“Pan Awakes”: Parable, Parody, and Paradox

by Jan Hoeper

At the core of the first movement of Mahler’s Third Symphony is a march, at times forceful, sinister, and raucous, and at other times gentle, playful, and majestic. Therefore, when audiences open their concert programs (usually during the softest part of the movement, alas) to read that this first movement of Mahler’s Third Symphony is titled “Pan Awakes; Summer Marches In,” they are likely to understand the second part of the title, since the movement’s foundation is a march rhythm. The first part, however, “Pan Awakes,” remains enigmatic to most, even to many Mahlerians. Who is Pan, and what shades of meaning might Mahler have assumed his audiences to comprehend? Moreover, what significance did the figure of Pan have for Mahler personally?

If I were to go out on the street and ask people “Who is Pan?” it is likely the most people, after recovering from the sheer randomness of the question, could give me an accurate short answer: (1) a Greek god, (2) half man and half goat, (3) plays the panpipe. It is somewhat remarkable that even these cultural crumbs should have been preserved, since Pan’s history goes back thousands of years to before the dawn of recorded history in the West.

However, these three essential facts provide us with a starting point for understanding Pan. (1) Pan was originally a pagan goat god from the Arcadian region of Greece. Pan stars in numerous early texts, the earliest being the Homeric Hymns, and, in general, he is portrayed as a rustic, pastoral figure, a musician, and a skirt-chaser. Ovid tackled the myth in Latin, and his anecdotes (the first about the origin of Pan’s flute—from a nymph that was turned into reeds—and the second about a music contest between Pan and Apollo) provided the fuel for centuries of elaboration (as I will discuss below). (2) The most essential characteristic of Pan is that he is half man, half goat. Even Socrates was said to refer to Pan as the “double-natured son of Hermes.” Pan represents two parts of human nature: the bestial (uninhibited, base, lascivious, animalistic) and the divine (artistic, sophisticated, restrained, civilized). This paradox of his bifurcated nature perhaps constitutes the central appeal of the goat god throughout the ages. (3) Finally, as a musician he is credited with the invention of the *syrinx,* or panpipe, which he is said to play beautifully. Especially in the late nineteenth century, artists and writers used Pan as a symbol of the arts, since Pan represented folk music as well as the pure, rural pleasures of the country (it was the age of industrialization, after all). The most famous use of Pan for this purpose was by Julius Meier-Grafe, who co-founded the “Pan Society” in 1894 and also published a highly acclaimed arts journal by that name.[1] *Pan* was an important forum for art nouveau, postimpressionism, and symbolism, and it included works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Käthe Kollwitz, Aubrey Beardsley, Emil Orlik, and Auguste Rodin. (The name *Pan,* which means “all” in Greek [discussed below], also implies an all-encompassing, inclusive, multi-art vision, which the publication undoubtedly was endeavoring to achieve.)

Simple Pan: Pastoral, Musical, Comical

The most enduring portrayal of Pan as a pastoral musician is in J. S. Bach’s delightful secular cantata “*Geschwinde, ihr wirbelnden Winde*” (“Hasten, you whirling winds”), BWV 201 (1729). The libretto, an adaptation by Picander of Ovid’s myth, is about a music contest between Phoebus (Apollo), who represents good (cultured) art, and Pan, who represents bad (banal) art.[2] Pan and Phoebus (both basses), who both claim to sing most beautifully, are advised by Momus (soprano) to choose judges and hold a singing contest. Phoebus chooses Tmolus, and Pan chooses Midas. Not surprisingly, of course, each judge votes for the singer who chose him. Tmolus criticizes Pan’s aria (“*Zu Tanze, Zu Sprunge*”) saying that although it is suitable for the forest and the nymphs, Phoebus’s tune “has give birth to grace itself.” Midas rallies to Pan’s aid, saying that Phoebus’s song was overwrought but that Pan’s melody was easy and unforced. For this opinion, which meets ardent disapproval, Midas is given donkey ears. Mercury moralizes, saying that those who don’t know anything should not be critics.

If you know Mahler’s songs, I’m sure you’ve already drawn the parallel that I want to make to his 1896 song “*Lob des Hohen Verstandes*” (“In Praise of High Intellect”). Mahler’s song concerns a singing contest between a cuckoo and a nightingale, which is judged by a donkey who proclaims the cuckoo to be the finer singer. The astonishing similarity between these two pieces does not prove that Mahler was necessarily thinking about Pan, but it is an interesting coincidence that 1896, the year of the composition of this song, was also the year of the composition of the Third Symphony (and its overt Pan reference). Clearly, though, in the Third Symphony, Mahler had moved beyond a simplistic conception of Nature (and of Pan) to a more conflicted, *fin de siècle* interpretation. “It always strikes me as strange,” wrote Mahler in 1896, “that most people, when they talk about ‘Nature,’ think only of flowers, birds, forest breezes, etc. Nobody knows the god Dionysus, Great Pan.”[3]

