

## **THE SATYR IN THE GARDEN**

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By Bob Bledsoe, Commissioned Lay Leader

“The satyr in the garden” is a sculptural term referring to a certain type of figurative imagery that places a mythic figure in his expected setting and then surrounds him with the trappings of where he would be expected to be. It’s a common theme, and one of the best examples I know of in the Twin Cities is *Play Days*, the lovely female sculpture based on the dancer Desha by Harriet Frishmuth in the sunken gardens at Como Conservatory.

It might be worthwhile to note, with few exceptions, these types of sculpture are solitary. The figure might have a companion, but the sculpture itself is often set apart from any others, as if it were happier in seclusion.

Generally, the satyr depicted is Pan or is meant to be Pan. Pan is a cloven footed god in Greek myth, the patron of herdsmen and farmers, of shepherds and wild mountain passes and rustic folk music. His name, often mistaken as being related to the similar Greek word pan meaning “all,” as in panoply or pansexual or pandemic or pandemonium—perhaps because of the way Homer attributes his name to his delighting “all the gods”—but it actually derives from a different word *Pa-on* or *Pae-in*, meaning “to pasture.” The word panic, however, does come directly from his name, and while it’s come down to us as meaning blind fear, it actually means to react to something with passion, as the music Pan makes arouses passion in individuals. Pan is associated with fertility and fecundity, with spring and fields and bounty. He is associated most specifically with sex, with rutting, and unbridled lust.

Pan, of course, is not the only deity associated with these actions. There is also his Roman contemporary Faunus and there is Herne, the Horned God of Celtic myth, and Kokopelli of the southwestern American Indians. He’s also related to the gods of misrule and mischief, like Coyote and Monkey and Loki, who was himself often depicted wearing a horned helmet. Pan was once thought to have been sired by Zeus—everyone was once thought sired by Zeus—but his father was actually Hermes, fleet messenger to the gods, and his mother one of the nymphs with whom he was constantly pictured.

There is also the god Aegipan or “goat-pan,” who was according to some sources separate but identical with Pan, in other sources was Pan, and in yet others was Pan’s father. In Plutarch, Aegipan was another name for Faunus, the Roman version of Pan, but was also the son of the incestuous union between Valerius and Valeria of Tusculum, and was somehow confused with both Silvanus, a Roman wood sprite who incorporated the Celtic Sucellos, and Silenus, the wine-bearer and nurse for the god Bacchus, who may or may not have been human and may or

may not have been a satyr. To add to this confusion, I used to hang out at a bar back in upstate New York called Bacchus which had a wooden bust of the Roman god mounted above the bar and holding court on the revelries; but I knew the artist and he told me it was actually a wooden bust of Pan he had made and the wine lees wringing his head had been added later to hide his original horns.

Faunus deserves his own examination. True, he was the Roman equivalent to Pan, but he was more besides. Like Pan, he predates the other gods. He was a member of the *di indigetes*, or “indigenous gods,” the inchoate forces left over from the birth of the world. Unlike Pan, he was considered a god of livestock as well as crops and called by another name, Inuus, when he was responsible for the fertility of cattle. He was also a prophetic god and called Fatuus or “foolish,.” from which we get both our word fatuous, meaning essentially the same thing, and our more recent Middle English word *fate*, from the Old French *fat*, from the Latin *fatum*, “prophecy” or “doom.” One who was fatuous enough to seek counsel from Fatuus was fated. Faunus’ oracles were situated in groves and orchards, and aspirants made contact with him through incubation, the ritual sleeping in a sacred area expecting to experience a divine dream. The responses were said to be revealed in Saturnian verse, a now-obscure versification that was uniquely Roman and of which we have only about 40 examples, mostly quotations and funerary orations.

Faunus was associated too, unlike Pan, with a specific feminine version of himself. Fauna or Fatua was sometimes called his wife, sometimes his sister, and she was called the *Bona Dea* “the good goddess” by the Romans. Faunus too was considered to have been a human king at one time, the son of Picus of Latinum, the father of Latinus, and the grandson of Saturn—hence his affection perhaps for prophesying in Saturnian verse. His devotion to agriculture and

animal husbandry so pleased the gods, they deified him so that he would teach humanity these arts. Both he and Pan were surrounded by smaller versions of themselves: Pan's were called the *paniskoi*, "little Pans," while Faunus' were called the *fauni* or, more commonly, fauns, the place-spirit or genies of wilderness and wild places.

