

*Pan and the Pandemic:  
Love in the Time of Capricorn*

Our word *pandemic* arises from the Greek *pandēmos*, formed from the two ancient words *pan*, meaning 'all' and *dēmos*, meaning 'people'. Pandemic implies all people. It was first used in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> C as an adjective suggesting of, or belonging to, all people – the public. Its use as a noun was recorded in 1853<sup>1</sup>. Today, in the atmosphere of 2020, it is a well worn word. When used, it reminds us that we are *all* the same, *all* on the same journey and *all* susceptible to the same forces.

Corona Virus is a pandemic disease; the very sound of the word evokes anxiety as it threatens our world. Lives and livelihoods are at risk. We are gripped by the instinct to panic.

It was the great god Pan who lent his name to our word *pan-ic*, as when frightened by his presence, a state of fear and anxiety was evoked. Imagining his exceptionally loud voice or the mere sight of the goat-footed god alarmed the ancients. Imagining the presence of the god could invoke panic. What was imaginal became physiological. Pan personified the archetypal constellation of pagan power and Nature in all its beauty and in all its savagery. Honouring Pan, being pantheistic, acknowledges the gods who dwell in the natural world.

Pan is the only Greek god I know of who was reported to have died. In the first Century AD, Plutarch gave an account of a sailor Thamus hearing a mysterious voice shouting out a message as he steered his ship along the western coast of Greece. As instructed, Thamus proclaimed that the great god Pan was dead and the news spread fast throughout Tiberius' Roman Empire. The Christians interpreted this to mean an end to the pagan era, the demise of all pagan and Nature gods. Under the new regime his image was used to characterize the Devil. 'Great Pan is dead' has come to symbolize institutional collapse, the nadir of a cycle or the end of an era - more on that later. For now, let's meet Pan the god animated in our instinctual responses to fear.

In Greek myth we will find numerous genealogies for Pan: fathered by Zeus, Apollo, Dionysus, Odysseys, even Penelope's suitors; mothered by Penelope or a variety of nymphs. There are many Pans.<sup>2</sup>

Of the many, perhaps Pan's most commonly known DNA is from the union of Hermes and Dryope, as told in the Homeric Hymn to Pan. Dryope, after giving birth to her 'goat-hooved, two-horned son', panicked. As soon as she saw his fierce face 'covered with beard', she fled, abandoning her son. Proud of his son, Hermes clasped the newborn in his arms and carried him to Olympus to show the other gods, who were all pleased; hence, named him Pan: 'And *Pan* was the name they gave him for pleasing the hearts of them *all*.'<sup>3</sup> The immortals welcomed Pan as part of their divine family. As god, as archetype, Pan is ensouled on our psychic terrain. But by prohibiting this god from our natural terrain, the divine Pan is dishonoured every time we plunder the forests, every time we maltreat an animal, every time we pollute the natural environs.

At the end of *Phaedrus*, Socrates offers up a prayer to the local deities: "Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and the inward man be at one."<sup>4</sup> It is a wise prayer resonant today since our outwardness seems so out of kilter with our inwardness.

### *Pan and the Pandemic*

What might Pan have to do with pandemic? Well, probably not a lot, except that myth and its inhabitants loosen a way of thinking, allowing symbols to take us to new ways of imagining and perceiving. With alternate ways to think of Pan, we may be less terrified of his booming voice or not as repulsed by his face. The presence of symbol is not to clarify or to explain, but to engage us in mystery.

For instance *The Homeric Hymn to Pan* is Hymn 19, the same serial number as Covid 19! It has been reported that the transfer of the virus from animal to human may have been passed from bat to pangolin to human. Ironic that Pan, even though the word pangolin originates in Malay, shows up again, but even more poignant is that the endangered animal is sought for its medicinal properties. I make no meaning of this except to recognize that when researching the symbolic world, synchronicities abound, as we enter through a portal to a world where linearity and literality no longer form timelines, nor causal relationships. They reveal through images, thoughts, senses, feelings, not statistics or facts. We are in mystery, the sacred space revered by gods, but which often causes panic in the secular world, such as the stock market roller coaster ride, panic buying, doomsday or naive predictions.

