

*from Mr. Bondo's Unshared Life*



by  
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Vida Loca Books

This book is for those who have read some of the Mr. Bondo poems in print or electronically and have asked that they be made available as a complete collection; others will meet Mr. Bondo for the first time. This book is distributed free and without charge and may be printed out and/or passed along electronically without further permission.

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“When Mr. Bondo awoke with his hair on fire” & “Hundreds of miles to the south, in the frying pan city”

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*from Mr. Bondo's Unshared Life*



How special it is to live in a special place,  
one which is photographed by tourists  
and included in packaged tours. Mr. Bondo  
wishes he lived in such a place. Sitting  
on his somewhat run-down porch, he'd be the envy  
of those shaking their heads from a distance,  
that shake which means *How lucky, I wish  
that was me*, and their list of bad choices  
as their eyes pan above Mr. Bondo  
to staggering heights of granite  
rising from his heavily wooded yard.

He would leave his almost-antique chair  
and calmly disappear into the forest  
to surprise himself with some newly-found den,  
hardly hearing the motors anymore  
and taking unto himself the tang of pine and juniper,  
the soft and musky forest floor,  
the afternoon of woods and pleasant footfall.  
Mr. Bondo's photos of his special place  
would be like those the tourists take  
and in which he provides a human scale.

\*

At eight or ten he came to know himself  
sitting on a window ledge, lost in the envelope  
of a panorama, then a tunnel  
in the air to the coast.

“Boy!” his mother yelled, and Mr. Bondo  
lost his balance, grunting  
like an animal phrasing a question.

Later, when window and view were one,  
he'd forget the window seat  
upon which he sat, and that he was looking  
through the bay window, over the rooftops  
at cypress leaning from the sea.

These days, he sometimes  
holds a window, steps through it  
and forgets it  
because he knows the way back.

He was that way with a person once.  
She lives over there, like a view  
from her window, and Mr. Bondo waves.

\*

Over coffee, he gave in or gave up  
in a paragraph about the fracas  
in the Gaza strip. He couldn't finish the sentence  
about a murderer. He wanted to know  
who was missing. He turned, instead,  
to the bird named *Transformer*  
which flew unexpectedly into his life: small  
metallic *Transformer*, who'd grown  
and softened, and whose feathers  
were now parrot-colored ribbons  
that twirled around a May pole bird,  
Mr. Bondo being ribbons and air,  
common gaiety, an old story  
he was so full of that spring  
whirled within him, a kiss of wings.

\*

The Law of Remarkable Resemblance  
was born this good day when Mr. Bondo decided  
the world does not run on wires, or waves, or particles.  
It runs, instead, on chains of tiny mirrors  
that face each other like half-opened wings.  
Excited resemblance finds itself  
over and over in the face of each mirror  
and spreads the word to its reflections.  
They might, Bondo mused, be influenced  
by an observer, so he looks over the shoulder  
of a resemblance and is instantly included.

\*

Mr. Bondo confesses that he is whole,  
that he is the same as leaf or star,  
that he is President and trembling on death row,  
that he is the music made by one man  
and the noise made by every music  
he knows only as random data  
of the person who means most to him,  
that the words *hope* and *wish* almost  
make him cry in the mightiest bookstores  
in the largest malls because they are  
weak words, black on so many white pages,  
his only desire – yes, *desire* is the same  
as *wish* – to wake the very next morning  
to a mockingbird that was wired  
to learn the song of every bird  
flying within its world, and to hear that  
personally performed for him  
as part of this blessed wholeness.

\*

He thinks you must divorce the gift  
from the giver, just as when his spirit-bird  
(so-called in his diary) flew in out of the blue  
as a tiny, delta-shaped craft (also confessed  
as such in the diary) and inspired fear  
in him, then joy as the thing transformed  
into long, sinewy wings  
that flapped like heartbeats, flight  
coursing within Mr. Bondo's veins.

Songster was around for quite some time  
and he flew with it, though unaccustomed  
to such lift at night. In his flying,  
Mr. Bondo did not notice an absence.  
Stilled at last, he knew why his hands  
and arms resisted his desk, why his chest rose  
then fell so heavily, and why, in silence,  
he could make song that neither practice  
now awkward instrument could provide.

