

Jadwiga Maszewska

“Nobody Knows Where Aztlan Is”:
An Interview
with Daniel Chacón

Daniel Chacón is a contemporary Chicano novelist and short story writer. His novel *and the shadows took him* came out in 2004, and his collection of short stories, *Chicano Chicanery*, in 2000. Chacón grew up in Fresno, California. He received his Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Oregon. Currently he is a professor of creative writing in the bilingual MFA program at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Located just across the Rio Grande from the Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez, the University of Texas at El Paso celebrated its ninetieth anniversary in 2004. It was established as the Texas School of Mines and Metallurgy to provide expertise for the excavation and mining of copper, silver, and other metals in the nearby mountains of Texas and New Mexico. With its Chicano Studies Program set up as early as 1971, UTEP has in recent decades been dedicated to border studies, and according to the campus newspaper, *The Prospector*, it has become a national model in educating Hispanics.

The bilingual and bicultural environment of El Paso and of its university has attracted numerous Chicano writers and poets. Among them have been the founders of Chicano literature: Tomas Rivera (*...y no se lo trago la tierra!...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*), Arturo Islas (*The Rain God*) or Rafael Jesus Gonzalez (*El Hacedor De Juegos/The Maker of Games*), as well as writers of the younger generation: Benjamin Alire Saenz (*Carry Me Like Water, Elegies in Blue*), Dagoberto Gilb (*Winners on the Pass Line*) or Pat Mora (*Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle*). Gloria Lopez-Stafford, raised in Segundo Barrio, El Paso's transitional neighborhood for Mexican immigrants, has written a moving autobiography, *Places in El Paso*; Denise Chavez (*The Last of the Menu Girls, Face of an Angel, Loving Pedro Infante*) lives in nearby Las Cruces, New Mexico and organizes the annual Border Book Festival in the historical village of La Mesilla.

The interview took place on June 22, 2004, a hot and stormy day, typical for that time of the year in El Paso. From the window of Daniel Chacón's office I could see the destitute, Third-World suburbs of Juarez. Chacón was preparing to leave for Buenos Aires, where he would be spending a year working on new literary projects.

Jadwiga Maszewska: Could you, please, explain the terms “Chicano” and “Chicanismo”? “Chicano,” “Latino,” and “Hispanic” cannot be used interchangeably, can they? Only a small percentage of Mexican Americans would identify themselves as Chicanos or Chicanas, am I right?

Daniel Chacón: Probably one of the most common questions that we Chicanos have of ourselves is where does the term Chicano come from and what does it mean. If you ask ten Chicanos, you’ll get ten different answers. Probably a more accurate question is: “What does it mean to me?” You can’t even look it up in a dictionary, or you would get some standard Webster definition but that, of course, comes from outside of the culture and not very many Chicanos would identify with it. There are also a lot of theories as to where the word “Chicano” came from. In the 1960s and 1970s the children of Mexican immigrants – field workers, farm worker, factory workers – who [growing up in the United States] spoke English as their first language and who had trouble communicating even with their parents, would go to school where the curriculum was entirely Eurocentric, based on tradition from England, and so everything that was read completely skipped over the Mexican indigenous experience. One of the goals of the young Mexican American people who began to go to the universities was to learn a little bit about themselves, a little bit about their culture. And one of the things they discovered was that prior to the Spaniards’ arrival to Mexico, there were civilizations there, there were extremely sophisticated cities, such as the city of Tenochtitlan. Chicanos began to identify with those [indigenous] people, called colloquially the Aztecs, although their actual name was the *Mexica*. And the *Mexica* became *Mexicano*. In fact, the capital of Mexico, Mexico City, is where Tenochtitlan once was, and next to the cathedral and the government building in the *zocalo* of Mexico City, you see the Aztec ruins coming out of the ground.

