

# HUMOR IN FACE OF AN ANGEL, BY DENISE CHÁVEZ: *A COUNTERHEGEMONIC DISCURSIVE TOOL*

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## RESUMO

O presente artigo tem por objetivo discutir o uso do humor na autobiografia ficcional *Face of an Angel*, da autora estadunidense Denise Chávez. Ao empregar comentários carregados de comicidade sobre temas que, a princípio, exigiriam tratamento criterioso – a condição social da mulher Chicana, casamento, religião e identidade cultural –, a autora, através do discurso autobiográfico de sua narradora/protagonista, expõe de forma crítica, mas bem-humorada, personagens, situações e práticas que compõem um universo cultural tão peculiar. O humor cáustico do texto autorreferencial de Soveida Dosamantes, a narradora/protagonista do romance em questão, tem por objeto a sociedade chicana, cujos recortes são sua própria família e a pequena cidade ficcional de Agua Oscura, onde se desenrola a trama.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** humor; família; sociedade chicana.

## ABSTRACT

The present article aims to discuss the use of humor in the fictional autobiography *Face of an Angel*, by U.S. writer Denise Chávez. While employing comments imbued with comicality about topics which, at first, require serious treatment – Chicanas' social condition, marriage, religion and cultural identity –, the author, through her narrator/protagonist's autobiographical discourse, exposes, in a critical but humorous way, characters, situations and practices that compose such a peculiar cultural universe. The caustic humor contained within the self-referential text by Soveida Dosamantes, the narrator/protagonist of the novel in question, has as its target Chicano society, the cutouts of which are her own family and the fictional town of Agua Oscura, where the plot unfolds.

**KEYWORDS:** humor; family; Chicana society.

The use of humor as a discursive resource by artists considered as socially underprivileged dates from ancient times with the Greek satires. While discussing Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque literature, Brazilian scholar José Luiz Fiorin (2008) wisely observes that:

[o]pposed to the centripetal force exerted by the discourse of authority is laughter, which leads to an acute perception of the existence of a centrifugal discursive force. It desecrates and relativizes the discourse of power, showing it as one among many and, hence, demolishing the closed and impermeable monolingualism of the discourses that attribute high value to seriousness, immutability and the official discourses of order and hierarchy (FIORIN, 2008, p. 89<sup>i</sup> – my translation).

In the American continent, the ideas of humor as a tool for criticizing the Establishment and the Mexican culture are deeply associated with a once popular figure in the movies scenario: Mario Moreno Cantinflas<sup>ii</sup>, whose name might ring a bell for those who are now over fifty. Famous for portraying the so-called *pelado*, that is, the impoverished *campesino* who struggles to succeed, Cantinflas used exactly what could be regarded as a stereotypical image – a “ ‘trickster figure”, as U.S. scholar Gutierrez-Jones (2004) calls it – in order to subvert the established order. Who could forget the anthological scene, in the 1968 production *Por Mis Pistolas*, in which Cantinflas, once more playing his emblematic character and using an apparently naïve speech, full of sarcastic hints, tries to convince a border officer to let him trespass the barrier that divides the two countries? What is important to point out here is that Cantinflas's buffoon-like personage is humbly asking to enter a territory that once belonged to the Mexican people, before the annexation legitimized by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848.

This purposely humorous discourse detected in Cantinflas's films, however, according to Gutierrez-Jones, still needs to be fully explored and due theorized. Given the fact that artists of color not only in the U.S., but also in the culturally called “Western world”, seek to be legally recognized, “humor can look like an escape valve, or perhaps a disruptive sideshow” (GUTIERREZ, 2004, p. 2). Nevertheless, Gutierrez-Jones agrees that the sort of humor employed by artists of color works, in fact, as a refined resource by which this marginalized group questions and counteracts the canonic models. Moreover, by using sarcastic discourse to destabilize the hegemonic white-European-oriented mainstream,

marginalized artists make use of what Gutierrez-Jones calls “engaged humor”, as he argues in his essay:

Many of these artist have turned to “engaged humor”, and Chicano<sup>iii</sup> culture in particular offers compelling evidence of this strategy as Chicano artists have built on the traditions of political humor derived from Mexico, and on the longstanding struggles over literacy that were played out in courts as the United States unmade the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the treaty that ceded half of Mexico to the U.S. as a result of the U.S/Mexico war of 1846-48” (GUTIERREZ-JONES, 2004, p. 3).

