerating the decline of ruralism and the expansion of capital-intensive industries"(ACUÑA, 1988, p.78). However, the fictional small town of Agua Oscura created by Denise Chávez does not seem to have been much affected by that urge of development, as it remained rural until the narrator/protagonist's moment of enunciation.

In the chapter entitled "The Sleepwalker", Soveida narrates how the story of her family began, focusing on her great-grandfather's trajectory. Born in Guanajuato, a colonial town, as Soveida herself defines it, Manuel Dosamantes had had California as his destination

at first. Nevertheless, for reasons not clearly informed in the novel, "he never made it"[10] (Soveida Dosamantes in CHÁVEZ, *Face of an Angel*, New York, Warner Books, 1994, p.5). He then leaves his hometown, crosses the Mexican city of Nuevo Laredo and finally reaches Fort Davis, in the American state of Texas, where he worked for a while. Afraid of being forced to marry a woman he did not love, the daughter to a farmer he had worked for, Manuel Dosamantes faced heat and the desert, escaping from a fate he refused to accept. Nonetheless, tired of running, he ended up settling down in the (fictional) town of Agua Oscura, New Mexico. While chronicling her great-grandfather's escape, Soveida describes Manuel and his original family – parents and siblings – meaningfully portraying a scene of material need.

> [T]he picture of his mother […] [,] his father[,] his brothers[,] and himself, as a boy, standing next to a dried tree, in a nowhere land on the outskirts of his colonial hometown, Guanajuato [; h]e had lived in poverty and hope there, full of **parched dreams from all the heat**" (p. 7 – my emphasis).

While describing the picture, Soveida alludes to Manuel's "**parched** dreams from all the **heat**" which demonstrates that he, from a very early age, **thirstily** dreamed of leaving behind that place whose **inhospitable weather** prevented him and his family from having a better life. It is important to highlight here, however, that the implacable climate was not exactly the only – or main – cause for the Dosamantes family's economically unfavorable conditions. That "heat" – maybe not only a denotative reference to the local weather but also a metaphor for an infernal environment which lacked all sorts of comforts – is the consequence of centuries of political and economic control both by Spain during the colonial period and of the annexation of part of Mexican territory by the States. In short, the Mexico Manuel Dosamantes was born and grew up in was what remained from a country once more marked by political and economic dominance: the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo signed in 1848, following the so-called Mexican-American War or the "The Invasion", as Mexicans termed it, a century before the narrator/protagonist's birth, Mexico had officially confirmed its condition of a still dominated country, since over half of its territory had been annexed by the United States. The poor rural environment described by Soveida from the picture of her great-grandfather and his family was, thus, the result of what Rodolfo Acuña (1988) clearly explains in the quotation below:

> Mexico's resources […] had been plundered and its lands monopolized by a few *latifundistas* and the Catholic Church. The lack of political stability and poor

[10] From here on all references to the novel will be made on the text by the page number only.

> transportation retarded the modernization of agriculture and the development of national markets (ACUÑA, 1988, p.2).

The scenario of poverty that marked Manuel Dosamantes's memories from Mexico pushed him out of his homeland and made him head for "the land of opportunities". Having California – back then already a symbol of prosperity – as his target, Manuel Dosamantes, after a period in Texas, ends up in a small town maybe as small as his own, Guanajuato. It is noteworthy Manuel's cyclic fate: in spite of desiring – and making all the effort – to move to a more cosmopolitan place, he wound up in a tiny provincial village. Note what the narrator/protagonist says about the relationship between her ancestor and her birthplace:

> [Agua Oscura's] severity suited him. He responded to this land as a hearty hungry woman does to lovemaking. He found it gave him what he needed: a response. He was able to see the change, dramatically. Water was this land's lover, and this love affair, the push and pull of nature with man, a man with his spirit, was what drew him to Agua Oscura. It allowed him to feel, at last, at home. (p.7).

As Soveida herself concludes, there was a strong link between her great-grandfather and Agua Oscura. Maybe it was the similarity between the fictional tiny rural town in New Mexico and the real Mexican city of Guanajuato, instead of a strong gap between the latter and California, his first goal, that held Manuel Dosamantes on to the former. The dramatic change Soveida affirms her great-grandfather had seen may be one that took place inside himself, since the Manuel who arrived in Agua Oscura was not the same who left Guanajuato. It was then a paradoxical feeling that Soveida's ancestor might have developed: the heat that pushed him out of Guanajuato was exactly what made him feel at home in Agua Oscura. However, the experience he acquired throughout those years of hard work on so many farms would enable him to change it and strengthen that love affair between water and the village. This way, he would be taming that heat – whatever extension of meaning the term might urge in this passage of the novel – which drove him out of Mexico and yet rooted him in the Mexican American town of Agua Oscura. The harmonic relation between Manuel Dosamantes and his new "homeland" may be interpreted as the crowning of a hard working man who, despite all odds, succeeded in acquiring all that nature and history had denied him.

Still examining this chapter, it is important to observe another historical element inserted in the narrative and that also functions as a counterpart to Manuel Dosamantes's story: the origin of the narrator/protagonist's great-grandmother. Considering Denise Chávez's intention of portraying a place characterized by miscegenation – let us not forget that Chávez meant to represent Chicano society in her novel – not by chance, did she create a

character lie Elena Harrell. Soveida's great-grandmother's Christian name is typically *latino*, commonly found in Spanish speaking countries. Her family name, in turn, reveals her British origin, promptly suggesting a mixed-race persona. Born in Chihuahua, one of the most important Mexican trade centers, which "North American merchants made fortunes from" (ACUÑA, 1988, p.54), Elena Harrell could not have had a more noble background: she was the daughter to "Bartel Harrell [,] a miner and **speculator** [and] Estrella de las Casas, from […] one of the wealthiest families in the state of Chihuahua" (p.9. my emphasis). Note that the narrator/protagonist herself defines her most ancient ancestor as a *miner* and a *speculator*, that is, an Anglo who was drawn to Mexico not only to exploit its natural resources, but also to speculate[11]. Soveida, thus, informs her readers that Bartel Harrell was an Anglo and a financial adventurer who came to Mexico in order to get rich over extracting its natural resources (miner) and also grabbing and selling its lands (speculator). Considering both Harrell's activities, it seems accurate to infer that his character truly embodies the Anglo (neo)colonizer, as he is engaged with the most epitomic exploitative actions in the neocolonial era.

Bartel Harrell's arrival in Mexico finds explanation in two important historical data: the Monroe doctrine, introduced in 1823, and the Manifest Destiny[12], a belief developed twenty years later. According to the political and economic creed, the United States was endowed with power enough to take economic, and consequently, political control of the northern hemisphere in an attempt to "protect" the area from European domination. Two decades after the signature of the Monroe doctrine, the ideology of Manifest Destiny legitimated the spirit President James Monroe's policy was imbued with, as professor María Antonia Oliver-Rotger explains: "[t]he ideology of Manifest Destiny was instrumental for speculators, land-developers, and large companies that rapidly moved into the Southwest" (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 99). In conceiving Elena Harrel's origin, Chávez resorts to history as a rich source of elements for her narrative, as Oliver-Rotger informs: "[s]ome of the wealthy sectors of Mexican society struggled to remain in control of their properties and established alliances with "Anglos by means of **marriage** or business ties" (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 100).

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[11] "engage in the buying or selling of a commodity with an element of risk on the chance of profit" (Disponível em: < http://www.answers.com/topic/speculate > . Acesso em: set. 2013.

[12] Ideology developed in the mid 1840s considered an aftermath of the Monroe Doctrine. Alleging the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, it justified the U.S expansion into Latin American countries. (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 99).

All the historical panorama marked by cultural/ethnic blending and discrimination on the one hand and by economic/political control on the other affected the narrator/protagonist's sense of what "nation" is supposed to mean. By joining in marriage a Mexican farm worker and an aristocrat of British and Spanish background, the author designs a fictional family stream so as to evidence the blending of races and walks of life that most real Mexican American families are made up of. In fact, by doing so, Chávez attributes to Manuel Dosamantes and Elena Harrell the role of the primeval cells of Soveida Dosamantes's family as far as her genealogical tree traces back. In Soveida Dosamantes's "private nation", which is her domestic and familial ambience, Manuel and Elena function as her ancestral milestones, as they are the very starting point of her familial lineage. Considering that family is the first sample of social organization any human being experiences, or rather, the familial environment is the place where people, as social beings, acquire the most relevant aspects of a nation/culture which are language and customs, it seems advisable to examine the concept of **national culture** that the Jamaican theorist Stuart Hall (2007) develops. It would be, thus, interesting to see how the notion theorized by Hall manifests in a fictional character who grew up in an environment which was the product of a historical process characterized by political/economic domination and ethnic/cultural blending.

While discussing aspects that the concept of national culture involves, Hall identifies five main elements. One of them, which he labels as the "foundational myths", seems to suit Manuel Dosamantes and Elena Harrell, the characters here in question. Although Hall develops this notion within the discussion about what the binomial nation/nationalism might stand for, it seems perfectly applicable to Chávez's *Face of an Angel*, since, when it comes to a postcolonial piece of writing, the idea of nation does not have the macro dimension people commonly share. In a world where cultures merge all the time, it is getting harder and harder to establish the boundaries between them. This way, what could be regarded as regional might be seen as universal and vice-versa. It looks like that Soveida Dosamantes senses it in the first chapter of "The Book of Service", the manual she wrote to her substitute at El Farol, the Mexican food restaurant she worked all her life. She then theorizes: "when you grow up in the Southwest, your state is your country. There exists no other country outside that which you know. Likewise, neighborhood is a country. As your family is a country. As your house is a country. As you are a country" (p.171). Soveida's text shows that she is quite aware that there is no such thing as an unquestionably defined universal notion of country. For her, the idea of country is a concept developed within each individual, eliminating any possibility of a general definition accepted worldwide. Miscegenation in the Dosamantes started so long before the

moment fo enunciation that Soveida loses track of its ethnic components. Besides, until the narrator/protagonist in Chávez's novel acquires scholarly knowledge on her own ethos, she is completely unaware of that racial blending and the social and economic consequences it had brought to her community. Thus, Soveida's great-grandparents indeed can be seen as the foundational myths of her "private country", the country that she knows, as she herself argues. To Soveida Dosamantes, country is a concept that covers a narrow range, "[an] imagined community […] [that] is […] conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (ANDERSON, 1991, p. 8). Chávez's narrator/protagonist's particular idea of country also seems to find theoretical support in the book by Oliver-Rotger (2003). The narrowed view of what a country could mean may be a consequence of the exclusion of non-WASP's from the U.S society, as Oliver-Rotger argues:

> Since American society is not an open ethos where one may participate independently of race and class, but a 'private' space where citizenship is restricted, it is in these very "ragged edges" of society that resistance struggles to the present configuration of a "privatized" public sphere emerge (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 131).

Nevertheless, it is important to point out here that it was Soveida's cultural awareness and literacy that enabled her, at the moment of enunciation, to theorize this individuality. As a theoretical support of this *privateness*, Hall quotes the American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein:

> [T]he nationalisms of the modern world are the ambiguous expression [of a desire] for… assimilation into universal… and simultaneously for… adhering to the particular, the reinvention of differences. Indeed it is a universalism through particularism and particularism through universalism" (HALL, 2007, p. 615, apud Wallerstein, 1984, pp. 166-7).

In order to close the present subsection, it is important to note that not by chance Denise Chávez, as the author of the fictional autobiography here analyzed, made her narrator/protagonist find her first origin in the junction of a Mexican poor rural family from Guanajuato and an Anglo-Hispanic rich lineage. The Dosamantes' miscegenation then goes beyond race and ethnicity: it also includes place in the social pyramid. The weaver of the fictional autobiography portrays herself as a *mestiza*, a "halfbreed", for having descended from such a mixed origin. This mix, considering the social and ethnic aspects, seems to have accounted for, or at least contributed to, the complex family relations she is about to share with her readers. In a very indirect and pulverized way, Soveida Dosamantes identifies in her great-grandparents' story the explanation for her Chicana experience.

1.2 **Soveida's Chicana Awareness – the Cultural and Political Effervescence of the 1960's**

In "The One", the nineteenth chapter of *Face of an Angel* is particularly meaningful in reference to the novel's historical contextualization. This passage of Chávez's book narrates a talk between its narrator/protagonist and her first husband, Ivan Torres, during which she hears for the first time the term "Chicano". It is when Soveida Dosamantes takes notice of the relation between herself as an individual and the concept conveyed by that word that, at first, sounded so strange.

As Rodolfo Acuña states, "the 1960's were a time of discovery, a decade when presidential candidates and the media suddenly discovered that poor people lived in 'America'" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 307). So, according to Acuña, the social condition of minorities – and Mexicans were included in the group – gained importance in the U.S. political scenario during the "boiling" sixties, a time of social political awareness and upheaval guided by a strong sense of humanism. In the wake of civil rights movement, which peaked in the early 1960s, a concern for human beings' welfare marked the decade. In this respect, U.S. professor Ellen McCracken emphasizes the importance of the decade, remarking that:

> the sociopolitical space of the 1960s and 1970s in which blacks, students and antiwar groups agitated militantly for social change, Chicanos sought the political rights and cultural recognition that eluded them under the traditional model of the U.S. "melting pot" (MCCRACKEN, 1999, p. 3).

Although Mexican Americans' hopes (and claims) for social changes remained restricted within political speeches, academic studies and press articles, without any effective improvement in their life style, Chicanos' political struggle in the decade left a positive legacy. In fighting for having their rights recognized, legitimized and, above all, respected, Chicanos forced the U.S. mainstream to review its concepts and change its historical discourse. In this respect, Oliver-Rotger comments:

> [t]here is no doubt that one of the legacies of the political struggle of Chicanos in the 60's is […] the concern for the revision of American history in relation to the history of others[;] [h]owever, before such a revision, a positive sense of community had to be forged […] (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 96).

During the 1960's, the American economy suffered a severe setback, since its products were losing market to those made in Germany and Japan. While the U.S. industry was

"pay[ing] high dividends and extravagant executive salaries" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 307), its German and Japanese competitors were succeeding in launching better and cheaper goods. In order to become more competitive, the U.S. industry was forced not only to destine financial resources to technology and machinery, but also to demand a more qualified labor that could deal with the investment made on equipment and knowledge. Needless to say, that that turning point in the U.S. industry excluded Chicanos from its plants' workforce, deepening the gap there had always been between Mexicans[13] and Americans, as the former, in terms of education, rarely went beyond the eighth grade. Once marginalized in the labor market, Mexican men gave way to their female counterparts and, from the 1960's on, the entrance of Mexican women in the industrial workforce was massive. Nevertheless, women's ingress in the labor market was not restricted to the plants. In the faraway fictional town of Agua Oscura, the young Soveida Dosamantes, at eighteen years of age, began her career as a waitress at El Farol.

The unfavorable social condition Mexicans and Mexican Americans were confined to was not restricted to the urban environment. If, on the one hand, the Chicanos who worked for the industrial sector were affected by the demand for qualified labor, on the other, the Chicanos who lived in the fields suffered from the exploitation of labor. In Chávez's novel, Ivan Torres tells Soveida Dosamantes that "the campesinos were breaking their backs in [their] lettuce fields [and their] families [were] torn apart by the great farm machine, and children hurt and damaged by pesticides" (p. 130). As Ivan points out, the industrialization of agriculture, which had been destroying the subsistence agricultural production since late nineteenth century, was now subjecting peasants to a practically slave labor, not to mention the toxic effects of the chemical resources – largely employed by farms – on the workers' families, including the children.

What is noteworthy is that the plight of *campesinos* is not revealed by a union leader or a political scientist. When the narrator/protagonist defines Ivan Torres as a guy "who [had] lived in California and the only man in Agua Oscura who [did not] wear socks with shoes" (p. 128), she portrays him as a modern outsider if compared to their hometown's young male provincial inhabitants. "The One" referred to in the chapter title is "the one" from whom she hears the term Chicano for the first time; "the one" who informs her there is a political struggle involving peasants of Mexican background – like them – somewhere in the States, outside their Mexican-American small world. As Soveida's narrative suggests, Ivan Torres

[13] Including Mexican-Americans in this group.

belongs to a Southwestern middle class and was sent to California to acquire a better education. From 1967 on, bigger and bigger waves of Mexican students headed for California where they got in touch with other groups engaged in the civil rights movement. For cultural reasons, as Acuña argues, "[m]ost Chicano students clearly identified with the United Farm Workers: its successes and tribulations became their own" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 335). Intentionally, as it may seem, Denise Chávez created a Mexican American fictional character, who, after a long stay in California, came back to his tiny Southwestern village to talk about Cesar Chavez and the *campesinos*' strife for better salaries labor conditions.

In *Face of an Angel*, the transformative 1960s were recalled in – and represented by – not only in Ivan Torres's political pamphleteering discourse in the nineteenth chapter of the novel. Two chapters earlier, humorously entitled "El Jester", in a reference to the narrator/protagonist's first boyfriend, the reader is brought into that decade in a comic episode involving the two characters. Jester and Soveida go to the local drive-in to see Doctor Zhivago, a 1965 Academy Award winner movie. During the movie session, the narrator/protagonist has her first – and disastrous – sexual experience and, disappointed with the situation, Soveida as a narrator, noticing a similarity between herself and Lara, the movie's protagonist, traces a parallel between the two at the moment of enunciation. Again, Chávez promotes a dialog between her narrative and other sorts of artistic languages, in this particular case a movie which, in its turn, is based on a literary work. As the quotation below illustrates, Soveida compares the afflicting moment she was undergoing with Jester with the situation the protagonist in the movie was going through:

> There was nothing exciting or sexy about the way Jester treated me, nothing personal or even real. I watched myself dissociated from my feelings, as the poor unwitting Lara had. Trapped by an older, selfish lover, she hardly recognized her own haunted face in a shadowy mirror (p. 119).

While engendering a postmodern historiographic metafictional piece of writing, Chávez brings into her fictional ambience David Lean's famous cinematographic version of the Russian poet and novelist Boris Paternak's 1957 literary work *Doctor Zhivago*, which is, in turn, a historical novel in the canonic sense of the term. According to the critical comment found on the website Goodreads, Pasternak's novel is defined as "[an] epic tale about the effects of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath on a bourgeois family"[14]. A literary work which criticizes the Soviet regimen, Pasternak's novel was quite welcomed in the West and

[14] Disponível em: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/130440.Doctor_Zhivago>. Acesso em: 28 out. 2013

quickly became a best-seller, not to mention his having been awarded the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1958. The scene described in the chapter now in focus recreates in the novel – even in a very indirect way – the Cold War environment, when any anti-Soviet posture – whether it was a political speech, a military action or even a fictional work that could possibly defend Western values – was gladly welcomed. Chávez's alluding to one of the many famous productions by the British filmmaker involves more than a historical reference. In projecting Doctor Zhivago on the screen of that drive-in in Agua Oscura, the author used maybe the 1965's greatest blockbuster as a spice to her narrator/protagonist's account.

If, on the one hand, in the second chapter of *Face of an Angel*, Denise Chávez resorts to history to lead her readers back to Soveida Dosamantes' origin. in the nineteenth chapter, on the other hand, Chávez adds to her fictional autobiography the 1960's flavor. While mentioning Cesar Chaves and the *campesinos*' situation back then, she not only contextualizes the novel's phase in question but also tells (or reminds of) her readers about an important passage in Chicanos' recent historical process. This contextualization is not performed only by the simple quotation of the Chicano political leader and by references to the abominable situation rural workers were then passing through. The fact that Denise Chávez engendered a character like Ivan Torres, a 1960's typical Chicano middle class young man, who had recently arrived from California, to be the spokesperson of such a period completes the ebullient atmosphere of the chapter. In addition to references to the *campesinos*' political movement, which was a factual piece of information, Chávez again makes use of intertextuality when she establishes an interconnection between her fictional autobiography and the filmic version of a novel that can be labeled as an artistic emblem of the decade.

1.3 **The 1980's: the Decade for the Hispanics?**

When, in the early 1980's, Raúl Izaguirre[15] said "I firmly believe that the immediate future will be our 'Golden Age' ", it was certain that Hispanics, whatever their origin could be, would find in that decade the proper time to grow in the States. The manifest enthusiasm in Izaguirre's statement probably meant a sort of reaction against the disappointment caused by the economically and socially sterile previous decade. About this hopeful prospection Ellen McCracken (1999) also signals that:

[15] Director of the National Council of La Raza – In: ACUÑA, 1988, p. 413.

> [i]ndeed, the media and political commentators heralded the 1980s as 'the decade of the Hispanic', a moment of history in which this rapidly growing minority group would receive its long overdue rights and recognition"(MCCRACKEN, 1999, p. 3).

Contrary to all expectations, the project of recognition, respect – as Aretha Franklin had brilliantly sang almost two decades earlier – and, thus, advancement for the minorities did not become reality. In fact, the shift from the 1960's to the 1970's "changed rapidly […] from one of intolerance of the establishment to a severe backlash against the poor and the minorities" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 401). Once more, the encouraging foresight for the 1980s proved to be another letdown. The "Rambo years", as Rodolfo Acuña named the period in a reference to Sylvester Stallone's warlike character, were definitely not the time for Hispanics to be positively noted and acknowledged, evidencing that "[h]istory has since proven Izaguirre wrong" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 413).

As observed along the world's historical process as a whole, it is almost natural that, after a period of political, economic and social retrocession, a wave of hopeful mood develops expecting that better times must come over. This "ideological seesaw" might explain Izaguirre's encouraging position towards the 1980's, which were then just beginning. Historically speaking, it was during the 1980's that the Hispanics started figuring within the U.S. public administration as representatives of their community, as informs Acuña: "Chicanos began moving into government positions that dealt with the implementation of policy" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 415). During the Reagan administration, names such as Nestor D. Sánchez, Cathis Villapondo and Vilma Martínez were appointed as heads of important institutions in the political and educational scenario like CIA, the White House and the University of California. What could be a case of legitimate political representation was, in fact, a demagogical maneuver: the appointment of Hispanic names in strategic positions within the governmental structure was just to give the impression (a false one) of genuine political engagement on the part of a minority group. As Acuña concludes, "[i]t became evident by the mid-1980's that these appointees were [actually] integral to the legitimation of government policy. They were the role models that had been picked to be celebrated" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 416). In 1991, President Bush, made use of the same subterfuge while nominating a black but conservative judge for the U.S Supreme Court. By doing so, Bush expected to obtain votes from the conservative and also the black segments of the U.S. electorate. Both U.S. presidents performed what Hall (2007, p. 600-601) calls "the play of identities", as they manipulated the signification of those representatives according to their political intentions.

It might have been due to this mood of disappointment fostered by the 1980's that Denise Chávez made the narrator/character in *Face of an Angel* enroll in a course on Chicano culture – and History could not be left out of its program. Therefore, it is interesting to examine the titles of three of the disciplines that compose the syllabus of the course Soveida attended: "Amnesty – Stigma or Stigmata: the Whys and Wherefores of Immigration – **Who Are We Trying to Suppress?**"; "La Frontera – The Tortilla Curtain – **A Means of Sustenance – For Whom?**"; "*Las Maquiladoras* – Twin-Plant Mania, **Another Taiwan for the U.S.?**" (p. 282-283 – my emphasis). Note that, not by chance, the three titles quoted here bear a skeptical/inquisitive overtone, straightforwardly indicating that the course chosen by Chávez's narrator/protagonist is going to follow an alternative and questioning stance, thus consequently opposed to the mainstream perspective and the official historical discourse. Another detail that must be noticed about the titles is that the three of them focus on political/economic/historical issues that have been affecting Hispanics: immigration, the geographical boundaries between Mexico and the U.S along with all the political implications the issue involves and the branches of multinational industries installed in Mexico with the purpose of profiting from cheap labor.

Regarding the 1980's panorama, three important factors must be thought about here: *Face of an Angel* was written by a Chicana, the novel's narrator/protagonist intellectual blooming takes place in that decade and the period witnesses "a virtual explosion of Latina writing" (ORTEGA; STERNBACH in HORNO-DELGADO, 1999, p. 10). Theorists and professors Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, whose article is now being used as a critical support, establish a cause/effect relationship between politically obscure times and creative production. As Ortega and Sternbach argue, in an era of "political repression and conservatism" (ORTEGA; STERNBACH in HORNO-DELGADO, 1999, p. 10), the flow of cultural production is interrupted and, consequently, all the country's cultural framework gets fissured. It is just the gaps left by the political oppression that will be filled in by minority groups who present alternative versions of history, as the authors themselves assert:

> […] Latina writers also found a space within the fractures of the political climate of United States culture of the eighties, when many social programs disappeared, when the radicalism of the sixties movements had been co-opted, and when the dominant Anglo-American culture was empowered more than through Reaganism (ORTEGA; STERNBACH in HORNO-DELGADO, 1989, p. 10).

While discussing this very factor, Oliver-Rotger refers to U.S. scholars Sarah Ruddick, Mary Ryan and Nancy Fraser:

> [They] focused on the way in which marginal groups that [were] not part of the public arena [had been] 'rethinking the public sphere' (Fraser 70); [t]his sphere, encompassing the apparatuses of the state, the official economy, and other forums of public opinion and discourse is generally viewed as opposed to the home, the ethnic group, sexuality, and religion, which constitute the "private" sphere of life (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 131).

