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Two Poems by Ellen McGrath Smith



January

It's easy to make the connection: the moths
in the kitchen last week, dead of winter,
meant the oatmeal was seeded with eggs

and their gooey unravelling.

At 50,
I'm no longer amazed when predictions
I make are as real as the ashy gray wings
twitching inside the plastic bag, biosphere
beyond a moth's wildest dreams.

Younger,
the infestation would have been loss
drilling through my middle, the trigger
bearing down and carving out the wider rings,
from a snub at a party or summer cold

to complete
annihilation.

It's good now, not to feel that early drilling
as fear hollowing out my whole being,
from my first embryonic pulsing at the center,
larval in its faceless outward push,
to the assemblage of bone and scar and soul

I am today.

One day
when I'm more empty than full, the lines
between cause and effect will appear as
thick rope in the foreground, an endless net
releasing the red scarves, loose tongues,
and ruined grains

into living air.



Teaching Notes

Graphically
depicting anyone's intestines is the end
of romance and the beginning of
a stunned innocence
that wriggles through the dirt so it can breathe
—or so my student wrote
in completely abstract, general terms,
which I told him in my comments.

What he said was
"everything falls back to nature,"
and he's not wrong
if one really looks at things
and doesn't conjure packaged faith.
I wrote, "Say a little more about what
does this look like?"

(The intestines and worms are mine.)

Art Information

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- “Worm with Pink Shroom” © Kelly Dumar; used by permission.



Ellen McGrath Smith teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and in the Carlow University Madwomen in the Attic program. Her writing has appeared in the *American Poetry Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Quiddity*, *Cimarron*, and other journals, and in several anthologies, including *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*. Smith has been the recipient of an Orlando Prize, an Academy of American Poets award, a Rainmaker Award from *Zone 3* magazine, and a 2007 Individual Artist grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Her second chapbook, *Scatter, Feed*, was published by Seven Kitchens Press in the fall of 2014, and her book, *Nobody's Jackknife*, was published in 2015 by the West End Press.

For more information, visit [Ellen McGrath Smith's website](https://www.ellenmcgrathsmith.com/) [5].

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