U.S. writer Denise Chávez, while engendering the plot of *Face of an Angel* (1994), a fictional autobiography in which she gives voice to an ordinary waitress, makes use of the same discursive strategy. In order to both criticize Chicano patriarchal society and expose the complexity of interpersonal relations within a family environment, Chávez recreates in her novel a domestic ambience which still feels the effects of a succession of historical mistakes. This way, by means of her narrator/protagonist Soveida Dosamantes’s voice, Denise Chávez shares with her readers a set of issues which, in spite of deserving a conventionally serious approach, are treated with humor, showing, thus, on the part of the author, a non-monolithic view of her own cultural heritage. So, by employing humorous comments about topics such as the Chicano feminine universe, gender – “gender clashing” to be more precise, as the conflict between men and women permeates the novel –, religion and cultural identity, Denise Chávez furnishes her readers a universe some of them – those regarded as WASP – know only from an outside perspective. Besides the topics previously mentioned, we could also include scatological humor, which is scattered throughout the novel but could *per se* provide enough content for a whole critical article.

The Chicano feminine universe reproduced in *Face of an Angel* is particularly interesting, for, while describing female types – some of them typical of the Mexican/Mexican-American culture – Chávez undoes the idea of Chicanas as a misleadingly homogenous group. If, on the one hand, Soveida portrays feminine types for whom she nurtures admiration – her grandmother Lupita, her family’s lifelong maid Oralia, Milia Ocana, the headwaitress at El Farol, the Mexican food restaurant she worked for all her life, and even Mara Loera, her cousin, whom she eventually will look at with more critical eyes –, Chávez’s narrator/protagonist will describe others with mercilessly sarcastic criticism. In the second chapter of *Face of an Angel*, Soveida provides the reader with a brief biography of her great-grandfather, Manuel Dosamantes. The title of the chapter, “The Sleepwalker”, is

indeed a sarcastic reference to the surreptitious way the Dosamantes's founding father escaped from being forced to marry Tobarda Acosta, the daughter of Manuel Dosamantes's employer. Right at the beginning of the chapter, while referring to Tobarda as a "price tag" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 5), that is, the price Manuel Dosamantes would have to pay so that he could "inherit" Tobarda's father's ranch, Denise Chávez reifies a human being whom she was supposed to identify with for a matter of gender. By doing so, Denise Chávez shows heterogeneity among women, breaking, thus, an expected "female solidarity". Chávez's narrator/protagonist proceeds to add caustically humorous traits while describing Tobarda, describing her as:

the owner's **dark-skinned, flat-chested** daughter [...] [the one who] was **well past her prime**, like **a piece of meat with all its natural juices gone**, [the one with] wispy hair, [who] [...] [sidled up] to him like a hungry cat, the one that was **always ignored** (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 5 – my emphasis).

The sequence of qualifiers employed by the narrator/protagonist in *Face of an Angel* outlines a portrait imbued with black humor<sup>iv</sup>: "**dark-skinned**" – apparently, a drawback, under the narrator/protagonist's eyes, as this feature opens the sequence of undesirable characteristics embodied by the focused on character –; "**flat-chested**", which points to Tobarda's lacking one of the most iconic characteristic of a female figure – the breast; "**well past her prime**", meaning that Tobarda fits the description of a spinster, an abominable label for a woman in the late nineteenth century, when the character in question appears in the novel; with "**a piece of meat with all its natural juices gone**" Soveida could not have made a more chauvinistic comment, as she compares Tobarda's unattractive looks to "a piece of meat", that is, something to be consumed – in Tobarda's case, something "improper to be consumed"; "**always ignored**", in its turn, seals Tobarda's destiny: abandoned by the man who was her last hope to become someone's wife.

Under a sympathetic feminist perspective, Tobarda Acosta would be seen as a victim of a sexist society, which devalues women who do not fit a pre-established pattern of beauty. Besides lacking any physically attractive feature, Tobarda, according to Soveida's narrative, does not have another goal in life but that of finding a husband, since she is "well past her prime", as the narrator/protagonist herself mockingly points out. The fact that her father expects to get her married on account of his privileged financial position reinforces Tobarda's condition as commodity in that particular context. Opposing the humorously

distorted figure personified by Tobarda, there is the narrator/protagonist's great-grandmother who bears a considerable number of positive qualities, as the excerpt below illustrates:

[...] Elena Harrell [...] was eighteen years old, a radiant young woman with blond hair, blue eyes, and a lovely face. She was tall, stately, thin, but substantial. [...] [She] had had grown up in luxury but, despite that, was simple, selfless girl. She taught in a small community school for people who couldn't afford private schooling (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 9).

