

Hymn to Artemis
Callimachus

translation by Yvonne Rathbone

Of Artemis we sing
no light matter is it for poets to forget
she who amuses herself with archery
and shooting hares,
who cares for the mountains.

When she was still a little girl, sitting
on her father's knee, she said to him,
"Papa, let me be a virgin forever
and give me so many names that Phoibos
will not challenge me.
And give me a bow and arrow,
from you father, I do not ask
for a grand bow and quiver.
The Kyklopes can start with crafting
slender arrows and a well curved bow.

"And let me be the Light Bringer,
and give me a chiton to wear
with a colored border down to the knee
for when I slay the beast of wild.

"And give me sixty of Okeanos'
daughters for dancing
all nine years old, all ungirdled girls
and twenty woodnymph waiting women
from Amnisadas, to tend my hunting boots
and care for my swift hounds
when I have finished shooting
arrows at lynx and stag.

"And give me all the mountains,
and as for cities, give whatever you feel
is best, for Artemis will rarely go into town.
I will live in the mountains, visiting
the cities of men, only when women
struck with painful labor, call to me for aid,
for the Fates have decided I am to be
a helper of women, because my own mother
had no pain when she gave birth to me.
I slipped easily from her womb."

Saying this she reached her hands
up to her father's beard, but try as she might,
she could not reach his whiskers.
Her father smiled, and laughing nodded,
patting her on the head, he said,

“When goddesses bear me children like this,
I hardly mind the jealous wrath of Hera.
Take everything you have asked for, child.
And Father will give you even more.
Along with your one city, I will give you thirty more.
Thirty more cities, which will exalt you alone.
Thirty more to call your own. Along with many more
to share with other gods, inland and island,
with groves and altars for you in every one.

“And you will be the guardian of highways and harbors.”

Having said these words,
he nodded his head,
and all was done.

The girl walked upon the white Cretan mountain
with its tall trees and then on to Ocean
to pick her many nymphs
all nine years old, all ungirdled girls.

But rejoice great river Kairatos!
Rejoice Tethys!
For your daughters will be
handmaidens to Leto's own.

And next she's off to visit the Kyklopes.
She found them on Lipara Island,
- called Lipara now, it was Meligunis then -
standing round the anvils of Hephaistos
hammering a molten thunderbolt, working
eagerly to fashion from it a monumental
water trough for great Poseidon's horses.

The nymphs grew frightened at the sight
of terrible monsters, cragged like Ossian cliffs;
beneath a single brow, a single eye
glaring furtively, the size
of a four-fold bull hide shield.
They trembled at the blast and din
of anvils, bellows, and the groans
of Kyklopes.

Aitna rung
Trinkakia cried,
seat of the Sikanians
as well their neighbor Italia
and bellowed mightily did Corsica

As they raised their hammers over head
taking the bubbling bronze from the forge,
the hammered iron, smiting it in rhythmic blows
to the beat of their own weary toil.

The harmless daughters of Ocean
dared not look them in the eye
nor listen to the din. No cause for anger.
Even daughters of the Blessed Ones,
long past the age of children
shudder when they look upon this.

When a little girl is naughty,
her mother calls the Kyklopes to come
for the child, Arges or Steropes,
and out of some closet, Hermes comes
smeared with ashes, giving the child a fright,
sending her racing to her mother's lap
her eyes hidden in her hands.

But you, Goddess,
when you were but three years old
had already been brought
in your mother Leto's arms
to Hephaistos that he might give you
first gifts. Brontes set you on
his stout knees - and let you pluck
the shaggy hair upon his chest,
and tear you did so that even today
he has a bald patch
(the monster looks like
he has a bit of mange.)

This time your words were filled with daring,
"Kyklopes, craft for me a Cretan bow
and a quiver full of arrows, for I too
am a child of Leto, just like my brother, Apollo.
And whatever wild beast or monstrous creature
I may slay with this bow,
the Kyklopes will receive and eat.

And as you said it, so it was done.

Immediately you were made ready, O Goddess,
And again you're off to get the dogs for your pack.
You come to Pan's Arcadian roost, there he is
butchering lynx meat from Mainalos
for the his breeding hounds to eat.

The Bearded God gave you:
two dogs half-white
three with droopy ears
one brindled.
These could pull down lions
by the throat and bring them home
still alive.

And seven Kunosourian bitches
swifter than the wind
swift to pursue fawns and wild-eyed hare
following the stag to his bed,
the porcupine to his burrow
swift on the tracks of the roe.

And you were off, racing your hounds,
you found at the foot of Parrhasian mountain
deer dancing on the banks
of black-pebbled Anauros
so grand, greater than bulls,
their horns shining with gold

You stopped amazed, and your heart whispered,
“This would be a first capture worthy of Artemis.”