What must be taken into consideration here is that most Latina writers – and Denise Chávez is no exception – were born in the 1940's and educated in 1960's, when minorities started having access to higher education. It was these women of Latin American background and with a considerable academic knowledge that "situated themselves between the cracks of the operative literary systems" (ORTEGA; STERNBACH in HORNO-DELGADO, 1999, p. 11). Soveida Dosamantes, although a fictional character, seems to fit the profile of Latina writers outlined by Ortega and Sternbach. Besides being the "fictional author" of the life writing embodied in *Face of an Angel*, Soveida also writes the "Book of Service", the manual she writes on how to be a good waitress. Soveida Dosamantes can be thus regarded as a fictional Latina writer whose narrative impulse was a result of the knowledge she acquired in the "Rambo years". It was exactly in the 1980's that Latina writers were mature enough to develop their own Literary discourse used as their crucial tool to construct their own identity. Based on this fact, it seems accurate to affirm that in a period marked by so many armed conflicts – Soviet-Afghan War, Iran-Iraq War, Lebanon War, just to mention some – the 1980's were the time when Chicano history was rewritten through the lens of women such as Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Helena Maria Viramontes and Denise Chávez who, in *Face of an Angel*, created a narrator/protagonist who seems to be somehow an extension of her "self".

Besides the chapter discussed above, other chapters included in the second half of the novel also allude to the historical panorama previously described. In the thirty-seventh chapter, entitled "The Night of the Cucas", during a phone conversation with her boss Larry Laragoite, the owner of the Mexican food restaurant she works for, Soveida mentions that "[that night] [was] the first night of [her] class" (p. 279). Although Chávez did not situate that passage in terms of chronology, that was the first reference of the narrator/protagonist's involvement with – and actual enrolment in – the course on Chicano culture already talked about here. Soveida's moment of cultural awareness is temporally located chapters later, when she interviews her family's lifetime maid Oralia. That interview, which aims at collecting data for Soveida's final paper, takes place in April, 1988 (p. 306). It seems to be appropriate to affirm that Soveida's interest in acquiring literacy on her own cultural background might have been a late result of an attitude launched by Cesar Chavez – already

talked about in this paper – back in the 1960's. That ideological posture, called *si se puede*, which literally means in English, "[yes], it is possible", may be interpreted as a "green light" to any progressive impetus on the part of the Chicano community. Considering the expression I Spanish used by Chávez, one might wonder now whether President Obama's worldwide famous "yes, we can" found in the Chicano movement of the 1960's its source of inspiration. Although Cesar Chavez's attitude had as its goal stimulating Chicanos to seek social mobility, Denise Chávez's protagonist did not have social status upward improvement as her motivation while recurring to academic learning. Soveida actually raised the *si se puede* banner for self-knowledge purposes, as she focused on acquiring conscious understanding of a past she sensed she had. After all, as Rodolfo Acuña appropriately observes, "Chicano studies had [always] been a progressive force in mounting a counterhegemonic force and keeping a Chicano agenda alive" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. 402).

Based on the theoretical support used to develop the historical section of the current research, it seems appropriate to conclude that Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel* constitutes a fictional autobiography in which the author uses historical elements to contextualize her narrative. It is noteworthy to point out here that it is not the author's goal to problematize any historical aspect. What seems to have been Chávez's purpose in spicing her novel with history is that of reminding her readers of Chicanos' historical conditions in a diachronic view. The author's main concern seems to have been developing an informative text, without being necessarily pedagogical; on the contrary, Chávez subtly sprinkles historical incidents in her novel, making them function as an external locator of her literary work. Thinking of postmodernity, it is not possible to consider a fictional piece of writing that is not connected with the historical moment in which it was conceived. As Linda Hutcheon (1998) points out, both history and literature belong to the same cultural system and none of them is hierarchically privileged, both concurring to apply internal and external meaning to the real and the fictional worlds. After a close reading of the novel, it is visible that history and literature intertwine to form the fabric that functions as the backcloth to the scenario of sectarianism Soveida Dosamantes describes in her memoir. Along the present research, *Face of an Angel* was classified as a "post/neocolonial"/"postmodern" novel. If, on the one hand, Denise Chávez developed a fictional coming-of-age narrative, whose narrator depicts an ethos marked by ethnic miscegenation and the social discrimination it provokes, the label "post/neocolonial" seems to fit such literary work. The double prefix of the adjective points to the two instances of political and economic domination: the colonial exploitative relation to Spain that spanned from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and the not less exploitative

dependence on the United States in imperialistic times, which started in the nineteenth century and continues up to now. The dislocation suffered by the characters in Chávez's novel is not caused by Spain, Mexico's European metropolis back in the Age of Discovery, but by its new economic predator, the United States, whose economic dependence was sacred by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in the middle of the nineteenth century. Since post-colonialism refers to the literary and critical writings produced by ex-colonies of Europe, it must be understood here that, although Mexico fits in the category, the realm created by Denise Chávez in *Face of an Angel* is composed by "sites and peoples involved in **imperial/colonial** encounters" (Encyclopedia of Canadian Writing, 2002, p. 897 – my emphasis). On the other hand, if the author composes a kaleidoscope made up of the intermix of pieces of history and artistic creation whose limits are many times difficult to identify, it seems adequate to attribute to Chávez's novel the quality of "postmodern" – the narrator/protagonist's ancestors transit in the aftermath scenario of "The Invasion" and Ivan Torres's commenting on the *campesinos*' struggle are good examples of this kaleidoscope. Besides, *Face of an Angel* also deserves the label of "postmodern" as it is not told by an "official" persona who, for holding in an important social position, would have the right to tell a history.

This smeared frontier between *factum* and *fictum* is textually constructed by an ordinary American woman of Mexican background. Therefore, it is a common waitress from a small village – as fictional as herself – in New Mexico that takes over the chore of telling her own story, the job of giving her testimony of what she experienced either by living or by learning up to the moment of enunciation. After all, "[p]ostmodern fictions often emphasize the socially marginal ("ex-centric") person over the mainstream figure, and explore (or invent) unofficial histories as alternatives to sanctioned history" (Encyclopedia of Canadian Writing, 2002, p. 896). When it comes to the historical approach adopted in the present analysis, what is important to observe is that the periods picked out as references here, despite being so chronologically apart, have in common a significant feature: the dislocation of the postcolonial – or neo-colonial, as Ella Shohat (1992) questions – subject, who straddles between two cultures, to apply here Gloria Anzaldúa's words. This amalgam of history and fiction forms a cut-out of a singular world that bears a set of particularities. It is this universe that the next section proposes to investigate, a universe that has been portrayed since "Mexican […] national territory was confiscated as a result of expansionist policies of the U.S." (ORTEGA; STERNBACH in HORNO-DELGADO, 1999, p. 3). However, among so many issues the Chicano universe offers for discussion the one chosen to be discussed here is

marital relation, using as references the narrator-protagonist’s great-grandparents, parents, and her own five loving experiences.

2 THE CHICANO UNIVERSE RELATED BY SOVEIDA DOSAMANTES – WOMEN AND MEN IN *FACE OF AN ANGEL*: A GENDER CONFRONTATION

> Men can be like that guacamole. A nice appetizer, a little spicy, but not a full-course meal. Don't put too much stock in men. They will have to prove their mettle (p. 245)

As previously said, this chapter aims to discuss the Chicano realm created by Denise Chávez in *Face of an Angel*, having as its guidelines, seven marital nuclei. Before analyzing the constituents of that universe, however, it seems necessary to draw attention to one important detail: the Chicano society portrayed in the novel here discussed has been rebuilt under a woman writer's perspective. Thus, the Chicano community that the readers have access to is one described in accordance with a woman's viewpoint, a woman who suffers discrimination on four levels: on the part of white Anglo males for being both a woman and a woman of Mexican background; on the part of Chicanos, her male ethnic counterparts, for being a woman; on the part of white women for being a Chicana; and on the part of other Chicanas of a higher social stratum. So, the society recreated by Denise Chávez and described by her narrator/protagonist is one marked by prejudice manifested on four layers, including here an additional aspect: upper-class Chicanas looked down on their less-favored *hermanas* – an aspect ignored by Philippa Kafka (2000) when she claimed that "Chicanas and other ethnic and women of color actually experience triple 'jeopardy"': from Anglo men and women and from their own men to the point where they are 'outclassed'" (KAFKA, 2000, p. 21).

This multifaceted aspect detected in *Face of an Angel* is the ground commonly shared by Chicana writers whose literary works reached the publishing market in the 1990's, a decade later than the expected "decade of the Hispanic". The pioneer novel in Latina writing was Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, published in 1984, in the middle of the decade expected to be a promising period for the Latinos. Along with Gloria Anzaldúa in the critical sphere, Cisneros paved the way for other writers who later became also influent in the area such as Ana Castillo, Helena Maria Viramontes and Cherrie Moraga. In order to grasp what moved Denise Chávez to create the cosmos in which her characters transit, the relation they establish between them and the events they experience, it is mandatory to know what the so-called Latina writing stands for. The first step to be taken towards understanding what comes to be labeled as "Chicano(a) writing" is investigating the origin of the term "Chicano". Quoting theorist Edward Simmen, professor Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger (2003. p. 101-102) attributes to the term "Chicano" two possible origins: the apocope of the gentilic adjective

"Mexican" or another form of the word "*chico*" (boy, in Spanish). Whatever its etymology, the fact is that the term "Chicano" has always been associated with the social and the political aspects. Historically pejorative, the word "Chicano" was used by middle-class Mexicans to refer to their low-class countrymen. However, in the wake of 1960's African Americans' struggle for civil rights, activists took over the term "Chicano" to proudly define themselves. Right after that, in the early seventies, due to the spread of Chicano middle-class and professional organizations (and, obviously, all the political implications involved), the American federal government – ruled by whites of European ancestry – saw fit to adopt the word "Hispanic", a synonym for Spanish. The choice for the term "Hispanic" was not purposeless: by employing it, the trace of *mestizage* the term "Chicano" bore would be erased. Those who were proud of being mix-raced refused to use such a word for understanding that it implied "ethnical purity". Nowadays, in order to be more diplomatic to an economically and politically important segment of the population, the comprehensive – "pastoral", to apply here the adjective used by theorist Ella Shohat (1992, p. 110) – term "Latino" has been largely employed.

When it comes to the problematization of the three terms here used, Acuña advises:

> Chicanos should be encouraged to read the history of struggle by their sisters and brothers rather than distort history to fit an Hispanic image. For that reason, when referring to all Spanish-speaking peoples in the United States, I use the artificial term "Latino" because at this juncture it has less political baggage than "Hispanic" (ACUÑA, 1988, p. x).

In this respect, American professor and theorist Alvina Quintana (1996) argues that, from the Chicano student movement on, the term "Chicano" has acquired a new meaning, in order to eliminate the dubious and pejorative "Mexican-American". Quintana alleges that from the sixties on it was not the white European who was referring to those of Latin-American background as "Chicanos". In employing the adjective "Chicano" as a self-referential term, those who were once derogatively called, were now removing from that word the trace of "alien" it had embodied up to that moment.

> In order to move away from a negative self-concept, […] the term *Chicano* [started being used] [.] [T]he term Chicano had evolved not so much from shame as from resistance to a belief system in which Americans of Mexican descent are categorized as second-class citizens, as "minorities" (QUINTANA, 1996, p. 7).

As to "Chicana", the feminine form, U.S. theorist Paula Moya (1997) argues that what differentiates a Chicana from a Mexican-American, a Hispanic or an American of Mexican

background is her political awareness. So, according to Moya's argument, calling a woman, whether she is a writer, a critic, or even a novel's character a Chicana necessarily implies her political engagement. Moya then states that what defines a Chicana is her recognition of her disadvantaged position in a hierarchically organized society arranged in accordance with categories of class, race, gender and sexuality; and her propensity to engage in political struggle aimed at subverting and changing those structures (1997, p. 56).

Therefore, it was in the 1960s, when people of Mexican background needed to make their ethnic identity recognized by the white portion of the American society, that the so-called "Chicanismo" arose, "claim[ing] [Chicanos'] right to political and cultural self-determination" (OLIVER-ROTGER, p. 102, 2003). One of, maybe the main one, goals of Chicanismo was to dismantle the worldwide misleading notion of "melting pot". According to this "myth", there was a pacific and homogeneous merge between Mexicans and Anglo-Saxons, the result of which was a harmonious blend of the American population. Besides, according to this "ethnic myth", the waves of Mexican immigrants[16] were drawn by the mere wish to acquire a better life, which made them head spontaneously for the States, hoping to fulfill the American dream. However, what the Chicano movement made a point to reveal was that, although the acquisition of American citizenship was "a conscious decision" (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 102), most Mexicans were forced to leave their homeland expelled by poverty. Another side of the question that Chicanismo aimed to expose was the prejudice suffered by Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Even bearing a document which entitled them to define themselves as American citizens, many national institutions did not consider them as "legitimate". After all, "America's civil society was a 'private' space to which many minorities had no access" (OLIVER-HOTGER, p. 102, 2003).

The first Latin America emancipating discourses emerged at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, when European colonies in the region acquired political independence. At that very moment, when a new era could have brought promises of a better life, those recently reborn countries had to face another threat: the U.S. expansionist policy. This then new political scenario was firstly described by thinkers that ranged chronologically from Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó (early 20th century) to Mexican Octavio Paz (the 20th century), without any woman critic figuring among them. The exclusion of women's voices from the historical narrative of Mexico was just a reflection of the "sexualized parable [that]

[16] In this "blending", there were also the families who, due to the annexation of the former northern Mexico, became, all of a sudden, part of the U.S. population.

perpetuates the image of the passive, resigned Mexican woman" (OLIVER-HOTGER, p. 112, 2003) outlined by Octavio Paz and other male theorists.

It was during the boom of the feminist discourse, which had important representatives like Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanti in the international panorama, that names such as Norma Alarcon, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherie Moraga and Paula Moya, to quote just some, could expose their counterdiscoursive version of Mexican history on theoretical basis. In the literary sphere, Latina writing was inaugurated by Sandra Cisneros with the launching of *The House on Mango Street*, which presented a thoroughly new textual construction, representing the Chicano universe described under the lens of a little girl, a narrative strategy that enabled the author to question many "accepted truths" of Chicano society. Following Cisneros, other Latin American women writers (mainly Puerto Ricans and Cubans who, along with Mexicans, form most part of Spanish speaking immigrants in the U.S.) decided to portray their own versions of the ethos they belonged to. This group of women writers who committed themselves to show their world had in mind two target publics: their own communities that needed to look into their own roots, build a cultural identity and, thus, recover their pride and the white Europeans who looked at (and also down on) them as a homogeneous group to be simply "enjoyed" and "consumed" as an "postmodern ethnic commodity", as Ellen McCraken (1999, p. 4) defines it. Like other Latina writers, Denise Chávez cleverly benefited from this wave of "cultural consumption" of "difference" and used it to exhibit her literary talent. Aware that "sameness" is not easily sold, these writers played the role of "the Other" by addressing their texts to an audience who is, in relation to them, also "the Other". The following passage extracted from McCraken's book is elucidating.

> Writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Julia Alvarez, Denise Chávez and Mary Helen Ponce are valorized […] for their presentations of what many perceive to be the exotic Other. They are foregrounded as exotic and different from the mainstream precisely as they are being integrated into the mainstream primarily because sameness is not as marketable in current conditions as is difference. Conscious of their mainstream and non-Latino audience, these writers often include ethnographic passages in their fiction, explaining cultural practices for the benefit of various groups of 'outsiders'" (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 5).

Based on McCracken's statement, it appears correct to affirm that Latina writers used fiction to reproduce and expose an environment they had always known pretty well and was exoticized by those who had not gone through the same ethnic and familial experience. The term "Latina writing" was clearly conceptualized by Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach (1989) in an article already used as theoretical support for the current research:

> By "Latina writing", we not only mean the literature of Chicanas and Puertorriqueñas but also the literary production of those women **from other groups** who identify with them and their struggle. This implies that literature by Latina women will depict, but not limit itself to, the reality, experiences, and everyday life of a people whose working-class origin serves as a springboard to understanding cultural contexts. (ORTEGA E.;STERNBACH, N.S., 1989, p. 11 – my emphasis).

Ortega and Sternbach then mention "other groups" within Latina writers, referring to the existence of diversity inside a broader group which must be understood by the "outsider", that is, by the reader who does not "identify with them and their struggle". The fact there is an assortment of Latina(o) writing is a reflection of the cultural plurality of writers who either come from Spanish speaking countries in South America, North America or the Caribbean or bear such an ethnic heritage, as McCracken (1999) sustains:

> The diversity of contemporary Latina narrative is an outgrowth of the heterogeneity of the U.S. Latino population. Wide differences persist in preferred language; customs; cultural practices; economic levels. Political attitudes; religious beliefs; sexual preferences; [and] national, ethnic, and racial backgrounds […] (McCRACKEN, 1999. p. 6).

The discussion about all these issues seems to be crucial in this study, as they pervade Denise Chávez's novel here analysed. Through Soveida Dosamentes's voice, Chávez develops a (fictional) life narrative strongly flavored with cultural elements that the narrator-protagonist becomes aware of as the novel unfolds. While weaving her memories, Soveida describes scenes which refer to a provincial environment populated by a hybrid people. It is some of the components of this milieu marked by hibridity that this section proposes to discuss. It is undeniable that a novel made up of over four hundred pages offer innumerable issues for discussion. As already stated in the introduction, it would not be possible to cover in satisfactory depth all topics raised during Soveida's account. Consequently, themes such as the role of religion, for instance, will not be investigated in this research. Throughout the reading of *Face of an Angel*, one issue in particular seem to form the basis for Denise Chávez's fictional autobiography: gender roles. So, the present chapter intends to examine the different profiles embodied by male and female characters whose paths cross each other. The question of cultural identity is another topic that stands out, but, as it is sprinkled in the narrative, it will be discussed while related to a character or an episode here focused on.

As one reads *Face of an Angel*, one realizes the author's strategy to portray a sort of game in which the opposing groups are organized according to gender. On one side, there are

the women who take part in the narrator/protagonist's life narrative: her great-grandmother, grandmother, mother, cousin, the family's long life maid, the cleaning lady and a childhood friend, to quote now those who either are present through most of the narrative or deserve a chapter totally or partially devoted to them in the novel. On the other side, there is the male team – "team" seems to be the most adequate term, as they appear to be in a competition – made up of the narrator/protagonist's great-grandfather, her father, her first boyfriend, her two husbands, her employer and her two blood cousins with whom she gets involved towards the end of the novel. Although there is some imbalance between the number of components of each crew, since there are seven males and three females, it is the female group that possesses the strongest members, women who have always been subjected to male authority, many times exerted by men who were weaker in many aspects.

In order to keep the contrasting (or harmonious, in the case of Elena Harrell and Manuel Dosamantes) relation between the male and the female characters here analysed, seven marital nuclei have been chosen to be here examined. Attempting to make their clashing (or consonant) features evident, they have been outlined side by side in the same subsection. This way, three samples of couples have been chosen to exemplify the sort of women/men's relation depicted in *Face of an Angel*: the adjusted and race conscious Manuel Dosamantes and Elena Harrel, the dissonant and yet interdependent duet Luardo and Dolores Dosamantes and Soveida Dosamantes and the five love affairs she experiences throughout the novel.

2.1 **Elena Harrell and Manuel Dosamantes: Chicano Consciousness in the Late Nineteenth Century.**

Regarded as the "mother cell" of the genealogical (and also ethnic) tree the narrator/protagonist proposes to draw, Elena Harrel embodies, in the late 19th century society, the ideal of woman the feminist discourse developed in the 20th. Born an aristocrat, Elena Harrel is, at that time, already conscious enough to know that education is the only key for a deep change for her people. She was absolutely convinced that only literacy could allow the children of the peasants on her father's farm not to perpetuate that status quo. Running course to what can be interpreted as an aristocrat model, Elena Harrell is described by her great-granddaughter, the narrator/protagonist, as "a simple, selfless girl [who] [t]aught in a small community school for people who couldn't afford private schooling[, which] caused [h]er

father, Bartel, and her mother much **consternation[17]"** (p. 9 – my emphasis). It is important to dwell on her parents' reaction. The definition of *consternation* found in the dictionaries here consulted associates the concept of consternation with the idea of worry, fear and danger. Only later on, it is clear the nature of the danger implied in the feeling of consternation Elena's parents nurtured. During a trip to Agua Oscura to visit her aunt Jewel Harrell, Elena, after having met Manuel Dosamantes, decides to stay in town, which was a relief for her both parents. If, on the one hand, her father Bartel was satisfied that his daughter finally managed to learn some English, his mother tongue, on the other, Estrella, Elena's mother, "got her wish as well: [Elena] never went back to the dusty adobe classroom on the outskirts of Chihuahua" (p. 9). From Soveida's account, it is possible to infer that that danger/worry/fear had a double meaning: the danger/worry/fear of putting Elena in contact with an environment which was not her own, and mainly, the danger of enabling poor people to acquire literacy and, consequently, awareness at all levels.

Manuel Dosamantes, Elena Harrell's counterpart, knew from a very tender age exactly what deprivation meant and, due to that, learned what hard work stood for and how necessary it was to his own survival. Unlike Elena, all Manuel had acquired in life was the result of exhausting labor and suffering. During a party in Elena Harrel's aunt's house, these two so different and yet so similar characters met. At that very moment, two identical souls joined, as the narrator/protagonist herself describes: "Manuel and Elena talked all night long, **in Spanish**. She felt as if she'd known Manuel all her life. **She felt so comfortable with him she didn't have to be Elena Harrel, American citizen**. In her heart, she was Elena Harrell, **a Mexican whose father was an Anglo**." (p. 10 – my emphasis).

It is important to observe how similar Elena and Manuel were, despite having come from so diverse backgrounds. From the very beginning, Manuel and Elena, tacitly to a certain extent, agreed upon building a relationship based on ethnic awareness. In a puristic and conservationist attitude, Manuel and Elena decided to have their first talk "in Spanish", consciously avoiding what Professor Ana Celia Zentella – referred to by McCracken – noted: "Spanish is being lost at a tremendous rate among U.S. Latinos" (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 6). Considering that language is the means by which humans can express ideas and feelings, that conversation in Spanish made the narrator/protagonist's great-grandmother feel "so comfortable [that] she didn't have to be Elena Harrell, American citizen". In other words,

[17] A feeling of worry, shock, or fear. (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English); an emotion experienced in anticipation of some specific pain or danger (www.thefreedictionary.com/consternation)

based on Soveida's narrative, Elena Harrell's being an American citizen was not an inherent feature of hers – so much so that she acquired a little English only when she spent some days with her aunt, Jewel Harrell, her father's sister, whose mother tongue was English. From Soveida's account, it seems accurate to affirm that Elena's American portion was something socially (at family level) constructed, which caused her a great discomfort. On a cultural and also emotional basis, meeting Manuel was a relief to Elena; with him, she could be just herself: "a Mexican whose father was an Anglo". Indeed, it was Manuel who unloaded from her the uncomfortable burden of "having to be an Anglo". On the other hand, it was Elena who helped Manuel get rid of the recurrent nightmares that he had been having since he had run away from Fort Davis, where he was about to be forced to marry Tobarda Acosta, the daughter to a rich former employer of his, a woman who "was well past her prime, like a piece of meat with all its natural juices gone" (p. 5). Therefore, Elena embodied the perfect woman Manuel had been dreaming of all his life and was the only one able to put an end to the horrible bad dreams he kept having with Tobarda. What is important to point out here is that, having arrived in Agua Oscura ten years later than Manuel Dosamantes, Elena Harrell, like her husband to be, did not come to the town where the whole narrative unfolds with the purpose to stay. Aiming to pay a short visit to her aunt Jewel Harrell, Elena just ended up settling down in Agua Oscura after her getting married with Manuel Dosamantes. What seems to be meaningful to an analysis of Chávez's novel is that what drew Elena and Manuel together was above all the pride of being of Mexican background, a feature they pleasantly they shared.

Regarding the fact that Manuel and Elena had been made to each other and perfectly fulfilled each other's needs, it seems legitimate to state that Denise Chávez could not have conceived more suitable characters to represent the Dosamantes' **foundational myths**, to use here Stuart Hall's terminology, already employed in this research. By creating two characters such as Manuel and Elena, Chávez could not have made a better origin for the Dosamantes': a harmonious couple, who shared principles and, more importantly, a common ethnic heritage they cherished and made a pact to preserve even on American soil. Thus, there is the heroic persona of Manuel Dosamantes, who traces a long trajectory in search of better conditions of life, as professor Francine Ritcher (1999) observes:

> Manuel's character […] is a sort of modern pioneer who endures noteworthy physical and mental stress out of his normal environment, finding that the old ways of existing, thinking and experiencing will not fit the new era. Therefore, he must cross not only geographical borders but psychological ones as well as he challenges

> himself to find innovative ways of dealing with a new way of life in the southwestern setting" (RICHTER, 1999, p. 281).

Even knowing that this crossing was casual, as Manuel only left Fort Davis to avoid marr Tobarda, this geographical and psychological trespassing indeed occurred. Considering Manuel's trajectory since the moment he leaves Guanajuato up to the moment he arrives in Agua Oscura, the reader meets a character similar to those medieval chivalrous knights recreated in the nineteenth century by romantic writers. As Richter (1999) argues:

> In [the] sequence of events [experienced by Manuel Dosamantes] is embedded much of the traditional path of the hero: the departure from the homeland and separation from all that is familiar, the quest or difficult task that must be performed, and the reward, in this case the beautiful damsel, [Elena Harrel], with a kingly father [, incarnating the oppressor Anglo], and prosperity in a new land where the hero is a near a king himself, having acquired a 500-acre farm, "various" employees, and a great deal of land in Agua Oscura (RICHTER, 1999, 281).