In the 1960s and 70s Chicanos began to hear this for the very first time because they never learned this in school, nobody ever taught them. Their parents, who were immigrants, and probably didn’t make it past the third grade, were illiterate in Spanish and didn’t speak good English, were not able to teach them much about the history or the literature of the Aztecs, not much about the conquest. The Chicanos identify with the *Mexica* because the *Mexica* were defeated by the Spaniards, just like the Chicano were defeated by the *gabacho*, the Euro-Americans. So they took out the “M-e”, and *Mexicano* became Chicano. In fact, you’ll see a lot of times Chicano spelled with an “X”. So the root of the word Chicano is an identification with the indigenous, an identification with the *Mexica*, with those who fought against the Spaniards. The *Mexica* people, before they came to the valley of Mexico and set up Tenochtitlan, lived in a place called Aztlan. Aztlan is their homeland, where they are native. Nobody knows where Aztlan is;

all we know is that Aztlan was north of Mexico, so Chicanos said Aztlan is the United States, the Southwest United States: New Mexico, California, Texas, Arizona. One of the earliest Chicano novels is *The Heart of Aztlan* by Rudolfo Anaya. So it was recognizing that we are very similar to the *Mexica* people in that our language, our culture have been taken away by... instead of “the Spaniards,” we call them *gabacho*. And if you think about Luis Valdez’s early works, especially *La Conquista de Mexico*, the Spaniards in that play all speak English, and the Mexicans all speak Spanish.

J. M.: You said earlier that Chicano and Chicanismo were terms of self-identification, that you have to wish to become a Chicano.

D. Ch.: Right, because it is an identification with this particular political perspective: we recognize that we are indigenous to this area, we are not immigrants; they’ve been telling us we’re immigrants all our lives, they’ve been trying to take away our language, and we are going to resist that, we are going to resist the oppression of the dominant culture. In order to rebel, you have to identify with the group that is rebelling. Not every Chicano wants to rebel, many Chicanos want to assimilate.

J. M.: You mean Mexican Americans?

D. Ch.: Right, that’s what I mean. In order to rebel you have to identify with a particular group and it’s self-identification. To pick up the symbolic arms against the oppressor, first you have to identify yourself as an oppressed person. The Hispanic does not identify himself or herself as an oppressed person, the Mexican Americans do not identify themselves as oppressed. The Chicanos recognize themselves as oppressed in their native land.

J. M.: Could you talk about places in the United States that are significant for the Chicano people? In the introduction to your novel you mention *Califaztlan*.

D. Ch.: *Califaztlan* is just California and Aztlan together, and of course any part of the Southwest of the United States is part of Aztlan and is important to our people because not only is it where the *Mexica* people came from but it is also the area of the seven states that belonged to Mexico prior to 1848, the end of the Mexican-American War, which was an unjust war, clearly a war to gain territory. The Chicanos still identify those states that belonged to Mexico as part of Mexico, so it’s twice our land. Not only is it a part of Mexico, where our parents are from, but it’s also part of Aztlan where the *Mexica* people are from, who are our ancestors.

J. M.: What about El Paso? El Paso seems quite different from most of Aztlan.

D. Ch.: Yea, it is different and I think one of the biggest differences is that it’s on the border. Because of its Mexican American population, it has been historically much more oppressed than other parts of Aztlan. If you have a majority population and you have to acculturate them, you have to socialize them into identifying not with their *Mexicanidad*,

not with their Chicanismo but with the dominant culture, you need to obliterate language in much more brutal and effective ways than you would have to in Los Angeles, than you would have to in Fresno or Arizona. Two or three generations ago, speaking Spanish in school in El Paso was a severe violation of public school policy. In fact, they had the so-called Spanish detention. If you were caught speaking Spanish, you were punished and you had to stay after school, if you were caught speaking Spanish you were paddled. You know, if you think about this, anybody who can function in two languages, can access literature, history and just any academic subject with greater effect than somebody who is monolingual. But rather than encouraging that, they wanted to take that away because they didn't want any identification with Mexico. And that's symbolic of the way people in El Paso had been brought up, very brutal, brutal oppression. Of course, it's better now but it was a system of apartheid essentially, where you had the majority of population oppressed by the dominant culture, and it was racist, much more racist than in other areas where there wasn't as much need to dominate.

