

WILD JOY

In The Dark Wood With Pan

V.B. Price

Christmas 2006

*Midway this life we're bound upon,
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
where the right road was wholly lost and gone.*

—Dante, *The Inferno*

Who if we cried would hear us
in the comic books of the gods?

Who would lead us with his dancing
through the melting woods?

Who would come to *us*, so rich in luck,
so pampered, daft, so gray around the muzzle?

Who would leap into the starry night,
whistling lullabies like comets croon the mysteries of light?

Only a dead god, loosed from dogma,
priests, dog mobs, and panics.

Never in the malls, or banks, or superstores
will the dead god dance us on our way.

Only in the turmoil of the inner forest,
only in the soundless turmoil of the stars.

The world's too hot and slick,
but Pan can dance upon it, Pan

can lead us to the wilderness
of joy in living right.

“Cry all you want,” he sings, piping just ahead.
“I’m dead, a god, transformed into a love affair

with land and air, preposterous, beyond all care.”
His advice to us, his map,

comes straight from our amazement
at having such a crush on this

wild god of panic, praise, and abject joy,
at falling in so holy love

with a dark beast of a world like this
ruled by chance and appetite beyond

our wildest scheming. “Follow me, follow me,
I will lead you to a Christmas tree,

will lead the way to innocence regained
and never once say anything

you must believe or trust,
worry through, or comprehend.”

*Of Pan the flowery pastures sing,
Caves echo, and the fountains ring,
Sing then while he doth us inspire;
For all the world is our Pan's choir.*

–Andrew Marvell

Let us go then, you and I,
through the doubt and fog

of Frankenstein's cruel science,
crying for a god to hear us

in the acid vats and salt crypts
of our poisoned reason.

Let us go though body codes,
laser bombs and nano holes,

crying for a god to lead us
through dust words, narrow thoughts,

the killing smoke
rising from the engines

that keep our e-mails full
of ads for blue pills, stocks, and phony watches.

“Unreal city.” The bosses overheard
second hand that Pan was dead,

that the wild world was
a toy store, rendering plant, a huge

animal slaughtered over and over,
ground up and processed

into cars, and laptops, Formica table tops,
and they rejoiced in mint condition rolling

in their toilet tissue
greenbacks by the billions.

We grow old, we grow old,
our world's as firm as Kleenex in a gale.

No wonder we are drawn to gods
who seem more solid than the future,

being long gone, long ago, but here,
not fossils, never dead,

imprints, though, and faintly true.
It's the Pan that matters,

not a goat legged little god
free as the evening air,

but all gods, Pan, everwise, everywhere,
taking our breath away, scaring us from death,

letting the worries of your days
teach us how to praise.

*Come blessed Pan, whom rural haunts delight, come,
leaping agile, wandering, starry light....goatfooted, horned,
from whom the world began; in endless dance and melody divine,
in thee a refuge from our fears we find, those fears peculiar to humankind.*
—Orphic Hymn to Pan

Oh dark dark dark,
they've all gone into the dark,

the lying and congested spaces,
false saints blowing on the sparks to blaze

their kindling dogma
into phantom flames, but Pan,

the residue of all,
the body of the hawk gods,

flaming bushes, lightning bolts,
flint butterflies, all tricksters

with their vulture smiles,
this all, this Pan,

the mighty forces of the world,
Santa Claus, and elves, and all,

at peace in comic relief,
answers all our seeking

in single moments
of suspended disbelief.

How can we complain?
Praise fears nothing.

“What you do
unto the least of my brethren,
you do unto....”
the rest of us.

Fighting the right fight,
surrendering to peace, opposing

what we know is wrong,
there's nothing anymore

to rail against, we agree
with divine graffiti when it says:

“never let joy
be one of your failures.”

*Dear Pan, master of grace
in the Holy Mess we thrive in,
teach us how to learn to be loved,
...like beasts who finally trust enough....
safe, calm, wild, fast, and unafraid.*

–Hymn to Pan, Mythwaking

Here we are in the middle way,
In the forest of our aging, hopes no longer

merely fears with fancy hairdos.
Can it be this randy, sleepy god,

is telling us to live
as if we are

unshakably
secure

in the pure
humor of the stars, the great

loving laugh that keeps the atoms
on their paths together, kind jokes

the joinery and glue of matter?
There are two gates of Sleep

the guiding poet saw,
one the glittering way

of false dreams in the world, the other
a footpath we can always walk

with holy images that are
more than the bluff of myth.

“Who am I
when I’m not afraid?”

is the only gift
to ask for.

*I sing of Pan, Nymph-leader... lord of winsome muses
when he pours forth the god-inspired siren-song ,...
and stepping nimbly to the melody leaps down
from the shadowy caves, moving his all-shape body,
fine dancer, fine of face, conspicuous with blond beard.*

– Inscription from the
Shrine of Asclepius at Epidaurus

Where is the end of it,
the ponderous wailing?

We don’t know much about gods,
but any can hear us as well as the next.

And all of them together
have big ears.

Let’s let them tell us what to do.
Let’s give in for a while, let go

and be the glorious memories

of long ago, of how

we have come to be
so happy.

We don't want to know what it's like
to be old without being wise.

Pan wakes us up
to our daring.

All the gods want
from us

is the peace
to see right through them.

[With all thanks to Virgil, Eckhardt, Dante, Rilke, and Eliot.]

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