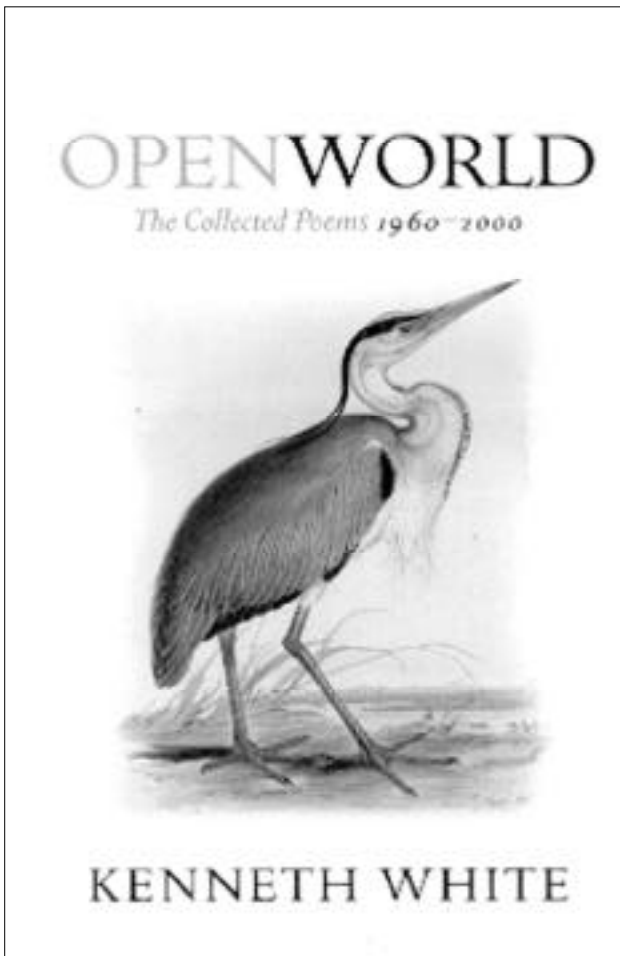


SCOTTISH CENTRE FOR GEOPOETICS

affiliated to the International Institute of Geopoetics founded by Kenneth White in 1989
NEWSLETTER 11 August 2003

August saw the publication of two books by Kenneth White. From Polygon, now an imprint of Birlinn, is publishing *Open World: Collected Poems 1960–2000*; and *Geopoetics: Place, Culture, World* is now available from Alba Editions, the new imprint of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics.



OPEN WORLD

Open World: Collected Poems, 1960–2000 by Kenneth White, published by Polygon at Birlinn, ISBN 904598 01 03) is now available in all good bookshops. At the Edinburgh International Book Festival, Charlotte Square Gardens, on Sunday 24 August, following the launch of *Open World*, Kenneth White gave a full hour's reading from the collection, ranging from early work in Glasgow to 'Atlantic Atlas' poems, from shorter 'diamond poems' to longer 'itinerary poems'.

HOT FROM THE PRESS

Geopoetics: Place, Culture, World by Kenneth White is a succinct introduction to the concept he has developed over the last thirty years. It includes historical and cultural analysis and an examination of scientific, philosophical and artistic contributions to the field of geopoetics. This first booklet from Alba Editions is now available for £6 (including postage and packing) from Main Point Books, 8 Lauriston Street, Edinburgh EH3 9DJ. (Cheques should be made payable to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics).



A Geopoetic Excursion

There were layers of different shades of green in the vernal sunshine, from the alders in the swampy bottoms to the shining pines on the heights, with the thrusting buds of oak and hazel in between. There was a deep quietness in these island woods, interrupted only by the Oracle declaiming from time to time on the ecological mysteries along the way, but the youngsters did find glistening blue-black beetles on the track and we smelt the powerful wild garlic in the hollows. How marvellous, after all the official portents of torrents from the heavens, that the sky was clear for much of the time (albeit shivery at Port Bawn for a huddled lunch) and the view from the ridge was even more spectacular because of the threat of storms over the northern hills.

Straddling the Highland Boundary Fault (that great divide of Scotland) the 'geo' of geopoetics was amply demonstrated, from serpentine to pudding stone, while the islands studded the surface of Loch Lomond like jewels. Even the short trip to the island, courtesy of McFarlane's boat, seemed a small adventure – there is nothing quite like an island even if it is only a quarter of a mile off-shore! Our small party had time to dawdle, to drink in the green atmosphere and to be quietly convivial, smelling the scents, listening to the woodpecker drumming in the birch stump, and wondering at the verdant luxuriance of a plethora of mosses on the fallen oak logs. In the distance we could see how the meandering

Endrick debouched into the loch to the south, its load of deltaic silt providing a haven for wildfowl and waders, not to mention its famous heronry.

Here too we were reminded of the earliest human inhabitants defending their space after the retreat of the ice on the tiny crannog or island fort – a mere heap of rocks in the rippling loch. Later, we were to wonder at the tenacity of their descendants in drying their corn in preparation for grinding in a tiny hillside kiln, before the island was dedicated to the products of the forest – wood for charcoal and bark for leather tanning. People and nature – the story of lowland and highland Scotland, encapsulated on a meridian islet.