In short, it seems appropriate to state that, while locating the origin of Soveida's family tree in so valorous characters, Denise Chávez devises a noble version of Adam and Eve for the Dosamantes – according to Richter, "two lovers" (RICHTER, 1999, p. 282). In engendering such "illustrious pair of lovers [with] […] honor-bond, exemplary lives" (RICHTER, 1999, p. 282), Chávez aims to prove that nobility and honor may be born out of hybridity, contrary to what the white European mainstream attempts to enforce.

2.2 **The Contending Luardo and Dolores Dosamantes**

Out of the seven marital nuclei here analysed, the narrator/protagonist's parents seem to embody the seemingly traditional Chicano couple. Underneath that apparent mainstream marital arrangement lie all sorts of problems. On one side, there is Luardo Dosamantes, the youngest among Mamá Lupita's children, "[the one who] was [her] baby and favorite child, [the one who] at the age of four […] still had to be carried everywhere" (p. 33). Due to his mother's overprotection, Luardo grew up with a great difficulty to make decisions, as Soveida herself asserts: "[it was] a tremendous burden on him to have an opinion. As a result, he rarely did. If he did have an opinion, it was wrestled from him after much prodding, prolonged debate, and confrontation" (p. 33). No wonder that, after a long life of lack of self-assurance, Luardo, in his old age, develops some sort of "insurance mania". As Soveida herself concludes, "[Luardo] was prepared – for disease, damage, mutilation, and even death. What

he wasn't prepared for was life." (p. 12), making the reader infer that all that compulsion for insurance was just a compensation for Luardo's insecurity. In the chapter entitled "Insurance", Soveida tells the reader about an agreement she had made with her father: she would help him move out whenever he needed or wanted to and also clean and organize his new home (a task "naturally" designed for women, according to Luardo's view); in turn, he would help her pay her bills (the role of provider socially designed for men). While narrating this episode, Soveida not only evidences once more her father's unreliable character but also communicates his view of gender roles. While Soveida was cleaning his house, Luardo "left quickly, quietly, with another promise to return soon". Soveida then continues outlining her father's character:

> My work was almost done. Luardo felt he was in the way. Women's work, that was it. Men were in the way. Cleaning, scrubbing, all those cleansers, knowledge of vacuum cleaners, washers, electrical appliances, household gadgets, anything having to do with house or yard or animal anything living or non-living that required attention, care and maintenance, was of no concern to Luardo Dosamantes (p. 13).

Luardo not only insists on keeping away from what he thought was just a woman's duty, but also away from those household chores traditionally destined to men (maintenance). Anything that requires responsibility and zeal did not suit him. In building such a character, Denise Chávez dismantles the typical Chicano icon, the macho, who, in spite of being exploitative and oppressor, must be protective towards his family, which implies features such as strength and self-assurance, characteristics that Luardo Dosamantes definitely lacks. By leaving the house while Soveida is cleaning it, Luardo helps depict the Chicano viewpoint of male and female roles within a family: the public sphere must be occupied by men, while the private one is destined to women. While discussing gender roles in Chicano society, Ni Luh Putu Rosiandani (2006) quotes scholars Miguel De La Torre and Edwin David Aponte – Cuban and Puerto Rican, respectively:

> For Latinos, to be a man, a macho, implies both domination and protection for those under them, specifically the females in the family. The macho worldview creates a dichotomy in which men operate within the public sphere […] while women are relegated to the private sphere, especially home. The family's honor is augmented by the ability of the macho to provide for the family. (DE LA TORRE; APONTE apud Rosiandani, N.L.P. 2006, p. 19).

Even after the Chicano community has gone through some changes, Luardo Dosamantes uses his economic power to get rid of chores he does not see as "naturally made for men to carry out". In doing so, although in a situation different from it used to be, Luardo (and also Soveida) contributes to perpetuate one of the typical features of Chicano society: machismo. As Rosiandani (2006) asserts, "it is explained that machismo is not merely about men's superiority, instead, it is also about the exploitation of men's power through customs, traditions, and norms designed to create restrictions over women" (ROSIANDANI, 2006, p. 20).

While discussing the concept of machismo, Saldívar-Hull (2000), quoting U.S. sociologist Maxine Baca Zinn, reaches an interesting conclusion towards the term. As Saldívar-Hull argues, the image of the Latino macho is an American construction aiming to reinforce and legitimize the stereotypes of "[the] Mexican males' inherent traits of 'irresponsibility, inferiority, and ineptitude'" (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 129). She the goes on explaining her own concept of machismo by concluding and suggesting that "[m]achismo, in this construction, is men's overcompensation for psychological feelings of 'inadequacy and worthlessness'. Rather than rely on stereotype, [Baca Zinn] proposes that the ideology of machismo be liberated, reclaimed, and refines by Chicanos themselves […] (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 129).

On the other side, there is the feminine component of this gender binomial: Dolores Dosamantes. If, on the one hand, there is the untrustworthy (in all senses) Luardo, on the other, there is the gloomy Dolores – "dolor" which means "pain" in English – who fits the socially constructed gender role of a woman. Coming from a family of a lower social layer than Luardo's, Dolores got married, like so many other women, to escape the stressful home she had grown up in, a home whose father kept on leaving and a mother who would keep on waiting.

The chapter in which Soveida talks about her mother is meaningfully entitled "Are You Wearing a Bra?", a reference to Dolores' voluminous breasts, her corporeal hallmark. In a humorous way, Soveida describes her mother as a woman who "grew up harnessed" (p. 19), in this instance, the word *harness* has a double significance, especially if looked at from a feminist perspective: either as the undergarment used to give support to the breasts (literal meaning, and in Dolores's case, it had to be something really supportive, practically a harness) or as something imposed on women by society to prevent them from physical freedom (not by chance, during a protest in the 1960's, feminists burned bras, as symbols of social constraint). It was exactly this eye-catching corporal particularity of Dolores's that

attracted Luardo the most, as Soveida herself states: “Luardo liked her from the beginning. **She was thirteen** when he met her, thin, but **with the breasts of a mature woman**. He liked women with what he called ‘two strong points’” (p. 19 – my emphasis). Besides Dolores’s “sharpness”, as Luardo himself defines her big breasts, between the two there was an age gap of almost a decade, which can be interpreted as an indication of the dream he, as an old man, would nurture, as he himself declares: “I’d like to move to México and live with a sixteen-year-old girl” (p. 13). His preference for (much) younger women can be explained by the fact that they are easier to control and manipulate than the mature ones. Having a sixteen-year-old girl as his sexual counterpart will enable Luardo to continue the familial pattern he had grown up in. It is important to note that his dream must take place in Mexico, where he knows that it will be easy to find young girls who will accept such a bond in order to escape poverty, an important ally for Luardo to fulfill his dream. Joining these two ingredients (young age and poverty), it would be easier for him to domesticate his partner and create economic dependence upon him (Rosiandani, 2006).

Due to social and religious control, the bond between a Chicano couple is quite strong. So much so that, despite having experienced a troubled and painful relationship with Luardo, Dolores could not get rid of the burden of remaining eternally tied to him even after their divorce, as she herself confesses to Soveida: “And I’m still married to your father even if we *are* divorced. **When you take a man on, you take a man on.** Mark my words. After all these years, **I still have to answer to others for your father**” (p. 21 – my emphasis). It is noteworthy that, as Dolores observes, it is the woman who “takes on a man” unlike what Chicano cultural tradition says. If, on the one hand, Chicanos take, in the public sphere they occupy, the role of the family provider, as De La Torre and Aponte (apud Rosiandani) define, women are the domestic and emotional supporters.

In the fifth chapter of *Face of an Angel*, which bears the bilingual title “Y tu, qué? And What About You?”, the narrator/protagonist gives voice to her parents so that they can tell their own stories. U.S. scholar Linda Naranjo-Huebl (2007) makes an elucidatory comment on the textual strategy employed by Chávez in the chapter now focused on:

> In a provocative chapter, Chávez uses two columns per page to juxtapose streams of consciousness of both Luardo and Dolores as they recount their stories. The format underscores the two radically different foci of their stories, which occasionally synchronize over shared memory (NARANJO-HUEBL, 2007, p. 56).

Therefore, in an apparently scrambled text, printed in a newspaper format (two columns of text printed on the same page), Luardo and Dolores focus their discourses on different topics[18]. While she rebuilds her past by talking about her family, he devotes his narrative to talk about Dolores, how they met, what in her attracted him the most, what a woman should be like, he also reflects over their marital relationship. If Dolores uses her narrative to rescue her past and try to indentify the origin of the dismal environment she grew up in, it is Luardo who tries to make an inventory of their marriage:

> The Dolores I first met was wild, eager, spirited […] It's hard for me to talk. […] After that year I never saw the woman I loved again. These last two years we've been two strangers cohabiting the same space, nodding and holding mumbled conversations, not knowing or caring if the other heard. We listen to each other abstractedly, halfheartedly, ignoring the occasional spontaneous bursts that sputter out like bubbles of saliva and are swallowed (p. 24).

Contrary to the stereotyped Chicano macho, at least in the passage now in question, Luardo Dosamantes, Mamá Lupita's eternally pampered boy, makes use of the space the narrator/protagonist opens for him and Dolores to "relocate [their] family from [a] secretive, barricaded [site] (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 24) . Despite being described as irresponsible and careless when it comes to family, home and marital relationship, Luardo manages to make a sincere and precise assessment of his marriage with Dolores. In making these sensitive words come out of Luardo's mouth (and heart), Chávez once more desecrates the image of the Chicano macho. It is a man whose personality is the result of the way Chicano families raise their male members that uses the private space of writing to confide his sorrow for his failed marriage, even if "it is hard for [him] to talk" (p. 23). The apparently superficial and immature Luardo is aware that his relationship with Dolores is nothing more that "two strangers cohabiting the same space" (p. 24) and that the truths they let out during the many arguments they had had were just "bubbles of saliva that were sputtered and swallowed" (p. 24) for the sake of keeping a "family".

If Luardo and Dolores disagree upon most aspects in life, there is one on which they agree almost totally: the ideal man for Soveida. In the seventh chapter of *Face of an Angel*, denominated "The Ideal", Luardo and Dolores manifest their opinion about the ideal future – which must be read as "marriage" – for their daughter. Although they see the question from different angles, there is one point they share: Soveida should never marry a Mexican.

[18] Dolores's discourse is in the column on the left and Luardo's on the right – see APPENDIX A

> You should marry **above you**. If not an Italian, an Anglo. Don't date Mexicans, they're low class, probably will never earn much money. Don't date anyone too dark, especially Mexicans […] (p. 38 – my emphasis).
>
> Whatever you do, don't marry a Mexican. I mean it, Soveida. I don't have anything against our own except that they don't make good husbands. Most of them, now there are exceptions, are too **macho** (p. 39 – my emphasis).

It is interesting to observe how different Luardo's and Dolores's perspectives are. On the one hand, the narrator/protagonist's father depicts Mexicans, whom he refuses to indentify with, as people doomed to failure and, consequently, unable to provide his daughter with a comfortable life. What stands out in Luardo's discourse is that he advises Soveida to marry "above her", associating superiority to European background. Besides, Luardo mentions people of dark skin who may represent a serious threat to Soveida's happiness in the future, if combined with Mexican nationality. Dolores's concern, on the other hand, is all about Mexican men's behavioral aspect, since most of them are machos, as she argues. Dolores's position is more lucid and balanced, as she acknowledges that there are exceptions amid a group which, for seeing women as inferior, does not treat them with respect.

Luardo's prejudiced attitude towards Mexican men reflects an argument used by Quintana (1996, p. 62) in reference to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. While identifying in Chicanos all the bad qualities he does not want for his son-in-law, Luardo shows that he is not aware that he has a strictly connection with Mexicans – his grandparents Manuel and Elena Dosamantes were Mexicans. By seeing himself at a status of superiority in relation to Mexicans, Luardo performs what Freire calls "an internally oppressive state". The image of Mexicans that Luardo has in his mind is fixed, rigid, something he acquired through his cultural ambience. This pre-established models were created by colonial discourse and and make the subject see "the Other" in his own people, as Homi Bhabha points out:

> An important aspect of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of "fixity" in the ideological construction of alterity. […] The same way, stereotyping, which is the main strategy of colonialist discourse, is a tool of knowledge and identification that straddles between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated (BHABHA, 1998, p. 105 – my translation).

Chávez creates a rude character who, thanks to a fossilized worldview he inherited from the colonial process that took place on the border of Mexico and the southern American states, encapsulates all Mexicans in a cohesive group who share the same undesirable characteristics, according to his personal biased evaluation. In contrast, Dolores, much more

sensitive to the question, recognizes that there is heterogeneity amidst Mexicans, whom she herself identifies as “our own”.

In the last chapters of *Face of an Angel*, the reader is informed about the destiny of such clashing couple. Considering the courses that Luardo and Dolores ran along the novel, it is quite interesting to observe the fates Chávez reserved for each of them. As to Luardo, the typical Chicano macho, who bore a façade of strength, but was indeed an everlasting child, the one who was prepared for anything but life, after a long while in hospital, goes back to his mother’s house in order to die at home. In “El Remolino”, the fifty-fourth chapter of the novel, Soveida recalls the day her father returned from the hospital. In a sensitive and sensible passage, she describes the Luardo who returned to the Blue House, the way the Dosamantes used to refer to Mamá Lupita’s house. Sick and more dependent on his mother than ever before, Luardo seems to be going back to his mother’s womb, under her protection: “[n]o longer the robust, handsome, light-skinned man with the full-head of still-dark hair, the man so many women had loved, fought over, cried about, and cursed, Luardo was simply a man in a rented bed, trying to breathe, using all his willpower to go on […] (p. 400).

Regarding Luardo’s characteristics, what marked Soveida the most or, at least, at a first moment, was the image of her father as a Latin lover. When she laid her eyes on the now frail Luardo, she automatically started comparing that man in a rent-a-bed to the strong good-looking man women used to strive for. The weakness she always knew was hidden behind the strong appearance was now being physically denounced. Soveida then goes on analyzing the father she knew as such, but whom she felt she never had:

> Luardo was a multitude of men to me. All troubled. Sick. Without boundaries. Sometimes I recalled the inappropriate things Luardo had done to me: the penny arcades he subjected me to, the trips to Juárez to see strippers, the topless nightclub he took Mara and me when we were teenagers. I remembered him hurting Mara and then me […] (p.402).

Although Soveida describes Luardo as “a multitude of men”, she spots a unique – and scaring – feature: no matter how many men he might have embodied all of them were troubled and sick. Way before narrating her father’s pitiful situation, Soveida provides the reader with a threatening version of Luardo. In the ninth chapter of the novel, Soveida, as a narrator, compares her father to a folkloric figure, present in many cultures, like the Mexican one, which is “the Boogeyman”, that is, an “eating beast” whichever semantic nuance that “eating” might take. In labeling her father that way, Soveida depicts Luardo as an evil

creature, dissociating him from the paradigm of the father figure, from anything she could think of as sacred, like the religious Chicano culture teaches its members a father should be. In that chapter, the narrator/protagonist describes what she understands by "bad", using as an example her own father:

> To be bad was to be removed from holiness, that ever elusive state of grace. It was to be dissociated from the core of life, to be out of balance with the spirit. It was to be someone like may father, Luardo Dosamantes, a reckless, thoughtless, wastrel alcoholic. "Sin juicio", said Dolores (p. 49).

In her final assessment of Luardo, Soveida asserts the legacy he left her: "[Luardo] taught me what love was through his lovelessness, and what loyalty was, and yes, trust, through his lack of both. Perhaps we learn the most valuable lessons from those we've ceased to understand" (p. 403).

Even knowing Luardo is about to die, Soveida portrays him as he had always appeared to her. As she argues, Luardo was the "negative reference", the one who taught her "not to behave like this", "not to be like that",

Dolores, who spent a great deal of her life suffering because of her husband, finally has "a happy end". In the chapter that precedes "El Remolino", entitled "Grandmothers, Mothers, Daughters", once more, Soveida, as the novel's narrator, gives voice to other characters. In the subdivision devoted to Dolores, a dialog between her and Mamá Lupita is reproduced. During the conversation, the Dosamantes' matriarch shows dissatisfaction with the fact that Dolores is going to get married again, and to make things worse – according to Lupita's point of view -, she is going to marry an Anglo. In a humorous line, with code switching sprinkled in, Soveida's grandmother expresses her opinion towards Dolores's second husband:

> It all began with the new name. And the divorce. I should never have lived to see you take up with another man! To see you engaged, ay, non aguanto el dolor, to an **americano**. Diosito! An engineer from **Fort Bliss**. Un desconocido. No es possible! Where does he come from? […] **The color of an earthworm** […] a retired barbón, fello y calvo […] Reldon Claughbaugh! **His name's like a family of insects** […] I thought I'd never live to see you change your name, **Maria Dolores Dosamantes** […] to become **Dolly Claughbaugh**. (p. 397 – my emphasis).

Mamá Lupita's evaluation of Dolores's future husband shows a curious feature which could be here denominated "inverted racism". While referring to Reldon Claughbaugh, she describes him as "an **a**mericano". The author, through her narrator/protagonist's writing,

makes a point to write the word with a lower case initial, marking here the Spanish spelling. As the word appears within a spoken discourse, it is possible to infer that Chávez's orthographic option may have two interpretations: it may be either representing Mamá Lupita's ignorance towards the correct spelling of the word or an inversion in social position in which the author endows a Mexican old lady with a counterhegemonic discourse. In doing so, Mamá Lupita subverts aesthetic patterns and attributes to the dominant element negative features (ugliness and strangeness related to language) historically imposed to the subaltern subject. Quoting scholar Chela Sandoval, professor Leila Harris points out that "visibility, acceptance and respect can be reached […] by means of tactics that promote what theorist Chela Sandoval denominates "oppositional consciousness" related to the dominant social order (HARRIS, in CAVALCANTI, Maceió, EDUFAL, 2006, p. 239 – my translation). Four elements in Mamá Lupita's line stand out: Dolores's husband to be is an engineer in Fort Bliss, a military post located in New Mexico (in terms of political domination, in neocolonial times, nothing more emblematic than a military post); while describing Reldon's skin color, she compares him to "an earthworm", negative and disgusting, rather than using a positive image to describe his complexion; again, in an attempt to criticize the man who is going to "steal Dolores from the Dosamantes's family", Mamá Lupita mocks the British sound of Reldon's name by connecting it to "a family of insects"; finally, she finishes her critical line by confirming Dolores's definite Anglicization – Maria Dolores Dosamantes was going to become Dolly Claughbaugh.

Paula Moya explains in her article that:

> [t]he cultural nationalist emphasis on cultural survival within an Anglo-dominated society further instituted strict roles on the sexual autonomy of Chicanas. Chicanas who dated or married white men were often criticized as *vendidas* and *malinchistas*[19], responsible for perpetuating the legacy of rape handed down to the Chicano community from the conquest of Mexico (MOYA, 2007, p. 57).

Mamá Lupita's criticism of her former daughter-in-law for marrying a white man of European background can be interpreted as an attempt of cultural preservation. This way, it seems that the Dosamantes' matriarch is seeing Dolores as a betrayer, a *malinchista*.

However, regardless of any critical opinion the issues here discussed might bring about, it is undeniable that, perhaps with pedagogical purpose, Chávez reserved a gloomy

[19] A reference to the Mexican myth of La Malinche, a mistress of Hernan Cortes, a Spaniard conqueror, accused of being a traitor, for supposedly having facilitated the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards (ROSIANDANI, 2006, p. 21).

ending to Luardo and a happy one to Dolores. On the one hand, Luardo, now physically weak, recovers his initial status of total dependence on his mother; on he other hand, Dolores, who learned since her childhood what pain – "dolor" – meant, managed to marry a non Mexican man, although, during Soveida's account, she never manifested such a will.

2.3 **Soveida's Five Attempts to Find "The Perfect Partner".**

If, up to the moment, in the present chapter, characters in *Face of an Angel* were discussed in couples, now, they are going to be analysed in a hexagonal relation, each of them happened at one time. Since she was a teenager up to the moment she got pregnant, which presumably when she was around thirty, Soveida tries to have a successful loving relationship. The present subdivision intends to examine the romantic experiences which played an important role in the narrator/potagonist's maturity process. While discussing Soveida and her partners, the same way it was done in the previous subdivisions, we will address issues such as cultural identity, gender roles, family matters, recurrently represented in fictional works by Latina writers and analysed by Latina critics. Hence, what will be analysed herein is the sort of relationship that was established between the Soveida portrayed in the specific moment in which each of the five lovers who crossed the narrator/protagonist's way.

2.3.1 Soveida's Buffoon

Juan Alfredo Ramos entered Soveida's life when they were twenty and seventeen respectively. In spite of having a name and a surname, he was called and referred to as **Jester**[20]. Except for his grandmother to whom he was "Yonny", anyone else used the name of the historically comic persona to refer to him. By making Jester a resident of a project house[21] (or housing project), Chávez informs her readers the social layer she placed him: that formed by people of immigrant background and or who could be labeled as blue-collar. The passage in which Soveida comments on the difference in social conditions between the young couple is rich in cultural elements as the following excerpt demonstrates: "we never spoke much. He was the **pachuco from the other side of town**, the low-rider from the barrio, my Chiva Town

[20] A man employed in the past by a ruler to entertain people with jokes, stories etc. - Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2006, p. 868.
[21] A publicly funded and administered housing development, usually for low-income families - <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/housing+project>.

boy, and I was la princesa, admired, **inaccessible**, and inexperienced, **a member of that once wealthy, still regal, family, the Dosamantes** [...]" (p. 116). The narrator/protagonist uses the kind of offensive term "pachuco"[22] to allude to her first (unofficial, as she herself defines him) boyfriend. By employing such a term, Soveida informs the way Chicano families of higher walks of life saw guys like Jester, who came from "the other side of town", that is, the poor side. In contrast, Soveida refers to herself as a girl of "noble" background whose family had lost, if not all, at least a great deal of, the fortune they once had. In other words, for all reasons, the couple here focused on had distinct backgrounds.

By creating such a clashing pair whose unique point of contact is their Mexican ancestry, Denise Chávez reproduces in her fictional work the heterogeneity that characterizes not only the Chicano community but any other ethnic group. Through the economic and social differences between Soveida and Jester, Chávez manages to prove wrong the U.S. mainstream pasteurized idea of a cohesive group, made up of a consistent blending of different sources: the specious concept of "melting pot". Unlike the homogeneous mixture of races that the phrase seems to convey, even within a group formed by people of the same ethnic heritage, there are differences of all sorts. This diversity is just one of the results of a long-term miscegenation process that has been taking place since Mexico was colonized by the Spanish, the first ethnic intermingling of which was the encounter of white Spaniards and local Indians. After the annexation of the northern part of the Mexican territory, the Anglo element was added to this mixture. Although it is not clear in the novel, Soveida and Jester, despite all the economic and social differences that set them apart, probably share one point in common: both are of Indian background. What makes Soveida not spot this aspect is that her indigenous ancestry may be prior to Manuel Dosamantes. Jester, in turn, has these ethnic characteristics more visible, so much so that Dolores refers to him as "El Indio", demonstrating being totally unaware that her husband – and probably herself – may share indigenous ethnic heritage. On this complex of diversities, relating to a more integrated Chicano discourse, Oliver-Rotger (2003) makes the following comment:

> Without ceasing to be political and indigenist, this discourse considers the various and often very different economic, gender, racial [and social] contingencies within the Mexican [and Mexican American] collective and the various ways in which people of Mexican origin have responded to the fact of living on the threshold of two cultures (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 94).

[22] A Mexican-American youth or teenager, especially one who dresses in flamboyant clothes and belongs to a neighborhood gang. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/pachuco>.

Towards the end of the chapter, Soveida narrates that Jester headed for California with an older woman who "[would] let him make love to her the way he wanted" (p. 121). As a mature woman and as a narrator, Soveida takes stock of her experience with Jester and comes to the conclusion that her experience with him, even casually, had a pedagogical effect. Long before Luardo, Jester was the first to teach her about the male model produced by a patriarchal society (not necessarily the Chicano community): "I now realize that Jester had taught me well. He prepared me for rude men, crude men, the one without shame, who use women like me and then discard us when they're done" (p. 121). It was her first experience of abandonment.

2.3.2 Ivan Torres: "The One"

Throughout *Face of an Angel*, Soveida's feelings for Ivan Torres ranged from some sort of adoration to abhorrence, as the excerpts below demonstrate:

> To a small-town girl like me [Ivan Torres] was the city personified: glamour, and effortless elegance. […] There was a glowing naturalness about the way he did things, he seemed so self-assured and able to cope. All the men I ever knew seemed helpless brats, incompetent in the matters of the world, and selfish by comparison (p. 129).

> My love for [Ivan Torres] was for like a bad toothache: you want to save the tooth, but the minute-to-minute pain was so bad you just wanted the tooth out, gone, rather than endure a deep, continual, nagging distress. It had been a beautiful tooth, too, with a decayed center no one could see. The smile was so bright (p.188).

