

POETRY

Telemachus' Burden

Nothing was exactly difficult because routines develop, compensations for perceived absences and omissions. My mother was the sort of woman who let you know she was suffering and then denied that suffering since in her view suffering was what slaves did; when I tried to console her, to relieve her misery, she rejected me. I now realize if she'd been capable of honesty she would have been a Stoic. Unfortunately she was a queen, she wanted it understood at every moment she had chosen her own destiny. She would have had to be insane to choose that destiny. Well, good luck to my father, in my opinion a stupid man if he expects his return to diminish her isolation; perhaps he came back for that.

[From *Meadowlands*, 1996]

Formaggio

The world was whole because it shattered. When it shattered, then we knew what it was.

It never healed itself. But in the deep fissures, smaller worlds appeared: it was a good thing that human beings made them; human beings know what they need, better than any god.

On Huron Avenue they became a block of stores; they became Fishmonger, Formaggio. Whatever they were or sold, they were alike in their function: they were visions of safety. Like a resting place. The salespeople were like parents; they appeared to live there. On the whole, kinder than parents.

Tributaries feeding into a large river: I had many lives. In the provisional world, I stood where the fruit was, flats of cherries, clementines, under Hallie's flowers.

[From *Vita Nova*, 1999]

Adventures in Poetry with ©Dr. Wes Browning



The good news: a panel of the 2nd U.S. Court of Appeals finally, FINALLY, told the Bush administration that simply declaring someone an "enemy combatant" did not provide them with an excuse to deny that person a lawyer or rights to a trial. The bad news: it isn't over.

Jose Padilla, a U.S. citizen, was arrested in Chicago in May 2002 and has been held in a navy brig in South Carolina for a year and a half. He hasn't been allowed to see his lawyers. Although the government has said that Padilla was involved in a dirty bomb terrorist plot he hasn't been charged with a crime in any court of law. The view of the government is that they didn't even have to say what he was supposed to be guilty of, it was enough for them to declare that Mr. Padilla was an "enemy combatant" to detain him in the brig FOR LIFE in ISOLATION if they wanted to do so.

Bush's people still think that's the way it should work and will probably appeal. They are no doubt encouraged by the fact that one member of the three-judge panel actually sided with them. The idea of the dissenting opinion was that the president needs the power to detain people who may be a threat to the public.

Let's reflect on that dissenting opinion to get a clear idea in our own minds as to what a screaming imbecile that one lame judge is.

The man has been detained for one and a half years. The immediate threat is over. HE'S IN THE BRIG. He's detained already. The issue isn't the detention. His arrest was proper. The issue is, once you've got him, YOU STILL HAVE TO LET HIM SEE A LAWYER AND TRY HIM AND LET HIM GO IF HE TURNS OUT TO BE INNOCENT.

And oh yes, the Bush Administration has had A YEAR AND A HALF to do that. Did I make that clear enough? A friggin YEAR AND A HALF.

Here is a personal note for that one lame judge: * Guess what? I think

you're a threat to the American people. Good thing I'm not the president, or I might declare your ass enemy combatant material and put you in isolation for, oh I don't know, how about for YEAR AND A HALF?! * — Ha, ha, just kidding — Signed, Dr. Wes.

Speaking of South Carolina, that was where police stormed a school recently and searched a hundred students for illegal drugs, some of them at gunpoint, because their principal thought it would be swell. What we have here is another threat to the American people. There are getting to be too many of these.

I don't expect the police to know or understand the constitution. That would be dreaming. But is it asking too much for a school principal to have read it with comprehension?

I don't expect the police to know or understand the Constitution. That would be dreaming.

What part of the Fourth Amendment does that principal not grasp, I wonder? Was it the part about "the right of the people to be secure against unreasonable searches"? Was he not aware that minors also constitute people? Was it the part about how search warrants were required to be specific? How specific is searching every kid in a school hallway whether they have done anything suspicious or not just because a crime may or may not have at one time occurred in that hallway days or weeks earlier by completely different people?

