

STRAVAIG #15

Travels in Euramerasia



Poems

Art

Essays

Geopoetics

- ∞ places the Earth at the centre of our experience
- ∞ develops heightened awareness of it using all our senses and knowledge
- ∞ seeks to overcome the separation of mind and body and of human beings from the rest of the natural world.
- ∞ learns from others who have attempted to find a new approach to thinking and living, e.g. 'outgoers' like Henry Thoreau, Nan Shepherd, Patrick Geddes, Joan Eardley, Kenneth White and many others.
- ∞ expresses the Earth through oral expression, writing, the visual arts, music, geology, geography, other sciences, philosophy, combinations of art forms and of the arts, sciences and thinking.
- ∞ develops a network of Geopoetics Centres with a common concern about the planet and a shared project to understand geopoetics and apply it in different fields of research and creative work.
- ∞ opens up the possibility of radical cultural renewal for individuals and for society as a whole.

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Editorial: Travels in Euramerasia

Our Kenneth White International Conference in Glasgow on 14-15 June 2024 brought together poets, speakers and participants from France, Poland, USA, Ireland, England and different parts of Scotland in talks, discussions, a poetry and music session, and haiku walking in the Botanic Gardens. Its theme was Travels in Euramerasia, a term coined by Kenneth White to denote the area that links the continents of Asia, Europe and America in which he travelled both physically and in his mind.

It's appropriate, therefore, that Cairns Craig's wide-ranging keynote address on this theme is preceded in this issue of *Stravaig* by a wonderful sonnet about meditation by Alan Spence, whose poetry and novels have done so much over many years to raise awareness of Japanese culture. The haikus included here by Alyson Hallett and Vera Glica indicate that culture's continuing influence and Monika Kocot's essay on Kenneth White's Waybooks also demonstrates the key Eastern element of White's thinking and geopoetic practice.

When our Council members discussed the conference in retrospect, we agreed that one of its weaknesses was that, although women gave important papers and contributions to panels about White's work at the conference, the role of women as forerunners of, and contributors to, geopoetics was missing. For that reason, we decided to include in this issue an essay by me about Women in Geopoetics which is based on extracts from my new book *Living on an Island Expressing the Earth*. We have also formed a sub-committee of our Council to specifically address issues of diversity and equality. As an organisation, we are wholly committed to identifying inequality and doing whatever needs to be done to address this. It is important for us to acknowledge lack of diversity and to make greater efforts to change this. We are currently considering what training might be needed to help strengthen this commitment and are working out how all future activities of the SCG can become more inclusive and equitable.

The poems by Anne Dunford and Zoë Main, and images by Lorna Nisbet, Terry Ann Gallagher, Birgit Whitmore and Zoë Main, show that women continue to make a significant contribution to geopoetics.

Alan Riach's essay places Kenneth's White's work in the context of other leading Scottish poets of the twentieth century such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Norman MacCaig and his insights into White's legacy make for compulsive reading.

We also received perceptive essays based on their talks at our June Conference from Patrick Corbett on *Kenneth White Grounded in Geology*, Steven Sutcliffe on *Dugald Semple and Kenneth White* and *Pinson After Mao* by Gavin Bowd. However, because of lack of space, we decided to hold them over for probable inclusion in *Stravaig#16* and to invite further papers, poems and artwork in response to the life and work of Kenneth White, and geopoetics more generally, for our next issue.

We hope you enjoy *Stravaig#15* and will let us know your thoughts on any of its contents. This can be done by emailing info@geopoetics.org.uk or commenting in either of our Facebook groups Scottish Centre for Geopoetics (for members) and Geopoetics Scottish Centre for anyone who is interested.

Norman Bissell

Conference Poems

Alyson Hallett

The conference begins
 with ritual - coffee, tea.
We need to open
 the windows
and let the shaman in.

Simone de Beauvoir
 Mary Anning, Hannah Arendt:
 also expressing the Earth.

Open world poetics -
 obituaries
for the left-hand margin.

Po-ethics: not
 what is seen but
 who's included in the seeing.

I dreamed of a cactus.
 You were there
 under the Argentinian sky.

Unknown flower.
 Your scent expands
my ribcage.

Men, come to the edge
of your manly worlds - invite
women to write the new manifestos.

Eco po-ethics -
a blackbird sings
Audre Lorde's poem, Coal.

So many languages in the room.
 Electric lighting.
Electric heat. Somewhere
 an atom splitting.

Sources of Creation

Anaïs Nin

Some writers expect to know what form to adopt before they begin to write. I feel that form is not a matter of prefabrication, but that it is erected by the meaning, the content of the book, its theme. For me it is an inner eruption, very similar to that created by the earth itself in its perpetual evolutions. They happen according to inner tensions, inner pressures, inner accidents of climate and it is the accumulation of such inner organic accidents which created mountains and oceans. To discover my own form I have first to dig very deeply into this natural source of creation. And the sources of creation, as in geology, lie very deep at the center of the beings, as they do at the center of the earth. Once I have been willing to travel in darkness, to the center of the earth, I find precious coals, metals, stones and all the elements necessary to life. I also find fire, and without fire no creation is possible, for fire makes coalescence. Fire, earth, and water are all parts of creation, passion, experience, flow. Once I have tapped those sources, writing becomes as natural as singing.

The Journals - Volume Four 1944 -1947

Kenneth White: Travels in Euramerasia

Celebrating Geopoetics through Creative Environmental Practice

Friday 14th & Saturday 15th June 2024

presented by

- The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics
- Islands in the Global Age ArtsLab at the University of Glasgow
- Heriot-Watt University
- Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen

This International Conference celebrating the life and work of Kenneth White is open to all.

Across the two days there will be an opportunity to hear and engage with distinguished speakers and panels from France, Poland, Tasmania, USA, Scotland, Ireland and England,

And more ...

Main Venues

Friday 14 June

One A The Square
University of Glasgow
University Avenue
Glasgow

Saturday 15 June

Hillhead Library
348 Byres Road
Glasgow

Film

Haiku Walk

Performance

Friday 15.10 - Preview of the beautiful **Expressing the Earth** film Dir: Glenda Rome. Followed by Q & A

Saturday 10.00 - Haiku Walking in Botanic Gardens led by Gilles Fabre

Friday 17.45 - Poetry and Music event at Innis & Gunn Ashton Lane

You can discover the full agenda for the conference and book your place by following the link below or use the QR code.

bit.ly/Kenneth_White_Event_14_15_June2024



Conference report Kenneth White: Travels in Euramerasia

Celebrating Geopoetics through Creative Environmental Practice

Patrick Corbett

A two-day event to celebrate the life and work of Kenneth White was held in Glasgow on 14-15th June 2024. It was hosted by The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, the *Islands in the Global Age ArtsLab* at the University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University and the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen. The event was held at two locations in the west end of Glasgow – familiar to Kenneth White - Glasgow University and Hillhead Library.

Prof Doris Ruth Eikhof, Professor of Cultural Economy and Policy (Theatre Studies), Director of the ArtsLab, University of Glasgow opened the meeting on Friday noting that such interactions were very important to the communication of research across disciplines.

As part of the welcome a quote from Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Glasgow was read out by Norman Bissell:

“Kenneth was a pioneering figure in Scottish poetry and the University of Glasgow is proud to count him as a graduate of our institution. Kenneth began his academic career studying French and German in the 1950s and graduating top of his class. He was subsequently awarded an honorary degree in 1991 for his work to advance the concept of ‘geopoetics’ and introduce a new form of thinking to the masses.

“It’s a critical time for us as a society to reflect on the importance of Mother Nature as we take decisions for our future and this conference provides an opportunity for people to get together and share their own perspective on the impact of Kenneth’s legacy.”

This was followed by a quote from Professor Richard A. Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University:

“Kenneth was one of the giants of Scottish poetry. His distinctive writing style and passion for ‘geopoetics’ enriched lives across the world and we’re proud to have recognised his immense contribution to the arts with an Honorary Degree in 1998. It is fitting that events like this, held in his name, continue to recognise Kenneth’s writing, ensuring his legacy remains vibrant and alive.”

Norman Bissell (Director, Scottish Centre for Geopoetics (SCG)) added to this welcome, a wish for two days of active discussion on the life and works of Kenneth White and his legacy.

Prof Cairns Craig (University of Aberdeen) presented a keynote talk entitled *“Kenneth White: Travels in Euramerasia”* focusing on Kenneth’s inspiration from New World poets Snyder/Ginsburg/Kerouac with the latter’s *On the Road* being an influence on his waybooks. The term “Euramerasia” was Kenneth’s amalgamation of Euramerica (one of the continents melding with Gondwana 350 million years ago to form Pangaea) and Asia, and Kenneth’s peregrinations across these parts of the world gave him the necessary mental space. He was attracted to the Hyperboreans – peoples circulating around the North Pole invoking shamanism and naturalism. Euramerasia was a white space for travelling in Earth-space – geological space, phenomenological space and textural space.

Dr Ramona Fotiade, one of the organisers of the conference (University of Glasgow) presented a paper on *"The White Archipelago – Scottish-French Encounters with Zen Buddhism"*. She emphasised that we are a living map that Kenneth White created, the living memory of all the places we have been and left. Geopoetics helps us articulate shared ideas and no prescribed plot that brings us to today. Ramona discussed the influences of Camus and Sartre, existentialist writers, also invoking the peregrinations of the human soul.

Prof Jeff Malpas (University of Tasmania) virtually, Dr Philip Tonner (University of Glasgow), Dr Martina Kolb (Susquehanna University of Pennsylvania, USA) provided some background on German Philosophy and Geopoetics. Nietzsche and Heidegger were both influences on Kenneth White. Nietzsche gave up everything to be a nomad – a metaphor for "work goes on". Heidegger's phenomenology – that we need to create worlds for dwelling to give us context, was also a great influence. Kenneth White's parallel interests in topological poetry inspired the creation of geopoetics – poetry at the "edge of the world".

Priscillia Leal Torres (Paris publisher) and Prof Régis Poulet (President of the Institut International de Géopoétique) represented by Stéphane Bigeard (Secretary of the Institut International de Géopoétique) followed a short screening of the film *"[Les Cygnes Sauvages](#)"* on the making of the artist book of the same name by Kenneth White. The book was also on show – a beautiful working of traditional Japanese artisanal techniques, with photographs by Marie-Claude White and Kenneth White's text describing the transect made following in the footsteps of Bashō on a journey to Northern Japan.

Unfortunately, Prof Régis Poulet's Zoom contribution *"Kenneth White, from Alaska to Hokkaido: The Idea of the North"* was lost because of technical challenges, but Stéphane Bigeard stepped in to explain the background to, what he described, as Kenneth White's No. 1 book. Kenneth's waybooks often start in an urban setting, involve bone/stone, swans/geese, follow Bashō to the North, a Zen master travelling on a Haiku journey – going as simply as possible (even hitch-hiking) with careful observations finding artistic expression models for a new culture. A selection of his rare Kenneth White papers and books on display caused considerable interest during the lunch break.

Dr Martina Kolb started the afternoon session with *"Homa and Ónoma: Remembering Kenneth White"* and noted that some of Kenneth White's key influences (Pound/Nietzsche) were global/local poets primarily grounded in eccentric territories. The three poet walkers (Nietzsche, Pound and White, who had never met) were essentially "men out walking" – nomads in search of fresh pasture. White founded geopoetics outside Scotland, as a counter-balance to what he felt were narrow nationalist mainstream trends.

Dr Steven Sutcliffe (Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religion, Edinburgh University) gave a talk entitled *"Kenneth White and Dugald Semple: Fairlie and the North Ayrshire connection"*. Dugald Semple was a resident of Fairlie who opened his library to Kenneth White, then a teenager, and this proved to be a lasting influence. Semple was a journalist/photographer, who had travelled widely in Europe, and invited Kenneth to read his extensive collection of Asian and Indian literature. Semple's heroes were Thoreau, Gandhi and Edward Carpenter. He had met Gandhi in London in 1931; Carpenter was a pioneer in the simplification of life (promoted animal rights, vegetarianism, gay rights, etc at an earlier time); Thoreau had lived in a shack and Semple had a

retreat on the Kintyre Peninsula. The young Kenneth White was exposed to these influences, and in his experiences 'up the back' of Fairlie, he was a shaman without a tribe.

