

The Piper among the Ruins: The God Pan in the Work of Arnold Böcklin

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Article abstract

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Böcklin a débuté comme peintre de paysages, dans la tradition de Caspar David Friedrich. Sa première peinture mythologique, *Syrinx poursuivie par Pan*, peint à Rome en 1854, inspirée de Poussin (vers 1637), présentait Pan comme l'incarnation brutale de la lascivité. Vers 1855 il s'éloigne graduellement des modèles baroques et devient plus attentif aux descriptions littéraires du poème homérique Ode à Pan et de la poésie pastorale de Théocrite. La figure de Pan devint pour Böcklin la personnification de la nature et l'incarnation d'une crainte quasiment religieuse du monde naturel, terrifiant et extraordinairement beau à la fois, et toujours imprégné d'absolu.

Pour Böcklin, dans l'ancienne Grèce, l'homme vivait en parfaite harmonie avec la nature. Il a hérité cette idée de Schiller, dont il avait illustré le poème « Die Götter Griechenlands ». Tout comme Schiller, Böcklin n'appréciait guère le monde moderne et choisit de vivre en Italie, tournant ainsi délibérément le dos au Nord industrialisé. Sa peinture *Idylle* (1875) représente un Pan vieillissant, aux cheveux argentés, jouant la flûte, oublié et seul parmi les ruines d'un temple abandonné, thème également traité par le poète Paul Heyse. Contrairement à Plutarque qui avait annoncé la mort de Pan, Böcklin le présente comme une figure simplement tombée dans l'oubli.

Böcklin constitue un lien essentiel entre le Romantisme et le Symbolisme. Ses représentations de Pan ont influencé bien des artistes symbolistes allemands, comme Franz von Stuck. Les pages des revues de l'époque (*Jugend*, *Simplicissimus*) sont remplies de ces personnages. En 1895 on fonde à Berlin une élégante revue d'art à laquelle, en hommage à Böcklin, on donne le nom *Pan*. Cette divinité a également été évoquée par des poètes, tels l'allemand Otto Julius Bierbaum et l'anglais Algernon Charles Swinburne. L'estime qu'on accordait à Böcklin dans les années 1890 et la prolifération de Pans qui en résulta, témoignent de la méfiance pour la modernité de la part de bien des artistes et des poètes de la fin du siècle.

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RÉSUMÉ

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At the time of his death, the Swiss-born painter Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901) was one of the most famous artists in Europe.¹ Although he is best known in North America for moody landscapes like *The Isle of the Dead* (1880), which is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and one of the few Böcklin paintings in any North American collection, he is remembered on the other side of the Atlantic largely for his depictions of creatures from classical mythology. He painted many horse-bodied centaurs, fish-tailed tritons, bird-winged sirens, and other imaginary hybrids; his favourite subjects were the goat-footed beings that he referred to variously as Pans, fauns, and

satyrs.² Böcklin was the foremost painter of Pan in the nineteenth century. His representations of the hoofed god repay examination because they were original and unconventional and because they exerted an enormous influence on art and, especially, literature in the 1890s, when his fame was at its zenith.

Böcklin began his career, not as a painter of mythologies, but as a landscape painter, creating dark, melancholy scenes in the tradition of Caspar David Friedrich. After completing his education at the Gymnasium in Basel and at the academy in Düsseldorf, he journeyed to Rome in 1850. He rejoiced in the sense of freedom that he found in

the south and, despite the poverty he suffered there, decided to make Italy his home. He later remarked to his student Floerke, "The sun doesn't shine in Germany. It lay on my shoulders but I couldn't feel it."³

Böcklin's work changed soon after his arrival in Italy. Instead of brooding northern forests, he began to paint light-drenched views of the *campagna*. His first Roman landscapes sometimes have figures in them but they are small, indeed almost imperceptible, and are usually representations of shepherds or peasant girls or other examples of local colour. These works followed in the tradition of such German artists in Italy as Joseph Anton Koch, Karl Rottmann, Karl Blechen, and Heinrich Franz-Dreber, who recorded the Italian landscape without classical *staffage*. Böcklin's gradual introduction of mythological figures into his landscapes may possibly have been at the suggestion of his friend, the historian Jacob Burckhardt, who came to Rome for an extended visit in March 1853.⁴ In Rome, Burckhardt nourished a lifelong interest in the classical past that ultimately gave rise to his study *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, published posthumously in 1897.

Böcklin's first painting on a classical theme, his *Syrinx Pursued by Pan* of 1854 (Fig. 41), was his first representation of Pan. The subject, drawn from an episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, had been frequently depicted by artists in the seventeenth century. Böcklin here chose a traditional subject and painted it in a rather conventional style based on Baroque prototypes. The fleeing figure of Syrinx, leaves sprouting from her fingertips, appears to be derived from that of Daphne in Bernini's sculptural group *Apollo and Daphne* in the Villa Borghese, while the picture is similar in composition to one of the same subject painted by Poussin (Fig. 42). In both paintings, the frightened nymph rushes away with outflung arms from the unwanted attentions of the amorous goat-god. Like Poussin and other seventeenth-century artists, Böcklin used the scene as a vehicle for bucolic eroticism.⁵

Such eroticism was certainly one of the original aspects of the god as the Greeks imagined him, as can be seen from the ithyphallic Pan on the famous Greek vase by the "Pan Painter." However, to the ancients, Pan was much more than an erotic image. Reduced since the Renaissance to a figure of brutish lechery, Pan was restored by Böcklin, in his subsequent versions of the theme, to some of the symbolic meaning he had lost. In classical mythology, Pan was a powerful god of nature, who was noted for many other qualities besides his sexual prowess. He dwelled in Arcadia, napped at noon, was an accomplished musician, and could overcome his enemies by infecting them, through

a shout, with a sudden terror. At one time or another, Böcklin represented all of these characteristics in his portrayals of Pan.

