

in a plane crash, while Elwood seems to remember running into them "the other day at Vernon White's" (146).

The most tragic commentary of suburban culture is Richard himself, whom Oates depicts as the manifestation of all the negatives of this shallow culture. Richard is constantly ill; he is known to the family and all their friends as a sickly child. He has spent years virtually abandoned by his mother, living in a house designed for adults with little regard for him as a child. When his mother leaves, his father takes him out drinking and proceeds to describe each of Nada's flaws and how the two men are better off without her. Richard is trying to survive in a situation where no one is surviving—the adults by choice, Richard by misfortune.

The ending of the novel is ambiguous. Did he kill his mother? Possibly, although everyone tells him he

did not. His suicide, which he says will follow the completion of his memoir, will be accomplished by eating himself to death as did one of Nada's uncles. *Expensive People* is a novel that combines Oates's use of violence (both physical and mental) and strong critical skills to bring to light the negative aspects of a culture to which many people wish they could belong.

SOURCES

Johnson, Greg. *Understanding Joyce Carol Oates*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987.

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Expensive People*. Princeton, N.J.: Ontario Review Press, 1968.

Waller, G. F. *Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979.

Kelly Flanagan

FACE OF AN ANGEL DENISE CHAVEZ (1994)

Face of an Angel (1994) won the 1995 American Book Award, the Puerto del Sol fiction award, and the 1994 Premio Aztlan award. This great novel is a tribute by a contemporary Chicana writer to a line of women whose voices have given substance and creativity to Chicana literature. This tribute to women also becomes Denise CHAVEZ's narration of a conflict and its development, since these women have played a paradoxical role as transmitters of Chicano culture's oppressive patriarchal dictates. Soveida Dosamantes, a waitress at "El Farol," a New Mexican restaurant, recovers the stories of pain and endurance of her female relatives. *Face of an Angel* is at the same time a bildungsroman and the progressive discovery of Soveida's own Chicana self as she explores Chicana women's history, their daily realities, their miseries and virtues.

The novel is structured around different stages of a process in which we find generational clashes among women caused by the oppressive roles and values that some women accept while others reject. Fifteen-year-old Soveida does not understand why she cannot go out with boys, why anything related to a woman's body is avoided and silenced, why she is supposed to become a docile and submissive woman. The causes for women's betrayal can be found only in women's stories but until now they have been unheard. The story of Soveida's mother is that of a woman condemned by her huge breasts, trapped within her own body that she hates for its connection to sex. She

F

would do her best to prevent Soveida's early entrance in the world of sex and womanhood, but, as in her own case, this is impossible. Mamá Lupita, Soveida's grandmother on her father's side, also tries to convince the young Soveida that she should become a nun, to spare her the sufferings and dangers of marriage and sex. The fate of women seems to be fixed through generations, mainly because the mothers are the ones who impart the lessons of a feminine identity that the young Chicana is compelled to imitate, as happens to Soveida, and as happened to her grandmother. Women's betrayal regarding the perpetuation of gender roles is the main starting point in the conflict between mothers and daughters. Betrayal usually takes the form of mothers controlling their daughter's lives, transmitting their own guilt and curse as women, and not supplying the same self-confidence given to their sons. The home becomes a paradoxical site for women: on the one hand it is the source of nurturance and safety that cannot be found outside in a dominant culture that labels them as illegal aliens, but on the other hand it can be suffocating and manipulative for women.

Soveida approaches the idea of service from a double perspective: she addresses service as a constraining role paradoxically enforced by women themselves who teach their sons to be masters of their future wives. But service is also a source of ethnic nurturance and humanity, a sign of women's spiritual strength to help other people. This second approach is connected to Soveida's decision to write the "Book of Service."

apparently for waitresses. Women's service is related to patience and waiting. Adult lonely women are always waiting for their men to come home, and most younger women also wait, but for a man to escape from his mother's suffocating sphere. But when the young Chicanas grow up and experience the same as their mothers, they feel the need to reconcile with their mothers, as in the case of Soveida who, unwilling to whisper feelings of guilt, pain or passivity, rejects a tradition of betrayal. Her mother, Dolores, will break with her past, divorcing Soveida's father, Luardo. She is a new woman and wants to be called Dolly. She meets an American man, and though she may have been considered a *Malinche*—a negative metaphor to describe both women and the culture—within her Chicano community, for Soveida she becomes an inspiration of strength and energy to fight for herself. Both women will try to break the perpetual silences between mothers and daughters.

After having a series of frustrating encounters with sex, love, and marriage, Soveida begins to find her true self, loving herself and the women around her. It is by recovering the stories of the women in her family that Soveida begins to understand the reasons for women's betrayal of daughters, but she also recovers the bonds that will always keep them together. As she rediscovers herself and becomes independent, she feels the need to find her ethnic identity within her community and at home. She asks Oralia, Mamá Lupita's maid, to tell her stories about her family and ancestors in an attempt to recover her cultural Chicana roots. Now a woman in her forties, she needs to come back to the only source of true love and relief she has known, female relatives. There is no better way for Soveida to heal her pain than to be surrounded by the women who understand that pain: Mamá Lupita, Dolly (Dolores), Oralia, and Mara.

In the last chapters we hear the inner voice of these women. They return to their early memories when women combed their mothers' hair and felt full and complete. When Mamá Lupita thinks she is dying she prays for a return to the origins of women when all her pains are healed. Dolly is afraid of losing Soveida's love because she is getting married again, but Soveida has returned to her after realizing her mother's real value and feelings: "When I was growing up, I hated her need, her pain. Now that she is happy, neither mamá Lupita

nor I recognize her. I want to wish her happiness. The same thing I want for myself. . . . My first role of server was to my mother and her needs. Dolores was my training for service. . . . And yet now I would like to sit down with Dolly and roll her hair the way I used to" (398).