Complex Pan: Veiled, Sinister, Dionysian

Although Pan had always had a lewd, mischievous, and sometimes mysterious side, it was in the late 1800s that the sinister Pan really began to emerge from the shadows. One of the first to re-envision Pan’s symbolism was the philosopher Friedrich Nieztsche. In “The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music” (1871), Nietzsche wrote,

> [W]ith the death of Greek tragedy there was created an immense emptiness profoundly felt everywhere. Just as the Greek sailors at the time of Tiberius heard from some isolated island the shattering cry, “The great god Pan is dead!” So now like a painful lament rang out throughout the Greek world, “Tragedy is dead! Poetry itself is lost with it! Away, away with you, you stunted emaciated *epigones* [imitators]! Off with you to hell, so you can for once eat your fill of the crumbs from your former masters.[4]

Here, Nietzsche, in his overly dramatic but effective way, laments the end of vibrant Greek cultural heritage, the end of the Dionysian (Dionysus is often viewed as a successor to Pan, and the two are sometimes conflated) worldview that “wishes to convince us of the eternal joy of existence: only we are to seek this joy not in phenomena, but behind them. We are to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end....We are pierced by the maddening sting of these pains just when we have become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence....”[5]

This Dionysian outlook, which pairs a persistent underlying tragedy with an exuberant exaltation of existence, approaches part of what I think Mahler had in mind with the opening of the Third Symphony. Certainly Mahler would have been well aware of Nietzsche’s writings (in fact, in the fourth movement of the Third Symphony, Mahler features the “Drunken Song” from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*). Mahler’s own view of nature, as related by Bruno Walter, fleshes out this idea of an underlying, universal truth of nature: “Love and fear, rapture and horror, existed in [Mahler’s view of Nature]. He saw the *bellum omnium contra omnes* [the war of all against all] in Nature and sensed its self-destructive forces fighting within his own inner being.”[6]

Pan’s evolution as the guardian of the deep, universal truths of nature has been largely shaped by his name, which coincidentally is the Greek word for “all.” Although the name “Pan” more likely actually comes from

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[1] de La Grange, Henry-Louis. *Gustav Mahler: Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[2] Crouch, Simon. http://www.classical.net (1999 [accessed 2/1/04])

[3] Blaukopf, Kurt, and Herta Blaukopf, eds. *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976).

[4] Adami, Martina. *Der Grosse Pan Ist Tot!?* (Innsbruck: Institut für Germanistik, 2000).

[5] Merivale, Patricia. *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969).

[6] Lebrecht, Norman, ed. *Mahler Remembered* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987).

"*pa-on,*" which means "grazer,"[7] the more automatic association with the word "all" has tempted many artists and writers (especially in the late nineteenth century—the era of philology) to attribute supernatural, universalist powers to the goat god.

One of the most striking *fin de siècle* portrayals of Pan as "All" was the novella *The Great God Pan* (1894), by Arthur Machen (1863–1947), a British writer of supernatural horror pulp fiction. The novella's bizarre plot involves a deranged scientist and an evil experiment, à la *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*[8] The twisted physician explains his prospective experiment, which involves brain surgery on an innocent victim, as follows:

> I say that all these are but dreams and shadows; the shadows that hide the real world from our eyes. There is a real world, but it is beyond this glamour and this vision, beyond these "chases in Arras, dreams in a career," beyond them all as beyond a veil. I do not know whether any human being has ever lifted that veil; but I do know, Clarke, that you and I shall see it lifted this very night from before another's eyes. You may think this all strange nonsense; it may be strange, but it is true, and the ancients knew what lifting the veil means. They called it seeing the god Pan.[9]

Thus, Pan has come to represent an ultimate reality, a veiled truth. This vision is not so far removed from Mahler's own remarks about Nature. Although I think it is unlikely that Mahler read this book, it is a product of the *Zeitgeist* that also produced Freudian psychoanalysis (whose works were published in the late 1890s and early 1900s) and the belief that it is possible to go "deeper," beyond the level of everyday reality. The demented doctor promises that this reality "will level utterly the solid wall of sense, and probably, for the first time since man was made, a spirit will gaze on a spirit-world." The actual outcome of the experiment, however, is that the doctor's victim becomes paralyzed by horror. She is frozen in a state of "panic," a word with obvious etymology.

