

# Voces con Eco:

## A Sample of Writing from Mano a Mano

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**Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders** has hosted a weekly gathering of writers—mostly Mexican immigrants—for the past two years, a shared project with the New York Writers Coalition. Mary Ellen Sanger facilitates the group. The group recently produced a chapbook, *Voces con Eco: Writing from Mano a Mano*, which was launched through the Mexican Cultural Institute, a project sponsor, at the Mexican Consulate in New York last May. The book collects poetry and prose writings of sixteen writers and is available through Mano a Mano, the New York Writers Coalition, and Amazon.com.

Begun in 2000 as a project of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, Mano a Mano is an independent, New York-based nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating Mexican culture in the United States and promoting the understanding of Mexican traditions among immigrants, artists, educators, and the general public. Mano a Mano is proud to present a sampling of the works of five writers published in *Voces con Eco*. We encourage you to purchase the book and support the work of creative artists in our immigrant communities. Writers in the New York area who wish to become part of this active community of writers should contact Mano a Mano at (212) 587-3070 or info@manoamano.us.

As the executive director of Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders, I have watched the Creative Writing Workshop for Mexican Immigrant Writers grow over the past two years. As we finish our workday on Mondays at Mano a Mano, the doorbell begins to ring at intervals: the writers arrive! Sloughing off the prodigious stresses of their city lives, they enter a transformed space of collective creativity. The expectation and camaraderie of the assembling group is thrilling.

Presiding over the writers is the luminous Maria Elena (Mary Ellen Sanger). The joy she brings to the work and her unparalleled capacity to catalyze creativity in all the writers is an inspiration. Epitomizing the philosophy of the New York Writers Coalition, the workshop she leads is a space of unconditional support and acceptance: a haven that is sweet and sometimes savory. While psychologists may talk of Monday Syndrome as something to be overcome, here at Mano a Mano, “Los Lunes”—the Monday people, as they call themselves on their blog—have turned that dread on its head: the week starts out with anticipation.

Mano a Mano is dedicated to celebrating Mexican culture, an endless font of expressive tradition. Artists are at the center of everything we do, and we view the arts as a bridge of communication across cultures and a path to personal and social integration. Thus far, more than forty people have passed through our writers’ workshop: authors of many ages and experience levels, from New York City, Westchester County, and New Jersey. Nothing moves me more in my work than to pass a new face coming through the door as I depart for home on Monday evening. When that fledgling writer asks me, ¿Es aquí donde escriben? (Is this where they come to write?), my heart fills with delight.

May the door to expression always remain open. ¡Qué vivan los escritores!

—Emily Socolov, Executive Director  
*Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders*

## “Onion, Castaway, Moon.” Write.

Each week, the writers at the Mano a Mano Creative Writing Workshop for Mexican Immigrant Writers start with an idea such as this. They can use it or not—change it, use part of it, or none of it. They can write on what the idea stirs up or what it means to them literally. The writers choose their approach. The only thing that is consistent is that each writer finds, through the act of putting pen to paper, a personal thread to unravel, sometimes unmasking possibilities from the most unlikely of phrases. And nobody sits idle. Even the newest writers around the table quickly tune into the uncommon freedom to create, and they begin, often with no idea where they will end.

It’s a familiar dynamic for this mostly immigrant group. They are discovering their own creativity as they open roads—now with their pens. The stories tonight will not likely be strictly about onions or moons, but

they will include the scent of frying onions in a mother’s kitchen and the pale gold sliver of moon that munched at the Empire State Building on the way to work. The diversity of reactions to a single phrase echoes the diversity of responses to their lives in New York City. Through poetry, in prose, with humor, as fable, as treatise on love or cautionary tale, the stories told by these writers are as varied as their experiences.

In that room on that night, they are all writers. Outside they are mothers, nurses, lawyers, pedicab operators, kitchen help, and art restorers. Having previously written is not a prerequisite for participating in the group. Currently the group has both practiced writers and writers who are just discovering their voices. The writing system used by the New York Writers Coalition is based on the belief that everyone has a voice, and given the proper space, time, and respect, the voices will emerge. The writers not only write as a group, but also read their fresh work to each other—a powerful

experience, as having a safe platform where one can be heard helps writers develop confidence in their own voices.

At the blog ([loslunes.wordpress.com](http://loslunes.wordpress.com)) where group members can post their work, a “word cloud” collects the themes and shows that they have taken on everything from hope and mythology to silence and love. The city and the country seem to have equal airtime, as both immigrants and U.S.-born writers remember (or invent) a nostalgic Mexico, Nicaragua, or El Salvador.

