

# STRAVAIG#17

Geopoetics: The Vision



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.

More information:

[www.geopoetics.org.uk](http://www.geopoetics.org.uk)

<https://www.facebook.com/ScottishGeopoetics/>

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Back cover image: *Expressing the Earth*, Director Glenda Rome

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## Editorial - Hope Is Where The Heart Is

World news continues to confound and astound us, with its huge anguishes and political machinations, and fears that open-mindedness and open-heartedness may soon be a thing of the past. Yet, surely, there is still hope?

In this issue of *Stravaig*, we seek out that hope, with reports on the Festival of Hope held in Glasgow in summer 2025 in association with Scotland in Europe and the GalGael Trust. We have a collage of photos, and feature many of the haiku written during one of the workshops.

You'll also find in these pages essays on Eastern thought by Alan Spence, Iljas Baker and Gavin Bowd who reflect on the work and thinking of Sri Chinmoy, Matsuo Bashō and Jean-Claude Pinson. And we have an essay from David Beatty, who takes us *stravaiging* with him across open savannah in eastern Africa as well as on a more meditative journey.

We're delighted to share the news that our film, *Expressing the Earth*, won Best Documentary Feature Film at the New Renaissance Film Festival in London, 2025. Glenda Rome was awarded 'Best Director' at this year's Stratford on Avon Film Festival, too. This issue of *Stravaig* includes stills from the film which convey its stunning quality.

As always, we include poems, prose and artworks selected from the very many sent to us during our open call. We think you'll agree, they are treasures. Making a final selection was difficult! If you were unlucky this time, please try again. Your thoughts on this and previous issues of *Stravaig* and on the future of geopoetics would be especially welcome. We'll announce our next submission window soon via our website, social media, and email newsletter. Once again this issue is a truly global one with work originating in Australia, Africa, Canada and USA as well as Scotland and the rest of the UK, and we very much value contributions from all over the world.

We draw *Stravaig* #17 towards a close with an essay from long-time Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, Norman Bissell. In what might be seen as a swansong, Norrie looks back to basics – what really is geopoetics? – and looks to the future, focusing us once again on that theme of hope.

Carol Mckay, Caroline Watson, Ullrich Kockel and Norman Bissell, Editors

## Yutori

*Philippa Ramsden*

Raindrops chatter  
against the window

a starling whispers  
the weather report

an idea sighs  
as it lands on paper

pens rasp, eager  
to capture fleeting thoughts

an elderly fly hums  
at the edge of the window pane

a door jamb exhales  
takes in rain

the trees whisper and wait

wisdom  
drawn from silence.

## Loch Lomond's eyes

*Axel O. Karamercan*

Loch Lomond's eyes –  
they reminded me of Kenneth White  
when we shook hands in Paris  
his *herons, kyles, and sounds...*  
all blues and greys  
gentle yet firm.

As eyes sought  
an underwater bridge to Loch Long –  
you see –  
what you see  
are not only hues.  
Words or worlds –  
visibly indifferent  
neither clear, nor true.  
You stay on that hill  
you gaze at the icy peaks  
in blues and greys  
and dreams of *silver birches*.

All the while  
you look through  
all the white –  
they see you through  
and through.

## **The Harvest**

*George W. Colkitto*

of late - the morning air has been so clear  
I stop at the highest point of my circuit  
to see beyond Ben Lomond to the grey peaks  
near Tyndrum – wishing I could name them  
wishing I had climbed them in my youth

today I stop – not to take in the view – but  
contemplate how heat haze and morning mists  
have closed my window to romance and dreams  
smile – nod to self-deception – know I linger  
because my aged muscles whisper surrender

I pretend I am entranced by far off fields  
yet - if it is a deception it is also acceptance  
of the joy age brings in finding what youth  
rushed past – thoughtless of the beauties  
the birch sapling stretching to the Sun  
the ancient Oak as gnarled as me

so many greens nestle beside the path  
my eyesight is not as sharp and yet I see  
so much to reap – now I take my time

## **Ruaomoko**

*AJ Marshall*

Beneath our island  
Lending heat, water, and life,  
lays ruaomoko

He is Atua  
Of earthquakes and eruptions  
Papa's youngest son

He rests long and hard  
Turning over in his sleep  
Earth is moved around

It can sometimes be  
Frightening, and make us worry,  
When land is moving

If we view it as  
still, an object lost from time.  
We just move so fast.

Atua timescales,  
As giants and gods of earth,  
Are slower than ours

Breaks in history  
As long as our lives, and more,  
Are mere blinks to them

When volcanoes are  
'dormant', they rest, and they sleep,  
Heat still moves around

Ruaomoko still  
Breathes, he snores, and he mutters  
The earth shifts with him

He's under the mounts,  
The lakes, and rivers. His reach.  
All the land and sea

When our ground rumbles  
He's moving, shifting around  
Earthquakes shake our homes

When land grows outward,  
Inflating under our feet  
He's growing, rising

Magma is rising  
From deep within the planet  
Through his might, it lifts

Volcanoes erupt  
Thanks to our ruaomoko  
to nourish our land

## **Butterfly Whisper**

*Philippa Ramsden*

Plum blossom wakes in a Scottish garden,  
a bumble bee sneezes,  
the earth cracks open in Mandalay.

A promise of fruit and spring  
ushers in groans and shrieks from the earth  
rubble and dust heap on the ground  
as the tailor's shop crumbles and screams



*Fossil Cove 2, Lutruwita. Tasmania, Philomena Manifold*



*Fossil Cove, Lutruwita, Tasmania, Philomena Manifold*

## Like a Rock

*Rebecca Clifford*

Sedimentary, igneous, metamorphic -  
consolidated deposits, hard and solid,  
molded by pressure, or heat, or both.

A galactic rock of ages and eons  
where we blast, dig, excavate  
consolidated deposits, hard and solid,

then soil, spoil, wreck, ruin  
air, water, land, gaia-earth,  
where we blast, dig, excavate

and make our graves, solemn as ash  
or blood. Assuming what we wish from  
air, water, land, gaia-earth,

we're unable to stop, unable to change.  
We could be clay, quartz, halite  
or blood, assuming what we wish from

whatever's left of earth, be it  
sedimentary, igneous, metamorphic.  
We could be clay, quartz, halite  
molded by pressure, or heat, or both.

## The Beyond Is Here Now And Inestimable

### The Geopoetics of Transformation Part 1.

David Beatty

*Be plural, like the universe.* - Fernando Pessoa.

When Norman Bissell asked me to write an essay on the future of Geopoetics, with reference to the influence of Eastern thought, I hesitated. Anticipating futures is risky. Kenneth White himself described the 'mental terrain' of Geopoetics as 'Euramerasia', whereas I am here in Africa, somewhere in between on the eastern edge of a vast continent in some ways, given probable Pythagorean sources in Egypt, historically primary to the long centuries of East-West Silk Road discourse. All right, he replied, then tell us where you are now.

Geographically I am in Lamu, on the east coast of Kenya, a small island in the Lamu Archipelago, a Swahili cultural enclave that has thus far largely survived modernity. It is a constant source of wonder that I ended up here at all, late in life, on the edge of the Indian Ocean on the other side of which 2,500 nautical miles away lies the small Buddhist hermitage island on a lagoon in Sri Lanka where I stayed 45 years ago on an extended retreat in the company of 3 Buddhist monks, and which was the centrepiece of my book **The Island, a Mirror for the Soul**.<sup>1</sup>

After that deep dive into Dhamma practice I continued a peripatetic life as a travelling photographer in North Africa, India and Sri Lanka, until I wound up in Kenya in 1996. In Africa I took up writing poetry again, which had begun in England in the 1970s, as a way of attuning myself to this newly adopted land, wandering into primeval landscapes of a kind that only Africa still offers, and which I can best describe as experiences of deep time. I began a process of revisiting what I had left unfinished on that island, diving more deeply into the ontological problem of ground that was central to the crisis of modernity, that I explore more fully in the above book.

My concern now has shifted to a more urgent sense that the centres of power are today in many ways more inimical to a notion like Geopoetics than in the more liberal period in which it was born, the relatively long window of the post-WWII consensus, a more Open World which is now closing in alarming ways. The Motorway of Civilization has morphed into a giant Machine, accelerated by AI into a lethal web of entrapment it is increasingly hard to escape. The work now, it seems to me, is to create intercultural solidarity, and to robustly challenge the Utopian vision of the kind of world being engineered by powerful Tech overlords, who embrace an Eschatology<sup>2</sup> with dark religious overtones, and regard humanity as a transitional species whose time is almost up. They and their minions, now congregated in Silicon Valley like Milton's swarming throng in Satan's Pandaemonium, are busy hatching their Gnostic pseudo-theocratic plans for global governance according to an AI Gospel that promises to deliver a virtuous elite to a digitized version of the Elysian Fields.

Whether Geopoetics survives this new more authoritarian turn of events will depend on how communities, dedicated to a more pluralistic earth-centred outlook, organize themselves to create

a widening public sphere of influence to form viable alternatives to the digitized Utopian simulacrum of reality planned as our Transhumanist Future, and the colonization of the universe, while more probably engineering our destruction. To this end I focus on a Geopoetics of transformation.

At the end of his study of Robinson Jeffers' poetry, *The Coast Opposite Humanity*,<sup>4</sup> Kenneth White cited Jeffers' poem *Shiva*, published in 1938 on the eve of WWII, that points to the Kali Yuga, a cataclysm wrought by Shiva's cosmic dance of dissolution, that would later usher in the Satya Yuga, a new age of truth and righteousness:

*There is a hawk that is picking the birds out of our sky.  
She killed the pigeons of peace and security,  
She has taken honesty and confidence from nations and men,  
She is hunting the lonely heron of liberty...  
The prey she will take last is the wild white swan of the beauty of things.  
Then she will be alone, pure destruction, achieved and supreme,  
Empty darkness under the death-tent wings.  
She will build a nest of the swan's bones and hatch a new brood,  
Hang new heavens with new birds, all be renewed.*<sup>3</sup>

White comments that perhaps the 'new brood' will usher in a 'harder mysticism', suggesting that *a finer, more clarified existence, may come out of it. I am not speaking of a hope, but of a possibility.* And he ends with, *And if it does not happen, well, it may happen next time round.* Or might the 'new heavens with new birds' now become the digitized simulations of TESCREAL<sup>5</sup>, since AI gurus like Sam Altman and Larry Page, regard digital life<sup>6</sup> as *the natural and desirable next step in the cosmic evolution*. Before dismissing this as the fever dream of Tech billionaires, intent on retaining optimum power and control over everything, bear in mind that these projects are driven by a mindset that openly rejects the dignity and sacredness of every human person, who is viewed through the materialist lens as little more than a 'hackable animal', and which regards some of those as dispensable, even as the claim is made that this re-branded form of eugenics will remove suffering entirely from the world, essentially by means of excising our humanity.

When White died two years ago he was still by all accounts a possibilist, but by then he surely had few illusions about where we were. Joanna Macy, who died in July, always said we must be prepared to do the work without ever seeing a result in our own lifetime. That is the kind of radical hope that she so beautifully articulated.<sup>7</sup> But in the post-Covid, post-Gaza, world, with Trump as Emperor of a chaotic and authoritarian Empire, there is a palpable sense of deepening anxiety.

My peregrinations in Africa – the word *stravaiging* best conveys my purposeless wandering - only reinforced the sense I had always had that the Western view of the human as *other than* nature, for all its ability to enable systems of utility, was a mistaken notion. Magnified by a self-aggrandizing hubris, it has ushered in the Anthropocene. By all accounts the prior Holocene's climate was hugely favourable to our species, allowing us to become what we are, while those privileged with temporal

power have forgotten that we are earthlings who share our home with other life forms, all enabled by a mere 20,000 years out of a probable 4.5 billion years on the only known living planet in the imaginable universe where we can be human. Yet we seem curiously forgetful of this fact, while our capacity for delusion and self-deception, especially in relation to our mortality, continues undiminished. The idea that in this short period we have acquired sufficient knowledge to become masters of the universe is sheer hubris, and indicative of our spiritual immaturity, that demands at the very least a return to first principles. A Chinese sage once reminded an assembly of Sophists, *All your knowledge is but a hair splitting the wind*.

The prevailing metaphor of our age is that what we call mind is an epiphenomenon of matter, and that our brains are basically a computer. The Cartesian search for a universal calculus, believing that the key to solving humanity's conundrums could be found in a method based on mathematical certainties that could dispense with the vague and mystical language of transformation, ended with the quantum enigma over a century ago. Yet by and large we still live under the tyranny of propositional knowing. Other forms of knowing, intuitive, perspectival and participatory,<sup>8</sup> equally acknowledged by Sapiential traditions, are marginalized by a hyper-rational quest for certainty. In a world fragmented by the pervasive propaganda of unrealities how do we discern what is real?

Wandering across open savannahs some 25 years ago in the company of the Maasai, and occasionally the Samburu, I learned that their way of relating to the land was entirely alien to modern Western consciousness. This was only a few years before the mobile phone, and long walks in their company were still uncontaminated by the synthetic clamour of modernity. Walking in the company of a Samburu in the wilderness you discover they have very silent minds. Acutely attentive to every subtle nuance of light, shade, and wind, or scent of animal or plant, the landscape speaks to them, and they know how to listen, to read the signs. Meet a Maasai elder and you find he bears on his face the silence of the landscape he walks in, a face shaped by the power of that silence formed out of the openness of the sky and the plains, where a face cannot hide from itself as it cannot hide from the land that formed it. I felt he had few doubts about what is real. Nomadic pastoralism, an adaptation to the rangelands, has been around, judging by rock art and other evidence, for at least 9,000 years, or three-quarters of that Holocene.

