

Stefan George, “Man and Faun” (1928)

Abstract

Many of the poems included in *The New Empire* [*Das neue Reich*] were originally published between 1914 and 1919 in *Blätter für die Kunst*, the literary magazine founded by Stefan George in 1892. Circulated privately as an exclusive forum for poets and like-minded intellectuals who would later come to be known as the George Circle [*George-Kreis*], *Blätter für die Kunst* declared: “The name of this publication says in part what its intention is: to serve art – especially poetry and the written word, and to exclude everything pertaining to the state and society.” The last issue appeared in 1919.

Source

MAN AND FAUN

MAN

A fall of water locks the narrow stream–
But who is there and hangs his shaggy leg
From lush and dripping mosses of this rock?
From bushy, curling pate protrudes a horn.
Though far on wooded mountains I have hunted,
His like I never yet have met ... stay still,
The way is blocked to you, hide nothing here!
The limpid wave reveals a goaten foot.

THE FAUN

Your find will pleasure neither you nor me.

MAN

I knew indeed of creatures kin to you
From tales of long ago–not that today

Such useless, ugly monsters still survive.

THE FAUN

When you have driven off the last of us,
For noble quarry you will search in vain,
Your prey will be the gnawing beasts and worms,
And when you have invaded every thicket,
The drouth will take what most you need: the well.

MAN

You, one so base, would tutor me? Our mind
The hydra, giant, dragon, griffin slew,
And cleared the wilderness that bears no fruit.

Where marshes stood, the wheaten acre sways,
On sappy meadow, tame, our cattle browse,
Demesnes and cities bloom and shining gardens
And woods enough are left for stag and doe—
We lifted treasures from the sea and earth,
Our victories the stones proclaim to heaven,
What would you, relic of the awful jungle?
For order follows in our tracks and light.

THE FAUN

You are but man, and where your wisdom ends
Our own begins, you only see the brink
When you have suffered for the step beyond.
When ripe your grain has grown, your cattle thrive,
The sacred trees their oil and wine surrender,
You think this only comes through ruse of yours.
The earths that breathe in stolid nights primeval
Do not decay, if ever they were joined
They sunder when a link escapes the ring.
Your rule is right for your appointed time.
Now hasten back! You have beheld the faun.
The worst, you do not know, is that your mind
Which can do much, in clouds may be enmeshed,
May rend apart the bond with clod and creature—
Loathing and lust, monotony and flux,
And dust and light and death and being born,
No more will grasp within the course of things.

MAN

Who tells you so? For this the gods be sponsors.

THE FAUN

We never speak of them, but in your folly
You think they help you; without go-betweens
They never came to you: you dawn, you die—
Whose thing you are in truth, you never learn.

MAN

Soon you will have no space for shameless sport.

THE FAUN

Soon whom you spurn without, you call within.

MAN

You poisonous monster with the crooked mouth,
Despite your twisted shape, you are too kindred
To ours, or else my dart would strike you now.

THE FAUN

The beast is void of shame, the man of thanks.
With all contrivances you never learn
What most you need ... but we in silence serve.
This only: slaying us, you slay yourselves.
Where we have trailed our shag, there spurts the milk,
Where we withheld our hooves, there grows no grass.
Your mind alone at work—and long ago
Your kind had been destroyed and all it does.
Your field would lie unsown and dry your brake...
Only by magic, Life is kept awake.

Source: Stefan George, *Poems*, translated by Carol North Valhope and Ernst Morwitz. New York: Pantheon Books, 1943, pp. 221–25.

Source of original German text: Stefan George, *Das neue Reich. Gesamt-Ausgabe der Werke*, Volume 9. Berlin: Georg Bondi, Endgültige Fassung, 1928, pp. 71–77.

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