By 1855, when he painted *Wooded Landscape with Resting Pan* (Fig. 43), Böcklin had begun to develop an approach to classicizing subject matter that was less dependent on Baroque models. In this picture, he no longer attempted to illustrate a specific classical text and he freed Pan from the erotic connotations usually associated with the god. The artist portrayed Pan alone in a landscape, stretched out drowsily on the grass. He holds his pipes negligently in his hand; they seem to be about to slip from his fingers. The painting suggests the hush of midday when the breeze dies down and the birds fall silent.⁶ The ancients associated Pan with the stillness of noon. The Greek poet Theocritus, whom Böcklin is known to have read,⁷ mentioned that time as the hour when Pan sleeps (*Idylls*, I, 18). Böcklin thus created a visual representation of one of the original qualities of the god. In such a portrayal of the reclining Pan as a single figure, he may have been influenced by classical prototypes, such as the Barberini Pan in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome or the Barberini Faun in the Glyptothek in Munich, but he would have found few models for solitary Pan figures in European painting.

In *Wooded Landscape with Resting Pan*, Böcklin used the image of Pan to suggest the silence of nature; in later works, the god appeared as an embodiment of its sounds. The artist often painted him playing a musical instrument. This theme emerged in 1856, when Böcklin began work on the first version of *Pan in the Reeds*, portraying Pan seated at the edge of a river, playing to an audience of little frogs. This picture may have been inspired by the tall, thick rushes that grew luxuriantly on the swampy northern bank of the Tiber where, according to his wife, the artist liked to walk and sketch.⁸ Later the same year, Böcklin began work on a second version of the painting (Fig. 44), larger and more ambitious than the first. The figure of Pan is closer to the viewer, dominating the composition. Here he can no longer be considered as *staffage*, subsidiary to the landscape surrounding him; he has become the primary subject of the picture. Pan here is not merely an inhabitant of nature but a personification of it. The image of the god blowing on his pipes, cut from the reeds that grow around him, suggests the sigh of those reeds, rustling like satin in the wind.⁹ It is apparent how Böcklin's work developed: beginning his career by painting pure landscapes, he then began to introduce figures into them. By 1856, the figure had become a metaphor for the landscape and was often substituted for it.

Pan as a musician was one of Böcklin's favourite subjects and he returned to it again and again. The connection of Pan with music comes down to us from classical mythology. The so-called "Homeric" hymn to Pan praised the sweetness of his piping that "bird cannot excel."¹⁰ Ovid made famous the tale of the musical competition between Apollo and Pan, with its unfortunate consequences for King Midas. This competition was frequently depicted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but Pan as a solitary piper did not become a subject for modern artists until Böcklin approached the theme, stripping specific literary references from the figure of the god and removing it from the context of history painting to the realm of the imagination.

To the ancients, Pan was a god of woods and mountains, a patron of shepherds and hunters, eulogized in the Homeric hymn as the lord of "every snowy crest and mountain peak and rocky path."¹¹ The word Pan, of course, is also the Greek word meaning "all." Böcklin infused the image of the god with his own almost religious feeling of awe towards the natural world. Although he was not a pious man in the conventional sense, he believed in a kind of half-formed pantheism or nature worship, viewing all natural phenomena as manifestations of the divine and emanations of a power beyond moral categories. A young friend, Arnold von Salis, a divinity student, recorded in his diary a conversation he had with the artist in 1870:

To [Böcklin] . . . all existing things are qualities of the same principle that one may call God, or Force, or Spirit. . . . In the case of the humble or the loving, the underlying principle reveals itself as love; through the ambitious or tyrannical it reveals itself as power, and so on. Therefore, there can be no question of morality; Good and Evil are only concepts that we form for ourselves. Everything that exists is equally good, or better to say: equally existing.¹²

Although he denied belief in any conventional Christian credo or moral system, Böcklin's reverence for nature verged on the mystical. He spoke lovingly of leaves, vines, flowers, and birds, since "all existing things are qualities of the same principle that one may call God." Nature was an enduring source of inspiration for him. His student Floerke remarked, "Colour . . . and tone . . . [and] drawing . . . are for him in and of themselves nothing but the pure medium of expression which must be at hand if he is to depict the abundance of his joy in nature."¹³

Seeing Good and Evil as two aspects of the same underlying principle, Böcklin found the natural world a complex thing, both beautiful and terrible, and symbolized this complexity in his work.

Some of the mythological creatures he painted underwent a series of metamorphoses in which they represented various opposing qualities of nature. The language of forms he developed was by no means consistent; an image could vary in its meaning from one picture to another. The figure of Pan, which had personified noonday silence in *Wooded Landscape with Resting Pan* and the gentle rustling music of the reeds in *Pan in the Reeds*, became a symbol of irrational terror in *Pan Frightening a Shepherd*, also known as *Panic Fear*. Böcklin painted two versions of this picture around 1860; the second was acquired by the Munich art collector Adolf Friedrich Graf von Schack (Fig. 45). In each, Pan appears at the top of a rocky hill to an unfortunate herdsman who turns and runs in fright, his flock scattering in all directions. The god looms against the sky at the crest of the slope, suggesting Pan's propensity for inspiring fear (hence the word *panic*), particularly in those who disturb his noontime repose. The artist again seized on an original quality of the god,¹⁴ described by classical writers such as Theocritus, who has a goatherd remark in his first Idyll:

. . . . in the heat of summer noon
I dare not pipe; for at that hour doth Pan,
Weary with hunting, take his rest, and him
I fear. Savage of mood is he, and Wrath
Sits fierce and grim above his nostrils ever.¹⁵

The artist here depicted a very different Pan from the serene and benevolent god evoked in his earlier works. In *Pan in the Reeds*, Böcklin placed the figure in a lush riverside marshland; in *Pan Frightening a Shepherd*, he located the god on a rugged mountaintop, the usual habitat of Pan according to the Homeric hymn. Böcklin's wife tells us that he was moved to paint this picture by the craggy landscape around Palestrina, where the couple had honeymooned in 1853.¹⁶

In classical mythology, Pan was a rural god, the lord of Theocritus's Sicily and Virgil's Arcadia.¹⁷ In many of his paintings, Böcklin, inspired by the Italian *campagna*, created an image of an Arcadian countryside, a tranquil world where people live in close proximity to nature. In 1859, he chose to paint such an idyllic landscape when he was commissioned to create an illustration to Schiller's poem "Die Götter Griechenlands" (1788-89) for the Cotta jubilee edition of the poet's work. *The Greek Gods* (Fig. 46) was executed in *grisaille* and copied in woodcut for the book.¹⁸ Although it was not a literal interpretation of the text, Böcklin's representation of the classical past was very appropriate to Schiller's poem. He painted a landscape in which he conjured up a sense of the happy simplicity of life in classical antiquity as Schiller imagined it to have been. The poet elicited a vision

of nature in which every stone, every tree, every babbling brook was inhabited by its own deity, the gods, and goddesses who brought life, warmth, and beauty to the ancient world:

Well might the heart be happy in that day—
For Gods, the Happy Ones, were kin to Man!
The Beautiful alone were Holy there!¹⁹

Schiller contrasted this idyll to the modern world, where faith in the gods has been replaced by belief in soulless science:

Deaf to the joys she gives—
Blind to the pomp of which she is possessed—
. . . Dull to the Art that colours or creates,
Like the dead timepiece, Godless NATURE creeps
Her plodding round, and by the leaden weights,
Her slavish motion keeps.²⁰

Schiller mentioned many of the Olympian gods and other mythological characters by name, but Böcklin was much more interested in the Arcadian gods than the Olympian ones. In *The Greek Gods*, he created a pleasant pastoral landscape inhabited by figures, only two of whom can be readily identified. A lyre-playing figure undoubtedly represents Apollo and a figure in a winged cap is surely Hermes. A nameless naiad reclines on a cool, shady ledge of rock.

Graf Schack was delighted with Böcklin's interpretation of Schiller's magic world and commissioned the artist to paint a second version in colour.²¹ Böcklin began this picture but apparently was dissatisfied with it. It remained unfinished and was never submitted to Schack. In this second depiction of the theme (Fig. 46), Böcklin made the classical setting of the work more explicit with the addition of a circular temple in the far background, recalling the Temple of Vesta in Rome. The nymph of the spring has become larger and more important in the second version; she leans on an overturned urn from which the water bubbles. Other figures dally flirtatiously or listen to Apollo's lyre in the sunlit landscape. This is a vision of the classical past as a golden age, a lost paradise of music, frolic, and lovemaking. It suggests Schiller's lines:

Where lifeless—fix'd afar
A flaming ball to our dull sense is given,
Phoebus Apollo, in his golden car,
In silent glory swept the fields of heaven!
On yonder hill the Oread was adored,
In yonder tree the Dryad held her home,
And from her Urn the gentle Naiad pour'd
The wavelet's silver foam.²²

To Böcklin, as to Schiller, the defining characteristic of classical antiquity lay in the harmonious relationship between humanity and nature he imagined had prevailed at that time. He fancied

that antiquity had been a period when human beings had been capable of a joyous appreciation of nature's beauty and that this faculty had been dulled in the modern age. Böcklin's concept of the classical past is reflected in some remarks recorded by his student Floerke:

To be Greek! Us? What made the Greeks Greek? Because they did as they saw fit, as it seemed right to them. . . . That is what we must do again today, without looking back. Full of life, as we see it and understand it. . . . Only then are we Greeks, when we seize life in our way. But today everyone is asleep or constipated. . . . Haven't we lain in the same buttercups as the Greeks did, and dreamed under the same apple trees against the blue? Isn't it the same world, in which they harvested their honey? Isn't life beautiful? Perhaps our nature, with which we were born, is different than the Greeks—but perhaps it's still the same: let's give it a try!²³

It is clear that to Böcklin Greekness equalled a rich appreciation of nature. The pleasant primeval landscape that he sought to recreate in many of his pictures may be interpreted as a rejection of the modern world, with its advances in science and its technology. He believed that the Greeks had enjoyed a sensuality in both their art and their lives that was lost in the modern age. He said,

At the present time, an immediate shift to a higher concept and a greater sense of art is absolutely not to be thought of, despite railroads, telegraphs, and greater interrelationships between peoples; but, if a people or a time is disposed to it, such things can develop in an unbelievably short time under the simplest circumstances and conditions of life, as in Greece.²⁴

Böcklin deplored the modern age. His sense of disaffiliation with his own era was to be found among many intellectuals of the period. Jacob Burckhardt shared his dismay with the hurly-burly of modern life and, like his friend, loved Italy precisely because it was not modern. Burckhardt once wrote in a letter,

You weather-wise fellows vie with each other in getting deeper and deeper into this wretched age—I on the other hand have secretly fallen out with it entirely and for that reason am escaping from it to the beautiful lazy south, where history is dead and I, who am so tired of the present, will be refreshed by the thrill of antiquity as by some wonderful and peaceful tomb.²⁵

Böcklin too was "tired of the present" and sought in his painting to recreate the lost Arcadia of the classical past. During the 1860s, many of his pictures dealt with Arcadian themes. He painted a series of young lovers in the landscape and several representations of naiads. In these works, he created a pleasance with a classical flavour, a tender garden where goatherds, beautiful nymphs, and loving couples wander amid a profusion of

plants. Although Böcklin's pictures of lovers of course have erotic implications, these are very restrained.²⁶ The artist seems to have been more interested in creating an idyll of childlike innocence than in openly celebrating the joys of Amour. He commemorated the simpler pleasures of the senses: the fragrance of flowers, the music of birds, the warmth of sunlight on naked skin.

In 1869, he turned once more to the commission he had received from Graf Schack to paint a work based on the *grisaille* illustration for Schiller's poem. At last, almost a decade after the original commission, the artist devised a formulation of the theme that pleased him enough to bring to completion. He sent the picture to Schack and was bitterly disappointed when the collector refused to accept it.²⁷ Known variously as *Spring Dance* or *The Spring in the Meadow* (Fig. 47), this painting was eventually acquired by the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden. It depicted a rocky bank strewn with flowers, on which sits a veiled nymph, a stream of water trickling from her overturned urn. Above her, on the top of the bank, a throng of putti are dancing in a ring on the grass. These figures are readily recognizable hieroglyphs for the forms of nature; the nymph with the urn is obviously a personification of the spring water, while the frolicking putti embody mists rising from the damp soil or meadow flowers swaying in the breeze. The composition also includes a pair of goat-legged Pans or fauns. These creatures display little interest in the nymph but scramble down the rocky bank in search of a drink. A slender faun scoops up water with his hands while his companion, a fat, red-cheeked faun, seems primarily concerned with getting down the bank without accident. Here for the first time, the artist brought together two themes that had previously occupied him separately: the Arcadian landscape growing out of his illustration of Schiller was now occupied by the hoofed image of Pan.