Norman Bissell followed the timeline of White's journey with "*Precursors of Geopoetics: the Jargon Group and Open World Poetics*". Norman had met Kenneth first as a student of Glasgow University in 1963 and joined in the activities of the Jargon Group. As well as live poetry readings they indulged in walks across the moors above Fairlie and on Arran. Later Norman joined Tony McManus and others in the collective endeavour Open World Poetics. This group met in various places – including Hillhead Baptist Church Hall– and wandered further afield staying in Allershaw Lodge near Elvanfoot. Both groups instilled in Norman a wish to be more creative and advanced an increased awareness of the Earth.

The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics has produced a major film: *Expressing the Earth* film directed by Glenda Rome) and the audience was treated to a pre-release, near completed, showing. The team that produced the film were keen to hear feedback – generally very positive – and although short of some final edits, there was push back on a suggestion to break it up into three shorter, complementary films. Geopoetics is best taken as a whole – with a wide range of contributors explaining in depth what geopoetics means in the context of work across many disciplines. A newcomer to geopoetics commented that it helped them understand the breadth of ambition in widely expressing the Earth and this demonstrated - as the welcoming address had advised earlier – that communication is everything.

A more relaxed interlude followed with the group heading to an evening of Poetry and Music Performances at Innis & Gunn Brewery Taproom, Ashton Lane, compered by Dave Francis (Musician and Treasurer, SCG). Performances by Alyson Hallett, Alan Spence, Patrick Corbett, Philip Tonner and Dan Luck, Finola Scott, Elizabeth Rimmer, Gilles Fabre, Steven Sutcliffe, Norman Bissell and others helped participants relax after an intense day of discussion.

On the Saturday morning, the attendees assembled at the Hillhead Library in Byres Road, before walking to the nearby Botanic Gardens for a Haiku walk led by Gilles Fabre (Dublin-based poet & publisher). It was a most informative and enjoyable walk. The works created in this outdoor session will surely see the light of day in a future *Stravaig* publication.

Prof Patrick Corbett (Heriot-Watt University) started the Hillhead Library session at noon on Saturday with "Kenneth White – Grounded in Geology" noting the strong influence that geology had on Kenneth White as a young man, on his verse and waybooks and in the metaphors he draws upon. There is something very strong in the link between walking the coast and observing the geology – it's almost impossible to ignore! Recent Scottish Centre for Geopoetics meetings have included a local geological walk and this has inspired new contributions (e.g., *Geology of Luing* in *Five Haiku*, published in *Stravaig* #14.)

After a break for lunch, Prof Charles Forsdick (University of Cambridge) spoke on "*Kenneth White: 'étonnant voyageur'*". He noted that Kenneth White's autobiography *Entre deux Mondes*, soon to be published in English, is deliberately ambiguous linking poor and wealthy spaces, in the tradition of Celtic travellers. He highlighted the symbolic and strategic neighbourhood of Brittany, where Patrick Geddes had once preceded Kenneth, and as the home to the literary St Malo Festival. In introducing the latter to an unfamiliar audience, whilst not directly referenced by Kenneth White, he highlighted the work of Jean Paul Loubes, Stevenson-expert M. Le Bris, and "*Littérature*

Mondiale” as related endeavours worthy of further research in the context of Kenneth White’s legacy.

Dr Monika Kocot’s (University of Lodz, Poland) contribution, *On Following and Returning to Zōka: Kenneth White and Matsuo Bashō*, featured Kenneth White’s waybook *Pilgrim of the Void* in which he follows Bashō’s footsteps to Northern Honshu. Bashō believed that following Zōka — *constantly immersing oneself in the embrace of nature, appreciating its beauty, and following its course* — is an essential way to conduct one’s life. The void in the title represents the silence Bashō used to represent limitations of language when encountering the beautiful bridge at Shirakawa Barrier. White seemingly followed Zōka, as advised by Bashō many centuries before.

Dr Gavin Bowd (University of St Andrews) presented *“The post-Maoist geopoetics of Jean-Claude Pinson”*. Pinson was a Maoist soldier-monk in his youth and, although he seems only to have used the word geopoetics a single time, his communist leanings would have perhaps intrigued Kenneth White. In later life “Tao rather than Mao” became his motto and one that White could share. White also followed Hölderlin — another walker poet — to Bordeaux. Perhaps geopolitics and geopoetics are not mutually exclusive and further research on these links would be interesting.

Luke Devlin (Centre for Human Ecology) was unable to present his paper *“The Unmapped Land: Geopoetics as ressourcement in the hour of chaos”* due to illness at the last moment. Alastair McIntosh (author & activist, University of Edinburgh) was able to regale the audience with the geopolitical aspects of Kenneth White’s influence in a contribution entitled *“Kenneth White and the Shamanic Imperative”*. We were told that Kenneth White remained Patron of the GalGael Trust (based in Govan, on the south bank of the Clyde) until the end and had been a regular visitor to their workshop since the 1990’s when his poem *My Properties* was used as a rallying cry for the nascent Land Rights protests.

Olivier Salazar-Ferrer’s (University of Glasgow) contribution *“Nicolas Bouvier - Kenneth White – A Creative Friendship focused on Scotland”* brought another French philosopher into the room. Bouvier and White, shared many common interests and many points of intersection were possible. They corresponded in public and he once met Kenneth White in a bar near Ettrick whilst travelling around in the Scottish Borders. “The world is what we have in common” — despite their strong personalities and not being always co-operative — they agreed on this point.

The final short panel discussion on Kenneth White’s legacy featured a few notable comments, from:

- Ramona Fotiade — you are made up of all the places you have visited — find your own route,
- Monika Kocot — learning how to look — sight and site — at the small things,
- Alan Riach (Professor of Scottish Literature, Glasgow University) — put him in the company of poets like MacDiarmid and McCaig who possess the landscape — and bring him into the conversation more
- Martina Kolb — his way of working established a network, making what you see important.
- Norman Bissell — his legacy are his books and perhaps a new edition of Stravaig “A way of Living in the World” will be an appropriate contribution to this legacy.

In conclusion, we did manage to organise an international celebration of Kenneth White’s life and work — his formative influences, his reading list, his correspondents and his output — and to do justice to the man. He has opened up the field of geopoetics to everyone and it is up to us all to find our way forward.



Speakers and panelists. Top row: Convenors: Dr Ramona Fortiade and Norman Bissell; 2nd row Cairns Craig, Alyson Hallett and Glenda Rome; 3rd row Priscillia Leal Torres and Stéphanie Bigeard, Martina Kolb and Philip Tonner; Bottom row: Martina Kolb, Alan Riach, Norman Bissell, Dr Ramona Fortiade and Monika Kocot. Photo credit: Gilles Fabre

Meditation Sonnet

Alan Spence

And is it after all no more than this -
release of opiates within the brain,
cerebral chemistry to unlock bliss,
to shut down thought and dull the edge of pain?

No more than this, and yet it's nothing less
than miracle, the here-and-now of it,
awakening, pure being, consciousness.

The light flows in and through me as I sit
in this bright room, this good and quiet place,
breathing, breathing slow, waves on a shore,
breathing in peace and gratitude, pure grace,
till there is nothing-but and nothing-more.

This heart is open and this mind is clear.

I just sit here as if I just sit here.



Travels in Euramerasia

Cairns Craig

Watching Eleanor Aitken's film *Nomad*, about the ideas of Kenneth White and their relationship to Glasgow, I was struck by how, as early as 1984, he was using the term 'Euramerasia' to describe the territory of his intellectual, if not his actual, 'stravaiging'. In Chapter 14 of his autobiography *Between Two Worlds*, which will be published by Edinburgh University Press early next year, he declares that, 'From early on in my studies I'd given a name to the mental continent I wanted to explore and investigate: Euramerasia' (p. 191). The chapter in which this quote appears is entitled 'Euramerasian Peregrinations' and recounts in brief White's travels in Europe, America and Asia, but note that he describes it as a 'mental continent' rather than a geographical one – it is a continent of influences and interactions, of intellectual rather than physical spaces, no matter how many portions of the three continents he actually went on to visit. Indeed, the 'mental continent' set the aims and directions of the physical travels, as in François Reichenbach's film 'Les chemins du Nord profond' (1984), which follows White as he retraces the journey North of the seventeenth-century Japanese poet Bashō: 'It would be a film about the meeting of a modern Western poet with a seventeenth century Japanese poet but, beyond that, a film about moving over the earth, seeing into things, opening a world' (p. 203). The film is about the overlapping of two poetic journeys, the earlier one when Japan was virtually closed to the outside world, the later when it has come to be central to the modern world economy; it is about a cultural space in which American, European and Asian cultures overwrite, reinterpret and remake one another.

White presented himself primarily as a Scottish European, one who identified most closely with expatriate Scottish writers in France, from the Celtic monks who founded the monasteries at St Malo or St Renan, to David Hume who wrote his *Treatise of Human Nature* at La Flèche in Anjou, to Patrick Geddes who attempted to establish a new Scots College in Montpellier, but he came to

describe himself professionally as an 'Americanist', engaging most directly with the American transcendentalists of the nineteenth century and with the modernist poets of the twentieth century from Eliot, Pound and Carlos Williams to the 'beat' poets of the 1950s and 60s such as Ginsberg and Snyder. What is significant to White in all of these writers is their sense of living in two worlds, not just the world of nature and the human world but between two distinct cultural worlds. The nineteenth-century Americans White saw as trying to make sense of the new world of America with the ideas and cultural tools of the old world of Europe – they were, in effect, 'Euramericans'. One of the things these Euramericans imported from the old world during the period when India and China and many other eastern territories were coming under direct or indirect European rule, was an increasing interest in Eastern religious texts such as the upanishads and sutras. White had encountered these in the collections of a local pacifist and 'simple lifer' in Ayrshire whom he misremembers as 'Dougal Semple', but who, as Steven Sutcliffe has pointed out, was actually *Dugald Semple*, acquaintance of Ghandi and author of books such as *Life in the Open* (1919) and *Looking at Nature* (1946). In America, that eastern turn was to produce a generation of 'Amerasians' among White's near contemporaries, the 'Beats'. Gary Snyder, whose work White analysed in *The Tribal Dharma* (1975), entered into an influential correspondence with White after its publication, and Jack Kerouac, the recorder of the Beat movement in novels such as *On the Road* (1957) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958), provided a template for the kind of immediacy of response to place that White was to develop in his 'waybooks'. Kerouac's protagonist in *The Dharma Bums* is a character called Japhy Ryder who is based undisguisedly on Snyder and declares:

'I've been reading Whitman, know what he says, *Cheer up slaves, and horrify foreign despots*, he means that's the attitude for the Bard, the Zen Lunacy bards of old desert paths, see the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars [. . .] all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray [. . .] all of 'em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving vision of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures [. . .]
Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (London: Mayflower-Dell, 1965), pp. 72–3.

Gary Snyder's buddhist inspired re-reading of Whitman as the original poet of the American road and Kerouac's account of what it means to be *On the Road* provide the American context for White's journeys into Euramerasia.

The bridge which connects the nineteenth-century transcendentalists to the Beats of the 1950s are the AmeroEuropeans, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, those American founders of modernist poetics in London in the years around the First World War. Eliot acknowledges the influence of Indian

religion in the final sections of *The Waste Land* with its concluding invocation of *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*, 'give, sympathise, control', before its last line,

Shantih shantih shantih

which Eliot glosses as 'The peace which passeth understanding'. Pound, on the other hand, acknowledges Ernest Fenellosa's translations from Japanese poetry as helping shape the 'Imagist' poetics of the 1910s:

In a Station of the Metro
The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Reading the title as the first line of the poem turns the two-line juxtaposition of conflicting images into the three-line structure typical of Bashō's haiku. Pound's poem was a forerunner of what became, in both Pound and Eliot's poetry, the poetics of allusive juxtaposition, in which allusions to texts by different authors in distinct literary periods and styles would be combined to create an effect where many possible meanings were opened up, different for each reader depending on the echoes with which the lines resounded in their particular consciousness. What Eliot and Pound created was an 'open poetics', inspired by the poetry of Donne and the metaphysicals which had been made available by Herbert Grierson's edition of Donne's poetry in 1912 and his anthology of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (1921), which Eliot reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* in terms which were much quoted by later critics. In that review he suggests that,

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

'The Metaphysical Poets', *Selected Essays*, 1934, p. 287.

