

Hyacinthus Met. 10. 162–219 (loeb):

“You also, youth of Amyclae,¹ Phoebus would have set in the sky, if grim fate had given him time to set you there. Still in what fashion you may you are immortal: as often as spring drives winter out and the Ram succeeds the watery Fish, so often do you come up and blossom on the green turf. Above all others did my father love you, and Delphi, set at the very centre of the earth, lacked its presiding deity while the god was haunting Eurotas’ stream and Sparta,¹ the unwalled. No more has he thought for zither or for bow. Entirely heedless of his usual pursuits, he refuses not to bear the nets, nor hold the dogs in leash, nor go as comrade along the rough mountain ridges. And so with long association he feeds his passion’s flame. And now Titan was about midway ’twixt the coming and the banished night, standing at equal distance from both extremes; they strip themselves and, gleaming with rich olive oil, they try a contest with the broad discus. This, well poised, Phoebus sent flying through the air and cleft the opposite clouds with the heavy iron. Down again to the solid earth after long time it fell, revealing the hurler’s skill and strength combined. Straightway the Taenarian² youth, heedless of danger and moved by eagerness for the game, ran out to take up the discus. But the hard earth, returning the throw, hurled it back up full in your face, O Hyacinthus. The god grows deadly pale even as the boy, and catches up the huddled form; now he seeks to warm you again, now tries to staunch your dreadful wound, now strives to stay your parting soul with healing herbs. But his arts are of no avail; the wound is past all cure. Just as when in a watered garden, if someone breaks off violets or poppies or lilies, bristling with their yellow stamens, fainting they suddenly droop their withered heads and can no longer stand erect, but gaze, with tops bowed low, upon the earth: so the dying face lies prone, the neck, its strength all gone, cannot sustain its own weight and falls back upon the shoulders. ‘Thou art fallen, defrauded of thy youth’s prime, Oebalides,’¹ says Phoebus, ‘and in thy wound do I see my guilt; thou art my cause of grief and self-reproach; my hand must be proclaimed the cause of thy destruction. I am the author of thy death. And yet, what is my fault, unless my playing with thee can be called a fault, unless my loving thee can be called a fault? And oh, that I might meet death together with thee and might with thee give up my life! But since we are held from this by the laws of fate, thou shalt be always with me, and shalt stay on my mindful lips. Thee shall my lyre, struck by my hand, thee shall my songs proclaim. And as a new flower, by thy markings shalt thou imitate my groans. Also the time will come when a most valiant hero² shall be linked with this flower, and by the same markings shall he be known.’ While Apollo thus spoke with truth-telling lips, behold, the blood, which had poured out on the ground and stained the grass, ceased to be blood, and in its place there sprang a flower brighter than Tyrian dye. It took the form of the lily, save that the one was of purple hue, while the other was silvery white. Phoebus, not satisfied with this—for ’twas he who wrought the honouring miracle—himself inscribed his grieving words upon the leaves, and the flower bore the marks, AI AI, letters of lamentation, drawn thereon. Sparta, too, was proud that Hyacinthus was her son, and even to this day his honour still endures; and still, as the anniversary returns, as did their sires, they celebrate the Hyacinthia in solemn festival.”