About this time caricature began to play an important role in Böcklin's work. In *The Spring in the Meadow*, he accentuated through caricature the goaty attributes of the two fauns, describing them laughingly to Schick as "stinking."²⁸ He explained their presence in the painting to a curious visitor: "The Pans are Philistines who have no concern at all with the beauties of nature or the beauty of the nymph, but are interested only in the satisfaction of their appetites and think only about momentary bodily pleasures."²⁹ This seems to be a derogatory comment.³⁰ But did Böcklin really mean to cast his goat-legged fauns in a derogatory light? He was fond of his fabulous creatures. If he referred to what he called "Pans" as "Philistines," surely he did not mean the term in a purely negative sense. I

believe that he meant only that the creatures were an unthinking part of nature, simple and naïve, like the demigods in Schiller's poem on which this painting was loosely based.

Schiller expressed regret for the loss of mythology. In his lost idyll, every phenomenon of nature was explained poetically rather than scientifically; mythology gave the Greeks a sense of connection to nature that did not need to be considered, questioned, or reaffirmed. When it disappeared, human beings lost the comforting and comprehensible set of explanations that gave the ancient world much of its richness and beauty. Schiller lamented,

Home! and with them are gone
The hues they gaz'd on and the tones they heard;
Life's Beauty and life's Melody:—alone
Broods o'er the desolate void the lifeless Word.³¹

Böcklin likewise regretted the modern mania for scientific explanation, with its emphasis on "the lifeless word." Familiar as he was with Schiller's poetry, he had undoubtedly read the famous essay, "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung" (1795), in which Schiller contrasted two types of poetry and two ways of looking at the world. Naïve poets were those who were unselfconscious, joyful, and practical. They sallied out into the world, free of unseen demons. In Schiller's view, the Greeks were a "naïve" people, at one with the world around them. "Sentimental" poets were ones who were not satisfied with the real, everyday world around them but constantly yearned to transcend individual specific reality in search of the absolute. Moderns are sentimental creatures in comparison with the naïve Greeks. Schiller wrote:

If one recalls the beautiful nature that surrounded the ancient Greeks; if one ponders how familiarly this people could live with free nature beneath their fortunate skies, how very much closer their mode of conception, their manner of perception, their morals, were to simple nature, and what a faithful copy of this their poetry is, then [one must observe] that one finds . . . little trace among them of the *sentimental* interest with which we moderns are attached to the scenes and characters of nature. . . . [Although the Greek reproduced nature in faithful detail in his art,] he does not cling to her with fervor, with sentimentality, with sweet melancholy, as we moderns do.³²

Schiller imagined that although the Greeks lived in harmony with nature, they did not celebrate its beauty. The aesthetic appreciation of modern man is "sentimental," arising just because he is apart from nature rather than one with it. If Böcklin's Pans are "Philistines," surely they are Philistines because they are naïve, in Schiller's sense of the word. They care little for the beauties

of nature because they are inseparably part of nature. They pipe in the reeds, they run in the meadows, they drink from the springs. They represent pure, unreflective, unselfconscious animal existence.

It was, I think, exactly this kind of simple existence that Böcklin sought by choosing to live in Italy. He often spoke of the freedom he found in the south, where he took refuge from German materialism and modernity, German science and scholarship. In his old age he wrote to the art historian H. A. Schmid, inviting the younger man to come to Italy for a visit “if sometime you get sick of life in the north and talk about freedom by spiritually un-free people.”³³ He shared the view, often held by the Germans and the English, that Italians retained a kind of joy in life that had been lost to the modern, progressive, industrialized north, with its burden of intellectualism and self-analysis. Böcklin deplored scientists and scholars, reserving his harshest words for art critics who attempted to rationalize, formulate, and classify art; he referred to art historians as “donkeys”—and worse.³⁴ He admonished his students to paint according to their intuition and to avoid philosophical discussions about art. He told them,

Paint strongly and observe closely. A lot of criticizing and philosophizing about art has no value for a painter. To paint—that brings out the stuff that’s inside one. The pictures should say what one is thinking and feeling, not the artist.³⁵

Böcklin reproved other artists for being too cerebral, too concerned with theory rather than the simple act of making art.³⁶ Despite his Gynnasium education and academic training, he lamented the emphasis placed on thought at the expense of feeling and action. The Pan figures in *The Spring in the Meadow* act rather than think; they thus express much of the artist’s attitude towards the world. Böcklin, who had started off in the tradition of German Romantic landscape painting, had become a painter of mythologies still strongly infused with his Romanticism. He brought together classical subjects and a Romantic sensibility.

In 1875, Böcklin introduced yet another implication into his representation of Pan in a small picture titled *Idyll* (Fig. 48). It depicts the goat-god once again playing his pipes among the reeds, standing and facing the viewers of the painting and appearing to be aware of them, rather than immersed in his music as in *Pan in the Reeds* of almost 20 years before. The earlier Pan, painted in Böcklin’s youth, is himself young and swarthy. This later Pan is aged and white-haired. He lifts his pipes to his lips with a gentle little smile of wry

amusement. The artist placed this Pan among the ruins of a small classical temple. The columns are broken and toppled, suggesting the loss of the classical past. The edifice is abandoned and the gods who were worshipped here have been forgotten by humanity. The marble is overgrown with ivy, while poppies and oleander force their way through cracks in the crumbling floor. Aged but undaunted, only Pan remains to play his pipes among the ruins.