Apart from the fact that between Elena Harrel and the narrator/protagonist there is a family bond, would be Denise Chávez applying a biased tone to Soveida Dosamantes's voice, while portraying Tobarda as a grotesque figure? Or would the author be revising a female figure probably common at the end of the nineteenth century: the ugly spinster who must, at any cost, find a husband and start a family, the then unique fate for a woman – ugly or beautiful – to pursue? If the second alternative is suitable, Chávez is, thus, performing what U.S. scholar Alvina Quintana calls, while referring to U.S. essayist Adrienne Rich, “a critique of the ‘traditional’ Mexican female experience”. This critical position becomes even clearer – and visibly prejudiced – when the narrator/protagonist establishes an implicit comparison with her idealized great-grandmother. Note that both characters, Elena and Tobarda, embody Mexican women who lived in the nineteenth century, but are revised in the twentieth by a Chicana writer – Chávez – who uses the voice of a narrator/protagonist – Soveida – who is, in turn, as politically aware as her creator.

If the sequence of depreciative qualifiers was used by the narrator/protagonist to refer to Tobarda Acosta, another sequence of qualifiers with opposite meanings is employed by Soveida Dosamantes to describe her great-grandmother. Therefore, Denise Chávez, through her narrator/protagonist, juxtaposes two aesthetically contrasting female characters: on the one hand, there is the grotesque figure of Tobarda Acosta and, on the other, we find the harmoniously shaped Elena Harrell. Discussing the concept of grotesque, Fiorin (2008) states that:

[t]he grotesque statuary stands in opposition to the classical one. [...] What the classical statuary portrays are young beautiful bodies, in all its beauty, perfectly proportionate. [...] The grotesque statuary shows ambivalent unfinished bodies, [representing] corporal desegregation, deformities, monstrosities [...] (FIORIN, 2008, p. 95-96<sup>v</sup> – my translation).

Therefore, through Soveida Dosamantes, Denise Chávez provides a critical view of women, showing that Chicana women do not form a homogeneous group and dismantling any monolithic collective identity, regarding women as a group – even considering that Chávez’s narrator/protagonist might be partial while juxtaposing Tobarda Acosta’s and Elena Harrell’s profiles.

While proceeding to outline profiles in *Face of an Angel*, Chávez is much more critical when she turns her focus on the male figure. When she makes the female characters in her novel express their views of men and marriage, in some instances, the comments are pervaded by critical humor. In fact, as already previously said here, the angle under which gender is discussed by Chávez in *Face of an Angel* could be seen as confrontational, since she juxtaposes men’s and women’s perspectives. In other words, men and women, while forming marital nuclei, live perpetually contending liaisons and it is on this clashing relationship that gender will be focused on. In the opening paragraph of the novel’s twenty-seventh chapter, parodically entitled “The House on Manzanares Street”<sup>vi</sup>, Soveida talks about her marriage with Ivan Torres. In that reflective passage of her life writing, the narrator/protagonist humorously compares her first marital experience to “a bad toothache” (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 188). By making use of simile, Soveida shows how conflicting her relationship with Ivan was: although it ached considerably – his unfaithfulness and the arguments it provoked – she wanted to keep it, in an attempt to fulfill her desire for a happy marriage. Soveida then regrets that the couple was apparently happy – “[t]he smile was so bright” (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 188) – but the actual relationship, that which really existed within four walls, was more of “a minute-to-minute pain [...] a deep, continual, nagging distress” (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 188). For that reason, despite the happy ending it could have had, the inevitable solution was having “the decayed tooth” out. Humor in the passage lies in the fact that, while reflecting over a topic which requires a serious treatment, Chávez’s narrator protagonist chooses a prosaic element – toothache – to which she equals one of the most sacred traditional institutions in Catholic communities: marriage. While attributing to her first marital experience the quality of “painful”, Soveida shows that, under no circumstance is marriage the only path a woman can follow in order to be happy. The “decayed tooth” in question is one whose cavity is hidden in order to keep appearances, a commonly used strategy in order to cover domestic problems: “[i]t had been a beautiful tooth [...] with a

decayed center no one could see” (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 188). The employment of simile here seems to be a discursive strategy by which the author, through her narrator/protagonist, intends to provoke her readers – men and women – to reflect over an institution that has been tying them together over ages and that is definitely not a synonym of happiness. By bringing something traditionally regarded as sacred, untouchable, unquestionable to such a profane and prosaic level, Chávez apparently aims to make her readers, no matter which gender they be included in, ponder about something that has been imposed on them for centuries.

