LEGEND

Louise Glück

My father’s father came
to New York from Dhlua:
one misfortune followed another.
In Hungary, a scholar, a man of property.
Then failure: an immigrant
rolling cigars in a cold basement.

He was like Joseph in Egypt.
At night, he walked the city;
spray of harbor
turned to tears on his face.

Tears of grief for Dhlua — forty houses,
a few cows grazing the rich meadows —

Though the great soul is said to be
a star, a beacon,
what it resembles better is a diamond:
in the whole world there is nothing
hard enough to change it.

Unfortunate being, have you ceased to feel
the grandeur of the world
that, like a heavy weight, shaped
the soul of my grandfather?

From the factory, like sad birds his dreams
flew to Dhlua, grasping in their beaks
as from moist earth in which a man could see
the shape of his own footprint,
scattered images, loose bits of the village; and as he packed the leaves, so within his soul this weight compressed scraps of Dhlua into principles, abstractions worthy of the challenge of bondage:

in such a world, to scorn privilege, to love reason and justice, always to speak the truth——

which has been the salvation of our people since to speak the truth gives the illusion of freedom.