

# The Rout of Pan and our Split with Nature

## in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*

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"Great Pan is dead," cried an ancient anonymous voice from a Mediterranean cliff-top, so Plutarch writes in his *Moralia*.<sup>2</sup> But it is no easy thing to kill off a god. Many centuries later the disturbing persistence of Pan - the Pagan goat-god symbolising, as his very name suggests, "all" Nature - provoked his final banishment from Western society under the name of Satan, the cloven-hooved god of "all" this fallen world.



Demonised by a split in human consciousness, both Pan and Nature have suffered ever since. This essay discusses the portrayal of Pan in a short interlude from an unfinished seventh book, the so-called "Mutabilitie Cantos", of Edmund Spenser's great sixteenth century epic poem, *The Faerie Queene*. I would like to show how

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<sup>2</sup> Plutarch (1971), *Moralia*, trans. R. Warner, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, p 47.

Spenser presents an allegory for an archetypal split in the human psyche and also to suggest how that split is manifested at both a social and an individual psychological level.

Somewhere around the sixteenth century a profound change in human consciousness, which had been slowly developing for centuries, crystallised in Europe. With the Protestant Reformation, as individuals stood alone before their God, there came a rise in Western self-consciousness which has altered our perceptions, especially our perceptions of the natural world. Wanting to dissociate the clear light of reason from the darkness of the nature-given body (following the philosophy of Descartes) we split mind from matter, the subjective inner self from the objective outer world, and thus alienated ourselves from Nature. As a result the natural world, once the radiant residence of divine energies, rapidly became mere material to be exploited for its wealth by the new-world colonisers and mere matter to be racked for its secrets by the new race of modern scientists. Nature herself was now seen as the subversive enemy, the sullen keeper of secrets, and the refuge of demonic forces. And Pan became the Devil, the consort of witches.

The poet Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) was living at a time when this psychological rift with Nature was widening. And the best of our psychologists, as even Freud himself acknowledged, are our poets. In the "Mutabilitie Cantos" of his unfinished masterwork *The Faerie Queene* - the acknowledged single most important work of the English literary renaissance, the first epic in English and the longest poem in the language, today rendered largely unreadable by the obscuring tangled briars of modern academic commentary - Spenser suggests an instructive psychological and social allegory of this split in human consciousness in his re-visioning of a classical story: the myth of Actaeon (an ill-fated mortal hunter) and Artemis (the goddess of the hunt whom the Romans called Diana).

Despite Pan's banishment as the Devil, the poets of the English Renaissance were loath to lose touch with the original Pan, a valuable figure representing the problematic juncture between the animal and the human, the sensual and the sacred. As a result of the Christian and secular appropriations of his name - for as well as a poetically evocative name for God and Christ, the name Pan also appears in various poems, plays and masques of the Renaissance representing such disparate characters as Henry VIII, James I and the Pope - Pan, with all his traditional feral attributes, was often forced to travel through Renaissance literature under other names, such as Silvanus or Faunus, or even in the guise of a lowly unnamed Satyr or Faun. This is how the figure of Pan usually appears in Spenser's work, where his original name rarely occurs. The name may have been usurped but the archetypal goat-god lived on. In Spenser's Cantos of Mutabilitie the figure of Pan appears under his Roman name of Faunus.

Within that complex fabric which is the Renaissance interweaving of polytheistic Classics with monotheistic Christianity, Spenser's creative conflict is never more clearly exposed than it is in the Cantos of Mutabilitie, the final movements of the unfinished *Faerie Queene*. While the short Faunus interlude in Canto VI is usually read as a comic commentary on the main plot of the two Mutabilitie Cantos, which

feature the aggressive will-to-power of the Titaness Mutabilitie, some critics have puzzled over its deeper significance. Douglas Bush writes: "Spenser's invented or adapted myths usually have an allegorical purpose, but it is hard to find one here."<sup>3</sup> It seems likely that Spenser did intend his adapted myth - a radical adaptation involving a schism between two usually harmonious classical deities - to carry an allegorical line connecting directly to the poem's main theme of mutability. So far the connection has remained obscure.