If, in the chapter "The One", Ivan was, as Soveida herself admits, the personification of what she then conceived as perfection, in the twenty-seventh, "The House on Manzanares Street" – the title of which is a clear reference to Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* -, Soveida, by using humor, compares her marriage to the unbearable pain a toothache can provoke. The interesting aspect of the analogy Soveida makes is that, although she could not stand the suffering Ivan's infidelity triggers, she wanted to keep their marriage, hoping it was just a phase. In the twenty-fifth chapter, "Here is My Enemy", Soveida, as a narrator, reflects over the reason why Ivan had turned out to be a careless husband, attributing Ivan's behavior to the sort of upbringing he had had. According to Soveida's account, Ivan was an upper-class Mexican American, who grew up in California. It was there that he became a mature man and used his good appearance along with his financial situation to get as many women as he wanted to, as Soveida herself evaluates: "Ivan was already a man, and […] was

turned to **the world's expectations** of what a man should be: a lover of women par excellence, managing the difficult as one would **animals** or **underlings** (p. 175 – my emphasis)". As Soveida argues, Ivan's unfaithfulness was the product of social paradigms that made people see women as "animals" or, at least, people always in a underprivileged position (underling). The imbalance there is between the positions occupied by men and women in Chicano society is what U.S. scholar Phillipa Kafka (2000) calls "inequitable gendered power relations". Referring to critics Adela de La Torre and Beátriz Pesquera, Kafka states that "most Chicana writers' major concerns and themes focus on the ideological manipulation of Chicanas into political and sexual domination and exploitation, or as I put it, into inequitable power relations […]" (KAFKA, 2000, p. xxi). In creating a character like Ivan, Chávez intends to show that, although education is truly the key tool to transform society, some cultural constructions are so fossilized that it is necessary much more than academic learning to change it. The same Ivan that showed political awareness in the nineteenth chapter and sowed in Soveida the first seed of Chicano consciousness, was the same that spent nights away from home with a collection of lovers. In other words, despite his having access to college education in a time that traditional values were being questioned – let us not forget the pamphleteering overtone of his lines during the conversation already commented on here – Ivan, in his everyday coexistence with Soveida, perpetuated the old gender role that he probably criticized as an activist in the 1960's.

While reflecting over the reasons why Ivan turned out to be practically the same macho that her father and grandfather had been, Soveida, as a narrator, finds in the familial structure Ivan Torres was raised in the reason for his behavior. Son of a real state agent who "had left his widow a fortune" (p. 175), Ivan grew up without knowing the meaning of "needing to earn money". Having always had a comfortable life in material terms, he spent a great deal of his life in California, a place that "matured him" (p. 175) and had endowed him with a sophisticated personality. Ivan then had only two concerns in life: studying and spending nights with women, "mistresses from all walks of life, of all ages, and all creeds" (p.175). What is more curious is that Soveida, while analyzing Ivan as a man and as a husband, blames her former mother-in-law, Lourdes Fonseca Torres, for Ivan's irresponsible behavior. As Soveida argues, Lourdes, besides having "babied both father and son" (p. 175), passed on to Ivan a futile way of life, since she spent her days "shopping and applying make up" (p. 175). Although Ivan does not act as the traditional oppressive Chicano family man, he disrespects Soveida by coming back home late without even giving a call to warn her. While encouraging Soveida either to go visiting her mother or to go out with Lizzie, Soveida's

lifelong best friend, Ivan apparently establishes an open and understanding relationship with her. However, he knows that a visit paid to Dolores or a ride with Lizzie will calm Soveida down and will not put at risk the role of faithful wife that was culturally built and reserved for her to play. Besides, it is he, Ivan, that, one way or another, allows Soveida to go out without him, and, by suggesting whom she should visit or go out with, he establishes the limits of her freedom. By using an apparently sympathetic discourse, Ivan knows that he can effectively control Soveida's will and actions. About gender roles in Chicano society, Saldívar-Hull (2000) explains that "[…] Chicano and Mexican culture […]enforce women's obedience. […] [T]he family structure is based on masculinist notions that emphasize men's supposedly natural superiority and authority over women" (SALDÍVAR-HULL, 2000, p. 30).

Regarding the duos Soveida-Jester and Soveida-Ivan, it is interesting to observe that, under a social perspective, by comparison, the relational positions of each character is curiously opposite. If Soveida was the inaccessible princess to Jester – the undesirable pachuco, the smelly "Indio" -, in relation to Ivan Torres, she was the waitress – whose job is **serving** – in El Farol, the restaurant Soveida worked at all her life and where Ivan and his family were regulars. The social aspect did not make any difference between the couples: both Jester and Ivan walked out on Soveida anyway. This somehow proves that manifestations of machismo may occur in Chicano society regardless of the social layer the Chicano macho belongs to.

2.3.3 Veryl Beron: Weakness and Paranoia Personified by a Gringo

If the first two love experiences Soveida had had were with Chicanos, in the thirty-first chapter of *Face of an Angel*, the reader will be told about the narrator/protagonist's only relationship with a white Anglo. The first time Soveida Dosamantes met Veryl Beron could not have been more prosaic: a casual encounter at a laundry service. What impressed Soveida the most in Veryl, as she herself admits, was the fact that he was reading the classic novel *The Red and the Black*, by Stendhal, a novel she had read in school and the plot of which she thought of once in a while. On that very first day, Veryl invited Soveida for a ride to a nearby river where very few people used to go to. Completely involved by "something about Veryl […] that [she] loved [,] [h]is blue eyes [and] soft light brown lashes" (p. 223) and in such bucolic place and atmosphere, the romantic Soveida certainly thought she was living a dream. However, what could have been a wonderful first and unexpected date was probably an indication of Veryl's tormented personality. After having "talked about [that] place [which]

he loved, and the colors of the sunset", demonstrating "his love of nature, his love of beauty" (p. 223), Veryl had an extremely weird reaction, as the narrator/protagonist herself describes:

> Suddenly, without warning, he grabbed me fiercely, brutally, and ran his lips over my face, while he clutched my breasts desperately and moaned like an animal. I was so surprised I couldn't even respond. And then, just as suddenly, he sprang away from [her] and jumped out of the truck and into the darkness. After a short while, he emerged, and we then drove back […]. Both of us were afraid to speak. " (p. 223).

Trying to find an excuse for that unexplainable reaction, already back home, "in the silence of [her] bedroom" (p. 223), Soveida attributes to Veryl's shame of ejaculating before her the reason for his rushing out of the car. Later, however, Soveida finds out that Veryl suffers from Peyronnie's disease, a disorder which causes pain during erection and about which she had once read in a local newspaper. Veryl had told her that "the problem was the result of a boating accident at Caballo Lake [but] he [had not gone] into details" (p. 229). Veryl's physical (and also psychological) problem, however, was not an impediment for Soveida to insist on their relationship. After all, she "knew things would never be normal, but [that] [was] all right, [as she] was **never used to normal**" (p. 229 – my emphasis).

Based on Soveida's narrative, it seems appropriate to affirm that Veryl embodies "a collection of weird characteristics". One day, coming back from the movies, Veryl and Soveida decided to go to his place where they unsuccessfully tried to make love. After a while, irritated for another failing sexual performance, Veryl fetched a box full of pictures and showed some to Soveida, in which he was representing Christ. Then, without contextualizing the pictures and just saying that "it was [his] turn [to be Christ]", he "look[ed] at [Soveida] triumphantly" (p. 228) and took the box back to his closet. Without understanding properly the meaning of his gesture, Soveida was only sure about one thing: she wanted to cry, but not knowing whether it was because of Veryl's sexual problem or for the pictures he had shown her.

After a year of relationship, despite the strangeness that had been marking it, "one night […] after **trying** to make love, he asked Soveida to marry him" (p. 229 – my emphasis). As it seems, unexpectedness and contradiction are Veryl's hallmarks, or else, marriage, to him, might be connected with sexual abstinence. At one point of the narrative, Soveida gets a severe flu and needs to stay away from work in order to recover. Due to Soveida's convalescence, Veryl develops a critical paranoia which prevents him from sleeping with her,

as he is afraid of getting sick too. Soveida's health recovery, however, was quite difficult, as Veryl, for stinginess, refuses to turn on the heating system.

Veryl's fate is sealed by himself: right after Thanksgiving, on their wedding anniversary, Veryl commits suicide choking himself with a plastic bag. In the narrative, the scene in which Soveida describes her finding Veryl's corpse is meaningful and moving: "[Veryl] was so beautiful. So beautiful. I rocked back and forth, holding him in my arms, like holding a child, crying in a little voice already strangely familiar, as if I'd already known the song. I held him in my arms, a sorrowful Pietà, my heart chiseled in stone" (p. 260).

In a detailed analysis of *Face of an Angel*'s narrative structure – which will be talked about in the following chapter -, Naranjo-Huebl (2007) reflects over the meaning of Veryl as a character in the novel. As Naranjo-Huebl argues, Soveida and Veryl's episode is inserted in the part of the novel entitled "Virtues", "those angels who protect the good, help people fight temptation, frustrate demonic assaults, and bestow blessings" (NARANJO-HUEBL, 2007, p. 61). Taking into consideration all Soveida experienced by Veryl's side, it seems reasonable to conclude that it was the narrator/protagonist's intention to protect a good man – according to her feelings about him – who, for some reason, was facing psychological problems. From the very first moment she laid her eyes on Veryl, Soveida, a sensitive angel, detected that "[t]here was something about [him], even then, that [she] loved" (p. 223). Perhaps, Soveida had somehow sensed that Veryl was "a misguided Christ figure" (NARANJO-HUEBL, 2007, p. 61) in need of protection and proper guidance. Not by chance, Chávez reproduced in the scene in which Soveida rocks Veryl's dead body, the image represented in *La Pietà*, Michelangelo's famous work of art. Veryl's physically and psychologically sick condition required Soveida's love and pity (*pietà*, in Italian), as NARANJO-HUEBL herself asserts: "[t]he last image of the chapter ["A Heart of Chiseled Stone"] has Soveida as a brokenhearted Mary, inconsolable in her loss" (NARANJO-HUEBL, 2007, p. 61).

The aftermath of Veryl's suicide was marked by two aspects in the novel: his being buried in a Mexican graveyard – due to Mamá Lupita's interference – and Soveida's trip to his hometown, Estancia, six years after his death. In the thirty-fifth chapter, entitled *El panteón* – cemetery, in Spanish – Soveida narrates that once, in a conversation, Veryl's said he would like to be buried in San Pedro Cemetery for preferring it to St. Anselm, another cemetery which seems to be destined to whites and upper-class people. According to Soveida's evaluation of Veryl's personality, San Pedro, the Mexican graveyard was more suitable for him:

> It seemed fitting […] for Veryl to be buried with hundreds of mexicanos in San Pedro's, amid the disorder and disarray that was part of that typically Mexican cemetery. It was a place full of colorful plastic flowers and paper wreaths […] That was where Veryl wanted to be buried, near the Dosamantes family […] in the middle of the bright, colorful chaos of Chiva Town's dead (p. 261).

Even six years after Veryl's death, Soveida is still sorrowful for his suicide and heads for Estancia in search for the question which she had been wrestling with all those years: why Veryl had put an end to his own life. Arriving at Veryl's parents, during a conversation with his cousin, she finds out that he had tried to kill himself once. The accident that he blamed for his sexual disorder was, in fact, his first or one of his suicide attempts. On top of that, Soveida noticed that, during all the time they were together, Veryl never mentioned his parents or anyone from his family. No matter how problematic the Dosamantes family might be, as the narrator/protagonist herself depicts them throughout the novel, she also admits that she keeps some good memories of them.

> Veryl never talked about his life in Estancia, or growing up on his parents' farm. […] [W]hen holidays like Christmas and Mother's Day came around, he never mentioned either of them. Coming from a large and close family, it seemed odd to me that Veryl shared so few memories of his family (p. 424).

Soveida then recurs to Veryl's roots, that is, to his hometown and family, in order to find the "true" self of the man with whom she shared part of her life. One aspect that calls attention here is that Veryl's recurrent attempts to commit suicide. Maybe unable to come to terms with the peculiarities and limitations, that is, the fragmented self he just could not bring together, Veryl tries to destroy his own self. Marked by estrangement and dislocation, Veryl does not manage to stabilize the many versions of himself that are portrayed in the novel: the cultured man who was reading Stendhal in the laundry service, the one who had a severe sexual disorder, the one who had personified Jesus Christ – the context is not informed in the novel, maybe it might have been a play, as "Jesus Christ Superstar"[23] was in fashion in the early seventies, when Veryl's passage is supposed to take place – the paranoid who freaks out before the possibility of getting sick, the one who, in life and despit being an Anglo, manifested his desire of being buried in a Mexican cemetery, the one who had never mentioned his parents .

[23] Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1970 rock opera which offers na alternative interpretation of the last week of Jesus's life. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Christ_Superstar>. Acesso em: jan. 2014

2.3.4 J.V. and Tirzio Velásquez: Closing a (Illegitimate) Family Cycle

Sometime – not informed how long exactly – after Veryl's death, Soveida decides to enroll at a course on Chicano culture, the first reference of which is shown at the end of the thirty-seventh chapter. As her teacher, she has J.V. Velasquez whom she later finds out that is her half-cousin. In the forty-third chapter of the novel, humorously entitled "J.V. and the Metal Pin" – a reference to his erect physical posture, as if he had a large metal pin installed inside his body -, Soveida outlines a rich picture of her teacher, cousin and, later, lover. In the third paragraph of the chapter, the narrator-protagonist gives important information about J.V., which partly explains his arrogance:

> Velásquez got his undergraduate degree at Standford University. That accounted for his **Chicano aloofness**. He spent a full year studying in England and that explained **his disdain for anything common**. He returned to the U.S. and received his master's degree and doctorate from someplace Ivy League[24] at one of the best sociology departments in the country. That explained **his brilliant mind** and **his intellectual prowess** and **his inability to understand the real world of Agua Oscura, New Mexico**. To look at him – tall, thin, with a handsome, intense face – was to be startled into understanding that **culture has nothing to do with education** (p. 322 – my emphasis).

From the description given by Soveida, it is possible to infer that the man she is depicting bears a deeply contradictory personality. Since he specializes in Chicano culture, he was supposed not only to understand it under a scholarly perspective, but, above all, to identify with the cultural practices of the community he belongs to. On the contrary, he bears what Soveida calls "Chicano aloofness" and is unable "to understand the real word of Agua Oscura". From the narrator/protagonist's text, it is possible to conclude that, after a long period away from the "real [and provincial] world of Agua Oscura", J.V. became another man thanks to the influence of the cosmopolitan and cultured environment of the Californian university. J.V., as a character, can be read as the personification of the "provisional subject" Stuart Hall (2007) talks about. Based on Soveida's narrative, the reader comes to the conclusion that the academic knowledge J.V. acquired in California and in England disrupted the bonds that once existed between Soveida's teacher and the Chicano community. Once J.V. became a learned man, he undid the "stitches" that "sutured" him to the cultural structure he

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21. A conference name used to refer to eight institutions of higher education: Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Princeton University, the University of Pensilvania and Yale University. Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivy_League. Acesso em: fev. 2014.

originally came from, "[de]estabiliz[ing] both [his] subject and the cultural world [he] inhabit[ed], making both [less] […] united […], to use in a reverse way Hall's words (HALL, 2007, p. 598). Now, as a scholar, J.V. looked at his ethos from an objective and scientific perspective, the same impersonal posture that, according to him, Soveida lacks as his assessment of her paper shows: "[y]ou have an impassioned flair for words. You argue with great emotion and sensitivity […] but it does not fully succeed […] Heated feelings alone do not make your case" (p. 320).

It seems legitimate to affirm that, once more, although in a different situation, Soveida is before a "dislocated subject". If Veryl can be seen as a dislocated subject in psychological terms, J.V. suffers similar dislocation, but in terms of cultural identity. This rupture between J.V. as a Chicano individual and J.V. as a specialist on Chicano culture is evidenced in the dichotomy Soveida herself creates at the end of the paragraph here quoted: the one between culture and education. Based on Soveida's evaluation, it is possible to conclude that culture[25] is strictly connected to living experience, whereas education[26] would be the result of a process carried out by mankind's intellectual work and effort.

While talking about J.V., Chávez, through Soveida's voice, again spots in family the reason for a character's behavior. The narrator/protagonist then describes a scene of domestic violence that J.V., witnesses along with his older brother Tirzio: their father, Soveida's grandfather's illegitimate son, beats their mother up after an argument. The two brothers had different attitudes towards the regrettable episode: whereas Tirzio, the older, tried to interfere, "J.V. ran to his room and locked himself up". Perhaps, this subject remained locked up for keeps, not only inside his sorrow for living in a violent home but also within his academic knowledge and position, as Soveida argues: "[t]he greatest mission of J.V. Velásquez's life was to rise above the poverty-ridden, intellectual and cultural void of his childhood and his family. He longed to be independent from his culture's expectations of him" (p. 323). Thus, by embodying the intellectual, J.V. tries to escape the role of rude Chicano macho. However, by charging perfection from Soveida as a student and "not supervis[ing] her studies with humility, but condescendingly respond[ing] to her work", as Naranjo-Huebl (p.62) observes, J.V. assumes a similar controlling position.

If, on the one hand, it was "Chicano aloofness" and "lack of emotionalism" on J.V.'s part and Soveida's "mockery and disdain [that] bother[ed] him for a long time […]" (p. 324)

[25] The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/culture>
[26] The knowledge or skill obtained or developed by a learning process.
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/education>

that drew them to each other, it was physical attraction that caused Soveida's and Tirzio's paths to cross. In the forty-seventh chapter of the novel, which is named after the character himself, Soveida describes the moment she and Tirzio got hold of each other at his elder daughter's birthday party:

> [I]n the midst of the sweet, cloying, earthy child sweat, his hands still red from the rope's twisting force, I first saw Tirzio Velásquez. […] He was confused, and a little excited. […] My thin beige summer blouse clung moistly to my breasts. Not sure if I was wearing anything underneath, Tirzio stared long and hard (p. 348).

In that very chapter, there is an interesting comparison of the two brothers in a passage that narrates a car ride J.V., Soveida and Tirzio took. In a mocking comment on J.V.'s looks, Tirzio teases his brother by saying that he is hiding behind his sunglasses, bearing a "Californian movie-star aloofness" (p. 350), a man who is in for only for "intellectual pendejas" (p. 348): "'Who are you?'" Tirzio would ask. 'The man with no eyes? I never know what you are thinking. Do you ever see the whites of his eyes, Soveida? Just what are you hiding, Velásquez?' "(p. 350).

In contrast, now seen under Soveida's lens, Tirzio is the one with "dark, absolutely open and honest eyes", that is, the one whose thoughts and soul are already revealed. Again taking into consideration the dualism of education and culture, it seems reasonable to see the enigmatic J.V. as a distorted product of education, as a Chicano who, maybe due to a twisted academic learning, became a broken off individual. Perhaps, by wearing sunglasses, as Tirzio acutely observed, he might be hiding the Chicano portion of his self, which he intends to erase. Tirzio, in his turn, would be the genuine Chicano, the one whose cultural identity remained untouched by formal education or the simple desire of being what he is not, as Soveida defines him: "I had never known or loved a man like Tirzio. He should be listed in the Chicano Culture Quiz as something truly great" (p. 354).

At the end of the fifty-ninth chapter, in a dialog with her nun friend Lizzie, Soveida reveals to be pregnant, something she tells Tirzio only two chapters later. Unlike the traditional model of a mistress, mainly regarding it within the Chicano society, Soveida does not expect that Tirzio will leave his family to start a new one with her. As Soveida herself concludes, "[Tirzio] was a man who loved children, **but he could not love** this child[;] [h]e was a person who believed in family, **but not in this one**" (p. 456 – my emphasis). Until their meeting in her house, during which he hears about her pregnancy, for unknown reasons, they had been apart for some weeks. At that moment, while he is entering her front yard, Soveida

starts analyzing him physically and, according to her evaluation, the Tirzio who was approaching her was not the same who "had been fresh, sweet-smelling and full of vigor" (p. 454). During the weeks they were apart, maybe due to some strength she had acquired through her pregnancy, a phase she was positive she had to face on her own, Soveida had a different reading of that sexy, involving Tirzio. At that very moment, she realized he had acquired "the mold of a married man":

> For the first time, [Soveida] saw how similar to [his wife] [Tirzio] had become after so many years of marriage; [that day] he was her equal, a clumsy boy, without grace, without words, afraid to stand in the front yard talking, frightened someone might see us, or, worse, yet, terrified to go inside the trailer, knowing it would lead to the back bedroom (p. 454).

Soveida then makes up her mind to carry her pregnancy to term without expecting Tirzio's leaving his family, which she does not think is the right thing to do. By deciding to assume her child on her own, Soveida breaks the pattern of the mistress that spends all her life hoping to become "the official wife". Reflecting over her own situation, Soveida indirectly evokes women who, one way or another, got hold of their own destinies, women who refused to accept to remain in the sufferer's position, as McCracken points out while discussing Ana Castillo's novel *So Far From God*: "transcended the role of victims [and took] strong measures to control their lives with both large and small acts" (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 38): "I wish I had been able to talk to someone about Tirzio. Sister Lizzie, Mamá, Dolores, Mara, all women I might have talked to were busy, deeply occupied with their lives. I wanted to say that I hurt the way they had all hurt" (p. 455). It is important to point out that the verb "to hurt" is being employed in the active voice, portraying that the characters cited by Soveida, contrary to Chicana women's history, became the agent of the act of hurting. Based on the trajectory of the characters mentioned by Soveida and also on her own, it seems correct to assert that they, in a way or another, "recenter" – to apply here a verb used by Saldívar-Hull - the nuances of the Chicana figure each of them represents. Considering Soveida's route in the novel, first of all, her working outside home (even not needing it to survive, as she belonged to a middle class family), her loving experiences, her enrolment (and engagement) in the course on Chicano culture, Rosiandani (2006) concludes: "[t]he redefinition of the feminine role undertaken by Soveida is found in her disobedience, in her demand to be treated equally in the marital relationship, in the fact she has access to education and in her gaining economic independence by working outside the house (ROSIANDANI, 2006, p. 27).

Another important aspect is that, besides deciding to be a single mother without demanding anything from Tirzio, Soveida made a significant resolution: to move to the Blue House, Mamá Lupita's house. In terms of Chicana literature, the image of the house, as U.S. professor Julian Olivares (1996, p. 1) argues, may bear two different meanings: under a male perspective, it signifies "his castle", a place where he finds comfort and, mainly, where he exert his power; to a Chicana, however, the house is the space where she must be confined to doing the housework necessary to provide the domestic ease the male "has the right to enjoy". Nevertheless, in Soveida's case, the image of the house seems to gain another sense. Therefore, the Blue House, which, in the case of the Dosamantes family epitomizes a hierarchically privileged place, seems to be now the space where the narrator/protagonist is going to start a new phase in her life, a phase in which she is gong to take part effectively in the continuance of the Dosamantes' lineage. What is curious to observe, however, is that the newest member of the Agua Oscura's respected family is the illegitimate son of the illegitimate grandson of Profetario Dosamantes, Soveida's grandfather. In doing so, Soveida is, as the title of the present subsection suggests, closing an illegitimate family cycle.

The present chapter focused on depicting a cutout of the Chicano universe, but through what is being understood here as "gender clashing". This way, along with the contrasting juxtaposition of women and men characters, many aspects of the Chicano community were discussed. The next chapter is going to be devoted to the kind of autobiographical account Denise Chávez makes her narrator/protagonist use. In this manner, the main focus of the next segment is the collective dimension of Soveida Dosamantes self-referential discourse. However, before going into the fictional life narrative engendered by Denise Chávez, some theoretical information on what comes to be autobiography seems to be necessary. This way, the next chapter will be composed of a conceptualization of autobiography, a brief history of emblematic life writings, the meaning of autobiography to the so called *minorities* and, at last, *Face of an Angel* as a fictional collective bildungsroman.

3 *FACE OF AN ANGEL*: A FICTIONAL COLLECTIVE BILDUNGSROMAN

> Bildungsroman – whether novel or life writing – written since the 1940s both within Europe and North America and in locations around the world undergoing uneven processes of decolonization and globalization participate in this process of projecting the subject as self-determining and incorporating contemporary readers into a global imaginary of universal rights and responsibilities.
> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson

The present chapter intends to examine the collective hue Denise Chávez applies to the self-reflexive discourse in *Face of an Angel*. Before addressing this point specifically, however, two aspects need to be focused on: the development of autobiography as a means of written expression and the relevance of life writing to Chicana writers, as components of a group doubly considered as minority: for being Chicanas and for being women. So, this chapter has been divided into four sections. The first is devoted to the conceptualization of autobiography under a diachronic perspective. For such a task, the article by Brazilian scholar Elizabeth Muyalert Duque-Estrada (2009) has been taken as the main reference, as it gives as samples three different autobiographical works which function as emblems of the period when each of them was produced. The aim of the following section is discussing the importance of autobiography for Latina writers, that is, what effects the self-referential discourse may produce in the message they intend to convey. This kind of narrative seems to be crucial for those groups of writers who seek to represent themselves. After these theoretical considerations, the focus will be on the format adopted by Denise Chávez as a vehicle for her narrator/protagonist's autobiographical project. So, each part of the novel will be analysed, taking into consideration their titles, the meaning of the *milagro*[27] that symbolizes them, the characters who play the role of the category of angel each part is named after[28], not to mention some of the chapters which are important in the process of naming the parts. Therefore, this chapter will deal with the core of the present dissertation, as it focuses on the representation of a community carried out by a fictional woman narrator.

