

FEATURES



Herne the Hunter



THE HORPED GOD

PART TWO



“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant, we have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift.” **Albert Einstein**

Nietzsche and much more recently the philosopher John Gray, have argued that the Enlightenment project was in many ways a continuation of a Christian cultural mindset in that much like Christianity it was based on a ‘salvation myth’; the rather simplistic idea that its own particular brand of ideology; in this instance, reason and rational thinking, would ultimately liberate mankind and solve all our problems. It is clear that in a great deal of Romantic thinking of the 19th century, conventional Christianity is lumped in with science and industrialisation as something to be associated with authoritarianism, repression and the destruction of the environment. William Blake, a key figure in the Romantic Movement despised rationalist ideology and unlike the philosopher Nietzsche who sought to balance the rational and irrational forces within us, Blake instead wanted to wage war on rational thought. Blake’s ultimate villains were enlightenment thinkers such as the scientist Isaac Newton and the philosopher John Locke, he despised what he saw as the chains of mechanical reason as he felt they cut man off from his true spiritual potential and inspiration.

Blake said:

“I must create my own system or be enslaved by another man’s, I will not reason or compare my business is to create”.

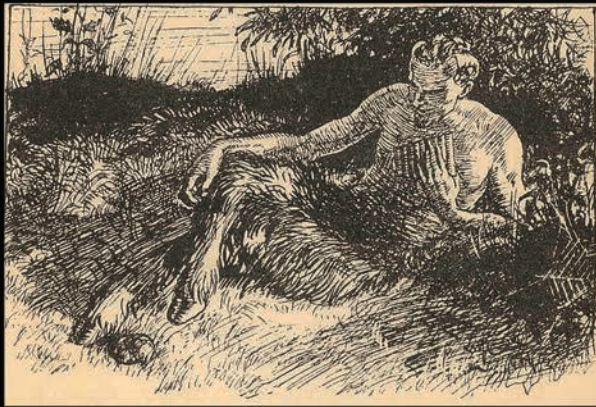
It is in the historian Jules Michelet’s *La Sorcier* [1862] a study of witchcraft in the middle ages, that we first hear the claim that European witches were worshippers of a Pan-like Horned God

and by the late 19th century and early 20th century many poets were frequently choosing Pan as their theme, including Eleanor Farjeon in *Pan-Worship* and Teresa Hooley in her poem *Prayer to Pan*. Pan as a figure of nonconformity and unconventional eroticism also appealed to gay writers such as Saki, Oscar Wilde and later on E. M. Forster. There is also Algernon Charles Swinburne's mystical poem *A Nympholept*, with its portrayal of Pan as representing an intoxicating combination of ecstasy and terror. Swinburne is often associated with the 19th century 'Decadent Movement'. An alcoholic, and sexual masochist, who in his own words 'liked to be flogged' he was also known to have boasted of having once had sex with a monkey and then eaten it.

There is of course also Arthur Machen's terrifying short story *The Great God Pan* with its strange mix of science and paganism. Lord Dunsinay pens the novel *The Blessings of Pan* and Victor Neuberg, the poet and associate of occultist Aleister Crowley, composes the poem *Pan's Triumph*. Then there is Crowley's own climactic and orgasmic *Hymn To Pan* -

**Come, oh come!
I am numb
With the lonely lust of devildom,
Thrust the sword through the galling fetter,
All-devourer, all-begetter,
Give me the sign of the Open Eye,
And the token erect of thorny thigh,
And the word of madness and mystery,
Oh Pan! lo Pan!**





Pan also becomes an archetype courtesy of the anthropologist James Frazer author of *The Golden Bough*. It was Frazer who first proposed the idea of archetypal deities, this was then later consolidated and expanded by the psychologist Carl Jung in his theory of archetypes as fundamental to the structure of the unconscious mind. We also see Pan appearing in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* [1908] as the 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn'.

According to Hutton it is the anthropologist Margaret Murray who first liberates Pan from his classical Greek setting by making the claim that a 'Universal Horned God' called Cernunnos was worshipped throughout ancient Europe. This it turns out is a bit of an exaggeration as there is in fact evidence of many different types of horned god with various different names being worshipped throughout ancient Europe.

The question then arises how do we fit 'Herne the Hunter' and the figure of 'The Devil' into all of this?

'Herne' as a figure of European folklore apparently first makes his appearance in European literature in Shakespeare and then later on in the Brothers Grimm who invented the phrase 'The Wild Hunt' and use 'Herne' to invent a new mythology for a new Germany in the 19th century. As for the Devil, it would appear it is probably a myth that the Horned God of ancient pagan Europe was turned into the Devil by incoming Christianity in order to discredit him and try and convert everyone. The reason this is unlikely is the fact that from ancient times up until the 19th century the Devil is mostly portrayed as having bat's wings, clawed feet and long ears, which are not very Pan-like. It is only in the 19th century that he acquires horns and hooves, and mostly in the late Victorian period that he starts looking like Pan. This process was probably part of the reaction of Christians to the emerging literary cult of Pan and a clear attempt to discredit him. A good example of this is the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning who as a staunch Christian attempted to fight back against the Romantics veneration of Pan by penning the poem *The Dead Pan*.

Finally by the 1940s we see the Horned God being reinstated in the form of Wicca and modern paganism. Along with The Earth Goddess and Mother Nature he is incorporated into contemporary mysticism, the new age movement, and various other forms of neopagan religious practices and popular culture. It seems that now, finally, the Horned God can take his place as one of the most significant modern deities of the 20th and 21st century.

Reading and listening to Hutton you can't avoid the sneaking suspicion that he appears to be rather sympathetic to pagan views, and in fact I have heard rumours that he is an active practitioner, although he has never publicly confirmed this. Hutton although a highly respected academic is clearly not an atheist and seems to be aligning himself with the view that God, or gods, can neither be proven nor disproven. Listening to Hutton I was reminded of the words of the ethnobotanist, and prolific consumer of magic mushrooms Terence McKenna, who when speaking about the limitations of science and referring to 'The Big Bang', once said -

“Modern science is based on the principle ‘give us one free miracle and we’ll explain the rest’. The one free miracle is the appearance of all the mass and energy in the universe and all the laws that govern it in a single instant, from nothing”.

Prof Hutton, similarly, seems to come to the conclusion that science has its limits and cannot explain everything. He makes the interesting point that, **“The whole question of the true nature and purpose of human life and of its relationship with the rest of the cosmos does remain completely open”.**

He ends on an interesting note -

“My tone may have suggested that this God and indeed all deities are cultural constructs projected by a human need. It may sound as if I am arguing that they have no objective existence but are poetic images to express and realise human emotions. This approach would be wholly in keeping with the tone of modern scholarship. My simple duty as a scholar drives me to remark that I have no solid evidence that any deity including the Horned God actually exists.”

Likewise I have no proof, the Horned God, or any other deity does not exist.

So if, after reading this article, you happen to find yourself walking in the woods at night, keep an eye out for a strange figure with horns and goaty legs!

Thanks for reading, good night, sleep well ...

Tom Plender