These pieces, excerpted from *Voces con Eco: Writing from Mano a Mano*—published in 2010 by the New York Writers Coalition, with the support of Mano a Mano and the Mexican Cultural Institute—show a diversity of style, points of view, approach, and voice. They show the diversity that is New York City, and the originality that each person brings to this city’s story as they open their own stories . . . now with their pens.

—Mary Ellen Sanger, *Workshop Leader*  
New York Writers Coalition



Participants in the Creative Writing Workshop for Mexican Immigrant Writers, 2009. From left: Mariel Escalante, Tatiana Mendoza, Rosio Ramos, Alberto Bremermann, Mary Ellen Sanger, Luz Aguirre, Raúl Hurtado, Flavio Tochimani, Abelardo Durán, María Cruz, and Luis Ángel Ortega. Photo: Mariel Escalante

## Evil Eyes

Luz Aguirre

You can see evil in people's eyes. It is like a flash; you can see darkness even in the lightest eyes. Every day I see him and he sees me. Somewhere in this city, he has something to do; it ties him to a schedule to which he is a slave. In the beginning, I started moving more and more to the cars in the front and to the ones in the back, but it did not work. When I turn, he is there, ghostly. Whenever I scan the narrow train cars, I fall into his watchful eyes. He may be in the car I am in, or one or two further back, but his gaze always tortures and enslaves me. I avoid his gaze but it is heavy, pervasive. I have the feeling that if I move, I will die. In the corners of my brain, I cannot find a reason for this unstable thought. When he arrives at his destination I sense it, the trepidation vanishes. I turn, I look for him, but he is not there. In this space, which I own and he violates, he no longer exists, and I can move again freely though the world. It is strange; with time, it has become an event I need in my daily life.

## Ojos Malvados

Luz Aguirre

Puedes ver la maldad en los ojos de las personas. Es como un destello, hasta en los ojos más claros puedes ver oscuridad. Todos los días; lo veo y me ve. En algún punto de esta ciudad, tiene algo que hacer que lo ata a un horario al que es esclavo. Al principio me fui moviendo más y más; a los vagones de enfrente, o a los vagones de atrás, pero no funcionó. Cuando volteo; ahí está, fantasmal. Siempre que escaneo los angostos vagones, caigo en su mirada acechante. Puede estar en el vagón en el que estoy, o uno o dos más allá, pero su mirada siempre me tortura, y esclaviza. Evito su mirada pero me pesa, es penetrante. Tengo la sensación de que si me muevo de lugar; moriré. En las esquinas de mi cerebro no encuentro argumento para este inestable pensamiento. Cuando llega a su destino; lo siento, el temor se desvanece. Volteo, lo busco y ya no está. En este espacio, el que me pertenece y el viola, ya no existe, y me puedo mover por el mundo nuevamente con libertad. Es raro, con el tiempo se ha vuelto un evento que necesito en mi diario vivir.

## Birth: First Encounter with My Father

Leonardo Anzures Ruíz

Trans. Luz Aguirre

It is midnight, and like every night, everything seems to be at peace. Images float through my mind and I feel calm, somewhat nostalgic. I think of the whole production, everything that happens or has happened, I think of my fate, of God's blessings, of my faults and mistakes, my triumphs and tribulations, in everything that occurs in life. I have made plenty of laps with these ideas. I have always wanted to write something special, something other than formulated words, adorned with poem or verse, something that speaks about us, when we met, something that will say everything about everything, without hurting either of us. It is very difficult, I almost cannot see the lines of my notebook, my tears blur my vision; like your age dulls your eyes. Do not think that I write because I'm resentful . . . no. It is necessary for us to be at peace. I want to imagine the day I was born.

I imagine you: you are getting rid of the weeds on your land. The year is 1979, midday, plenty of sunshine, your machete on your belt, wearing a hat. You lightly kick the playful dog between your feet to leave you alone to conclude your day's work. You seem a little worn out, but focused on what's happening in the room of the adobe house. My mother is in labor, my grandmothers are nervous, cheering her. The midwife is unyielding, accustomed to all this. Cries of pain and tears, sweat and blood. I let out a cry, I breathe, I breathe and cry. My grandfather hears me from the yard, anxiously waiting for me while weaving a chair with broken legs. He hears my cry and crosses himself. He thanks the heavens that I'm alive. My grandmother comes out yelling "He has arrived . . . It's a boy!" Then my grandfather yells to you, "Come, hurry up, you have a baby! You have a son!"