[27] Milagro – a small metal charm in the Latino folk art tradition that comes in different shapes related to human affairs and concerns and are invoked in prayers and vows over related needs; for example, a heart milagro may be worn or pinned on a personal altar when praying for a physical or emotional ailment (NARANJO-HUEBL, 2007, p. 69).

[28] See Appendix B.

3.1 **Montaigne's *Essays,* Rousseau's *Confessions,* Barthes's *Ronald Barthes by Roland Barthes*: the Evolution of Life Writing Under a Diachronic Perspective.**

From the very start, those who read *Face of an Angel* know that they will be a sort of confidant of the narrator-protagonist's. By using the first person discourse, Soveida Dosamantes drags the reader into her testimony, her own life experience, using her family and town as the guidelines for her description of Chicano society. In order to contextualize the present section, we will discuss the concept – or concepts – of what can be labeled as *autobiography*. For this purpose, the book by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) and the article entitled "Montaigne, Rousseau, Barthes" by Elizabeth Muylaert Duque-Estrada (2009) will be used here as the main theoretical supports.

After approaching the term "autobiography" from an etymological perspective[29], Smith and Watson talk about the traditional concept of autobiography theorized by French thinker Philippe Lejeune. According to Lejeune, a work can only be regarded as autobiographical as long as there is a personal identification between the author and the narrator. This identification is the basis for what Lejeune calls[30] "the autobiographical pact", that is, the treaty sealed between author and reader to identify the name that figures on the cover with the name of the one who narrates the story. Smith and Watson then clarify this aspect:

> The identification of authorial signature with the narrator […] is a distinguishing mark of autobiography, [as] argues Philippe Lejeune in his seminal essay "The Autobiographical Pact". Lejeune usually defines the relationship between author and reader in autobiographical writing as a contract […]. For Lejeune, […] two things distinguish autobiography, and […] a wide range of life narratives, from the novel: the "vital statistics" of the author […] [(] date[,] […] place of birth and education[)] are identical to those of the narrator; an implicit contract exists between author and publisher attesting to the truth of the "signature" on he cover and title page. (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 11).

Taking autobiography in this strict sense, Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel* cannot be classified as such, since the name of the author on the book cover is not the same as the character's who tells the story. This way, *Face of an Angel*, as a novel, is definitely placed in the fictional sphere and defined as a fictional first person account. In the introductory chapter

[29] "In Greek, *autos* denotes 'self', *bios* 'life', and *graphe* "writing" {…] [t]aken together in this order, the words self life writing offer a brief definition of autobiography" (SMITH;WATSON, 2010, p. 1).
[30] After creating the concept of "autobiographical pact" in 1973, Lejeune revised it in 1975, 1986 and 2001. In: LEJEUNE, Philipe. O pacto autobiográfico – de Rousseau `internet. Belo Horizonte, Editora UFMG, 2008

of their book, Smith and Watson consider and register this category of autobiography, quoting some of the most important examples of this specific genre in the Western European literature – Charles Dicken's *David Coperfield*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister Apprenticeship* and Fyodor Dostoievsky's *Notes from Underground*[31]. Smith and Watson conclude that, even as fictional characters, the first person narrator of these novels use the self-referential discourse to make sense of themselves in relation to the environment they were born and grew up in. As Smith and Watson observe, "[t]he narrators of these texts employ the intimate first person as protagonists confiding their personal histories and attempting to understand how their past experiences formed them as social subjects (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 10). Considering that, like the nineteenth century novels quoted as examples, *Face of an Angel* is a reproduction of the community the author focuses on, we might infer that these "pseudo-authors" – as they are the textual producers but only within the fictional realm – seek to locate themselves, as individuals, in the social organization they are inserted in. As Smith and Watson comment,

> [s]uch narratives and the traditions from which they emerged are part of the development of the bildungsroman, a form German scholar Wilhelm Dilthey defined as the story an individual's struggle to become a social subject who 'becomes aware of his purpose in the world' (SMITH;WATSON, 2010, p. 10).

Thus, Soveida Dosamantes, by using the first narration, tries to recognize (and make recognized) her purpose in the Chicano world. Denise Chávez then endows her protagonist with the power of representing herself and the cultural setting(s) in which her family transited from the late nineteenth century up to the late 1980's, when Soveida, pregnant, finally takes over her grandmother's house.

Before discussing the meaning and relevance of the autobiographical discourse for Chicanas, as a minority group, let us investigate how the autobiographical impulse progressed, what compelled the subject to try to figure himself – or herself, in Soveida's case -, that is, what were the social and political contingencies that provoked that impulse towards a textual self-portrait. In her article, Duque-Estrada (2009) analyses the autobiographical urge under a diachronic perspective, using three emblematic works in the area: *Essays*, by Michel de Montaigne, *Confessions*, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, by the twentieth century French philosopher.

[31] The autobiographical works were cited here in the same order they appeared in Smith and Watson's book. Source: SMITH;WATSON, 2010, p10.

Montaigne's *Essays*, the first self-referential writing Duque-Estrada analyses, reflects the identity crisis the sixteenth century subject went through: the expansionist policy of the century amplified the borders of the world the way it was then known, causing the individual to face an identity crisis. Therefore, writing about oneself would be seen as an attempt to reunite a subjective unit, an identification of the self that was affected by a new world of dimensions never seen before. Thus, the man of that century found in autobiography the chance of registering himself, the chance of preserving his identity so that he would not vanish like that old world that had surrounded him (DUQUE-ESTRADA, 2009, p. 122-124).

Still reflecting over Montaigne's *Essays*, Duque-Estrada includes in her article an interesting comment by Julia Watson[32]. According to Watson, Montaigne's life writing, for its deconstructive and self-reflexive nature, can be regarded as marginal, if compared to the classical model of autobiography. The fragmented being that Montaigne outlines in *Essays* works as a precedent for any individual's claiming a right to represent himself, contrary to the canonic version of autobiography which recognized in renowned people the autonomy to describe themselves. Under a more contemporary view, Watson sees in Montaigne's self-representative work the gene of "autobiographical narratives by 'peripheral subjects seen as inappropriate […] to tradition" (DUQUE-ESTRADA, 2009, p. 125 – my translation).

While discussing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, Duque-Estrada resorts to German thinker Jürgen Habermas, who argues that, thanks to the importance acquired by European bourgeois society, the eighteenth century was fertile in terms of autobiographical writings. The control imposed by the absolutist state on both public and private spheres in the previous century was undermined by the economic relevance conquered by the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois citizen then differs from the aristocrat: while the latter has as his paradigm a noble lineage he believes that comes from, the former has as reference a history of labor and, consequently, of social ascendency. Having developed his own code of values based on his own development process, the bourgeois subject will need to interact with other human (social) beings with whom he shares the same experience. This interaction will promote, through the exchange of letters and the registration in diaries, that code of bourgeois values, providing their readers with "a psychological portrait of characters in the format of autobiographies" (HABERMAS apud Duque-Estrada, 2009, p. 136).

[32] WATSON, Julia. Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography. In: *The Culture of Autobiography – Constructions of Self-Representation*. FOLKENKLIK. Robert, edit. California: Stanford University Press, 1993. p. 57-79.

In the long run, the development of bourgeoisie made public spaces more democratic; their access was conferred to many people, regardless of their origin. The cafés, one of the hallmarks of cosmopolitanism at that time, would draw together intellectuals, businessmen, students and also workers of all walks of life. Seeing this facilitated ingress to public spaces as an invasion to privacy, and as a sign of disrespect for individuality, Rousseau wrote his *Confessions* in an attempt to recover "lost privacy". The format he chose for his life-writing can be regarded as a paradigm, since it obeys the chronological order that is expected from such a genre. Rousseau, as an autobiographical-I is unified, autonomous, homogeneous and exerts total control over his actions, feelings and memory, unlike that fragmented narrating "I" portrayed in Montaigne's *Essays*. Smith and Watson add an interesting interpretation of Rousseau's autobiography, which is particularly important for the present research, considering that its focus is a fictional life writing by a woman character: the fact that Rousseau's autobiographical project, besides promoting extreme individualism, ignores the possibility of women's representing themselves. Smith and Watson discuss this aspect:

> For some, Rousseau inaugurates modern autobiography, with his focus on childhood, his retrospective chronology, his radical individualism, and his antagonistic relationship to both readers and posterity. For others, Rousseau's legacy in the Confessions is **a radical individualism** that privileges the white male citizen. For them, Rousseau inaugurates traditional autobiography, which […] has become **a suspect site of exclusionary practices** (SMITH, WATSON, 2010, p. 115 – my emphasis).

If Montaigne and Rousseau are set apart by two hundred years, Duque-Estrada keeps the same chronological gap between Rousseau and Roland Barthes. Contrary to Rousseau's subject, Barthes's is dispersed and diluted throughout his memories from the past. While seeing himself in an old photo, for example, Barthes identifies what he calls "the subject's fissure", as he is aware that the passing time and experience have made two different individuals in terms of physical appearance and personality. Barthes acknowledges that the young Barthes in the photo and the older who is observing it are only the same subject in the genetic aspect, that is, only their – or rather, his – genetic code remains the same. This way, under no circumstances, is the subject who is talking about himself the same who is being talked about. If Rousseau sought isolation so that he could rescue his "individual unit" – at least, what he imagined as such -, Barthes can only recognize himself in the Other, showing that he is aware that the experiences he acquired along his life produced diverse versions of the same "genetic being". Barthes's autobiographical project, unlike that of Rousseau's,

Duque-Estrada argues, does not aim at outlining the author's profile and telling about his formation. Barthes's self-referential discourse focuses on showing his ideas, which he discusses, refutes and later recovers. As the author himself defines, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* is a "recessive book [as] it retreats itself and also incorporates its own withdrawal" (Barthes apud Duque-Estrada, 2009, p. 144 – my translation).

Smith and Watson call attention to the anti-conventional trace in Barthes's autobiographical work. As the author plays with the boundaries between fiction and reality, Smith and Watson classify his life writing as autofiction, that is, an autobiographical piece of writing whose limits between what is "real" and what is "imagined" is blurred:

> Roland Barthes […] also wrote "autobiography" and autobiographically in many essays, experimenting with the media, the chronology and the subjectivity of life writing. His putatively autobiographical *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* enacted at once an antiautobiographical engagement with questions of the self, not least because Barthes urged his readers, in his epigraph, to read it as a novel. Barthes routed this provocative intervention in conventions of self-representation through the assemblage of personal photographs and wrote it in quasi-alphabetical textual fragments that obscured his personal life by using first-, second- and third-person pronouns (SIMTH; WATSON, 2010, p. 208).

In order to close this subsection, I propose to verify in *Face of an Angel* the features spotted by Elizabeth Duque-Estrada (2009) in the autobiographical works by Montaigne, Rousseau and Barthes. The answer will be then focused on the duo autobiographer/autobiography, that is, the text's (fictional) weaver and the (fictional) result of her literary production. **Reflexivity**, the characteristic recognized by Duque-Estrada in Montaigne's *Essays*, is also discerned in Soveida Dosamantes's (fictional) self-referential discourse. Born in the late 1940's, the narrator/protagonist in *Face of an Angel* can be regarded as a product of two important decades for the so-called Latinos: the 1960's, when people of Hispanic background joined in the struggle for civil rights led by African Americans and Soveida has her first moment of cultural awareness, and the 1980's, when she, as a mature woman in her forties, acquired a reflexive vision towards her family, her cultural heritage and, mainly, towards herself. **Representation**, the feature found in Rousseau's *Confessions* is also present in *Face of an Angel*, since, by recalling her past, which intertwines with that of her own family and community, Soveida Dosamantes tries to recenter and resignify elements stigmatized by prejudice and oppression: both externally – from Spaniards first, and later, from Anglos – and internally – from men towards women, and from upper-class people towards those classified as low-class. Finally, **dispersion**, identified in *Roland*

Barthes by Roland Barthes is also recognized in Chávez's novel, as the narrator-protagonist consciously keeps a distance from herself as the narrating-I and the versions she presents of her "self" in the novel. Thus, Soveida, as a narrator, presents the different stages of the development process she went through, which follows some sort of chronological order, allowing the readers to have access to the versions of Soveida as a character. So, it seems correct to affirm that Denise Chávez engenders a fictional autobiography which brings together the three characteristics previously pointed out: **reflexivity**, **representation** and **dispersion**.

3.2 **Autobiography: the Canonic Format Versus Minorities' Self-Representation.**

In the first chapter of their book, while introducing the topic of autobiography, Smith and Watson (2010) raise an interesting question: at first, "[nothing] could be simpler to understand than the act of people representing what they know best[:] their own lives[.]" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 1). By that affirmative, the authors bring to light an idea that lay people usually have towards autobiography: all the information it contains deserves credibility as it is given by the individual who is describing his/her own life experience. In the common reader's eyes, then, the self-referential discourse can be considered as undeniable truth, since nobody else could ever give more precise information than the autobiographer himself. However, talking about oneself involves more aspects than one may suppose. Before reflecting over what self-referential discourse means to those who weave it and to those who read it, it is worth considering first who society and history have entitled to talk about himself. In other words, whose life deserves to be read about, to be known, to gain the public sphere? In autobiographical historiography, whose life writings were famous and were particularly attractive to the editorial market? What was the meaning of reading a person's life? These are issues addressed by Susan Stanford Friedman (1998), Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms (2004) and by Smith and Watson (2010), among others.

Friedman starts her article by discussing the canonic view of autobiography outlined by George Gusdorf. In his 1956 essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography", Gusdorf, as the title of his text announces, establishes not only the social conditions that are appropriate for an autobiography to be engendered, but also lists the criteria necessary to classify a written work as life writing. To Gusdorf, for a work to deserve the badge of "autobiographical", its producer must bear what he calls "consciousness of self". In other words, the individual who

talks about himself must be aware that he stands out in the social frame he is inserted in, as Friedman explains:

> Autobiography is the literary consequence of the rise of individualism as an ideology, according to Gusdorff. As a genre, it also represents the expression of individual authority in the realm of language. The "sign" to which Gosdorff refers is, literally and literarily, the "mark", the "imprint" of man's power: his linguistic, psychological, and institutional presence in the world of letters, people, and things. (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 73).

Considering both Gusdorf's and also Lejeune's concepts of autobiography discussed by Friedman and Duque-Estrada respectively, *Face of an Angel* could not be regarded as an autobiographical project. The narrator created by Chávez is not someone who would fit Gusdorf's definition. Even if Soveida Dosamantes were real, the narrator in *Face of an Angel* is an ordinary woman, who works as a waitress at a restaurant in a (fictional) small town in the U.S. state of New Mexico. Given her prosaic profile, Soveida, as a first-person narrator, runs counter Gusdorf's individualistic idea of an autobiographer. On top of that, Soveida does not make use of a self-centered discourse and, by giving voice to some of the characters in the novel, generously shares the space of self-writing with those who, like her, need to represent themselves. In relation to Lejeunne's position towards autobiographical work, the fact that the name informed on the cover as the author does not identify the narrator impedes *Face of an Angel* to be included in the autobiographical category. Besides, as we are going to analyse later, while talking about *Face of an Angel* as a fictional autobiography, we realize that Soveida's self-referential discourse is continually turned towards the collective aspect, be it regarding the family or the Chicano culture.

In contemporary autobiographies, as Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms (2004) emphasize:

> [P]ersonal narratives no longer depend on speakers belonging to dominant social groups but emerge with pride from minority positions, cultivate the value of undervalued experiences, and risk distinctly intimate subject matter. Because the personal is also expressed as political, recent life writing contributes explicitly to changing cultures and to changing understanding of personal, communal, even national identities (EGAN; HELMS, 2004, p. 216).

Egan and Helm's statement highlight the relevance of the collective reference for women to make sense of themselves. As Friedman points out in her article, under a historical

perspective, unlike men – mainly those of white European background –, women have not had the opportunity of thinking of themselves as purely beings, as subjects who do not need to rely on the community or the ethnicity they belong to so as they can understand themselves as individuals. The canonic perception of the autobiographical self is misleading as nobody is completely isolated, without an environmental connection. In this respect, Friedman ponders:

> Isolate individualism is an illusion. It is also the privilege of power. A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He can think of himself as an "individual". Women and minorities, reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex or color, have no such luxury […] The emphasis on individualism as the necessary precondition for autobiography is thus a reflection of privilege, one that excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers who have been denied by history the illusion of individualism (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 75).

Along with the communal feature, Friedman spots in women's autobiographies another important feature: subversion. While breaking patterns and, consequently, acquiring voice, women make the self-referential discourse an important tool with which they autonomously describe themselves and move their self-portraits to the public sphere. Moreover, women as autobiographers are not dependent upon the group they are part of, or get lost amidst an amorphous mass. Women who write about themselves find in the community they partake the proper solidarity – but never a corporative feeling – to make emerge their real "selves". By means of this symbiotic association, they destroy the image of women socially constructed which they refuse to fit and make use of the textual space to register and legitimate their own version of themselves. About this aspect, Friedman asserts:

> [T]he self constructed in women's autobiographical writing is often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness – an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women's individual destiny. Alienation is not the result of creating a self in language […]. Instead, alienation from the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing, the creation of an alternate self in the autobiographical act. Writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 76).

Up to this point what has been discussed is the question of autobiography in the sense originally conceived by Philippe Lejeune: that of a life writing whose author and narrator are the same person. However, if literature is taken as a representation of reality, all the theory here discussed can be applied to the fictional bildungsroman that *Face of an Angel* consists of.

Taking into consideration that the creator of Soveida's self-referential narrative is a Chicana writer, it is worth examining the meaning of autobiography for those writers who are currently categorized as U.S. Latinas. In order to understand what self-referential discourse means to Chicana writers – and fictional writers, in Soveida's case – the main theoretical sources to be used here are "The Construction of the Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies" by Lourdes Torres (1998), the third chapter of Ellen McCracken's *New Latina Narrative*: The Feminine Space of Postmodern Ethnicity (1999) and the groundbreaking work *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*, by Gloria Anzaldúa, first published in 1987.

Autobiographical discourse, as Torres (1999) reasons, has worked as an important artifice for women to contest the roles imposed on them by a traditional male-centered society. By making use of new contents (ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and language) conveyed by an innovative first-person narrative framework (a mixture of essays, sketches, short stories, poems and journalistic texts), Latina writers "subvert both Anglo and Latino patriarchal definitions of culture [, undermining] linguistic norms [through] a mixture of English, Spanish and Spanglish" (TORRES, 1999, p. 276). Therefore, through self-referential narrative, Latinas acquire authority to depict themselves, contesting the distorted and negative image built by a patriarchal society. In other words, it seems appropriate to affirm that, while outlining themselves, Latina writers seek to construct their own identity, revealing through their memorial narrative, a new and contesting version of Chicano society.

If compared to the traditional autobiographies written by men (mostly white, European and culturally regarded as important), Latina autobiographies do not portray a solid, uniform self, who is independent enough to be dissociated from a group. On the contrary, the autobiographical subject described in Latinas' self-referential narrative is one who, regardless of the difference within the group she belongs to, is one whose collective identity is acknowledged and celebrated. Torres, then, by referring to some of the most important Latina writers and critics, summarizes:

> Moraga, Anzaldúa, Levins Morales and Morales create a new discourse which seeks to incorporate the often contradictory aspects of their gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and feminist politics. The radicalness of their project lies in the authors' refusal to accept any one position; rather they work to acknowledge the contradictions in their lives and to transform difference into source of power. They find that being marginalized by multiple discourses, and existing in a borderland, compels them to reject prescriptive positions and instead leads them to create radical personal and collective identities (TORRES, 1999, p. 279).

Ellen McCracken also emphasizes the collective feature of Latinas' autobiographies:

> Several experimental works among the new Latina narratives of the 1980s and 1990s stand out for their anti-individualist strategies. While they are not autobiographies in the strict sens of the word, they might be read as collective oral *testimonios* [,] […] communiz[ing] the technique of first-person narration through the project of joint authorship. […] Thus, the individual and the collective coexist in this autobiographical narrative (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 66-67).

That new individual of Latino background who talks about herself is the product of a new posture regarding her cultural environment. U.S. Latinas are born in an ambience marked by contradictions against which they decide not to fight. Instead, they decide to cope with the paradoxes that characterize Latino society, in order to undermine the established order. This new way Latinas have found to deal skillfully with an environment which is often hostile to them is called by Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) as "new *mestiza* consciousness", which is a sort of awareness that enables Latinas to be tolerant with those conflicting forces, as Anzaldúa herself explains:

> The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain, she turns ambivalence in something else (ANZALDÚA, 1999, p. 101).

From the previous quotation, it is possible to infer that the "new mestiza" engendered by Anzaldúa assumes a kaleidoscopic personality so that she can handle the plural positionalities she needs to take up. By acknowledging the plural nature of the cultural system she is included in, or rather, by understanding the contradictory characteristic of Latino society, Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* undertakes an anti-Manichean position and develops efficient strategies to subvert it. This understanding posture is taken by the narrator/protagonist in *Face of an Angel* in the very first chapter of the novel. When the narrating-I, who completely identifies with her family members and, guided by maturity, concludes: "Now that I am older I can allow myself to look at my family as people[,] [p]eople like myself with hunger and hope[,] [p]eople with failings" (p. 3).

3.3 **Collective by Individual: Chicano Culture Through the First Person Narrative in *Face of an Angel*.**

In the previous section, thanks to a theoretical discussion about the concept of autobiography, it was possible to conclude that, despite the individualistic shade it historically bore, a self-referential discourse can acquire – or inevitably acquires – a collective contour. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to examine how the Chicano society is depicted by a fictional narrator/protagonist, a representative of this society, whose importance has been widely acknowledged. It was aiming to investigate how a mestiza, as a postcolonial subject, portrays herself and those who surround her that Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel* (1994) has been picked out as the literary representation of such ethnic group. In this fictional autobiography, Chávez gives voice to Soveida Dosamantes, a Mexican American woman, who decides to put down in words the stories of her family and of those who, in one way or other, deeply marked her life. In telling those stories, Soveida responds to her grandmother Lupita's request, sharing with whoever is going to read her account the memories of her family members.

> Soveida, [e]veryone has a story, your mamá has a story, your daddy has a story, even you have a story to tell. Tell it while you can, while you have the strength, because when you get to be my age, the telling gets harder. The memories are the clothes in your closet that you never wear but are afraid to throw out because you'll hurt someone […] (p. 4).
>
> I speak for them now. Mother. Father. Brother. Sister. Cousin. Uncle. Aunt. Husband. Lover. Their memories are mine (p.4).

. In fact, Soveida's autobiographical project can be interpreted as a pact she seals with her grandmother Lupita, who, according to Smith and Watson's terminology, works as a coaxer – the character who "provoke[s] [Soveida] to tell [her] story" (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p. 64). This way, Chávez's narrator/protagonist decides to act, that is, to work as an **agent**, taking over the position of her family's spokesperson, that is, spokes**woman**. What Soveida proposes to do in the first chapter of her memoir is what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) call "collective remembering" (2010, p. 25), using writing as her technology and having as her personal sources family stories and genealogy, since the Dosamantes family tree is drawn at the very beginning of the novel. Thus, by using the autobiographical discourse, she not only acquires voice but also gives voice to her grandmother, mother, father,

husband, lover and all those who played a role in her life story, combining autobiography and biography, that is, intertwining the discourse about herself and the one about the other, as Egan and Helms (2004) conclude:

> Indigenous narratives, and immigrant narratives, autobiographers and biographers have identified themselves as part of a web of relations without which their own story would be incomplete […]. Remembering their forebears, these authors instruct their [readers] and, by inserting their extended relationships into the history of their times and places, combine autobiographical and biographical. (EGAN; HELMS, 2004, p. 223).

In a thoroughly domestic environment, the narrator/protagonist in *Face of an Angel* (1994) offers her readers a collection of characters who represent (stereo)types typical of the Chicano culture. Quoting here what theorist Ellen McCracken (1999) says about "anti-individualistic strategies" (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 66), I propose that Soveida Dosamantes "collectively narrativize[s] representative elements of everyday life" (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 66).

In *Face of an Angel*, a fictional autobiography, Soveida's life writing encompasses all those who shared some sort of experience with her, grouped according to gender, family bond and social role. Therefore, it seems correct to affirm that the domestic realm depicted in Soveida's self-referential writing reflects a major social and cultural framework. Chávez then conceives a first person fiction and gives a postcolonial female narrator/character the task of providing her readers with an *authentic*[33] portrait of Chicano society with its complexity of characters. The authenticity applied to the account in *Face of an Angel* (1994) is due to the fact that its weaver is a Chicana herself. Based on her heritage and experience, she is entitled to furnish an inner view of that specific ethnic group. Like Smith, Watson and McCracken, Friedman (1998) sustains that minorities' autobiographies necessarily bear a collective contour. Friedman then argues that women's autobiographies do not fit the canonic concept engendered by George Gusdorf in his 1956 essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography", since "[…] individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities." (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 72).