Starting from the title, another topic that pervades Chávez’s novel is religion. Throughout Soveida Dosamantes’s narrative instances of mocking comments about religious practices typical of the Catholic Church and assimilated by the Chicano culture, are easily detected. In the fourteenth chapter of the novel entitled “The Exorcism”, Soveida Dosamantes describes the exorcism session her cousin, Mara Loera, was forced to go through. Daughter of a single mother and a married man, rebellious Mara was seen by Mamá Lupita, the Dosamantes’s matriarch, as the personification of sin. When Mara started showing signs of womanhood, arising sexual interest in Luardo Dosamantes, the narrator/protagonist’s father, Soveida’s grandmother decides it is time for Mara to be exorcized. Note that, perpetuating a sexist social frame she herself is a victim of, Mamá Lupita attributes to the girl, who was revealing her feminine forms, the entire responsibility for any sort of sexual assault she might suffer – in fact, she is foreshadowing what her son is going to do -, as the quotation below demonstrates:

Dolores and Mamá Lupita were forced to tie Mara to the bed. Now that she looked like a woman and her body had changed to a woman’s and she had the desires of a woman and men looked at her like she was a woman, it was certain as well that the devil had entered her flesh (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 85).

On a discursive level, what is interesting to observe is that the narrator/protagonist ironically applies to her narrative the tone her mother and grandmother’s speech would assume. The last sentence of the excerpt above is an evidence of Soveida’s intention to be sarcastic towards an “established truth”: that evil naturally and undoubtedly lies in women’s nature and that must be fought against. The sarcasm Soveida’s statement contains has as its nucleus the antiphrastic<sup>vii</sup> use of the adjective “certain” by which the narrator/protagonist criticizes the sexist position taken over by women against women.

In that very chapter, Soveida reproduces a dialog between Mamá Lupita and Father Dupey during which the Dosamantes's matriarch asks the priest for help. While giving him a brief biography of Mara's, the old lady, according to the narrator/protagonist's account, textually blames the "poor possessed" Mara for the negative change the Dosamantes's house had been going through since she was taken in by the family:

Mara [...] [is] not well. Troubled. A sick child. **Always has been.** Her mother Lina's dead, her father is who knows where. She never knew him. He left her mother when Mara was born. **Ran away. They never got married.** [...] I took Mara in, an orphan without a home, **I took her in when no one would.** I brought her up, **fearing God. In this house there are no secrets, no darkness. Everything changed when she came into this house** (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 85 – my emphasis).

While talking about Mara, Mamá Lupita establishes a cause-consequence relation between the fact that Mara does not come from a couple conventionally married like her son Luardo and her daughter-in-law Dolores, Soveida's parents. Therefore, Mara is, in accordance with Mamá's perspective, the result of a sinfully carnal junction. Even knowing that Mara was the "condemnable outcome of an ungodly relation", Mamá "disrespected God's will" by taking the "poor orphan" in. After all, "her generosity" was such that she even "dared to disobey heavenly rules". The apex of irony in the narrator/protagonist's reproduction of the old lady's speech resides in the character's statement that in her house "there are no secrets, no darkness", while, five chapters before, meaningfully entitled "The Boogeyman"<sup>viii</sup>, Soveida talks about her and Mara's having suffered sexual abuse by Luardo. In fact, Mamá Lupita's call for an exorcism session in order to "free Mara from evil forces" is a strategy she makes use of – even unconsciously – in order to conceal what she intimately knows that happens within the Dosamantes's household. In exposing the intimacies of her family, even hypocritical attitudes similar to that Mamá Lupita had, Soveida Dosamantes throws light on secrecies that should be kept within familial ambience. By exposing such unacceptable behavior, even on the part of her favorite grandmother and the head of their family, Soveida ends up building what Bakhtin calls "carnavalesque perceptions of the world", as Fiorin (2008) points out:

The carnivalesque perceptions of the world are, as Bakhtin argues, the familial contact, without respecting hierarchies, [...] free of coercive social norms; eccentricity, which allows those who are repressed to express themselves, centering those regarded as marginal, excluded, raucous, contingent; the contact between elements which are separate, disperse, closed: sacred and profane, high and low, sublime and insignificant, wisdom and foolishness, sacrilege, offense,



conspuration, parodies of sacred texts [...] These categories are not abstract ideas, but situations concretely experienced (FIORIN, 2008, p. 93<sup>ix</sup> – my translation).