\*

Seldom dreamless, Mr. Bondo is disturbed  
he cannot name the cast of last night's dream,  
as if, without names, the dreams did not exist.  
He, who has had John F. Kennedy hold his hand  
on a small ramp leading to a Lear jet, who ate  
crumbs offered by Mao Tse Tung or the terra cotta  
general in a secret prison beneath the Great Wall,  
who made love to Joan of Arc, with her paisley shift  
snagged on the buckles of his boots – he cannot,  
for the life of him, mutter more than “She had long hair  
into his dream book, which is woefully inadequate  
for those who measure life in details. Mr. Bondo  
resigns himself to periodically hazy mornings  
in which he wanders like a butterfly, unaware  
of the word for morning glory, or jasmine,  
or that sudden lull in morning breeze.

\*

When Mr. Bondo awoke with his hair on fire,  
he did the only thing he could do.

Having hung his drenched pajamas on a line,  
he returned to find his bed unscathed,

no sign of frayed wires, no smoldering butts,  
no ozone from a possible visitation.

Bondo meditated beneath his frizzy hair  
until he was lost in the cobalt blue

of a mountain photo taken years ago, a puff  
of white cloud to the right and above the peak

in late afternoon, when he'd forgotten the hours  
following skittery paths, speaking out loud

to bushy Kaibab squirrels, so frank and open  
with their stares. He remembered the hour

and how the sun would be setting if he didn't  
begin his descent. Quickly now,

and never mind the slipping.

\*

Night after night, he digs deeply  
in his yard for the golden helmet  
buried somewhere near the base  
of a monolithic boulder. Coronado  
chose well, as the earth is soft  
and there are no rocks save the giant one.

The summer nights wear the map down  
to wet tissue, and Bondo is apprehensive  
until he realizes he's dug the "X" so deep  
he'll never lose his way. Three angels,  
predictable in white chiffon and footless,  
flutter their robes to cool his brow.

Surprised at the ease with which the earth  
gives way, he places the first of three lilies  
but cannot remove his hand from the pale  
timekeeper, this harbinger revealed  
by a peeling golden sheath, its roots  
like hair buried more dead than alive.

\*

His pal, the spirit bird, good old *Transformer*,  
paid a visit in disguise. There was a dailiness  
about the way they met the challenge, digging out  
the truck while keeping the animal in its pen.  
And there was no complaint about the mud  
caked onto his arms and legs, making him  
putty-colored and crazed like the varnish  
on an Old Master which *Transformer*  
lifted from the wall. He liked  
losing his semblance that way,  
unframed, peeling from the canvas  
like shiny skin from a newly healed wound.  
Translucent in the sun, the true picture  
of himself floated to and fro, a child on a swing,  
a leaf in spirit bird's disturbance of air.

\*

This morning, Mr. Bondo believes  
people in the airport look familiar.  
That man with a mustache,  
for example, is his brother before  
he became clean-shaven. An ex-wife  
holds a child who looks like her.  
He wants to speak to her about this  
but is not such a fool as to risk  
his anonymity. He tells his mind  
not to think the name of a woman  
whose smile says *I-know-that-you-know*.

So he continues breakfast  
at the concourse café, seated  
to watch arrivals and departures.  
Mr. Bondo will not admit confusion,  
and maintains a grip by checking  
his ticket now and then, verifying  
he is part of the departing stream.  
Still, he deserves a hug, as if  
he were arriving. It would even do  
to toss a gift at someone vanishing  
down that telescope into a plane.

Practical Bondo recognizes  
the absurdity of these thoughts  
and, in near panic, abandons breakfast  
for a morning brandy and quick notation  
in a small, spiral notebook, which he covers  
with unnatural posture of his cigarette hand,  
for he knows when he's given himself away  
by an expression he couldn't hide.

\*

Mr. Bondo is lost in a suburb  
sprung up among cornfields where,  
from a distance, every silo looks the same.  
He wonders how many streets are named  
after innumerable oaks, and how many times  
they cross streets beginning with *Stone*.

As dusk approaches, he points the rented car  
toward a stream of lights a sudden rise  
has revealed to him. He is relieved  
that the highway's number is familiar  
and that he knows which way to turn.

He will roost in the restaurant  
with a border theme until he calls  
and is found and retrieved. Men his age  
seem interested in numerous mute screens  
but stare now and then at the acreage  
of polished wood beneath their drinks.

He wonders if he's like them  
and smiles to himself, though furtively,  
when he thinks to ask the closest one  
if he lives at something-oaks and  
stone-something. That, surely, is a sign  
that he's not like them. But Bondo is entranced  
by the veins in his hands, which do not seem  
as full as when he's home.