In the first chapter of the present research, a debate over the term "Chicano" and others employed to refer to Spanish-speaking people was developed. The discussion about these terms seems to be crucial in this essay, as they work as badges to the concepts Chávez explores and the issues she raises in her novel. Through Soveida, Chávez develops a coming-

[33] The term "authentic" has been written in italics due to its controversial concept.

of-age narrative strongly flavored with cultural elements the narrator-protagonist gets aware of as the novel unfolds. While weaving her memories, Soveida describes scenes which refer to a provincial environment populated by a hybrid people. Up to chapter 19, meaningfully entitled "The One", Soveida, isolated in her small provincial "world" of Agua Oscura, is aware neither of her ethnic background nor of what lies beyond her small town's boundaries. Only after meeting Ivan Torres, "the one" the title of the chapter refers to, does Soveida hear the term "Chicano". Ivan, for having lived and studied in California, knew about – and, more importantly, sympathized with – the political movements which arose in the late sixties. As a college student at that time, he learned about the then new sense of the word "Chicano" and its consequent acceptance on the part of politically engaged Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The passage quoted below depicts Soveida's political alienation towards the political transformation the world was going through and also her lack of cultural identity: "I had never met anyone before who called himself Chicano, I didn't know what the word Chicano meant then. I knew I was a Mexican American and that was it, **I knew vaguely that my family roots were in México**, but what did Chicano mean?" (p. 130, my emphasis).

In the nineteenth chapter, previously discussed, the young Soveida (one of the narrator-protagonist's versions portrayed by herself in her life writing) shows that she has no connection with her ancestry, as she "knew vaguely that [her] family roots were in México" (p. 130). Nonetheless, in chapter 36, which received the questioning title "Who are the Waitresses?", Soveida has a phone conversation with her cousin Mara, an important character in the novel. During that chat, Mara accuses her cousin of having no ambition and advises her to acquire education so that she can get a better job. After all, Mara cannot come to terms with the fact that Soveida has a "*Sí, señor* job" (p. 269), as she sees Soveida's occupation as a waitress as revoltingly subservient. Even not agreeing with Mara upon what "service" means, Soveida, in the following chapter, alludes to her enrolment in a course on Chicano culture. By doing so, Soveida, as an individual, seeks her cultural identity, that is, she attempts, by means of education, to identify her "self" with the collective body she belongs to.

It is interesting to note that the Soveida who admits her thorough ignorance towards her Chicana heritage is not the same character/narrator who tells the story. This aspect is revealed not only by the maturing process the readers witness throughout the novel, but it is also disclosed by a tiny detail: the mature Soveida – the autobiographical subject, that is, the executor of the autobiographical project, the producer of the autobiographical account – writes the word Mexico with the Spanish spelling, bearing an orthographical mark (´ - *acento agudo*) which does not exist in English, her mother tongue. So, by means of a linguistic

feature, the narrator/character in *Face of an Angel* (1994), since the very beginning of her account, gives her readers a discreet hint of the collective feature of her life writing.

This mature Soveida, now conscious of and eager to learn about her ancestry, appears clearly in chapter 38, entitled *Ni Modo*. In the passage in question, Soveida, already enrolled in the course on Chicano culture, declares her enthusiasm to acquire knowledge about her cultural background, which she had access to in her domestic environment, but which was too embedded in her everyday life for her to notice. She then needed to recur to education so that she could bring to light a past devalued by colonization, as the passage quoted below reveals.

> I, too, wanted to learn more about my Chicana self. When I looked at the catalogue, I had no idea there were so many courses about things I was familiar with, understood, and yet wanted to know more […] Where had I been all this time? I was moving into a new century but so up to my neck in food that I hadn't had the eyes to see what was happening around me (p. 283-284).

Not by chance, Chávez chose the Spanish expression *ni modo* to name this chapter. In Soveida's words, the expression refers to a situation when "a person accepts what can't be undone; in other words, there's nothing you can do about it, let it go, accept it, might as well. Ni modo." (p. 288). Although the title also referred to the physical **attraction** Soveida felt for her professor, as the chapter is devoted to the narrator/protagonist's cultural awakening, its interpretation may be expanded to the idea of **choice** at two levels respectively: Soveida's attraction to her teacher J.V. Velásquez (her "individual" side as a narrator/character) and Soveida's **choice** of Chicano studies (her "collective" side as a narrator/character). What seems to be happening at this point specifically is what Smith and Watson (2010) call intersectionality of identities: Soveida, as a female individual, and Soveida, as a member of an ethnic group, in a situation of surrendering to physical (and intellectual) attraction and cultural self-recognition, respectively.

It is not possible to talk about Soveida as an autobiographer and, therefore, as a writer, without talking about the book she commits herself to write: "The Book of Service". Aiming to leave her professional experience as a waitress registered to whoever would replace her at El Farol, Soveida writes "a handbook for waitresses, [which] really [talks] about life" (p. 168). The narrator/character then makes use of her manual to guide Dedea, the final addressee of her normative text, as to how she should behave as a waitress. Extremely worried about portraying her occupation as something valued, Soveida focuses on showing that the act of serving does not mean subservience, the way Mara, her cousin, understands it. On the contrary, she portrays the act of rendering a service as something sublime, almost sacred. The

first chapter of “The Book of Service”, entitled “The Service Creed” deserves special attention because, having her family ambience as her parameter, Soveida declares that the idea of “serving” had always been present in her life. Regarding the Dosamantes as a representative of Chicano low-middle class, living in a small border town, it seems legitimate to affirm that this relation of “serving’ (or subservience, as Mara insists on calling it) is a cultural datum that constitutes another trace of collectiveness in Soveida’s memoir, since Chicano families typically have a patriarchal structure. According to her text, the act of serving is actually performed by a chain of services imposed on women in the Chicano society.

> In our family, men usually came first. Then God and country. Country was the last. Should be the last. When you grow up in the Southwest, your state is a country. There exists no other country outside that which you know. Likewise, neighborhood is a country. As your family is a country. As your house is a country. As you are a country” (p. 171).

Note that in the passage previously quoted, Soveida starts her “creed” by situating her addressee in a structure of power which originates within the family, passes by religion and ends at a more distant level, the country. In this structure of power, it is the women’s, and only theirs, the duty to render service, may it be to men (who come first), to God or to the country. It is also worthy dwelling on the concept of “country” developed in this passage by Soveida. Due to her lack of ethnic identity and to her provincial worldview, her definition could not be more diffuse. To her, the idea of “country” lacks that monolithic and global stance that anyone learns it should be. In the scale she develops in her “creed”, the notion of country, as everyone knows, comes after family and religion. After all, Chávez’s narrator/character, although born in U.S. territory, lacks the sense of belonging: Agua Oscura is a small town where English is spoken, but it is completely immersed in Chicano culture. The first chapter of “The Book of Service” unveils a displaced subject as its producer. The displacement Soveida experiences is not geographical in the traditional sense of the term. About this specific semantic shade of displacement, theorist Stuart Hall (1999) asserts: “this is the familiar, deeply modern sense of dis-location, which – it increasingly appears – we do not have to travel far to experience, Perhaps, we are all, in modern times (…) literally, ‘not at home’ (HALL, 1999, p. 3).

It is clear that Soveida as a fictional autobiographer is a mature woman in her mid forties – she was born in 1948 and, in chapter 38, she states to be “moving into a new

century" (p. 283-284), causing the reader to infer that the passage takes place in the turn from the twentieth to the twentieth century. However, her first autobiographical impulse took place when she was only twelve, officially the last year of childhood. Entitled "Sinner or Saint", chapter 12 is the register of Soveida's then short life experience. In its preface, the narrator/character expresses concern towards her relation to "the other". In the introductory passage of her "childhood memoir", Soveida declares the target of her self-referential account: "In this book I try to make others understand me. And yet, no matter how hard I try, I am still a mystery to myself." (p.76). By means of *relationality*, a strategy for writing and reading life narratives theorized by Smith and Watson (2010), among other critics like Susan Friedman and Ella Shohat, Soveida tries unsuccessfully to identify herself. As she was "still a mystery for [her]self", she relies on her readers' interpretation to help her self-recognition project. The narrating I, to use here Smith and Watson's terminology, is a subject in conflict, as the title itself suggests. On the one hand, there is the "saint", the Soveida (con)formed by religious constraints; on the other, the one who had not suffered any interference from social or religious norms. In the last two chapters of her "girly life writing", Soveida clearly showed she was split into two: between the "wild" self and the socially and mainly religiously "molded" being. The excerpts below, taken from the last two (out of five) chapters of Soveida's autobiography as a child, portray the split Soveida who, even straddling between an indigenous self (sinner) and another formed by the limits imposed by society and religion (saint), seeks to identify herself.

> Yes, I was growing up. I tried so hard to be good, and I still try. And yet I knew something was missing. One of my greatest dreams is to be accepted because of MYSELF (p. 77).
>
> Every week I have a crush on a different boy. […] I am torn between Heaven and Hell. Some days I want to be a saint or an angel or even the Blessed Virgin. Others I just want to be Me. So what am I? Saint or sinner? (p. 77).

Although the passage in which Soveida, as a child, writes her first autobiographical project does not refer to the collective and ethnic contour of *Face of an Angel*'s major body of writing, it seems legitimate to affirm that, even at such a tender age, Chávez's narrator/protagonist outlined a certain sense of collectiveness. As a clever and insightful girl, she perceived that she inevitably belonged to a group and, in order to feel as part of it, however, she needed – more that she wanted – to be accepted. The very young Soveida then recurs to writing, believing it can help her to define herself. Discussing the importance of self-

narratives for Indigenous people to outline their cultural identity, Elleke Bohemer affirms that "writing is an integral part of self-definition" (BOEHMER, 2005, p. 221).

Taking into consideration that the purpose of the present essay is to identify the collective shade of Denise Chávez's fictional autobiography, an aspect that could not be left out here is the autobiographical subject who weaves it. It is then the aim of this paper to investigate who Soveida Dosamantes is, this narrator/protagonist who takes charge of speaking for the community she always felt she belonged to, but only became aware of its tradition by means of education.

The fact that Soveida is a Chicana gives her "the authority of experience", as the American historian Joan Scott calls it in her article "Experience" (1998). In her essay, Scott problematizes the concept of "experience", debating the viewpoints of many theorists, among them the British historian E.P. Thompson. In his 1963 book *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson, of Marxist orientation, interprets "experience" as a social phenomenon, as Scott herself explains:

> In Thompson's use of the term, experience is the start of a process that culminates in the realization and articulation of social consciousness, in this case a common identity of class. It serves an integrating function, joining the individual and the structural and bringing together diverse people into that coherent (totalizing) whole which is distinctive sense of class. (SCOTT, 1998, p. 63)

It is this "joining of individual and structural" that Soveida Dosamantes, as a narrator/protagonist, succeeds in doing in the emblematic chapter "Mothers, Teach Your Sons". In fact, the passage in question is a term paper she prepares for her course on Chicano culture, in which she condenses on a couple of pages many aspects often shared by Latino families.

The Soveida who writes that essay, the narrative reveals, is a more learned woman, if compared to the one who used to spend her days between home and El Farol, the place she considers as her second home, where she got the professional experience she passes on in "The Book of Service". After the classes on Chicano culture, by using education as her most valuable tool, Soveida turns her focus on her own community and tries to identify the origins of Chicano society's ills. Allying theory and empiricism, Soveida develops her paper by conciliating elements she probably learnt through reading and illustrates this theoretical content with examples she extracted from her own family.

Soveida then opens her paper, spotting in history the genesis for the oppression Chicanos (as) have been suffering. In doing so, while pondering over two dimensions of

collectivity – Chicano community and her family - , she evolves some sort of binary reasoning: on the one hand, she recurs to history, a broader – according to the mainstream – field of knowledge to explain traces she identifies in her family environment; on the other, her familial references reflect a larger and more complex realm. While doing that, the narrator/protagonist in *Face of an Angel* (1994) makes use of what Edouard Glissant (1992) calls "a particular form of rhetoric" (GLISSANT, 1992, p. 69) to demonstrate that "history insofar as it is the 'reflection' of a collective consciousness today is concerned with the obscure areas of lived reality" (GLISSANT, 1992, p. 69). In the passage quoted below, Soveida Dosamantes brings together family and history, establishing a connection between them.

> This developed country we call the United States, this New World, founded in hopeful gain and based on material success, this battle zone of those who have and have not, this cultural mélange of people, was always out of reach for most of my family. We were the servants […] [w]e were the ones who built whatever stands as testimony to the American Dream (p. 315).

In fact, Soveida evidences her understanding in reference to the position of her family, which is an icon of Chicano family. She is aware that the Dosamantes, like many others who shared the same cultural heritage, partook in the construction of that "New World", but were always denied that "material success" they helped build.

It is interesting to note here that Soveida, although born in the American state of New Mexico, refers to the States as if it were not her own country. Later on, in the same chapter, she labels "México" (written with the Spanish spelling, as she writes it throughout the novel) as "our homeland". Before the talk with her first husband Ivan Torres shown in chapter 19, and mainly, before her taking her classes on Chicano culture, Soveida "knew [she] was a Mexican-American and that was it" (p. 130). Even with that hyphenated idea of nationality/ethnicity ("Mexican-American"), it is possible to infer that the notion of community that the then unaware Soveida had in mind bore wholeness as its main trace. Adapting here professor Carine Mardorossian's words (2005), Soveida Dosamantes, by means of education, "exploded the idea of nation as a unified imaginary community, dissected its constructions and made its presuppositions lay bare" (p.22).

Soveida goes on narrowing down her discussion towards Chicano society, finally focusing on the question of gender – country > Chicano community > male and female members of the Dosamantes' family. She shows how the Chicano males, "downtrodden, and overburdened, and unhappy the way things are" (p. 315), reproduced in their homes the same oppressive system of which they themselves were victims. After all, once "[t]hey've lost their

dignity, [t]o feel powerful, they must oppress others" (p. 317). From this point on, Soveida exposes the so-called *machismo*, a distinctive ethos of Chicano community. Labeling Chicanos as "broken men", due to the negative effects of the colonization process, Soveida provides the readers of her paper with a romanticized or at least wishful view of Chicano males, before "Columbus's encounter with the New World" (p. 315), claiming that they "had words, words full of mercy and love, not words loosened by alcohol, or slowed by drugs, or masked by insecurity" (p. 316). She then identifies in this "broken voice" the explanation for domestic violence in Chicano society, highlighted by alcohol and drug abuse, an escape valve commonly used by Chicanos to relieve their frustration.

However, if Chicano males once had voice before white European domination, Chicanas had never had this privilege, as Soveida herself attests to: "In the past, our men had power, and their women couldn't speak" (p. 316-317). Based on Mexican official historical discourse, there is the myth of Malinchismo which says that all Chicanas descend from *La Malinche* who was the native Mexican who helped Hernán Cortés to conquer Mexico in the 16th century. Therefore, under the Chicano perspective, all women are betrayers and, as such, must be mistreated. So, in Chicano society, Malinchismo legitimates patriarchy and all the suffering Chicanas have been subjected to for centuries, as Soveida explains in her academic paper:

> In the past our men had power, and their women couldn't speak. When they did, it was with the Malinche voice, called the voice of the betrayer. That's where it all began What do we know of Malinche, anyway? That she was the translator for Cortés, that she became his lover, the mother of his children, and, in turn, the betrayer of a race, a culture. **That is what men say** (p. 316-317 – my emphasis).

Note that Soveida is cognizant of history's discursive nature, as she points out that all which is known about *La Malinche* is biased, once it is told from a male (and sexist) angle.

From that point on, Soveida shifts from a historical perspective to a more synchronic interpretation of Chicano community. Although she recognizes the centennial oppression Chicanas have been submitted to, she also admits that women help perpetuate this unequal relation between men and women. It is Chicanas, as mothers, who "partak[e] in the cycle, by looking the other way, in their obvious deferment to males, assuming responsibility for both father and son, and in the seemingly loving act of mothering" (p. 318). What Soveida does, as the weaver of that academic article does, is an act of resistance to what professor Françoise Lionnet (1995) calls "the victim syndrome". Although Lionnet uses that expression to refer to cultural studies, it seems to be applicable to Chávez's fictional autobiographer, as she refuses to portray women as the eternal victims of Chicano patriarchal system. On the contrary, she

argues that women's posture within their families that eternalizes this cycle of oppression, which she commits herself to interrupt.

> Abuse was not uncommon among people I knew. My father's goal in life was to keep a scorecard of all the women he slept with. My brother's goal in life was to become the best lover of the most women. Oppressor of the oppressed. That is the Macho Man. I know him well. He is my father. My brother. My cousin. But he will not be my son (p. 318).

Before summing up the present division, it seems appropriate to recall all the arguments used here to prove the collective nature of the narrating-I in Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel.* Soveida Dosamantes, as a fictional autobiographer, a woman in her mid-forties at the time of the narrative – woven in the mid-1990's -, having her grandmother as the coaxer for her life writing, decides to share the stories of her family. By doing so, Soveida exposes the Dosamantes' intimacy, which is far from being a set of familial particularities. Otherwise, all the characters and events involved in Soveida's account can be regarded as representatives of Chicano society. In the fictional bildungsroman engendered by Denise Chávez, however, the narrator/character only acquires awareness towards her ethnic origin – and its historical process and political aftermath – when she takes a course on Chicano culture. Soveida produces an essay in which she examines the historical origins of her people and, in a sort of zooming process, she at last focuses on the gender roles in a Chicano family. In this passage particularly, thanks to education, Soveida Dosamantes not only gains academic knowledge of her Mexican heritage, but also acquires enough distancing which enables her to develop a critical positioning towards her cultural background. Chávez's narrator/protagonist in *Face of an Angel* (1994) employs the self-referential discourse not only to outline her "self", but also "to speak for them", to represent those with whom she shares a past, a present and a future, whose vicious cycle she promises to break.

3.4 *Face of an Angel*: the formal organization of a (fictional) collective autobiography.

This section intends to investigate the formal organization given by Denise Chávez to Soveida Dosamantes's (fictional) autobiography, that is, the sort of framework the author chose for the narrator/protagonist's life writing. As the title itself suggests, by the presence of the word *angel*, religion pervades Denise Chávez's novel, a characteristic shared by most Latina writers. By writing in order to "reverse the melting-pot model of integration into U.S. society (McCracken, 1999, p. 95), U.S. Latinos called attention to cultural markers that could

distinguish them from the mainstream and one of these markers were undoubtedly religion. In doing so, they ended up paving the way for their women counterparts to elaborate another view of religion, now taken as a paradigm for creating a new understanding of social ethics, as Ellen McCracken observes:

> In much contemporary Latina narrative, the religious also emerges as a sense of social ethics and a new moral vision sometimes quite different from those of orthodox religion. Issues of social justice and concerns of immigrants, feminists, gays, the landless, and other marginalized groups are articulated to the alternative religious practices narrativized in this new writing (McCracken, 1999, p. 95).

It is this articulation of religion and other issues, or rather, the use of religion that Chávez promotes in *Face of an Angel* through Soveida Dosamantes's voice. Although the present dissertation does not intend to analyse of religion in Chávez's novel, while examining Chávez's autobiographical novel, it is worth observing how religion is used by Chávez to dismantle some petrified images. By way of example of the articulation McCracken talks about, we can talk about Lizzie, Soveida's lifelong friend, one of the women characters that marked the narrator/protagonist's life. Apparently, or rather, if taken into consideration here the identities socially constructed and historically fossilized – the "play of identities" Hall (2007, p. 601) talks about -, Lizzie could be considered a repository of contradictions: as a nun, she was supposed to have an orthodox behavior. However, despite belonging to the Catholic clergy, she is a feminist and a lesbian. In order to illustrate this aspect, Lizzie's lines – excerpts of which will be quoted here – in a dialog she has with Soveida in the fifty-ninth chapter of novel are quite revealing. In a self-referential discourse, Lizzie chronicles how she puts into practice the articulation between religion and the so-called secular world.

> Nuns were disconnected from society then. They were shunted off to cloisters where you'd see them peering from some metal grate. Not only couldn't they see what was happening in the world, they couldn't see anything about it. It's another era now, thank **Mother God**! […] I love being with young people. […] With my kids, I'm back in the struggle. I marched against the Vietnam War, became a Brown Beret and then I joined the Revolutionary Communist Party. Now I'm a feminist lesbian nun. […] That's what this struggle against AIDS is all about. It's become my cause. […] My life as a nun is in the heart of the world, not in some mausoleum with other women, praying for the pagan babies in Africa. I didn't become a nun to sit home or in church twiddling my unworked, white-starched, collared hands over a set of softened black beads. It's Nun's Lib I'm talking about (p. 439-440 – my emphasis).

It is worth commenting on a significant detail in Lizzie's line: a feminist and an activist by nature, she thanks "Mother God" for the privilege of living in a different world, a

world that allows her to promote the articulation of her religious life and the prosaic realm that surrounds her.

Even acknowledging – and evidencing with Lizzie's example – the importance of religion as a topic in *Face of an Angel*, it is not going to be discussed in depth here, as it was informed in the introduction. However, as religion works as the guideline for Chávez to build the framework of her novel, a certain aspect of the topic will be addressed here: the categories of angels. For this purpose, the main theoretical source to be used is the essay by Linda Naranjo-Huebl (2007), already used in the present research, since the scholar proposes to analyse how Chávez has structured her novel.

As Naranjo-Huebl (2007) informs at the beginning of her essay, the figure of an angel, no matter the order it might belong to, is unconditionally associated with the idea of **service**, or rather, as the scholar herself states, "[…] whatever angels are called, their name **signifies** a service" (Naranjo-Huebl, 2007, p. 51 – my emphasis). According to Naranjo-Huebl, by naming each part of her novel after the different orders of angels, Chávez traces a double parallel: one between each angelic category and the roles imposed on Chicanas by Chicano society and the other between each order of angels and the narrator/protagonist's maturing process. Naranjo-Huebl gives important theoretical information about this aspect: "[t]he nine sections of Face of an Angel correspond to Catholicism's most traditional classification of angels, which are based primarily on […] the writings of Pope Gregory I ("the Great") and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*" (NARANJO-HUEBL, 2007, p. 54).

Given that the term "service" is easily mistaken as "servility", Chávez makes a point to tell the former from the latter. As Naranjo-Huebl argues, "service" is seen as a noble duty used to subvert an established order. "Servility", in its turn, equals submissiveness, subservience, which Soveida and other women characters in the novel proved having subverted. In *Face of an Angel*, Chávez makes an effort to impose the first term and erase the second, as Naranjo –Huebl points out:

> Denise Chávez […] navigates a difficult path celebrating service in [the traditional] Chicano culture – that valorizes the complete effacement and the martyrdom of women, and also in a secular intellectual culture that views religious beliefs with suspicion. […] *Face of an Angel* examines and negotiates a position that distinguishes between servility and service and points service as not only an antidote to power, but as a virtue is the highest order, love in action (Naranjo-Huebl, 2007, p. 51-52).

In short, it seems legitimate to affirm that the analysis of *Face of an Angel*'s formal structure will help us understand not only the evolution of its narrator/protagonist but also of

those whom she shares her space of writing with. Each part in Chávez's novel is not only named after each order of angels, but also identified by a symbol called *milagro*. Chávez then reinforces the title she finds in the Catholic religion by including in her novel the image – or icon – that symbolizes the function of each order of angel. At the end of this chapter, there will be a chart demonstrating all parts, their respective chapters and *milagros*.

3.4.1 Angels – the First Part

The angel the title of this part refers to is the narrator/protagonist. As an angel, Soveida's duty is **to listen** - that is why it is symbolized by the *milagro* of an ear - to those she represents and to be, thus, their spokesperson. That accounts for the fact that she takes over the mission of telling their stories which are also hers. The stories Soveida tells in her autobiographical project may be divided into two categories: those in which men are the central figure – the second and the third chapters, "The Sleepwalker" and "Insurance" respectively -, for example, and those which are restricted to the domestic and less important sphere for representing women, like the fourth ("Are you Wearing a Bra?") and the sixth ("Family") chapters. In this first part, Soveida gives the reader a portrait of her closest family members, starting from her great-grandfather's story, which was the starting point of the Dosamantes' saga.

3.4.2 Archangels – the Second Part

Like angels, archangels operate close to mankind, but have specific tasks, mainly fighting against malign forces. According to Naranjo-Huebl, the archangels in this section, symbolized by the *milagro* of a prayer, are Mamá Lupita and Dolores, who do whatever they can in order to protect Soveida and Mara, Dolores's niece who was raised by the Dosamantes since her mother's death. However, due to cultural restrictions, Mamá and Dolores subject Soveida and Mara to the constraints of a patriarchal social frame. By doing so, Mamá and Dolores perpetuate the social practices which they disapprove of. Uncomfortable with the idea of marriage, Mamá makes every effort to convince Soveida to become a nun, as she sees in the religious life the most efficient way for a woman to escape the inconveniences of a marriage, as shown in the tenth chapter entitled "Saints". The malign forces here involved are strictly connected with sexuality. Not by chance, in this part, are included two relevant chapters: the ninth, meaningfully named after the folkloric figure of the Boogeyman, used to

threaten children and the eleventh, also importantly named as “Bloody Towels” in reference to Mara’s periods. The Boogeyman in question is Luardo, who abuses Mara and Soveida. In “Bloody Towels”, Soveida chronicles a weird episode in which Luardo takes her to a peepshow, in which naked women perform lewd acts. Luardo used to pay the little Soveida a quarter to accompany him, indirectly associating sex and money and making her dissociate sex from love (p. 69). In this passage, the narrator/protagonist shows the innocence of Soveida as a character and a little girl who, despite not understanding what that show meant, was fascinated by the images she saw. What delighted her the most, however, was the fact that the bizarre “entertaining activity” was a rare chance of being by her father’s side:

> Luardo would give me a quarter to see naked girls washing cars. He would hold me up to the peephole so I could place my little eye there, peering inside the moving-picture machine to see several young naked soapy women washing and then rinsing down an old Studbaker or Rambler, the foam dripping from their large breasts. I was fascinated by the moving picture and the strange incongruity of naked women washing a car in daylight. I was fascinated, too, by the close proximity to my father (p. 70).

