

blood to bathe us in its blue past

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**poems** new and selected

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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 disgrief





*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.

## NOTEMOST

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\_