How might we think of Pan in midst of the Pandemic? Pan is nature, both beautiful and treacherous. With Pan dead, so too is Nature. Gods do not die, but they can be dislocated, denied and silenced. With Pan dead, so too is our relationship to Nature – to all forms of Nature, to Nature's pantheon. While trees, animals, rocks, hilltops and valleys may be assigned to a God, they are Nature's deities and speak through all the spirits of nature whether embodied by dryads, devas, elementals, nymphs or satyrs. Nature is not just godlike, it is God.

In his beautiful tribute to Pan, DH Lawrence speaks of the death of Pan as if the mechanistic world has replaced Nature, a world now mastered by humans who locate the god in the machine. Our pantheon no longer includes our nature spirits, but is pervaded by mechanistic gods. Lawrence poignantly pleads:

"A conquered world is no good to man. He sits stupefied with boredom upon his conquest. We need the universe to live again, so that we can live with it."<sup>5</sup>

Nature is Pan, all the trees, all the animals, all the stones - all of us. Gods do not die, yet they can be repressed. As James Hillman emphasized, Pan still lives. He exists "in the repressed which returns in the psychopathologies of instinct" and it is these psychopathologies that assert themselves in panic.<sup>6</sup> Let's remember that at the heart of this big word psychopathology is the invitation to study the soul's suffering. Without Pan the soul suffers, the mind is anxious. A hybrid, a goat-man, Pan is an imaginal figure who is instinctual, not civilized.

Pandemic returns us to Nature. Planes are not flying, air pollution is decreasing, birds are singing. Pandemic also isolates us, inviting us to return to quiet and stillness, lost in our mechanistic, natureless world without Pan.

### *Pan, Capricorn & the Devil*

No doubt Capricorn is an 'old goat', as the zodiacal constellation of either a horned goat or a sea goat, was recognised as early as the second millennium BCE. While known as a goat to the Persians, Syrians, and Hindus, the Babylonians identified it as a goat-fish. It may have been the Assyrians who first superimposed the image of the goat-fish onto the constellation about mid 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE around the same time that the Arcadian shepherds told stories of their god Pan.

The Greeks found a correlation to the stellar image in their myths of the horned goat-god Pan who, when frightened by the monster Typhon, jumped into the sea and transformed himself into a sea goat, identified as the goat-fish god Aigipan, one of the many Pans. The Greeks made another mythic connection to the constellation through Amaltheia, Pan's sister. Amaltheia was the goat-nymph who nursed the young Zeus when he was concealed from his father Cronus, the Titan king. Grateful, Zeus immortalized Amaltheia in the heavens as the constellation of Capricorn. Zeus took one of her horns and filled it with the fruits of the harvest. This plentiful symbol was the Cornucopia, the Horn of Plenty, an emblem reminding us of the abundant resources underpinning this sign. As a bountiful mother substitute, Amaltheia constellates the polar opposite to Cronus, the devouring father. Cronus is the predecessor of Saturn, the deity who astrologically rules Capricorn.

The oppressive side of Saturn, ruler of Capricorn, exposes the rigidity and anxiety of the authority complex that underscores the myth of this constellation. In Capricorn we are confronted with the split between Pan's instinctual drives and Saturn's devouring and controlling aspects that attempt to exert power over what feels compulsive and unknown. An obsession for perfection has no room for Pan. Capricorn is vulnerable to striving for perfection. But success, excellence and accomplishment are too often measured in terms of consensus and corporate directives, not the soul. In the split between the public need for perfection and the private sense of failure, anxiety and pan-ic can become constellated. Pan returns us to 'All'; what are our communal responsibilities and objectives for caretaking our natural world? The Capricornian myth reminds us that this search for sovereignty and control of our lives can be nurtured by an ancient wellspring in the guise of Amaltheia, the *soror mystica* of Pan<sup>7</sup>.