Poetry comes from the interaction of apparently disconnected elements in experience: what seems disconnected to the 'ordinary man' is revealed as a new series of connections in the mind of the poet (or in the poem as produced by the reader). As a result the poem may seem chaotic and fragmentary, as in Eliot's *The Waste Land* or Pound's *Cantos*, but what the apparent chaos strives towards, according to White, is a level of integration that will become revelatory:

The idea was that, gradually, the chaos of references and impressions, in the poems and in the essays, would draw together, the associations forming a constellation, the whole becoming 'whitegathered' (Pound's word). The way of poetry is from 'realities perceptible to the sense', interacting by a kind of fertile logic, towards a 'radiant world', a 'world of moving energies' (essay on medievalism, in *Make It New*).

'The Ruins and Lights of Ezra Pound', *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 507.

Eliot and Pound's way of achieving such an entry into a 'radiant world' was by means of a poetry of 'allusive juxtaposition', the juxtaposing of elements from different orders of experience or radically different historical contexts: take, for instance, the following from Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear

Lines from Spenser's 'Epithalamion' – a celebration of marriage – collide with lines from Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' and then a jazzy modernisation of the theme of the grim reaper. The meaning of these lines is not *in* the words themselves but *between* the allusive contexts that they invoke, and these, of course, will be, potentially, very different for each individual reader. The poem is radically 'open' because its meaning is in the 'white space' between its segments rather than in the linear statements that it appears to make. Or, as White puts it in his 'Chaoticist Manifesto',

here at the sea's edge
laughing
laughing a new laugh
(quotations, quotations
at home in this topography
beyond the nations)
Kenneth White, *Open World: Collected Poems 1960–2000*, p. 550

Quotations taken out of their original context become 'at home' in new but unconstrained (in this case, non-national) contexts.

What makes White's 'waybooks' very different from traditional 'travel writing' is that they are journeys not only across territory but through texts. They assemble a variety of textual materials that interact like Eliot and Pound's allusive juxtapositions. So, from *The Blue Road* we get this:

At Trois-Rivières, there's a fifteen-minute stop. I drink a philosophical coffee in the company of Ludwig Wittgenstein ('What you can't talk about, *shows* itself,') then go for a stroll in the street. At the windy corner of Des Forges and Du Fleuve, I watch the St Lawrence rolling by. Another big cargo out there:

Logistic Transport.
Ah, how the world always seems to be throwing out signs. Logistic
Transports! (p. 50)

Ships project texts (name, place of origin) but texts are like ships, always being transported to new environments, producing new interactions with other texts, like the lists of names, some French, some Amerindian, some English, of the towns along the blue road. They are transported across space, across time, across language boundaries, their unexpected linkages producing new possibilities of meaning while they are continuously if unconsciously 'throwing out signs'.

What is true of ships, however, is also true of human beings, who, whether they were nomadic or not, have always been travellers. White often invokes as his own Nietzsche's declaration that 'we are the hyperboreans':

We are Hyperboreans. We know very well in what remoteness we live. 'Neither by land nor by sea will you find the way to the Hyperboreans' – already Pindar knew that. Beyond the North, beyond the ice, beyond death itself lies our life, our happiness. We rediscovered happiness, we know the path, we found the way out of millennia of labyrinth. Who else found it? Modern man perhaps? 'I don't know whether I'm coming or going', moans modern man. We were mortally sick of that kind of modernity. Rather live amid the ice than among modern virtues and other South winds!

'The Archaic Context', *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 30

Such an identification contributed to what was known as the 'Septentrional' world on early maps – the white space and an unexplored emptiness which bounded the known world. For White it not only echoed his own name and sense of a northern identity, but provided a context in which Europe, Asia and America abutted on one another in their far northern regions: the 'Septentrional' world, as it began to emerge from the white blankness of the unknown, was a transcontinental or multicontinental world:

there is, or was, in the arctic and sub-arctic area, a culture of which we can find traces among the Amerindians, the Eskimo, the Siberians, the northern Japanese – and the Celts, which was of far-reaching influence. It is characterised by naturalism and shamanism. If it came to be associated, in historical times, with the Celts, its origins are further back: it is not only pre-Celtic, it is non-Aryan, non-Indo-European.

'The Archaic Context', *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 25–6.

This is what White's *picaro* (the protagonist traveller of picaresque novels) realises as already known to him when he visits an Indian reservation in *The Blue Road*:

Imagine you're walking through the halls of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris one quiet afternoon and you stop in front of a glass case labelled 'Montagnais Woman, circa 1850' – and the doll gives a smile and steps out of the case. Well, that was Joseph's mother. She had on this funny little squashed bonnet, with sausage ringlets at her ears and a pipe in her mouth. Last time I saw anything like that was in the hills of North Thailand several moons ago. Yes, Meo tribes. At first I don't get the connection, but then it comes to me so forcefully I'm surprised I could forget it: Montagnais, that is Algonkin Indians and Meo tribesmen, it's the same thing. Proto-mongol stock. Only some stuck around Tibet, building

monasteries and drinking buttered tea, while others wandered North, and kept wandering (what were they really hunting for?) and finally crossed the Bering Straits (can you hear the wolves howling under that frozen moon, can you hear the ice cracking?) and became American.

Primitive, rock bottom Americans, at one with their dream.

The Blue Road, Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 60.

The earliest Americans are actually Amerasians: modern America, the once European America, sits on top of a pre-existing Asian America and both, of course, inhabit a space which was once part of Pangea, the original continental landmass of Earth, whose splitting and travelling produced America, Europe and Asia as we now know them.

The world in which the earth's tectonic plates are constantly in motion involved a continual sundering, realignment and rejuxtaposition of strata from very different geological epochs, as illustrated by Hutton's famous 'unconformity' in his *Theory of the Earth* (1788), with which White claimed to have been familiar from boyhood (*Collected Works, Vol. 3, p. 35*), and to which he attributes the stylistic effects of his own writing:

It was on the basis of Hutton's tectonics, concerned with the open structure of strata and the introduction into these open structures of all kinds of heterogeneous matter, this collocation of matter being later subjected to dislocation, fracturisation, all sorts of transference and translation, that I gradually derived a style of writing, let's say, employing the kind of linguistic shift I love, a textonics.

Collected Works, Vol. 2, 'What is World Writing', The Wanderer and his Charts, p. 162.

The geological and the textual follow the same principles: Euramerasia is both a geology in formation and mental continent of information, and White travels always in both. We moderns are inhabitants of Euramerasia as a single interconnected and globalised economy and of the cultures in passage which this produces. We are the inhabitants not of our modern nations, however much they may define and constrain us, but of the strata of human history that go down through texts and textual remnants into the earth which temporarily sustains us and, in the end, will grind us into the fine remains of geological processes.

There is a photograph by Marc Gantier of Kenneth White in his 'atlantic atelier' in which piles of different manuscripts are each held down by a stone: does geology uphold the texts or do the texts hold up for inspection the debris of geology? Tectonics and textonics are the foundations of White's geopoetics.



Photo credits: Kenneth White at the Sorbonne, 2019, Norman Bissell. Kenneth White in his Atlantic Studio in Brittany, 1987, Marc Gantier.

Waterlily – Nymphaea

Anne Dunford

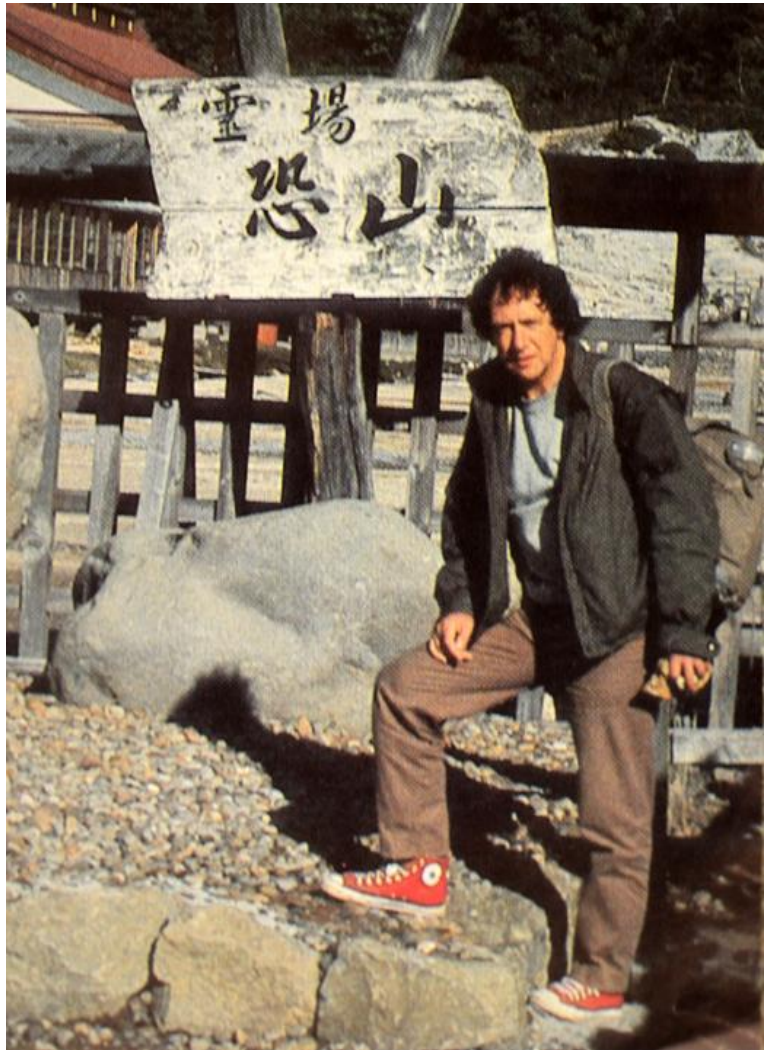
nature's floral mandala
draws my gaze deep deeper
sun glints on the pond
droplets on bronze green leaves
glow in rainbow prisms
my thoughts are sucked down
into ring upon ring of pink and white
a soft bed of glowing petals
a gold dust crown of stamens
not only a magnet for bees
but for minds I see
into another world
tempted
transfixed
lost
in a journey
to depths
of colour
and shadow
light
and dark
life
and death



How to Look in Order to See: Kenneth White's Waybooks

Monika Kocot, PhD

*The thoughtful exert themselves;
they do not relish attachment.
Like swans leaving a lake,
they abandon one attachment after
another.*
Dhammapada 7.3



Voyage-Voyance

Kenneth White divides his writing into three different forms: poetry (path-poems and diamond-poems), essays, and prose-books or “waybooks,” and he likens this triple literary activity to an arrow which is in constant movement: “The essays, maintaining direction, are the feathers; the prose, ongoing autobiography, or what I like to call “waybooks” (alias transcendental travelogues) is the arrow’s shaft; and the poem is the arrow-head” (1990: 7–8). Using another image, White sees the essays as the cartography, the waybooks as explorations of particular landscapes, and the poems as “condensations of travel, or particularly enlightened moments along the itineraries” (McManus 2007: 160; See Graham 2011: 217–25). This essay focuses on passages from White’s waybook entitled *Pilgrim of the Void*; in it White follows in the footsteps of one of his favourite writers, the seventeenth century Japanese master of *haiku* and *haibun*, Matsuo Bashō.

In an essay entitled “Petit Album Nomade,” White discusses the philosophy of his waybooks, and the way his travels (*voyages*) relate to two words in French which sound almost like homophones: *voie* (life-way) and *voir* (seeing). I provide the quote in original, as some of White’s word games are lost in translation:

Dans une série de livres, *La figure du dehors*, *Une apocalypse tranquille*, *L’esprit nomade*, j’ai essayé (il s’agit en effet d’essais, un genre explorateur) de dégager l’espace de cette littérature-là et de dresser la généalogie d’une sorte de récit de voyage d’un type nouveau,

qui pourra bien sûr prendre plusieurs formes, adopter plusieurs tonalités, selon la personnalité des écrivains. En anglais, je l'ai appelé *waybook*, en allemand *Wegbuch*, et en français, faute de la possibilité d'un terme aussi court: *voyage-voyance*. Dans tous ces termes, en plus de la notion de voyage, il y a la notion de voie (ligne de vie) et de voir (percevoir un autre espace, ouvrir d'autres dimensions). S'il n'y a pas cet autre espace, cette autre dimension, on ne sort pas de l'"universel reportage" que stigmatisait déjà Mallarmé. (1999: 180)

In a series of books, *La figure du dehors*, *Une apocalypse tranquille*, *L'esprit nomade*, I tried (these are indeed essays [attempts], an exploratory genre) to clear the space of that literature and to constitute a genealogy of a kind of travel narrative belonging to a new type, which can of course take several forms, assume several tones, according to the personality of the writers. In English, I called it *waybook*, in German *Wegbuch*, and in French, for lack of a similarly short term: *voyage-voyance*. In all these terms, in addition to the notion of travel, there is the notion of a path (the life line) and of seeing (perceiving another space, opening other dimensions). If this other space, other dimension, is not there, one does not escape the "universal reporting" that was stigmatized already by Mallarmé. (1999: 180; trans. Justyna Fruzińska)

It seems that the German and English names of the genre are not as revealing as the name in French. For Mohammed Hashas, *voyage-voyance* means travel and vision that cannot exist without each other (2017: 49; Kocot 2019b: 113; Kocot 2020: 54–57; Kocot 2021: 258–259). The word "vision" is a good translation, as *voyance* in French means clairvoyance. In the passage we are looking at, the notion of the way (*voie*) is semantically interlinking with the line of life (*ligne de vie*) and with seeing (perceiving that other space, opening other dimensions). For White, without the element of vision and seeing, the *waybook* is nothing more than "universal reporting." Hashas aptly notices that for White, travel (*voyage*) should be both mental and physical "so that the mindscape will correspond to the landscape, and vice versa, which will in turn be expressed in a particular wordscape that is fraught with whiteness and desire for the white world" (2017: 49). The physical and mental aspects of the travel are rather obvious, but the term "path" in White's passage suggests that he sees the experience of travel as associated with the process of self-discovery, if not self-realisation.