I began to find a convergence between what the Buddhist monks had taught me on that small island with its abundance of birds, monitor lizards and snakes, and the silent attentive minds of those long attuned to a now shrinking wilderness where they had lived always in symbiosis with wild animals. The former wilderness that was their home, now subject to increasingly intense droughts, has long been cordoned off into Nature Reserves, from which humans are evicted under a kind of Fortress Conservation. This is intended to 'conserve' mainly iconic species, now commodified, after white colonial settlers were estimated to have shot 16 million elephants 'for fun' between 1800 and 1900. In precolonial Africa killing for sport was unknown and regarded as an affront to the deities who provided the resource.<sup>9</sup>

At archaeological sites near Magadi, and in the far north on the shores of Lake Turkana, and elsewhere, the words 'deep time' lost their conceptual distance and became experientially tangible,

radically altering my perspective on life. It was in Turkana I met the stone tool archaeologist Hélène Roche who had been tasked with contextualising the 1984 find at Nariokotome of Turkana Boy, an almost entire skeleton 1.5 million years old. Hélène stayed on in Turkana, to trace the evolution of flaked blade technology, which she demonstrated at her campsite at a remote spot in the Turkana desert. My life was suddenly opened to a deep sense of belonging to something vastly greater than one brief lifespan, and thereafter to living in a less self-invested way:

*My foot slipping on a shelf of rock  
drops me  
ten thousand years  
from gravel bed  
to fossil print  
pumice and grey ash unveil  
a volcano trapped in rock  
the land's anatomy gives up its secrets  
scalpels of wind and sun  
carving a skeletal elegance  
down millennia  
into diatomaceous reaches of prehistory  
I am walking on a lake bed  
a million years ago  
yet even now our own depths  
are unknown to us.<sup>10</sup>*

Encountering a landscape such as this at Olorgesailie, an archaeological site at the southern end of Kenya excavated in the 1940s, one moves with a simultaneous awareness of the openness of horizontal space and vertical time across an acacia filled desert terrain inhabited mostly by Maasai, aware of the layered depths of earth's geological strata beneath one's feet plummeting to a former lake bed a million years ago, while giving attention to a landscape full of surprises. Coming across a deep cleft I find a hidden river coursing beneath me, winding through the dry scrub desert. Then crossing into open ground, sun-beaten and rain-washed, I come upon tuffs of chalk white gullies eroded into stream beds by cataracts of vanished water wildered in the sand, and far off steeper slopes clad in olive trees that conceal a mountain path to higher ground. Traversing wilderness without a map one retrieves the forgotten art of getting lost: *Never to get lost is not to live, not to know how to get lost brings you to destruction, and somewhere in the terra incognita in between lies a life of discovery*, as Rebecca Solnit<sup>11</sup> reminded me at the time, summoning Meno's question in the Socratic dialogue: *How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you.*

Giving acute attention to the land, poems seem natural responses that evoke the Japanese notion *koto*, signifying both 'matter' and 'word'. The practice of walking attentively is akin to 'solving' the riddle of, say, a koan, understood as 'obtaining its mind', in effect a merging of mind, matter and word, where landscape and mindscape mirror each other, a way of apprehending reality intrinsic to

the work for instance of the Japanese traveller monk Bashō. The reciprocity of this living transmission of minds is the elemental way of understanding meaning, not that some 'meaning' first exists 'out there', and which we then discover to grasp hold of. Rather, seeing into the depths of nature is to dissolve the boundary between subject and object, and the poem arises from this realization as reality realizing itself in us. Reality actualizes as the empty mirror mind reflecting the manifestation of what is, in its suchness, enacted as the self-realization of reality. In this way we intrinsically belong to the web of life with which we are inextricably interwoven, inter-related and interdependent, an insight that releases unfathomable wellsprings of co-creative possibility, nature's poiesis unfolding in concert with my movements across the terrain, merging 'inner' and 'outer' worlds:

*As tambourine beats rhythmic  
to the wayward drum  
so my tongue finds lyrics  
to footsteps in their discourse with the ground,  
as water quickens into speech  
tumbling smoothed pebbles of found words  
in the slow brown reach of rivers.<sup>12</sup>*

We still face huge obstacles, as Dr. Iain McGilchrist acknowledges<sup>13</sup>, to establishing a more coherent world view informed by such ecological/ontological ways of understanding, which by and large are still dismissed as 'unrealistic', and need to muster all possible resources, philosophically and spiritually, to reconfigure our place in the current context, as well as to transfer the burden of proof onto those who persistently deny the validity of this way of seeing reality, and to insist they offer coherent reasons why such a view, which might be categorised as mystical, a word still regarded with deep suspicion, is not something natural and proper to human beings.

*The second part of this essay will turn from deep time to deep mind touching on the work of Keiji Nishitani, a Japanese philosopher of the Kyoto School, whose profound insights present a challenge to traditional Western philosophy, and its standpoint of a substance ontology, and how he provides, with maybe some help from Whitehead, an important contribution towards evolving a truly ecological civilization where a pluralistic Geopoiesis of earth-dwelling communities might be possible.*

## Notes.

1. Available on amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/ISLAND-Mirror-Soul-Journeys-towards/dp/9914986110>
2. Article by Emile Torres: <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-endgame-of-edgelord-eschatology/>
3. Collected Poems of Robinson Jeffers, Stanford University Press.
4. *The Coast Opposite Humanity*, Kenneth White, Unicorn Press, Wales, 1975.
5. TESCREAL. An acronym coined by computer scientist Timnit Gebru and philosopher Emile Torres: Transhumanism, Extropianism, Singularitarianism, Cosmism, Rationalist ideology, Effective Altruism and Longtermism. For more on this toxic ideological brew you'd best visit [Gebru, Timnit; Torres, Émile P. \(April 14, 2024\). "The TESCREAL bundle: Eugenics and the promise of utopia through artificial general intelligence". \*First Monday\*. 29 \(4\). doi:10.5210/fm.v29i4.13636. ISSN 1396-0466](#). Or there is a very good in-depth exploration of what is at stake on Gil Duran's podcast: [https://youtu.be/S1tcBUS0NYQ?si=F\\_lkJGv2gcwqdaAm](https://youtu.be/S1tcBUS0NYQ?si=F_lkJGv2gcwqdaAm)
6. Quoted in *Life 3.0* by Max Tegmark, Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.
7. Working to Reconnect website: [www.WorkThatReconnects.org](http://www.WorkThatReconnects.org)
8. Ref. the work of Cognitive Scientist John Vervaeke, author with Christopher Mastropietro of *Awakening from the Meaning Crisis* series. Part One available on amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Awakening-Meaning-Crisis-Part-Origins/dp/1645011003>
9. Mordecai Ogada, interviewed by Michael Asher, author and desert explorer, in the article *The Next Big Green Lie*, May 2021 The Star, Kenya.
10. From the poem *Olorgesailie*, David Beatty.
11. Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Canongate Books, Edinburgh, 2006.
12. From the poem *The Rain Path*, David Beatty. Poems from a forthcoming collection to be published later this year.
13. Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary; The Matter with Things, Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World*. (2 vols), Perspectiva Press 2021. And <https://channelmcgilchrist.com>

## **The Habit of Hazel**

*S.W.T. Southwick Reserve*

*Robin Leiper*

The crackle of leaf-litter underfoot, the brittle  
silence of a blue November gloam – a chill

in the reception from your adopted woodland.  
Yours? Your habit to come here, to intrude.

The trees have no use for you who is used  
to meddling, to making use of everything.

The hazel occupies its place of quiet wilderness  
here in the mid-storey, tells its rambling tale,

brings the story to an end in its own good time,  
has no hungering after immortality.

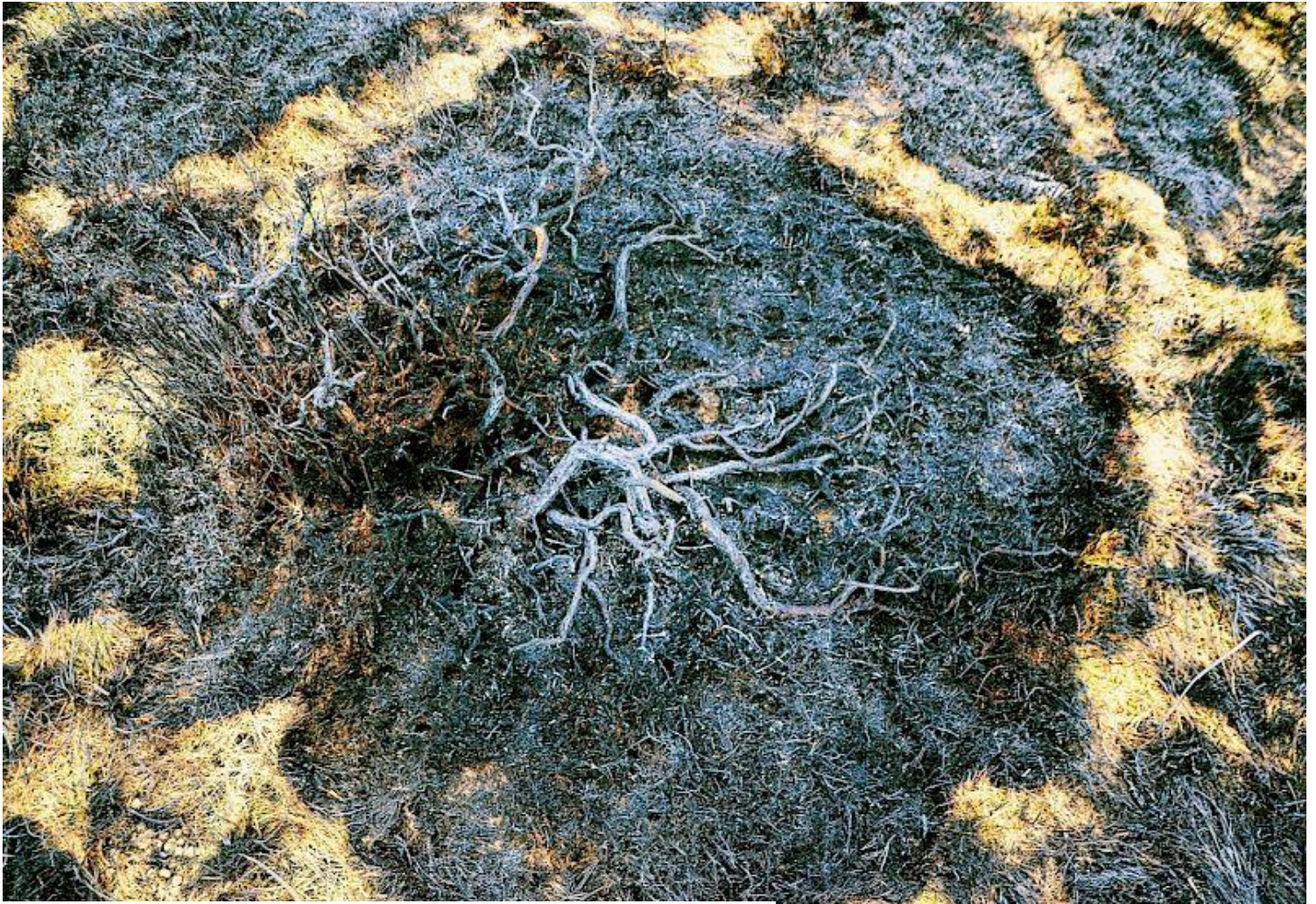
It is only you who wants to set things right,  
straighten the edge of everything, make it last.

Fast rooted, many stemmed, the hazel's habit  
is to tangle, grow awry seeking the elusive

light. Learn the lesson of its ways, go  
other wise, leave things be.



Caroline Schofield



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## The Poetic Yoga Of Sri Chinmoy

Alan Spence

Some time ago I did a Geopoetics Zoom session, *On Eastern Paths*, with Norrie Bissell, in which I quoted a favourite poem by Kenneth White:

Working and reworking  
the same texts  
over and over again  
losing all sense  
of 'production' and 'publication'  
and 'furthering one's reputation'  
engaged rather in something  
outside literature  
that might rightly be called  
poetic yoga.

I really liked that notion of poetic yoga, poetry as *sadhana*, as spiritual path, and it seemed the perfect description of the way followed by my teacher Sri Chinmoy whose poetry and philosophy featured in that online discussion with Norrie. Then recently I found myself revisiting some of Sri Chinmoy's earlier work with the reissue of a little selection of his poems, *Between Nothingness and Eternity* (Ganapati Press, Oxford). This was a volume I'd originally edited back in 1982, with an introduction entitled *Poetry as Mantra*.

A mantra is in its simplest form a syllable or set of syllables, chanted aloud as an aid to meditation. There is an awareness here of the power of the word as incantation, invocation. Poetry described as mantric actually invokes the qualities it describes.

Nolini Kanta Gupta, a respected Indian poet and philosopher, wrote, 'The highest form and the most perfect perfection of poetry lie in the mantra.' In mantric poetry, he suggests, 'speech is not the dress or outer garb of an experience, but the realisation of an inner delight.' Clearly such poetry is best read aloud, for maximum impact.

Many years ago my old friend, poet and playwright Tom McGrath, was reading one of Sri Chinmoy's poems to another poet, Tom Buchan, using the poem, as it happens, to illustrate the impossibility of expressing in English what he regarded as a peculiarly Indian sensibility. Tom thought the poem was in some way 'old-fashioned' in its rhythm, in its diction. But somehow he realised he was not making his point. What happened as he read the poem, he described as follows:

'The words sprang from my lips and sounded in the room with an authority that was awe-inspiring. It became clear that we were listening to a voice speaking from the absolute pinnacle of human experience, and speaking directly from it. By the time we reached the closing lines, we were both

dumbfounded. Not only had we heard a great poem, but we both felt we had been in the presence of a consciousness the nature of which filled us with the deepest humility and reverence. Thereafter, I had a new respect for Sri Chinmoy's poetry.'

The poem in question was *The Absolute*. It is one of the poems in which Sri Chinmoy is most clearly working in what I called the 'mantric' mode. It's a poem I have read and re-read often (over the last 50 years!) and it never fails to inspire, illumine, uplift.

#### THE ABSOLUTE

No mind, no form, I only exist,  
Now ceased all will and thought.  
The final end of Nature's dance,  
I am It whom I have sought.

A realm of Bliss bare, ultimate;  
Beyond both knower and known;  
A rest immense I enjoy at last;  
I face the One alone.

I have crossed the secret ways of life,  
I have become the Goal.  
The Truth immutable is revealed;  
I am the way, the God-Soul.

My spirit aware of all the heights,  
I am mute in the core of the Sun.  
I barter nothing with time and deeds.  
My cosmic play is done.

Here is another favourite:

#### EVER THE SAME AGAIN

Ever the same again,  
My lost Truth rediscovered.  
Ever the same again.

Ever the same again,  
My forgotten Self remembered.  
Ever the same again.

Ever the same again,  
My Lost Goal regained.  
Ever the same again.

In keeping with the meaning, it's one I come back to (again and again!) As in most of his work, the language is simple. But that simplicity is deceptive, like water so clear it belies its depth. It is a poetry which can be demanding, though not in the usual sense of the terms, where the demand is on the intellect, struggling to unravel something obscure. Rather what is demanded here is a qualitative leap of consciousness; the reader has to come up to the level of the poems. There has to be an active participation. The understanding has to be experiential. I'm reminded of something I read by Thomas Merton on 'Praying the Psalms'. He wrote, 'To understand the Psalms we must experience the sentiments they express, in our own hearts.'

As well as being mantras, Sri Chinmoy's poetry also have the quality of *sutra*. The word originally meant *thread*, and it is used to describe series of short, aphoristic utterances, perhaps the best known being the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. These offer instruction in the path of Yoga, and are tight, densely packed, designed to be memorised and recited aloud, gradually revealing their truth. Many of Sri Chinmoy's short poems are also instructional, revealing more and more on each re-reading. They display a haiku-like compactness, which unfolds, opens out. They can function like koans, or like Buddhist gatha to be recited as part of daily practice. These are two I have found particularly effective:

#### EXHALE THE DUST

Exhale the dust  
Of the past.  
Inhale the fragrance  
Of the future.

#### EVERYTHING I NEED

Everything I need  
Can be found  
In the very depths  
Of my heart.

Simply repeating these, out loud or in silence, leads deep into the moment, the here and now.

Many of his poems, in English and his native Bengali, are also songs, set to simple, haunting melodies. This adds yet another element to their mantric power, to poetry-as-practice. His poems often remind me of the *Tao Te Ching*, profound yet accessible, timeless and carrying their wisdom lightly.