Here Böcklin represented a Pan who has been affected by the passage of time. This picture may allude to an aspect of the Pan myth that was well known in the nineteenth century. According to a tale recounted by Plutarch in the *Moralia* (*De defectu Oraculorum*, xvii), several fishermen in a boat once heard a voice booming over the sea that announced, “Great Pan is dead!” From that time forward, Plutarch tells us, all the oracles fell silent and spoke no more. Patricia Merivale demonstrates how later writers seized on the story of the death of Pan and transformed it into allegories of varying meaning. As she points out, many of the Romantics, perhaps under the influence of Schiller’s lament for the classical past, associated the death of Pan with the loss of mythology.³⁷ The image of Pan’s passing appeared several times in the writings of the Munich poet Paul Heyse, who was a close friend of Böcklin’s as well as a friend of Burckhardt’s. Böcklin and Heyse had known each other since youth, having first met in Rome in the early 1850s. In 1888, Heyse wrote a tribute to Goethe, finding in Goethe’s demise an analogy to the death of the goat-god:

... a profound shudder
Passed through the world . . .
... and through the trembling air
Was heard the lament: “The great Pan is dead!”³⁸

However, in another poem, Heyse denied Pan’s mortality. In “Der Dichter und der grosse Pan,” the poet-narrator describes a noontime vision of the god, who appears to him as he lies beneath the olive trees “where the thyme is blooming.” While revelling in the beauty of nature, he seems to see a mysterious figure that announces itself as Pan. The poet exclaims:

So you are still alive, exalted one!
Do you still rule in blessed quiet
The world and your stunted creatures
Who, while forgetting you, suppose themselves wise?³⁹

Pan replies:

None of the eternal ones can disappear,
None can perish.
Don’t you have eyes to see,
Ears to hear?⁴⁰

Heyse's Pan is not dead but is a vital power in the universe, who must sleep at noon because at night when the other gods rest he breathes strength into every living being. Although he is everywhere, he can be seen only by those few who truly rejoice in the beauty of nature and who, with no trace of mockery in their souls, "devoutly have faith in the eternal ones." Like Böcklin, Heyse equated the classical past with a reverence for nature. There can be no doubt that the poet was inspired by the concept of Pan manifested in his friend's paintings. In *Idyll*, Böcklin created an image of a Pan who, like the Pan in Heyse's poem, is forgotten but very much alive, still playing his pipes among the crumbling columns. Like nature itself, Pan has survived the decline of the ancient pagan cults. Even though modernity no longer worships beauty, not having "eyes to see, ears to hear," the beauty of nature still continues to exist, unobserved.

In his later representations of Pans or fauns, Böcklin most frequently placed them in association with music or musical instruments, carrying on the significance that the theme had held in his work since the 1850s. In 1879, he repeated the motif of the pipe-playing Pan in *Spring Evening* (Fig. 49). Pan appears blowing on his reed pipes on an outcropping of lichen-encrusted rocks while, on one side in a grove of trees, two nymphs listen to his music with rapt attention. In Böcklin's later works, Pans and fauns were often associated with stones, while nymphs were associated with trees and springs. This picture makes clear the demarcation between what the artist evidently considered were the proper habitats of fauns and nymphs.

Pans, satyrs, and fauns were seldom represented by other nineteenth-century artists before the 1890s. When they appeared, they were usually conventional images, based on earlier depictions of the theme. This becomes clear when Böcklin's *Spring Evening* is compared with the French artist William-Adolphe Bouguereau's 1873 painting *Nymphs and Satyr* (Fig. 50). This picture shows four voluptuous nudes playfully attempting to pull a not-too-reluctant satyr into a lily pool. The implications of the scene—a male figure beset by a bevy of nubile nymphs—are highly erotic and relate Bouguereau's picture to earlier prototypes in French art, like Poussin's *Pan and Syrinx* (Fig. 42) or the famous terra cotta group of about 1775 by Clodion, *Satyr and Bacchant* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). It contrasts strongly with Böcklin's picture, where there are no erotic connotations; the Pan and the nymphs stand apart from each other, linked only by the music that he creates and they attend. Böcklin's image is much

less traditional than Bouguereau's and exemplifies the new meaning that he brought to bear upon the theme: Pan as a symbol of a profound experience of the beauty of nature.

When Bouguereau's painting was exhibited in the Salon, it was accompanied in the catalogue by a quotation from the Roman poet Statius: "Conscious of his shaggy hide, and from his childhood untaught to swim, he dares not trust himself to deep waters."⁴¹ Because of the emphasis placed on history painting by the academy, Bouguereau clearly felt the need to legitimize what might be called a classical genre painting by connecting it to a specific text. In this too he differed from Böcklin, whose image of Pan was deeply influenced by classical literature but who felt no need to illustrate specific literary passages. This sets Böcklin's depictions of Pan apart from others that appeared in the art of the period.

One of the few English artists who depicted the goat-god was Edward Burne-Jones. In *Pan and Psyche*, completed in 1874 (Fig. 51), the god consoles the nymph, who has been abandoned by her lover, and dissuades her from attempting to drown herself in her despair. Burne-Jones's painting adheres closely to a literary source. The subject originated in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, although the artist based his picture not on the Latin story directly but on a retelling of the tale by William Morris in *The Earthly Paradise*.⁴² Burne-Jones's painting has no conventional erotic connotations but it also has no classical vitality. His Pan seems listless and enervated when compared with Böcklin's lively and convincing depictions of the god. This Pre-Raphaelite Pan, conceived with *quattrocento* delicacy, was based on a satyr in Piero di Cosimo's *Death of Procris* in the National Gallery in London.⁴³ Like the painting by Bouguereau, Burne-Jones's work is traditional in many ways, as it illustrates a literary text and is based on earlier prototypes. All three of these pictures were painted during the 1870s but it was evident that those by Bouguereau and Burne-Jones are very different from the much more original image of Pan created by Böcklin.

In the 1880s, after decades of hardship and neglect, Böcklin began to achieve recognition, and in the nineties he grew to be famous. He had an enormous effect, not fully recognized today, on countless artists. Of his legacy to those who came after him, his image of Pan was perhaps the most important. Under Böcklin's influence the god became one of the most popular subjects for art at the *Jahrhundertwende*. Suddenly Pans thronged on the walls of exhibitions and piped their way through the pages of the many periodicals of the era. A single example will suffice to demonstrate

Böcklin's influence. One of the most literal of his many imitators was the Munich painter Franz von Stuck, who became extremely successful by reworking Böcklinesque subjects. A cursory survey of a catalogue of his work reveals dozens of pictures of centaurs, tritons, nereids, nymphs, fauns, and Pans;⁴⁴ all of Stuck's depictions of these mythological creatures are closely related to earlier works by Böcklin. Stuck's *At the Spring* (Fig. 52) of about 1900 depicts a naiad sitting by a gurgling fountain; she listens entranced to the music of Pan, who perches nearby, playing his pipes. This picture is clearly based on works like Böcklin's *Spring Evening* of 20 years before.