Leaving the dogs behind, on foot you captured
four of the five, the fifth escaping with Hera’s help
over the Keladon River, to hide by the Keryneion Hill
a later labor for Herakles.

Artemis Parthenos, Tityoktone
golden clad in armor and belt
you yoke to a golden chariot
your golden bridled deer.

From where did your horned team
first set out?

Thracian Haimos,
where Boreas’ hurricane blows
his evil frost on the cloakless.

And where did you cut your pine torches?
and from what flame did you light them?
On Mysian Olympos,
you breathed into them
the unquenchable light of fire
distilled from your father’s lightning bolts.

And how many times, goddess,
did you test your silver bow?
First at an elm
Next you shot an oak
And third some wild beast.

And fourth you shot not into a tree
but a city of unjust men, who betray
their guests and themselves with
many wicked deeds. On them
you press your fearsome wrath.

Plague feeds upon their cattle, and frost
upon their fields, old men cut their hair
mourning for their sons, women die
in childbirth or escape with crippled children.

But for those illumined by your smile and grace,
their fields abundant grain will bear,
the four foot stock of wealth will multiply,
men go not to the tomb until the very last
and strife - which wastes even well established houses
does not wound the family; brother's wife and
husband's sister set their chairs around a single table.

Lady, may all that are true friends of mine,
and may I myself, be counted among that number.
And may I always tend to song.

I will sing
of Leto's marriage, of Apollo,
and of Artemis,
your name repeated many times
all your labors, your dogs, your bow,
your chariot as it carries you lightly,
wondrous to behold, to the house of Zeus.

At the entrance, Guileless Hermes takes your weapons
and Apollo takes whatever wild beast you've killed
at least he did so until Herakles came;
now the "Anvil of Tiryrs" hangs round the gates,
hoping you'll bring a hunk of fat meat.

The gods never fail to laugh at him,
his mother-in-law, Hera, more than anyone,
as he drags a great big bull from the chariot
or a wild boar, gasping for breath, by the foot.
Then he lectures the goddess so very craftily:

“You should kill lions, so that mortals will praise
you like they do me. Let the deer and hare
have their mountains. What harm do they do?
Swine, now, they savage the fields,
and cows are a great evil to mankind.
Shoot them instead.”

Having spoken, he still manages
to quickly suffer through the great beast,
for though his limbs were deified
under the Phrygian oak,
he’s still a glutton
his belly the same as the one he had
when he met Theidoamas ploughing.

The nymphs of Amnisos, rub down your deer
setting them loose from the yoke,
they bring quick growing clover, from Hera’s meadow
what the horses of Zeus feed on themselves;
the nymphs fill golden winevats with water,
a pleasing drought for a deer.

You enter your father’s house.
All the gods call you to sit with them,
but you sit beside Apollo.

When the Nymphs whirl and circle around you
near the streams of Egyptian Inopos,
or in Pitane - which is yours as well
or in Limnais, or in Alai Araphenides
where you came to dwell after leaving
Skythia, denouncing the Tauric custom,

then may my oxen not be hired out,
to break in a four-acre field,
for they would surely come home
lame, their necks drooping,
even if they were Stympheian cows,
nine years old with the long horns,
the best at cutting the deep furrow;

for Helios never passes by
that beautiful dance without
pausing his chariot to watch
and lengthening the day.

What island now, what mountain,
what stream and city, find most favor
with you.?

Which Nymph do you love the most?
Which heroine accompanies you?

Tell me, Goddess, and that will be my song.

Of islands, Doilikhe is your favorite,
Of cities, Perge. Taygetos for mountains,
and Euripos harbor pleases you most.

Beyond all others, you love
the nymph of Gortyn most of all,
deer-slaying, sharp-shooting Britomartis.
Deranged with love for her, Minos pursued
her through the hills of Crete.
The Nymph hid here under a shaggy oak
there in a field. For nine months Minos
clambered over rocky crags and screes,
relentless until, when he almost had her,
she leapt, for the sea from a high cliff
and into the saving net of some fisherfolk.

And so the Kydonians named her Nymph Lady-of-the-Nets
and where she jumped is now Net Mountain;
They have set up altars there and give sacrifice
making garlands of pine and mastic
But they leave the myrtle untouched
for it was a myrtle bough that caught her dress
as she fled and now she hates that wood.

Oupis, O queen, fair-faced Light Bringer
The Cretans invoke you with this nymph's name.

You made Kyrene your companion,
gave her two hunting dogs
with whom this daughter of Hypseus
won the contest beside the Iolkian tomb.
With the golden-haired lover
of Kephalos, son of Deionios, O Queen,
you chased away the summer.
They say you loved fair Antikleia
equal to your own eyes.

These were the first to wear the swift bow
and arrow filled quivers across their shoulders,
the right with its breast always bare.

