

## PAN — BECOMING HUMAN

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For the ancients, the gods could do no wrong. But that didn't mean the gods were seen as virtuous. The concepts of sin and wrongdoing simply didn't apply to divinities: the gods were seen as beyond good and evil entirely, as Nietzsche puts it. And they were beyond mortality too, of course, because the gods could not die — by definition.

But things were less clear when it came to the demigods. Take a satyr: an in-between creature, neither god, nor man, nor beast. Could satyrs do wrong? Were they mortal, or not? And if satyrs could sin, and die, would it ever be justifiable to put them to death?

Pan, whose story unfolds over the nine tableaux of Marcos Balter's *Pan*, is the satyr-lord of the woodlands, and the enchanter of all that hear his music. His musical talents are certainly godlike, as are the powers that those talents bring in their train. But Pan is not really a god — or at least, he is not acknowledged as such. When Pan invites Apollo to compete with him in a musical duel, Apollo sees this not as a challenge from an equal, but as an outrage. Condemned as an upstart, Pan is seized, tortured, and put to death. In dying, Pan gives his persecutors the satisfaction of knowing they were right: if he has died, he can't have been a true god.

In many ways, Pan is more animal than anything. He has the hindquarters, legs and horns of a goat, and he can be as heedless and vicious as any wild creature. But Pan does not really belong among the animals, either — because Pan is on the cusp of becoming human.

*Pan* offers a musical portrait of this turbulent transformation. As we listen to the music that Pan plays, noticing how it alters, we are given an insight into what it would be like to be a creature taking the first hesitant steps toward fellowship, accountability, and love.

The transition from beast to man is not a linear one. Over the course of the work, we hear Pan's subjectivity veering continually and unpredictably between the animal and the human. At times, we are given his white-hot, right-here-right-now animal consciousness: the searing rage, the overwhelming desire, the single-minded and unalloyed self-interest. But at other times, we sense the dawning of compassion, and a burgeoning need for companionship.

*Pan* begins with Pan's violent death at the hands of Apollo, the horror of which is made viscerally apparent in the musical texture ('Death of Pan'). As the agony becomes unbearable in his final moments, Pan begins to lose consciousness of the world around him. He turns inward. Pan dwells on his grief for what he has lost ('Lament for Pan's Death'), imagining his followers mourning him, and he begins to relive the course of events that has terminated in this most hideous of fates.

We are taken back to the very beginning of Pan's transformation. This is the moment of his twofold discovery: of music on the one hand, and of power on the other ('Pan's Flute'). As Pan

begins to play, we see his followers flock to him, enchanted by his music ('Music of the Spheres').

Pan initially sees the community as a tool to use for his own purposes, but this begins to change. Slowly, Pan realizes that his followers are fellow consciousnesses with minds and wills of their own: they are not creatures to dominate, but people from whom he needs recognition. As his conception of himself and his companions begins to alter, Pan begins to feel love. 'Echo', 'Serenade to Selene' and 'Dance of the Nymphs' are Pan's hymns to his three lovers: Echo, Selene and Syrinx.

But love, for a creature like Pan, is not love as we know it. Pan has committed unspeakable acts of violence against all three of his lovers. In 'Serenade to Selene', we are given a window into what love feels like for Pan: for him, passion is shot through with aggression, hostility and bloodthirsty glee.

Pan's misdeeds come home to roost in 'Fray – The Unravelling'. Here, we see that Pan is not the only one whose understanding has been evolving. Pan's followers have been growing, too, and they are realizing that they can no longer countenance his offenses. The musical charm breaks, and Pan's community turns against him.

Pan sees condemnation, betrayal and disappointment in the faces of his friends. And this is the moment when Pan becomes human. In knowing others, he has come to know himself. Pan offers one last, thoroughly human plea for forgiveness ('Soliloquy'), but it is too late.

Pan has spent his entire existence as an outcast, shunned by the worlds of god, man and beast alike. At the very end, he proves that he belongs in the human world. But the very moment at which he does so is the moment of his final, and irrevocable, banishment.

Many works of art explore what it is to be human. But *Pan* explores what it would be like to *become* human. *Pan* makes it clear that transformation of consciousness from animal to human carries with it not just the possibility of redemption, but the seeds of tragedy, too.