In *L'Ermitage Des Brumes: Occident, Orient et au-Delà* White develops his theory of *waybooks* as books of the way (*livre de la voie*), and he speaks of the importance of what Zen philosophy calls "beginner's mind" (Shunryu Suzuki 2020), of opening one's senses to the unknown:

Tout en traversant des territoires, à l'horizontale, si je puis dire, ces livres cherchent à découvrir des chemins de culture occultés par l'histoire, des pistes de pensée (un lieu, un moment, peut-être l'occasion, non d'une vague réflexion, mais d'une percée de l'esprit), et des sentiers du sentir, où jaillissent les sensations les plus fraîches possibles: "à chaque pas le vent pur," comme dit le koan zen. Sous le voyage, il y a toujours la voie (*waybook* – livre de la voie, non seulement livre de voyage) – mais d'une manière discrète. (2005: 79)

While traversing territories, horizontally, if I may say so, these books try to discover cultural paths overshadowed by history, ways of thought (a place, a moment, perhaps an opportunity, not for a vague reflection but a turning point of the spirit), and pathways of feeling, where the freshest possible sensations appear: “each step pure wind,” as the zen koan says. Within the journey [voyage], there is always the way [voie] (waybook – a book of the way, not only a travel book) – but in a discreet way” (2005: 79; trans. Justyna Fruzińska).

White is quite explicit about treating each moment as an opportunity for mental or spiritual breakthrough (*l'esprit* in French means both mind and spirit) which might take place anywhere, provided one is truly open (mentally and emotionally) to what is happening. In an interview with Michèle Duclos, White says that travelling (*voyage*) should be accompanied with *voyance*, with vision, with knowing how to look in order to see (*savoir voir*): “Il y a beaucoup de choses à découvrir [...]. Pour cela, bien sûr, il faut être sur le qui-vive. Voyager, pour moi, c'est bouger, certes, et j'aime le mouvement, mais c'est aussi savoir voir. C'est pour cela que je parle de voyages-voyances” (1987: 53). “There are many things to discover [...]. For that, of course, one needs to be on the alert. Travelling for me is about moving, of course, and I like movement, but it's also about knowing how to see. That's why I'm talking about sites-sights [voyages-voyances]” (1987: 53; trans. Justyna Fruzińska).

Those sites-sights, or travels-visions go hand in hand with mindful being in the world, and with constant movement. In *Pilgrim of the Void*, White literally follows Matsuo Bashō, and writes-through his world famous travelogue / waybook *Oku no Hosomichi*.

Practising wonder in *Oku no Hosomichi*

In the first chapter of *The Wild Swans* section of his waybook, White introduces some history behind the Japanese adventure:

For some time, the idea had been taking shape in my mind of a Japan-trip that would be yet another geopoetic pilgrimage: a salutation to things Japanese (things precious and precarious) and a haiku-journey in the wake of Bashō, a dreamlike documentary of roads and islands a quick and elliptic plunge into Emptiness – all in all, a wild little Nipponese book full of images and mental zig-zagging, written in “flying white style,” as the painters say.[...] By the Autumn of 1985 I felt ready for it and had laid out roughly my itinerary. (White 1990: 178)

Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* consists of 53 stations, but for the purpose of this essay I have chosen stations 13 and 14, crossing the Shirakawa Barrier and visiting Tōkyū at Sukagawa Station, to show how they are creatively rewritten by White in his *Pilgrim of the Void*. There are many translations of Bashō's travel narrative, and I will quote from *Narrow Road to the Interior* translated and annotated by Sam Hamill.

Station 13 introduces an important place, the Shirakawa Barrier, which, geographically speaking, marks the entrance to the Northern provinces. It has been visited for centuries by generations of Japanese poets who wanted to pay homage to the poets of the past. The Shirakawa Barrier is literally and metaphorically a liminal space where the impeccable natural beauty opens the gateway to the realm of spiritual insights. This is how Bashō describes it:

A little anxious, thinking of the Shirakawa Barrier, thinking on it day by day; but calmed my mind by remembering the old poem, “somehow sending word home.” I walked through heavy green summer forests. Many a poet inscribed a few words at one of the Three Barriers – “Autumn Winds” and “Red Maple Leaves” come to mind. Then, like fields of snow, innumerable white-flowered bushes, *unohana*, covered either side of the road. Here, Kiyosuke wrote, people dressed their very best to pass through the mountain gate, men in small black formal hats as though dressed for the highest courts.

Unohana

around my head

dressed for ancient rites

[Sora] (Bashō 2000: 9)

The story continues in Station 14:

Over the pass, we crossed the Abukuma River, Mount Aizu to the left, the villages of Iwaki, Soma, and Miharu, divided from the villages of Hitachi and Shimotsuke by two small mountain ranges on the right. At Kagenuma, the Mirror Pond, a dark sky blurred every reflection.

We spent several days in Sukagawa with the poet Tōkyū, who asked about the Shirakawa Barrier. “With mind and body sorely tested,” I answered, “busy with other poets’ lines, engaged in splendid scenery, it’s hardly surprising I didn’t write much:

Culture’s beginnings:

from the heart of the country

rice-planting songs

“From this opening verse,” I told him, “we wrote three linked-verse poems.” (Bashō 2000: 10)

As I have argued elsewhere, “Bashō’s poetic silence at Shirakawa results from physical and mental fatigue, but more importantly, from the sense of wonder triggered by the beauty of the scene combined with memories of the already mentioned poetry of the past” (Kocot 2023: 118). According to Peipei Qiu, Bashō’s silence suggests that language is incapable of expressing the wonders of nature, and, more importantly, it implies an aesthetic belief – emphasized in the

Zhuangzi (a source of poetic inspiration for White) – that “overtones of silence are more powerful than insufficient language” (Qiu 2006: 69). Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu put it in more simple terms: “what Bashō doesn’t say moves at least as much as what he does. One knows his silences go deeper than reasons” (Bashō 1968: 8).

Literary critics agree that the poem on culture’s beginnings is truly revolutionary, and it has been rendered in English by a number of translators. The following translation appears in *Back Roads to Far Towns, Basho’s Travel Journal*, translated by Corman and Susumu:

fūryū’s
beginning Oku’s
rice-planting song (Bashō 1968: 47)

In the notes section, they add that *fūryū* – the untranslatable term which literally means “wind-fluent” – left in its original form is “reflective of Japanese taste for the natural and immediate and humble as well as evanescent, as graceful” (Bashō 1968: 163; Kocot 2023: 118–119).

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Bashō describes the location which is very important for generations of Japanese poets, he does not draw inspiration from the poets of the past in terms of metaphors or imagery, and focuses instead on the poetry of the moment: rice-planting songs. So “culture’s beginnings” is literally drawn from folk songs (Kocot 2023: 119).

White’s “Shirakawa”

In *The Wild Swans*, in a chapter entitled “Shirakawa,” White literally and metaphorically follows in Bashō’s footsteps. The chapter features White’s playful retelling of *Oku no hosomichi*’s Station 13 and 14, but we will also find there some history of Japanese aesthetics and literary theory, White’s anecdote, and, last but not least, some traces of his own experiences in Japan. As usual, associative thinking is his main compositional principle.

It all begins with a short introduction to the history of literature:

Shirakawa (White Barrier) marks traditionally the beginning of the North. Maybe poems, travel-poems at least, were first written, and spoken, as propitiatory offerings to the “spirits of the road.” What’s sure is that it was the established custom to write poems at Shirakawa. (White 1992: 202)

This is where White decides to come up with a funny anecdote illustrating his argument about the established tradition of the Shirakawa poem:

In fact so strong was the tradition of the Shirakawa poem that some people wrote their “Shirakawa poem” without even setting foot in the place. The most famous example is the poet down from Kyoto, who appeared in Autumn in the literati

tearooms declaring that he had made the big trip and here was his poem. In fact, wily gentleman, he'd spent the whole summer holed up in his house getting sunburned at the back window. So he had the tanned face of the traveller, but what he didn't have, as one astute observer remarked, was callouses on his feet. (White 1992: 202–203)

By applying the technique of associative thinking, White connects the story of the poet from Kyoto pretending to be a traveller with a genuine travel-lover, master Matsuo Bashō. Interestingly enough, Bashō was born in Iga, in Mie prefecture, not far away from Kyoto, Japan's capital city.

Basho, a real travel-poet with sore footsoles, didn't write any poem at the White River gate. Nothing came to him, and he didn't want to force it. But in the fields nearby he'd heard a young girl singing a rice-planting song, and that simple song seemed to him to contain elements of the kind of poetry he wanted, so that he wrote this haiku later:

*First signs
of deep North poetry
a rice planting song*

White's version of Bashō's haiku emphasizes the geographical importance of the place, its deep Northern significance. This should not be surprising given that White has written extensively on the North; in *Travels in the Drifting Dawn*, one finds the following quote: "To travel north is to travel into the mind. I suppose the same might be said for the south, the east, and the west (any 'pure direction,' as it were), but I'm not sure if the north, with maybe the east, isn't privileged" (White 1990: 143–144). But Japanese North holds a special significance for White, which explains why in the last section of the chapter he dwells on the interconnection between the landscape and his mindscapes: "All along the road, I had had my eyes on the signposts. The sign for 'river' seemed to get more and more frequent, as well as the sign for 'mountain'" (White 1992: 203). Generally speaking, signposts in White's waybooks are important, but they are even more important in *The Wild Swans*, on the Road North, on the road to the Deep Interior. What seems equally important is the practice of "feeling" the landscape:

Here at Shirakawa, I look at the old frontier map and read the historical notice that goes with it. But mostly I just try to feel my way into the depth of the country and the depths of Autumn, watching leaves, salmon-red, blood-red, flutter in the rainy wind. (White 1992: 203)

One might argue that White's state of mind is vaguely reminiscent of the one described in *Oku no hosomichi*; the beauty of the place leaves him almost speechless, and he finally writes this kind of half-haiku:

At Shirakawa
no poem, no rice-song
only the rain (White 1992: 203)

In this playful trickster haiku, White praises the rainy poetry of what happens, making rain the master of poetic practice. On his way to the Deep Interior, White's speaking persona disappears in the Shirakawa rain.

Bashō famously said: "do not follow in the footsteps of the masters; seek what they sought" (qtd. in Schiller 1994: 107). When reading *The Wild Swans*, we can sense what it means to seek what Bashō sought, and we can see how by following in the footsteps of his master with his eyes open to the unknown, White is able to experience mind-bending visions which change his way of seeing the nature of the real.

Photo credit: Kenneth White in Japan, International Institute of Geopoetics.

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Ask

Michael Jarvis

Climb to where the mountain sky is black,

Listen to the silence of the starlight,

Touch the wind,

Search for answers

Out to the horizon

And you may find the question

The Contribution of Women to Geopoetics

Norman Bissell

The Kenneth White International Conference in Glasgow in June 2024 included papers by several women scholars and readings of their poems by many women. However, none of the subjects of any of the papers were women. This may be because the precursors of geopoetics for Kenneth White and those about whom he wrote were all men.