And more, you wholly praised swift footed Atalanta
boar-slaying daughter of Arkadian Iasios,
taught her how to hunt with dogs
and how hit her mark.

Nor could the hunters called to kill
the boar of Calydonia find fault with her,
the tokens of victory went to Arcadia,
the tusks reside there still.

I suspect that savage Hylaios
and senseless Rhoikos,
although they hate her, do not sit
in Haides faulting the archer's aim.
Their flanks, with whose blood
the Mainalian mountains flowed,
would not join in the lie.

Lady of so many shrines, so many cities,
Hail! Khitone, sojourner in Miletis
For Neleus made you his guide
when he set sail, departing
from the Land of Kekrops.

Lady of Khesias and of Imbrasia
first throned, at your temple
Agamemnon gave you the rudder
of his ship, a soothing ward
against a too calm sea
when you battened the winds down
as the Akhaian ships were sailing
to torment the Trojan cities,
inflamed for Rhamnusian Helen.

Proitos built two temples for you
one to Maiden Artemis, who brought
his daughters back to him
when they'd been wandering mad
through the Azanian mountains
The other, in Lousa, to Artemis the Mild
because you took the madness
from his daughters.

The battle lusting Amazons set up
a wooden image, under oak, in Ephesus
by the sea, and Hippo performed a
holy sacrifice to you. Queen Oupis,
first around the oak, they danced
a leaping battle dance with shields
and then a broad ringed circle dance
the fine, clear pipes keeping time
with the stamping feet.

(This was before
they used pierced bones of fawns
for flutes - Athena's handiwork
and bane to deer)
The echo raced to Sardis
and to the Berekynthian land.
Their feet stamping loudly
their quivers clattering.

Afterwards around the image
a shrine was built on broad foundations.
Nothing more divine, nor richer
does Eos see, it easily surpasses Pytho.
Insolent Lygdamis, in madness threatened
to lay waste to it, and led an army
of mare-milking Kimmerians,
numerous as sand, who lived near
the straights of Io, daughter of Inakhos.

Wretched king! His crime so great
that neither he nor anyone whose wagons
stood upon the plain of Kaytria,
ever would return again to Scythia
Your bow forever lies before Ephesos.

Lady of Mounikhia, Watcher of the Harbors,
Hail Pheraia!
Let none dishonor Artemis.
Oineus dishonored her altar
and no auspicious struggles to his city came.
Nor compete in shooting stags or skillful aim
The son of Atreus could boast of no small price.
Neither let them seek the Maiden's hand
for Otos and Orion did not win a wedding feast.
Nor let any flee the yearly dance
for Hippo, not without weeping
refused to circle round the altar.

Hail, great lady, and graciously greet my song.

Afterward

The reason for this translation is to circumvent copyright laws. I cannot find an English translation of the hymn freely available online, Perseus only has the Greek, and I wanted to be able to quote the hymn in English well beyond any fair use law. So with my usual imperviousness to academic convention, I decided to make my own translation despite the fact that I've never studied Greek.

That's right. I don't know Greek. How can I translate a poem from a language I don't even know, you ask. Well, two reasons.

The first is that I studied Linguistics in my undergraduate days and was left permanently marked as someone who understands the inner workings of Language while lacking the ability to use even my native tongue with any facility.

The second reason is that I really am that arrogant.

This is my own translation. I've stuck to my own poetic style - an arhythmic freestyle that's really just prose with lots of line breaks. I have a child's affinity for alliteration that occasionally rears its head. And whenever my two source translations did the same thing, I've gone out of my way to do something different. (This usually means picking a different word from Liddell & Scott. My bitches are chasing after a roe instead of a gazelle, for instance.)

While I joke about my own abilities, I wasn't joking when I translated the poem. It is accurate. I glossed all the Greek words using L&S off of Perseus and a Langenscheidt's Pocket Dictionary. I also sincerely tried to use what I know of inflected languages from my Latin studies to understand how the words were related to each other. My knowledge of Latin, however, was no use whatsoever as the Greek case system is apparently insane.

I haven't strayed from the general meaning apparent between my two very different translations. Their differences allowed me a sense of how far I could stray. I'm not saying how well this sense works, just that I have a bit of it.

One of these translations is by Stanley Lombardo and Diane Rayor. Their translation is pretty free, but captures the essence of the poem. The second translation is more old school. This is the Loeb edition translated by A. W. Mair. It has lots of thees and thous and is about as musical as a dirge. In other words, it's very traditional.

To sum up, my goal was to make a usable translation in case nothing better was available. I believe I've succeeded. I'll end with this quote of William Matthews from *The Mortal City: 100 Epigrams of Martial*:

"A poet from classical languages is kept alive by a process of continual translation, an enterprise that grows on itself like a coral colony."

This translation is my mutant brain coral addition to the Great Reef of Callimachus.

-Yvonne Rathbone