LOUISE GLÜCK

HYACINTH

1.
Is that an attitude for a flower, to stand
like a club at the walk; poor slain boy,
is that a way to show
gratitude to the gods? White
with colored hearts, the tall flowers
sway around you, all the other boys,
in the cold spring, as the violets open.
2.
There were no flowers in antiquity
but boys' bodies, pale, perfectly imagined.
So the gods sank to human shape with longing.
In the field, in the willow grove,
Apollo sent the courtiers away.
3.
And from the blood of the wound
a flower sprang, lilylike, more brilliant
than the purples of Tyre.
Then the god wept: his vital grief
flooded the earth.
4.
Beauty dies: that is the source
of creation. Outside the ring of trees
the courtiers could hear
the dove's call transmit
its uniform, its inborn sorrow—
They stood listening, among the rustling willows.
Was this the god's lament?
They listened carefully. And for a short time
all sound was sad.
5.
There is no other immortality:
in the cold spring, the purple violets open.
And yet, the heart is black,
there is its violence frankly exposed.
Or is it not the heart at the center
but some other word?
And now someone is bending over them,

meaning to gather them—
6.
They could not wait
in exile forever.
Through the glittering grove
the courtiers ran
calling the name
of their companion
over the birds’ noise,
over the willows’ aimless sadness.
Well into the night they wept,
their clear tears
altering no earthly color.