Here I would like to offer a reading of the rout of Pan/Faunus in this short scene from Spenser's poem from the perspective of the post-Jungian psychology of James Hillman, a leading figure in the emerging Ecopsychology movement who reads Greek mythology as "a psychology of antiquity." In this reading we may find the allegory of our "European dissociation", a mythical revision detailing the very origin and cause of the dangerous Western split between mind and Nature. "Pan," Hillman writes, "personifies to our consciousness that which is all or only natural, behaviour at its most nature bound."<sup>4</sup> For the Greeks, as much as for Spenser or ourselves, Pan personifies instinct and impulse. Psychologically speaking, Pan is the spontaneous, instinctual animal in human nature, dwelling in the wilderness of the forests and grottoes of the body-focused psyche, beyond the defences and controls of the civilised, rational (and rationalising) ego.

In canto VI we find Spenser's Faunus/Pan hiding in the bushes, lustfully ogling the naked goddess Diana. Pan, as all the Greek myths tell us, has an insatiable lust for vision of the female body. However, bestial god that he is, he simply cannot control himself in his hiding place, and announces his presence with a coarse chuckle:

That for great joy of some-what he did spy,  
He could not containe in silent rest;  
But breaking forth in laughter, loud profest  
His foolish thought. A foolish Faune indeed,  
That couldst not hold thy selfe so hidden blest (46).<sup>5</sup>

Pan represents spontaneous instinct. Incapable of suppressing his capricious noise, and caught red-faced for a peeping Tom, Faunus is pursued by an enraged Diana and her nymphs. Usually Pan does all the pursuing in the original stories. However, unlike Actaeon, who provokes and suffers this fate in the original classical myth, Faunus/Pan is not destroyed because, as Spenser tells us, "The Wood-gods breed ... must for ever live." In terms of the psychological allegory I would like to develop, instinctual forces (the gods) are indestructible, they "must for ever live" by virtue of their archetypal nature: they are the nature-given patterns of our bodily inheritance. Unable to destroy him, Diana and her nymphs chase Faunus deeper into the woods "till they weary were." In short, by the end of this episode, Spenser's instinctual

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<sup>3</sup> D. Bush (1957), *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry*, W.W.Norton, New York, p 116.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hillman (1988), *Pan and the Nightmare*, Spring Publications, Dallas, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> E. Spenser (1886), *The Faerie Queene*, in *Complete Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed R. Morris, Macmillan, London. The numbers in brackets refer to line numbers.

Faunus/Pan has not been destroyed but, in modern terms, merely repressed.

The problem is, as Jung suggested, that when the perennial, archetypal patterns of the gods are denied or repressed they inevitably return as symptoms: "the Gods have become diseases."<sup>6</sup> I believe, along with Hillman (who, however, does not mention Spenser's work), that the repression of Pan, the denial of our instinctual, body-bound reality, results in the return of the repressed in anxiety and panic disorders - the word "panic" was once an adjective modifying "fear": Pan-ic fear, the fear specific to Pan. In the same fashion, our modern emphasis on the light of Apollo's detached rationality, and the consequent repression of the dark Dionysian and Plutonic underworld of the psyche, returns in the modern "disease" of depression.

Throughout his long history Pan has been credited with a dual nature: in the *Cratylus* Plato describes Pan as being essentially double, *diphues*.<sup>7</sup> That is, he has the earthy lower body of a shaggy animal attached to the heaven-gazing upper body of an anthropomorphic god: he is the very model of polarity. And indeed, psychologically speaking, the very model of a human being. Thus Pan is shown in the myths to be equally at home down in the dark grottoes of the forest and also up in the rarefied air of the mountain tops: he is both an earthy soul (his shaggy thighs and goat-hooves) and an airy spirit (sublimating his pain into art on his reedy Syrinx). In Sandys' 16th Century *Ovid* we read:

Men worship nature by the name of Pan  
A man half goat withal a goat half man.  
Above a man, where sacred reason raignes;  
Below a Goat, since nature propagates  
By coiture, in all whom life instates.<sup>8</sup>