## THE WAVE

The wave subsides and the wave rises.  
The flower withers and the flower blossoms.  
There is no end to human wants  
And human achievements.  
Nothing is permanent and nothing is fleeting.  
Then for whom shall we cry,  
For what shall we cry?  
Whom shall we invoke  
With a new thought and new form?  
Everything eventually blossoms.

They often delight also in a playful, zen-like directness:

## YOU DO NOT HAVE TO UNDERSTAND

You do not have to understand.  
Just believe.  
You do not have to believe.  
Just keep your eyes wide open.

His writings about poetry are fascinating and revealing.

## THE FUTURE POETS

The future poets  
Shall sing only one song:  
The song of beauty  
Inside the simplicity-heart  
Of a profundity-soul.

He imagines a poetry of true spirituality, expressing the highest aspirations of humanity.

*'Throughout my poetry-journey, my poetry-tree has cherished various branches: philosophy, prayer, religion, spirituality, my love of nature's beauty, my love of word-making, which the English language indulgently allows me to explore, and my abiding love, concern and hope for this world of ours.'*

His poetry is born of love, a oneness with all of creation.

*'If something as small as an insect comes along, the heart has the capacity to identify itself with this tiniest creature. With its concern, compassion and feeling of oneness, our human heart becomes one with the insect. And when this same heart looks at the vast sky, it can identify itself with the vastness.'*

*The poet uses his inner heart to look at the ocean and feel his total oneness with it; or he looks at the sky and becomes totally one with it. If he looks at a mountain, he becomes the mountain itself in his inner life, in his inner being. So the heart has the capacity to identify with anything, be it small or big.'*

This poetry of the heart has a universality of appeal and his words are often read by those who might not necessarily pick up a book of poetry. Some might have read one of the poems on the back of a t-shirt during a long-distance race. (Sri Chinmoy was a keen athlete completing many marathons and a few ultramarathons, and often described meditation as the 'inner running').

This is a favourite:

There is only one perfect road  
and that road is ahead of you,  
always ahead of you.

I have also seen one as graffiti at Amsterdam Airport (mis-attributed to Jimi Hendrix!)

When the power of Love  
Replaces the love of power,  
Man will have a new name: God.

Just recently a friend shared with me a link to a radio broadcast by Bob Dylan in which he recited one of Sri Chinmoy's poems, The Lock and the Key. He added, 'I heard this from my friend Carlos Santana. Thanks Carlos!'

#### THE LOCK AND THE KEY

Doubt is the lock,  
Faith is the key.

Hate is the lock,  
Love is the key.

Body is the lock,  
Soul is the key.

Ignorance is the lock,  
Light is the key.

*God's Heart has no lock.  
Man's mind has no key.*

(And yes, back in the day, his poems might be found on the covers of albums by Santana or John McLaughlin). So yes, 'something outside literature.' His poetry finds its readership in mysterious ways!

A few years ago, to mark a special occasion, I sent one of Sri Chinmoy's short poems to fifty people - friends and acquaintances, writers, artists, politicians. The response was extraordinary. So many folk replied saying how much the poem meant to them, that they found it uplifting and inspiring.

*A STRONGER HEART*

*Mine is the wisdom-light  
That tells me to ask  
Not for a lighter burden,  
But for a stronger heart.*

This is a poetry that is out there in the world, doing its work.

Another aspect of his poetic output is its sheer scale. He was more than prolific. Leonard Bernstein called him 'the very model of abundance in the creative life.' He wrote constantly, often carrying a pen and a little notebook. Or he would compose the poems orally, speaking them aloud as they came to him, took shape. There was a real sense of him channeling the words, often to a group of his followers, and someone would record and transcribe them. He was sharing the process, sometimes changing a word here and there. That 'working and reworking' was done as he went, improvising in the here and now, finding the right word, the right image, and moving on.

In contemporary writing he is, I believe, unique. There is nothing really to compare with his achievement, because there is no one writing from the same level of *inner* accomplishment, the same perspective.

He has created his own space, his own category, beyond the ebb and flow of literary fashion.

Poetic Yoga.

## Indra

*Alan Spence*

I am the Lord of thunder, lightning, rain.  
I water the parched earth, my blessings pour,  
bring torrent, deluge, monsoon, hurricane.  
This is my work, but I am so much more.

My net extends across the universe,  
it shimmers, infinite, neverending,  
a sheer web of interconnectedness  
strung with bright jewels, each one reflecting

every other, the many in the one,  
the one in the many, the all in all.  
No time no space no separation -  
this oneness is the flowering of my will.

The part is the whole, the drop the ocean.  
I offer you this realisation.  
Now, praise me. *Aum Indraya Namaha*  
Yes, praise me. *Aum Indraya Namaha*

## **A Ledge's Treasure**

*Leath Tonino*

a ledge's treasure

of red pebbles  
and brown seeds  
and a mouse's  
white jawbone

and three pine needles  
four cactus spines

and profound thoughts  
useless thoughts  
beautiful harmless thoughts

all flicked  
and glinting  
spinning down  
past raven winds  
and a spider web's  
stray silver strand

into shadows below

## Glide

*Mark Gallacher*

Into the trees' deep shade you glide, too carefree yet  
for knuckled roots and traps, the mud-slaked pools  
splitting apart in insect-dancing sunlight,  
birdsong returning like a rumour of hope,  
the forest, still dripping bright rain and rivulets  
staining green leaves and moss-laced bark with quivering silver.

You'd have to be blind  
to miss the cedar and the silver birch leaning in,  
the dizzy aroma of wild garlic,  
the wet loam and pungent grass,  
vast canopy of green-laced silence.

You'd have to be senseless not to sing in the heart.

Each leap, each glide,  
down crumbling wet-earth incline,  
the river dark as night,  
its brew of mountain-water  
sliding over shoals of blunted, shining stone,  
huge volumes stirring in deep muscular pools,  
where the old gods slumber.

And come out on the other side not a little sad.  
That pull of forest behind you: tugging at the mind.  
The trees, watchers on tall stilts,  
know you'll be back: in foul weather in winter  
glad for snow-smothered track,  
the way ahead, blindness you must wade through,  
and something hidden, tracking your laboured trespass.

## Matsuo Bashō: The Person, The Poetics

*Ilijas Baker*

*furu ike ya / kawazu tobikomu / mizu no oto*

The old pond;  
a frog jumps in—  
the sound of the water

Matsuo Bashō's haiku,<sup>1</sup> translated here by Robert Aitken<sup>2</sup> is one of the most well-known and well-loved haiku in the West (and in Japan), yet knowledge of the author and his poetics is perhaps neither deep nor widespread. This essay gives some essential information on the two subjects that might be of interest to geopoets, nature poets and the like.

Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) is renowned in Japan and in the West for his unique and profound contributions to the development of Japanese literature.



Bashō by unknown artist, 18th-19th century (Public domain)

He was known as Matsuo Kinsaku before he changed his name to Matsuo Bashō after being gifted a bashō (banana) tree, which he or his students planted by the hut in which he lived. As a young man he was employed in the service of a well-respected and kindly Samurai family where he developed a close relationship with his employer's son, who was also a writer of haiku and an admirer of Bashō's writings. This allowed Bashō ample time to develop his poetic skills. After the death of his employer's son in 1666, he decided to leave traditional feudal society and attempt to establish a livelihood as a master poet. He had succeeded in this by 1680, but being dissatisfied by the literary status quo he set out to establish a personal style that was more spiritual and aesthetically refined. [1] Much of the remainder of his life was spent travelling to seek out new experiences and inspiration for his poetry.

According to Ueda [2], Bashō's poetic journey can usefully be organized into five phases. The first phase, covered the period before he moved to Edo (as Tokyo was then called) in 1672 when he was 28 years of age. During this initial phase he and his contemporaries wrote haiku often in the form of linked humorous verses (*haikai no renga*) merely for entertainment. The second phase, covered the initial period he spent in Edo up to 1680. During this phase he threw himself into learning about and imitating the new trends in poetry in Edo. Some of the poems were perhaps overly influenced by Chinese verse and classical Japanese literature. The third phase was from 1681 to 1685 when in his late thirties he moved away from his previous influences and sought something original. The fourth phase was from 1686 to 1691 when he developed his own style and gained a following. This is when his writing peaks. His book of travel sketches *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* was written during this period. The pond-frog haiku is the most famous haiku of this period, but others are not far behind, e.g. (translated by Ueda):

*arumi ya /sado ni yokotau /amanogawa*  
The rough sea—  
Extending toward Sado Isle,  
The Milky Way.<sup>3</sup>

Ueda writes that many of the haiku written during this period manifest the quality of *sabi*, which can be translated as loneliness or quietness. This was the philosophy Bashō imparted to his students. Ueda illustrates this with the following haiku:

*sabishisa ya / iwa ni shimikomu / semi no koe*  
Loneliness—  
Sinking into the rocks,  
A cicada's cry.

*Sabishisa ya / kugi ni kaketaru / kirigirisu*  
Loneliness—  
Hanging from a nail,  
A cricket.

Ueda, in a beautiful and profound passage, writes:

Bashō conceived loneliness to be very close to quietness. In his usage, then, loneliness does not just mean that one is alone and in need of company; it has more to do with a particular atmosphere arising from a scene or moment that need not involve a human being. In these two poems there is no man; there are only a cricket and a cicada. The “lonely” or “quiet” atmosphere is created when such a tiny living thing fulfils its destiny within the vast expanse of the universe. The fragile life of a little creature merging into the immense power of nature, like the cricket's chirp fading into the autumn night or the cicada's cry sinking into the rocks [or the sound of the frog jumping into the pond] seems to lie at the root of Bashō's concept of loneliness and of *sabi*. To realize that all living things are evanescent is

sad, but when one sees a tiny creature enduring that sadness and fulfilling its destiny one is struck with a sublime feeling. The haiku most characteristic of Bashō in this period seem to point toward this sublime feeling. [p. 52]

The fifth phase covered the last three years of his life. Although he had achieved considerable fame, something he had initially desired, he was still dissatisfied and was keen to improve his writing right up until his death. But the circumstances had changed. The haiku of Bashō's last three years were written after he returned to Edo in the winter of 1691 and began to live more sociably, mixing with non-poets and looking after some relatives. According to Ueda, "... some of the haiku of this period show bitterness, frustration, and even despair to an unusual degree." [p. 60]

Typical haiku of this period are:<sup>4</sup>

*toshidoshiya saru ni kisetaru saru no me*

Year after year,  
the monkey's face  
wears a monkey's mask

*nusubito no ōta yo mo ari toshi no kure*

year-end-thought:  
one night,  
even a thief came to visit

There is some diversity, perhaps confusion, in the West regarding what a haiku is and how a Japanese haiku should be translated into English. Traditionally, haiku are imagistic poems that consist of 17 phonetic units (*onji* in Japanese), similar to but not identical to English syllables, written in a 5/7/5 pattern in a vertical line, which is the norm for Japanese orthography.<sup>5</sup> In addition, traditional haiku usually include a *kireji* or "cutting word" that cuts the haiku into two parts, one of twelve *onji* and the other of five *onji*, or vice versa (*ya* is the cutting word in the pond-frog poem here). The cutting word indicates a pause and often signals some emotion arising from the second part with which it ends. Bashō was to some extent flexible in his use of syllable count. [3] He once instructed a student, "Even if you have three or four extra syllables, or even five or seven you needn't worry as long as it sounds right. But even if one syllable is stale in your mouth, give it all your attention." [4] Bashō's influence goes beyond form though and it is said that he, "... elevated the haikai [haiku] from word-play into lyric poetry, from a game played by poetasters into a spiritual dimension." [5] This elevated form of haiku remains the touchstone in our own time when haiku has been reduced often to expressing cuteness and cleverness in three, two or even one-line poems.

English language translations of haiku initially adopted the Japanese conventions, but distributed the 17 syllables among 3 (sometimes indented) lines of 5/7/5 syllables. However, translations of traditional haiku of 17 *onji* into English can be (and are now routinely) accomplished using fewer syllables as Japanese *onji* are often of much shorter sound-duration than English syllables. This can

be seen in Robert Aitken's translation at the beginning of this essay or in this even shorter, and perhaps better, version by Alan Watts:

The old pond,  
A frog jumps in:  
Plop!

Word choices are important in any translation, but it is perhaps even more critical in the case of haiku where the text is so short. There is certainly great value in reading as many translations of the same haiku as possible.

For an interesting story about the genesis of Bashō's pond-frog haiku, see Kenneth White's *Pilgrim of the Void* [6]. White suggests that the story is probably apocryphal but relates that Bashō came up with the last two lines upon hearing a frog jump into a pond. He realized that the first line of what was potentially an excellent haiku was missing. Bashō and two others who had come to visit him (one a Zen master and the other a Zen adept) took turns in suggesting an opening line until Bashō came up with "the old pond". White does not tell us the source of this story, but he might have read about it in D.T. Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture* where there is a similar version. Geoffrey Wilkinson points out that Suzuki took the story from a Japanese source "now generally regarded as dubious if not fraudulent". [7] Wilkinson also gives an alternative Japanese source for a much more mundane version of the story.

Although the practice of writing and translating haiku into English comprised of 5/7/5 syllables is perhaps no longer as widely practiced in Japan and the West as in the past, it has resulted in many fine haiku and is unlikely to disappear.

