

blood to bathe us in its blue past

Barton Smock
poems new and selected

May 2022

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cover image Noah M Smock

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sequence:

country / ghostalgia / partials / magic or poverty / new & selected &
changed / so sang

COUNTRY,

country 1

Death is the only absence that absence honors.

Not seeing creatures
up close
is home

country 2

No one prayed here
nor left
here to pray.

Hurry, math.
The small gods

they lower
the footprint

country 3

Blue from making thin air,

we could almost
see
the snowball

in your mother's
stomach

country 4

A tooth taken by a tooth.

The night
on one
knee.

A child as friendless as a wrist

country 5

A bunch of insomniacs are making short films about nosebleeds. To them I am sometimes a sound effect. Handstand or handsand, I am too young to be watched. I don't have wrists and I can't take the bath your body took. Kiss loss. Kiss loss where

country 6

Lightning as it thirsts for a stray glacier's rib.

The unsought
quiet
of a surgeon's
body.

Things
after they happen

in the sun of my disbrief

country 7

Two mirrors praying over the glass in our food. Death continuing to
believe I know where god is. The pill that remembers your one thought.
The choir of alas

country 8

I made a list, once, of all the weapons I wanted you to try and then,
while barefoot, I was told that god would never walk and that my
birthmark was a hole I'd never see.

Here are two poems about nostalgia:

regret regrets not using its alias

this is the wrong
tadpole's
past

country 9

Two poems about his gun:

You can like your body but only if we can see it all at once. Sleep

is the new
sleep

country 10

100 poems about time travel:

The child young enough to be on my hip is waving to the nobody in the microwave. The dead have a past. But it's empty

country 11

We argue agonology in the exploded ghostgrief of god.

Repair is winter's last machine

country 12

We throw seashells into a cornfield.

There are children
we want back

country 13

A glove passed from baby to baby

or a light switch
left
for nearby
angels.

A hand in the middle
of being a hand

country 14

An orange baseball gives up in a white field.

Birth and death
no longer
miss each other.

A broken branch from my dog's sleep
is a big deal

and the saddest thing

country 15

We put the baby in the house and went outside. I wish I could be more specific. The baby was alone. It wasn't a house you could see from another baby. From the road

I mean

country 16

Again the hands know which is newer. A flame yawns your hairbrush
still. The toothache on the top of my head wants its own toothache. For
hours the child

Soft like an exit

country 17

a ghost with a nosebleed
left by god
to milk
away

country 18

We've the same
last thought
Death

makes nothing

country 19

Hunger cuts its own hair

But can't
save time

GHOSTALGIA,

GHOSTALGIA

I don't know how to tell you that god comes back for everything but the mouth or that sleep was the last breathing machine to break our first.

Meaning
loses word.

Buzz rootless in the child's bee.

GHOSTALGIA

A drop of blood lands in an eye-sized field.

Imagine
waking up
to cry.

Hide the hidden ant of your son's loneliness.

GHOSTALGIA

In the doll's only dream, the child cuts god underwater

I wasn't ugly
but you didn't
see me

Return gives its hair to absence

An elevator is lost
by an angel

GHOSTALGIA

A pup expires with a yip in a ransacked store. You say we are behind the snowy tv screen we made into a blanket for a dying robot. You can have me from the waist up. In Ohio I am not a girl chewing the corner of a baseball card but I am her brother researching the toy exile of lightning storms. Our domestic inquiries include the sex of the first person in hell, the number of animals giving birth in the field that burned emptiness, and if Adam was Eve's great lie. The more I think of time travel, the more it can do.

GHOSTALGIA

memory scares itself
twice
or once

you've a way

with squirrels
and pain

GHOSTALGIA

A train named after another train
changes fields.

Mirrors forget
that god
can't move.

GHOSTALGIA

God slips in and out of the bomb before it lands

Snow and rain
meet once
Not yet

GHOSTALGIA

A moon-owned payphone

The leaf of my pain

A pharmacy
trying to move
a tornado

Bad lighting, cigarettes, grass

It's not
personal

GHOSTALGIA

You are a certain way
and look
for love

Cricket
learns of sleep

Jesus wanting there to be a god

GHOSTALGIA

I can't tell if my stories start in the middle or if they're just without a beginning. The last time I heard my grandmother sing, I was at rest in a boy pretending to sleep. Footprint, footstep. The hands love both.