You forget your fatigue and run to meet me. The dog follows you, and you hurry your pace. The wind blows your hat, but you do not care. You run to see me. Before entering, the midwife clouds you in rosemary smoke, according to her to remove the bad spirits and bad air. Finally you enter the room, but you cannot see me because it's dark. You blink and the first thing you see is my mother smiling, her black hair, wet with sweat. You look at her side and there I am. The midwife congratulates you and tells you, "In the field the birds are dancing, thrushes, because you have someone who will plant with you, you have someone to accompany

you!" You draw near, quietly, and watch me. I do not see you but I feel you; I note your smell and your breath. I complain a bit, as if to greet you. And at the door your father, my grandfather, weeps at seeing you again being a father, again being a man.

After this fantasy, a memory crossed my mind, and I think it is the first real memory I recall. I see you one morning waving goodbye to my mother. She sleepily welcomes a kiss. I, sleepy as well, lie on the floor on a mat and look at you, as you smile nervously. You tell my mother, "Take care of the kids. I'll come back later." My mother answers, "Go with care." And for five years I did not see you, five years that every night, all nights, my mother held me, hugging me, perhaps to protect herself, and bear your absence, perhaps to protect me.

Already six years old, and with my imagination sharp as the tip of a needle, I saw you coming up the paved road with two suitcases at your side, with your well-shined shoes and your fashionable hair. It is almost dusk, when the sun kisses the mountains, when animals climb trees, and when the light of the fireflies begins to flash in the ravine. That is the way I see you coming, and stretching out your arms you yell, "Hey kid, come here!" I was playing on the ground with some stones, stones that were my cars or motorcycles, or my horses. I get up suddenly, run to embrace you, ignoring the gravel which digs at my callused feet. You leave your bags on the ground, lifting me all the way overhead with your strong arms. You whirl me around, then I see myself flying, flying in circles I see your smiling face that says you love me, you are happy to see me, and nothing else matters.

But you were on the other side of the world, as my grandfather would say, in that place known as *El Norte*. He showed me the only contact you had with us, an envelope full of postage stamps, a letter, where you apologize and say how much you miss us, but it is a sacrifice for us to have a better life, so that we could have it all. I didn't have you close, but if you were, I'd tell you that close to you I had it all.

*To my father who, like every human in the world, stumbled and fell, but was able to get up and move on. This is one of the values that I learned from him.*

## El Parto: Primer Encuentro con Mi Padre

Leonardo Anzures Ruíz

Es media noche y como todas las noches, parece estar todo tranquilo. En mi mente pasan varias imágenes y mis sentimientos calmados, a veces nostálgicos. Pienso en todo el sistema, en todo lo que ocurre o ha ocurrido, en mi suerte, en la bendición de Dios, en mis faltas y errores, en mis triunfos y caídas, en todo lo que se presenta en la vida. Le he dado muchas vueltas a mis ideas, siempre he querido escribir algo especial, algo que no sean palabras formuladas adornadas de poemas o versos, algo que hable de nosotros, de cuando en esta vida nos reunimos, algo que diga de todo, pero que no nos hiera ni uno ni otro, es muy difícil, casi no veo los renglones de mi libreta, mis lagrimas empañan mi vista así como la edad opaca tu mirada. No creas que todo lo que voy a escribir es porque estoy resentido . . . no. Es necesario para estar tranquilos, quiero imaginarme de cuando nací.

Te imagino, tú quitando la mala hierba de tu sembrado, año de 1979, medio día, mucho sol, tu machete en el cinto y sombrero, el perro entre tus pies jugueteón le das una liviana patada para que te deje tranquilo a terminar tu jornada. Te veo un poco fatigado, pero atento de lo que está pasando en el cuarto de la casa hecho de puro adobe. Mi mamá en pleno parto, mis abuelas nerviosas; a mi madre echando porras. La partera firme acostumbrada a todo aquello. Gritos de dolor y llanto, sudor y sangre. Suelto el llanto, respiro y grito. Mi abuelo me escucha, que en el patio ansioso me esperaba mientras tejía una silla de patas quebradas. Escucha mi llanto y se persigna. Agradece al cielo porque estoy con vida. Sale mi abuela gritando “¡ya nació . . . nació hombre!” Entonces desde ahí, mi abuelo te grita “¡ven apúrate, es un niño, es un hombre!”