\*

Anticipating a journey, Mr. Bondo gathers music that will surround him in his car, measuring miles in sixteenth notes, with pure, glass-edged sopranos turned up high, wafting out an open window to hang like mist on some buck's ear, and husky blues alto that weaves through the thump and whine of tires on country asphalt. For the high plateau, he grabs Vivaldi and Bach, because their notes are like numberless sage dotting the ground until, somewhere, a rock rolls off the edge into the sky. Yes, he will have a great time getting there, until he has to turn it off and listen to the lights and signs humming as they do when he's landed in the middle.

\*

There's a way-station for everyone,  
and one visited so often  
that the natives assume you live there.

Such were his thoughts  
dropping in at *The Wild Hare*,  
where he asked again

if he might get his haircut.  
No blame from Mr. Bondo  
when he was told, again,

there'd be an opening  
during his absence. Refusing  
a menu was another

of his tags on home,  
and accentuating *today* in  
*What's the special today?*

There was Hippy-Joe at the bar,  
not smoking, and ordering tea,  
and Bondo's usual mistake

of a familiar *Hi* to someone  
as unanchored in this place  
as he. Who would know

unless they followed him and saw  
he never shopped for hardware  
and was never bereft of toiletries?

Mr. Bondo likened himself  
unto the weather of the place  
occurring later down the road.



Summer settles in like a heavy guest  
leaving too large an impression  
in his favorite chair. It extends  
beyond his arbitrary home  
into a mountain retreat, where a man  
fails to brush a leaf from his lover's hair  
and Bondo shrugs as if he were that man  
and the woman was forgotten for the leaf.

He looks at the trees along the street –  
mountain ash no taller than one storey –  
and senses a fullness without any sign  
of opening leaves. The sky cannot carry  
any more light and the mountains  
cannot snag clouds. he will go now,  
but return looking for that edge  
when the town looks cut from air.

\*

Today, Mr. Bondo will apologize  
to strangers for uncommitted slights.  
He will meditate upon his life  
at unscheduled moments, like the brief pause  
with coffee on a screened porch  
before he piles into a van with relatives  
and is taken shopping.

He finds a moment  
in the mall with many fountains  
where wishing pennies are running fish.  
Mr. Bondo seems to bounce  
off monogamous faces  
wrapped in broadcast song.

“I’m sorry,” Bondo says  
to the first pair of bottomless eyes,  
referring, the recipient assumes,  
to the slight discomfort  
from his too familiar stare. It is time,  
he thinks, to buy something,  
put it in a bag, and call it his.

\*

His dog cannot sit still in the homes  
of others and comes to check  
Bondo's scent from time to time.

He is not so different from the dog.  
He smells water, the lingering edge of coffee,  
then something in the upholstery

or the ghost of a body  
recalling the home of a dying man  
who died trying to be family.

He wonders what airy paths  
a dog must follow, and if they cross  
or end somehow in the familiar,

or if the dog desires more  
than human resolution and just visits  
Mr. Bondo as a momentary link

before it bounds away on its broad path,  
a black dog in the night sky  
remembering star after star.

\*

Mr. Bondo is two people in the world  
this afternoon on the viny campus  
and two people again at the grocery store.  
He is maybe one person in the dog's  
deep brown eyes, and nothing  
to the desert milkweed  
whose meager thirst he satisfies.

He thinks there might have been three  
of him for his wife, possibly four  
when he would leave for walks alone.  
Absent one. zero on a keyboard,  
untouched while fingers take  
one order of letters into another.

In this mood, his friends multiply  
into unknowns. One turns a smile  
toward him and into his eyes  
and he knows; one of several backs  
walking away and he knows. But who  
is that in a story in Chicago, driving

past what he though was her hometown,  
ignoring signs held out to her, running  
right through a cloud of details? Mr. Bondo  
thinks of a crowd on a ship waving  
to a waving crowd on shore, and how  
easily he could be in both.

\*

Yesterday, he tried to find shade  
under a patio umbrella and realized  
he was hiding from his own thoughts,  
those whispers from a hidden road  
the other side of a man-high fence  
where he'd been lost. But now  
he connects with a hot-air balloon  
that drifts partially along the flat horizon  
and partially below the fence: there is that  
which he can see, and that which is  
related but obscured by fences.  
Mr. Bondo spells it out because  
he knows his missing hosts  
are not metaphorically inclined  
and have no time to waste, here  
in the cornfield, or over there.