The forestry-minded Oracle, eschewing his scientific objectivity, was moved to gather round his party of acolytes to hear his extended quotation from John Lister Kaye's recent *Song of the Rolling Earth* on the glories of the great ash tree:

'I am enthralled by this tree, rapt. Every time I stand here I shrink: it grows. I age; it shrugs off such foibles, and just goes on expanding into a thousand shaded alleys. What is ten minutes or a week when you are three hundred years old? ...'

– but was so carried away that he forgot the time – the history of the 14th-century nunnery and church dedicated to St Kentigerna and ancient Buchanan Parish burial ground was given scant attention before a forced march to the jetty in time to reach Balmaha for welcome tea, scones, and beer. It had been a magical day.

The Oracle



PHOTOS TAKEN AT INCHCAILLOCH

ABOVE: Ian Wallace www.scottishphotography.com

FACING PAGE: Elspeth Murray www.elspethmurray.com

INCHCAILLOCH

From Balmaha on the boat
across Loch Lomond
on a May morning to
the island of Inchcailloch

we climb from the shoreline
strewn with skimming stones
to the mossy oak wood
where once-coppiced trunks
intertwine

the woods are green
with fresh new leaves
and springtime-bright light
still filters from the canopy
through layers of growth
to the bluebells on the floor

we're led on a path
of heavy wooden sleepers
over alder swamp
where thriving trees
are touched by
fallen dead branches
and wood-pecker pecked
dead trunks are alive
with insects and stand
totem-like against the sky

we see the iridescent
blue bellies of beetles
taste the peppery leaves
of wood sorrel
and hear the bright song
of the chiff chaff overhead

curled fern fronds
sponge-like sphagnum moss
and blaeberry bushes

a shining wet outcrop
of rough mixed-up rock
is marked with the smoothest
rounded-down pebbles
and hints at the power
of the ice mass which
scoured out this landscape

looking out south
towards the lowlands
slow-moving swathes of sunlight
shine silver over the grey loch
and bring millions more
shades of green to the trees
that coat the slope we've ascended
and arch their mossy branches
over us

a flight of dark wooden steps
leads up further
through bright green
and out to a huge huge view
of bare highland peaks
sharply spruced slopes
and wooded deciduous shoreline
dotted with small boats
and pointing out at
the other islands on the loch

scorched cones
and tangled black twigs
edge up to a fringe
of pale brittle grass
and the green begins again
coloured with the bluebells' blue

the beetle's blue
the bluebells' blue
the bright blue jay feathers we find

we eat down by the beach
and talk and laugh

at the fallen trunk
orange fungus on the khaki moss
and seven dead beetles
in a plastic cup

birch bark
rubbed by roe deer
glossy holly marked with red
and the coastal sculpture
of rock wood and water

so many mosses
and the old walls
of an old farm
and the tombstones
etched with green

dog violet by the path
a primrose on the steps
and white wild garlic flowers
crisp against dark leaves

the song of the wood warbler
burr of the wood pecker
freshwater waves
at the island's edge
and the seasoned diesel drone
of the engine of the boat
that takes us back
to Balmaha

Elspeth Murray



SCOTTISH CENTRE RECENT TALKS

Living On An Island

An Approach to Geopoetics

Norrie Bissell's talk to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics in May 2003 gave an outline of geopoetics as developed by Kenneth White and the work done in Scotland by Tony McManus. Norrie offered an approach to geopoetics by way of a specific place, in this case the island of Luing and the west coast of Argyll, from a geological, historical, geographical, cultural and poetic standpoint. There followed a lively discussion on the importance of the Atlantic seaways for human exploration and settlement, and how some early cultures were of the earth rather than seeing themselves as separate from it. (It is hoped that the text of this talk will be published in the next issue of *Cenrastus*)

Powerlines

In June 2003 Gerrie Fellows read from her poetry and prose collection *The Powerline* and spoke about 'geopoetical connections'. She referred to her sea journey from New Zealand to live in London when she was 8 years old, emphasising that a life begins with a network of relationships as well as a territory. The Scots and others who went to New Zealand took their own mental histories with them and renamed its mountains and rivers, creating a web of connections. *Powerlines* is not a 'roots book': it is about the essential energies of the earth, and ways in which they are being changed and scarred by human societies and their technologies.

DIARY DATES

Wiston Lodge Weekend

Friday 19–Sunday 21 September

Come to our second geopoetic weekend of discussions, hill and woods walking, words and music-making at Wiston Lodge near Biggar. Our AGM will be held there on Saturday 20 September. The cost, including 2 nights accommodation, 2 evening meals and 2 lunches (all organic and prepared for us), is only about £60. You can also come along for just one day or part of a day. Cheque deposits of £20, made out to Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, should be sent ASAP to Richard Browne, treasurer, at the address below.

Forty Years of the White World

Friday/Saturday 10–11 October 2003, St Andrews University

A conference to mark forty years since the publication of Kenneth White's first poetry collection, *Wild Coal* and to critically appraise his work. Contact Gavin Bowd at gpb@st-and.ac.uk.

CONTRIBUTIONS to the *Newsletter* on geopoetic themes are invited (max. 400 words).

SUBSCRIPTIONS: NEW AND DUE Please send name and contact details with a cheque (£10/£5 concessions) payable to Scottish Centre for Geopoetics.

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