Numerous poems referred to in Western journals and online as haiku, because they are short and contain 17 syllables (or fewer), are often better described as *senryū*, although the distinction is one that is often of greater concern in Japan than it is in the West. These poems do not address nature or contain a reference to a season or a cutting word, and are often humorous, cynical even, and frequently address current events. [8] A more drastic rejection of traditional haiku rules is referred to as *jiyuritsu* haiku.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars disagree on the exact number of haiku written by Bashō. Some say one thousand, others slightly less. Blyth [9] says two thousand. But most scholars, both Japanese and Western critics agree that not all of Bashō's haiku were of the highest standard. Indeed, anyone who chooses to read the complete Bashō corpus expecting them all to be Zen-influenced masterpieces, will be surprised by the large number that are discursive or that simply fall flat. Blyth says only a hundred can be considered "really good". Among these are haiku written in the context of a *haibun*, a genre in which Bashō was also an innovator.<sup>7</sup> According to Nobuyuki Yuasa [10], Bashō in his earlier travel sketches

failed to maintain an adequate balance between prose and haiku, making prose subservient to haiku, or haiku isolated from prose .... [but later in *The Narrow Road to the*

Deep North (*Oku no Hosomichi*), he] “mastered the art of writing haibun so completely that prose and haiku illuminate each other like two mirrors held up facing each other. This is something no one before him was able to achieve. [p. 39]

Some commentators/translators consider Bashō to be primarily a Zen poet, many of them no doubt influenced by the writings of D.T. Suzuki [11](who states he himself was influenced by Blyth’s ideas). After quoting Blyth’s “Haiku is an expression of a temporary enlightenment”, Suzuki goes on to say,

Whether temporary or not, Bashō gives in his seventeen syllables [referring to the pond-frog haiku] a significant intuition into Reality .... The sound coming out of the old pond was heard by Bashō as filling the entire universe. Not only was the totality of the environment absorbed in the sound and vanished into it, but Bashō himself was altogether effaced from his consciousness. [p. 228]

Hamill [12], for example, writes of Bashō’s, “lifetime of consciously perfecting his practice of both Zen and poetry, indeed of making them one seamless practice.” [not numbered but it is the fifth page of the Introduction. Stryk [13] writes,

Bashō’s discussion of poetry was always tinged by Zen thought and what in his maturity he advocated above all was the realization of *muga*, so close an identification with things one writes of that the self is forgotten ... Bashō’s late poems demonstrate that, in spite of periods of acute self-doubt, he was able to achieve a unity of life and art, the great hope of Zen creators. [p. 16]

Barnhill [14], however, notes that, “cultural memory is a crucial part of Bashō’s apprehension of the present, and allusions to the past are essential to our understanding of some of his hokku [haiku].” [pp. 12-15] He also mentions that although Bashō’s work “does partake of the Japanese literary and religious traditions ... it also participates in the Chinese religio-aesthetic tradition, which includes Daoism and Confucianism, as well as aesthetic ideas and ideals in Chinese poetry and painting.” [pp.12-15]

In some of the prose sections of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Bashō mentions being unable to concentrate on matters at hand and engaging in day dreaming, of longing to travel rather than focusing on the present moment so valued by Zen Buddhists. Here is an excerpt from the first page of this text [15]:

The year too gradually passed, and with a sky of spring’s rising mist came thoughts of crossing the Shirakawa Barrier. Possessed by the spirits of roving which wrenched the heart, beckoned by Dōsojin [a guardian spirit of the road], unable to settle hand on anything, I mended a tear in my pants, replaced a cord in my hat, burned my shins with moxa, and then with the moon of Matsushima [a renowned scenic bay which is dotted by small islands full of pine trees] rising in my mind, I handed on my hut to another and moved to Sanpū ’s cottage. [p.39]

Robert Aitken [16], a Zen scholar and teacher who has written many books on Zen dismisses the view that Bashō was a Zen poet, but notes that his haiku display a familiarity with Zen terminology. Aitken writes, “This shows that Bashō was familiar with the ways of Zen monks to some degree, but it is thin evidence for a case to establish Zen as anything more than an element in his environment.” [p. xviii].<sup>8</sup>

He later suggests that this did not necessarily disqualify Bashō from experiencing *samadhi* and it is his experience of *samadhi* that led to the pond-frog poem.

Rather than viewing *samadhi* as the fruit of intense meditation practice or *zazen*, Aitken, perhaps influenced by his abiding belief in anarchism, somewhat iconoclastically writes:

Samadhi means ‘absorption,’ but fundamentally it is unity with the whole universe. When you devote yourself to what you are doing, moment by moment—to your koan when on your cushion in *zazen*, to your work, study, conversation, or whatever in daily life—that is *samadhi*. Do not suppose that *samadhi* is exclusively Zen Buddhist. Everything and everybody are in *samadhi*, even bugs, even people in mental hospitals. [p. 5]

There is no evidence that Bashō engaged regularly in *zazen*, especially later on in life when he reached the pinnacle of his writing both in terms of reputation and expression. But if we are to make sense of Aitken’s remarks, we might speculate that there are degrees of absorption and while only the highest degrees are available to those whose practice of *zazen* is long and intense, the lower degrees are perhaps available to anyone who can at least temporarily set aside the ego and this can lead to impressive expressions in art and literature that are aligned with Zen ideals. Nevertheless, given our deep layers of temperament, conditioning, memory, second-hand knowledge, capacity for self-deception and the resilience of the ego, a large degree of circumspection before making any claims of even temporarily setting aside the ego is warranted.

According to Ueda [17], Bashō’s final haiku, written three days before his death, is the following:

*tabi ni yande /yume wa kareno o / kakemeguru*

On a journey, ailing—  
My dreams roam about  
Over a withered moor.

Ueda interprets the poem as expressing Bashō’s existential unease [p. 68], not a state you’d expect from an experienced Zen Buddhist close to the end of his life. The serenity and sense of unity with nature that characterize some of his best and most famous haiku seem like a distant memory. Kenneth White [18] speculating on Bashō’s motivation for traveling, writes that there may have been, “a fundamental anxiety in Bashō that no mere religion, even an enlightened one, could allay, and maybe he felt that simply getting out on the road could relieve that anxiety.” p.199].

Bashō's life and work reveal a complex and sensitive person subject to depression and loneliness who was, arguably, as deeply interested in the writing and teaching of poetry as in following the path of Zen. He did become a lay monk and studied Zen under a well-known teacher for a time. But writing poetry seemed to dominate Bashō's life. According to Hirshfield [19], he wrote, "The invincible power of poetry has reduced me to the condition of a tattered beggar." And close to his death she writes that he told a student, "I know I shouldn't be writing haiku now, so close to death. But poetry is all I ever thought of for over fifty years." [Book not paginated but quote can be found on the fifth page from the end.]

Whatever position you take on Bashō and his relationship to Zen it is important to acknowledge that the writing of haiku for Bashō was not simply a matter of spontaneously capturing in words a moment out of time and thereafter treating them as untouchable. Bashō was a committed reviser of his writings and made repeated, often very subtle, changes. No one knows for certain whether his revisions were designed to better or more accurately express what he experienced or to improve the literary merits of the text. [20] Given that Bashō had a school of poetics with his own students and we have a record of his advice on the use of syllables (*onji*) I think it would be safe to assume that some of his revisions were designed to improve the literary merits of his texts.

There is some debate about whether Bashō can be classified as a nature poet. He is certainly not a poet of wild nature as generally defined dualistically by Westerners, more a poet of cultured nature. According to David Landis Barnhill [21], "There is a long tradition in Japanese literature referring to *utamakura*, that is places made famous in the cultural tradition, with specific associations known to most all [sic] readers. Bashō tended to write of places in nature handed down through literature, giving cultural depth to his experience of nature." [p.5] That certainly, Barnhill avers, doesn't disqualify him from being referred to as a nature poet, it just highlights different conceptions of nature held in East Asia and the West.

Barnhill characterizes the East Asian view of the natural as, "what exists according to its true nature." [p.7] Thus, culture and nature are not seen as dualistic. Nevertheless, he writes, "Poetry will be natural only if the creative act arises spontaneously out of authentic feelings and our true nature. Poets who vainly ... strive to create a poem are acting out of their sense of self and its desires, and so their art is not natural." [p.8]

Bashō remains an inspiration for contemporary writers of haiku and haibun who often take these genres into new social, psychological and spiritual territories. Fitzsimons [22] writes, "Haiku has ... become the most prevalent poetic form in the world, and Bashō's poems the standard by which all others are measured." [p. xxxiv] If Bashō's poems are the standard by which other poems are judged, then perhaps knowledge of Bashō's life and of his poetics still has a part to play in enriching our experience of writing and reading haiku and haibun and ensuring that we are not completely untethered from his spirit and ideals. His literary output during the period 1686 –1691, which was the peak of his writing career, definitely warrants close reading and contemplation. Nevertheless, we should be careful not to idealize him.

## Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Haiku is actually a late nineteenth century term and thus Bashō did not write haiku. At the time of writing, he wrote *hokku* which originally referred to the opening stanza of a *renga* or series of linked verses. It was the poet Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902) who popularized the use of the term haiku as he wanted to establish the three-line opening stanza as an independent verse form. See *Bashō's Haiku*, 2004. Western writers generally refer, anachronistically, to all of Bashō's three-line stanzas as haiku. I have followed this practice here for convenience.

<sup>2</sup> All English language haiku presented in this essay use the layout provided by the translator.

<sup>3</sup> This last line is sometimes translated as River of Stars or Heaven's River.

<sup>4</sup> These are from Hirshfield's book *The Heart of Haiku*. She characterizes the first haiku as "a portrait of entrapment within the social." The second, she writes, "surely refers as well to the overly social life Bashō had been leading, but here, bitterness has vanished, and the poet seems less rueful than amused." This second poem seems to reflect a new philosophy applicable to both living in general and writing haiku specifically. He called it *karumi*, which can be translated as "lightness." The book is not paginated, but these quotes can be found on the eighth page from the end of the book.

<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, a page of Japanese script consisted of vertical lines which were read from top to bottom and right to left. Modern Japanese printed books are now printed using horizontal lines and are read from left to right.

<sup>6</sup> See *Pilgrim of the Void*, pp. 212-214 and *Santōka: Grass and Tree Cairn. Translations by Hiroaki Sato. Red Moon Press, 2002.*

<sup>7</sup> Haibun are texts combining prose and haiku.

<sup>8</sup> This is a view similar to that of White who writes, "Bashō himself was no Zen monk. He studied Zen ... learned a lot from it, but he was never totally zennified [sic]. He simply tried to deepen some general notions, without knuckling down to any prescribed discipline." *Pilgrim of the Void*, p. 208.

[1] *Bashō's Haiku: Selected Poems of Matsuo Bashō*. Translated and with an Introduction by David Landis Barnill. SUNY Press.

[2] *The Master Haiku Poet Matsuo Bashō*. Makoto Ueda. Kodansha International, 1982.

[3] *Bashō's Haiku*, 2004.

[4] *The Haiku Handbook*. William J. Higginson. McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1985.

[5] *The Essential Bashō*. Translated from the Japanese by Sam Hamill. Shambhala Press 1968.

[6] The Wild Swans. In: *Pilgrim of the Void*. 1992, pp.178-254. Mainstream Pub.

[7] Bashō's Frog, the Great Survivor. In: *Going to the Pine: Four Essays on Bashō*. Geoffrey Wilkinson. Published by Wilkinson, 2019, pp. 23-33.

[8] *The Haiku Anthology: Haiku and Senryu in English*. Edited by Cor Van Der Heuval. 1986. Simon and Schuster: New York.

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[10] Matsuo Bashō. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*. Translated with an Introduction by Nobuyuki Yuasa. Penguin Classics. 1970.

[11] Zen and Haiku. In: *Zen and Japanese Culture*. D.T.Suzuki, 1959, pp . 215-267. Princeton University Press.

- [12] Introduction to the Japanese Poems. Sam Hamill. In *The Poetry of Zen*. Translated and edited by Sam Hamill & J.P. Seaton. Shambhala, 2011.
- [13] *On Love and Barley: Haiku of Bashō*. Translated from the Japanese with an Introduction by Lucien Stryk. Penguin Books, first published 1985.
- [14] *Bashō's Haiku*.
- [15] *Bashō's Journey: The Literary Prose of Matsuo Bashō*. Translated with an Introduction by David Landis Barnhill. SUNY Press, 2005, p.39
- [16] *A Zen Wave: Bashō's Haiku and Zen*. Robert Aitken. Shoemaker & Hoard. 2003.
- [17] *The Master Haiku Poet Matsuo Bashō*.
- [18] The Wild Swans.
- [19] Jane Hirshfield. *The Heart of Haiku*. iBook. [not paginated]
- [20] *The Haiku Handbook*.
- [21] *Bashō's Journey*.
- [22] *Bashō: The Complete Haiku of Matsuo Bashō*. Translated, Annotated, and with an Introduction by Andrew Fitzsimons. University of California Press, 2022.

## Two Poems From The House At The Mouth Of The Mountain Pass<sup>1</sup>

*Ilgas Baker*

i  
the sun will come up  
soon

now  
the sky is as black as a calligrapher's ink  
and there are congregations of stars  
just above the treeline  
a long arc of lights  
to marvel at  
and stars  
dancing  
behind me

I see the patterns but  
leave their names unsaid  
they are not the names  
that Adam spoke  
the names that brought  
honour  
proved our  
worth

will we ever remember  
those names  
or be taught them again?

ii  
to the west  
a mountain waits patiently  
over a cave where a million bats  
fly out to feed  
at dusk  
the living plume  
grows longer, longer, longer still  
spirals and curls  
curls and spirals  
inspired  
they go to where the insects swarm  
I stare at  
an emptying sky  
rapt  
then head down the mountain  
pulled by gravity  
empty of thought  
but not empty

<sup>1</sup>I started writing these poems at Pak Chong (Mouth of the Mountain Pass) , Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand and completed them in Pakkred, Nonthaburi, Thailand

## **Borrowing in the Stone Library**

### **What I know about Bashō and Colum**

*Ruth Reid*

I was going to write about Bashō today. I've been admiring his spirit of lightness and trying to catch something of his understanding of Time. But instead, I think I will tell you about my weekend.

It was St Columba's Day yesterday, and in the spirit of pilgrimage we walked to a place I have always imagined as the Stone Library, where the rocks have been thrown up in a particular arrangement that reminds me of books jumbled upon shelves by an absent minded academic. It is a secret bay, or rather a series of secret coves which are inaccessible except at low tide.

Stone books lie jumbled  
unread; red anemone  
tentacles in foam

The rock pools in this place are filled with red anemones, coral and periwinkles, and the stone is a satisfying black gabbro which makes it easy to climb. I know every inch of this place - I spent so many childhood summers there, climbing barefoot over the rocks, knowing just where to centre my balance to traverse the ridges, every hand and foothold on the cliffs. Yesterday I bemoaned the waves throwing up so much sand that the knee hold on one of the pink mica cliffs was just too low to make it much fun anymore. On reflection I wondered was it the tides - or have I just grown up and old? Are my muscle memories still ten years old?

Changing light falling  
glances glittering mica  
reflection - I've aged

Of course, there are geological terms for all the rock formations and stones in this magical corner. The huge shelves of the library have been heaved sideways by unimaginable forces, igneous rocks have metamorphosed into tectonites, conglomerates. The sand is white, almost pink at times, reflecting the ground up shells of the creatures that live and have lived there.

things here are alive  
generations of existence  
concurrently, not

*Everything, everywhere, all at once.*

The crystal clear waves lapped our feet as we splashed back from the library to the broad expanse of beach.

So, inevitably, back to Bashō. What is he trying to tell us?

For one, he's quite clear that anyone trying to match his art is a fool.

But his essential lightness in the face of the enormity of existence, his understanding that to truly know a thing, one must attempt to somehow be that thing - and that Time is mainly a human dimension - they are beginning to make more and more sense to me.

And that is where St Columba comes in - another monk who lived a way of pilgrimage, in a different place and time, and who came up with three important values for life -

Courage, faith, cheerfulness

So, we left the Stone Library. Did we take anything other than photos? The huge slab "books" - no. No rucksack could ever carry them!

But I did take three pebbles of green Iona marble, a little miracle in itself, as this beach is not on St Columba's Isle.