\*

Enough of this, enough of that,  
I'm up to here with it, never again  
not another minute, don't you dare . . .

Mr. Bondo's rant hung  
because there was no *you*  
and his dog, a Malamute,  
stopped chasing its tail  
and regarded him.

"Oof!" it said, and sat, lay,  
then rolled over  
to have its underbelly scratched.

Bondo's ears rang from the bark  
but cooled somewhat from the wild  
wind that scurried off into the dark. Why now

that train whistle in the distance?  
Or the moon like a bloated actress  
playing peek-a-boo with clouds  
as if they were curtains? Evening dust

is different, he thought, as is  
night jasmine from day, and pressed  
his nose deeper into the screen  
to catch the change as rain  
swept in, passed by, then stayed.

\*

He has taken to hiding the hand cleanser,  
antiseptically sharp, which takes him  
to a certain room; pine nuts, which open him up  
to make space for a forest; a certain lotion  
that brings him empty hands.

Paper, fresh from the printer, and old paper  
that slowly decomposes and takes him  
to the libraries of his youth – those are alright.  
Even the two pines in his yard, about which  
he can do nothing, and whose transport ends  
when he simply looks up at them.

No, he is out to import new smells,  
perhaps ubiquitous furniture  
with equatorial sap still present  
in its wood, or a fresh coat of paint  
on everything, or leaving the windows open  
through four seasons, a year of sweeping  
by the wind from all directions.

\*

Business intrudes on Mr. Bondo's  
sun-struck summer. He feels like an orange  
waiting on water from frantic  
little hands clawing into stubborn dirt  
only inches from rock, crumpling  
their little pails, mindful he might wither  
before shouting *yellow!*

He feels like a tree without choice  
on the western side of a hill,  
there for the pleasantries of birds  
and updrafts of winds, until the alarm  
of afternoon and sunset, when it  
must truly wake and burn again.

But it's simple, really,  
to make marks where there was nothing before,  
fill in the blanks with what is called for,  
and then go from left to right  
and up and down again, like a stream  
where rocks still tumble in,  
its banks receiving a flood  
as Mr. Bondo does.

\*

A person sits on the steps of a deck  
that juts into the space between house and forest.

Clouds change and move quickly from southeast  
to northwest, but much more quickly for this person, a man  
who has just noticed himself sitting on the steps of the deck.

He has always looked up at clouds, but now they change  
at every glance. Distance is closing for him. His thoughts  
are right there, sitting on the steps, witnessing.

Just like that, the swallow he has admired  
for the last few minutes lands not three feet from him.

He almost breaks into tears, for he could be happy  
just witnessing or being that still part in clouds that move so fast

or swallows that see him, then don't.

\*

Mr. Bondo sings the blues  
with air-guitar and shadow-dances

with a rented horn.  
He doesn't like his belly

full of blues and a heart  
as empty as Kansas City

when the wind blows in  
and 3 a.m. and sweeps streets

like long-legged woman  
turning in her sleep.

Mr. Bondo sings the blues  
to the Gulf of Mexico,

picks up shells to hear the chorus  
from Houston to New Orleans,

licks salt from bricks,  
drinks ocean from the fog –

man on the move, feeling  
that outgoing tide

like long-legged woman  
turning in her sleep.

\*

The smell of another adheres to him.  
Perfume and body. Opening the door  
to the house causes it to snake  
from the cotton coverlet through an arch  
to the living room, then curl in  
on itself in the open entryway.

There is no faint version of it.  
Steam from a shower seems to release  
hidden reservoirs to which  
he contributes. Likewise the rush  
of hot water into the washing machine,  
and the pillows exhale it.

Later, he sniffs the sodden lumps  
before the dryer thumps them  
into wads he will not lay  
his head upon. There is clarity  
in blood to the brain from lying flat  
upon material smells.

\*

Early dog-days. Yard work to be done  
under the fireballs  
in dust that rises from the grass  
and sifts down from leaves.

He does it mindlessly.

Why not? It's all push and shove,  
swipe and pull. And afterwards,

after desiccated air has dried him,  
he chances upon stars  
glittering on the backs of his hands,

the microscopic salt  
of his own water, his self-made sky  
trailing up his wrists, forearms,  
and he takes off his shirt

to see sky everywhere. How far away  
from himself must he be  
to know that under stars

there is only this.



