LOUISE GLÜCK

EXILE

He did not pretend
to be one of them. They did not require
a poet, a spokesman. He saw
the dog’s heart, the working
lips of the parasite—
He himself preferred
to listen in the small apartments
as a man would check his camera at the museum,
to express his commitment through silence:
there is no other exile.
The rest is egotism; in the bloody street,
the I, the impostor—
He was there, obsessed with revolution,
in his own city,
daily climbing the wooden stairs
that were not a path
but necessary repetitions
and for twenty years
making no poetry
of what he saw: nor did he forfeit
great achievement. In his mind,
there could be no outcry that did not equate
his choice with their imprisonment
and he would not allow
the gift to be tainted.