Another way of conceiving this essential duality is to see Pan and the nymphs he pursues as the two inseparable poles of a unity. As Hillman writes, "a God and his [or her] partner describe the two main components of an archetypal complex [...] And if the noblest truth of psychological thinking [...] as well as mythical and mystical philosophy [...] is the identity of the opposites, then not only are the twin nuclei within Pan's nature one and the same, but also Pan and the nymphs are essentially entailed because they too are one and the same." And therefore, "The other whom Pan chases so compulsively is none other than himself reflected, transposed to another key."<sup>9</sup> Pan's pursuit of the nymphs is the externalised expression of his own instinctual impulses in pursuit of his own mental reflection. Pan's attempts at rape, as with the content of all mythic stories, are not to be read literally, but as a metaphor. Pan's pursuit of the nymphs is a metaphor of the human

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<sup>6</sup> C. G. Jung, (1953 ff), *The Collected Works*, trans. R.F.C.Hull, ed. H.Read, M.Fordham, G.Adler, Wm.McGuire, Bollingen Series XX, vols. 1-20, Princeton University Press, Princeton & London, vol. 13, p54.

<sup>7</sup> Plato (1961), *Cratylus*, in *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. E.Hamilton and H. Cairns, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 408d., p 187.

<sup>8</sup> Ovid (1640), *Metamorphoses*, trans. George Sandys, printed for Andrew Hebb, London, p 110.

<sup>9</sup> Hillman, *Pan and the Nightmare*, p 48, 51.

need to connect spontaneous impulsive instinct with flighty, nymphic, mental reflection. In other words, what Pan most desires is not sex, but art. Andrew Marvell, in a witty revision of the myth in his poem "The Garden", was perhaps closer to the truth than he might have thought:

And Pan did after Syrinx speed,  
Not as a nymph, but for a reed.<sup>10</sup>

That is, Pan pursued the nymph Syrinx because he actually wanted her to become a reed, the material needed for his Pan-pipes. As Hillman says in reviewing a number of Pan's frustrated pursuits: "Pan's sexual compulsion seems wholly directed towards the end of reflection ... instinctual nature itself desires that which would make it aware of itself ..." <sup>11</sup> This view would also suggest a way of understanding the response of nymphic panic in the dissociated mind at the approach of hairy-haunched Pan, "because," as Jung said in another context, "consciousness struggles in a regular panic against being swallowed up in the primitivity and unconsciousness of sheer instinctuality."<sup>12</sup>

Spenser, in splitting Pan/Faunus (impulsive bodily instinct) from Artemis/Diana and her Nymphs (the mind's detached lunar and water-born reflection), has split an archetypal unit representing the polarity of instinct and psychological reflection, and thereby suggests an allegory for a split between body and mind, on the individual level, and a philosophical split between matter and spirit on the social level. However, the actual mechanism for this split has yet to be identified.

While desire and panic are the inseparable and alternating poles within the Faunus/Diana pair, should the instinctual impulses be denied, rejected, and separated from the reflective mental awareness of those impulses, as Spenser's allegory suggests in this interlude, we might expect serious trouble. After Diana has forced the humiliating retreat of the instinctual Faunus into the depths of the woods for daring to approach her exposed and vulnerable awareness, she also departs from the previously fruitful region of Arlo hill, laying a curse on the land as she leaves.

Them all, and all that she so deare did way,  
Thence-forth she left; and parting from the place,  
There-on an heavey haplesse curse did lay,  
To weet, that Wolves, where she was wont to space,  
Should harboured be, and all those Woods deface,  
And thieves should rob and spoile that Coast around.  
Since which, those Woods, and all that goodly Chase,  
Doth to this day with Wolves and Thieves abound:  
Which too-too true that lands in-dwellers since have found.  
(VII, 54).

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<sup>10</sup> A. Marvell (1972) "The Garden", in *The Complete Poems of Andrew Marvell*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, p 100.

<sup>11</sup> Hillman, *Pan and the Nightmare*, p 51.

<sup>12</sup> Jung, "On the Nature of the Psyche," *CW*, vol. 8, p 212.