For example, a couple generations ago the university itself was a white enclave. Now, of course, the majority of the students are Mexican American but before the majority of the students were white. Now, the majority of the professors are still white and all the leaders are still white, and so that exists but certainly not as bad as it did in the past. When you oppress a culture over generations and generations, I think they begin to develop an inferiority complex, not only about Mexico but about themselves and about their city. El Paso is one of the most beautiful cities I've ever been to, it's got the most incredible sunsets, it's got the most incredible mountains, and you can walk half a mile in El Paso and the horizon changes so many times because of the unevenness of the land, and it's just beautiful; but people in El Paso think El Paso is the worst place in the world to live in because they've been told over and over that El Paso is horrible. People in other parts of Texas look down on El Paso as the armpit of Texas. So you have this inferiority complex which grows out of systematic oppression, systematic denial of who you are in your own culture, in your own history. I am teaching an American drama class this summer. Eighty per cent of my students, I would say, are Latinos. Not one of them in that class has heard of Luis Valdez, who is the most important Chicano playwright in Chicano theater, at least most important in terms of the foundation of Chicano theater. Nobody has ever heard of Luis Valdez, nobody. Nobody has ever heard of any Chicano writers. They're not teaching Chicano writers here, they are not teaching Chicano history here. And some people have even told me that unless it is a bilingual program, their children [in some public schools] are not allowed to speak Spanish. Still!! Not at the university. Everybody speaks Spanish at the university. At this university we encourage bi-, trilingualism.

J. M.: Yet Spanish is very much present in the life of the city.

D. Ch.: Absolutely, it always has been, it’s never been different; *El Paso* is in Spanish.

J. M.: And there is a Mexican-American middle class here, isn’t there?

D. Ch.: Now there is, yes, absolutely. Like I said, things have changed. But what hasn’t changed after years and years of socialization, of teaching you to disrespect one thing and respect another, are the attitudes, and we don’t have a very strong sense of activism in El Paso. There aren’t a lot of Chicanos in El Paso.

J. M.: But the city seems to attract Chicano writers, painters, muralists. Why is it such an attractive city for artists?

D. Ch.: Well, Chicano art, Chicano expression comes out of oppression and you are in a very oppressed land, and you are in a land full of metaphor and full of very strong images. There are so many striking images here that exist on so many different levels at once...

J. M.: Could you name a few?

D. Ch.: The river, the Rio Grande River. Rio Grande on one side, Rio Bravo on the other. And if you think about language, which writers do, language does not exist on its own, language exists, like anything else, on multiple levels, so the fact that it is called Rio Grande on one side and Rio Bravo on the other side is very symbolic. The whole idea of the river as archetype is, of course, shared by all humanity. The river separates people, the river here in El Paso is not a raging river, it’s a dry strip of land, yet it’s still separating people. It’s just staggering to think of the history of that river, what it means to cross that river, where the term “wetback” came from. You have this mountain here called *Cristo Rey*, with a cross on top where people take pilgrimages. It’s in three territories, I guess you can say: New Mexico, Texas and Mexico. You’ve got the bridge. It’s just an incredibly energetic land; where there is metaphor and where there is archetype, there is artistic spirit. Because what do we do as artists? We access archetype and put our signature on it. The other thing is that this is an oppressed land. Art comes out of oppression, not always, but certainly wherever there are oppressed people, there is going to be a lot of art. And also, and this may sound a little weird I guess, you have a lot of people who have died in this area. On the narrative level, it’s horrible what’s happened to these women in Juarez but look at the metaphor of it and look at the theme of it, and look at the history of it, and it just fits so perfectly into this whole area. And if you think where these women are working, at these factories that belong to North America, where they pay extremely low wages. And where do they live? They live out in the worst parts of Juarez. What I am trying to say is there’s been a lot of death here: a lot of people crossing the river when it actually used to be a river have died. A lot of people have come here for dreams, for hopes, you know, and have died for them. A lot of people have been

killed here. There was war here, the Mexican Revolution. Pancho Villa was based here. And wherever you have a place with archetype like we have, metaphor like we have, oppression like we had, and death, it's going to produce a lot of artists.

J. M.: Can we go on to your own writing now? You're a representative of the second or is it the third generation of Chicano writers. Who would you say are your literary masters, ancestors, *antepasados* in Spanish?

D. Ch.: I don't know what generation of writers I am, whether it's third or... My friend Andres [Montoya], a great poet who died before his first book came out, one time said to me: "Don't think of yourself as a Chicano writer, think of yourself as an international writer," and over the years, as I began to develop my craft and began to understand why it was that I expressed myself in ways that were different from other students in the workshop at the university (one of my professors used to call me experimental), I realized that my form of expression has a literary tradition, and that this literary tradition is not necessarily Chicano. However, I do have Chicano *antepasados* as well, and that comes from my political perspective. I've been influenced, like everybody, by the *veteranos*: Tomas Rivera, Rudolfo Anaya, and by the masters. I consider Sandra Cisneros a master and, of course, I've been influenced by her. How could you be a Chicano writer and not be influenced by her? Even if it's unconscious. Her language is just beautiful, she accesses metaphor through rhythm and through language, and there is not a lot separating it from the experience, so there is a lot to learn from her, but she also embraces images and values and politics of the Chicano Movement.

