

The Great God Pan

“Tell them that the Great God Pan is dead”

Pan: the god of the wild, the embodiment of nature, keeper of woodland creatures and natural spirits, is dead, as recorded by Plutarch of Ancient Greece. I think about this quote often, and have since first hearing it as a child.

The talk of environmental damage and the climate crisis is not a new one. It is one that I've heard and participated in from the second I became a part of this earth. I grew up hearing stories of sea creatures choking on plastic and swimming in oil, of woodland animals asphyxiating on trash left behind, of humans destroying the ecosystem of which we are a part. The one we should be taking care of, but instead chose to dominate.

It stunned me that the Ancient Greeks, who had no concept of the climate crisis, recorded the death of Pan. The only god to ever die was one that was a symbol of the natural world. I always wondered, “How did they know?”

Historians are now saying that this quote was a mistranslation, that Pan never actually died. I understand the importance of correcting past mistakes, but every time I hear someone say that the death of Pan was a mistranslation, all I can think of is the fact that the first stage of grief is denial.

There are people still trying to deny the climate crisis. That say our actions have had no impact on the natural world. That push the narrative that we can keep going as usual with no consequence. It is these people that make me see no end to the mourning of Pan.

“I’m sorry, Pan,” I think as I watch the large stretches of land become overtaken with

townhomes, dirt mounds, and heavy equipment. Stealing the places where children could run, play, and fall in love with the natural world, just as I did.

“Forgive us, Pan,” I say as I hear stories of deforestation, poaching, and extinction. Innocent lives taken, their only crime being they dared to exist in a world where humans weren’t at the center.

“Not all of us wanted this, Pan,” I cry as they drill into the Earth and exploit it for their own personal gain. Destroying the delicate harmony in which our home had once thrived. I have mourned Pan longer than I have been able to know him. He was taken away from me before I had the chance to learn his name. This planet was on a descent into the hell of our own self-destruction before I had taken my first steps.

Maybe the original death of Pan was a mistranslation, but that does not mean he still lives. They have destroyed everything he represented. The CEO’s, the government officials, the so-called “innovators,” everyone who sacrificed lives for the sake of profit.

So tell them. Tell them the Great God Pan is dead, but don’t forget to mention who killed him. Tell it to all the species of animals that will never walk the Earth again. Tell it to the suffocating plants and the infected oceans. Tell it to the faces of every single human being who begged you to save them, to save us, to make the changes that could have changed things for the better.

Tell them the Great God Pan is dead, and you killed him.