Someone slips out from his skin  
taking all that he is  
except for one gasp  
and he

is the sliding door  
that keeps behind glass  
terrace and garden.

A balloon tied to a string, blossoms  
skittering across fallow ground.

People can be storm,  
little whirlwinds  
at revolving doors, or perfumed wind  
you didn't know you were waiting for.

Braced against a gale force spring,  
waltzing with some Indian summer?

He doesn't know, nor does the other.

These are two men back to back  
hoping to step into a stillness,  
each with his answer to *Let go, let go . . .*

\*

Somehow, he missed the major campaign  
in the Urals, and the one in the swamps  
where those to the left and right of him  
lost their lives. Likewise the beaches  
where ads are filmed, and again  
he cannot remember the names or faces  
of those to the right or left.

Still, he mourns  
those in peripheral vision  
who could have been himself,  
their noses and audible breath,  
trunks and legs in the self-same  
uniform invisible to him.

Khaki is the color of desert, or eucalyptus  
with shadows of peeling bark, certain stones  
exposed on mountaintops, or of some beaches.

Somehow he'd been spared  
and doesn't have to remember  
emptiness when he tries  
to bring back the names. Ackelstrom!  
he blurts in his mind, and knows instantly  
those are three men blurred together  
before a colonel, or at a breakfast  
where full plates are dumped into a bin.

It was so long ago. Even the ground  
they wanted so much to be a part of  
is overgrown and renamed, and the beach . . .  
Well, there is less to them, or more.

\*

He smelled her sunscreen before he saw her,  
and also her husband's tangy cologne  
wafting through walnut and stunted pine.

"Excuse me," she says, pointing to a rock shelter,  
"but do you know why we cannot enter?"  
"Because," he lies, "they found a couple making love."  
And the husband stoops and peers around the sign  
which forbids all but park employees to enter.  
*Ich meine, er luegt. Aber vielleicht nicht.*

Later, at his summer home, Bondo wakes  
as the rooster in the east crows  
and the rooster in the west answers  
from across the meadow. Two elk  
saunter from the forest, their racks aglow  
in the rising sun, and he thinks of the couple,  
how they never emerged from the shady side  
of the cliff to join him as he climbed, sweating,  
past stony rooms in full morning sun.

He imagines the man's pupils  
dilating in the darkness, his new belief  
in urgent, earthen beds, and woman's scent  
returning to the ruins, echoes of crow and dove.

\* *Ich meine, er luegt. Aber vielleicht nicht.*: I think he lies, but perhaps not.

\*

Does everyone wonder about the birds  
that come and go in the yard? Are those really  
the same two doves every morning, the same grackles  
arriving like a gang on vacation, the very same  
hummingbird going eye-to-eye with a pair  
of perfect, odorless blossoms that blink?

Or do they all strut, squawk, and stare  
in the same way on any stage? He wonders  
because he wishes a special usefulness  
for himself and his yard: that he has planted  
the right things for delight and sustenance  
of birds, that his cats swoon and are paralyzed  
by so much bounty, that his dog

merely cocks its head like Mr. Bondo  
when a hummingbird hovers before him,  
mesmerizing with its blur of wings, the black dwarves  
of its eyes blinding him to the color of air that surrounds it.

\*

She had to stop and call  
from the playground's phone booth,  
alarmed that the new moon  
was not yet visible at dusk.

Perhaps it was location,  
but her woman's face turned girlish,  
swept blankly past him and looked up.  
He looked where she looked  
and there the mountains  
bled darkness into darkening sky.

Why this fear over an absent moon  
in the playground's phosphorescent glow  
and with new stars in the east? Why  
had she not mouthed words into the phone?

He looked out the car's window at her  
and she, as still as the merry-go-round,  
looked back at him. Where would they go,  
what would they do, each alone, but together  
like this, with no way to hurry the moon?

\*

As if  
after a long time,  
the sun has not moved  
but the shadow of bamboo palm  
is sharper, and the bedspread  
and his chest of drawers  
have haloed edges, as when  
photographs have been hastily  
superimposed,  
grafted onto each other  
to portray an ideal,

and as if, after sundown,  
he has not moved  
but is six hundred miles  
down the road, awake too long  
and still too far away,  
map on the seat  
and lights turned on  
for oncoming traffic,  
because he can see  
this lost way in the dark  
and he'll slow and halt  
when the right sign  
turns off its lights.