Spenser's conflation of the mortal Actaeon of the original story with the divine "God Faunus" is powerfully significant. In the classical myths Pan might be unlucky in love or in musical contests, he might even be embarrassed on occasions, but he remains a God and is never hounded out of his natural domain like a mortal criminal. But here, significantly, one God has displaced another. Diana's pursuit of Faunus also goes against mythic tradition for, as Phillippe Borgeaud points out, "the hunt of the wild goat was not proper to Artemis."<sup>13</sup> Actaeon was metamorphosed to a stag, a proper quarry, but Faunus remains the wild goat-god.

After this split between Faunus and Diana (as if the two poles of Pan's own nature have been split), the woods (wherein Spenser implies that all humanity are "in-dwellers") become the haunt of wolves and thieves, who desecrate and plunder all the land around. The rift between Faunus and Diana has wrought havoc in the place where we all live, the natural environment. Why? In terms of the psychological allegory, a dissociative split in the Pan/Artemis pairing will always "spoil" and "deface" the psychic landscape, for, as Jung writes, the split between conscious reflection and instinctual impulse is "the source of endless error and confusion."<sup>14</sup> And the rift between mind and internal Nature soon manifests as an antipathy to the natural world, where mere meaningless matter may be shaped, controlled or abused, and where thieves are free to rob and deface the land. In short, the antipathy of mind against Nature within (the impulsive instinctual body) is projected onto Nature without (the more-than-human natural world).

The environmental degradation described by Spenser here was having tangible effects during his time. In fact, the very first movement towards a science-supported colonial culture, the felling of the great forests for ships and fuel for new industry, was already under way. This late sixteenth-century assault upon the forests is the subject of Michael Drayton's "The Tenth Nymphall," where a Satyre mourns for his lost home, destroyed by wood-cutters, again presented in terms of a curse:

The earth doth curse the Age, and every houre  
Againe, that it these viprous monsters bred.  
(II, 119/20).<sup>15</sup>

By the end of the Faunus episode Spenser graphically depicts the deterioration of the natural environment. Even Molanna, the river of inspiration responsible for directing Faunus to Diana's bathing place, is made shallow by the stones thrown by the vengeful, departing nymphs. And all this at a time in English history when the Elizabethan fashion of the ruff separated the head from the body and served it up on a bed of the purest aerated froth - as if a pleated foam-bed of spirit was preserving the mind from the contagions of the lower, instinctual, animal body.

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<sup>13</sup> P. Borgeaud (1988), *The Cult of Pan in Ancient Greece*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> Jung, "The Symbolism of the Mandala," *CW*, 12, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> M. Drayton (1931), "The Tenth Nymphall", in *The Works of Michael Drayton*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p 206.

In stanza 51 of Canto VI Spenser makes Diana's motivation for the vengeful banishment of Faunus quite clear, and here is the specific trigger mechanism for the split: she has been made conscious of shame. When Faunus hoots with joy at seeing the naked goddess, Spenser tells us that Diana, "all abash'd with that noise, / In haste forth started from the guilty brooke." Not only is the stream Molanna implicated in guilt, but Diana also, for she is "all abash'd," and to abash, the OED says, is to "disconcert with sudden shame," bringing "a consciousness of error."<sup>16</sup> Significantly, this is precisely the same shame that Faunus suffers, hanging his head like a guilty fool. And Diana's shame implies guilt as surely as guilt implies shame. Moreover, shame is that specific guilt which attends the body, causing it to blush and squirm so distressingly. We also note that Faunus and Diana both suffer from a Pan-ic fear in this passage: she in starting at his sudden noise, and he in desperate flight from her and her avenging nymphs. This mutual implication of both characters in the responses of the other confirms that we are talking about the two poles of a single archetypal complex.