In the myth we are reminded that Cronus, as the regent of the old order, and his son Zeus, the light bringer and leading god of the new era, are adversaries. In Capricorn a collision between these two ways often occurs; the way of the father versus the way of the son, or the way of the leader versus the way of the people; perhaps the public life versus the private life. Capricorn is a symbol of autonomy and self-reliance won through the confrontation, perhaps battle, with the authoritative ruler of the old way, who controls through fear and uncertainty. In the Tarot the old order is the Devil symbolizing the fearful and limited patterns that enslave the individual. Without hope or reason the individual is bound by a limited reality constructed out of the Devil's concrete world of

materialism and desire. Fearful of progress and change the Devil imprisons his own creativity and potentialities in a world that offers no possibilities or choices. "Better the Devil we know": perhaps pandemic reminds us to acknowledge Pan and the devils we deny.<sup>8</sup>

As the astrological ambassadors of Cronus and Zeus, Saturn and Jupiter symbolize this mythic template. Together they rule the last four signs of the zodiac and during the Pandemic they pass through Capricorn to meet at the Northern Hemisphere winter solstice. They conjoin in the first degree of Aquarius, the midpoint of their four transpersonal signs. While Aquarius' mythos calls forth other gods, Saturn still rules the sign.

In the tropical zodiac, Capricorn heralds the winter solstice for the Northern Hemisphere, the nadir of the Solar cycle. The beginning of Capricorn marks the turning of the Sun; the darkest moment has passed and the light bringer, the new torchbearer, emerges. In the Roman calendar this was marked by the Saturnalia. At this time Christians celebrate Christmas, the birth of Christ, the antithesis of Pan. This marks the ending of the year, the old order. About one third of the way through Capricorn the New Year is literally born. Like great god Pan, Capricorn heralds the end of an era, the bottom of the cycle. At the darkest point in the journey, another round begins. As we approach the nadir, sanctions and limits are often introduced to remain in control and insure the situation remains static and unchanging. Similar to the work of the Devil, life can be locked up in a state of fear and homeostasis, leading to depression and powerlessness. Tradition and the past need to be honoured in Capricorn, yet not to the extent of imprisoning the new order which wants to emerge. Fearful of progress and change, the Devil imprisons his own creativity and potentialities in a world that offers no possibilities or choices.

Enchanted by the sweet sound of the wind blowing through the reeds, Pan tied them together to make his beautiful instrument of the panpipes. From nature music arises. During the pandemic, Pan is alive in the music that has poured out of the windows and balconies onto the streets again, in the banging and making noise to appreciate the work being done and in the anxiety we all are feeling. Pan's music is the natural and instinctual creativity embedded in our being. The Devil arises when it is not allowed expression, devoured by our fear, enclosed by fixed beliefs and self-interested values. Imprisoning creativity locks us in a two-dimensional materialistic world where power is derived through status and possessions. Imprisoned in this world, panic arises, driving us into a compulsive round of satisfying physical desires. Creativity inspires the imagination, which brings the freedom to fertilize a new way of being. But first we must acknowledge the end of the cycle. Pandemic is the nadir of the cycle.

Astrologically and metaphorically we are in the tropics of Capricorn. In 2020 a host of planets are at crossroads in Capricorn, as if the heavens repeat the theme of the ending of institutional, governmental and corporate control, as Pan and his Pandemic return the establishment's focus back to the health of the people. Governments introduce new rules; Treasury releases more resource – the qualities of Capricorn are brought into focus. But the health of the populace depends on Nature, not corporate cartels. Pan is Nature in all its manifestations. We are no longer, actually never were, able to control the natural world,

just that Pan had not shouted loud enough for us to panic. Perhaps now? And will we remember after the Pandemonium (Pan-Demon-ium) has past?

### *Love in the Time of Capricorn*

How sad I feel, as I walk down the empty streets and look in the vacant shops and stay a metre and a half away from any other human being with whom I might cross paths. Yet the sky is a beautiful bright blue, the birds are singing and my garden is profuse. Within a heartbeat, the natural world is no longer out there, at work, on the streets, in the cafes or pubs. It is home, a return to Hestia's hearth; we have been called inside, for our outward nature to be more still.