\*

He notices the *Do Not Disturb* sign hanging on a doorknob down the hall. He knows it's for the housekeepers but can't help himself and wonders if love might be more gentle than he'd thought. The sign is not that different from *Please stay on the path* or *Avoid stepping on the plants*. Once he'd seen: *If you can't resist touching, please return object to its original location*.

"No, I promise I won't knock," Bondo protests to no one in particular, for in his mind he sees a face resting on a pillow, lids slightly open, the body's dew on the eyelids, the fingertips of the right hand under the right cheek, and two pale bands from rings that have been removed from the second and third fingers. It's too easy to stay on the path away from this person

he'll never meet, he thinks. Perhaps if he met her he could obey the signs, never touch what she chooses to wear, never insist on a kiss other than the one he blows from his hand. Mr. Bondo, striding down the hallway, makes up such stories for each wagging sign, and remembers to remove dead blossoms and bank the roots of roses when, at the foot of a door, he sees the wreck and smear of dinner plates.

\*

Now it is morning, noon, and night  
that he feels free to talk to himself

about a small piece of childhood  
in the corner of the room, contemplate it

and even feel the raised letters  
of its partial alphabet: the **A**

and the **B**, and somewhere  
a corresponding apple and ball.

He can talk of embossed yearbooks,  
or envelopes with Eisenhower cancelled

by sine waves which impart the motion  
of a breezy flag to what was once

sufficient postage to carry love.  
He speaks of weightier years

as if they were an unsealed carton,  
perhaps still added to, with some large

mistake sticking out, perhaps a foot  
with nail polish glistening on the toes.

But the supposed leg and supposed torso  
continue somewhere, and the face

is framed and on someone's desk.  
All the while, he has eaten, taken a walk,

read a book, and done some shopping,  
talking his way into the moment,

commenting that the man in the moon  
is in the mirror, and that behind him

all of the named and unnamed stars  
go on as questions and certainties

like the conversation of sleep.

\*

*Where you nursed is where you'll decompose.*  
Mr. Bondo cannot find the question  
for that answer. But there it is again,  
this time at 58<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, undressed  
and not even shivering, as it were, its origin  
like an erasure on a blackboard.

At the party, the hostess is older than him.  
*Where you nursed is where you'll decompose*  
comes mid-sentence and covers  
whatever she says on the edge of her chair,  
attentive, ready to rise and greet  
a guest already halfway across the room.

*We were so worried about you,* said his mother,  
*We didn't know if you were back.* Then, out  
of some airy hollow fifteen hundred miles away,  
from hours when she hadn't existed: *Did you*  
*get married?* He wants to laugh in her face,  
but he will not laugh in his mother's face.

He wants to turn his back on whoever says  
*Where you nursed is where you'll decompose*  
because it comes when he is wakeful,  
the voice bright in his ear, unlike filaments  
of dream one walks into and through, ignorant  
of their shimmering anchors falling limply.

\*

This evening, Mr. Bondo makes stew,  
a *boeuf bourguignonne* with good burgundy  
because it complements the smell of dead leaves,  
those falling as they die, letting sunshine  
hit the house from the east in November.

He will have to rake, but thinks he will wait  
until the trees are bare, until *the sun's*  
*critical angle is significant and marked*  
*transition occurs*. He read of this  
somewhere and will apply it to his life.

His neighbor is playing music outdoors,  
tacking lights to his eaves. Smell of manure  
for winter rye lingers, so Bondo goes inside  
for the onion, bay leaf, thyme, the soupy mix  
of tomato, oils, and beef. He sniffs and decides

there will be no tree this year, no fussing  
with lights or the history of ornaments.  
Fainter smells of carrot and mushroom  
follow him around the house, piquant  
green pepper, perhaps the water and salt.

\*

Time to stop lying to himself.  
It is never intent that takes him  
here or there. Even now,  
revisiting the bay of leaden water  
spread beneath familiar hills,  
*home*, that deep, round word,  
slips off the tongue in his mind  
under close gray skies.

*Home*, whose silly smile hovered  
above the confluence of two rivers,  
smiled as happily in a trailer  
on dead-end gravel; the base  
of a mountain and the whole  
of its hundred-mile slide  
down to high desert, easily  
conned into *home*.