Pan's worship was an old, old thing. According to Theocritus it began in Arcadia, the home of what we think of as The Good Life, The Sweet Life, Easy Street, Good Livin', all of which are ideas arising from Virgil who called it the home of pastoral simplicity and happiness. It was a region chiefly inhabited by shepherds. "Et in Arcadia ego," meaning "I am also in Arcadia," is a common memento mori or phrase reminding one of the imminence of death. It is most famously found inscribed on a tomb in Poussin's painting, *Les Bergers d'Arcadie*, and is thought to be an anagram of the phrase "I! Tego arcana Dei", or "Begone! I keep god's secrets." Arcadia is a real place, still in existence on the Peloponessian peninsula, still primarily agricultural—potatoes are its primary export. It was named for Zeus' son Arcas, who became the he-bear in the sky, Ursa Major. Hunters in Arcadia would scourge Pan's statue after an unsuccessful hunt, an example of a people trying to force a god to keep his commitments.

Pan is often pictured as bearded, horned, short, scruffy, his hair matted and leaves woven in his fur on his thighs and his hooves caked with manure. Type his name into Google and you'll come up with 26, 500, 000 images, give or take a couple million that actually are part of Pan Am or Pan Asian or are simply pictures of pans, and nearly every one of them looks that way. A notable exception are photos from the Guillermo del Toro movie, *Pan's Labyrinth*, in which the title creature is clean-shaven and, save for a tuft of unruly hair between his immense curved horns, bald. But it's a false exception because, despite the title, the creature is not meant to be Pan but simply a representative satyr.

You might think such an ugly specimen had a hard time finding partners, but you would be wrong. Pan was infamous for his sexual prowess, often depicted with an erect phallus. He was the god of rutting rather than lovemaking, and his attempts, while clumsy in the way of a young goat or a young man, were often successful. His most famous conquest was the goddess of the moon, Selene, for whom he wrapped himself in a sheepskin to hide his hairy back and drew her down to a misty wooded glen. In one of his more extraordinary feats, he managed to have sex with every one of dozens of Dionysius' *maenads*, literally "raving women, by multiplying himself into an entire tribe of Pans. And this is not to mention the young men and shepherds he also seduced, the most famous of which was his half-brother Daphnis, inventor of lyric poetry, and whose name means "laurel" or "bay leaf," so if you know the tendency of Greek gods to metamorphose into something as punishment for one or another wrongs, you've got a pretty good idea how that relationship turned out.

Aside from this false Pan in the del Toro film, which takes place during the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, and a number of other non-Pan satyrs that appear in films and novels and stories such as *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, *The Great God Pan*, *The Blessing of Pan*, and in the person of Mr. Tumnus in C.S. Lewis' Narnia books, Pan himself does appear in a few places, such as *Jitterbug Perfume* by Tom Robbins and Stephen King's short story "The Lawnmower Man," Charles de Lint's *Greenmantle* and Megan Lindholm's *Cloven Hooves*. He also makes an anonymous appearance in the children's novel *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame and never appears but is the primary theme of Knut Hamsun's novel, *Pan*.

You might think, then, that Pan has only appeared fictionally or literarily, but you would be wrong. Pan has made appearances in several books of magic, either as symbol, teacher or guide, including some by Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune and Al G. Manning. You might

further think, as Crowley and Fortune were both early 20<sup>th</sup> Century writers and Manning refers to Pan only peripherally, that he hasn't appeared literally anywhere recently, and you would be wrong again. This is from one of my favorites from my collection of counterculture books from the 1960s, *The Findhorn Garden*, and is a description of his experience by Robert Ogilvie Crombie who died in 1975 and called himself Roc. It might be worth noting that Crombie had a career as a scientist early in his life, although studying what science I can't discover, but at the time of this encounter he had long left it "for reasons of ill health."

This is it. Crombie goes to lengths to explain to us he "felt completely awake and full of energy" prior to this meeting.

Suddenly, I saw a figure dancing round a tree about twenty or twenty-five yards away from me—a beautiful little figure about three feet tall. I saw with astonishment that it was a faun, the Greek mythological being...He had a pointed chin and ears and two little horns on his forehead. His shaggy legs ended in cloven hooves and his skin was honey-colored. I watched him in astonishment, not believing my eyes.

For a moment I wondered if perhaps he was a boy made up for a school show. Yet he could not be—something about him was decidedly not human. Was he a hallucination? There were one or two other people walking about in the gardens. I looked at them and then back at this beautiful little being. He was still there and seemed to be as solid and real as they were. I tried hard to analyze this experience and explain him away. Suddenly I was brought up sharp—what was I trying to do? Here was a strange and wonderful experience. Why should I not accept it, see what happened and analyze it later? I began to watch the little being with delight as he circled round another tree.

He danced over to where I was sitting, stood looking at me for a moment and then sat cross-legged in front of me. I looked at him. He was very real. I bent forward and said:

"Hallo."

He leapt to his feet, startled, and stared at me.

*Can you see me?*

"Yes."

*I don't believe it. Humans can't see us.*

"Oh, yes. Some of us can."

*What am I like?*

I described him as I saw him. Still looking bewildered, he began to dance round in small circles.

