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White phalaenopsis

by Eric Ormsby

The protocol of orchids lies in subterfuge
swanning petals form a curve's cortege
where slant diplomacies of lip engage

the winter-dociled bee. Such grace is made
of tasseled rhetoric, arced only to dissuade:
See how the orchid angles out of the white shade

that shrouds its calyx. Form can never lie
we tell ourselves, although the pilgrim fly
find heaven in fragrance where it comes to die.

Is the orchid's flowering but stratagem,
mere disillusion of a diadem,
or our most shadowy Elysium?

Eric Ormsby is the author of *The Baboons of Hada*, a selection of his poems (Carcenet).

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