But later on, as I started to write, I started to read more: Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, and then Lorca and Neruda and for Americans, North Americans, Bernard Malamud and Flannery O'Connor. What they write is much different from the linear North American short story, which frankly bores me. I'm really bored by the *New Yorker* East Coast approach to short fiction, which is what most of the workshops in MFA programs around the country teach you to do. Once I wrote a story which had a lot of stream of consciousness and was completely non-linear; I didn't know what the hell I was doing, I just knew that that's how the story had to be told, and my teacher said: "Dan, just let Faulkner be Faulkner." Because he thought I was trying to emulate Faulkner, which was unfortunate because I think he should have said: "Dan, find your voice, keep going because maybe you are on to something." And so now I realize that Borges and Cortázar, who are very non-linear, and Lorca who jumps from archetype to archetype just in this beautiful rhythmic language and incantation...

One time when I was in Buenos Aires I was walking down the street and there were Gypsies dancing at the crossroads... And so as I was standing on the corner, over the heads of the Gypsies and through their arms and through their legs, I could see to the

other intersection, and Lorca was standing there. I don't mean, of course, he was literally standing there but I felt him. And that to me is a sign of *antepasados*, of ancestors, when you are standing around the same archetype, when you are standing around the same metaphor. I'll give you another example. I was walking through a neighborhood, a suburban neighborhood in El Paso in the evening one time and passed by a house where the curtains of this big window were open and I could see the dining room, an empty dining room, and there was a table, and there were chairs, and it looked like it had been set up as if a formal dinner was about to take place, but it was dim and empty, and the glasses and the furniture... Even though it looked like it was real, there was a sense that they were not really used. And there were pictures hanging on the wall. It just struck me as such a beautiful, sad, and ghostly image that I had to stop and watch it for a while. A couple days later I was reading a poem by Borges which has exactly that image. It's an entire poem about an empty dining room with the chairs, the tea set that's really not being used, the photos in the background. And you just sense the ghosts. The family photos are sepia colored, and you know the people in the photos are dead, and the chairs that are now empty have been sat in by generations of people who are now dead. I was struck by that same image.

J. M.: I want to ask you about Chicano literature in the United States. When we were talking earlier you said that it needs to get beyond what it's been doing so far, beyond the theme of the search for identity. How do you see the goals of Chicano literature today? Where is it heading?

D. Ch.: I guess what I'm going to say about that may be controversial. First of all, the writing community in the United States is very small. And the Chicano community within the writing community is even smaller, and if you use the metaphor of the city, the writers in the United States are like a small city, maybe the size of El Paso or Minneapolis. The Chicano writing community is a small town, and as is true in any small town, one of the things that affects our behavior is what our neighbors are going to think. And although we want to be noticed, we don't want people to talk about us. And there are certain shared values of a small town. I think the Chicano writing community at this point is a very small town, and they have certain shared values, and those values, although many of them are very, very superficial on the level of craft, oftentimes affect the way that we work. We don't want to work outside of those values because people will talk about us, and we may not be invited to dinner by our neighbors, and we may be shunned by the community. Every Chicano writer who has a book out knows every other Chicano writer. You begin to make aesthetic decisions based not on what the work needs but on what the community expects. And that means you're bringing values from outside of the work into the work, and that is... that's a good way to begin to write poorly.

When my novel was about to come out, a Chicano writer said to me: “Well, you did not italicize your Spanish, did you?” That would be a no-no. I mean, he didn’t say: “That would be a no-no,” but that’s what he meant. Why? It makes sense on an ideological level because what you’re saying by not italicizing Spanish is that it’s not a foreign language. It makes complete sense, politically. Because if you italicize your Spanish, he is saying, subtextually, then you’re a sellout, you’re giving in, you’re conforming, man, to the white man! But what if my characters weren’t bilingual, what if my characters, even though they were Chicano, like many Chicanos, don’t even speak Spanish? It would make sense to italicize, but because the value comes before the work, it can adversely affect the development of many Chicano writers, and I think it has. There are some incredibly gifted Chicano writers whose recent works are so influenced by this community that they’re not going to break out of repeating what is acceptable, repeating what they have done, and thus on some level becoming a parody of their own work, or at least a bad imitation of their own work. And I think that’s one of the dangers of living in a small town.

