

The Family Izquierdo

Rubén Degollado

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Rubén Degollado's resonant novel *The Family Izquierdo* maps three generations within a Mexican family on the Texas side of the Rio Grande.

A family tree orients the reader among the book's large, mixed ensemble, whose members are often featured all together at family gatherings. While the stories favor one side of the family (sons Gonzalo and Braulio and daughters Marisol, Maggie, and Dina), they circumnavigate the legendary patriarch Papa Tavo, his maps, his act of moving his family across the border, his fears and struggles, and his mental decline and death.

The stories plumb the hyphenated identities of being Mexican and American through family dynamics, as with Saturday afternoons when Papa Tavo brings his family across the border to go shopping in Mexico. They also explore the brawny, sometimes flawed, Latinx culture of masculinity in heightened dramatic moments: Papa Tavo teaches his grandson, Cirilo, about handling a knife; his son Gonzalo feels unfounded jealousy over Cirilo's closeness with his young wife; and his son-in-law, Eusebio, is insecure around the Izquierdo men.

But the book's women hold their own: Maggie Magic Fingers, a hairdresser who can soothe away men's pain with her scalp massages, has a sensitive voice; each Torres sister has an episode of religious coming-of-age. Catholicism is complicated by folk religion and witchcraft in Dina's story: she finds the belated courage to leave her house and confront a neighbor's hex. And Gonzalo's beautiful wife, Victoria, weaves through the stories—strong, maternal, and influential.

Peppered with Spanish terms, *The Family Izquierdo* is a rich intertextual novel that's embedded within Mexican festivals and traditions. It is a testament to the importance of family and the influence of religion, as well as a poignant tale about personal hopes and dreams.

ELAINE CHIEW (September / October 2022)

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