GHOSTALGIA

the crawling, the baby, what if it was never me, what if it was my
memory of being near the thing that's coming, and my kids can't sleep

if a paint can
is open

and you only talk to me when I'm dying

GHOSTALGIA

In the dream that my brother calls his haircut dream, I have a tail I'm not allowed to touch. I tell him no haircut has ever taken this long. I tell him that god wanted more kids. I am trying to make him laugh, or pray. Far mice are eating the noise from your wrist.

GHOSTALGIA

I am small asking if I can bring some snow with me into the bathtub &
someone starts to say no but because we're outside nothing gets
finished & later to my mom someone explains how frostbite has been
using our handwriting for suicide notes & pain in its unfound egg is
drawing its take on pain

GHOSTALGIA

My neighbor on one side has a pop-gun and my neighbor on the other a candy cigarette. Both are on me to get a pool as if we've seen the last of any mother's blue-headed angel. Like most houses our houses are made of a god listening for the toothpick that sings to a crack from inside a doll. Doll I am not surprised to be with you in the same bathtub where sleep stays to remind death of its failed audition. I don't tell you about my kids.

GHOSTALGIA

Say poor and I'll say my arsonist son didn't sell a single flashlight. Touch
is a debt touch owes itself. A warm boat left on the erasable sea.

GHOSTALGIA

By the time darkness touches every map, the baby is useless. God a
mistake mistaken for a childhood's double life. If there is a horse, there
is a horse

thinking only of itself yet also
on the kindness
of a past
horse.

Sight cooks my eye in a voided spoon.

GHOSTALGIA

eyesight
in the dream
is a small
cloth
on a decent
doll
but the dress
code isn't
clear

GHOSTALGIA

I will miss your hair
with mine.

We don't need to talk.

Someone

remind longing
to mourn.

GHOSTALGIA

I've never been in a dream like this where I can see all my kids at once.
It could mean nothing. A thumbtack I've had longer than a paperclip.
The sleep-getting guard of god's two amnesias. Dying. I'm not sure what
you want. The animals I name in no time.

GHOSTALGIA

I don't remember the whole poem. Sister announcing in the shower how
she's taking a thunderstorm. Another sister asking is silence a fruit. Me
saying no. The dark a tiny whale fooled by emptiness.

GHOSTALGIA

The headless doctor whose memory of every birth is the same. The
child whose skin fools god but not water. Fire in fire's preferred shape.

GHOSTALGIA

The hour-long crow. The birds living bird to bird. Death, here and there, in the later stages of its disappearance. An almost father weeping on a movie set left to him by god. Weeping perhaps a poverty too far, ah. They don't go away. Hungers that report to no one.

GHOSTALGIA

The hole god says is coming, isn't.

I still cannot sleep
if I think someone can see my mouth.

Earlier, a tunnel was using a tunnel to unmiss abstraction.

Take the hands
out of your poems.

PARTIALS,

PARTIALS

I wonder does death worry about my son like does death ever grip the
doorknob that hurt a sound

PARTIALS

God and time mark differently the length of death's dream. My youngest son my sickest falls asleep on his mother, then on me, then again on his mother. I will always need to carry him to someone who can carry him.

PARTIALS

God can't read grief's handwriting. This is where most of us come in.
We tell the kids they're dying because one of them is. I hope it helps.
Find a hole in three of your father's shadows. Lose the rabbit.

PARTIALS

I was touching people with other people and my movies were getting made. Pain drank my sons away. I remember my daughter asking god what's the hardest animal to be. Her drawings got better, and then worse. We knew what to do, but did nothing. You haven't seen anything until you've seen an angel reenact running out of ghost blood. Aliens grieve in dog years.

PARTIALS

I thought learning would free me from feelings of terror. In photos of the infant me, photos are a thing of the past. It's far too easy to like a child.

PARTIALS

Sister's eggshell rabbits. The hand I don't use anymore. Brother's angel
emptying its stomach for the ghost of an undiscovered fish.
Thunderstorm's best invisible cemetery.

PARTIALS

Grief is that sibling who's tired all the time but still moves a pill from friend to friend while believing that if you watch a movie before anyone else then the sex scenes are real. Our version of musical chairs has us adding

a chair. I don't get hungry. No one wins the baby.

PARTIALS

Memory only eats in front of god. Mothers and daughters smoke together from tornado watch to warning trying to pick up on voice changes in a neighbor's fish and in doing so make of each cigarette a ghost kite that leaves me longing to miss a more specific balloon. There aren't enough of us. Every suicide surprises loss.

PARTIALS

Each finger believes it knows how many times the hand has been troubled. Image unseen, angel takes every bone. Bread hides itself in bread. Becomes paper in the pilot's stomach.