The event that finally brings all the women together is Oralia's death. The roles reverse and now it is Oralia who is nursed and served by the three women. All of them find a new source of strength in recovering the bonds, healing their wounds. The reconciliation will be embodied in the future when Soveida gets pregnant and decides to become a single mother. Soveida and her baby become the hope for the future. The book of service Soveida has been writing and intermingling with her family's stories, is not only dedicated to the new waitresses but to all female readers. Female service is something more than serving men, it is a source of strength for your own self.

The book Soveida writes, like *Face of an Angel*, becomes a book of service for all women. At the end of the novel Soveida acknowledges her role as a writer and transmitter of female knowledge. Oralia and the other women whose voices are heard telling stories are acknowledged as representatives of the only available female literary tradition. It is among these women that the Chicana writer finds an authentic creative voice as her literary source.

SOURCES

- Chavez, Denise. "Interview with Denise Chavez," by Annie O. Eysturoy. In *This Is about Vision. Interviews with Southwestern Writers*, edited by William Balassi, John F. Crawford, and Annie O. Eysturoy: 157–169. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990.
- . "Interview with Denise Chavez," by Lynn Gray. *Short Story Review* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 2–4.
- Dominguez Miguela, Antonia. *Esa imagen que en mi espejo se detiene: La herencia femenina en la narrativa de Latinas en Estados Unidos*. Huelva, Spain: University of Huelva, 2001.
- Eysturoy, Annie O. *Daughters of Self-Creation. The Contemporary Chicana Novel*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.
- Gonzalez, Maria. "Love and Conflict: Mexican American Women Writers as Daughters." *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century Literature*, edited, and with introduction by, Guillyou Elizabeth Brown, 153–171. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

Quintana, Alvinia E. *Home Girls: Chicana Literary Voices*, 93–111. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

Socolovsky, Maya. "Narrative and traumatic memory in Denise Chavez's *Face of an Angel*," *MELUS* (Winter 2003): 187–205.

Antonia Domingo Miguela

FAHRENHEIT 451 RAY BRADBURY (1953) Ray Bradbury's most widely read novel, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), has sometimes been compared to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), but it has more in common with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a classic examination of the manipulation of the human mind. All three works express fears of modern, technologically advanced societies by extrapolating contemporary authoritarian and antihumanist trends into the future, not necessarily to predict the inevitable but to sound the alarm. *Fahrenheit 451*, conceived while the McCarthy hearings were at their height, reflects the paranoid atmosphere of the period, without being or trying to be an allegory of cold war politics. Notably, Bradbury's "Big Brother," President Winston Noble, is a minor character, though his first name is a nod to Orwell's protagonist Winston Smith.

The story evolved from the novella "The Fireman," published in *Galaxy* in February 1951. Its idea can be crystallized into a simple "what if" question: "what if books were banned," or to follow the storyline: "what if firemen were burning books?" However, the main subject of the novel is not censorship as it often has been claimed, in spite of the fact that the publishing history of the book appears to confirm this ironically—swearwords and all references to nudity, drinking, and abortion were secretly removed from the Bal-Hi editions of the 1960s and 1970s for high schools. The original text was restored in 1979 with Bradbury's afterword, in which he noted that there is more than one way to burn a book.

At one level, *Fahrenheit 451* is an insightful analysis of mass culture, or cultural industry, to use the term of Theodor Adorno, a decade before Marshall McLuhan made media studies fashionable. Bradbury's stance on the impact of television is critical. Books represent individualism, reason, and quality of information: they "show the pores in the face of life," whereas we cannot

argue with a wall-size screen that substitutes sensations for thinking. In general, Bradbury considers television the technology of control and manipulation. Another remarkable feature of the work since its publication has been the seriousness with which readers have taken its prophecies, the end of the book particularly. Not too many science-fiction novels from the 1950s have survived the test of time and continue to enjoy a similar following.

The story is set in a possible future in America, where the pursuit of happiness has displaced liberty, and pleasure means not to think about anything. Books have been outlawed by the government. The public itself has stopped reading—"technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick." (This is a new type of barbarism introduced into science fiction.) Also, history, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, has been rewritten. We are informed that the Firemen of America was established in 1790 to burn English-influenced books in the colonies. The first Fireman was Benjamin Franklin.

The chief protagonist of the dystopia, Guy Montag, is a surrealistic figure: a fireman who has been trained to seek out and burn books and libraries. "It was a pleasure to burn," he says in the opening line. His journey from false identity into self-discovery begins when he meets a young woman, Clarisse, a kind of Muse. Full of zest for life, she is the opposite of Montag's wife, Mildred, whose empty, suicidal existence becomes a metaphor for the whole self-destructive society. Mildred is a truly tragic figure, cruel and narcissistic, as authentic as her "family" on her three-wall television.

Beatty, the fire chief, is Montag's antagonist and the first of three opponents or mentors, who engage Montag in lengthy philosophical debates. Others are Faber, a retired English teacher, and Granger, the leader of the "memorizers." Beatty is a Nietzschean nihilist without any real values to cling to; he accepts only trivial facts and rejects the notion of a writer as an indispensable teller of truths. Clearly, he is not the author's mouthpiece. The fire chief fully embraces the tyranny of "political correctness"—in practice, censorship.

Literary references and allusions, incorporated into the narrative, are an inseparable part of the texture of the novel. Beatty plays with contradictory quotations