

[Ellen McGrath Smith: Two Poems](#) [1]

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Aged Animals in the Wild

You put it in as a search term, and bam
the information's out there, for example:
male orangutans' flanges start to sag,
stressed females lose a lot of hair,
and as for male blue-footed boobies,
The colour of [their] feet changes with age,
mirroring the oxidative damage suffered by their sperm.
A lion's butt may get bigger and his tail divine
the earth's center, hungry mouth that craves us all,
but not in the dog-panting-with-every-lift-of the-fork way
it craves the young—more like the way the old dog
noses his bowl just to check that the pellets are there,
the same ones he's been given for years,
which he eats up eventually,
barely aware that he's eating them.



Shaken 59: *If there be nothing new, but that which is*

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I'm a dot connected to dots across the earth. Technology
can trace the lines we used to just imagine. Absence
is now an excuse for intensified presence; Skype & the like.

I fed him a lunch I brought special. What drugs are they giving him?
(He was so cheerful.) I showed him my phone, with his dog's photo on it;
he waved it away, being much more concerned about the black cat

he'd rescued from the bottom of the sea. This is standard dementia.
How, then, to classify the endless news on the ebbs and flows
of the big search in the Indian Ocean for wreckage from the disappeared

flight from Malaysia? CNN runs an interminable loop of the flight path
in straight lines from Kuala Lumpur to halfway to Vietnam then zig-
zag and backtrack and on to the wide plain of blue off Australia.

The sundowning, slack-jawed inhabitants of nursing homes—
Does anyone wonder what they make of the daily refrain of details?
A black box on the bottom of the ocean knows something we don't.

Publishing Information

- Blue-footed booby quote is from "[Wild Animals Age, Too: Researchers Study Senescence in Blue-footed Booby Shows](#) [3]," *Science Daily*, May 10, 2011.

Art Information

- "[Pacific Ocean From Space](#) [4]" © blueforce4116; Creative Commons license.



Ellen McGrath Smith teaches at the University of Pittsburgh. Her poems have appeared in *Cimarron*, *Bayou*, *Quiddity*, *Sententia*, and the *American Poetry Review*, among other journals.

Her work has been recognized with an AROHO Orlando Prize, an Academy of American Poets award, a Rainmaker

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Award from *Zone 3* magazine, and a 2007 Individual Artist grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

A chapbook of her poems, *Scatter, Feed*, was published in 2014 by Seven Kitchens Press.

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