

# Scottish Centre for Geopoetics

affiliated to the International Institute of Geopoetics founded  
by Kenneth White in 1989

## Annual General Meeting in Dunbar 16 October 2004 Director's Report

This has been another successful year for the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, the second year since our relaunch in August 2002. We have continued to expand our activities aimed at developing and extending an understanding of geopoetics in Scotland, and we now have fifty-seven members.

Since our last AGM in Dalkeith last November, we have provided some excellent talks by members of the Centre. Last December, Tess Darwin gave a talk, which was illustrated with slides, on the folklore of trees in Scotland and, in February, Jim McCarthy gave an illustrated talk in Edinburgh (repeated in Glasgow in April) on the importance of geology for Scotland. I also gave talks in Balloch in February on *The Atlantic Poetics of Kenneth White*, and in Glasgow in June on *Living on an Island: an Approach to Geopoetics*, the text of which was published in *Cencrastus* literary and arts magazine.

Our field visits to the Hidden Gardens in Glasgow in March, to Rosslyn Glen and Chapel in April, to the Isle of May, which 23 members and friends attended, in May, and to Ian Hamilton Finlay's Garden in the Pentland Hills in September proved to be very popular.

At the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August, Kenneth White gave a talk and readings from his new essay book *The Wanderer and his Charts* and waybook *Across the Territories* published by Polygon; their publication, and that of *Geopoetics: place, culture, world* by our own imprint Alba Editions, is proving to be very important in further deepening and extending the understanding of geopoetics in Scotland. The leaflets about the Centre, which we were given special permission by Catherine Lockerbie, director of the Book Festival, to give out at the Kenneth White nights, brought in five new members and two enquiries for more information. Sales of our booklet *Geopoetics: place, culture, world* have gone well and are generating funds which will assist us to bring

out other books. We are seeking your approval to transfer the proceeds of the booklet to our Alba Editions account to enable us to do so.

We have produced three Newsletters since last November, and these are to be found on the International Institute of Geopoetics website L'Archipel under "Autres coordonnées". Our Alba Editions imprint is preparing a book of essays for publication based on the "Forty Years of the White World" conference held last year at the University of St Andrews, and this will provide the first comprehensive study in English of the work of Kenneth White. Gavin Bowd and Charles Forsdick have almost completed the editing of the book and we will then prepare a camera ready copy for the printer. We have sought funding from the Entente Cordiale fund and the Carnegie Trust to assist us, but some discussion about our distribution and marketing of the book would be helpful.

There are also plans to make a film about the life and work of Kenneth White, which Paul Welsh, and his *digicult* film production company, is interested in making, and for which I am drafting a script. The George Campbell Hay Project, which Tony McManus took part in, intends to produce a music CD of its work, and it is hoped that a book by Tony about Kenneth White and Geopoetics will be published in the coming period.

At our meeting in June, we decided to hold an islands weekend instead of an islands day and to hold it either on Cumbrae or Luing in May 2005. We are collaborating with Julie Johnstone, editor of *island* magazine, in this and it is hoped that the weekend will lead to a geopoetics issue of the magazine. Further discussion on the venue and on the content of the weekend would be useful.

We have three members in England as well as others interested there, one of whom, Ian Prior, is contacting the rest, with a view to getting a geopoetics group going in England.

With regard to our programme up to May 2005, I would like to suggest that we should have less meetings this winter and try to have more communication between members by e-mail and letter instead. This is because the attendance at meetings hasn't been all that it might have been this year, not all members find it easy to be present, and I think it would be better to try to create more space for interested members to

exchange views in writing about their understanding of geopoetics, and their ideas about how they might contribute to its development in Scotland. We also have a lot to do in publishing, distributing and marketing our book about Kenneth White, and more time is needed to write more articles and reviews.

Although our field visits have been popular, there hasn't been any obvious visible follow-up to them, but this way we could invite those who took part to exchange views and work which has resulted e.g. from our visits to the Isle of May, to Little Sparta, and to the John Muir Way. We could also invite members to tell us about what their interests are in geopoetics, and enable those with similar interests and experience in e.g. the visual arts, in geology, or natural history, to contact each other and work together. Having encouraged this interchange, we could hold a meeting in early spring 2005 to discuss what has come from this, and could also publish some of the work that emerges in our Newsletter and elsewhere.

Looking further ahead, we should aim to have geopoetics on the syllabus of some University classes e.g. in the University of Edinburgh lifelong learning department, where Bill Eddie is interested in this, or possibly in the University of Glasgow Department of Adult and Continuing Education programme.

The International Institute of Geopoetics is also going from strength to strength, with new Centres being established in Quebec in Canada and Geneva in Switzerland in the last year, and just recently two more have been set up on the islands of New Caledonia in the Pacific and Reunion in the Indian Ocean. In Sweden, Anne Geddes Shalit has given talks on geopoetics to members of the Green Party and others in Karlsbad, and has almost completed the translation of *Geopoetics: place, culture, world* into Swedish. We should try to develop our connections with these other Centres over the coming year.

This summer Kenneth White was awarded the Édouard Glissant Prize in Paris for his "openness to the cultures of the world", and such recognition is long overdue in Scotland. He will be visiting Scotland again several times in 2005: possibly in the spring to give lectures in Edinburgh and Glasgow at the invitation of the French Institute, in July to give a lecture in Edinburgh on Gauguin at the start of the National Gallery's major Gauguin exhibition, and no doubt in August at the

Edinburgh International Book Festival. There will also be an exhibition of his artist-books in the early summer at the Royal Scottish Academy on the Mound in Edinburgh. All of these events should give a further impetus to our work.

Norman Bissell, director, Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, 340  
Lincoln Avenue Glasgow G13 3LP Scotland  
[norman@rbissell.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:norman@rbissell.fsnet.co.uk).