It is a time of Capricorn – of social distance and self isolation – the world has changed; no longer business as usual. Like any time of great upheaval, there is a possibility of initiation; Capricorn initiation suggests the descent into the fears of loss of purpose, of instability, of control, of economic collapse. The first stage of any initiatory transition is generally recognized as separation, either a physical and/or psychic separation from the community and conventional life. We are in the separation phase – quarantine and closed boundaries. Forced into an unknown situation, the initiation takes place through encountering in ourselves and others what is repressed and needs healing and liberation. Then we are able to return to a more integrated world with appropriate boundaries and integrity. At least that is the theory: Capricorn implies hard work, focus, integrity, respect..... Capricorn's soul making process is authenticity which is inside, not out.

How do we love and relate in a time of Capricorn? Authentically, I feel. We make room for it All – especially what we fear. We return to Pan and find a way for our instincts and pagan self to be acknowledged in ways that suit our nature, not damage it. We form relationship to our professional self, that self we profess to be, not the one we make up to win favour and reward. We respect the other, not because they have things but because they are these things. We honour boundaries so others can be who they are, not what we desire them to be. Love in the time of Capricorn allows us to bring back quality, integrity and sincerity back into our relationships through returning to that in ourselves.

Astrologically Capricorn has that in-built paradox of being a trans-personal sign, yet sensitive to feelings of aloneness and rejection, feelings often denied in the pursuit of outer rewards. The pandemic brings this paradox to light; loneliness, depression and sadness are felt in our isolation as we pass through this time. But this is a feeling not a reality; negative feelings are feelings too, not realities, unless we make it so; another Capricorn paradox. Perhaps we are being called to reach out through these feelings to find our authentic humanness.

### *How will it All Pan out*

Pan, as a pagan god of Capricorn, must feel so displaced to see His landscape desecrated by mines, logged to death, crowded with animals raised to slaughter. But our inner landscapes are crowded too with acts against the Self. We start here.

How will it all Pan out? I don't know. I do know in times of uncertainty we want to know and often seek the assurance of oracles and diviners; hence astrological predictions will abound during this time. And astrology is very assuring as at its heart is the reality of the

cyclical process, so evident in 2020. But perhaps we need not to know at this juncture so that another knowing can emerge out of our being present and participating in the process that involves us All.

I return to another Pan, a heroine who emerged at another time of great transition when the natural world was ceding to the civilized one, when Prometheus stole the fire and gave it to humans and when the Goddess was trampled by the heroic cults.

Her name is Pandora which means All Gifts. In her urn was a pandemic of disease and when the lid was taken off the cauldron, all these viruses were released amongst the entire human race.<sup>9</sup> But left at the bottom of the urn was Hope, the great gift that the Goddess passes on in times of pandemic. It is not wish fulfilment, nor expectation or optimism, not even prophecy. It is the deep knowing, embedded in every human being, underneath the fear, the disease and the desires. Hope is the human quality passed on in times of pandemic that guides and motivates us *all* when all seems to be lost.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pandemic>

<sup>2</sup> For reference to the many Pans, see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 1, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD: 1993, pp. 110-111. On the web see <https://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/Pan.html/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Homeric Hymn to Pan (Hymn 19) from *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Michael Crudden, Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, Phaedrus from *The Essential Plato* translated by Benjamin Jowett, The Softback Preview: 1999, p. 851

<sup>5</sup> D.H. Lawrence, "Pan in America", *Southwest Review*, Vol. 11, no 2, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas (January, 1926), p. 113, [www.jstor.org/ - accessed 25 March 2020].

<sup>6</sup> James Hillman, *Pan and the Nightmare*, Spring Publications, New York, NY: 2007, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> The *soror mystica* is an alchemical reference meaning mystical sister, the anima or equal partner to the alchemist. In this image Amaltheia is Pan's partner in Nature, the nurturing and caring sides of our natural world.

<sup>8</sup> Of interest, a beloved childhood character, Peter Pan took the goat god's name. Disney's characterization excluded the darker tones that underlay the original character created by James Matthew Barrie.

<sup>9</sup> I am reminded of the mythic theme that Melanie Reinhart so aptly amplifies with Pholus, another hybrid on the margins of the civilized world. See Melanie Reinhart, "Pholus: 'The Lid Comes Off'", from *Saturn, Chiron and the Centaurs*, Starwalker Press, London: 2011, pp. 215 - 234.