In my recent book *Living on an Island Expressing the Earth* I wrote about women who were forerunners of geopoetics and made a significant contribution to it. What follows are some edited extracts from it.

Christopher Whyte, one of the most perceptive critics of White's poetry, goes further in *Modern Scottish Poetry* (2004):

Appropriation for White also has gendered and sexist aspects no less disturbing because he is evidently unaware of them. To penetrate a woman means appropriating both her country of origin and its culture, as in the second section of 'Mahamudra' ('all that I knew of India/ all that I knew/ centred in your body' ... or the short poems 'Gujarati' 'and when you opened your thighs/ I penetrated India.'

At the time I didn't go along with these criticisms. The same could be said, and was said, about Walt Whitman and his great poem *Song of Myself* and *Leaves of Grass*. I took the view, that White himself took, that these were less important issues than his geopoetic direction of travel and the quality of most of his poems. He was aware of these criticisms yet did nothing to address them, almost saying this is me, take me or leave me. However, as I became more aware of his aversion to critiques about this, I began to see some truth in such criticisms.

In his prose too, White's male chauvinist attitudes sometimes emerge. I reviewed *Pilgrim of the Void* favourably for *The Glasgow Herald* when it came out in 1992 since I found its vivid descriptions of his travels in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Thailand and Japan fascinating, informative about Eastern thought and, for the most part, beautifully written. However, I was surprised and dismayed by an episode in it set in Bangkok where he details a sexual encounter with two young prostitutes, whom he called Blue Jeans and Lady Boob. What was the purpose of this account? Let's hope it was fictional. To my shame I didn't comment on this in my review and subsequently was rightly chastised by a close female friend for not doing so. White has also been criticised for the lack of women in his pantheon of intellectual nomads and predecessors of geopoetics. My earlier examples here and on the The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics website of intellectual nomads and precursors of geopoetics now include four women. I consider Rachel Carson, Joan Eardley, Nan Shepherd and Katharine Stewart to be prime examples of women who practised what became known as geopoetics in their creative work — and there are many more. It is time to acknowledge the work and contribution of women to Geopoetics.



Marie-Claude White

Yet in talk after talk, essay after essay, he (White) denounced fiction that he thought writers should not be writing. Instead they should be following his example of writing the journey books or travelogues he calls waybooks. Marie-Claude never appears in any of these books and yet she went with him to many of the countries he visited. Even in *House of Tides* set around his home in North Brittany where he lived with her for forty years, which he's referred to as a 'stay book', she hardly gets a mention. When I asked him about this, he said she would need a whole book to herself. She is included in his autobiography *Entre Deux Mondes*, but only in a minor supporting role. Like many another famous man, White relied on his wife to enable him to write, teach and live on a day to day basis. Early on they jointly agreed not to have children so he could concentrate on his work. She was the translator of his poems into French from an early stage, she was his personal secretary, typing work from his handwritten manuscripts, she was his closest adviser on most matters, she managed their home, got their groceries and drove him to engagements. She was a notable photographer in her own right and had exhibitions of her work in France and Scotland. Without her, he could not have accomplished a fraction of the work he did. She willingly sacrificed much of her own creative life for his, which could not have been easy. Perhaps as a result, she could sometimes be opinionated and negative about others. She did all this because for over sixty years she believed in him and the importance of his work. Her significant role in his life needs to be recognised.



Rachel Carson

Ed Ricketts on the west coast and Rachel Carson on America's east coast were marine scientists and conservationists who were well ahead of their time and she wrote three books about the sea long before her most famous book *Silent Spring* came out in 1962. She too was a marine biologist and her *Sea Trilogy*, *Under The Sea Wind*, *The Sea Around Us* and *The Edge of the Sea* were published between 1941 and 1955. A shorter book *The Sense of Wonder* published posthumously in 1965 exhorts parents to help their children experience the natural world: 'The lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not

reserved for scientists but are available to anyone who will place himself (herself) under the influence of earth, sea and sky and their amazing life.'

The book tells how Carson took her grandnephew Roger Christie as a baby of twenty months old and later as a toddler of three down to a Maine beach to experience big waves thundering in, and into the woods on a rainy day. She says:

Exploring nature with your child is largely a matter of becoming receptive to what lies around you. It is learning again to use your eyes, ears, nostrils and finger tips, opening up the disused channels of sensory impression... For the sense of smell, almost more than any other, has the power to recall memories and it is a pity that we use it so little... Take time to listen and talk about the voices of the earth and what they mean...

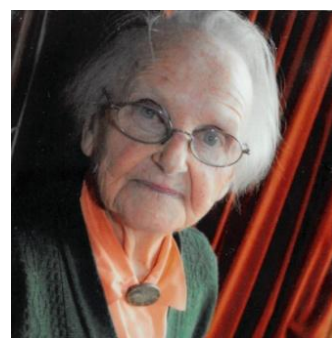
Lost Woods is a collection of previously unpublished work by Carson including essays, field journals, speeches and letters that range from 1937 to her death from cancer in 1963. In *Design for Nature Writing* in 1952 she says:

I myself am convinced that there has never been a greater need than there is today for the reporter and interpreter of the natural world. Mankind has gone very far into an artificial world of his own creation. He has sought to insulate himself, in his cities of steel and concrete, from the realities of earth and water and the growing seed. Intoxicated with a sense of his own power, he seems to be going farther and farther into more experiments for the destruction of himself and his world.

As early as 1953, in a paper she presented to an American scientific symposium, she was warning:

Now our climate is changing and we are moving into a warm cycle of unknown duration. Ocean temperatures are slower to reflect the change than the air, but there has been a measurable warming of Atlantic coastal waters. The winter temperatures, which may be the critical ones for some marine animals, are less severe. Also the water is warmer in summer.

Her writing was both scientific and poetic and she showed considerable courage when she stood up to powerful vested agricultural interests who tried to disparage the evidence of widespread chemical pollution in USA which she presented in *Silent Spring*. Rachel Carson was truly and very definitely an outstanding conservationist and precursor of geopoetics.



Katharine Stewart

(At Abriachan Forest Trust) I explored a newly built pine hut which contained information about Abriachan crofter, writer, teacher, museum curator, gardener and postmistress Katharine

Stewart... Two tall glass doors illuminated the room and against the back wall sat a tiny black bookcase with cushioned basket chairs on either side and a colourful display of red, white and pink azaleas in front of the bookcase. On the top shelf sat copies of Katharine's books *A Croft in the Hills*, *A Garden in the Hills* and *Abriachan: The Story of an Upland Community*. Below were her Kenneth White books from Mainstream and inside one I discovered a cutting of my review of one of his books that she had kept. She had joined the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics in 2005 and each August would go to the Edinburgh International Book Festival to hear lectures and readings by him. We corresponded by post and she wrote in a letter to me:

Geopoetics – the earth speaking – that's what has transformed my whole life. That positive, happy outlook, being thrilled with our world, that's what we need.

I met her just once, after the lecture A Highland Reconnaissance which Kenneth White gave in Inverness that year as the first international fellow appointed by Hi~Arts, the cultural organisation set up by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. She was well known to many of the large audience and, in spite of her ninety-one years, was as sprightly and enthusiastic as ever in greeting me and others. She had that glint in her eye which signifies that life is for the living. As well as writing her very popular books, Katharine played an important role in the acquisition of Abriachan's community land... For thirteen years she wrote On the Croft, a regular column for *The Scotsman*, and a Country Diary which followed a similar pattern to Jessie Kesson's earlier *Country Dweller's Year* for *The Scots Magazine* by depicting the seasonal changes on the croft and in Abriachan. She was still writing books in her nineties. She also wrote books for children such as *A Chanter in the Glen* (1963), *A Dream in the Sea* and *Silver in the Peat* (both 1966). After Sam died, she became the village postmistress and the curator of the Abriachan Museum. Her 'positive, happy outlook' comes across in *A Croft in the Hills*:

'The larks are singing!' Each year we make the announcement to one another. The words are sober enough, but what they convey, it is almost impossible to express. It means that our hills and moors are again fit places for new life, for song and work and laughter, all the things we cling to so passionately in the name of living...

A Croft in the Hills was first published in 1960 and has been reprinted and reissued seven times. Other books followed: *Crofts and Crofting* (1980); *A Garden in the Hills* (1995); *A School in the Hills* (1996); *The Post in the Hills* (1997); *The Crofting Way* (1999); *Abriachan, The Story of an Upland Community* (2000); *The Story of Loch Ness* (2005); *Women of the Highlands* (2006); *Cattle on a Thousand Hills* (2010); as well as regular newspaper columns and magazine articles and short stories for radio...

The last part of *The Crofting Way* contains a series of short essays about the land and calls for a plan for its sustainable use in the Highlands and Islands... And in the final essay in the book, A New Beginning, she lists the communities of Assynt, Eigg, Knoydart and Valtos on Lewis who had taken over community ownership of their lands by 1999. She says:

To work with the earth, learning its ways and the ways of the livestock you can manage to rear on it, on the intimate scale of a few acres and some rough outrun, this is to learn real respect for the environment, the environment of nature — of hill, rock, water, plant — of animals, of people... This harmony between the land, the animals and people had been the foundation of the Celts' spiritual attitude to life... Culture, that many faceted concept, expressed in the magic of a people's poetry, in the flying movement of dance, in the long-told stories that bring the generations to life, in song that can stop the heart; culture, with its inheritance of tried values, lying deep in the age-old customs of courteous welcoming and care, all this is waiting to be repossessed.

Katharine Stewart was well and truly grounded in her understanding of the crofting way of life, of the ways of nature and in the practical ways in which humanity could live in harmony with it. Her life and work as a crofter, writer, geopoetician and community activist deserve to be treasured for future generations.



Nan Shepherd

I asked Jim McCarthy to give the first (Tony McManus) lecture that November (2017) on the subject of Nan Shepherd and geopoetics. Jim is a long standing member and friend as well as a first class author of non-fiction who had been writing a series of books about little known explorers and plant hunters which were coming out almost every year. I knew he could be relied upon to undertake the necessary research within a limited timeframe, and I chose Nan Shepherd since I felt that it was high time that more women were part of the canon of precursors of geopoetics... Jim gave an excellent lecture on Nan Shepherd, an Early Geopoet. I was pleased that members of Tony's close family were amongst the forty or so listeners. The lecture can be read on our website. Nan Shepherd's significance as a writer has been much more widely recognised in recent years thanks to new editions of her books by Canongate with Introductions by Roderick Watson and Robert Macfarlane... Charlotte Peacock's biography of Shepherd *Into the Mountain* came out in 2017, *Wild Geese a Collection of Nan Shepherd's Writings* with essays, poems and short stories in 2018, and her poetry book *In the Cairngorms* in 2019. Robert Macfarlane also made a television documentary *The Living Mountain: A Cairngorms Journey* for BBC. Her portrait has been on Royal Bank of Scotland £5 banknotes since 2016 and they contain her words:

But the struggle between frost and running water is not quickly over. The battle fluctuates and at the point of fluctuation between the motion of water and the immobility of frost. Strange forms are evolved. It's a grand thing to get leave to live.

In *The Literature of Scotland* (1984) Roderick Watson describes *The Living Mountain* as a 'Zen-like meditation on how we approach the world and how it approaches us, in a strange marriage of spirit and matter.' ... Merryn Glover, author of *Hidden Fires: A Cairngorms Journey with Nan Shepherd* published in 2023 by Polygon Birlinn, said, 'Recounting her experiences of walking the Cairngorm mountains of Scotland, particularly through the latter years of WW2, the book is at once field guide, geopoetics and philosophical meditation.' It's a short book that rambles around the Cairngorms, much like she did herself, and none the worse for that. 'Yet often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him.' It begins with the Plateau and Recesses, moves on to Water, Frost and Snow and considers the life of the mountain, its plants, birds, animals and insects and how they relate to humans, all the time searching for the life of the mountain both within and without. She has an artist's eye for light: 'Light in Scotland has a quality I have not met elsewhere. It is luminous without being fierce, penetrating to immense distances with an effortless intensity.'

Sensations come through the hands, by walking barefoot and swimming:

This plunge into the cold water of a mountain pool seems for a brief moment to disintegrate the very self; it is not to be borne: one is lost: stricken: annihilated. Then life pours back.

