

Chopper! Chopper!

Poetry by Verónica Reyes
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Verónica Reyes



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Chopper! Chopper!

POETRY FROM BORDERED LIVES

by Verónica Reyes

The 2013 Arktoi Books selection, *Chopper! Chopper!* reflects the lives and experiences of Mexican Americans, immigrants, Chicanas/os, and *jotería* communities in the barrios of East L.A., El Paso, and borders beyond.

Chopper! Chopper! reflects the lives of Mexican Americans, immigrants, Chicanas/os, and la *jotería*—malfloras, jotos, and beautiful rainbow communities. As vividly as Mexican Technicolor, these poems capture life in the barrio: vendors hauling carts with elote, raspados, botes y más. Vatos fighting to exist. Mujeres claiming space. Summer evenings, children playing in the calles of East L.A., El Paso, and bordered tierras everywhere. Reyes's work exudes the pride, strength, turmoil and struggle of neighborhoods brimming with tradition and invention, estilo a la brava. These homegrown verses reveal the barrio in all its intricate layers. Revering difference, they fight to make room for something new: Marimacha Poetry. ¡Y Qué!

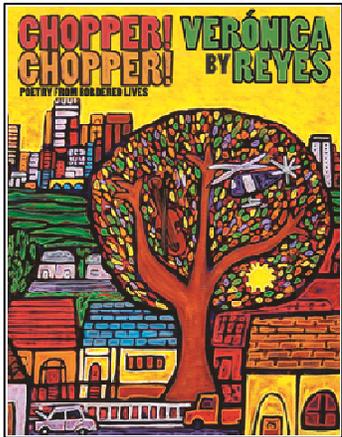
Praise for *Chopper! Chopper!*

“*Chopper! Chopper!* replenishes the landscapes of East L.A. and the lives that give it shape. Reyes resurrects old-time shops and hangouts. They memorialize the land alongside edifices of refuse, sterile towers, man-made deserts and rivers, machines that suffocate the sky, fields locked in the historical cycle churning out the fieldworker's woe. Queers, dandies, cholos, mariachis the same as ‘Chumash, Pomo, Modoc’ ramble these streets. In these dramatic monologues, the perfect poetic mode to retool history, Reyes' wit leaves a mark. Her young self marvels at ‘old coors or budweiser botes, tab, aspen soda cans . . . tossed by the lake at Lincoln Park, half buried in the sandbox just like the statue of liberty in planet of the apes.’ In this cool, sad, funny collection, East L.A. startles us like ‘a pinche far, faraway land’ it really is.”

—Kristin Naca, author of *Bird Eating Bird*

Biographical Note

Verónica Reyes is a Chicana feminist jota poet from East Los Angeles, California. She earned her BA from California State University, Long Beach and her MFA from University of Texas, El Paso. Her poems give voice to all her communities: Chicanas/os, immigrants, Mexican Americans, and la *jotería*. Reyes has won AWP's Intro-Journal Project, an Astraea Lesbian Foundation Emerging Artist award, and was a Finalist for the Andrés Montoya Poetry award. She has received grants and fellowships from Vermont Studio Center, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Ragdale Foundation, and Montalvo Arts Center. Her work has appeared in *Calyx*, *Feminist Studies*, *ZYZZYVA*, and *The New York Quarterly*. She is a proud member of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) and Macondo Writers' Workshop.



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More Praise for *Chopper! Chopper!*

“In this book there is no time to run home chillando or licking your wounds—the gente in Reyes’ recollections pull you into a world where crooked tortillas and marimacha swagger are less the image of otherness, but a symbol of nosotros’ness. Through Reyes’ barrio lyricism, we, the others, do not cross over to become the norm, but come together as strands of hair, distinct, yet slicked together by the force of love, coraje, and Tres Flores.”

—Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano, Publisher of Kórima Press

“Reading Verónica Reyes’ work, I marvel at the breadth of this poet’s heart as it spills upon these pages. Reyes’ ability to know deeply the intimate world of all she observes marks her a ‘people’s poet.’ Because all is love in this writing—love for our honored abuelos invisible as janitors in downtown office buildings; love for the crazy irony of chavalitos playing hide ‘n’ seek with police helicopter search lights.

If el arte cura, then Verónica Reyes’ queer poetics have been ‘anointed’ by ‘the desert rain in [this] city,’ East L.A., to do just that. She is given the gift by the ‘moist fingers’ of her mother, Socorro. Socorro. Succor.

—Cherrie L. Moraga, author of *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness – Writings 2000-2010*

From *Chopper! Chopper!*

Texas Twilight on the Border (El Paso, TX)

Cobalt glazes the sky
into a blue earthen bowl
Peaks of white clouds flower up down up into round edges silhouetted
on desert mountains
Heavy blues to sweet papaya orange press against the ridges
squeezing the red tunas, the brown espinas of a nopal
Then the evening drapes a black cortina on the montañas
as if it is a cardboard cutout behind a luminous light
And dreams, hopes flutter above the river canal
across the borders that slice families in half