Alma relates an instance in which Mahler was similarly struck with sudden fear of the goat god, "One day [during the writing of the Eighth Symphony] in the summer he came running down from the hut in a perspiration and scarcely able to breathe . . . it was the heat, the stillness, the panic horror. It had gripped him and he had fled. He was often overcome by this feeling of the goat god's frightful and ebullient eye upon him in his solitude and he had to take refuge in his house among human beings and go on with his work there."[10]

The connection between the artist's quest (through the creative process) for an ultimate truth and the hidden world that Pan illuminates is further clarified in Hugo von Hoffmansthal's *Der Tod des Tizian* (*The Death of Titian*) (1892). (Hoffmansthal is known, of course, for his collaborative relationship with Richard Strauss, in such works as *Salome.*) In the play, at the end of the painter Titian's life, he has a vision of the god Pan ("*Dann sah er uns mit grossen Augen an/ Und schrie laut auf: 'Es lebt der grosse Pan.'*"["Then he looked at us with wide-open eyes/ And screamed aloud, 'The great Pan lives.'"]).[11] When compared with this epiphany, which reveals to the painter "the secret of all Life," his own works seem to him to be insignificant, although they far exceed anything produced by his contemporaries, who don't bring any life experience to their art. Similarly, Mahler's goal, it seems, was to compose the secret of life: "The symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything." Mahler's symphonies indeed embrace the paradoxes of the world, the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly, and these paradoxes are the essence of the Dionysian character of Pan.

The fearsome quality of Pan is mixed (as in the above excerpts) with the experimental and creative processes. Pan can illuminate terrifying vistas, yet he can also enlighten. This can be thought of as a metaphor for artistic introspection, which can be not only frightening but also empowering. Artists constantly seek to lift the veil on the soul and on experience, and Mahler's music epitomizes this quest for answers. Mahler was attracted to the idea of Pan because Pan is a paradox: god and goat, cultured and crude, enlightening and frightening. By invoking Pan in the first movement of his Third Symphony, Mahler prepares us for a vision of nature that is unflinching in its farce, in its emotion, in its brutality, and in its depth, and through which Mahler will lead us on a harrowing yet revelatory journey toward an ultimate truth.

Special Announcement

The Chicago Mahlerites will organize the first society-sponsored Mahler recital. This recital will feature Mahler's *Ruckert Lieder*, *Wunderhornlieder* as well as *Kindertotenlieder.* In addition to Mahler's works, this recital will highlight the much-neglected works by Alma Mahler. Alma Mahler wrote many songs, but most were not published, and the manuscripts were destroyed in the bombing of Vienna during the Second World War. However, there are sixteen surviving songs in four books, three of which were published in her lifetime: Five songs in 1910 and four songs in 1915 (both books were published by Universal Edition). Josef Weinberger published another five songs in 1924; and in 2000, Hildegard Publishing of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, published two more songs, with Susan Filler serving as the editor. The first three books of songs were subsequently reprinted by Universal Edition about fifteen years ago, but Dr. Herta Blaukopf – who wrote the introduction for that collection – made no attempt to find other sources and compare them with the published prints.

We are fortunate that a manuscript of the four songs published in 1915 is in the collection of Henry-Louis de la Grange, and Susan Filler has made the critical edition of those four songs based on a comparison of the published and manuscript sources. The manuscript itself combines the hands of Alma and Gustav Mahler, but the differences between the two versions are quite extensive, it therefore represents the changes made by Alma between Mahler's death in 1911 and the publication in 1915.

The Chicago Mahlerites is therefore excited to present to the audience in the Chicago area the world premiere performance of the critical edition of these four songs by Alma Mahler. All sixteen surviving songs written by Alma Mahler are for *Mittelstimme* and piano. For this special recital featuring the works of both Alma and Gustav Mahler, we are extremely pleased to have secured the commitment of baritone Mr. Thomas E. Bauer, who will be accompanied by his wife Ms. Uta Hielscher on the piano.

Thomas Bauer and Uta Hielscher have been guest artists at renowned concert series such as the Schleswig Holstein Music Festival, the Bonn International Beethoven Festival, the Académies Musicales Saintes, the Schubertiade Schwarzenberg, the Toblach Mahler Festival Weeks, and the Octobre Musical Tunis. Mr. Bauer will also perform *Kindertotenlieder* with Philippe Herreweghe in July.

The recital, which is co-sponsored by the Goethe Institute, will be held at Roosevelt University (430 S. Michigan Avenue) on May 23, 2004 at 3pm. The program include:

Gustav Mahler	*Kindertotenlieder*
Alma Mahler	*Vier Lieder*
Gustav Mahler	Selections from *Wunderhornlieder*
Gustav Mahler	*Rückert Lieder*

Tickets price: $20
Please mark your calendar for this exciting event. Further information will be announced to the membership once they are available.

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[7] Merivale, Patricia. Ibid.

[8] Merivale, Patricia. Ibid.

[9] Machen, Arthur. *The Great God Pan, and the Inmost Light* (Boston: Robert Bros., 1894).

[10] Carr, Jonathan. *Mahler* (New York: Overlook Press, 1997).

[11] Kovach, Thomas A. *Hofmannsthal and Symbolism: Art and Life in the Work of a Modern Poet* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985).