PARTIALS

A boy whose mother is cleaning a house in the dark is saying very near to my son that our hands are the same age. No one is being kissed. A blank drink makes something of my mouth but it's too late. You can't take prayer with you. Words get named.

PARTIALS

Until recently, touch believed in my eyesight's past life. Time needs loss
and loss the jailer's missing nudes. A stone starts over.

PARTIALS

Birth, our briefest talent, has come to switch the wrong bodies. Keep the world like a fish that hasn't surprised a bird. I have little, I have only. My secret death and its unled lord.

MAGIC
OR POVERTY

MAGIC OR POVERTY

magic
or poverty

a cicada
from a paper
cup

-
in each drive-thru
a delicate
absence

-
eat I guess
like you'll
go missing

MAGIC OR POVERTY

language ruins language

-

magic
or poverty

-

sleep is the bruise my blood won't eat

MAGIC OR POVERTY

raindrop
in bathwater, the desperate
brain

of a groundhog, the moth

corrections, the actual

age
of your weapon
when left
on a bus, is touch

nowhere's
oldest
witness, magic

-

or poverty

MAGIC OR POVERTY

poverty
a handprint
starts

in the shoulder of a ghost

-

I could not kill

not after
seeing
the ice-covered

red dog
by the barn

-

not magic
we call it god

the waiting
that god
does

NEW

& SELECTED

& CHANGED

MOTHERMOST

the secret that sleep tells death about breathing

DEATHMOST

blood is a star being made too quickly

-

there were pictures only I could see

LASTMOST

three giants obsessed with face-sized halloween masks die in their sleep after my brother breaks his nose and enters what we'll come to call his birdbeak years which will include a dream that changes what you watch

FATHERMOST

god will find god's bones
in another past

cry
small

SOBERMOST

In the end everyone was a witness

It happened
but only
to god

RECENTMOST

We kiss because we don't know whose eyes got here first. I walk one hand until it limps and the other until it doesn't. Babies pray all the time. I move my son often and pretend the bath doesn't give him away. Each movie is longer than god.

NOWMOST

We all work very hard to give god a future. You lucky you get as many a black eye as the number of times one of yours loses a baseball in the sun. Here is what I'll say about that boat: That boat never did get its silence back. My bet is you've forgotten more spiders than you've seen. Naming is the leading killer of the animal that's with you when you die. About sacrifice: Angels were the last to have hands and the first to tally every broken bird-like rule.

VOICEMOST

abused
in dreams
on outside
birthdays

ENDMOST

Needles hiding from a blank swan.
The plastic razors of a prop angel.
No one to cry ghost.
The fingernail as grief's only idea.

forget, forget. In that order

SAYMOST

No one in the elevator when it dies

-

By x-ray I mean many stars will find my son

BLISSMOST

Snow in the knee

A normal church

Pain
dog and helicopter
pain

A timestamp
there's nothing

more god

WITHERMOST

Each place I go is from Ohio. Mirror softens mirror. A leatherback sea turtle drops its angel. I don't think art is working.

WANTMOST

The flat curiosity of our girlhood's insects. Age-appropriate infants with no self-esteem.

The grey math of being clothed.

The pink
of being
dressed

-
Again the wrong person
forgetting my death

BLANKMOST

Why in Ohio
is it still
this thing
you said

A leaf is in pain
A footprint isn't

HALTMOST

The babies came out silent

Our talk
was over

It might still be
meal two
or three

Meal one: the slow

cry
ing
of having had

a toothache
on the moon

WESTMOST

I started to care about form.

Sleep
could not sleep.

One brother turned more blue than the other.

I drank myself into three gods
but didn't
ask.

It was late and then it was now.

PARENTMOST

An oven too small to be left on.

An ear that makes an animal-sized hiccup.

A bidding war started by god for the children of our unprotected hypnosis.

A miniature loneliness.

An error-free nothing.

NOTE MOST

soon is a baby studied by the scholars of now who in their prime predict
that foresight will found the church of loss on the next baby born to
know that I woke up in the tree again while the house itself let it run
once more the crucifixion on tv

HYPNOSIS FOR CLUMSY GODS

in Ohio a blinking fog no older than a bandaged deer leaves in a
hospital a hole might the angel need previously more than the nothing it
learns at a spelling bee that never ends

BODYMOST

In a game of telephone they've trapped a starstruck loneliness. My
amen and your amen need the same light

switch. Our sick son knows we can't be from the future.