Se te olvida el cansancio y corres para verme. El perro te sigue y tú aceleras el trote. El viento vuela tu sombrero, pero no te importa. Tú corres adelante para verme. Antes de entrar, la partera te fumiga con humo de romero, según ella para quitar todas las malas vibras y el mal aire. Por fin entras al cuarto, pero no puedes verme porque está oscuro. Parpadeas y lo primero que ves es a mi madre sonriente. Su pelo, negro, mojado de sudor. Miras al costado y ahí estoy yo, te felicita la partera y te dice “¡en el campo están bailando los pájaros, los tordos, pues ya tienes quién va a sembrar, ya tienes quién te va acompañar!” Te acercas delicado y me ves. Yo no te veo pero te siento, apercibo tu olor y tu aliento.

Me quejo un poquito, como saludándote. Y en la puerta tu padre, mi abuelo, que llora por verte a ti otra vez siendo padre, otra vez siendo hombre.

Después de esta fantasía; en mi mente cruza un recuerdo, y creo que es la primera memoria grabada. Te veo una madrugada despidiéndote de mi madre. Ella adormitada te recibe un beso, yo también adormitado, acostado en el suelo sobre un petate te miro, y tú, nervioso, sonríes. Le dices a mi madre “ahí cuidas de los niños, yo luego regreso.” Mi madre te contesta “te vas con cuidado.” Y luego cinco años no te vi, cinco años que cada noche; todas las noches, mi madre se apretaba a mí abrazándome, no sé si para protegerse ella y soportar tu ausencia o era para protegerme a mí.

Ya con seis años encima, y con la imaginación en la punta de una aguja, te veía llegar subiendo por esa calzada empedrada, con dos maletas a los lados, con tus zapatos bien boleados y con tu peinado a la moda. Casi al atardecer, cuando el sol besa la montaña, cuando los animales se suben a los árboles, y cuando la luz de las luciérnagas empieza a parpadear en el barranco, así te veía llegar, y extendiendo tus brazos me gritas “¡hey muchacho ven acá!”. Mientras yo jugando en el suelo con la tierra, con unas piedras, que imagino son carros, o motocicletas, o que son mis caballos, me levanto bruscamente y corro a abrazarte, sin importarme la grava que se clava en mis pies llenos de callos. Dejas tus maletas en el piso, me levantas hasta lo más alto, con tus brazos fuertes. Luego me das vueltas, entonces me veo volar, volando en círculos veo tu cara sonriente; que me dices que me quieres, que estás feliz de verme, y no me importa más.

Pero tú estabas en el otro lado del mundo. Así le decía mi abuelo, a ese lugar conocido como el Norte. Me mostraba el único contacto que tenías con nosotros, un sobre con muchos sellos postales, una carta, donde te disculpabas y decías lo mucho que nos extrañabas, pero que era un sacrificio; para poder darnos un cambio de vida, para tenerlo todo. No te tenía cerca pero si lo estuvieras, te diría que junto a ti lo tenía todo.

*A mi padre que como todo humano en el mundo, se tropezó y cayó, pero supo levantarse y seguir adelante; y, ese es uno de los valores que me enseñó.*



## My America!

Betsy Lainez

Trans. Luz Aguirre

You saw me arrive,  
and the same smile left your red lips.

I admired the environment,  
the immensity of your structure,  
and seeing me with those huge eyes,  
resembling pieces of heaven,  
you wanted to say:  
you are not the only one, neither the first, nor the last.

Without asking, or wanting,  
you would have become that adoptive mother,  
self-sacrificing, and dedicated.

You have provided, and lend me your children's toys.  
You showed me your gardens, you showed me your  
hospitals,  
your mountains, your rivers, your lakes.

You taught me your laws and discipline.  
You let me rest on your land,  
You were self-sacrificing, gentle, and tender.

Now, now,  
your daughter that came to seek you  
and without words  
requested to be adopted,  
without laws, without lawyers, without manuscripts,  
without midwives,  
and without birth pains.

You let me attach to your skirts,  
and you covered me with your shadow.

You protected me with your immense mountains and  
ridges,  
you quenched my thirst with the vastness  
and the coarseness of your rivers.

You showed me the calm you carry in your veins.  
You showed me hierarchy, with which you were born.  
And you gave me open pastures to run.

My America,  
I reflected myself in the vastness of your sky-blue eyes.  
Now I have to leave.  
But not before I thank you, and tell you,  
I am returned or carried by magnetism,  
where my umbilical cord is.  
It is not a lack of appreciation,  
but the call of my spirit,  
which brings me and shows me the exploration,  
and the origin of my being.