Shades of wild swimming which has become so popular these days. Forgetting the self in moments of sensation is partly what Zen practice and geopoetics are about. Heightened awareness is another key aspect of both. In the final chapter Being she advocates a life of the senses in which 'the body may be said to think' with heightened awareness and describes climbing above Glen Einich for the first time:

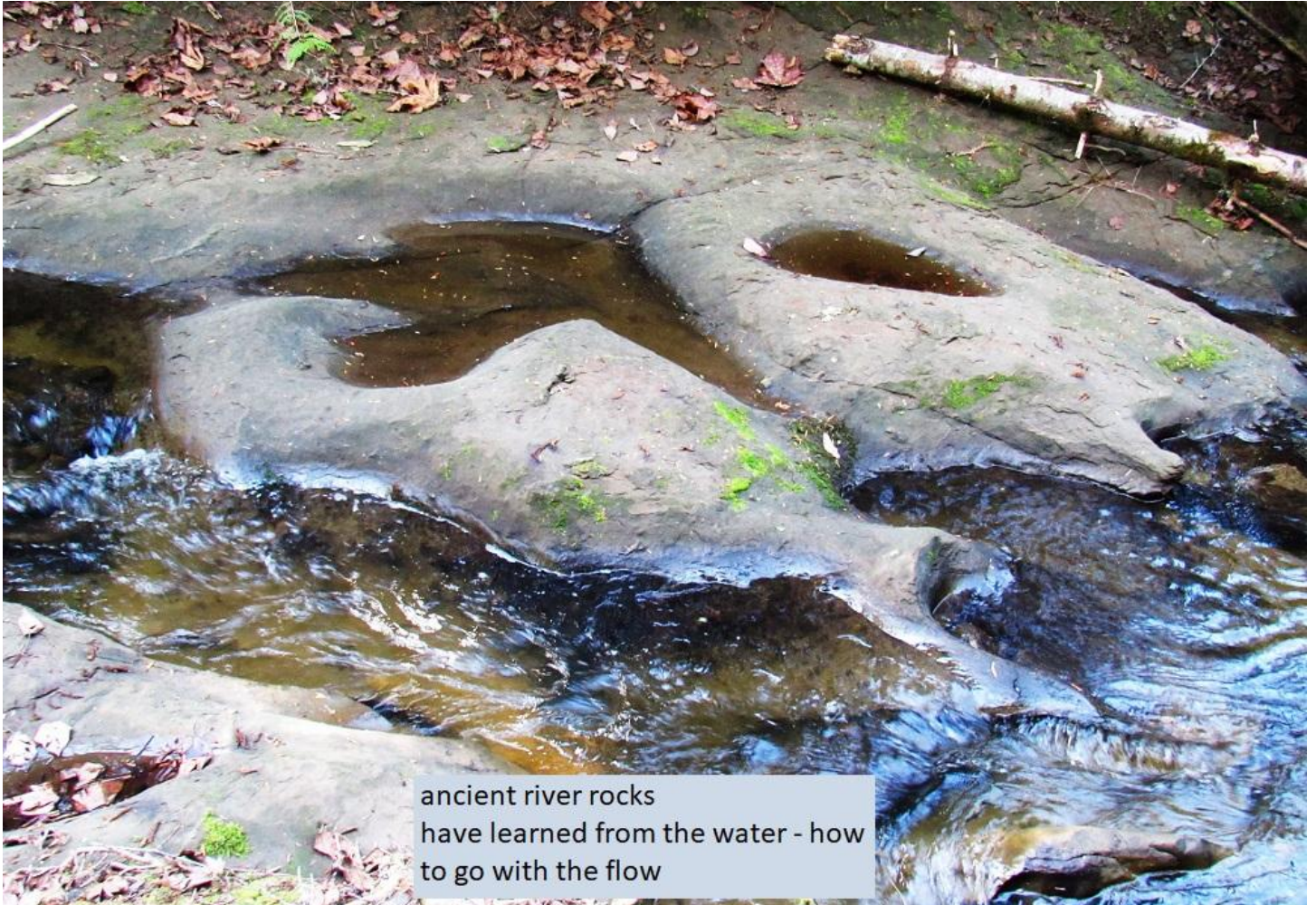
I gulped the frosty air — I could not contain myself, I jumped up and down, I laughed and shouted. There was the whole plateau, glittering white, within reach of my fingers, an immaculate vision, sun-struck, lifting against a sky of dazzling blue.... It is a journey into Being; for as I penetrate more deeply into the mountain's life, I penetrate also into my own... I am not out of myself, but in myself. I am.

This is a true geopoetic experience and it is expressed creatively in a way that conveys her complete identification with the mountain.

The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought by Samantha Walton Bloomsbury Academic (2020) is the first comprehensive book on the thinking and creative practice of Nan Shepherd. She looks at Shepherd and her work from different perspectives with chapters on Place and planet, Ecology, Environmentalism, Deep time, vital matter, and selfhood which include Shepherd's Geopoetics. She uses the term geopoetics but doesn't explain its meaning other than to refer to how Nan's knowledge of geology influenced her writing.

In her Conclusion Walton says she found 'a richness of influences from geology to biology, philosophy to early twentieth-century spiritualism' on Nan Shepherd but that 'her genius is in the fusing of these ideas and their transformation into a new philosophy of being: a world of life, a rare humility, a boldness of perception'. That new philosophy of being could well be described as geopoetics.

The redoubtable trio of Katharine Stewart, Jessie Kesson and Nan Shepherd, as well as Rachel Carson, demonstrated in their lives and work that the 'great work-field' of geopoetics was never the sole province of male writers, but that women, as much as men, experience and express a profound sense of place and the joy of living on the Earth.



ancient river rocks
have learned from the water - how
to go with the flow

Haiku by Vera Glicia and photograph by Terry Ann Gallagher

The Rowan

Zoë Main

The Rowan is heavy with rain

I can see the crown in all its glory

From my bedroom window

This tree with berry weighted boughs

The deep reds of velvet

And its russet browns



On Norman's Seat

Zoë Main

Not today on Norman's seat
But the other day
The rain had ended
And the sun came out

Large perfect spheres
Of raindrops formed
Balancing on curves
Of bladed gentle grass
A bright expression
Of our rounded world
Perfect in form and shining
Clear as a mirror
Or a drop of dew.

There is a reflection of a light
Across the islands and the sea
There is peace in this place
There is the sanctity
Of life.

Hundreds of grasses
Nod their heads
In the rain filled air
Abounding varieties
From worlds gone by
Tiny seeds
Of flowering heads
Bouncing in the light

Looking out, you can see the islands
Far out onto the horizon
In their long named lines
Strewn out across the sea.

I try to memorise
Scarba, Lunga, Jura
Dubh Sgeir, Rhuba Fiola

Eilean Dubh Mor, The Big Black Isle
Eilean Dubh Beag, The Wee Black Isle

Fladda in all her glory shining

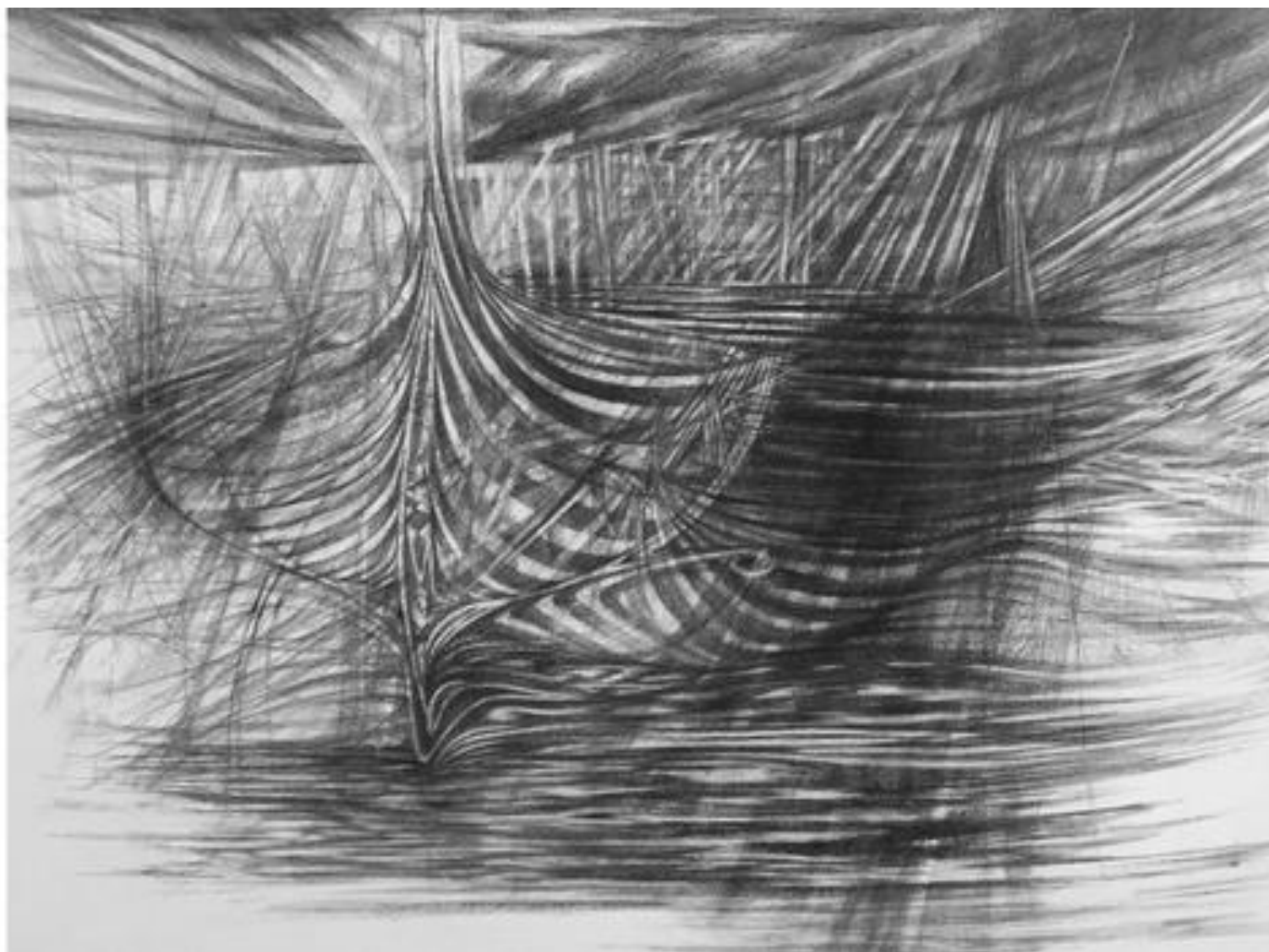
The Holy Isle
Eileach An Naoimh
Where Columba's mother lies

The Garvellachs or
Garbh Eileach
The rocks that prove its ancient
Rhymes

Belnahua
And Don Chonmuil
A castle or a prison

And way out there
The broad horizon's view
The detail on the water
The laps and slaps on rocks
Below
The broadening strokes
That form the artist's view

And Norman, who I didn't know
Can you see me ?
Sitting here below ?



Jem Main, *Migration Myth Metaphor*

The Legacy of Kenneth White

Alan Riach

When I took part in the concluding speeches at the Kenneth White symposium in Glasgow, 14-15 June 2024, I started by reflecting on what I had heard on the Saturday afternoon, with Olivier Salazar-Ferrer talking about White and Nicolas Bouvier, highlighting the significance of wandering, dialogue, conversation, imaginative exchange, exploration, and Alastair McIntosh introducing the work of the community organization GalGael, taking a maritime initiative into and out from the urban world, from Glasgow along the Clyde and into the west, and returning and extending the address of intellectual liberation and geographical curiosity into the urban, city-centred worlds of relative poverty and deprivation. I was thinking first that Kenneth White's legacy is multiple.

It exists in both urban as well as rural, and maritime and marine as well as earth-rooted realities, and it moves through what we might call archipelagic identities, that is, groups of islands, each island a separate, living, multiple identity but each group also a distinctive living group of identities, and each group or cluster or small constellation in living relationships with the others, extending across the whole earth's geography.

This is a world of connection, but also a world in which differences and distinctions are respected. These archipelagos are actual and also metaphorical. A group of nations is also an archipelago. So I'd say Kenneth White's first legacy is an engagement with company, an understanding of, a welcoming of, a taking of pleasure to be within, company – not to be isolated but rather companionable.

But then the second and immediately apparent legacy is just that isolation – isolated identity, the work of peripheral vision, the wanderer's world, the work of the nomad's always moving point of view. That work is a first principle and cannot be neglected. You cannot surrender it to a comprehensive, communal view which might drown it in an oblivion of mere collectivity.