J. M.: Well, thank you. That is a very interesting answer.

D. Ch.: Don’t tell any Chicanos I said that or I’ll get in trouble.

J. M.: So far, you have published a collection of very well received short stories, *Chicano Chicanery* and a novel *and the shadows took him* which came out only a couple months ago. Could you comment on the titles of these two works?

D. Ch.: Actually, “Chicano chicanery” is a term I came up with when I was writing the story about Chicano college students who, in an attempt to incite the community and divide the university community, began to write “Fuck Shakespeare” all over the walls. I called it “Chicano chicanery” because, of course, it’s a chicanerous thing to do. In fact, that story is going to appear in the next collection, the one that I just finished. My editor suggested that I change the title of the story but I wanted to keep the title *Chicano Chicanery* [for this collection] because in the book there is a lot of chicanery going on, there is a lot of deception, a lot of trickery, and so it just seemed to work thematically. Plus, I love the alliteration “Chicano chicanery,” and also on the historical level there used to be this theory that the word Chicano came from the word chicanery because Chicanos were tricksters. It kind of works on that level too. And then of course the alliteration Chacón’s *Chicano Chicanery*.

J. M.: What about *and the shadows took him*?

D. Ch.: That novel was first called *Joey Molina*, which is the name of the main character, *What Manner of Love Is This*, *Father of a Thousand Heads*, but I finally came up with *and the shadows took him* when I was watching a movie, I think it was *Au revoir, les enfants* with Gerard Depardieu, where he plays a cellist who is learning under his master. Gerard Depardieu is telling about his master’s death, and he says “and when the

shadows took him,” and I was just so struck by that... All the other titles just didn’t fit but “and the shadows took him” fits so well not only because there is a lot of shadow imagery, and shadow is one of the most primary artistic metaphors, but there is the father-son relationship, the father overpowering the son, and of course there is always the cliché, you are the shadow of your father, the shadow of your ancestors. I think it also refers to Tomas Rivera’s *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*. You know, how many titles start with ‘and the,’ and so you can’t escape that association.

J. M.: Now you have a new collection of stories ready for publication, and then you are taking next year off from your academic duties at UTEP to work on another novel in Buenos Aires. Can you say a few words about these projects?

D. Ch.: The title of the collection is *Unending Rooms*.¹ The whole book is structured like a house, and I think that every story should function like a room. When you enter a story, you should be entering a different room, and the walls of that room should rise up around you, and you are completely inside of that room as opposed to being outside and looking in because if you are doing that, you are probably not fully experiencing the work. One of the things that Lorca would say before every poetry reading was: “I would like to invite the spirit of good will or the *duende* into the room, so that way the metaphors could be understood and experienced at the same time.” This book of stories is structured in such a way that the first room, that is the first story, should be very easy to enter, there should be a lot of light. I welcome you into this room. The second room could be like the dining room, again it’s very easy to enter, but as you go deeper and deeper into the collection, the rooms become more personal, and some of the rooms become darker, and sometimes some of the rooms are just little closets, and some of the stories are really, really dark, darker than anything I’ve ever written, but those are the back rooms. It’s about twenty four stories at this point.

J. M.: That’s a big collection.

D. Ch.: Some of them are very short, though. The very first story is just a list of images. It’s almost incantation because it’s very quick. I try to evoke metaphor, to evoke archetype. I am hoping that as you get deeper and deeper into this house, you will find yourself transformed into another world. All the stories, at least on some level, are about entering a work of art.

J. M.: And your plans for the next novel? How advanced are they?

D. Ch.: I have five chapters written. Tentatively, it’s titled *She Wore White that Day, Didn’t She?*² It’s about a Chicano artist with a fourteen-year-old daughter. They live in L.A. He quits his job and they go to Mexico; he goes there to paint.

¹ *Unending Rooms* came out in 2008, published by Black Lawrence Press. In 2007 it received the Hudson Prize.

² The title of Chacon’s forthcoming novel has actually been announced as *The Cholo Tree*.

