



Steven Isn't Normal

Marco A. Vasquez

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This is a joint publication of Berkeley and Floricanto Presses. Steven isn't normal. But, then again, nobody is. Still, ask anyone, and they'd tell you that Steven is retarded—because he is. Steven is a retard by definition, practice, and circumstance. It's an epithet given to Steven by his community: his neighbors, peers, family, which has been embedded in his psyche and dictated his absurd existence. His absurd determination to kill his mother, who—Steven is convinced—is plotting the elimination of his dearest bottle collection—the hundreds of bottles, from which he has meticulously removed the labels, perfectly sorted and aligned against a secluded wall near the railroad tracks. On his journey, Steven's chaotic family history is revealed, as Steven encounters an array of grotesque characters that, in their efforts to reinforce the label that burdens Steven, they exhibit their own retardation that has been, until then, successfully camouflaged and ignored by their own complacency. Steven Meresko, the main character of Marco A. Vásquez's novel, is strange and funny and sad all at the same time, much like those characters in *Being There* and *Bless Me Ultima*. Vásquez has written a novel in clear and vivid prose, an entertaining story about a curious and individual Chicano boy and his dysfunctional family, who live in the same, very recognizable side of town where we all live. It is a very enjoyable journey. —Rafael Zepeda, author of *Desperados* and *Tao Driver* and *Selected Poems*. Only a born poet could do what Marco A. Vásquez has done with *Steven Isn't Normal*. This novel is as much about voice and what a master can do with language as it is about his fascinating story and characters. His work sings like Gwendolyn Brooks' fiction, but it is rooted in the complex and ominous world of Steven's East Los Angeles. —John Brantingham, author of *Let Us All Pray Now to Our Own Strange Gods*. Marco A. Vásquez's first novel *Steven Isn't Normal* is a bit poignant, a bit macabre, a bit absurd, a bit abnormal. It is one man-boy's quest to find the line of social acceptability in a world that is far from normal; it's a bit of an underrepresented sub-culture of "Americana"—Timothy Matthew Perez, author of *The Savagery of Bone*. Marco A. Vásquez has taken on a subject that demands knowledge, sensitivity, intelligence, narrative and stylistic skills, and versatility. This is a complex and compassionate tale of the highest order, deserving of a broad and sophisticated readership. It is an accomplishment of an award-winning excellence.—Gerald Locklin, Prof. Emeritus of English, author of *A Simpler Time, A Simpler Place*. Marco A. Vásquez received his MFA in Creative Writing at California State University, Long Beach. He is the author of *Standing at the Corner of Trouble and Sacrifice*, *Tripping Over My Machismo*, *East L. Alien*, and *As We Go Along*, which was edited by Gary Soto as part of his Chicano Chapbook Series. He is a Pushcart Prize nominated author whose work has been featured in magazines throughout the country. He lives in Southern California with his wife and two boys.

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