
As Heracleon was reflecting upon this in silence, Philip said, “Not only has Empedocles bequeathed to us bad demigods, Heracleon, but so also have Plato, Xenocrates, and Chrysippus; and, in addition, Demolitus, by his prayer that he may meet with ‘propitious spirits,’ clearly recognized that there is another class of these which is perverse and possessed of vicious predilections and impulses.

‘As for death among such beings, I have heard the words of a man who was not a fool nor an impostor. The father of Aemilianus the orator, to whom some of you have listened, was Epitherses, who lived in our town and was my teacher in grammar. He said that once upon a time in making a voyage to Italy he embarked on a ship carrying freight and many passengers. It was already evening when, near the Echinades Islands, the wind dropped, and the ship drifted near Paxi. Almost everybody was awake, and a good many had not finished their after-dinner wine. Suddenly from the island of Paxi was heard the voice of someone loudly calling Thamus, so that all were amazed. Thamus was an Egyptian pilot, not known by name even to many on board. Twice he was called and made no reply, but the third time he answered; and the caller, raising his voice, said, ‘When you come opposite to Palodes, announce that Great Pan is dead.’ On hearing this, all, said Epitherses, were astounded and reasoned among themselves whether it were better to carry out the order or to refuse to meddle and let the matter go. Under the circumstances Thamus made up his mind that if there should be a breeze, he would sail past and keep quiet, but with no wind and a smooth sea about the place he would announce what he had heard. So, when he came opposite Palodes, and there was neither wind nor wave, Thamus from the stern, looking toward the land, said the words as he had heard them: ‘Great Pan is dead.’ Even before he had finished there was a great cry of lamentation, not of one person, but of many, mingled with exclamations of amazement. As many persons were on the vessel, the story was soon spread abroad in Rome, and Thamus was sent for by Tiberius Caesar. Tiberius became so convinced of the truth of the story that he caused an inquiry and investigation to be made about Pan; and the scholars, who were numerous at his court, conjectured that he was the son born of Hermes and Penelope.’

Ezra Pound, ‘Pan is Dead’ (1912)

“Pan is dead. Great Pan is dead.
Ah! bow your heads, ye maidens all,
And weave ye him his coronal.”

“There is no summer in the leaves,
And withered are the sedges;
How shall we weave a coronal,
Or gather floral pledges?”

“That I may not say, Ladies.
Death was ever a churl.
That I may not say, Ladies.
How should he show a reason,
That he has taken our Lord away
Upon such hollow season?”