In the 1890s the pages of *Jugend*, *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, *Simplicissimus*, and *Kunst für Alle* abounded with Pans. When a lavish new journal was founded in Berlin in 1895, it seemed appropriate to name it *Pan*. The title was, at least in part, a tribute to Böcklin; a reproduction of one of his paintings was published in the first issue. Stuck designed an emblem for the new periodical, a full-face view of the god's head, closely related to *Idyll* and other paintings by Böcklin. In the German-speaking world, Böcklin was acclaimed as the greatest artist of the age, an artist with a unique sensitivity to nature. Under his influence, Pans appeared everywhere, not only in the visual arts of the day, but also in its literature. In 1893, the poet Otto Julius Bierbaum published a cycle of verses, *Aus biedern Lagern*, dedicated to art in Munich. It included a poem called "Faunsflötenlied," inspired by Böcklin's *Pan in the Reeds*, in the Bavarian state collection:

I believe in the great Pan,
The gay holy spirit of becoming:
His heart beat is the rhythm of the world,
.....
It becomes and dies and dies and becomes,
No end and no beginning.
Flute, sing out your prayer of air,
That is the meaning of life.⁴⁵

To Bierbaum, Böcklin's image of Pan was an embodiment of an eternal, mystical truth; this image had a special resonance for the Symbolist generation and many writers of the nineties adopted it. By no means limited to those writing in German, the "literary Pan cult"⁴⁶ manifested itself in English literature as well and is exemplified by Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1893 poem "The Palace of Pan":

The spirit made one with the spirit whose breath
Makes noon in the woodland sublime
Abides as entranced in a presence that saith
Things loftier than life and serener than death,
Triumphant and silent as time.⁴⁷

Clearly Swinburne, like Bierbaum, intended Pan to be a symbol of a stirring experience of nature and of life. The god appeared in a wide variety of guises around the turn of the century. He was depicted as a sinister Satanic figure in Arthur Macken's horror story *The Great God Pan* (1894) and as a gentle, benevolent one in Kenneth Grahame's idyllic *Wind in the Willows* (1908). In 1902, E. M. Forster used an apparition of Pan to suggest spiritual awakening in his "Story of a Panic." But as time went on, Pan made fewer and fewer appearances. In 1910 Forster wrote,

The Earth as an artistic cult has had its day, and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town. One can understand the reaction. Of Pan and the elemental forces, the public has heard a little too much—they seem Victorian . . . and those who care for the earth with sincerity may wait long ere the pendulum swings back to her again.⁴⁸

Forster had a sense of history and he was certainly correct to suppose that by 1910 the cult of Pan was over. But in the 1890s, it seemed as if Pan was immortal. Most of the artistic and literary manifestations of the Pan figure around that time were intended to suggest wisdom gained through the contemplation of nature. This significance was derived from the paintings of Böcklin, who was of essential importance as a link between the Romantics of the early nineteenth century and the Symbolists at its end. With the revival of Romantic ideas in the nineties, Böcklin's image of Pan was adopted by many as a vivid symbol of the relationship between human beings and nature that prevailed in the idyllic world of classical antiquity as Böcklin and his followers imagined it. Despite Plutarch's story, Böcklin did not envision Pan as dead but merely as neglected. In the modern age, he believed, the emphasis on science over intuition, on technology over art, on thought over feeling, had cut off contemporary humanity from a mystical, perhaps even terrifying, experience of nature but that such an experience was still possible. Böcklin himself, by choosing to live in Italy and by turning his back upon the modern industrial north, sought the personal freedom and rich appreciation of life and the natural world he thought had characterized the classical age. To Böcklin, Italy was the closest thing in the modern world to Arcadia. The great esteem in which the painter was held in the nineties and the resulting proliferation of Pans are evidence of the widespread sense of disaffection with the modern age that prevailed at the *fin de siècle*. Böcklin's image of Pan was adopted by many artists and writers because they shared his reverence for nature and his distrust of modernity. There were many who,

like Böcklin, did not go gladly into the twentieth century.