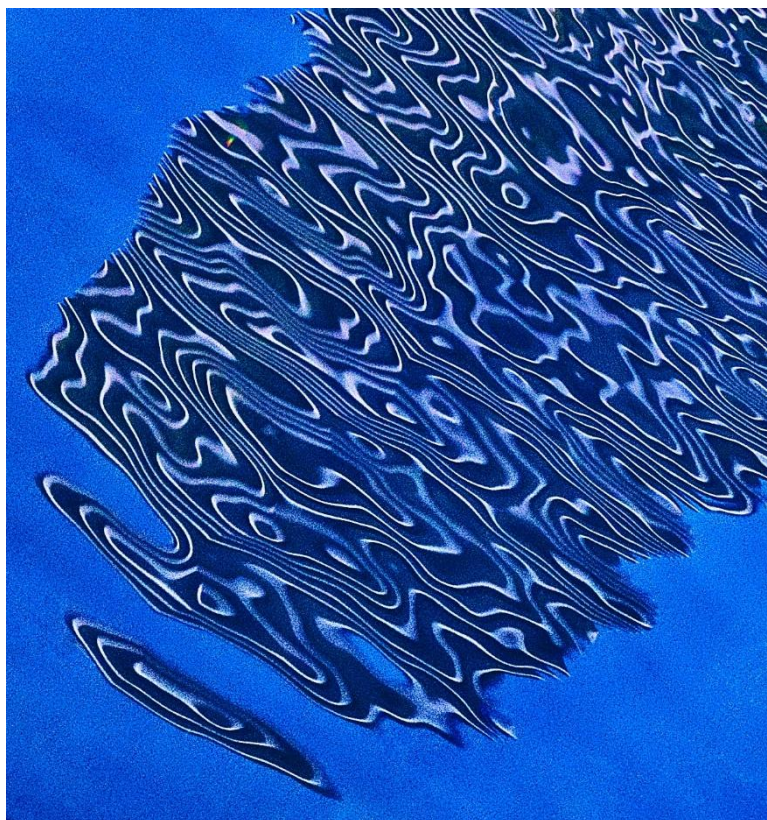
And here they are, sitting on my desk marked inexpertly with the Columban values. As with all stones, I've merely borrowed them.

They will be here long after my human dimension is complete.

Reorder green stones  
you may find they'll fit the day  
if not, day'll fit them

## Peninsula of dreams

*Andrew Abraham*



Far below our orbital vantage point, a peninsula extends into the sapphire sea.

This promontory's erosion highlights its complex and dynamic history.

Is it real, or a subconsciously created fluid mirage extracted from our beliefs and memories?

Reflecting upon the scene below, we find ourselves longing for a safe harbour, where waves and ripples gently break upon a friendly shore.

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How do we deal with uncertainty and manage our emotions in a world where hope, it seems, is hard to find?

In times of distress and chaos we can find solace in the beauty that Nature provides.

We can slow down our lives and step away, even for a moment, and reconnect with the natural world we are a part of. This relationship synchronously calms and invigorates our spirit. It also reduces the effects of unsettling external forces and thus creates inner balance and a foundation for hope.

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This image is part of a photo of the reflection of a condominium on a marina's gently rippled waters. The solid structure, standing tall against the sky's blue background, is no longer recognizable. It has been deconstructed and assimilated into Nature by a gentle breeze.

## **The Poet Sniffs A Flower**

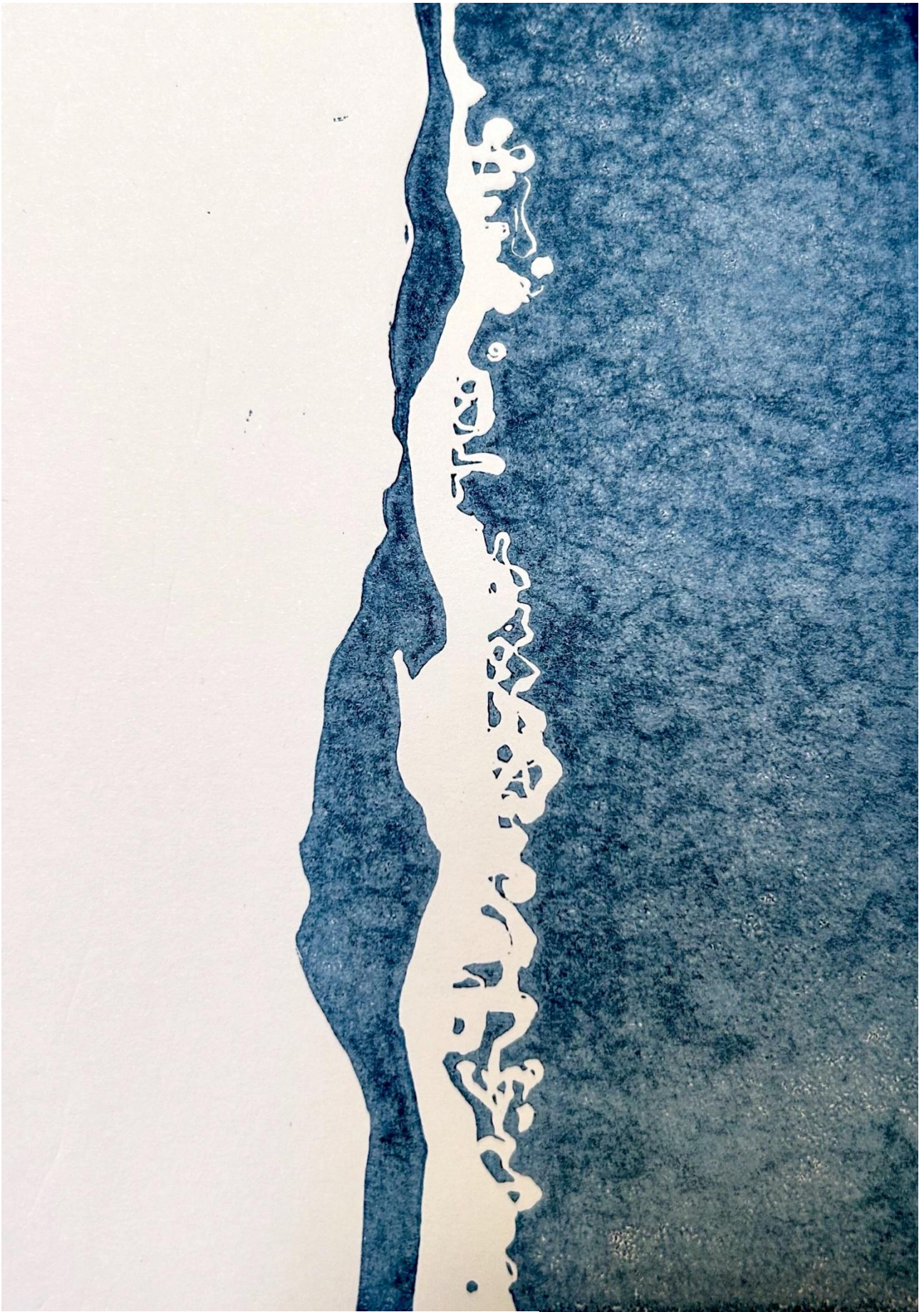
*Martin Goldie*

In the shores wakening  
time we easily waste,  
I sit among old black rock  
by a child's rock pool  
alive with cockleshells  
and pink and green starfish.  
The stone moon is still there  
high in a pale sky.  
I watch the tides  
trembling whisk to shore,  
brine kelp and coarse shingle  
wither and drown,  
the scent of moss and dew bark,  
hidden finches rumouring.  
A red trawler sails into haven,  
and beyond the chantering sea  
and the threat of the coming storm,  
this changing world to consider.

## Movin Waves

*Martin Goldie*

Atwin the heidlaund  
an gowden saunds;  
in bobbin sowf,  
a yacht dreams on a thrawn grey loch.  
An comin past in seelent graft,  
a paddle boarder  
fechts the muin's faint tide  
an windblawn waves.  
In the quate o his preevat mornin,  
brak the shackles o sweirtie,  
the hyne toon's noise o graft,  
seelant, his strang legs balanced  
on the endless pinkin, movin waves,  
he haulds his coorse fur the mowrie shore,  
an hame fir brakfast, beams, the day tae come.



*Tideline*, Philomena Manifold

## The Post-Maoist Geopoetics of Jean-Claude Pinson

Gavriel Salvendy

In his ego-geographical memoir, *Là* (*There*; a pun on L-A, Loire-Atlantique, the French department in which he has lived most of his life), the poet and philosopher Jean-Claude Pinson remembered a detail which punctured the 'pastoral idyll of the summer of 68', that he and his Maoist comrades had been enjoying with radical peasants in the countryside near Nantes:

Disappointment, deconstruction of our illusions, the day when we found, at La Chapelle-sur-Erdre, in a farm where we were working, placed on the wooden plank of an old-style latrine, just next to the hole, as toilet paper ready to use (carefully unstapled and torn) a whole load of glossy pages from *China in Construction*, a colour magazine glorifying the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, printed in Peking.<sup>1</sup>

This bad omen was not enough, however, to turn them off ideological course. In 1967, Pinson's conversion to Maoism had led him to abandon literature, philosophy, petit-bourgeois jazz music, sex – 'girls' breasts, when measured next to the Tsinghang mountains/we had decreed them not sublime enough for us'<sup>2</sup> –, and a sense of place, unless it was attachment to the distant utopia of the People's Republic of China. He avoided contact with the psychogeographers then active in nearby Nantes – with the exception of a disastrous intimate encounter with a Situationist female student. In the poem '*In situ* – Saint-Nazaire', he remembered:

It was a beautiful spring day I think  
But I no longer know if we could make out  
With as much clarity as today  
The coast opposite and its fringe of pines  
Before which pass the cargo ships

Anyway landscape was not my first concern  
I had come here to distribute tracts<sup>3</sup>

However, in 1980, disillusionment with the People's Republic of China, Pol Pot's Kampuchea, and the revolutionary workers and peasants Pinson and his comrades idealised, led our poet to break with a moribund Maoism. Another memoir, *Drapeau rouge* (*Red Flag*), recounts with humour and profundity the disintegration of his Maoist cell outside Saint-Nazaire:

Flag tragically hybrid ; hope and crime intimately linked. Flag of shame and hope, Jekyll and Mister Hyde (...)  
And yet it had begun so beautifully  
Red flag of morning hope  
Feast of satin

But very quickly  
Red flag of a sad evening  
Cutters travails

Swarm of toothless monsters,  
Anteaters, abattoirs<sup>4</sup>

Dissolution of the Parti communiste (marxiste-léniniste), the end of 'red ecstasy', leads to liberation, notably when the ex-*moine-soldat* (soldier monk) visits a jazz club: 'Floodgates suddenly opening and freeing into the air flows of abois and rhythms, rolls and cries, geyser releasing its decibels, thousands, millions of m3s, for ten years, more than ten years, walled in, compressed (February 1980)'<sup>3</sup>. The memoir ends on a different red flag: 'Outside roared a great storm. Red flag raised on the lifeguard station of Tharon-Plage. No swimming. Deserted beach. Even the keenest windsurfers hesitate. The ideal moment, we thought, to go onto the beach and refresh our ideas with sea spray'<sup>6</sup>.

From then on, Pinson returns to poetry and philosophy and develops an outlook which can be described as 'geopoetic' (he uses the word once). The emphasis in his work is, to borrow Hölderlin's famous line, dwelling poetically on the earth. This expresses itself in verse and prose which is attentive to the spaces he inhabits, above all the river Loire and the Atlantic littoral. In a poem from *J'habite ici* (*I dwell here*), he writes:

For a long time you lived like an insect caught  
In the beam of a lighthouse (the distant one  
Of the radiant future as we used to say) (...)  
Today you try to understand  
The meaning of living here  
Or at least you invent it according to the light  
Which constantly changes for we are in Brittany.<sup>7</sup>

This is accompanied by a 'poethics' that seeks a new, ecologically-sensitive, approach to the environment: 'A poethics always points to a "poethics". A poem is not just a verbal object offered for aesthetic pleasure or analysis, it also proposes a world – a proposal as to the possible modality of dwelling in it'<sup>8</sup>. There is a place for the pastoral and the 'local poet' in our 'wretched times':

It is towards another way of life that we must turn ; it is another relationship to the Earth and to places that we must invent – a poetic, non-predatory relationship. And for that humanity needs poets (poets in the widest sense of the word, well beyond poetry alone). It needs them to be as many as possible, for them to go, like an army of climate activist teachers, green hussars of the Earth, everywhere to defend and put into practice the old yet always young pastoral ideal specific to poetry.<sup>9</sup>

The song of Orpheus, in dialogue with Nature, is preferred to Prometheus's predatory will to power.

These quotations invite comparison with the geopoetics of Kenneth White, even though White is never mentioned by Pinson: the latter's poetic contemporaries include Guillevic, Ponge, Bonnefoy, Jaccottet and Prigent. A biographical coincidence: both Pinson and White were the sons of radical railwaymen, and grew up on the shore, Pinson in the Nantes suburb of Saint-Sébastien, White in the Ayrshire village of Fairlie. But differences soon appear. In 1968, while Pinson was seeking re-education among the peasants, White's slogan in Pau was 'Pas Mao, le Tao!'. Such a slogan showed his attraction to an Oriental philosophy that was anti-authoritarian (and thus attracted persecution, including by Mao's communists) and had a holistic outlook which would inspire New Age thinkers like Fritjof Capra. Around this time, White wrote, in *Travels in the Drifting Dawn*, of a 'purifying wind' under the red flag: 'The cold wind of dawn. Beginnings, beginnings. Once I lived among pigs, now I live among gulls. The gull academy. Taoist scholars and poets. Cool. Clear, dancing, laughing artists'<sup>10</sup>.

There is therefore no tale of disillusionment in White's ego-geography. For him, it is urgent to quit the 'Motorway of History' and its grand narratives. White was certainly active during the 'events' of 68, agitating in Pau, where he taught English literature, and in Toulouse. The moment of May showed the possibility of a conjunction between poetry and militancy. But, observing the internecine struggles between various communists, Maoists, Trotskyists and anarchists, he quickly realised he was dealing with a party of despair, a Ghost Dance. Typically, to clear his mind, White embarked on a walk along the Basque coast. Back in Pau, in the teeth of hostility from the head of the English department, White continued briefly to lead his proto-geopoetic group, *Feuillage*.

In the inaugural text of the Institut international de géopoétique, published in the tumultuous year of 1989, White wrote :

If, around 1978, I began to talk about 'geopoetics', it was, on the one hand, because the earth (the biosphere) was, quite obviously, more and more under threat, and that we had to concern ourselves with this in both a profound and effective way, on the other hand, because it had always appeared to me that the richest poetics came from contact with the earth, from plunging into biospheric space, from an attempt to read the signs of the world.<sup>11</sup>

Among the thinkers and poets White references are Heraclitus, Henry Thoreau, Wallace Stevens, Tschang-tsou and, inevitably, Hölderlin.

Both Pinson and White have written poems about Hölderlin's trip to Bordeaux in 1802, which the German Romantic notably evokes in his poem 'Andenken', 'Remembrance': 'But now to the Indies/The men have gone'... Pinson and White's texts show similarities and differences between these two geopoeticians. In White's 'Hölderlin in Bordeaux', the German Romantic eschews the habit, triviality and mere opinion of the times: 'he tended to go away/for a walk along the river', accompanied by 'memories of friends/who had left on a ship/from the windy promontory'. On his way back to Tübingen, he gets lost in the ice and snow of the Auvergne, which triggers an epiphany: 'the landscape had changed/colder/craggier/more massive -/poetry itself would have to change'.