*What am I doing?*

I told him.

He stopped dancing and said, *You must be seeing me.*

He danced across to the seat beside me, sat down and, turning towards me, looked up and said, *Why are human beings so stupid?*

In some ways I may be over-personalizing this being. I realize I was not seeing him with my physical sight, though when I closed my eyes he was not there. And the communication between us was, no doubt, taking place on a mental or telepathic level by means of thought transference, probably in the form of images and symbols projected into my unconscious mind and translated into words by my consciousness. However, I cannot be certain whether I was speaking to him mentally or aloud. (Now, when I meet such beings, I usually speak aloud.) I have to report our exchanges in the form of dialogue, since that is what I hear in my head. I am aware that in a case like this there is always the possibility of coloration from my own mind. However, applying my training as a scientist in objective observation and analysis, I do try to report experiments and experiences as accurately as possible.

To return to his question of why human beings are so stupid, I asked him, "In what way stupid?"

Pretty silly, isn't it? Putting aside for the moment the unlikelihood that in the thousands of years of his existence that Pan has never encountered a person who could see him before, and it should not turn out to be William Butler Yeats or Arthur Conan Doyle, both of whom actively sought proof of the existence of such a thing, but should turn out to be an octogenarian former "scientist" with at best a tortured command of the language, there is also the matter of Crombie's excessive insistence here and elsewhere that "I am a scientist." And let's not forget that, once he does accept that this particular human can see him, Pan doesn't ask, "Are you drunk?" but a very generic question that gives Crombie an opportunity to expound for several pages here and elsewhere on the human condition and how we are, most of us, stupid.

Yes it is, it is very silly, and in a world where most recent estimates put the number of dead after China's Quingzhu River Valley's earthquake at nearly 29,000—29,000, that's an astronomical number, 10 times the number of Americans lost on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001—and where victims of Myanmar's Cyclone Nargis of May 2 and 3 are said to be reaching 78,000—78,000, I can't even conceive a number that high, a number the Red Cross says is too low by nearly half—and whose military rulers are accused by aid agencies of confiscating billions of dollars worth of articles sent there and of selling rather than distributing it, in such a world where a mob of men can hunt down and beat a man to death on the streets of Cleveland, one person urinating on his head as he died, in such a world it is worse than silly. It may be positively obscene. To focus on a mythical, shaggy-thighed, lustful, horned creature whose single purpose seems to lie in getting laid—this would seem to spit in the eyes of this world's victims.

It would seem so. But as with so much relating to Pan, seems doesn't cut it.

Consider how often he's appeared in both ancient and contemporary poetry and literature. Even now, two millennia after his supposed death, when Plutarch tells us he was the only god to die, and while the details of his demise are shrouded later commentators claim it was at the moment of Jesus' birth that the world wailed, "Pan is dead, Pan is dead, the great god Pan is dead!"—even now, he is still a potent symbol. Because despite how Crombie may see him, if even he does see him, that's what he is.

It's probably a chicken-or-the-egg situation as to which appeared first, the cloven feet and horns attributed to Pan or to the Devil and his demonic incubi, but that they're strongly suggestive of one another is undeniable. Some of those later commentators, Christian of course, said that the wailing of the world at Pan's death was actually a hosanna at the death of Lucifer in

his Pan-suit, although they seem to have missed the role of Lucifer in several of the gospels, but never mind. We are after all talking image here and not substance.

Consider his music. As infamous for his rut, Pan is so much more famous for his music, with which he often accomplished his seductions. If music hath charms to soothe the savage breast and if music be the food of love, play on. Give me excess of it. We all laugh at the commercials for Zamphyr, Master of the Pan Pipes, but his music is undeniably haunting. It tickles something in our souls. It's the sound of the wind and birds. Crickets and frogs. The patter of rain on the soil and the sizzle of the sun against our bare flesh. Pan has been called the piper at the gates of dawn not for his location in existence but for his role in making sense of it. Ancient symbology sees Pan's horns as noting, not something satanic but something reaching out, bursting from its confines, like the sun's rays, the aggressive force behind existence. The same for the hair on his legs. Nothing exists if it can't push aside the things that block it—grass, flowers, trees pushing upwards, birds pecking their way out of shells, mammals shouldering their way through birth canals, cicadas popping out of the ground every x number of years, even in the Bible the explosion of the earth out of the void and the emergence of Jesus from his tomb. All this is suggestive and symbolic of the fecundity of life, its rudeness, its insistence on accessing life and sun and air.

Think of that image I began with, that sculptural definition of the satyr in the garden. It is alone, come upon by surprise, rising up as it were out of the earth or at least out of the bushes to tell a story or make a point. This is what Pan is: representative of the life force itself. Like Christ, like Buddha, like an avatar, he is a way we think about ourselves and our relationship with reality. What better way to celebrate this life force than by eating with one another?