Here's another one, folks. Say you're on vacation in Guadalajara, Mexico, and our government, or some imbecile in it, decides they want to incarcerate you for life without charges or a hearing. Here's how they could do that. They would seize you in Mexico without clearance from the Mexican authorities. Then, they would take you to Guantánamo Base ("Gitmo") and imprison you with all the Taliban, as an "enemy combatant." (It doesn't matter if you are or not, they don't have to prove that part. They just have to declare it.)

Gitmo, a secure US military enclave, isn't really America, so all that constitution BS doesn't apply. That's the essence of our government's actual legal position as they fight for that power all the way to the Supreme Court. What a crock. ■

Telemachus' Guilt

Patience of the sort my mother practised on my father (which in his self-absorption he mistook for tribute though it was in fact a species of rage—didn't he ever wonder why he was so blocked in expressing his native abandon?): it infected my childhood. Patiently she fed me; patiently she supervised the kindly slaves who attended me, regardless of my behavior, an assumption I tested with increasing violence. It seemed clear to me that from her perspective I didn't exist, since my actions had no power to disturb her: I was the envy of my playmates. In the decades that followed I was proud of my father for staying away even if he stayed away for the wrong reasons; I used to smile when my mother wept. I hope now she could forgive that cruelty; I hope she understood how like her own coldness it was, a means of remaining separate from what one loves deeply.

[From *Meadowlands*]

Solstice

Each year, on this same date, the summer solstice comes. Consummate light: we plan for it, the day we tell ourselves that time is very long indeed, nearly infinite. And in our reading and writing, preferences is given to the celebratory, the ecstatic.

There is in these rituals something apart from wonder: there is also a kind of preening, as though human genius had participated in these arrangements and we found the results satisfying.

What follows the light is what precedes it: the moment of balance, of dark equivalence.

But tonight we sit in the garden in our canvas chairs so late into the evening—why should we look either forward or backward? Why should we be forced to remember: it is in our blood, this knowledge. Shortness of the days; darkness, coldness of winter. It is in our blood and bones; it is in our history. It takes genius to forget these things.

[From *The Seven Ages*, 2001]



The Queen of Carthage

Brutal to love;
more brutal to die.
And brutal beyond the reaches of justice
to die of love.

In the end, Dido
summoned her ladies in waiting
that they might see
the harsh destiny inscribed for her by the Fates.

She said, "Aeneas
came to me over the shimmering water,
I asked the Fates
to permit him to return my passion,
even for a short time. What difference
between that and a lifetime: in truth, in such moments,
they are the same, they are both eternity.

I was given a great gift
which I attempted to increase, to prolong.
Aeneas came to me over the water: the beginning
blinded me.

Now the Queen of Carthage
will accept suffering as she accepted favor:
to be noticed by the Fates
is some distinction after all.

Or should one say, to have honored hunger,
since the Fates go by that name also."

[From *Vita Nova*]

"I am attracted to ellipsis, to the unsaid, to suggestion, to eloquent, deliberate silence."

—Louise Glück

Louise Glück is professor at Williams College in Massachusetts and the newly appointed Poet Laureate of the United States. Weaving themes of loss, isolation, and abandonment into each poem, she examines paradox and transformation from a uniquely women's perspective. With both sorrow and humor, she provides the reader with sincere empathy and an intuitive understanding of human existence.

Glück has said she prefers to write poems using "the simplest of vocabularies." Plainness allows her to be suggestive, to enchant the reader with "the possibilities of context." Like Zen or the negative space in painting, her "deliberate silence" allows the reader to explore their own context. Hence, each poem is an individual journey, mapped by her words, always allowing for detours.

Glück selected these poems especially for the October 16 issue of *Spare Change*, a Boston street newspaper. They are republished here with her permission.



—Kara Hoppe