SNOWMOST

Death introduces again

its slow
teacher

-
Reading a poem
fixes only
the poem

-
The past runs on a loop

-
Love
out of nowhere

windows

HALFMOST

In the hips there is a knowing that water is made of patience.

I am still creating a god

that's hard
to look at

DRIFTMOST

Illusion is hallucination's lost journal
and mirror
is its found.

Look, the water will always want to be your hair.

Put your father
on a boat
that's asleep.

LEFTMOST

The sleepy fictions of any longing

My distance
keeping yours

The scar

in spoon's
dream

TWO POEMS ABOUT GOD

I keep seeing the same beautiful things

DEATH AND FATHERHOOD IN LASTLY OHIO

I don't want to be from the future anymore.

I'm not ready.

PART POEM

Ghost has aged

Death is homesick

Touch pretends its lost eye
is lost

RESPONSE POEMS WRITTEN IN NO CITY

for Benjamin Niespodziany

i.

My sibling's white noise machine reminds angels that they've no young.

There are three light switches per rooster. They are

The overlooked church of the eel

Frog's empty life

God sees an image

that's been moved

by me

ii.

Everything being done
is done
outside
of a horse

Your mother's hearing loss keeps my voice from changing

Lightning dreams itself into a cat thrown from a moving car

A lit match
enters a flashlight

iii.

dear Ohio the ocean is worried about a trapdoor

also about the ocean I want you to think about the number of limbs
remembered by a bitemark

and then our little satan using the same bowl for his food
that he does
for his water

iv.

Body language being kept alive in a ghost town.

Wind's missing child
can't get sick.

v.

Loss sees its mother in its mother. Not all of us die.

-

In hell, one forgets

hell's naked
birds

-

Empty says it has a twin.
Far says nothing.

PART AND POEM

Death pulls at its unreal hair. Hand is a color.

Touch has a postcard for the painter who sees your breath.

TWO POEMS ABOUT SLEEP

The sea writing nonsense on god's back

TWO POEMS ABOUT DESIGN

Her god hides pronouns in video games about touch.

TWO POEMS ABOUT LONGHAND AND ONE FOR OHIO'S
NOTHINGNESS

The rental history of that kid who killed himself who loved the soonest
animals of my siblings whose girlfriend was named after a website who
joked that his girlfriend was named after a website who got fired for
watching porn but then had to wait because of the snow that kid whose
note wasn't cruel to god whose note somehow made it to my mother
and then to yours and then our mothers did not there pass but knew in
secret the number of years that would between their dying

FIRST POEM ABOUT SLEEP

an unreal child

its masterless jaw
& invisible fast

FIRST POEM ABOUT DESIGN

Unheard window

Infant's doorbell

PUZZLES ONE CAN KEEP FROM GOD

A shadow puts its hand through a tent

Ice
hides Ohio
from hell

CODA

thunderstorms
reported missing
by some
verbose
orphan

MODEL

the ugliness
of horse
corrected
by deer

PARTINGS

in a movie untouched by movies a mother not known for any child is
visited by a doll on leave from its scarecrow-loving scarecrow no longer
held by figure as a gift from the department of shape

THE SILENCE ONLY THERE IF YOU PLAY IT BACKWARD

Hair-dryer
A sun of empty pain

THE GATHERING DONE BY OUR GHOSTLESS CONSTANT

the prop
ear, the slip-on

wrists, the hand

that moves to kiss
a kiss
in the eatery

of starvation's
now, the gathering

done
by our ghostless

constant

SECOND POEM ABOUT SLEEP

it keeps me up

the mirror

in bear's

dream

death and its troubled past

there will always

be more

to forget

LOST POEMS ABOUT LOSS

a crow becomes a star above a swimmer's toyless child & not an eyed
thing is looking at the sea

EACH CHILD ORPHANS YOU DIFFERENTLY

A bowl being taken from the paradise of my left hand. The second meal
arriving at god's mouth. Any word learning to shorten the life of the
poem. Bending

with newborns
a spoon.

YOU LIVE LONGER THAN THE PERSON USING YOUR
LONELINESS

for Mark Lanegan

what
would keep
angels
from comparing
papercuts
god and sleep
are actions
I take

AFTERJAW

for Mark Lanegan

Every third angel in the shared dream of swimming with a nosebleed
emerges with a temporary fact about god. To hear anything, one must
first

pack snow near a dying bear.