From now on there is 'a nothingness to face/in an open expanse/He would have to learn how to travel alone'<sup>12</sup>. Here Hölderlin becomes part of the 'White World': a solitary, biocosmopoetic being walking and evolving in a landscape-mindscape outside decadent mainstream society.

As for Pinson, in "Hölderlin humblyment", there are echoes of his own political disillusionment. As the German made his journey to Bordeaux, 'maybe he advanced with in his heart the hope/of finally reaching an athletic country/open to the full light/and then no doubt he found in Bordeaux/too much disenchantment since there had ended long ago/the surge to the open sea to poetic invention'. At the same time, Pinson's Hölderlin anticipates an eco-poetic *prise de conscience* among poets and philosophers: 'perhaps instead of seeking/heavens of a more adorable blue/today they try to stare into/the darkness of a vanishing earth'. As for Hölderlin's return to Tübingen, Pinson mentions his passage through his own *pays natal*: the inhabitants of Charentes have 'something a bit Greek about them', but on the edges of the Vendée, 'he was worried to see the burns of war'. He therefore rediscovers home with joy. However, unlike White's Hölderlin, he is not all alone. He spends the last 36 years of his life in the home of Zimmer the carpenter, and, writing his verse, paradoxically 'went away into the proximity of things'<sup>13</sup>.

For, unlike White, there remains in Pinson a sensitivity to the human, and notably to social injustice. In this way, he resembles another writer from the Nantes area, Julien Gracq, who left the French Communist Party over the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, but who, Pinson writes, did not completely abandon politics:

Having quit the *vita activa*, militant life, Gracq took on the rôle of a simple spectator. However, he did not yield to the temptation to forget the world; he did fall into that 'acosmism', as Arendt calls it, which lies in wait for the *depoliticised* intellectual, awoken from his political illusions. He did not yield to that disgust with the world which often accompanies withdrawal into the sphere of the *vita contemplativa*.

In *Laius au bord de la mer* (*Laius by the sea*), Pinson describes walking along the Loire to give a philosophy lecture at the University of Nantes: 'Nor do I pretend not to see/On my path those who have come here/With their fishing rods on the riverside/To flee their schemes and the noise of the ring-roads /To forget unemployment with packs of beer'<sup>14</sup>.

As for the red flag, 'it's got lost in dust in space. Vainly in eternity, for, it knows too well, it doesn't have the right to commit suicide, having always to carry out the heavy, the difficult, the ever urgent task of finding equality. However much it may burn, on Earth we never cease to make and re-make it. All you need is a rectangle of red cloth'<sup>15</sup>. And in his essay, 'Carrefours de la poésie' ('Crossroads of poetry'), Pinson calls for a 'poetariat' that would create 'forms of life liberated from the deadly logic of capital'<sup>16</sup>. The nightmare of History still weighs on the minds of the living, the Motorway roars relentlessly on. Is there a place for both geopoetics and geopolitics?

A last word from our geo-poet, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Nantes in March:

‘Post-Maoist geopoetics’? I like that expression. Today, in fact, I would happily adopt Kenneth White’s expression, ‘Tao rather than Mao’. No doubt I should even have become aware of its relevance much earlier! I also can agree with your assessment: the contestation of capital and a keen interest in geopolitics have not left me.

So two or three great minds eventually met, at least partially.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Jean-Claude Pinson, *Là (L-A, Loire-Atlantique) Variations autobiographiques et départementales*. Suivi de *Frères oiseaux* (Nantes : éditions joca seria, 2018), p. 100.
- <sup>2</sup>Pinson, *J’habite ici* (Seyssel : Champ Vallon, 1991), p. 88.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 11.
- <sup>4</sup>Pinson, *Drapeau rouge* (Seyssel : Champ Vallon, 2008), pp. 32-33.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 77.
- <sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 153.
- <sup>7</sup>Pinson, *J’habite ici*, p. 12.
- <sup>8</sup>Pinson, *Habiter en poète. Essai sur la poésie contemporaine* (Seyssel : Champ Vallon, 1995), p.135.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 176
- <sup>10</sup>Cairns Craig (ed.), *The Collected Works of Kenneth White, Volume 1* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p. 273.
- <sup>11</sup>*Cahiers de Géopoétique*, volume 1 (1989), p. 151 [our translation].
- <sup>12</sup>White, *The Bird Path. Collected Longer Poems, 1964-1988* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1989), pp. 91-93.
- <sup>13</sup>Pinson, *J’habite ici*, pp. 101-106.
- <sup>14</sup>Pinson, *Laius au bord de l’eau* (Seyssel : Champ Vallon, 1993), p. 26.
- <sup>15</sup>Pinson, *Drapeau rouge*, p. 37.
- <sup>16</sup>Pinson, ‘Carrefours de la poésie’, *The Irish Journal of French Studies*, No. 18 (2018), p. 22.

## **The Turning**

*David Beatty*

Here where the land reaches beyond itself  
I look to unattended things, to intervals of change,  
minutiae of flora against the tenacity of stone.  
In the chain of recognitions that nourished me  
I became as rain to the clouds,  
or as a breath to the wind.  
Now on the edge of abandonment  
the earth turns me once more  
towards each questioning venture  
where memory yields to uncertainty.

Grant this terrain shall surrender me to its elements,  
to the wood's heart and the river's rain,  
the savannah's light to its dark silences,  
the valley's green flanks to its water's secrets,  
shaping my tongue to this adopted land,  
wind-soled and fleet as the flight of birds  
along the causeways of thought,  
a nomad among the ancient trails  
the waters mirroring the sky's vastness  
in the contemplation of millennia.

I have broken with the pernicious winters,  
the austere solitudes of leaf fall,  
the blessed revelations of stillness.  
Now I hunger for the language of movement,  
a pilgrim mapping the pathways  
in the rootless spaces where I am found,  
seeking music in topographies of motion,  
the land writing itself immeasurably  
in the words it finds for my tongue  
in the traces their sounds leave on the wind,  
in the cartographies sketched on the pages of dust  
and the broken paths of stone and of sand.

By the river tonight I lay wood on fire.  
Through the lens of the moon's pillar  
these embers give darkness to the leaves.  
The night sings in the turning sparks,  
in the throats of birds invisible to the eye,  
and in the melancholy song of the river cello:  
a quiver of air bowing its sonata of sound  
across the shimmer of waters  
where I rest until morning,  
my sleep resonant with the primal voices of night.

## New Year Letter 1980

*David Beatty*

A light green music, a whiff of salt,  
I flourish in stone gardens by the sea.  
And when the hills run with bracken fire,  
thunderous dark rock, the evening pine,  
the sun's eye colours this whole horizon  
that will devour us in the end,  
colour by colour and line by line.  
And when the sea rages along this coast  
the white foam of love runs in my blood:  
there is a music in these hills  
will outlive my dying breath  
in the pale air of dewfall by moonlight,  
dropping lighter than a winter mist,  
or like snowfall whispering gently down  
through the untrodden starless night.

Somewhere out there a ship moves  
darker than the darkness  
in a sea as cold as iron.  
The halyards are ringing like lost voices,  
or sheepbells in the drifting mountain night.  
Shepherds or sailors on their lonely watch  
know darkness better, the shifting tides  
of wind and sand, the soul's cloudy places,  
the uncommon ground of everyone's night.  
The territory of speech is uncharted silence,  
runs like a darkness underground,  
falls between the notes of the shepherd's flute,  
in the bare troughs between waves,  
between the lines of the traveller's letter home.  
Unwritten shadows of another life.

From my small window  
hope might be the last illusion.  
Life's daily erosions wear down at last  
to some natural music.

I am at ease with the thin silver tones  
of water threading the darkness,

and am alone where the morning refreshes the eye

in a long line between the sea and the sky  
to where it ends on the rough stone of time.

And am in love with the transparent wave,  
the ever motional green waste

magnificent with life

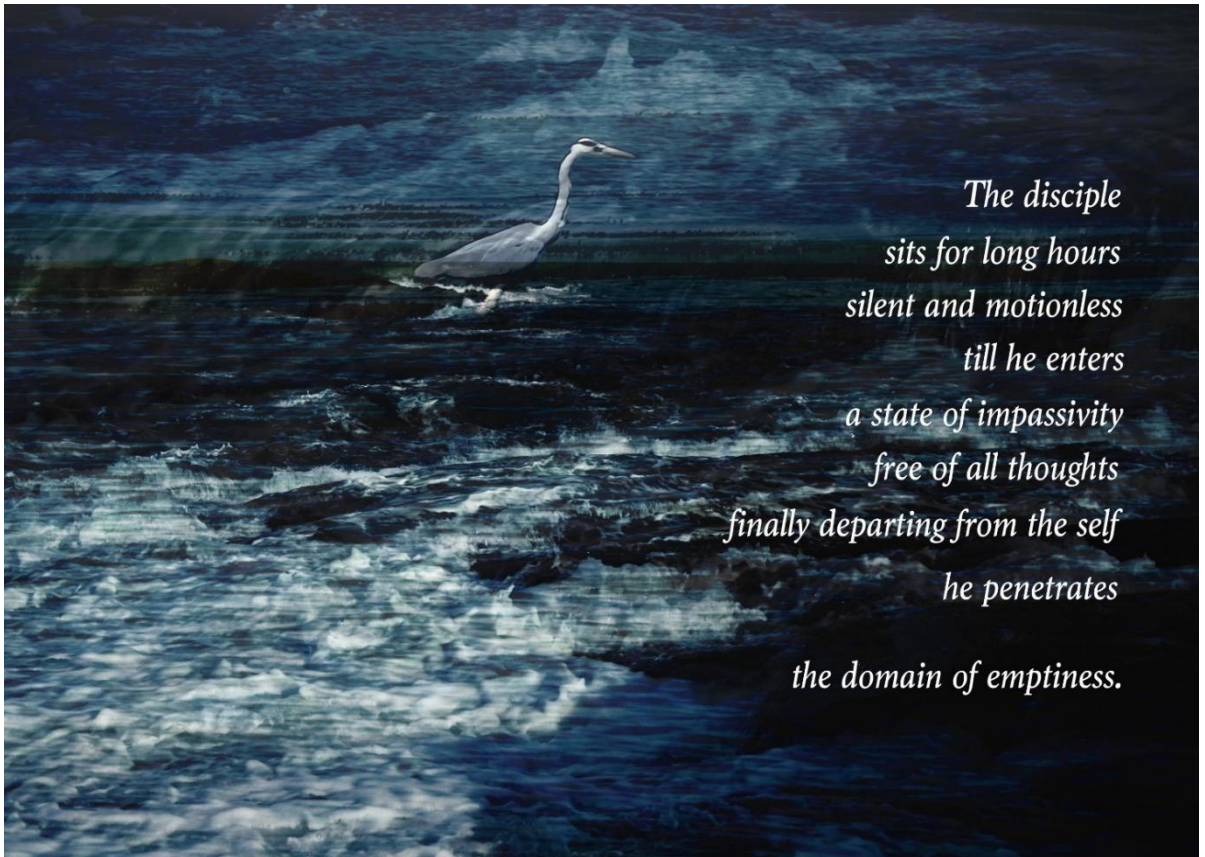
and the sun's new born reflected rose  
whose home is the unburnable light.

*Porlock Weir, Somerset, Winter 1980.*



Director: *Glenda Rome*

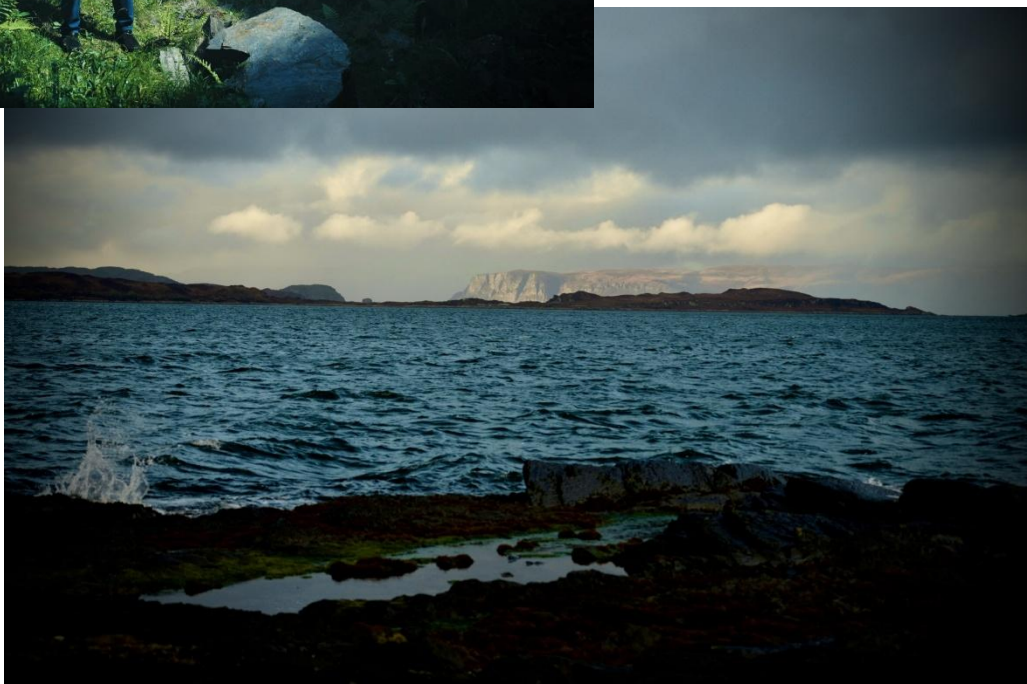
Producer: *Norman Bissell*



*The disciple  
sits for long hours  
silent and motionless  
till he enters  
a state of impassivity  
free of all thoughts  
finally departing from the self  
he penetrates  
the domain of emptiness.*

