

A Short Note on the Long Poem

We read them. From the beginning we've published them, from time to time devoting entire issues to a single poem, such as John Nist's Civil War epic "Dulce et Decorum" (Fall/Winter 1958/59 and Spring 1960), Albert Goldbarth's "The Two Domains" (Spring 1994), and more recently Michael Broek's "The Logic of Yoo" (Fall 2011). Though we're always on the lookout for the distilled lyric that steals our breath away, we also welcome poems that create a broad field for exploration. The world's a big place, after all, bigger than the inch of turf trod by too many contemporary poets.

The issue you hold in your hands came about serendipitously. Over the course of two quarterly editorial board sessions we found ourselves accepting six long poems with wildly different styles and subject matter, the breadth of each contributing to a still larger breadth in the aggregate. We like the geography: Poland and Maine, Palestine, Arizona and Mexico, England and Italy, mons veneris and mythological mountains. We value the cultural and historical reach: violins and the Holocaust, airports and cyberspace, Edmund Spenser, the Song of Solomon and Ahdaf Souief, the Penitentes, tooth fairies and labors lost.

We see the long poem not as an undisciplined effusion but as a vehicle for formal innovation: Alicia Stallings's application to the domestic sphere of the ottava rima epic stanza, Margaree Little's interleaving of prose and verse in a narrative of interleaving times and places, Susan Tichy's mesostic conversation with John Ruskin's notebook entries. Each poem in the issue has a shape fit neatly to its expression.

We admit to a bit of mischief in juxtaposing poems governed by such blatantly different aesthetics. We hope that juxtaposition invites careful reading and broadens your sense of what is possible in contemporary poetry. During the months of March, April, and May, all the poets with work in this issue will contribute to a discussion on the *BPJ* blog, the Poet's Forum, about the crafting of their poems and the long poem more generally. We invite you to join the discussion at blog.bpj.org.

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