The exorcism practice, however, is not limited to Mara. By noticing that Soveida's adolescence period was approaching, Mamá Lupita decides it is time for her granddaughter to be submitted to the same ritual. After all, as the narrator/protagonist herself reveals, "[i]t was common for the women in [her] family to be prayed over at various stages of their lives, without giving thought to why" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 86). Observing that Soveida starts to have behavior common among adolescents, such as remaining locked up in her room for hours, Mamá Lupita detected some sort of "unrest", as the old lady herself calls it, which was enough reason for summoning "[s]omeone to lay hands on [Soveida], to uplift [her] spirit and cleanse [her] soul" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 87). This time, however, it was not the help from a priest that was required. In order to perform Soveida's *limpia*, an ancient Mexican ritual, but this time blended with elements from the Catholic Church, Mamá Lupita resorts to the so-called "Traveling Prayer Team, a phenomenon of the late sixties and seventies, **when speaking in tongues was the norm**" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 86 – my emphasis), in a reference to the Pentecostal trend Christianity seems to have gone through according to what the narrator informs. In this case specifically, Soveida is referring to xenoglossy<sup>x</sup>.

The comicality of the passage, however, lies in the fact that Raúl Rojas, the man who was the leading performer of the xenoglossic religious ritual, was a Mexican janitor, practically illiterate, but, who, for his talent in converting people, became, as the narrator/protagonist herself denominates, "the diocese's reigning religious superstar" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 87) and "[the local] spiritual wonder" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 88). In order to legitimate Rojas's talent, his wife, Rosario Rojas, resorts to his social condition, affirming that a humble man like him could not speak "God's language, unless God himself was speaking through his mouth" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, 87). After all, she argues, they had been together for thirty years and she could guarantee that it was really God speaking through Rojas, because "he [was] still trying to learn all the words of the Pledge of Allegiance<sup>xi</sup> in English" (CHÁVEZ, 1994, p. 87). Note that Rosario establishes a connection between the language in which the Pledge of Allegiance is written and "God's language", equaling both "tongues". The "hybrid ceremony-performance", as U.S. scholar Ellen McCracken (1999) labels it, not only illustrates the syncretic trace of Chicano Catholicism, but also hints at how culturally dominated

Mexicans are. By making a man like Raúl Rojas a sort of respected religious leader, Chávez, ironically, exposes the inconsistencies of religious practices and subverts the Chicano religious framework. While discussing Chávez's play *Novenas Narrativas y Ofrendas Nuevomexicanas*, McCracken (1999) reaches a conclusion which is perfectly applicable to the way she treats the topic in *Face of an Angel*: "Chavez's text is an important contestation and re-reading of official and non-official religious practices" (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 128).

As a Chicana<sup>xii</sup>, Denise Chávez could not have left out an issue regarded as crucial for a segment of writers who were trying to represent themselves. Still within the gender clashing/marriage sphere, Chávez sprinkles in other topics such as cultural identity. The narrator/protagonist's mother, Dolores, who spent a great deal of her life suffering because of her husband, finally has "a happy end". In the fifty-third chapter, 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! [...] Un desconocido. No es possible! Where does he come from? [...] **The color of an earthworm** [...] a retired barbón, fello y calvo [...] Reldon Cloughbaugh! **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 Cloughbaugh**. (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 Cloughbaugh, Dolores's future husband, she describes him as "an americano". 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 on 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). While describing Reldon’s skin color, Chávez, now through Mamá Lupita’s voice, 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 Cloughbaugh.

