

Ontopoetics Forum

Introduction

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In the last issue of PAN a new forum devoted to the cross-disciplinary, cross-genre exploration of *ontopoetics* was added to the journal. The notion of ontopoetics was introduced in a special issue of PAN in 2009 ("Invitation to Ontopoetics", PAN 6) and defined as "the communicative engagement of self with world and world with self." Such engagement, as I noted in the Introduction to the new forum in PAN 8, may take many forms, but in each instance it will involve not merely a causal interaction but an *exchange of meaning*. The presupposition of ontopoetics, in other words, is that the world is not merely an object-domain, as represented by physics, but also a field of meaning, a potentially communicative presence with a psycho-active dimension of its own that may be "sung" into responsiveness to us.²

In the current issue of PAN, this premise is explored in different ways in four very different papers. In "Plant Speak", Lorraine Shannon continues the theme of our special issue, plant ethics, with an exploration of her life-long sense of the communicativity of plants and their distinctive subjectivity. She finds clues to this subjectivity in the origins of Western culture, specifically in Greek myth, thereby pointing to a link between myth and a deeper relationship with our world. In "The Tree of Life", Etain Addey continues this theme of engagement with plants, though in a rather more symbolic vein. The "tree of life", in this story, is an image of the intelligent vegetative realm, or Middle Earth, that links the "Upper World" with the "World of the Dead", holding all three worlds together in one intelligible universe of meaning. This dimension of meaning is accessed, in the story, via dream (where dream is perhaps here playing a role comparable to that of myth in Lorraine Shannon's reflection), and the meaning that emerges is deeply personal, revealing the shared roots of our own unconscious, on the one hand, and a wisdom that animates the world at large on the other. In "Enchantment and Modernity", Patrick Curry approaches the idea of world as animate via an examination of the notion of enchantment, noting the many ways that the reductive materialism of modern civilization, premised on dualistic science, is inimical to the experience of enchantment. The experience of enchantment, he explains, is a response to the essentially animate and wild nature of embodied existence - a nature occluded by the lens of modern science. Finally, in "Down to the Roots of the Word 'Culture'", Massimo Angelini delves into etymology to reveal the origins of culture *per se* in the sacred practice of cultivating, in the sense of creatively collaborating with and caring for, the soil, the earth. From this point of view, it is nothing less than *worship* that provides the ground and context for the very existence of culture.

Notes

1. For further explication of the notion of ontopoetics, see my Introduction to the Ontopoetics Workspace in PAN 8; also Introduction to PAN 6; and my paper, "An Invitation to Ontopoetics: the Poetic Structure of Being", *Australian Humanities Review* 43, 2007.