America, America.  
I admire you,  
I respect you and I love you.

The rest of my life is not enough to let you know:  
Thank you for your *ru-ru-llos*,  
when I was just a child,  
and when you taught me to walk upright.

My America.  
I'm leaving, but I leave knowing that you exist,  
and always will,  
because you are the plentiful, the vast,  
and you are the woman who never gets tired  
and always has for everyone who comes to your  
pastures,  
that never sleeps  
but is always passive.

America, America  
I love you.

## ¡América Mía!

Betsy Laínez

Llegar me viste,  
y esa sonrisa de siempre se escapó de tus labios rojos.

Admiré el ambiente,  
la inmensidad de tu estructura,  
y al verme con esos ojos inmensos,  
que parecen pedazos de cielo,  
me quisiste decir:  
no eres la única, ni la primera, ni la última.

Sin pedirlo, ni quererlo,  
te habrías convertido en esa madre adoptiva,  
abnegada, y dedicada.

Me proporcionaste y me prestaste los juguetes de tus  
hijos.  
Me enseñaste tus jardines, me enseñaste tus hospitales,  
tus montañas, tus ríos, tus lagos.

Me enseñaste tus leyes,  
y me enseñaste disciplina.  
Me dejaste descansar sobre tus tierras,  
fuiste abnegable, suave y tierna.

Ahora, ahora,  
esta tu hija que te llegó a buscar,  
y que sin palabras,  
te pidió que la adoptaras,  
sin leyes, ni abogados, ni manuscritos, sin parteras,  
y sin dolores del parir.

Me dejaste apegarme a tus faldas  
y me cubriste con tu sombra.

Me protegiste con tus inmensas montañas y cordilleras,  
me saciaste la sed, con la inmensidad  
y la bastedad de tus ríos.

Y me enseñaste la calma que llevas en tus venas.  
Y me enseñaste jerarquía, con la que tú naciste.  
Y me distes los potreros abiertos para poder correr.

América Mía,  
que pude verme ante la inmensidad de tus ojos azules,  
como el cielo.  
En estos momentos tengo que partir.  
Pero no sin antes agradecerte y decirte,  
que soy regresada o llevada por el magnetismo,  
donde esta mi cordón umbilical.  
no es falta de agradecimiento,  
si no el llamado de mi espíritu,  
que me lleva y me enseña la búsqueda,  
y el origen de mi ser.

América, América,  
que tanto te admiro,  
que tanto te respeto y que tanto te amo.

No me alcanzaría el resto de mi vida, para poder decirte:  
que cuanto agradezco tus ru-ru-llos,  
cuando apenas era una criatura,  
y cuando me enseñaste a caminar erecta.

América Mía.  
me voy, pero me voy sabiendo que existes,  
y que existirás siempre,  
porque eres la abundante, la inmensa,  
y eres esa mujer que nunca se cansa  
y siempre tiene para todo aquel que llega a sus potreros,  
que nunca duerme,  
pero siempre esta pasiva.

América, América  
Te amo.

## My Little Honey Eyes

Claudia Urey

Trans. Miguel Ángel Ángeles

Some years ago I found my Little Honey Eyes, then after a few months I lost him. I suffered, but not so much, because I always had the hope of finding him anew.

Incredibly, one day I found him, I found him! I couldn't believe it! He was even more beautiful than the first time I saw him.

Oh my God! How beautiful he was! My happiness was so great, so great that it didn't fit in my body. Just only to think that I might lose him again caused an unexpected and inexplicable sadness, and only at that moment did I realize, Oh my God! I realized that I loved him and needed him at my side.

From that day, as soon as I awake, I give thanks to God for making possible his return. Return? I don't know if one day he left, I don't know if one day I lost him, or worse even, O my God! I don't know if one day I had him with me. I don't know if one day he felt my presence and my silent love. Could he have heard my internal voice that called to him in shouts and howls that I released every day, every night that I didn't feel him near me?

My Little Honey Eyes, my Little Honey Eyes, come, I need you. I want to know where you are. I want to know if you're okay. Are they treating you well? Are you happy? Do you not miss me? Can you live without my pampering and attention? How do you do it? Because I can't manage it, nor do I want to live without your pampering, without your little honey eyes looking at me profoundly with that gaze so tender, so clear, so transparent, begging me: want me, love me, here I am solely for you . . .