3.4.3 Principalities – the Third Part

Symbolized by the *milagro* of a foot, whose meaning will be discussed at the end of the present division, this order of angels, as Naranjo-Huebl explains, have a duty to preside over matters that involve mankind’s profession and sexuality. It is in this section that Soveida enters – perhaps a broader significance of the *milagro* – the world of adults: she starts working at El Farol and has her first sexual experiences. It is also in this section that Soveida experiences her cultural-ethnic awakening when she meets Ivan Torres. As Naranjo-Huebl herself acknowledges, while quoting scholars Steven Chase and David Keck: “Principalities […] are also involved with raising people to honorable office”. The “honorable office”, in the realm created by Chávez in *Face of an Angel* is the task of “serving” that Soveida struggles to demystify and distinguish from “being servile”. The attractive and cultured man who helped her become aware of her cultural heritage, eventually proves to be like all men in Soveida’s family. This part ends with the chapter about Soveida’s wedding. On that very day, Mamá Lupita tells Soveida a story significantly called “The Man With Chicken Feet”, indirectly alerting Soveida that she is about to have the same experience all Chicana women after getting married: unhappiness. The man with chicken feet the title refers to would have been a man who showed up at a party at Manuel Dosamantes’s barn and who proved to be the devil.

Naranjo-Huebl interprets the *milagro* of a foot, which emblematizes this section, as a dualistic image, since it bears a positive side, which would refer to Soveida's career as a waitress, and a negative one which would suggest Ivan's evil side as he turns out to be a Chicano macho.

It is the sixteenth chapter, also included in the section in question entitled "The Memories of Waits". It is in this chapter that Soveida is guided by Milia Ocana, the head-waitress at El Farol who preceded Soveida and also taught her all about the career. As an oracle, Milia foresees that Soveida will eventually replace her: "I knew when I saw you, Soveida, that you were like me a waitress de deveras. A true waitress. Someone who loves people and enjoys the craziness of this work. Someday you'll replace me" (p. 108).

3.4.4 Powers – the Forth Part

Powers are the category of angels which play the important role of warriors and, as such, have the responsibility for identifying and fighting against evil forces. In the twenty-fifth chapter of the novel, entitled "Here is my Enemy", the enemy announced in the title is easily recognized: the Chicano macho with his unreliable and/or violent behavior, such as Ivan and the man who becomes Soveida's neighbor after her splitting from Ivan. It is also in this section that Soveida starts her "Book of Service". In its first chapter, "The Service Creed", the narrator/protagonist reflects over the possible meanings of "service" and comes to the conclusion that living is serving, as, in life, no matter who you might be, what you might do, you are always, one way or other, serving someone else. In short, Soveida identifies in her macro view of life an inevitable chain of service and also perceives that each human being has a different relationship with service.

> Children served their parents, and parents served their work, their family, their God. Towns serve states, and states countries […] Life was, and is, service, no matter what our station in it. Some wrestle more with service than others. It is those to whom more is given from whom more service is demanded (p. 172).

Concerned about defining "service", Soveida lists a set of possible meanings the term may convey. At the end, however, while associating "service" with "obedience", she admits that it is "[w]here [she] always [has] trouble" (p. 171), proving that, unlike the definition she closes her list with, she does not consider the two terms synonyms. In the same passage, Soveida attributes a sort of sacredness to her profession as a waitress: "My waitressing is

connected with, some might say based, even bound, in a divine, preordained belief in individual service" (p. 171).

It is in the first chapter of "The Book of Service" that the readers find the explanation for the image materialized in the *milagro* of a hand. Besides emblematizing this section, it also points to the title of the second chapter of Soveida's manual, devoted to the hands, a waitress's main professional instrument, according to the "author" herself. While recalling the gloves – mainly the white ones – she wore in many occasions in her life, Soveida comes to the conclusion that they were a sign that she was going through a maturing process and also that she would use her hands to carry out the profession she chose for her life:

> My gloves kept me warm and elegant. They reminded me that I was a young lady and that some day I would become a woman. I would wear white gloves to proms and down the aisle to the man who vowed **to serve** me all his life […] White gloves were my training for service (p. 172).

It is worth observing that the act of "serving" is not restricted to women, as some radical critics could argue. The fact that Soveida expects Ivan "to serve [her] all [her] life" proves that she sees "service" as an interpersonal loving relationship.

Another interesting aspect in this section is the title of the twenty-seventh chapter of *Face of an Angel*: "The House on Manzanares Street". It is flagrant and undeniable the reference to the novel *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros (1984). Not only is Cisneros a reference to all Chicana writers but also is the image of the "house" important to the narrator/protagonist's trajectory at this point. The house mentioned in the title materializes the narrator/protagonist's acquiring independence. After leaving the so-called "Brown House", where she lived with her parents and brother, Soveida moved to the house she was going to share with Ivan Torres from their marriage on. The "house on Manzanares Street" was the narrator/protagonist's space for self-knowledge as she herself states: "Before the house on Manzanares Street, I had never really lived by myself. Until I was twenty-two, I had lived with Dolores and Luardo, and five years with Ivan. For the first time in my life I was completely alone" (p. 192).

The Powers' section closes with a very important chapter in the novel, which is focused on and named after the narrator/protagonist's cleaning lady, Chata. Once again, Soveida cedes her self-referential discourse so that another character may acquire voice. Although a humble woman, Chata has important insights towards many aspects of life. One is religion, when she reasons why she thinks God is a woman, always founding her reasoning in

the activity of cleaning. The other topic is society, when she compares the opposing way Mexican and American ladies treat those who work for them. Even in a simplistic discourse – as she could not have access to education – Chata has a clear idea of cultural/ethnic identity while referring to the prejudiced way Mexican ladies address and refer to their own people:

> [O]ne of the best God's inventions has to be the fingernail. […] God knew she was doing when she invented the fingernail. And when you think about it, God had to be a woman to invent the fingernail. That's what I say. Only a female would invent the fingernail. What would we do without fingernails? (p. 212).

> I decided to move on to las americanas. They pay me what I'm worth. And they give me old furniture they don't use anymore and their clothes, which are very nice – not the rags your grandma Mamá Lupita tried to give me. Las americanas, Soveida, they're good to me […] I don't have anything against my own people, except they don't feed you or pay you what you're worth. The men run after you when their wives are gone, and try to lift up your skirts when you're hunched over cleaning out their toilet bowls, and the wives […] don't have no pity for you in anything goes wrong. They start on how a Mexicana and nobody from México can do anyting right and how mexicanas can't be trusted and so on. And they forget they're mexicanas, too. Maybe should look in the mirror (p. 214).

3.4.5 Virtues – the Fifth Part

Virtues are the category of angels who "protect the good […], fight against temptation, frustrate demonic assaults, and bestow blessings", as Naranjo-Huebl explains, once more, quoting Steven Chase and David Keck. The chapters that compose this section, except for those belonging to "The Book of Service", chronicle some kind of sorrow, justifying the imagery conveyed by the *milagro* which symbolizes it – a heart pierced with a dagger.

In the thirty-first chapter – "The Strip Poker" – Soveida describes the embarrassing situation she went through with Veryl, while she was about to take her clothes off if she lost a card game. In the following chapter, Soveida recalls how hard she had to struggle to escape the sexist – and prejudiced in all senses – Russian conductor who harassed her, arguing that Soveida was more attractive than those other Mexican women whose bodies he mockingly describes as hairy: "There was hair over every damn brown inch […] – hair like a man's wildest hair" (p. 237). The chapter that ends the section, entitled "*El panteón*", describes Soveida's everyday visits to San Pedro Cemetery to take flowers to Veryl's tomb. Overwhelmed by her second's husband suicide, Soveida "never missed a day beside Veryl's grave" (p. 264). In seeing Soveida's sorrow, the wise Oralia, the Dosamantes's lifelong maid, comes into play and, as a Virtue, convinces the narrator/protagonist that she must go on

living. The exorcism of Veryl's memory takes place by means of a "limpia", a cleansing ritual performed by Oralia, an instance of ethnography, since Chávez uses this passage to show a sort of religious practice typical of people of Indian ancestry.

The painful experiences Soveida goes through in this section may be interpreted as her "virtues", that is, her "moral goodness of character and behavior"[34], since it is also a religious – Christian mostly – conception that sorrow brings wisdom and righteousness.

3.4.6 Dominations – the Sixth Part

Dominations compose the category of angels believed to exert leadership not only over mankind, but also over those other angelic classes which are hierarchically inferior to them. Since they **watch over** both humans and angels, the *milagro* which functions as their emblem bears two eyes. A much more mature Soveida is now able to "observe" things with more discernment. As an example of this phase marked by Soveida's mature observation is her lucid analysis about J.V's personality in the forty-third chapter, humorously entitled "J.V. and the Metal Pin": "J.V. Velásquez was an educated man; he had graduated *magna cum laude* […] but underneath his pressed suit, slicked-down hair, and neatly groomed mustache there lurked a chained, unhappy, and hungry man" (p. 322). Unlike the very young Soveida who fell in love with Ivan and the still romantic woman who felt attracted to the complex Veryl, the Soveida who appears in the chapter now in question is sensitive and sensible enough to perceive there are two J.V's – one arrogant that dwells on the surface and the other, who lies underneath that apparent – and questionable – self-assurance.

Another demonstration of Soveida's maturity in this section appears in the fortieth chapter, entitled "Off Nights/On Nights", when she led a movement that resulted in the closing of El Farol. Still devastated by Veryl's tragic death, Soveida realizes she needs to take some time off. Then in a reflexive passage, the narrator protagonist talks about "the **F**ace" – with a capital letter -, an imagery that seems to point to "identity", not only hers, but also those she takes as references to outline her own. Some are volatile – her mother's, her cousin's and brother's, but others are concretely vivid like Mamá Lupita's and Oralia's who work as guardians of the Dosamantes and the Chicano culture, respectively. She then turns her analytical sense of observation towards herself, confining her need to find herself and gather her own personality, scattered by a traumatic moment:

[34] Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003, p. 1841)

> Sometimes the Face is a man. Sometimes the Face is a woman. Sometimes it's nobody. Has no body. It's ethereal and as real as a dream. I can try to describe Dolly's face or Mara's or Hector's. Ivan's I know in every pore of my body. Veryl's face is a tender memory. And to me there is no face in the world like Mamá Lupita's or Oralia's. When I saw in the mirror this morning chilled and frightened me. Behind my face were so many other faces, all of them changing before my eyes. Which one was my **real face**? The face that I knew I could accept and love? That's why I quit El Farol today. Maybe it's just to gather strength (p. 297).

Another important chapter in this section is the following one, entitled "Oralia's Story". During an interview Soveida carries out with Oralia for a college paper, the interviewee demystifies the image of inferiority the act of serving has been associated with over time. Having perpetuated a subservient relationship with the Dosamantes, Oralia did not have anything of her own: she lived – resided – with them and lived – had a life – for them. Despite this apparently inferior position, Oralia does not see – and Soveida agrees with her – devotion to the narrator/protagonist's family as servile. Oralia and Soveida find an explanation for this "non servility" in religion. The watchful relation the former keeps towards the latter's family is interpreted as that performed by an angel. It is worth examining what the two characters say about this aspect, which is corroborated by Naranjo-Huebl's theoretical analysis:

> To me, Oralia Milcantos was oftentimes more family than family. More than a servant, more than a maid, more committed than a house-keeper, she was a laundress, a scrubwoman, a cook, a nurse, a dishwasher, a nanny, but never a slave (p. 306-307).

> It's all interconnected […] Todo esto es trabajito de la vida. Everything we do, no matter how small, is part of the work of living […] The only work in life is watching people die and then dying yourself. It os an unavoidable ordeal that at a certain point transforms into the most immeasurably and exquisitely beautiful sacrament […] (p. 307 - 309).

> Like the ministries of angels, no one vocation is more important then the other – all are equally essential. Those who serve with humility like Oralia are not sevile but, rather, cognizant of their equal status in God's eyes, which explains Soveida's assertion [in the "Book of Service"] […] that the waitress is "the observer/observed sanctified by food" (p. 271).

Besides acting as an angel who devoted all her life to watch over the Dosamantes, Oralia's function in the family and in the novel is to preserve the Chicano culture. In the passage previously discussed, it was Oralia who performed the "limpia", the indigenous ancestral ritual with the purpose of keeping away bad spirits – in this specific case, Veryl's soul that would not "rest in peace". While chronicling the interview she conducted, Soveida,

as a narrator and now a Chicano culture college student, recognizes in Oralia the personification of a cultural bearer:

> Oralia Milcantos represents the voice of a woman for whom the ideals of loyalty, steadfastness, and unconditional commitment are not governed by personal gain. This way of life is, assuredly, a dying one. […] Miss Milcantos, of Indian and Mexican heritage […] is able, as a result of her [background] to unite two worlds: a Native-American belief in […] nature and its earth rituals – the spiritual interconnection of all life – with the world of Catholicism and its tenets of self-sacrifice, unselfishness, long-endured suffering. Living as she does in the modern world, she still has a window on the ancestral one. She is the bridge between cultures, languages, and beliefs. She is a representative of that bygone ideal of service, a thing of the past, only now and then remembered in this highly individualistic society (p. 306).

Still focusing on Chicano society, this section presents another interesting topic: the way Soveida portrays male authority by depicting Larry Larragoite and J.V. Velásquez in the thirty-seventh and forty-third chapters, respectively. Assessed as "unwise governors" by Naranjo-Huebl (2007, p. 62), both characters are seen as unjust, as two Chicanos who refuse to acknowledge, and much less, show deference to their cultural background. Despite their resistance against their ancestry, both Larry and J.V. make a living by exploring Mexican/Chicano ethos: the former has a restaurant specialized in Mexican food– and yet does not like eating it – and the latter is a scholar who specializes in Chicano studies.

3.4.7 Thrones – the Seventh Part

According to Naranjo-Huebl, whose sources in her essay were *Catholic Encyclopedia* and *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, this category of angels is associated with the notion of judgement. It is in this section that some characters like Luardo and Doña Trancha, Dolores's mother, lose their mobility. Therefore, paralysis may be interpreted as the lack of autonomy and death, that is, the loss of freedom of moving around while someone is alive and healthy. Therefore, in most chapters, the *milagro* of a leg symbolizes paralysis, which is, as Naranjo-Huebl argues, an equivalent to death. The idea of death, in turn, is linked to the concept of judgement, since, according to the Catholic tradition, each man is subjected to a divine trial on his dying day. The image of immobility is not only linked with the idea of death, but also with the notion of illness, which shows how frail human beings are. Naranjo-Huebl then explains:

> The image of a leg milagro ironically graces this section concerned with judgment *seats* and featuring characters who have lost the use of their legs […] The narrative

> records the deaths of Luardo and the wheelchair-bound Doña Trancha, as well the diseases and illnesses of other characters, perhaps referencing the unusual characteristic of Thrones, which are said to reside in the threshold where heaven meets earth ("Nine Choirs), where "life" meets "death" or the afterlife (Naranjo-Huebl, 2007, p. 63).

In some chapters, the concepts of death and disease are portrayed in different ways, like that in which Larry, the owner of El Farol, wants to force his employees to prepare a will – which is strictly connected with death – and leave the documents kept in a safe in the restaurant. The forty-eighth chapter, "Soveida's Will", besides foreshadowing chapter fifty-eight – "Bonnie Takes Over" – in which Larry has a heart attack and is forced to retire, also functions as a springboard for chapter fifty-two which, although included in the next section, Cherubins, concentrates on this very subject, being an extension of it. In the fifty-second chapter, then, entitled "Pito's Will", the character referred to in the title, El Farol's cook, finally surrenders to his boss's insistence and prepares his will. Larry then guides Pito, a very simple man, as to what he should include and to whom he should leave his assets. Pito insists on leaving his prosaic belongings – pots, pans, aprons, clothes, chain key, to quote some – to God, maddening Larry Larragoite. In this chapter, it is worth observing the passage in which Larry, in an attempt to convince Pito to leave his "properties" to a human being, he humorously tries to define God.

> God isn't a person. I mean, he's a person, but he's not human. He's dead, I mean, he's not dead, he's alive, well, in a manner of speaking, he's alive. You can't leave everything to God, Pito […]. Take this seriously, would you? We're talking about leaving your things – touch-and-feel *things* – to *someone*, a person, a human being, someone who breathes, is alive (p. 383).

The religious charm, however, as Naranjo-Huebl argues, may point to a different interpretation in the forty-sixth chapter, named after the narrator/protagonist's cousin's father, "Miguel Angel Fortuna": his walking out on Lina, Mara's pregnant mother. In this chapter, Mara has one of the many phone conversations with Soveida. Over this one specifically, Mara recalls her mother's suffering after giving birth to her and been abandoned by the man referred to in the title, a married man who promised leaving his wife to start a family with her and Mara, which never happened. Depressed, Lina started having massive bleedings but refused to receive medical treatment. Commenting on her mother's gradual suicide, Mara attributes to the women in her family the hallmark of penance[35]: "That's the way the Loera

[35] Penance: something that you must do to show that you are sorry for something you have done wrong, especially in some religions (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003, p. 1215).

women are, Soveida. They abuse their own bodies in the guise of shame. It just goes to show how stupid women are, how eternally, confoundingly stupid. Stupid with love, stupid with grief. Just plain stupid" (p. 340).

The section closes with the forty-ninth chapter, in which Soveida shares with her readers the most intimate secret of her painful relationship with Ivan Torres: the sexually transmissible diseases she got from him throughout their marriage. Recalling a dialog she had with her grandmother, Soveida reveals not only the partnership, the complicity there is between the two, but also that suffering in silence was a duty for Chicana women for the sake of keeping their marriage:

> Ivan's girlfriends came and went. I knew them by my body's symptoms: infections, fevers, tiredness, allergies […] No one really knew I was sick, except Mamá Lupita, who looked at me, then through me, and knew: "What's wrong with you, Soveida? Otra arrimada? Another one of them got close? […] Mamá knew but never confronted me at length. To do so would be to negate the Sacrement. And that's exactly what it was those two last years – the sacrament of penance (p. 366).

In the same chapter, Soveida writes a letter to a woman who, like herself, is a regular reader of a column in a newspaper written by a doctor. In that letter, she tries to clarify what "the career woman's disease" stands for – an expression used by the woman's doctor. In her text, Soveida assesses the problem and comes to the conclusion that "feeling pain" is a duty socially attributed to women only and admits that they have been paralyzed, by concealing their sufferings, specially if they are related to their intimacy:

> For too many women, pain is a career, their sole career. I know. Our mothers have lived with it every day because they were too ashamed to admit they hurt "down there". They've masked their itches, their burns, their flows. They've said it's nothing, but the pain wouldn't go away. They'd try to forget about their curse, for that is what it is when pain goes on too long. They would say everything is fine, when it wasn't (p. 367)

This silent suffering and this idea of penance are still an aftermath of a mythical aspect of the Chicano culture: the concept that all Chicanas, by descending from *La Maliche*, are betrayers, and as such, must bear the burden of suffering to pay for an ancestral guilt. Alluding to Gloria Anzaldúa, Philippa Kafka (2000) talks about this aspect:

> [Gloria Anzaldúa] indicts "male culture" for brainwashing Chicanas into believing that treachery flowed into their veins at birth from their maternal line only, from their female Indian foremother. [By saying so, Anzaldúa] is striking back at the centuries of masculinist discourse that conceptualized Malinche as a traitor (KAFKA, 2000, p. xvi).

3.4.8 Cherubim – the Eighth Part

This category of angel, like that which names the last part – Seraphim – "are said to be the guardians of God's glory, serving God around the throne" (Naranjo-Huebl, 2007, p. 64). Perhaps, for being closer to God, they may have the privilege of passing on to humans wisdom, knowledge, enlightenment. The *milagro* which is symbolizing this part, not by chance, is a woman's head, suggesting that the narrator/protagonist is about to complete her maturing process. Considering that the novel is also moving towards its end, the chronological interval between the time of narration and the time of enunciation is getting narrower and narrower. This, therefore, means that the psychological gap between Soveida as a narrator and the narrated versions she presents of herself (as a child, as a teenager and as a still immature young lady) is diminishing. This narrowing is the result of the narrator/protagonist's acquiring wisdom and knowledge through her life experience, her academic learning and, mainly, the influence exerted by Oralia, whose cultural importance Soveida herself acknowledges in the novel. Naranjo-Huebl then asserts:

> At this point in the narrative, the Cherubim, consistent with the milagro of a woman's head, would represent those wise and enlightened women in Soveida's life, particularly Oralia, whose legacy will enable Soveida to complete her journey, as well as Soveida herself, who has become wise as a result of her own life experiences. These chapters recount several of the great lessons Soveida has learned from the knowledge she has gained (Naranjo-Huebl, 2007, p. 65).

One of the most important chapters in this part is the fifty-first. Named after the title of the book, it contains the explanation of what "face of an angel" stands for. The phrase that figures as the title for Denise Chávez's novel bears a deep sexist positioning, since it means the way women must be, according to Chicano men: they must be (and behave) like angels, but in their intimacy, must show outstanding sexual talent. After overhearing her brother say "She has the face of an angel and she likes to fuck" (p. 375), even not knowing whom he was referring to – whether to Ada, his fiancée, or to his mistress Virgie -, Soveida, like a cherubim, makes use of the wisdom she acquired in life and tries to warn her sister-in-law to be. Astonished by the fact that Ada does not consider the episode serious, Soveida starts reflecting over Hector's perspective towards women: "I overheard him telling [that] about some woman. But it doesn't matter *who* he was talking about. He was thinking that! […] All I

know is that he said something I wasn't meant to hear […] because when he said it about her, he said it about all women" (p. 376).

After hearing Dolores's saying that it is not worth worrying about Hector because he is "that way" (p. 376), Soveida criticizes women's way of raising their sons – which she had already done in the forty-second chapter, previously commented on here. By minimizing the reprehensible behavior their sons adopt towards women, mothers end up perpetuating a patriarchal model of society they themselves are victims of.

> When Dolly was Dolores, boys were boys, and girls were girls. Boys wore blue and girls were pink. Boys were snakes and snails and puppy-dog tails. Girls were sugar and spice amd everything nice. That's how it was then. Hector was in that then, still. […] It's no surprise, then, that Hector is *that* way. Luardo had been *that* way. And my grandfather Profe, and his father, too. And his father's father. All of them. That way, Those Dosamantes (p. 376).

Another chapter in this section that deserves to be examined is the fifty-fifth one. Bearing in its title a biblical reference, "Lupita's Ruth" talks about the solidarity there must be among women who share a past of oppression. The Ruth referred to in the title is Dolores who, despite having a complicated relationship with Mamá Lupita throughout the novel, manages to form a sentimental bond with her former mother-in-law. As Soveida herself concludes, "[Dolores] loved her mother-in-law more than she dared to admit" (p. 408). In the chapter now discussed, Mamá Lupita, fearing death is coming soon, wants to reconcile with Dolores and, mainly, with Mara who left Agua Oscura, escaping from Mamá's austere treatment. While assuming she is now in her death bed, the Dosamantes matriarch decides to make a sentimental inventory and analyse the bonds there were between herself, Dolores and Mara. Thus the narrator/protagonist's grandmother compares the tree of them to biblical elements. According to the reading of the fifteenth chapter of Exodus, "Mara" is the name of Sur desert which Moses crossed with the Hebrew people. It received that name because the little water found in there was not potable for its bitterness. Under Lupita's lens, it explains Soveida's cousin's resentment towards the Dosamantes. The social frame which the three characters grew up in produced antagonistic roles they were forced to play, which caused them to nurture some sort of hate for each other: Dolores, under Mamá Lupita's perspective, was the one who took her favorite child away from the Dosamantes's home; Mamá Lupita, in Dolores's eyes, embodied the stereotypical mother-in-law who insists on interfering in her son's relationship with his wife; Mara, in Mamá's and Dolores's eyes, is the illegitimate child of a woman – Dolores's sister – who "dared" to fall in love with a married man and get

pregnant with his child; Mamá and Dolores, under Mara's lens, are those who exploited and mistreated an orphan, who has the Dosamantes as her only family reference.

3.4.9 Seraphim – the Ninth and Last Part

Considered as complementary to the Cherubim, the Seraphim, according to Naranjo-Huebl, is the category of angel who is closest to God. Surrounding the divine throne, Seraphim symbolizes passion and love. The biblical meaning of the Seraphim is connected to the action of representativeness. Isaiah, who considered himself and his people as impure, after having been blessed by God, was given the duty of delivering His message. The meaning of these two categories of angels is strictly related to Soveida's mission in the novel. With the help of Oralia's and Lizzie, her feminist lesbian nun friend, Soveida manages to find a new and consistent view of what comes to be "service".