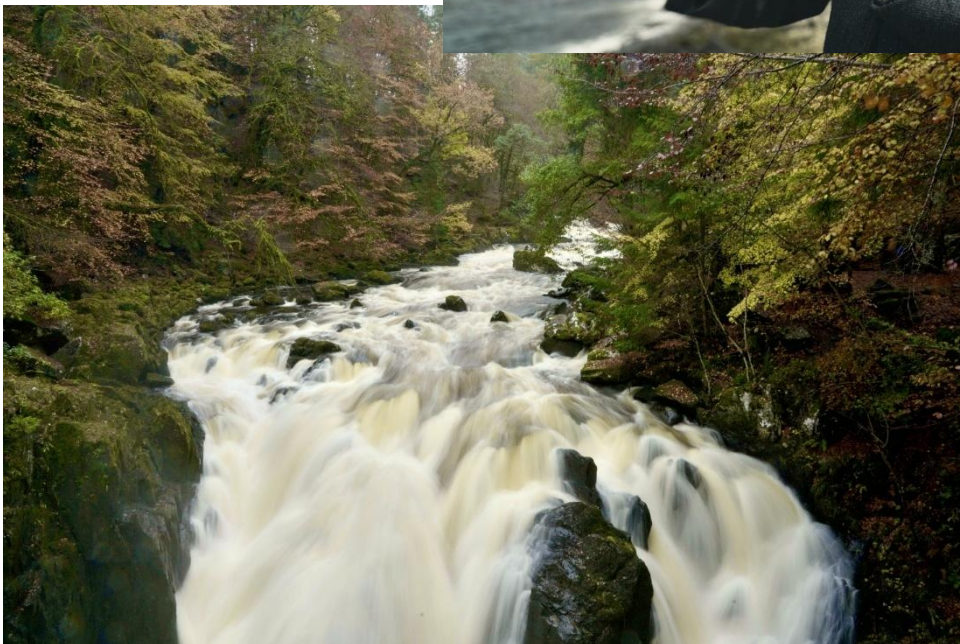


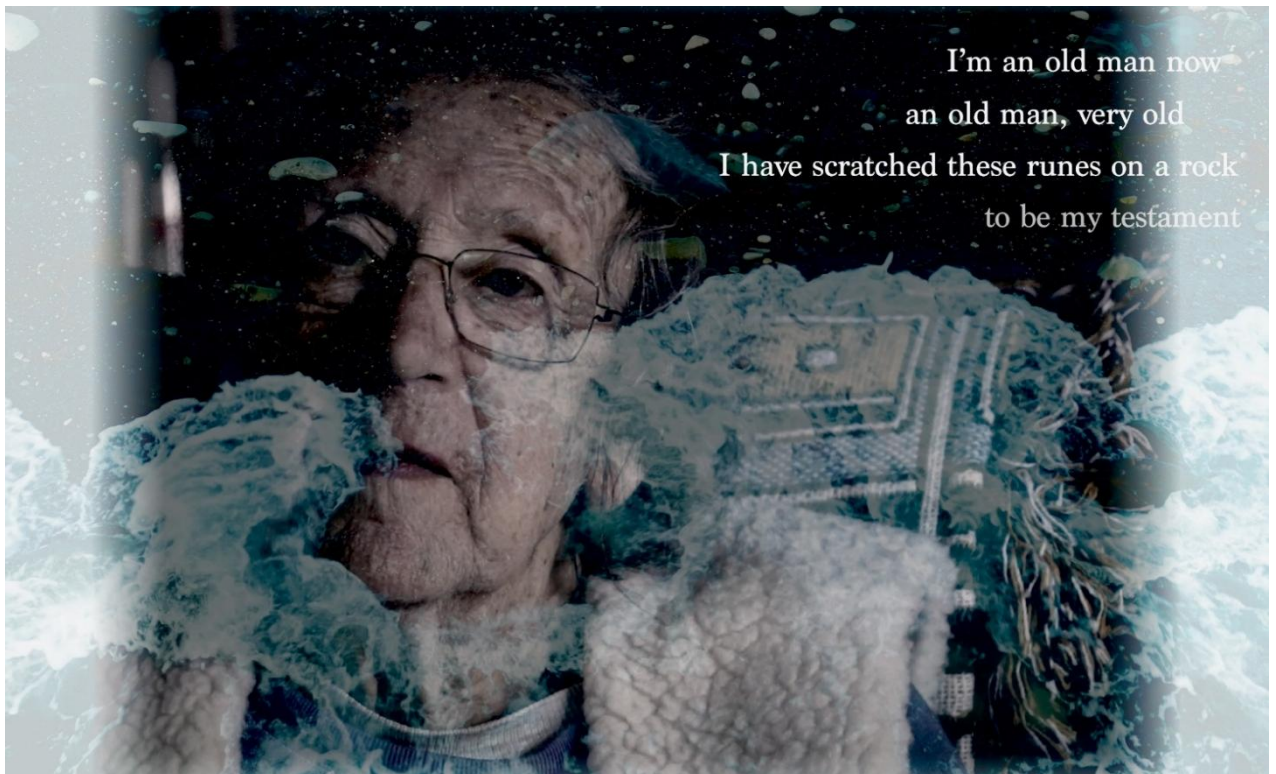
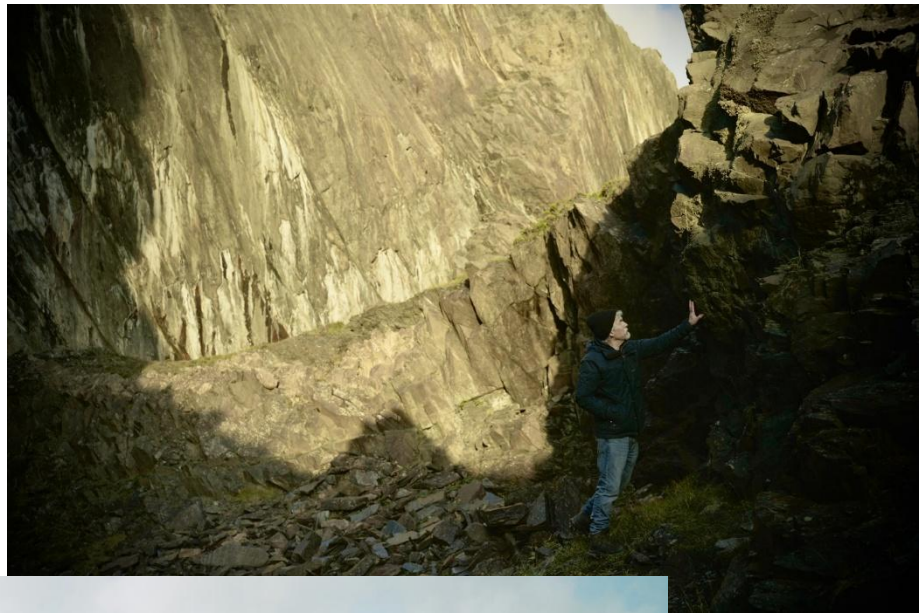
**BEST DIRECTOR,  
STRATFORD ON AVON  
FILM FESTIVAL 2025**





**BEST FEATURE  
DOCUMENTARY, NEW  
RENAISSANCE FILM  
FESTIVAL 2025**





# - FIELD NOTES -

## Festival of Hope

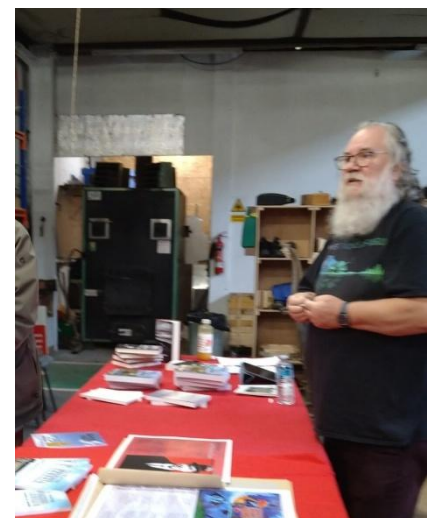
24<sup>th</sup> August 2025 – GalGael, Glasgow

The Festival of Hope was held at the GalGael Trust in Glasgow and organised by Scotland in Europe led by Helen Kyle to celebrate the legacy of Kenneth White and geopoetics and to bring hope to the tumultuous times we are living in. There were interesting presentations and discussions from Alastair McIntosh, environmental activist and author, and Norman Bissell, author and Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics. A short preview of the beautiful and inspiring film, *Expressing the Earth*, was shown followed by a conversation with Director Glenda Rome and Producer Norman Bissell. There were singers and workshops in the afternoon and a haiku workshop outdoors. The volunteers at GalGael provided a delicious homecooked lunch with great generosity of portions and flavours! For those visiting for the first time, the Unexpected Garden was a delight and surprise, lush with an abundance of herbs, flowers, vegetables...and people! A day of conversation, nourishment, comfort and community.

The GalGael Trust began in one of the most deprived areas of Glasgow where GalGael grew from an environmental campaign. They hold fast to their community roots where they began to build boats to encourage a sharing and exchange of skills and knowledge and a place for transformation, achieving their social, cultural and ecological aims with community involvement. They aim to provide a space that redefines notions of identity and belonging that is inclusive, 'recognising there is both a bit of the stranger and a bit of the native in us all'. [www.galgael.org](http://www.galgael.org)

*For the past 20 years our purpose has remained unchanged – to work together and demonstrate that more humanity is possible in the world. This is demanding graft, but for us, it is where hope is made possible. – The GalGael Trust*





Clockwise from T-L: Boatbuilding, Norrie Bissell and Glenda Rome discuss the film, *Expressing the Earth*; printmaking workshop; book sales with Joe Murray; nourishment from the GalGael kitchen; Helen Kyle, host of the day. Photo credit: Susan Bissell and Caroline Watson. Overleaf: Caroline Watson

## Haiku Walking Workshop – Festival of Hope, August 2025

*Eveline Pye*

sacred fire in Galgael  
sending smoke signals out  
to all of Govan

not quite a thistle  
seeming to invite touch  
a teasel

orange as sunrise  
hot pepper spice for the tongue  
nasturtiums

apples on dwarf trees  
our hands reach out to pluck  
low-hanging fruit

the cabbage white flies  
past bright green brassicas –  
companion planting

daisies of all sizes  
vying for supremacy -  
gone by late autumn



Clockwise from T-L: Woodworking, Haiku walk and workshop in the Unexpected Garden; Hope Possible window; attendees with N. Bissell, Director of Scottish Centre for Geopoetics; Visit from Kenneth White (1936-2023), former patron of GalGael. Photo credit: Susan Bissell and Caroline Watson



Photo credit: Susan Bissell

## **Spring - Field**

*Martin White*

The dry twig  
Three deer stare hard.  
Bobbing of white.

## **Slug**

*Hugh Salvesen*

On the wet road  
After the rain  
A black slug lies curled like a question



Photo credit: Unexpected Garden, Above, Caroline Watson; Below, GalGael Trust

## Seo teine naomh Ghobhainn Geopoetic

Katherine Buchanan

As I sat facing the yet to be lit pile of kindling in the place of the Sacred Fire, I was aware of the high rise building and the extraordinary contrast of the beautiful flowers around and about in the Unexpected Garden. The ones near me seemed extra alive in contrast to the building! And were flickering their red and orange petals in the wind. And we were all sitting there with hope and weaving into the space...

So I called my haiku "Seo teine naomh Ghobhainn Geopoetic".

High Rise  
Flickering Flames  
In the Flowers  
Starting

On my way out I took a photograph which captured something of what I was meaning.  
And then the following metamorphosed haiku came:

Geopoetic tongues  
Flickering patiently-  
Rising High



## **Festival of Hope - GalGael**

*Megan Hollingsworth*

Clingers like sweet pea  
require support to climb.  
The way, always lit.

(Dedicated to my teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh.)

April snow fools  
the first flower, a vision  
stolen at the gate.

## Festival of Hope

Krista Muir

Trust

With bow and arrow

Aim and pin doubt to the wall

Let it vanish there

GalGael

Flint and steel unite

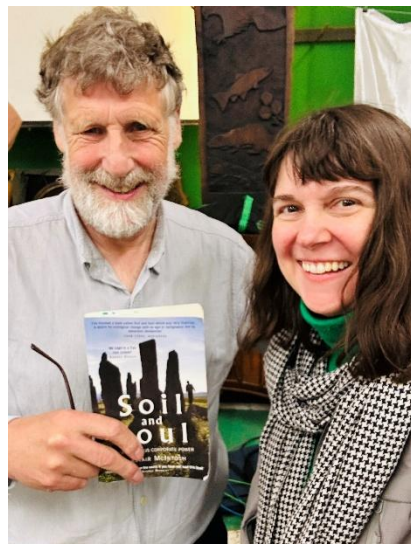
Sparks turn strangers into friends

Ideas flicker

### How I Came to Join In!

The story of how I came to be at the Festival of *Hope* - indeed! In need! It springs eternal! - is serendipitous. Born and raised in Kingston, Ontario but of Scottish heritage (Aberdeenshire? Still delving into my family's emigration journey), an art therapist friend of mine told me just over a year ago "you need to read this book" - *Soil and Soul*. I dove in and re-dove as time permitted and *zap* I found myself flying to the UK from Canada/Turtle Island this past July for a music mastering mentorship in the Wirral. After it wrapped up I ventured to Scotland for a few days to see friends at Fringe By The Sea and the Edinburgh Fringe. My first stop was Glasgow by train (something was pulling me there) and on a whim en route searched to see if Alastair McIntosh was doing any readings/events. I was arriving the day of *Festival of Hope* (imagine!). While I missed Alastair's talk (gutted! But then resewn), I arrived just before the screening of *Expressing the Earth*, Director Glenda Rome, and was delighted to find a warm and welcoming community and incredible interconnectivity - other Canadians there? Glenda's friend Jo has friends from my hometown she hosted while they were in Scotland. There's much more to dive into but I must be off to visit my sweet parents so I'll leave it here: Thank you, thank you for creating and maintaining such a place. It's been a long time since I've felt so incredibly nourished, from the mind, to the heart, to the gut (still raving to friends about the delicious food on offer) and of course - the spirit. One thing's for certain, in this uncertain world, I felt absolutely at home in your company.

Till next we meet,  
Krista





*Entry Point to Lushness, Krista Muir*

## **Festival of Hope at GalGael**

*Karunajaya Sally Watson*

Submarine on loch  
Trailing sequined shafts of light  
Smiling monk watching

St Molaise's cave  
Ancient place of protection  
Tara guarding rocks

Golden red light on water  
Bathing world in peace and love  
Continual unfolding

## Hopeful Haiku

*Norman Bissell*

lasagne, pork stew  
charred tatties  
a gentle voice

silvery logs  
in solid piles —  
the unexpected garden

multi-storey balconies  
leaves reflected in windows  
wind rush

stone cobbled circle  
a rusted brazier  
the tree alphabet

## We Live in Hope

*Norman Bissell*

Kenneth White died on Monday 11 August 2023, on Hugh MacDiarmid's birthday, as it happens. There is much to celebrate in his life and work as a poet, author and teacher. He was born at 353 Florence Street in Gorbals on 28 April 1936 and grew up in Fairlie on the Ayrshire coast but spent most of his life in France and travelled all over the world. He was forever reading and writing books, but perhaps his most important and enduring legacy to us was to emphasise humanity's crucial relationship with the Earth, with the planet in all its forms and the creatures who live on it. And to urge us to express the Earth creatively in a whole variety of ways and media. He gave a name to what humans had been doing for thousands of years from the earliest cave paintings, through the oral traditions of song and words, to the Romantic and Modernist poets and beyond. He synthesised and developed what had gone before and called it geopoetics.

With his wife, the photographer and translator Marie-Claude, and others, he founded the International Institute of Geopoetics in Paris in 1989 which continues to this day and has groups and members all over the world including the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics which was set up in Edinburgh on Burns Night in 1995. But what is geopoetics? Kenneth White gave many lectures and wrote many books about it. From these and others' essays I summarised it in my book *Living on an Island Expressing the Earth* as:

- ∞ putting the Earth at the centre of our experience: rediscovering the Earth and opening a world.
- ∞ caring about the Earth and acting to conserve it and all its life forms.
- ∞ developing a heightened awareness of the Earth of which we are part.
- ∞ practising a way of perceiving the world, a way of being in the world, as well as a world outlook.
- ∞ seeking a new or renewed sense of the Earth, a sense of space, light and energy which is experienced both intellectually, by developing our knowledge, and sensitively, using all our senses to become attuned to the world.
- ∞ requiring both study and a certain amount of de-conditioning of our selves by working on the body-mind e.g. by meditation, yoga and walking - to become more mindful, more attuned and more open to the world around us.
- ∞ seeking to overcome the separation of mind and body and of human beings from the more than human world.