TWO POEMS ABOUT WINGSPAN

afraid
of the world
then afraid
of the world
again

ALIVE IN A SALTED MIRROR, RAIN

Alive in a salted mirror, rain remembers my grandmother pulling me
from the ocean

-

I live in a god that cannot touch a nerve

IN THE MUSEUM THAT LOVED CINEMA

The cartoon churchbell of a father's war. Boneless mountain. Some
baby of both a reformed cannibal and an uncalled bulimic. A bullet. The
way a bowl cries into me. A god to tell us when the missing vanish.

REMOTE MUSICS

I write in this tongue and pray in another.

we sleep
and are kissed
by an ear
in three
beds: train, cow, frog.

if you've seen one roach,
you've seen them all. that's where they come from.

BARN MUSICS

your father
spelled
into baiting
hosanna's
cricket
by a red
a gaslit
mouse

THE BEAR

flyless wall. box of baby clothes

in an empty dream

SHE MUSICS

saddest
when peeling
an orange
these days
of sink
and crib, the earth

in parts
flat

WHETHER BOY SAYS BREAD OR BIRD, WE HEAR BOTH

& a toothache
can miss
its shadow

UNTITLED

we bid
in Ohio
on a pack
of condoms
dropped
by the invisible
man.

birth approaches its black stoplight.

in clothes
that fit
I feel
remembered.

EASY

a ghost and an angel compare childhoods

(we've all
let our food
get cold

IDEATIONS

with his mother's purse under his arm
the gatherer
of knocked-out
teeth

tracks
to the entrance
of a waterpark
the so-called

last
deer to imagine
a rock

empty

A BALLOON IN THE CHURCH OF TOUCH

she reaches into the same hat for the rabbit he's made disappear.

I sleep and the dark takes me for the bone

lightning
straightens.

by death I mean nothing was beautiful for a very long time.
that, and when did you know.

CLEANING THE BODY SMALL AND BOY

the brain a nude
in the remoteness of god

GRIEFMOST

the lamp
eating
its bowl
of light

UNTITLED

two boys at a rest stop

one cowboy, one indian-

also there

a mother's
burning
car
and the mother herself
flipping open
a pocket knife

oh place, you are not
my first
language
but

it was men
created
machines
that they could tell
those machines
the little
they knew, and it was god
found god, and it was your father
that with his father

while in
their astronaut
poverties
took shyness
from a gun

TWO POEMS ABOUT TWO POEMS

I give god enough to imagine me naked. Fish and bird are loose in the same mirror. My children, Object and Permanence, examine my spotless body like aliens who cannot hurt their own but want to. Their mother's decoy has a clock distracted by time and their mother swims to have no ghost. Suicide. All those dates I didn't.

CAT NUMBER EIGHT ENTERS THE DREAM

how many fingers, fork

will hunger
lose

-
I am the trap
god sets
for my kids

TREE OF NOTHING'S APPLE

I know a woman whose shadow will never be the same.

-

we are eating from a bowl that wants to go home.

CIVILIZATION

for Brian Dawson

three unicorns
in horse's
dream
surround
a lame
deer

can dream
be stopped

NOTES FOR INSECT

I will never know a ghost story

god does not

MY QUIET QUIET SON

*“Probably I'll die like this,
a long time ago.”* - Franz Wright

I will never forget hearing god pronounce your name
to a ghost obsessed with wolves

out there in the dogness

LIKE A FATHER

eating lamb
for his lovely
misheard
boy

SO SANG

father paints an abstract jesus. my sister bites at the shoulder strap of
her bra. my brothers

to keep from crumbling
are sharing
bread.

I draw a violinist. a dog

at the neck of its owner.

in our imaginings
gutted baseballs

became

the skulls of small animals
through which
the wind

called heads.

a refrigerator rocks in a junkyard.

either the door has jammed, or she

is pregnant.

a cement wall
scraped
in passing
by one
with a stick
is the love
we have
for father

depression is a dog whistle. I miss dinner sounding it out.

[END]

blood to bathe us in its blue past
poems. 2022

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OTHER WORKS:

**Skin To Skin In An Unmarked Life**  
chapbook  
(Trainwreck Press, 2021)

**Ghost Arson**  
full-length  
(Kung Fu Treachery Press, 2018)

SELF-PUBLISHED:

*Animal Masks On the Floor of the Ocean*, 124 pages  
June 2019

*rocks have the softest shadows*, 237 pages  
Dec 2020

*untouched in the capital of soon*, 187 pages  
Sept 2021

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NOTES:

*'in the museum that loved cinema'* appeared on Twitter in the journal  
**Obliterat** @obliterat\_