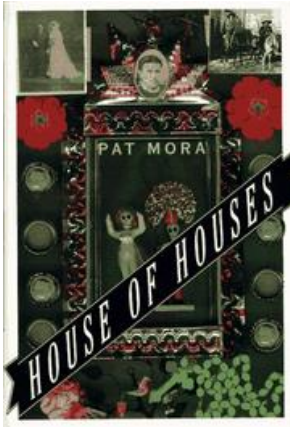


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HOUSE OF HOUSES

by Pat Mora

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KIRKUS REVIEW

A lyrical celebration of several generations of a Mexican- American family in El Paso, Tex., by a poet and essayist (Nepantla, not reviewed). Mora has created an ingenious structure for these recollections of her extended family, of their lives and the tales they share about the family's history. She imagines a family home, an "adobe body to house the spirits I gather," a space "through which generations move, each bringing its gifts, handing down languages and stories, recipes for living," and then populates it with several generations of family, living and dead: her austere grandparents; her loving, quarreling aunts; her quiet, beloved father; and her own bright, affectionate, independent children. The book's 12 chapters are devoted to different family members, who illuminate in the stories they tell Mora both their own lives and their relationship with the larger family. Indeed, it is the family as both the source of life and the one sure guarantee of a kind of immortality that figures most here. The stories are often of mundane matters: of vanished riches (the family settles in El Paso in 1913 after losing everything during the Mexican Revolution), of frustrated romances, and of course of the battles the family fights over several generations to preserve its identity in a new country. Woven in with these memories are recipes, fragments of songs and poetry, folk remedies, and jokes, all of the small matters that most reveal a family's identity. Several figures stand out, including Mora's maiden aunt Lobo, repelled by the idea of physical intimacy between men and women but fiercely protective of (and indulgent toward) the family's children. In a language deftly mingling the natural cadences of speech and precise, poetic imagery, Mora believably summons up both a group of tough, loving, idiosyncratic survivors and a vivid, detailed portrait of life in the southwest in this century. (12 b&w photos, not seen) (Author tour)

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