NOTES

- 1 Böcklin's great fame is attested to by the enormous number of writings published on him around the turn of the century. Witness the huge bibliography in Rolf Andree's monumental *catalogue raisonné, Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde* (Basel and Munich, 1977), 548-62. It seems as if everyone who ever knew Böcklin published their reminiscences between 1895 and 1915, when his reputation was at its height, including his wife, his son, at least three of his students, and several friends. These memoirs are an invaluable source of information about the artist for the modern scholar. An important recent addition to the literature is the catalogue of the 1977 exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel and Basler Kunstverein: Dorothea Christ, ed., *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901: Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Plastiken* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1977).
- 2 In his catalogue of Böcklin's work, Andree listed 16 paintings on the subject of Pan and 13 on the subject of fauns, making these goat-footed creatures among the most frequently depicted subjects in Böcklin's *oeuvre*. In Greek mythology, Pan was the god of flocks, shepherds, forests, and wildlife, patron of shepherds and hunters. The fauns (called satyrs by the Greeks) were woodland spirits in the form of men with animal characteristics; sometimes they had horse's tails rather than goat's legs. They were attendants of Dionysus, but because of their similarity to Pan they were often associated with him as well. Böcklin does not seem to have distinguished between these various types of mythological beings. The theme of Pan in Böcklin's work has been previously treated, rather superficially and with some inaccuracies, in a tiny pamphlet by Georg Schmidt, *Arnold Böcklin: Pan* (Stuttgart, 1963).
- 3 Gustav Floerke, *Zehn Jahre mit Böcklin: Aufzeichnungen und Entwürfe* (Munich, 1901), 228.
- 4 Werner von der Schulenburg, *Der junge Jacob Burckhardt: Biographie, Briefe und Zeitdokumente* (Stuttgart and Zurich, 1926), 251.
- 5 Anthony Blunt wrote of Poussin's work of the 1630s, "It has always been assumed that these Ovidian compositions are straightforward poetical renderings of the familiar stories from the *Metamorphoses*, but the allegories interwoven with such themes . . . might make one suspect that the artist had a more complicated intention" (*Nicholas Poussin* [New York, 1967], 114). There is no reason to assume that Böcklin, painting in the 1850s, was aware of what Blunt referred to as "Poussin's use of hidden meanings" or that he intended his subject to be seen as anything more complex than an erotic idyll.
- 6 The association of Pan with the silence of noon in classical and modern literature has been pursued at length by Gunther Kleineberg in his dissertation, *Die Entwicklung der Naturpersonifizierung im Werk Arnold Böcklins (1827-1901)* (Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, 1971).
- 7 Böcklin's most important patron reported that the painter possessed an "uncommon literary education" and that he had read Theocritus (Adolf Friedrich Graf von Schack, *Meine Gemäldesammlung* [Stuttgart, 1891], 151).
- 8 Angela Böcklin, *Memoiren: Tagebuchblätter von Böcklins Gattin Angela*, ed. Ferdinand Runkel (Berlin, 1910), 15.
- 9 Kleineberg demonstrated how many of the artist's mythological characters are to be seen as the personification of nature. He thought that in this painting Pan is an embodiment of the silence of nature, whereas I see him rather as a personification of nature's sounds (*Die Entwicklung*, 177-78).
- 10 "Hymn to Pan," *The Homeric Hymns*, trans. Andrew Lang (New York and London, 1899), 231.
- 11 "Hymn to Pan," 230.
- 12 Arnold von Salis, "Erinnerungen an Arnold Böcklin nach Tagebuchnotizen eines Studenten," *Basler Jahrbuch* (1902), 12-14. The translation is mine, as is that for all quotations for which no other translator is credited.
- 13 Floerke, *Zehn Jahre*, 16-17.
- 14 Reinhard Herbig, *Pan der Griechische Bocksgott* (Frankfurt, 1949), 19.
- 15 Theocritus, *The Idylls*, trans. J. H. Hallard (London and New York, 1924), 16.
- 16 Angela Böcklin, *Böcklin Memoiren*, 39.
- 17 Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969). See Chapter 11, "Arcadia," 232-46.
- 18 This work was formerly in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Magdeburg but disappeared in 1945. The woodcut copy made from the *grisaille* has been reproduced by Walter Scheidig, *Die Geschichte der Weimarer Malerschule 1860-1900* (Weimar, 1971), pl. 29.
- 19 F. Schiller, "Die Götter Griechenlands," *Gedichte, Erzählungen: Schillers Werke* (Frankfurt, 1966), III, 83-86. Trans. Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Poems of Schiller* (Leipzig, 1844), 205-209.
- 20 Schiller, "Götter Griechenlands," 83-86, trans. Bulwer-Lytton, *Poems*, 205-209.
- 21 Rudolf Schick, *Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1866-1868-1869 über Arnold Böcklin* (Berlin, 1901), 166.
- 22 Schiller, "Götter Griechenlands," 83-86, trans. Bulwer-Lytton, *Poems*, 205-209.
- 23 Floerke, *Zehn Jahre*, 127. These words are probably a paraphrase of Böcklin's remarks rather than a direct quotation.
- 24 Schick, *Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen*, 83.
- 25 Alexander Dru, ed., *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt* (New York, 1955), 96.
- 26 Examples of this kind of painting by Böcklin are *Love's Spring*, 1868, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt (Andree, no. 206), and *The Shepherd's Lament*, 1866, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Schack-Galerie, Munich (Andree, no. 186). Schick reported that the latter was referred to by the artist as *Daphnis and Amaryllis*. These are the names of characters who appear in the *Idylls* of Theocritus and suggest the importance of Greek pastoral poetry for Böcklin (Schick, *Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen*, 1).
- 27 Schack, *Gemäldesammlung*, 155-56.
- 28 Schick, *Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen*, 300.
- 29 Schick, *Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen*, 362.
- 30 Böcklin often used the term "Philistines" to refer to know-nothings who have no understanding of beauty or art. Only a few days earlier he had expressed his anxiety that this picture, *The Spring in the Meadow*, would not be well received in Munich. He inquired bitterly, "Where do the Philistines find nothing to criticize?" This picture was intended for Graf Schack, a finicky and demanding patron, and the implication is that Böcklin considered Schack to be a Philistine. Schack did indeed reject *The Spring in the Meadow*, as the artist had feared, perhaps because the picture was so far from the original commission for a painting based on Schiller's poem (Schick, *Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen*, 361).
- 31 Schiller, "Götter Griechenlands," 86, trans. Bulwer-Lytton, *Poems*, 209.
- 32 F. Schiller, *Naive and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime: Two Essays*, trans. J. A. Elias (New York, 1966), 102.
- 33 Heinrich Alfred Schmid, "Böcklin und Jacob Burckhardt," *Jahresbericht der Kunstsammlung Basel 1927*, xxiv n.f. (Basel, 1928), 28.
- 34 Albert Fleiner, *Mit Arnold Böcklin* (Frauenfeld, 1915), 154.
- 35 Otto Lasius, *Arnold Böcklin aus den Tagebüchern von Otto Lasius (1884-1889)* (Berlin, 1903), 47.
- 36 Even his friend Hans von Marées was not exempt from his criticism. "Marées should reason less and work more," he

- remarked to his son (Ferdinand Runkel and Carlo Böcklin, *Neben meiner Kunst* [Berlin, 1909], 24).
- 37 Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 63-76.
- 38 Paul Heyse, "Das Goethehaus in Weimar," *Gesammelte Werke* (Stuttgart and Berlin, n.d.), v, 555.
- 39 Paul Heyse, "Der Dichter und der grosse Pan," *Gesammelte Werke*, v, 260.
- 40 Heyse, "Der Dichter," v, 260.
- 41 Statius, *Silvae II*, iii, 35-37. Quoted in the catalogue of the 1984 exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *William Bouguereau 1825-1905*, by Louise d'Argencourt with Mark Steven Walker, 184. This painting was exhibited in Montreal at that time.
- 42 F. Saxl and R. Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean* (London, 1948), 85.
- 43 Martin Harrison and Bill Waters, *Burne-Jones* (London, 1973), 106. Harrison and Waters include a reproduction of the Piero di Cosimo.
- 44 See Heinrich Voss, *Franz von Stuck: Werkkatalog der Gemälde* (Munich, 1973).
- 45 Otto Julius Bierbaum, "Faunsflötenlied," *Gedichte* (Munich, 1923), 42.
- 46 Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God*, 127.
- 47 Algernon Charles Swinburne, "The Palace of Pan," *The Complete Works* (London and New York, 1925), vi, 119.
- 48 E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York, 1961), 108.



FIGURE 41. Böcklin, *Syrinx Pursued by Pan*, 1854. Canvas, 107.5 × 67 cm. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister, Dresden (Photo: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden).