Uniformity is the enemy. Conformity is the enemy. As Nietzsche put it, 'Objections, non-sequiturs, cheerful distrust, joyous mockery – all are signs of health. Everything absolute belongs to the realm of pathology.'

Geopoetics in this understanding is a sensitivity, physical, spiritual and intellectual, outwardly enquiring. It isn't so far away from psychogeography, which is an understanding in the perceiving person, the singular mind at work. Louisa Gairn's book *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (2008) and Monika Szuba's books, *The Poetics of Space and Place in Scottish Literature* (2019) and *Contemporary Scottish Poetry and the Natural World: Burnside, Jamie, Robertson and White* (2019) are especially pertinent here. The closest readings of Kenneth White in the totality of his achievement and the extension of his legacy, is Norman Bissell's *Living on an Island: Expressing the Earth* (2024). This is an extraordinary compendium of a book, an autobiographical account of Norman Bissell's accommodation with the ecology of life on a small island, a growing

understanding of a community of care and concern, but also an intellectual enquiry into the term 'geopoetics' itself: a way of living in what the American poet Charles Olson called a 'human universe' – an earth of actual value.

But it's more than that. It's a meticulous literary exploration of the author's grateful relationship with Kenneth White, taking into full account White's long residence in Brittany and his experiences as a world-traveller, geographically and spiritually, an intellectual nomad, yet a poet grounded in glancing but profound realities, shorelines of understanding, coastal territories, tidal places.

Bissell tells his own story of meeting White, and then weaves into it their parting company and his search for, rediscovery and finding of White once more, years later. He includes a full exposition of White's writing, documenting his own growing comprehension of an earth increasingly under threat in a climate of political encroachment. And he deftly and fairly indicates some of White's own limitations as well as summarizing the sometimes harsh and reflexive criticisms White has come in for. The book is a quest narrative of ultimate discovery. Bissell takes us into his confidence, and locates White, and himself, in the company of a wide range of other writers, ecologists and artists whose priorities are shared, sometimes exchanged and largely endorsed, including Nan Shepherd, Jessie Kesson, Katharine Stewart, Rachel Carson and Joan Eardley. His argument is that these women were in pursuit of similar or related and overlapping realisations in their respective works. White's writing may be masculinist in various obvious ways, but his concerns are not a male prerogative. In fact, one might argue, feminine principles are deeply ingrained in them, no matter how macho, or even sometimes misogynist, he can be. Ultimately, Bissell's book is an affirmation of a world where truths can be accurately valued.

One might think of Kenneth White also in the company of Hugh MacDiarmid, not least MacDiarmid in the Shetland archipelago in the 1930s: an immediate precedent, inimitable but again, in a different way, exemplary – an example to learn from, critically. One of the things I've always liked and admired about White is his fondness for MacDiarmid, his liking, his joyful and light-shouldered acceptance that here is a great poet, not to be afraid of him, not to agree with everything he says, not to go gaga over the guru, but to say yes, let's find out, especially those aspects of MacDiarmid that White admired most, and liked, and learnt from: the great long poems of MacDiarmid's mid and late writing career, 'On a Raised Beach' and *In Memoriam James Joyce* (the first intrinsically a 'geopoetic' poem, if ever there was one, beginning with the poet in the position of uttermost isolation then working through difficulty to find himself in the company of innumerable stones



and unencompassable humanity; and the latter a world-encompassing poem of innumerable companions and perspectives, peripheral visions, assemblages of the words of others). Many others – who should know better – have shown MacDiarmid such hostility and opposition, that White's unstressed, unanxious praise of him always seemed to me both admirable and likeable.

Or think of him in the company of Norman MacCaig, the MacCaig who said, 'landscape is my religion'. Well, not literally, a religion, but a source of unembarrassed spiritual replenishment, something to be devoted to and returned to. MacCaig found any religion repulsive and he would have retreated from signing up to any defined or even vaguely described doctrine, including 'geopoetics': too much theory, he'd have thought – and quoted the composer, Duke Ellington, when asked if he had been influenced by Debussy: 'That kind of talk just stinks up the joint.' And yet, as Alastair McIntosh and the GalGael initiative exemplifies, something of practical material value, as well as spiritual worth, is here. What we might call MacCaig's geopoetic masterwork, 'A Man in Assynt', was also part of the process by which Assynt, Lochinver and that territory MacCaig made his own poetic provenance was purchased from its biggest landowner by the people who live there. So I'm thinking of Kenneth White in the company also of Mandy Haggith, the poet and writer who has made the same territory her own as well, so it is not an exclusive provenance, but something open to more than one way of seeing. It installs itself into more than one mind, more than one sensibility, more than one way with language, more than one way of seeing.

Land repurchasing and repurposing – or, returning to purpose – is part of the story too, both literally and financially and also metaphorically and imaginatively. As Alastair McIntosh said, 'Poetry subverts power'. It is a redress to the vulgarities of ownership and capitalism. Poetry is not a democracy, but it isn't a competition either. Its virtues are manifest, or else, not at all.

Then think of Kenneth White in the company of the Japanese poet Bashō, whose title, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, is in itself such an emblem of hope. Or in the company of a number of American poets, opposed to the exploitative status quo, the capitalist earth of waste, the takeaway, throwaway world, and the hierarchies of power that enforce it. I'm thinking of such poets as Gary Snyder, Charles Olson, Edward Dorn. Dorn, who, remember, once wrote that the modern world is all built for entrapment, only laughter can blow it to shreds. So, laughter is there, or rather, perhaps, a benevolence, or a gentleness, an acceptance in a smile, behind which still remains the whisper of an irony, where a calculation not for profit but for accurate measurement is going on, and along with that a sense of blessing, a generosity that sets us an example.

These are aspects of Kenneth White's character which I remember from the few times I met or corresponded with him, actually. An affable, curious, kind man, slender, glancing, using his peripheral vision as well as looking straight at you, sometimes looking over you, around you, superficially, you might think, but then slipping almost accidentally into profundities. He might seem lightweight at times, and with that, could move quickly, lightly, but that belies his quiet thoughtfulness, his patience, his sense of the value of consideration. And with that, an iron-hard and unsentimental seriousness. There can be a selfishness in that, but it is not always vanity.

But there is a risk. As Norman Bissell points out in *Living on an Island*, White's 'waybooks' are ultimately works of fiction, selectively arranged stories with real people turned into fictionalized characters, and leaving quite a lot unspoken, not least about Marie-Claude, his wife, often his companion, his finest critic (he said), but also, one senses, a proportionate balance for him. She is largely written out of the books but clearly, profoundly and for a long time continuously, was consistently present in the life he lived. This allows him to locate himself centrally in the writing. This makes the metaphor of 'A White World' liable to the accusation of exclusive self-regard and self-promotion. 'Here is the world and I am its centre.' But this doesn't feel right. It feels wrong because White is always and everywhere indicating other things, pointing outwards, to elsewheres, to other writers, other books, other maps, other geographies, climates, roads yet untraveled, places unvisited. The 'openness' is real and is felt on every page. (Although this urge to indicate good things elsewhere doesn't guarantee good criticism of what remains. His account of the virtues and weaknesses of Scottish literature is as off-beam as anything I've ever read. *Travels with a Donkey* is a lovely piece of writing, but it simply isn't Stevenson's greatest work!)

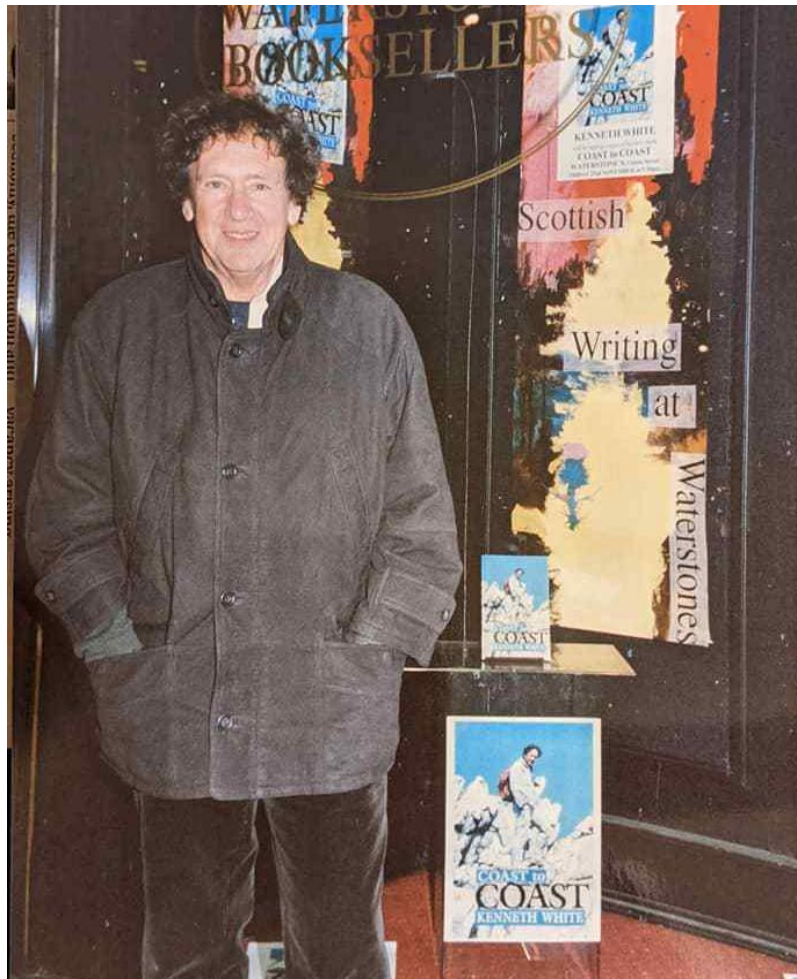
And yet, if the expression of this openness runs the risk of a grim seriousness of intent, this is never formed in any tone of glum solemnity. That friendly aspect of his character comes into play here – and I mean, into *play* – in the *poetics* of *geopoetics*: the matter of poetic *form*. Surely one of the lasting legacies of Kenneth White is the poetic form of his poems, not only 'what they're about' but what *form* they take, and that's a lasting legacy to be grateful for and act upon.

If you look at the whole trajectory of modern Scottish poetry, from the 1920s, or even from the 1890s, onwards, or from before then, but all the way through the 20th century and into the 21st century, the poetic forms it takes are almost all extremely conservative. Almost all the major poets almost always use regular metrics, ballad stanzas, complete sentences, regular grammatical and syntactical structures, coherent verse paragraphs or recognized or 'closed' poetic structures. Kenneth White almost from the very beginning rejected the tyranny of the left-hand margin. He uses the whole page. A word or a phrase might carry the weight of a meaning on its own. It might be placed anywhere on a large page.

Carefully structured sentences in themselves don't guarantee meaning or freshness or depth of insight. White's poetic forms might seem slender and sometimes even superficial and yet they can be slender as a sharp stiletto, superficial as a flick knife, whose blade is so thin you don't feel it. It isn't only an 'open world' out there but a gathering of open pages, within the covers of each poetry book, each poem itself an archipelago of words and meanings, in a floating world, an oceanic earth. There's a risk of banality as well, a phrase that falls flat. Well, he takes risks. The movement is worth taking them for. And the loose-limbed prose of the waybooks matches the easy-on-the-eye lucidity of the poetry books.

The learning and the teaching go together, for yourself and for others. I have taught in a number of institutions, from New Zealand to Scotland, and been an external examiner for various universities, from Exeter to Orkney, from Helsinki to Inverness, sometimes for literature courses, sometimes for courses in creative writing. Wherever I've worked, I have always found that while

you will have students who are excellent, good, good enough, not quite so good, in their many degrees of accomplishment and aspiration, every single one of them, whatever their abilities and potential, are more engaged, more charged, more curious and more given to enjoying themselves in their work, when the work itself is connected to the geography in which it takes place.



And geography in this sense contains history. Creative writing courses that involve walking through landscapes, enquiring into their geology, their human history, their natural wildlife, flora and fauna, or literature degrees that connect work written and set in the landscapes and histories of their locations and that of their neighbours, always produce work in which students are more deeply invested and curious, whatever their innate abilities are. And that investment in turn develops and improves those abilities. This isn't a direct result of Kenneth White's legacy but if you think about that legacy, it is not simply a specific bequest, like a gift in a will, it is rather an ongoing, unrolling, developing contextualization of oneself and the world, a reciprocal growth of enquiry, stretching back into the past, the very primordial and ancient past, and open to the future, and vibrant with life in the present. The legacy is to highlight and stay vivid with this knowledge and these priorities.