And cities, cities absurd  
in their existence as map,  
a maze of streets with names,  
the homey intersections  
of curb and manhole, a park  
and the crease of a fold,  
D-12, K-32, P-47 –  
all of them embraced  
because he is there.

You are here  
always has some red mark  
and arrow, and because  
the universe is spherical,  
its center is you. Even if  
the flat circumstance

includes some cork  
and space beyond the frame,  
there's always a store window  
or windshield reflecting someone.



The unresolved music of wind chimes  
persists in the afternoon,  
always after the wind has passed  
and without a beginning.

*Be gone, stay, begin now,*  
*wing, be gone,* he hears them chime.  
They stop before the pine says *bush,*  
then they follow with *gone, now stay.*

Gone where, stay where, begin what?  
He cannot ask because *wing* chimes,  
then *now* and *stay.* he is gone  
before the pine is still, a wing now,  
without a beginning, without a way.

\*

Hundreds of miles to the south, in the frying pan city,  
a large lens focuses the sun on those who scurry

from house to car. Mr. Bondo is heading there,  
where channeled water flows into kidney-shaped lakes

and ponds like lungs without air. He is falling  
past the shores of an old sea whose salt still glimmers

and whose shells are bowls full of sand. Cedar  
and juniper have tipped their roots in; the piñon pine

gave up miles ago. His hand lets go of the wheel  
on a curve whose tangent throws him

into the plump barrel of a cactus, arms up  
into the sky. Hallelujah! The land

of lizard gods, snakes of dry belief.

\*

When the body gives up its water,  
white bracelets  
form on the wrists, ankles,  
neck, and highlight  
bony points of the face.

When the soul gives up its water,  
it gives one  
last lick to the body  
to savor its host, to taste  
what is left of water.

\*

Someone is rattling a cage,  
someone is reading a newspaper,  
someone is fighting a fire.

The weather is putting a damper  
on everyone's summer plans  
while peace talks fail: signs

of an age, smoke from a fire.  
So the person reading turns a page,  
the one rattling bites the bars.

\*

There is too much day,  
too much of the wrong light  
seeping into the third eye  
waking in someone's cloud of play.

As if unwanted children  
had reduced the garden to dust,  
kicked up desiccated leaves  
as a kind of dead snow.

*It looked like a monkey,  
she said of the fetus,  
tubes and sacs of blood  
moving like a beheaded snake.*

But today's news is of holes  
blasted through a young adult  
who showed much promise,  
and of strong light shining through.

As if the cartoonist was right,  
or the filmmaker who slows life  
and death until both  
are the same spherical window.

Not up there, in the arch  
of a nave, but down here  
where something has gnawed a hole  
just above the kitchen floor.

\*

Mr. Bondo senses an ear to the ground  
that is not his  
and so he lifts his head

with its warped halo  
of cartilage, a green smudge  
which the waiter will comment upon

later, when he orders tea  
he has not had in years, Lapsang-Souchong,  
last ordered in Edinburgh

in the company of people with large pores  
visible like the rhythm  
of the amateur band, not exactly

oompah-pah, but close  
enough to ruin a moment of  
marriage renewal, of silent vows

shouted drunkenly, though sincerely  
enough to be wearing berets, goatees,  
and clothes of mourning.

\*

The Greek liquor  
goes down easily, clear  
or milky. He prefers it  
milky from the magic of ice.

Someone always turns  
on a barstool to ask,  
“Why does it do that?”  
But he can never  
remember the catalyst.

Better to let mystery  
hang over the bar, better  
to swallow the kiss  
and wonder tomorrow

why the woman slid on her back  
down blue ice,  
her lengthening hair  
turning white on the mountain.

\*

Sleep does not come easily  
to him, but then it wins  
like a broad blade flashing  
through the dust of horses.

Moonlight on a dark stream,  
hoot of an owl, the splash  
of a sleepless trout. Hand  
on a fin, Mr. Bondo goes

hunting in the waters  
among silvery lights and eels  
until his guide turns its only eye  
toward him. It is human

and even has lashes. Bondo  
knows the look of fear and hangs on  
until they clear the surface  
and he is tossed flapping

sprays of water until  
he is merely scattering dust  
under setting moon and rising sun.

\*

He stands before red, black, and ochre  
handprints on cliff walls, close  
to where water pools, anywhere the hand  
extends from the mind to ask,  
to make, to sign itself.