In addition to the concept of "service" Oralia had given Soveida during the interview narrated in the forty-first chapter "Oralia's Story", in the fifty-ninth chapter, "Nuns", Lizzie asserts that "each of us chooses our service", corroborating the notion of "service" as a mission in life that any human being has. What is worth observing in Lizzie's sentence is the use of the verb "choose". As a character who is mostly characterized by her desire for liberation – let us not forget that Lizzie is an activist even after becoming a nun – Lizzie's assertion attests to her belief that the mission each person has in life is a personal choice, perhaps contrasting with Oralia's idea of a duty pre-established by God. As Naranjo-Huebl argues, it is in this final part that Soveida is finally prepared to pass on to her family the lessons she learned in life – mainly to dismantle the misconception of "service" – and also to be their representative as a member of the Chicano society. Therefore, Naranjo-Huebl sees a connection between this part and Soveida's defining in the first chapter, "A Long Story", her mission in the novel: "I speak for them now […] Their memories are mine. That sweet telling mine. Mine the ash. It's a long story". (p. 4). As Naranjo-Huebl argues, Soveida emerges from those ashes and, purified by the angelic service she has performed in life, takes upon herself to reveal family and communal virtues and failures. Then, as a narrator, Soveida proposes to talk about those who partake her memories but seeing them as people, as she herself acknowledges "[p]eople like myself with hunger and hope[;] [p]eople with failings" (p. 3).

This final section has yet another important significance: it is in this part, more precisely in the last chapter entitled "The Blue House" that Soveida, pregnant, moves to

Mamá Lupita's house. Thus, after going through all the maturing process chronicled in the novel and now about to promote the perpetuation of the Dosamantes's family, Soveida is rewarded with a house which will be of her own for keeps. It is interesting to observe that, perhaps intentionally, Chávez chose blue for Mamá Lupita's house, applying to it chromatic symbolism. By making it blue, Chávez seems to have given it a heavenly aspect in opposition to Luardo and Dolores's house, where the narrator/protagonist grew up, to which she gave the earthly brown color – the Brown House, as Soveida refers to. The imagery of house that Chávez constructs here is unlike that, already commented on here, outlined by Julian Olivares (1996). Instead of epitomizing a place of oppression, the Blue House is the apex of Soveida's journey during which she overturns the Manichean view of service, constructed by the Chicano patriarchal society. The end of *Face of Angel* does not portray a radical rupture promoted by the narrator/protagonist in relation to her family and cultural background. On the contrary, a mature and educated Soveida goes back to her grandmother's house to continue a family cycle, but this process will be guided by the principles she has learned in life. Naranjo-Huebl then asserts:

> In her celebration her celebration of service, Chávez redefines the angel and acknowledges the diversity in work performed not only by [mankind] but in service to the good and true. Chávez ends her book with Soveida moving into her new home – a remodeled version of Mammá Lupita's house, signifying not a total abandonment of her heritage but, rather an improvement to it – to raise her child in the light of what she has learned. Thus, Chávez installs a new alternative angel in the house, described as a homecoming (NARANJO-HUEBL, 2007, p. 68).

Whoever reads Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel* will surely be intrigued by the format given by the author to Soveida Dosamantes's fictional autobiography: a first person account, linearly organized, whose chapters are grouped in parts named after categories of angels. While establishing a parallel between Soveida's journey and the progressive course of the angelic ranks – from angels, who are closer to humans to Seraphim, who are closer to God -, Chávez makes use of a textual strategy which in one of postmodernism's hallmarks: parodic intertextuality. At a first glance, what would appear to be contradictory or even disrespectful – the use of religious tradition to characterize an earthly individual, is indeed a remarkable feature of postmodern literary production, as Linda Hutcheon points out: "To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact, to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. And this is the postmodern paradox" (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 6). Thus, Chávez appropriates some of the most sacred images of Catholicism and connects them with a profane/prosaic element – an

average Chicana who receives the mission of telling her his/story and, in the wake of it, the his/stories of her family that represents a whole ethos. When Chávez, in each part of her novel, confers a certain title of angel to a Chicana with a trajectory like that of Soveida's, she subverts the traditional religious discourse. However, it is important to point out here that, by doing so, Chávez is not attempting to destroy the religious beliefs she grew up with and which are cherished by the Chicano society. Therefore, it seems legitimate to affirm that Chávez, by bringing something sacred to the mundane sphere is actually offering her readers an alternative and questioning interpretation of tradition.

CONCLUSION

Attempting to close the present research, it seems appropriate to bring together the conclusive arguments that compose each of the three chapters this dissertation: the first one, which focused on the dialog between fiction and history promoted by Denise Chávez in *Face of an Angel*; the second that, based on the imbalance between men and women in Chicano society, presented a particular aspect – and perhaps one of the main features – of that cultural and ethnic group; and the third and last one, which dealt with Soveida Dosamantes's autobiographical project that, in fact, works as a communal discourse which represents a whole ethos, including men and women as individuals.

By opening the first chapter with the excerpts of "America, the Beautiful" and "The New Colossus", I intended to show the misleading image of the U.S portrayed in Katherine Bates's and Emma Lazarus's poems: a hospitable country which was ready to act as a balsam for those who suffered in their "impious and unfair" homelands. It is this deceptive discourse, with clear propagandistic purpose, that postmodern literature seeks to deconstruct. Therefore, based on the works by Lúkacs, Hutcheon and the other critics consulted for the present research, it seems correct to state that Chávez's *Face of an Angel*, regarded as a postmodern fiction, was indeed historically contextualized and, as a fictional work, aims to offer another version of history, an interpretation that focuses on dismantling that false idea of a welcoming nation. As Linda Hutcheon (1989) argues, this contextualization is inevitable, since history and literature operate within the same set of cultural values, without privileging one over the other, that is, both occupy important statuses in the same system and perform in a complementary e cooperative mode. Throughout this research, we also saw that, along with the adjective "postmodern", *Face of an Angel* deserves the qualifier "post/neocolonial", if we consider that Chávez engenders a fictional memoir in which the narrator/protagonist proposes to depict a particular cultural group singled out by racial intermixing and affected by multifaceted racism: *mestizos* being looked down by white of Spanish background and both these groups discriminated by the so-called Anglos.

What is important to point out here is that the dimmed boundary between reality and fiction, a typical trace of postmodern narrative, is chronicled by a fictional narrator who was created based on a real woman role found in Chicano society. Closing the chapter devoted to history, it seems legitimate to affirm that, no matter how chronologically apart the periods focused on may be, the Chicano subjects portrayed in the novel fit the concept of postcolonial subject conceived by Ella Shohat (1992), subjects who, though unaware that they are product

of the same continuous process of racial and social interaction and transformation, live constantly tensioned relations.

In the second chapter, it was possible to conclude that, by using gender confrontation as her springboard, Chávez, through her narrator/protagonist's voice, reproduces a microcosm of Chicano society. Chávez uses Soveida Dosamantes's self-referential discourse to discuss a point largely focused on by Chicana writers, whether in critical articles or in fictional/poetic production: traditional Mexican family values. Chávez then creates Soveida Dosamantes who, in spite of descending from a family whose women members were raised to work as "mothers, submissive wives, custodians of the unity of the family and the community" (OLIVER-ROTGER, 2003, p. 110), follows a trajectory marked by autonomy and freedom, conditions that have been dreamed of and struggled for by feminists since the 1960s. By doing so, the author elaborates a family saga, at the end of which the narrator/protagonist subverts all the roles imposed on women not only by men, but by other women who, even unconsciously, perpetuate a cultural system that subjugates them.

What is important to point out here is that the end reserved by Chávez to Soveida Dosamantes was, in fact, the outcome of a process that started with her grandmother, Mamá Lupita. After the death of her husband, Profetario Dosamantes – or maybe before it, as there is no information about this point in particular in the novel – Mamá Lupita takes over the Dosamantes' family. Since the very beginning of Soveida's account, Guadalupe Dosamantes – named after Mexico's patron saint like many other Mexican and Mexican American women – is depicted as the family's major authority and, as such, deserves all the deference of those under her "protection". Even not attempting to reach such a privileged status in her family, it is undeniable that Mamá Lupita's transition from a common Chicana wife to the Dosamantes' matriarch endowed her with familial and communal power. Dolores Dosamantes, in turn, underwent some sort of liberation process: she left behind the image of "sufferer" that seems to have been destined to her since birth - her suggestive name, to begin with – and set off an emancipation process that started at the moment she divorced Luardo. Dolores's development – no idea of "progress" involved here – culminated with her marrying an Anglo, that is, her replacing the undesirable model of a husband which Luardo, as a Chicano, performed, according to her own evaluation, by another who could respect her and treat her with respect. Soveida, in turn, was free enough to choose another path: that of a single mother. Unlike her grandmother, who remained married to her husband until his dying day, and her mother, who, as it seems, associated the idea of happiness with that of marriage, Soveida decided to carry on by herself, but assuming the responsibility of continuing the Dosamantes' lineage. If we

keep on analysing Chicano society from the perspective of "familism", Soveida really ruptures with a pattern of family that has its genesis in a marital nucleus. Tying up the second chapter, it seems legitimate to assert that Soveida Dosamantes subverts tradition at two levels: as a character, by destroying the traditional family stricture, one of the pillars of Chicano society, and, as a narrator, daring to share with her readers all the intimacies and secrecies of her family.

By the points developed in the third and last chapter, it is possible to come to the conclusion that Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel* constitutes a fictional autobiography by means of which its narrator/protagonist exposes an internal view of Chicano society. The theoretical material used in the chapter now in question showed an important conclusive point: traditionally seen as a narrative genre exclusive to men of certain hierarchical position, autobiography has proven to be a valued tool for minorities to construct their counter-hegemonic discourse. At the end of the first subsection of the chapter currently discussed, I proposed to consider which of the three distinguishing characteristics spotted by Duque-Estrada (2009) in the autobiographical projects she analysed in her article could be identified in Soveida Dosamantes's bildungsroman: **reflexivity** – in Montaigne's *Essays* -, **representation** – in Rousseau's *Confessions* – and **dispersion** – in Barthes's *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. As the autobiographical-I in *Face of an Angel*, Soveida Dosamantes frequently **reflects** not only over herself, but also over the environment she grew up in and, as a mature narrator, proposed to observe and talk about. Soveida, as a narrator and as a member of a minority group, tries to form her identity, that is, to **represent** herself as an individual and also as a Chicana. Along Soveida's narrative, it is visible that the narrator is conscious that she is dealing with many variations of her "self", versions that are **dispersed** in the instances of past she tries to rescue through writing. Closing the third chapter, I suggest examining the sort of textual framework Chávez chose to build Soveida's life writing. We then conclude that the division given to the novel is, in fact, a reference to the narrator/protagonist maturing process. At the very beginning of the novel, already as a narrator, Soveida Dosamantes proposes to tell her life story which she cannot dissociate from those who partook and still partake her life experience. While recalling and rebuilding her past textually, Soveida reviews the way she evaluated her parents, ex-husbands and friends, inviting the reader to witness her development – from angel to seraphim – as a woman deeply marked by her cultural community.

Finally I propose that Denise Chávez, by giving voice to Soveida Dosamantes, exposes the blackspots experienced by Chicanas in the border of The Unites Sates and

Mexico. Therefore, the author, by means of the narrator/protagonist, represents in her fictional realm types who inhabit the factual Chicano universe. Through this authorial binary – Chávez, as the real author, and Soveida, as the fictional one – both women speak for all Chicanas who see reproduced in their domestic ambience the same power relation that any Chicano – women or men – is subjected to in order to survive in the WASP world. In an attempt to affirm themselves as subjects, Chicano men repeat in their households the same oppressing attitude they are victims of outside home. It is in the domestic environment that they manage to impose their will, having the illusion that they are in charge.

Thus, among characters, fictional events and also references to the so-called real world, Chávez entitles Soveida to talk about herself and also about those she shares the same cultural heritage with, thus applying to her fictional autobiographic account the feature of authenticity, expected in this discursive genre. What is important to highlight here is that Soveida Dosamantes's confidences do not bear a denouncing or combative tone. On the contrary, Chávez's narrator/protagonist seems to be conscious that, at the moment of enunciation, she presents a mature, and to some extent impersonal, perspective as she herself admits in the first paragraph of the novel (p. 1), already quoted here.

It is by means of her life writing that Soveida rebuilds not only her past but also her family's and it is through this textual retrospective that she finds explanation for the social dynamics that she partook all her life. Thus, Chávez's narrator/protagonist establishes a cause-consequence relationship between past and present, evidencing that she is aware that her experience is the result of a historical process, that is, the sequence of events her past is made up of also made the community she belongs to. Responding to her grandmother's Lupita's request, Soveida outlines – and carries out – her autobiographical project in order to break the cycle of patriarchy perpetuated by Chicano society – and she does not spare Chicana women this responsibility – and make previously silenced voices be heard. Soveida Dosamantes's fictional autobiographical writing is a woman's version of what happens in most Chicano homes, marked by frustration provoked by a succession of historical mistakes. As it is evidenced in the passage quoted below, Soveida shows her awareness that any change in this sense will be also a result of a process and that it will take some more generations to put a definite end to *La lucha* – "or the struggle that Mexican Americans have to live through in order to survive" (RICHTER, 1999, p. 277): "My grandmother's voice was rarely heard, it was a whisper, a moan, Who heard? My mother's voice cried out in rage and pain, who heard? My voice is strong. It's breath. New Life. Song. Who hears?" (p. 1). Therefore, by

entitling Soveida Dosamantes as a spokeswoman, Denise Chávez enables her narrator/protagonist to make her and other Chicanas to be heard.

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Appendix A – "Y tu, qué?/And What About You?" (*Face of an Angel* – chapter 5)

5

Y tú, ¿qué?

And What About You?

Home is coming back when you've been away, messing up the covers and lying underneath them in darkness without anyone to demand anything of you: no food, no sex, no errands of service, no talk, no noise, no smells, no thought. When I was a child, everything was so quiet. People talked without talking. There was no need for words, for all the business words entail: emotions, arguments, misunderstandings. Mother, my mother, was never one for words. Anything that could be stated could just as well be conveyed with a look, a raised eyebrow, a curled lip.

My mother's parents weren't born deaf but you might have thought they were. She grew up in a house of silent innuendo. Mother, my mother's name was Trancha. She was a cold woman. When I see what she had to endure, I understand her coldness.

My father, Primitivo, was a

The Dolores I first met was wild, eager, spirited. Everything was miraculous to her. Men. The way men were. The way they smelled.

Pressing her small fingers into my flesh, she would touch me as if she were deciphering some ancient language, some mysterious and lost culture blessedly removed from her own. When she made love to me she called out to the woman who had created her, to all the other women who had existed before her, women whose life it was to love. She told them that she loved me. Me! That was how it was then.

Dolores was filled with a hunger men love to see, to know, a hunger that makes men desirous and headstrong and committed. She would be mine. All of her. That little girl with the large brown eyes, the small, delicate hands, the great burning heart.

It's hard for me to talk. It's been

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miner. He lived with us so little I often wondered if I really did have a father. Often we didn't have enough food or heat. Mother, my mother, was not a good cook. Her cooking got worse and eventually it stopped altogether. If we needed to eat, my older sister, Lina, usually cooked. Home was Lina baking pies or empanaditas de camote or her flat bread made of tortilla dough, with the fork marks evenly spaced to let the air escape. Home was the three of us women in a house of women, each doing something different. Mother sitting at the window staring out into that great vast darkness, me reading something while chewing on a piece of Lina's bread, and Lina at the stove, cooking.

"Spanish rice. It's all in the guiso, Dolores. Brown your onions with the rice. That's the secret, and then, when they're done, brown, not burnt, quickly put in the tomato sauce, but not the water, not just yet, and let it all simmer. When that's ready, it's time for the water, hot, the hottest from the tap, or boiled, better."

Lina's rice. Lina's bread. Mother staring out the window near the door, as close to the darkness as she could get without getting lost in it. Waiting for my father to come home from the mine. His life was one long errand for someone other than his family. so long since I've felt this way for her. After that first year I never saw the woman I loved again. These last two years we've been two strangers cohabiting the same space, nodding and holding mumbled conversations, not knowing or caring if the other heard. We listen to each other abstractedly, halfheartedly, ignoring the occasional spontaneous bursts of truth that sputter out like bubbles of saliva and are swallowed.

"Maybe it would be best if I went away, Dolores."

"Do as you please."

"You're choking me! I'm suffocating!"

"Don't let your mother hear you. When you yell, it upsets her. You know she can hear everything from the Blue House."

"You leave my mother out of this. I have to go away! All of you are killing me."

"Mamá Lupita can hear you!"

"It's not good, it never was. And now you suspect me of *that*. I never did *that*, not *that*. Not to my own child!"

"Mara wasn't your child! She was my dead sister's child!"

"You expected too much!"

"I was your wife!"

"You make me tired! You talk too much."

"*I* talk too much? You don't talk at all. Your silence is driving me mad!"

"How can I talk when there isn't

When he came home, it was to die.

It's no wonder my mother never cooked. Who was there to cook for? Her parents were both deaf and she grew up without childish rhymes, with an unsure alphabet. She was the last child, with several other brothers and sisters, all of them gone. She was the baby, her parents' tongue.

She met a man, Primitivo, also of few words. Their courtship was one of nods, unspoken agreement. There was the comfort of his solidity. Never bother with the words. What can words do but lie?

Mother knew the warmth of him those early mornings of their first year as she knew his face, his strong back and his hands, working. She knew his breath as light in the long, intractable obscurity of night. What she didn't know was that one day he would be gone and that she would become the mother, father, lover to herself. It's not surprising that Mother grew old that way, sitting by the door, waiting. Waiting for that warmth. It had been so glorious.

Every time my father would come back home he'd leave his hurried seed. And when he returned again, Mother had lost another child, usually a boy. Out of the twelve, only Emanuelina and I survived. My father, Primitivo Loera, was an unfortunate vagabond. All it got him in the end anything to say, when the saying time is gone . . ."

"She'll hear you!"

"Let her, goddammit! So she'll know you're killing me and why I have to go."

"Luardo! Don't!"

"Stop crying! Don't you ever get tired of crying?"

When I first met Dolores she was a child, she couldn't be touched enough. She was Don Primitivo Loera's little girl, María Dolores, the quiet one, the one who lived across from the cemetery. She tracked me down and sought me out and begged for loving.

All the girls wanted me. I'm not lying. Everyone's secrets were revealed in el Padre Cantucci's confessional. He was a greasy, corpulent loafer who loved to gossip and who delighted in directing lives. My objective then was to break away from all that hypocrisy.

Dolores was thirteen and I was twenty-two. I had moved away from home long before, and had lived alone, and with women, working wherever I could. I didn't want to run my father's store. I wanted to work for the government. My best friend, Chante, had a cousin who was a plumber. He said the plumber's life was good, occasional shit, get it done, and get paid. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I was going

was that curse of illness that plagued him, aged him, broke him, covered him at last.

"Out there," he said, "that's where I want to be buried. Where a man can breathe fresh air." So, when he died, Mother buried him in San Pedro Cemetery, across the street from her house, a place where he had never spent much time. Never mind the fresh air. He had already had his share of it. Mother knew where he was, at last. Near the little cactus Juanita Archibeque had put up in memory of her husband, Antonio, near the Camuñezes' little baby girl, Nefrida, who had died when she was only two months old, near old Padre Faustino, the priest who had choked to death eating menudo for supper, near her mother and father, close to all her sons and Zoraida, her other daughter, and near where she, too, would be buried someday. From her window Mother could see the statue of San Pedro holding his simulated gold-leaf keys. He and Primitivo Loera were out of the wind, sheltered under some leafy trees, facing the mountains, in the shade.

I can understand Mother, my mother's coldness. Our house was a house of women. Women waiting. Lina baking, me reading. Mother, my mother, sitting in the darkness. Me trying to escape my mother's hunger and the to do something. To make something of my life.

Dolores was thin but she was full-breasted. She was pale then, face like an angel's. Her hair was long. She wore it braided around her head, a black halo with white ribbons that kept slipping off. She had to keep undoing and redoing it again and again.

What I desired most in her was her desire. She was so eager to love. She gave me wonderful pleasure then. Not full pleasure like Mauricia, my girlfriend, who was a woman and felt things fully, but a tumultuous pleasure I had never experienced.

Chante told me, "Leave the kid alone, she'll drive you mad or get you married." But I always liked them young. Soft like that. Waiting for me to tell them what to do. Little girls. He was right. Funny!

After my daughter, Soveida, was born, Dolores's body came to life. She became a woman. Dolores was twenty-five when Hector came along, seven years after Soveida. At thirty Dolores was lovely, but then all the loving stopped.

Before I knew Dolores, I couldn't love. After I loved her she became a stranger. Damn el Padre Cantucci's predictions!

Dolores spread: hips, thighs, stomach. She was never fat, she looked good, her breasts large,

smell of food, once hot, now cold.

"Mother! I'm hungry!"

"María Dolores Loera! Enough! We'll wait for your father, he should be here soon!"

"You and your women killed me."

"Them? They were a replacement."

"Hell, yes, for the space in your chest where a heart should be. You can't feel anything."

"*I* can't feel. That's good, a cold stone talking about feeling."

"Yes!"

"You can't feel."

"Stop it! She'll hear you!"

"That's all you wanted me for, to escape your mother—that old woman. She couldn't feel either, that's why you are the way you are."

"Yes, I wanted to escape. Y tú, ¿qué?"

"I have to leave. You don't understand, do you?"

"*She'll hear you!*"

"Chante was right, little girl. Have my balls on a spit, roast them, serve them cooked in your sex. Christ, it's been my hell."

"Whodoyouthinkyouarethe world'sgreatestloverallthegirls followyoutotheendsoftheearth throwthemselvesdowncryforyou dieforyouLuardo?"

"Y tú, ¿qué? What about you?"

not saggy. She would go to bed early and undress when I was out of the room. When I got to her, she would be asleep with a rosary in her hand.

"You and your women killed me."

"Them? They were a replacement."

"Hell, yes, for the space in your chest where a heart should be. You can't feel anything."

"*I* can't feel? That's good, a cold stone talking about feeling."

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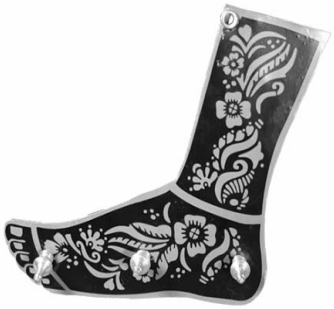
"Y tú, ¿qué? What about you?"

APPENDIX B – PARTS OF THE NOVEL

FIRST PART	MILAGRO	THE ANGELS AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Angels		**FUNCTION** – The closest to humankind, they are to listen to humans' sufferings and demands. **THE ANGELS:** The narrator/protagonist, as her function is to listen to all she represents.

SECOND PART	MILAGRO	THE ARCHANGELS AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Archangels		**FUNCTION** – Also close to humans, their duty is to fight against malign forces. **THE ARCHANGELS:** Dolores and Mamá Lupita, represented by woman praying, as they try to protect Soveida and Mara, her cousin, from any harm.

THIRD PART	MILAGRO	THE PRINCIPALITIES AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Principalities		**FUNCTION** – preside over profession and sexuality **THE ARCHANGELS:** Mamá Lupita who tries to persuade Soveida not to get married to Ivan (sexuality/marriage); Milia Ocana (profession).

FORTH PART	MILAGRO	THE POWERS AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Powers		**FUNCTION** – Operate as warriors, powers are responsible for identifying and fighting against evil forces. **THE POWERS:** Soveida, who ends her disastrous marriage with Ivan; Chata, Soveida's cleaning lady who refuses to work for exploitative Mexican ladies.

FIFTH PART	MILAGRO	THE VIRTUES AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Virtues		**FUNCTION** – protect against the evil and endow blessings. **THE VIRTUES –** Soveida, who insisted on trusting a problematic husband forwhom she nurtured some sort of maternal feeling. Oralia who resourses to ancestral practices in order to protect Soveida from Veryl's hopeless soul who cannot rest in peace.

SIXTH PART	MILAGRO	THE DOMINATIONS AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Dominations		**FUNCTION** – exert leadership over mankind and others categories of angels **THE DOMINATION IN THE SECTION –** Thanks to education**,** Soveida acquires more reflexive sense of observation and is, thus, able to analyse those around her under a more critical perspective.

SEVENTH PART	MILAGRO	THE THRONES AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Thrones		**FUNCTION** – judge those who are "paralyzed", which metaphorically means "about to die". **THE THRONES IN THE SECTION –** Soveida in relation to Luardo and Mara in relation to her father, Miguel Angel Fortuna.

EIGHTH PART	MILAGRO	THE CHERUBIM AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Cherubim		**FUNCTION** – guarding God's throne, which can be interpreted as the Dosamantes's family and the Chicano culture. **THE CHERUBIM IN THE SECTION –** Soveida who, after acquiring academic knowledge, also gained the proper discernment to watch over her own family and people.

NINTH PART	MILAGRO	THE SERAPHIM AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)
Seraphim		**FUNCTION** – spread love and is the category of angel which is closest to God. **THE SERAPHIM IN THE SECTION –** Soveida, about to perpetuate the Dosamantes' lineage with her pregnancy and after reaching a high level of maturity, moves to Mamá Lupita's house, which symbolizes some sort of hierarchical – with no notion of power involved – position.