In final considerations, it seems legitimate to affirm that the use of humor in *Face of an Angel* works as a centrifugal force, as argues Fiorin (2008) – that is, it decenters whatever/whoever is considered to be in a hegemonic position – acting against the centripetal discourse of power. By permeating her novel with mocking comments on issues such as women’s social condition within Chicano society, gender/gender clashing/marriage, religion, and cultural identity, Denise Chávez furnishes a peculiar portrait of the ethos she was born and grew up in. By giving voice to an ordinary woman, a waitress at a Mexican food restaurant, Chávez entitles a marginal element to represent Chicanos and Chicanas with loud colors and a humorously caustic discourse. What unfolds before the readers of *Face of an Angel*, however, is not a narrative which seeks to victimize people – mainly women – of Mexican background. While engendering Soveida Dosamantes’s autobiographical project, Denise Chávez represents, under a critical perspective marked by comicality, a cultural universe she knows quite well, subverting, thus, the mainstream version of experience many Chicanas share.

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<sup>i</sup> Ao esforço centrípeto dos discursos de autoridade opõe-se o riso, que leva a uma aguda percepção da existência discursiva centrífuga. Ele dessacraliza e relativiza o discurso do poder, mostrando-o como um entre muitos e, assim, demole o unilinguismo fechado e impermeável dos discursos que erigem como valores a seriedade e a imutabilidade, os discursos oficiais, da ordem e da hierarquia.

<sup>ii</sup> Mario Fortino Alfonso Moreno Reyes, artistically known as Cantinflas (1911-1993) was a Mexican actor. Source: <[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantinflas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantinflas)>. Access in April, 2014.

<sup>iii</sup> According to Rodolfo Acuña, the term Chicano was once used by middle class Mexicans and Mexican Americans to refer to blue collars of the same cultural background. From the 1960's onwards, however, due to the civil rights movement, intellectuals who shared that cultural heritage started naming themselves as such in an attempt to proudly assume their mix-raced origin. Source: ACUÑA, 1988, p. 307.

<sup>iv</sup> Black humor: "jokes or funny stories that deal with unpleasant parts of human life". Source: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, London, Pearson-Longman, 2006. p. 142.

<sup>v</sup> A estátua grotesca constitui-se em oposição à estátua clássica. [...] [O] que a estátua clássica retrata são corpos jovens, em toda a sua beleza, com proporções perfeitas. [...] A estátua grotesca mostra o corpo em sua ambivalência [representando] desagregação corporal, deformidades, monstruosidades [...]

<sup>vi</sup> A clear reference to Sandra Cisneros's groundbreaking novel *The House on Mango Street*, a hallmark in the so-called Chicana literature, launched in 1984.

<sup>vii</sup> Antiphrasis: a figure of speech in which a Word or phrase is used in a sense contrary to its conventional meaning for ironic or humorous effect; verbal irony. Adjective: *antiphrastic*. Source <[grammar.about.com/od/ab/g/antiphrasisterm.htm](http://grammar.about.com/od/ab/g/antiphrasisterm.htm)>. Access in April, 2014.

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<sup>viii</sup> Boogeyman: a mythical creature in many cultures used by adults [...] to frighten mischievous children into good behavior. [...] In some cases, the boogeyman is a nickname for the Devil. Source: <[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boogeyman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boogeyman)>. Access in April, 2014.

<sup>ix</sup> As categorias da percepção carnavalesca do mundo são, segundo Bakhtin, o contato familiar, sem respeito a hierarquias [...] livre das coerções da etiqueta; a excentricidade, que permite ao reprimido exprimir-se, tornando central o que é marginal, excluído, escandaloso, contingente; o contato de elementos que estão separados, dispersos, fechados em si mesmos: o sagrado e o profano, o alto e o baixo, o sublime e o insignificante, a sabedoria e a tolice; a profanação, os sacrilégios, os aviltamentos, as conspirações, as paródias aos textos sagrados [...] Essas categorias não são ideias abstratas, mas situações vividas concretamente [...]

<sup>x</sup> A paranormal manifestation during which a person, in a kind of trance, is able to speak and/or write in a language that he or she did not learn by the conventional means. The term derives from the juxtaposition of the Greek words *xenos* (foreign) and *glossa* (language). Source: <[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/xenoglossy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/xenoglossy)>. Access in April, 2014.

<sup>xi</sup> A speech that U.S citizens learn, which is a promise to respect the [country] and to be loyal to it. ".Source: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, London, Pearson-Longman, 2006. p. .

<sup>xii</sup> According to U.S. theorist Paula Moya, what differentiates a Chicana from a Mexican-American, a Hispanic or an American of Mexican background is her political awareness.