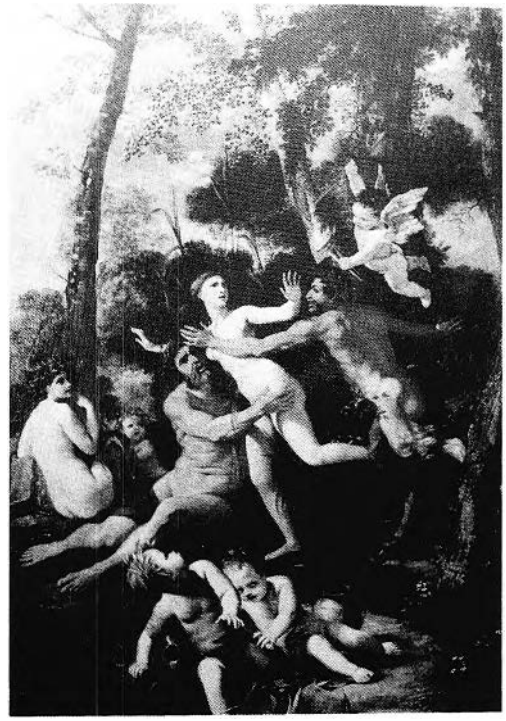


FIGURE 42. Poussin, *Pan and Syrinx*, c. 1637. Canvas, 106.5 × 82 cm. Staatliche Gemäldegalerie, Dresden (Photo: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden).



FIGURE 43. Böcklin, *Wooded Landscape with Resting Pan*, c. 1855. Canvas, 90 × 75.5 cm. Kunstmuseum, Basel (Photo: Kunstmuseum, Basel).



FIGURE 44. Böcklin, *Pan in the Reeds*, second version, 1856-59. Canvas, 199.7 × 152.6 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich (Photo: Author, courtesy Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen).



FIGURE 45. Böcklin, *Pan Frightening a Shepherd*, second version, 1860. Canvas, 134.5 × 110.2 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Schack-Galerie, Munich (Photo: Author, courtesy Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen).



FIGURE 46. Böcklin, *The Greek Gods*, second version, 1866. Canvas, 266 × 186 cm. Formerly in the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, disappeared 1945 (Photo: from P. O. Rave, *Die Malerei des XIX. Jahrhunderts* [Berlin, 1945], Fig. 160).

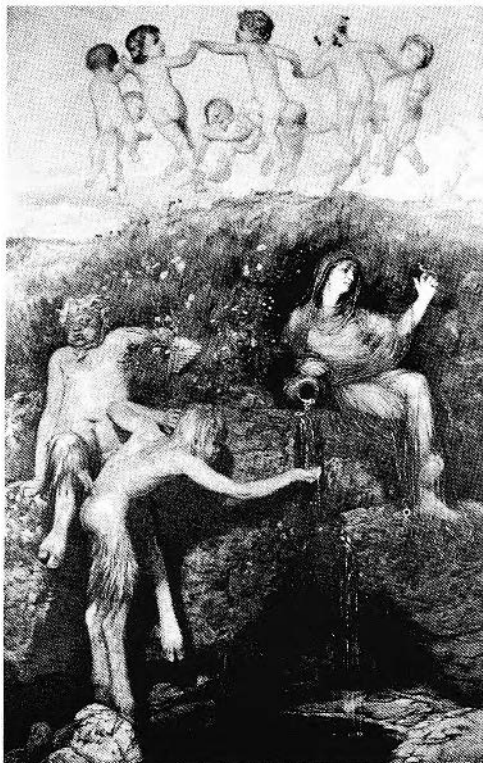


FIGURE 47. Böcklin, *The Spring in the Meadow*, 1869. Canvas, 226 × 137 cm. Formerly in the Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister, Dresden, destroyed 1945 (Photo: from H. A. Schmid, *Arnold Böcklin* [Munich, 1922], Pl. 27).



FIGURE 48. Böcklin, *Idyll*, 1875. Canvas, 62.7 × 50.2 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich (Photo: Author, courtesy Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen).



FIGURE 49. Böcklin, *Spring Evening*, 1879. Panel, 67.4 × 129.5 cm. Szépművészeti Múzeum of Fine Arts, Budapest (Photo: Szépművészeti Múzeum).

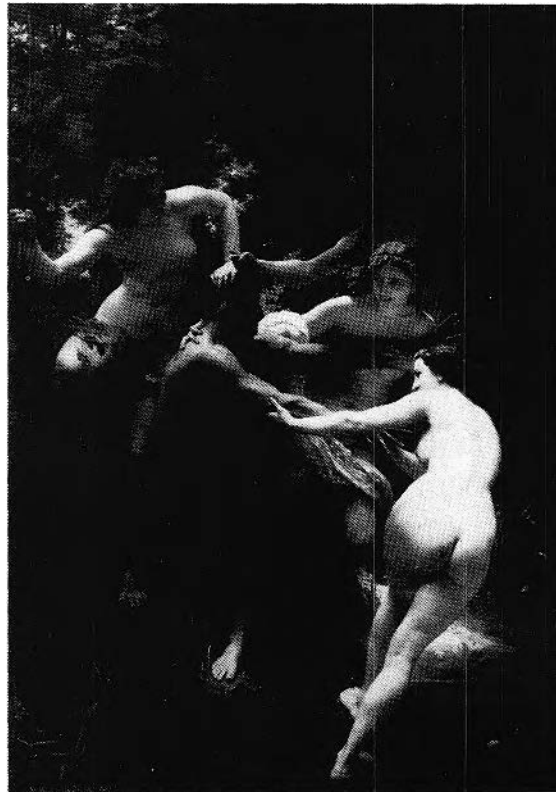


FIGURE 50. Bouguereau, *Nymphs and a Satyr*, 1873. Canvas, 260 × 180 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts (Photo: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute).



FIGURE 51. Burne-Jones, *Pan and Psyche*, 1869-74. Canvas, $25\frac{5}{8} \times 21\frac{3}{8}$ ". Courtesy of the Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest (Photo: Harvard Art Museums).



FIGURE 52. Stuck, *At the Spring*, c. 1900. 98×84 cm. Whereabouts unknown (Photo: Heinrich Voss).