

7-15-2019

Orion's Final Song

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Recommended Citation

Chisholm, Chad (2019) "Orion's Final Song," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 2019 : Iss. 41 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol2019/iss41/15>

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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Abstract

While there are different stories about the death of Orion, the inspiration for this poem mainly comes from Hesiod's *Astronomia* where the huntsman Orion comes to Crete for the wild game and there becomes the beloved of Artemis, goddess of the moon and the hunt. Orion and Artemis became hunting companions, and the mortal huntsman won the heart of the young immortal. However, their love was short-lived. Because of his zeal for the hunt as well as his boasting, Orion angered Gaia, the primordial goddess of the Earth, who then sent a gigantic scorpion to battle the famous hunter. While Orion fought valiantly, he fell mortally wounded. When he died, Artemis was devastated by the loss of her only love. According to most legends, Artemis pleaded with Father Zeus to engrave Orion's image in the skies as a memorial to the great huntsman, and he honored her request. As a mature goddess, Artemis never took another lover but remained celibate and became a protector of maidens, hunters, children, and expectant mothers.

Orion's Final Song

by
Chad Chisholm

Artemis, Mavourneen:

Once more to touch your moonlit hair.
I say someone beautiful as you
Hardly understands the life whirling about you
Sealing minds and tongues of hunters
But, as wildflowers among weeds,
Hold high your heads and bloom
Not indifferently, but oblivious to things sublunary
Mad with Nyx's nympholeptic storm
(And all other such seeming-silliness)
Rushing and rolling, beveled and unable to offend.

Artemis, Mavourneen:

Tears I feel for me? No mortal form is immune.
Water no more Scorpio's arrows and stings:
There's always another star above.
Cry for the sea, Gaia's most mewed and ancient lover:
Wild, hopeless, and immortal Oceanus
Restless chancellor of a thousand colonies;
Pitiable kinsman, he rages perpetually
Towards the moon and sandy mainland.

Artemis, Mavourneen:

Yet see you will, or...see you now?
As a Delos girl on an April day
Could you see flocks of seagulls and jaybirds
Fluttering through a bushel of chrysanthemums?
Did you listen to wingtips waving above
Fragrant buds, from petals both lithe and fresh?
And did your cerulean eyes in childhood
Become vaporous and vein red?
And did your newness of heart then know
The birds and blooming buds (through no fault of their own)
Could never know nor comprehend
What still you feel like flocks of quail flushing
Through reeds beneath your breastbone?

Weep you still those nonage tears?
Artemis, there is your heart.
Mavourneen—there is your heart!
Goddess to be: there is your heart.

Author's Note:

While there are different stories about the death of Orion, the inspiration for this poem mainly comes from Hesiod's *Astronomia* where the huntsman Orion comes to Crete for the wild game and there becomes the beloved of Artemis, goddess of the moon and the hunt. Orion and Artemis became hunting companions, and the mortal huntsman won the heart of the young immortal. However, their love was short-lived. Because of his zeal for the hunt as well as his boasting, Orion angered Gaia, the primordial goddess of the Earth, who then sent a gigantic scorpion to battle the famous hunter. While Orion fought valiantly, he fell mortally wounded. When he died, Artemis was devastated by the loss of her only love. According to most legends, Artemis pleaded with Father Zeus to engrave Orion's image in the skies as a memorial to the great huntsman, and he honored her request. As a mature goddess, Artemis never took another lover but remained celibate and became a protector of maidens, hunters, children, and expectant mothers.



“Dogwood.” Photograph by Janet Brennan Croft