And his tail, Oh my God! His tail! How he moved it to and fro when he heard my voice, no matter how far away I was, he reacted with his little tail straight up when he heard my voice, Oh my God! How happy it made me to feel that . . .

His barks, oh my goodness! His barks were like poems whispering in my ear: you make me happy, you give me peace, by your side I feel safe, loved, complete. Don't leave me, even though sometimes I act badly, keep me, don't abandon me, give me that unconditional love that only you can give to me. Please don't leave me, don't leave me, because without you I feel lost.

Oh my goodness! Now my Little Honey Eyes is very sad, and I don't know how to console him. I give him all I have, I feed him my caresses, with my pampering and my love, and even then his little honey eyes still look very sad. I don't want to think it, but I should. Does he no longer feel happy with me? Will he abandon me? Oh my goodness! Would he do it? Would he leave me again in the dark? In the uncertainty? In my desperation? In my sadness? Oh my goodness! I don't want that. I don't want it.

Please, please, my God, I'm desperate for someone to help me to learn to cure the sadness of my Little Honey Eyes. What must I do to keep him with his little honey eyes full of happiness by my side, I don't want him to die . . . that sentiment that unites us and will unite us in all of our future lives. My dog, my dog, my Little Honey Eyes, my Little Honey Eyes I love you . . . I need you so much. Don't abandon me, because without you I will die.



## Mis Ojitos de Miel

Claudia Urey

Algunos años atrás, me encontré con mis Ojitos de Miel, luego pasado unos meses lo perdí. Sufrí pero no tanto porque siempre tuve la esperanza de reencontrarlo nuevamente.

Un día prodigiosamente me lo encontré, ¡¡¡Me lo encontré!!! ¡¡¡No podía creerlo!!! Estaba más lindo que cuando lo vi por vez primera.

¡Oh Dios mío! ¡Qué lindo que estaba! Mi alegría era tan grande, tan grande que no cabía en mi cuerpo. Solo pensar que lo perdería nuevamente, me provocaba una tristeza inesperada e inexplicable y solo en ese momento me di cuenta, ¡Oh Dios mío!, me di cuenta . . . de cuánto lo amaba, y lo necesitaba a mi lado.

Desde ese día, todos los días cuando me levanto, le doy gracias a Dios, por haber hecho posible su regreso. ¿Regreso? No sé si algún día se fue, no sé si algún día lo perdí, o peor aún, ¡Oh Dios mío! No sé si algún día lo tuve conmigo. No sé si algún día sintió mi presencia y mi amor silencioso. Habrá escuchado mi voz interna que lo llamaba a gritos o ladridos que yo daba cada día, cada noche que no lo sentía conmigo:

Mis Ojitos de Miel, mis Ojitos de Miel, ven te necesito. Quiero saber dónde estás. Quiero saber si estás bien. ¿Te están tratando bien? ¿Sos feliz? ¿No me extrañas? ¿Puedes vivir sin mis mimos y mis atenciones? ¿Cómo lo haces? Porque yo no puedo, ni quiero vivir sin tus mimos, sin tus ojitos de miel mirándome profundamente, con esa mirada tan tierna, tan limpia, tan transparente, pidiéndome: quiéreme, ámame, mímame, cuidame, aquí estoy solo para ti . . .

Y su cola, ¡Oh mi Dios!, su colita como la giraba de un lado a otro, cuando escuchaba mi voz, por muy lejos que yo estuviera, él reaccionaba con su colita parada cuando escuchaba mi voz. ¡Oh dios mío! qué feliz me hacía sentir eso . . .

Sus ladridos, ¡Oh Dios mío! sus ladridos eran como poemas susurrándome al oído: tú me haces feliz, tú me das paz, a tu lado me siento seguro, amado y completo . . . No me dejes, aunque algunas veces me porte mal, consérvame, no me abandones, dame ese amor incondicional que solo tú me lo puedes dar. Por favor, no me dejes, no me dejes, que sin ti me siento perdido.

¡Oh Dios mío! ahora mis Ojitos de Miel está muy triste y no sé como consolarlo, le doy todo lo que poseo, lo alimento con mis caricias, con mis mimos y mi amor y aun así sus ojitos de miel se ven muy tristes. No quiero pensarlo pero debo de hacerlo. ¿Ya no se siente bien conmigo? ¿Me abandonará? ¡Oh Dios mío! ¿Lo hará? ¿Me dejará nuevamente en la oscuridad, en la incertidumbre, en mis desesperanzas, en mis tristezas? ¡Oh Dios mío! No quiero eso. No lo quiero.