J. M.: So visual art has attracted you for a long time?

D. Ch.: Imagery is really what we are struck with.

J. M.: Why did you choose Buenos Aires as the place to live and write next year?

D. Ch.: A lot of dead people there, a lot of metaphors. Everywhere you go; it's like El Paso in that sense. A lot of people have died there during the reign of terror. It was just horribly oppressive. But it's also the city of my ancestors, and I don't mean blood ancestors but literary ancestors too. Borges, of course, is associated with Buenos Aires more than any other writer. Cortázar is from Buenos Aires, Lorca lived in Buenos Aires for a time, and it was the place where he made his speech on the *duende*, and that speech and perhaps subsequent readings of Lorca really allowed me to enter another room of my artistic development. In fact, when I was in Buenos Aires, I thought I would confront Borges, but instead Lorca was everywhere. Neruda lived there for a time and wrote about Buenos Aires. One of my favorite poems, called "Walking Around" in English, the first line of which is "It just so happens that I am tired of being a man," was written about Buenos Aires when he used to live there. And then I just found out that one of the very first writers I was attracted to in high school, Eugene O'Neil also lived there for a little while. There are so many of my literary ancestors there that it's probably going to be conducive to my own work. And another reason is that it's a walking city, I can walk any hour of the day or night. And I like that, it's like Paris in that respect, only cheaper than Paris.

J. M.: Do you think there might be an interest in Chicano literature in South America?

D. Ch.: Probably not as much as there is in Europe. Just as there is not as much interest in it in Mexico. Because it's not exotic. It's almost like two things South Americans hate most, and this, of course, is a gross oversimplification, North Americans and Latinos who are more North American than they are Latino.

J. M.: So do you think your works will ever be translated into Spanish?

D. Ch.: I hope so, but I think it will then be because of the work and not because I am a Chicano.

J. M.: Is it easy to be a Chicano writer in the U.S.?

D. Ch.: I don't think it's easy to be a writer in the U.S. There are probably more fiction writers in the U.S. than there are anywhere in the world, and I think the reason for that is the proliferation of MFA programs, Master of Fine Arts in creative writing. If these institutions are going to be supported, then you have to have jobs for these people when they get out. And so MFA programs perpetuate MFA programs, which means that there are going to be thousands and thousands of writers. A hundred thousand books are published every year in the United States. It's increasingly competitive. I don't think it's ever been like this at any time in the history of the United States. I don't think it's ever

been more difficult. But also I don't think it's ever been easier because there is a lot of good teaching out there, a lot of writers you can relate to. The *Poets and Writers Magazine* is available almost in any bookstore in the country, and this is a magazine about craft, and interviews with writers. The material that is available is incredible. But it's difficult to get published, and I think it's more difficult for Chicanos, and I think the reason for that is that literary standards come out of New York. Even if it's not New York – that's probably an oversimplification – they come out of the dominant culture. And you look at writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, she won the Pulitzer Prize for a collection called *The Interpreter of Maladies*, but John Updike could have written that book, John Cheever could have written that book, it's the exact same thing only it has Indian characters and deals with the theme of identity. But in terms of the short story form it's very North American. And it's almost: “If you're going to be a Chicano writer, it's fine. But you need to be a BigMac with salsa”; that is, the BigMac is *Americano* and the salsa is just a few italicized words in Spanish, or now the thing is not to italicize them. And I don't think that there is much room for Chicano writers who are not writing North American fiction. North American fiction, when it comes to people of color, has always been focused on the issue of identity. And it makes sense because what does the dominant culture want us to be concerned about? How we fit into their culture. So if a white editor gets a good story by a minority, as long as it's a John Updike story and as long as it deals with identity, it has a chance of getting published. But if it has a different aesthetic, I think it's a little more difficult.

J. M.: What about your own experiences with publishers?

D. Ch.: It hasn't been easy for me but it's been easier than for a lot of people I know, Chicano writers included. So I just count myself as blessed, lucky. It took me three weeks to find an agent. I have friends, Chicano friends, who have been looking for years. My first collection of stories was accepted by the very first publisher I sent it to. I've got Chicano friends who have manuscripts they've been trying to publish for years. But it's still been hard. It's not like I wrote a collection and got it published. I wrote for years and years before I got published, and I, of course, accepted a lot of rejections. And I am still getting rejections. It's difficult for anybody.