And this leads us finally to the bringing of these twofold aspects of his legacy together. He was, his work remains, and his legacy is, both earthed and nomadic. His world is both Brittany and Scotland

– but on the edges of both these edged-out countries. And so much further afield. The northern shores, the far east, the oceans, the southern hemisphere, as well as the far west.

And this is reminding me of those wonderful lines of Charles Olson, ‘There are no hierarchies, no infinite, no such many as mass, there are only / eyes in all heads, / to be looked out of’ – which when I think of it now extends my own remit all the way around the world to New Zealand, where I spent fourteen years of my own life, and I’m remembering the first book of my friend the artist and poet Gregory O’Brien, entitled, *Location of the Least Person* (1987). And this now draws me to my very last point about Kenneth White’s legacy, that it stands as a permanent reminder and encouragement, so that we know that the world is in need, in need of us, even of us, however damned and marginal we might seem to be.

The legacy of White’s work may not directly be the spread or escalation of geopoetics. The poetic initiatives already being undertaken in the condition of global climate catastrophe have their own dynamics, and as Norman Bissell explains in his book, White described geopoetics, but did not define or originate its meaning or purpose. Its practice predates him, overlaps with his contemporaries, and goes far beyond without reference to him.

The legacy of his writing lies in the threefold identification of its genres: poetry, fictionalised travel journals, and skipping, skimming philosophical essays, referencing rich sources. Each genre is written lightly, some might say, superficially, glancing at great depths below, indicating other writers of far more difficulty, challenge and provocation, but embodying a spirit of enquiry and observation. He can be flat-footed, but never very ponderous. He can risk banality, pretentiousness and stridency, but not over-wrought anxiety or gestural ennui. What seems like innocence can be insouciance. This means that a sober critical account of his poetry is yet to be made, since, as Guy Davenport says in an essay on Ronald Johnson, ‘A poem as it is generally understood is a metrical composition either lyric, dramatic, or pensive made by a poet whose spiritual dominion flows through his words like the wind through the leaves or the lark’s song through twilight.’ White’s actual practice doesn’t quite match that conventional romanticism. But if his legacy is a prioritisation of open enquiry, opposed to the closed mind of predestined conclusions, that’s no bad thing to be remembered for, and for future generations to take forward.

Photo credits: Hugh MacDiarmid and Kenneth White at Brownsbank Cottage, 1966, Marie-Claude White. Kenneth White in Glasgow, 1996, Norman Bissell.

Elegy for KW

Norman Bissell

It's hard to take in
that he's gone
the man who was such
a big part of my life
and thoughts for almost sixty years.

I think back to those Jargon Group days
when he opened my mind
to so many ideas and
more than ideas
to the joy of life itself

and how after we went
our separate ways
he to pursue a cultural revolution
I to foment a social revolution
I tracked him down
at the Sorbonne and en Bretagne
after twenty years.

Reading his work this past year
when writing my book about geopoetics
I felt I got to know him
even better and to tell my truth
about how I found him.

His books will live on
to influence even more
seekers of truth
and to spread the good news
of the creative expression of the Earth.

That afternoon when I heard
of his passing
we walked along the shore
and out in the bay
the rigging on a white schooner
clanged a death knell
for the life of Kenneth White.

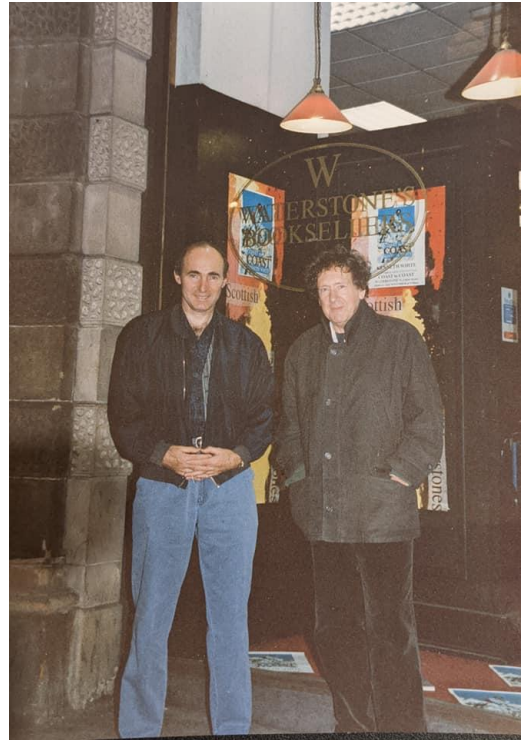


Photo Credit: Norman Bissell and Kenneth White in Glasgow, 1996, Norman Bissell.



Birgit Whitmore, *Seascape*



Membership

The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics is a membership organisation which relies on members' subscriptions to fund its activities which are carried out by volunteers. Its purpose is to raise awareness of geopoetics as a crucial way to approach and creatively respond to the natural world of which we are part.

It is a network of individuals including visual artists, writers, musicians, ornithologists, geologists, botanists, teachers and lecturers who share a common interest in developing an understanding of geopoetics and applying it creatively in their lives. The Centre organises talks, discussions, events and field walks which are designed to extend members' knowledge and experience of geopoetics. As the main English language geopoetics centre, it has members in USA, Canada, Sweden, Poland, Germany, France, Ireland, Australia, Wales and England as well as throughout Scotland.

Further information is available from info@geopoetics.org.uk and at www.geopoetics.org.uk.

If you join or renew your annual membership you will receive:

- a free copy of *Grounding a World; Essays on the Work of Kenneth White*, ed. G Bowd, C Forsdick & N Bissell rrp £9.95.
- newsletters by e-mail.
- advance news of and discounts on books relating to geopoetics.
- advance news of geopoetics events.
- invitations to all our meetings and field visits.
- the satisfaction of assisting the development of our geopoetics work and publications.
- encouragement to develop your own understanding of and creative response to geopoetics.

Please send this completed form with a cheque for £10 waged/£5 unwaged, payable to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, to David Francis, 214 Portobello High Street Edinburgh EH15 2AU. Or you can pay by standing order or bank transfer to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics account no. 00694888 sort code 80-02-24.

Name

Address

..... Postcode

E-mail address

Contributors

Norman Bissell has lived on the Isle of Luing for 17 years and is the Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics. He is the author of the poetry collection *Slate, Sea and Sky* and the novel *Barnhill* about George Orwell's last years on Jura. His latest book *Living on an Island Expressing the Earth* tells of how he came from Glasgow to Luing and his involvement in geopoetics over many years. He was the lead artist in the Coastal Cultures Islands Residency *Expressing an Island* funded by Culture Heritage Arts Assembly Argyll & Isles (CHARTS). <https://www.normanbissell.com>.

Patrick Corbett is a carbonate geology specialist but seeing oolites at Helpston showed him a new perspective. Gently undulating topography, with varying soils and stones in the fields, the drystone walls and building stones all relate subtle human aspects of this soft rock that he had not appreciated before. Patrick was a professional geologist for many years before taking up poetry and is now exploring the geopoetic appreciation and expression of the earth, combining technical expertise in the widening field of science communication through poetry. Patrick hosted Alyson Hallett's residency at Heriot-Watt University and co-edited *Earth Lines: Geopoetry and Geopoetics* published by the Edinburgh Geological Society in 2021. He is the Assistant Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics.

Cairns Craig is a Professor Emeritus in Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen. His most recent books are *The Wealth of the Nation: Scotland, Culture, Independence* (2018) and *Muriel Spark, Existentialism and the Art of Death* (2019), both published by Edinburgh University Press. He was the general editor of the four volume *History of Scottish Literature* published by Aberdeen University Press in 1987 and was involved in editing the magazines *Cencrastus* and *Radical Scotland* in the 1980s. Other books on Scottish subject matter include *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999) and *Intending Scotland* (2009). He is the editor of *The Collected Works of Kenneth White* (Edinburgh University Press).

Anne Dunford, after a career predominantly in education but with a few detours, moved to Wigtownshire in 2002 to focus on writing, photography and gardening. Her poems have been widely published in poetry magazines, anthologies by Dove Tales Scotland and online. She has read her poems in 'From the Mountains to the Sea' (published 2019) at Big Lit and Wigtown Book Festival. Blog: Life's a Beach. <https://annedunford.wordpress.com/>

Alyson Hallett's latest book of poems is co-authored with Penelope Shuttle, *Covid/Corvid* and is published by Broken Sleep Books. She is currently the EarthArt Fellow in the Earth Sciences Department at the University of Bristol where she works with vulcanologists and explores the impact of meteors. In 2020, *Tilted Ground* was published. This book of poetry and quoted texts emerged in response to a residency in the Lyell Centre, Heriot-Watt University. Alyson curates *The Migration Habits of Stones* project, lives in Bath and loves to swim in the sea.

Michael Jarvis is a retired environmental scientist and a member of the Lochwinnoch Writers' Group. He writes essays on Nature, some poetry and rather odd stories.

Monika Kocot, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Department of British Literature and Culture at the University of Lodz, Poland. She is the author of *Playing Games of Sense in Edwin Morgan's Writing* (2016) and co-editor of *Języki (pop)kultury w literaturze, mediach i filmie* (2015), *Nie tylko Ishiguro. Szkice o literaturze anglojęzycznej w Polsce* (2019), and *Moving Between Modes. Papers in Intersemiotic Translation. In Memoriam Professor Alina Kwiatkowska* (2020). She has published

articles on contemporary Scottish poetry and prose, as well as Native American writing. Her latest research is on philosophy and spirituality in literature, with a particular emphasis on geopoetics and comparative literature. She is a member of the Association for Cultural Studies, the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, and Polish Cognitive Linguistics Association. She is the Vice President of The K.K. Baczynski Literary Society.

jem main MA trained in Fine Art at Birmingham and Portsmouth and in Education at Liverpool University. Taught in Liverpool. Lectured in Dorset. Conceived the project to realise The Study Gallery, Poole - renamed Kube - and appointed Founding Director. During its development: seconded to Dorset LEA as Art Adviser, involved in three national projects, gained MA in Museum and Gallery Education. Post Kube, worked freelance including leadership of Dorset Visual Arts for twelve years. Now living on Luing, he is able to focus on drawings and reliefs responding to the movement of light and air over sea and land with a conceptual interest in migration.

Zoë Main came to live on the Isle of Luing having lived in Dorset for the past 40 years. She is trained as an artist having studied Sculpture & Ceramics at Bournemouth & Poole College of Art from 1973-77. She has worked for years in pastels and in land and seascapes. She has always written her own poetry, as part of her creative expression. "I suppose my writing is about putting the visual landscape and experiences around me into words. I think of words while I walk. Walking to me seems conducive to creativity."

Alan Riach is a poet and Professor of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow. 'Living right now in Alloway. I guess I'm the OTHER poet from Alloway. Though I was born in Airdrie, and the history starts in darkest Lanarkshire, but takes in Kent for my schooldays, Cambridge for my university years, and New Zealand, working there from 1986 to 2000. And now, since 2001, back in Scotland again. But 'geopoetically', so to speak, Tobermory and Mull and Oban and the west coast and the islands have always been the magnetic north, north-west, family and childhood times, connections, holidays and archipelagic identities.'

Alan Spence is an award-winning poet and playwright, novelist and short story writer. He was born in Glasgow and is based in Edinburgh where he and his wife run the Sri Chinmoy Meditation Centre. For almost 20 years he taught Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen where he founded the hugely successful WORD Festival, and where he is now Emeritus Professor. His most recent novel is *Night Boat* (Canongate) based on the life of Zen master Hakuin. <http://www.alanspence.co.uk/>

Caroline Watson divides her time between her studio in Paisley and working in housing and homelessness. She makes drawings and mixed media works on paper depicting light and space to create work that is about connection and attachment to place. She is committed to the local creative and cultural community where she lives, most recently opening a new gallery and art space as part of her role as a Board member of Creative Renfrewshire. She is part of the SCG Stravaig editorial team. www.carolinewatsonart.com @carolinewatsonpaisley

Birgit Whitmore has lived on the island of Luing for over 30 years, currently running the local shop and post office and has just opened 'luing art works', a micro art gallery showcasing her own and other islanders' art. "Living here makes you very exposed to the elements, and I will never get tired of the forever changing weather, its impact on the sea, the enormous sky, light and reflection and the energy this creates." At present she works with wool (dry felting), makes slate mosaics (using local Luing slate) and craft sea glass jewellery.



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