¹ http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0251%3Asection%3D17

SYRINX THE NYMPH

Here we cannot help hearing a summons in the singing. It began as a cry, a cry expressing an urge and appeasing it at the same time. Originally the human cry was accompanied only by noise, by clanging, drumming and rattling. This kind of thing deafens the ear and remains dulled, for a contrast develops between high and deep but never anything approaching fixed pitch, far less the forming of intervals. This, i.e. music, had modest beginnings in the invention of the shepherd's pipe or pan-pipe. This handy and eminently portable instrument derives from a different social stratum than noise-producing, fearsomely ritualistic instruments. Used primarily by shepherds, the pan-pipe served more immediate, more human emotions and their expression. It was not its function to induce a stupor or to work magic like the wooden clapper, the cymbal or the magically painted and in itself magically venerated drum. Rather it was confined — pure entertainment apart — to amorous longing and to the enchantment of love, the latter being a survival of magic. The sound of the shepherd's flute, pan-pipe or, in the case of the Greeks, syrinx (the meaning is always the same) was intended to reach the distant beloved. Thus music originated in yearning and it began very much as a call into what has been forgone. This belief is still widespread among the Rocky Mountain Indians. The young Indian goes off into the plain and laments his love on the pan-pipe; the girl is then supposed to weep, however far away she is. Ultimately the pan-pipe came a long way, being far more than the ancestor of the organ: it is the birthplace of music as a human expression, a sonic dream-wish. Not only a Red Indian belief attests to this but also — filling exactly the same role — one of the loveliest of ancient legends. This legend represents the origin and content of music in a charming allegorical form. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid gives the following account of the Arcadian flute and its content. Pan was chasing about with some nymphs and ambushed one of them, Syrinx the dryad. Fleeing from him, she found herself cut off by a river and implored the waves, her liquidas sorores, to change her appearance. Pan tried to seize her but was left with only a reed in his hands. As he was lamenting the lost beloved, the wind produced notes in the reed-bank, and the god was gripped by their beauty. Pan broke the rushes, saw reeds of varying lengths, bound a suitable selection together with wax and played the first notes just like the wind, but with human breath and as a lament. This engendered the pan-pipe, and Pan's playing gave him the consolation of a union with the nymph (hoc mihi conloquium tecum manebit) who had vanished and yet not vanished, since she was still present in the sound of his flute. Thus the version by Ovid. His legend was a recollection of primitive times and the primeval history of music viewed as the pathos of loss, a recollection which makes the story unsentimental and, like all genuine allegory, objective. Leaving Pan aside, the pan-pipe did not of course originate in Greece but in the Far East around the third millennium, and it quickly spread right across the Earth, especially among nomadic races. But while the legend indicates, in a manner both elegant and profound, the need for music, it also truly denotes the invention of music as human expression — a minor invention, but one of great consequence. There is an important contrast between the syrinx and ritualistic or percussive instruments with their dull, bellowing, howling and rattling noises. Into this ritualistic sound-world was now thrust an instrument giving out a well-organised series of notes. And by uniting syrinx and nymph, Ovid designated the goal towards which the note-sequence — always a tracing of lines in the invisible — is moving. It is something contradictory and Utopian, for this flute-playing constitutes the presence of a vanished entity; that which has exceeded the limit is regained by this lament and contained in this consolation. The vanished nymph has remained as sound, adorning and preparing herself within it, and sings in the face of want. The sound comes from a hollow space, is produced by the fructifying breath of air and remains in the hollow space, which is made to resound. The nymph became the reed, and the instrument is called her syrinx. It is simply that, up to now, we have not really known what music itself is called and who music is.
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 11 (trans. Walter Kaufmann)

Greek tragedy met an end different from that of her older sister-arts: she died by suicide, in consequence of an irreconcilable conflict; she died tragically, while all the others passed away calmly and beautifully at a ripe old age. If it be consonant with a happy natural state to take leave of life easily, leaving behind a fair posterity, the closing period of these older arts exhibits such a happy natural state: slowly they sink from sight, and before their dying eyes stand their fairer progeny, who lift up their heads impatiently, with a bold gesture. But when Greek tragedy died, there rose everywhere the deep sense of an immense void. Just as Greek sailors in the time of Tiberius once heard on a lonesome island the soul-shaking cry, “Great Pan is dead,” so the Hellenic world was now pierced by the grievous lament: “Tragedy is dead! Poetry itself has perished with her! Away with you, pale, meager epigones! Away to Hades, that you may for once eat your fill of the crumbs of our former masters!”

[...]

Odyssesus, the typical Hellene of the older art, now sank, in the hands of the new poets, to the figure of the Graeculus, who, as the good-naturedly cunning house-slave, henceforth occupies the center of dramatic interest. What Euripides claims credit for in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*[^2], namely, that his nostrums have liberated tragic art from its pompous corpulency, is apparent above all in his tragic heroes. The spectator now actually saw and heard his double on the Euripidean stage, and rejoiced that he could talk so well. But this joy was not all: one could even learn from Euripides how to speak oneself. He prides himself upon this in his contest with Aeschylus: from him the people have learned how to observe, debate, and draw conclusions according to the rules of art and with the cleverest sophistries. Through this revolution in ordinary language, he made the New Comedy possible. For henceforth it was no longer a secret how—and with what maxims—everyday life could be represented on the stage. Civic mediocrity, on which Euripides built all his political hopes, was now given a voice, while heretofore the demigod in tragedy and the drunken satyr, or demiman, in comedy, had determined the character of the language. And so the Aristophanean Euripides prides himself on having portrayed the common, familiar, everyday life and activities of the people, about which all are qualified to pass judgment. If the entire populace now philosophized, managed land and goods, and conducted lawsuits with unheard-of circumspection, he deserved the credit, for this was the result of the wisdom he had inculcated in the people.