He covers them with his own hands.  
The warm stone feels much like flesh  
and seems to say *It's just me.*

Mr. Bondo takes this home  
and several hours disappear  
under the great Aleppo pine.  
Squatting, arms extended, palms up,  
he understands the gesture.

Open and weaponless,  
he further translates his hands as *no rock.*

With a branch from the pine,  
he makes circles in the dirt  
and gives them words: *I gave it away,  
that's why it's not here, in my hands.*

\*

Now he is the trees and shrubs  
that look as if photographed,  
meaning they are very still  
and will remain so until  
someone brushes them or  
the waiting storm decides  
it is time to amble in.

The trees are Shamel ash  
and the shrubs *juniperus*  
and *justicia*, one with many  
blades caught in the act,  
and the other limply there,  
but this in no way changes  
what may or may not happen.

The storm is called *monsoon*  
while the moon wanes yet again  
in the Christian calendar year  
of two thousand, which again  
changes nothing in terms  
of whether rain will fall  
suddenly and quickly.

It's possible he will stay  
when rain comes, and remain  
stiffly in his limp clothes  
like a flag and a pole, or run  
into the house and rejoice  
through a window, steady  
house light behind him, jagged  
lightning on the other side.

\*

Bondo's friend has made a mess  
for someone to find, the new pistol  
fired with new meaning for the first and last time.

A switch that turns everything off,  
its blast and silence are one in the same.  
But that is just Bondo's conjecture.

One version of a family history is gone,  
snuffed out, one version of Bondo  
and of each and every friend.

And for the neighbors: that shot  
no more than a shoe dropped.  
Bondo suspects these are not original thoughts.

Only one version of his friend is gone.

\*

Long shadows as the sun heads south  
and a leaf drops as if on cue.

The newspaper is damp. Windows go down,  
muffling music meant for him

but he hears their weights rattle  
in the frames of a war-time house.

Rain comes, of course, and the world  
is outside-in. Staring at sodden ferns,

glistening moss, and the darkening mirror  
of his street, he hears an edgy newsman

talk of death and battleships. The pictures  
are right there, reflected in the window,

if he wanted to look at them, and the hole  
in the battleship's side would just be

part of the window revealing a flowerbed,  
if he happened to look that way.

\*

He wants to write that he is more  
than the letter he is writing  
and perhaps prove that with  
a blood-red seal, or a drop  
of blood itself. The paper  
already has a moist dimple  
of sweat and the faint odor  
of his tobacco. Perhaps a seed  
from his favorite dying tree  
in the envelope, a pinch of  
acidic soil, the pressed blossom  
of a midsummer rose?

So much to be carried  
on the back of a mailman  
through a neighborhood as seen  
by a child on his first solo walk.  
The invisible string that ties him  
snaps one house away from home.  
A mother hangs clothes, a father  
mows the lawn. All of the houses  
empty their children and he  
follows their backs. Each house  
could be a single stone, each  
set edge to edge on grass.

So why send a sampler  
of his life into a home  
familiar only to another,  
and otherwise just a shell  
for a hermit crab laden  
with a message? What's to prove  
except that little feelers  
must make an irritating noise  
as they slide along pink

and pearl-gray walls. And once  
in the perfect niche, does it  
remember by sleeping always  
with its eyes wide open?

He walks over dramas  
on a beach: an empty bottle there,  
a sodden receipt, and pink sandals  
with broken thongs. Salt air  
comes in like thick medicine  
timed to waves, timed to his walk  
until both lungs have their portion.  
But machine time and broken thread  
take over, a relative's talk  
interrupted by broken sewing.  
How does one resume a special stitch  
without some tying? Things unsaid  
must be like that: what is felt  
is finished with uneven breath.

Like everyone else, James Cervantes has been drifting at 380 miles per second in the general direction of the constellation Leo. He chose to retire from teaching for the latter part of this journey and is now living half the year in San Miguel de Allende. Accompanying him are two books in print (*Temporary Meaning* and *Changing the Subject*), the bookstores that choose to carry them, rare copies of two books out-of-print, and this newest (in terms of publication) collection available via a medium that is also drifting in the same general direction at the same speed.

## Vida Loca Books

1. Halvard Johnson, *Tango Bouquet* (2007)
2. Rochelle Ratner, *Toast Soldiers* (2007)
3. James Cervantes, *From Mr. Bondo's Unshared Life* (2007)
4. Lynda Schor, *Sex Manual for the Lower Classes* (forthcoming)

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