In short, Diana's revenge on Faunus is retaliation for a panic attack in a reactive anger born of bodily shame. The shame, of course, is the ethereal, nymphic mind's sudden horrified awareness of the inescapable presence of the gross, impulsive body. The anxiety of Diana's panic engenders the denial of the instinctive, impulsive, bodily pole of her own nature, and Faunus is driven deep into the unconscious woods. Diana reacts as if her very life had been threatened, which, as all who have suffered a full-blown Pan-ic attack will confirm, is psychologically true: one feels that death is imminent. As Freud argued, it is anxiety that produces repression (and not the reverse, as he originally thought), and that what the mental ego fears "is in the nature of an overthrow or an extinction."<sup>17</sup>

Transposed to a Jungian reading, the instinctual, animal presence of Pan reaches up from the squelching maternal darkness of the instinctual underworld psyche and threatens to extinguish the light of the heroic, mental, masculine ego. Little wonder that in our present dissociated modern world, and growing more so every day, the so-called "Panic disorders" are endemic - or rather Pandemic. But our own internal Pan, representing all that is Nature within us, only returns as a "disease" because of our Diana's (our mental ego's) Pan-ic repression of his intrusive presence. The mind prefers to believe itself blissfully independent of the spontaneous, instinctual body. And when the body reveals its impulses from below (like Faunus blurting a laugh from the bushes), the mind rushes off like a nymph in Pan-ic fear, or Pan-ic attack, in shame at its suddenly disclosed vulnerability.

With the pathology-inducing split in the Pan archetype in Spenser's poem, the Golden Age of Saturn is ended and the Titaness Mutabilitie begins her violent and vengeful campaign. The post-split natural world may now be used and abused since it is seen by the dissociated, repressive mind as "fallen", "inferior", and intrinsically

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<sup>16</sup> Oxford English Dictionary (1989), Clarendon Press, Oxford, p7

<sup>17</sup> S. Freud (1962), *The Ego and the Id*, tr. J. Riviere, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, p. 85.

“evil”. Spenser, true to his creative Pagan/Christian split in consciousness, both applauds and laments Diana’s revenge and flight: the Protestant Christian in Spenser approves of the righteous suppression of “base” instinct; but the Pagan poet in Spenser sadly recognises that all nature falls when this occurs, leaving a blasted world, the haunt of “wolves and thieves”.

Spenser also seems to realise that this spontaneous rift is both inevitable and perhaps even necessary, at least on an individual, if not a societal, level. Faunus/Pan’s shocking intrusion into consciousness produces a fall that may be seen as a *felix culpa*, a happy fault, a necessary step to the acquisition of true wisdom and understanding; a realisation that only a rigorously attempted separation from Nature could show us our unbreakable union with Her. As the ancient alchemists knew, the true union of elements first requires their separation. Or, as the Irish poet W.B. Yeats puts it in his poem “Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop”: “For nothing can be sole or whole / That has not first been rent”<sup>18</sup>. The necessary psychological movement, also recognised by William Blake, is from the unconscious union of primal “Innocence”, moving then through the state of painful alienation of “Experience”, to the conscious union of wisdom or “Organised Innocence”. In short, our conscious return to union with Nature (the archetypal rift consciously acknowledged) is perhaps of a higher order than our original state of primal, unconscious union.

In other words we must either love our own archetypal Pan and all his humiliating, shameful ways - the ways of Nature within us, including our vulnerability to archetypal patterns of desire, to sickness, symptoms, to ageing and death - or continue to chase him with the enraged and Pan-icked Diana of our abstracted, dissociated mind through the evermore desolated forests of our world. In short, only Pan repatriated to the same realm as Diana and her nymphs can heal our inner rift. And only the ending of the modern internal war between mental spirit (Diana) and bodily soul (Pan) can make a lasting difference to the modern war we continue to wage against external Nature. Any ecologist in whom the internal war against Nature still rages, with a mind vulnerable to anxiety and panic by the repressed presence of the instinctual body, will only sabotage their avowed external mission. In short, our modern war against Nature without, is the mirror of our war against Nature within. And, as Edmund Spenser saw so clearly four centuries ago, only with the healing of this internal split will come the renovation of our relationship with the natural world.

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<sup>18</sup> W. B. Yeats (1992), “Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop,” in *Collected Poems*, Vintage, London, p 268.