Por favor, por favor ¡Dios mío!, estoy desesperada que alguien me ayude a saber cómo sanar la tristeza de mis Ojitos de Miel. ¿Qué debo de hacer para conservarlo con sus ojitos de miel llenos de felicidad a mi lado?, no quiero que se muera... ese sentimiento que nos une y que nos unirá en todas nuestras vidas futuras. Mi perro, mi perro, mis Ojitos de Miel, mis Ojitos de Miel cuánto te amo . . . cuánto te necesito. No me abandones que yo sin ti me muero.

## I Saw Him Only Once

Ricardo Hernández

Trans. Luz Aguirre

Barbershops bring me bad memories.

That's why I keep my hair long.

My bad relationship with them (the barbershops) has nothing to do with fear of scissors or with the memory of a chopped cut done in poor taste.

You see: it is only that I never knew my father, or rather, I saw him only once.

One evening while lying on my stomach playing with my cars, my mother called me and said, "Get ready, your father is coming to take you to cut your hair."

I didn't know what to think and turned back on my stomach. The bell rang. Mom opened the door and from her mouth came three words, "Yeah . . . come in."

I was there, still lying on my tummy on the floor, when suddenly before my eyes a pair of strange shoes appeared. A hoarse voice (strange) greeted me. A strange hand helped me up (I looked at his face with the fear reserved for observing a solar eclipse). He took me to a strange car. We went through strange streets.

Finally we reached our destination: Barbershop "The Sailor." The place was very spacious with sea motifs, ships painted on the walls. I remember a breasty blond mermaid riding a seahorse. I remember fish nets hanging from the ceiling. I felt trapped.

On one of those red plastic-covered chairs, a boy sat, his face like a humiliated prisoner of war.

An old man in thick glasses and white coat was busily cutting his victim's hair left and right, as if to dispel his soul. The boy seemed to be hypnotizing himself in the mirror to prevent such degradation. (A child sees in the mirror something very different from what an adult sees.)

The child came down off the throne of the wretched. The barber shook his apron heavily to prepare it for his next victim. I got up on the chair. Other kids looked at me.

The old man turned to my father. "How do you want it?" My father exclaimed with some certainty, "Short, nice, like a young man."

Before the mirror I was a spectator of my imposed transformation. I felt like a piece of property. I wanted to disappear for a moment. I set my eyes on a giant ship's wheel on one of the walls of the place. I imagined myself taking that big wheel with both hands and steering this ship towards my escape, with all these pirates behind me talking about economics, politics, and things that do not shine in my universe. The barber stopped cutting. He passed a brush with baby powder on my neck and shoulders. "What do you think?" said the old man to my father.

He just nodded. "Like a young man, right?"

We left. During the ride home, Dad gave me life lessons that to this day I can't remember. The car stopped. Mom met me at the door of the house. I got out of the car, and it just left. My mother touched my head as if trying to find a thorn.

*Dedicated to the work of Alice Miller.*

## Lo Vi Solo Una Vez

Ricardo Hernández

Las peluquerías me traen un mal recuerdo.

Es por eso que ando de pelo largo.

Mi mala relación con ellas (las peluquerías) no tiene que ver con el temor a las tijeras o a la memoria de un corte trasquilado de mal gusto.

Verán: es que nunca conocí a mi padre, o más bien, lo vi solo una vez.

Una tarde estando tirado de panza jugando con mis carritos, mi madre me mandó llamar y me dijo: "Prepárate, tu padre va a venir para llevarte a que te corten el pelo". No supe qué pensar y me volví a echar de panza al suelo.

El timbre sonó, mama abrió la puerta y de su boca salieron tres palabras: "A si . . . pasa."

Yo seguía echado de panza en el suelo cuando de repente ante mis ojos un par de zapatos extraños aparecieron. Una voz ronca (extraña) me saludó. Una mano extraña me ayudó a levantarme (miré su cara con el temor con el que se observa a un eclipse solar). Me subió a un coche extraño. Nos dirigimos por calles extrañas.

Finalmente llegamos a nuestro destino: Peluquería "El Marino". El sitio era muy amplio y con motivos marinos, barcos pintados en las paredes. Recuerdo los senos de una sirena de pelos rubios que montaba a un caballito de mar. Recuerdo redes de pesca colgando del techo. Me sentía atrapado.

Encima de una de las sillas rojas forradas de plástico permanecía un niño sentado con semblante de prisionero de guerra humillado.

Un viejito de gafas gruesas y bata blanca cortaba a diestra y siniestra el cabello de su víctima como queriendo desvanecerle el alma. El niño parecía que se auto-hipnotizaba frente al espejo para evitar semejante degradación (es muy diferente lo que ve un niño a lo que ve un adulto en un espejo).

El niño bajó del trono de los desdichados. El peluquero sacudió el delantal con fuerza, preparándolo para su próxima víctima. Yo subí a la silla. Otros niños me miraban. El viejito volteó a ver a mi padre: "¿Cómo lo va a querer?"

Mi padre con cierta certeza exclamó, "Cortito, bonito, como hombrecito."

Ante el espejo fui espectador de mi transformación impuesta. Me sentí propiedad privada. Quise desaparecer por un momento.

Fijé mi vista en un timón gigante que yacía en una de las paredes del lugar. Me imaginé tomando ese gran timón con ambas manos para dirigir este barco rumbo a mi escape con todos estos piratas detrás de mí hablando de economía, política y cosas que no brillaban en mi universo. El peluquero dejó de cortar. Pasó una brocha con talco sobre mi cuello y hombros. "¿Qué le parece?" le dijo el viejo a mi padre.

Él solo asintió. "Como hombrecito ¿verdad?"

Salimos de allí. En el transcurso a casa, papá me dio lecciones de vida que hasta este día no recuerdo. El auto se detuvo. Mamá me esperaba en la puerta de la casa. Bajé del auto y este arrancó. Mi madre tocó mi cabeza como queriendo sentir una espina.

*Dedicado a la obra de Alice Miller.*

## About the Authors

**Luz Aguirre** has lived in New York for more than twenty years. She was born in Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico. She is utterly in love with her culture and lives it to the fullest in this marvelous city filled with *Mexicanidad*. She has a wonderfully supportive family and is the mother of a nine-year-old. She has participated for a year in the workshop led by Mary Ellen Sanger at Mano a Mano, where she also works. A contributor to the Los Lunes blog, she hopes someday to write about urgent issues, such as immigration.



Luz Aguirre, 2010. Photo: Alejandra Regalado

**Leonardo Anzures Ruíz** is Pueblan to his core, forced into exile by the political, economic, and social crises that prevail in beautiful, wounded Mexico. He emigrated to the United States bringing a backpack full of dreams, which has now become a suitcase full of nightmares. He works in a kitchen to pay his expenses and is an actor and writer for pleasure in the city of New York. The city closed its doors to him—but he has been able to sneak underneath, if only to bring the message of his work to the whole community. Leo has been an active member of Mano a Mano since its early days and has performed widely with La Carpa street theater throughout the city. His piece “Birth” is part of a larger unpublished work, *Las Memorias de Facundo (Memories of Facundo)*. He is seeking a publisher for his manuscript and asks that helpful inquiries be directed to him at [anzurestlan@gmail.com](mailto:anzurestlan@gmail.com).

**Betsy Lainez** is from El Salvador and has been in New York since her arrival in the United States almost thirty years ago. She credits her mother with being the pillar and inspiration of her large family of brothers and sisters. Betsy enjoys her career that gives support and assistance to those around her.



Betsy Lainez. Photo: Cristian I. Peña, Crisma Imaging

**Claudia Urey** is from León, Nicaragua, and has been in New York and New Jersey since she arrived in the United States seven years ago. She says her mother is the most important person in her life. From an early age, Claudia has worked to help those most in need. She currently works in a program that gives assistance to Latino immigrants and cites among her driving passions, justice and reading.

**Ricardo Hernández** was born in autumn by San Francisco Bay. His mother is from Chihuahua and his father from the State of Mexico. His first childhood memories are as follows: seaweed, Candlestick Park, and Curious George books. In the late '70s, as a seven-year-old child, he enters Mexican territory where he realizes for the first time the existence of a wide variety of insects and fruits, in particular bees and mangos. He completes all of his basic studies in the State of Jalisco,



Ricardo Hernández, 2009. Photo: Julio Montero

sponsored by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In Guadalajara, he undertakes his university studies and begins his intellectual and artistic formation. He comes to New York City in 2000, where he can be found cycling through the streets of Manhattan and doing yoga in the East Village. He is a singer, songwriter, and creator of the musical group Beboluz. He can be reached at [ricardohernandezramirez@gmail.com](mailto:ricardohernandezramirez@gmail.com).

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