- ∞ learning from others who have attempted to leave 'the Motorway of Western civilisation', as Kenneth White called it, to find a new approach to thinking and living. For example, 'intellectual nomads' or 'outgoers', who approached the world in creative ways like:
  - the German explorer and scientist Alexander von Humboldt
  - the American writer Henry Thoreau
  - the conservationist and writer John Muir
  - the Scottish polymath Patrick Geddes
  - the American writer and environmentalist Rachel Carson
  - the English artist who lived in Scotland Joan Eardley
  - the Scottish writer Nan Shepherd
  - the Scottish writer and community activist Katharine Stewart
  - the poet and thinker Kenneth White
  - and many others.
- ∞ creatively expressing the Earth in a variety of ways e.g. oral expression, storytelling, poetry and prose, the visual arts including film making, music, geology, botany, geography, ornithology and other sciences, philosophy, and combinations and collaborations of art forms and of the arts, sciences and thinking.
- ∞ developing a trans-disciplinary movement, a network of individuals organised in Geopoetics Centres with a common concern about the planet and a shared project to develop our understanding of geopoetics and apply it in different fields of research and creative work. As well as Scotland, there are Centres in Quebec in Canada, Chile, Brazil, Belgium, Poland, Serbia, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, La Réunion, New Caledonia, Bora Bora, Lamu Island and in different parts of France. Geopoetics Appalachia in USA was formed in 2018 and networks in England and Wales as part of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics began in 2022.
- ∞ opening up the possibility of radical cultural renewal for us all as individuals and for society as a whole.

The death of Kenneth White and that of Marie-Claude in March this year mark the end of an era for geopoetics. They have passed on the geopoetics baton to younger generations to run with it. I'm convinced that Geopoetics is a big idea whose time has come and there has never been a greater need for it. But how do we take geopoetics forward in the years to come?

1. We deepen our understanding of geopoetics by reading more widely and applying that wider and deeper knowledge to what we say, write and do.
2. We read the *Collected Works of Kenneth White* and his other books like *Coast to Coast Interviews and Conversations* and *The Tribal Dharma*, but not uncritically.
3. We read work by others like Gary Snyder, Rachel Carson, Iain McGilchrist, Mary Oliver, Alan Spence, Joanna Macey, David Beatty, Rebecca Solnit, Dōgen Zenji and Charlotte Joko Beck. Many of them have been Buddhists or influenced by Zen Buddhism.

4. We carry out research into geopoetics at the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics on the Isle of Luing in Argyll, which has an unrivalled library of books, papers and tapes related to it, and at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh which holds the papers in English of Kenneth White and Tony McManus.
5. We seek to develop closer links with the International Institute of Geopoetics and groups like La Traversée in Quebec, Canada to learn from their approaches to geopoetics and to share ours.
6. We approach others working in this field with whom we might collaborate such as *Resurgence & Ecologist* magazine, and be open to working with others who express an interest in geopoetics.
7. We become more sensitive to the world of which we are part by using all our senses. We walk, we meditate, we take it all in, we make notes, we write, we paint, we make music, we apply geopoetics as a way of living our daily lives. In our *Expressing the Earth* documentary film, Claire Pençack says of the poetry of Kenneth White, 'for me it offers a life way, I suppose, different life ways... if we express ourselves differently then maybe we act and dwell differently... it's not a single pathway towards some sort of hopeful future, hopefully it is a pathway towards it, but it's not the only way.'
8. We take our *Expressing the Earth* film to a wide range of audiences to indicate to them what geopoetics offers and to inspire younger generations to get involved in practising it. It's a beautifully shot film, edited and directed by Glenda Rome who won Best Director at the 2025 Stratford on Avon Film Festival out of 250 films submitted and 40 selected. Its world premiere took place at the *Sea Change* Film Festival on the Isle of Tiree on 20 September 2025 and it won Best Documentary Feature Film at the *New Renaissance* Film Festival and was selected for the *Docuworld* Film Festival, both in London. A programme of further screenings is being planned.
9. We continue to develop a more collective leadership within the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and elect a new Director or Co-Directors. After our AGM in April 2025 we set up a Succession Planning Sub-group of our Council which has met and discussed the need for a Secretary and Events Organiser as well as a Diversity and Inclusion Officer. We have appealed for volunteer members to come forward to take on these roles.
10. This could mean a return to the more collective approach of the Open World Poetics group I set up in Glasgow in 1989 which involved a variety of speakers on topics like Taoism, Red versus Green, Patrick Geddes, Gender and Nature, Henry Thoreau and Chinese Poetry.

The world is in a wretched state as we can see from the Zionist genocide in Gaza, Putin's invasion of Ukraine, Trump's attempted dictatorship in USA, Starmer's support for Israel and the rise in anti-immigrant racism in Britain, and conflict in other parts of the world. Worldwide surveillance capitalism breeds wars, poverty, starvation and death, and it is destroying the planet and many of its species through global warming and its pollution of rivers and seas in its pursuit of greed. Faced with all this what can we do?

We can take a leaf out of Patrick Geddes's book and think globally but act locally. Begin from where we live, and work with others to try to make a difference. Would that mean geopoetics becoming more politically involved? That will be up to our members and those who lead it in the future. One thing's for sure, we need hope to inspire and sustain us, and geopoetics is one of the vital ways of giving us hope. It's not just a concept or a good idea, it's a way of living our lives to be more sensitive to the world we live in, using all our senses to become more aware of it, and of expressing our love of it in whatever way we choose. Kenneth White changed my life when I attended the Jargon Group he set up in the 1960s and I became aware of all kinds of ideas he introduced me to. I became an active socialist and later began to write my own poems and books. In my experience, political activists can often become burnt out by their all consuming activity and I think that one of the things that geopoetics offers environmental activists and others is not only hope but a vision of what life is and can be like, and a joyful practice of living which can sustain them.

We have recently gained new members of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics in the Furneaux Islands, to which the indigenous people of Takayna were cleared by white settlers, and in the Lamu archipelago off Kenya. Their and others' poems, art and prose from many parts of the world feature in *Stravaig* which now comes out twice a year. If you share our vision and feel that you'd like to continue Kenneth White's legacy, I hope you'll consider joining the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics. If you do, I'm sure you'll find it a welcoming and nourishing place and a friendly group of people to get to know.

The many members who attended the Festival of Hope at the GalGael Trust in the Govan area of Glasgow in August found it a very nourishing experience. From the skills of boatbuilders and sculptors on display to the delights of the herbs and flowers being grown in the Unexpected Garden and the warm welcome we received from the volunteers who provided us with a plentiful supply of delicious meals, it was an inspiring day.

The acclaimed author Alan Spence, who grew up in Govan and has written about his early life there, addressed the Scottish Parliament during its Time for Reflection session in 2016 when he was the Edinburgh Makar. He spoke about how we all need hope in today's world and ended with the words 'We live in hope'. I would like to echo his words: We live in hope.

## Letting Us Into New Gratitude

*John Hegley*

O.K. so there are notters  
many otters  
as we thought there might be  
but there is community  
and coastline  
to outline and sing

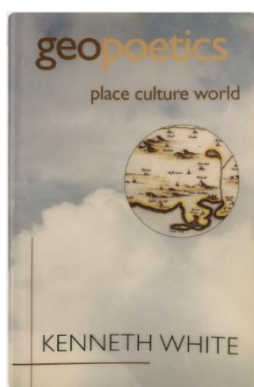
and there's the hare that was haring away  
and the herds to be heard  
in their brown  
further down  
from the fleeces of flocks

and then back at the slack  
and the slap of the incoming sea  
along with the song  
of the overheard bird  
there's the great and grey number  
of pieces of unrivalled slate  
you may skimmingly underarm fling

and there's bringing  
the new morning's news  
of the views  
from high up on the rocks  
from the one who was first out of bed  
and there's the honesty box  
in the Cullipool cupboard  
for shortbread

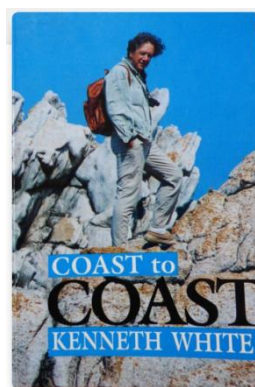


## ALBA Editions



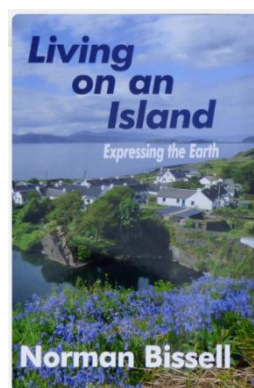
### Geopoetics – place culture world

In this booklet, Kenneth White presents in succinct form the concept he developed over 30 years. Non-fiction. £6.00



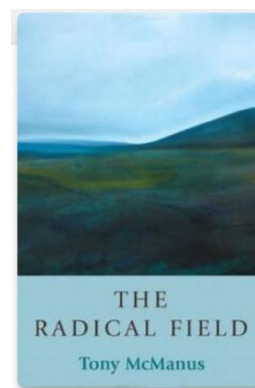
### Coast to Coast

Twelve interviews and conversations with Kenneth White, 1960 – 1990, with an introduction by Norman Bissell. Non-fiction. £7.95



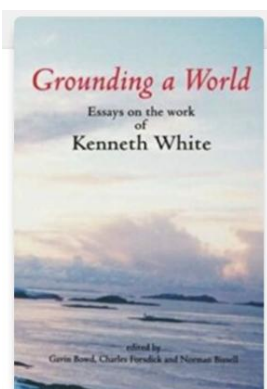
### Living on an Island – Expressing the Earth

A memoir about leaving Glasgow to live on the Isle of Luing, and an account of the growth of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and of those writers, artists and scientists who have contributed to it. Non-fiction. £9.99



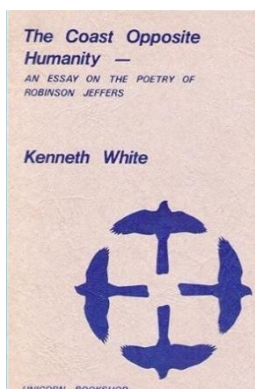
### The Radical Field

A breakthrough analysis of geopoetics and the work of Kenneth White. Non-fiction. £8.99

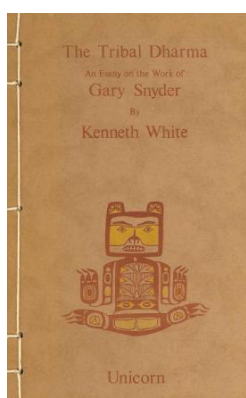


### Grounding a World: Essays on the Work of Kenneth White

Sixteen essays on the work of Kenneth White, edited by Gvin Bowd, Charles Forsdick and Norman Bissell. Essays. £9.95  
Or free with a membership to Scottish Centre for Geopoetics



**The Coast Opposite Humanity**  
An essay on the poetry of Robinson Jeffers by Kenneth White  
A rare first edition published in 1975. £10.00



### The Tribal Dharma – An Essay on the Work of Gary Snyder by Kenneth White

A rare first edition published in 1975. £10.00

All books are available to order online from the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics.

[Shop – Scottish Centre for Geopoetics](http://shop.scotgeo.org.uk)  
or email [info@geopoetics.org.uk](mailto:info@geopoetics.org.uk)





## 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, Netherlands, Ireland, Australia, Wales and England as well as throughout Scotland.

Further information is available from [info@geopoetics.org.uk](mailto:info@geopoetics.org.uk) and at [www.geopoetics.org.uk](http://www.geopoetics.org.uk).

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

- a free copy of *Geopoetics: place, culture, world* by Kenneth White rrp £6.00.
- 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 concessions, 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

**Andy Abraham** is a Canadian geologist, photographer, writer, and poet who is passionate about earth science, the environment and creating new avenues to explore our connection with nature. For him, photography is an extension of his never-ending interest in the natural world. Through his art and writing he hopes to create greater awareness for protecting biodiversity and nature, and highlighting local and global environmental and social issues. He was one of the contributors to Earth-Lines in 2020 <https://www.edinburghgeolsoc.org/earth-lines/#toggle-id-2> and presented his poem Zircon as part of the European Geosciences Union General Assembly 2020 Geopoetry Slam. His unique Lithoface portraits are highlighted in Spectaculum Magazine <https://spectaculum-magazine.com/2023/04/30/lithofaces/> ). One of his ICM images was featured in the Spring Issue (2024) of Humana Obscura: <https://www.humanaobscura.com/issue-8> and two of Andy's images were included in Humana Obscura's recently published (2025) first anthology Blue". <https://www.humanaobscura.com/blue-anthology> @artisticrocktextures

**Illias Baker** was born and raised in Lanarkshire, Scotland and was educated at Strathclyde, Aberdeen and Edinburgh universities. He now lives in Nonthaburi, Thailand where he is a retired university lecturer. His poetry collection Peace Be Upon Us was published by Lote Tree Press, Cambridge, UK at the end of 2022. His poems have appeared widely in poetry anthologies and journals and are always about essential things.

**David Beatty** is a photographer, writer and mindfulness teacher who lives in Kenya, his adopted home. Born in UK his photographic work in Africa and Asia included stories on threats to indigenous communities posed by large development projects. In 2020 he published *The Island, A Mirror for the Soul*, a memoir, part travelogue, and part critique of modernity, based on diaries he kept during a retreat on a Buddhist hermitage island in Sri Lanka in 1981. He has established a Geopoetics Centre in Lamu, where he now lives, an island off the East Coast of Kenya known for its unique Swahili culture and Indian Ocean connections. A collection of his poems will be published soon. He ruminates occasionally on substack: <https://deepractice.substack.com>

**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 via Culture Heritage Arts Assembly Argyll & Isles (CHARTS). <https://www.normanbissell.com>.

**Susan Bissell** has attended geopoetics events over many years, including Kenneth White ones, and has taken photographs and sold books at them. At the recent Festival of Hope in Glasgow she again sold books, recruited members and took a series of photographs many of which were selected for publication here. She lives in East Kilbride and has given long-standing support to her father Norman Bissell throughout his work as an author and Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics.

**Gavin Bowd** is a poet, novelist, literary translator and academic. He has published widely on Kenneth White and Geopoetics.

**Mel Brimfield** was delighted to visit the island of Luing in 2025 and to stay in the Geopoetics Centre with her husband. The coastline of Mull, visible from the slated beach, is one she now conjures in her London home as a calming influence in a hectic Metropolitan existence. Mel is not usually one

for drawing animals, but she has depicted one of the island species, to further cement the memory of their happy stay and explorations.

**Katherine Buchanan** is a freelance evolutionary biologist researcher, ecologist, and storyteller interested in how we relate to Nature. She combines her interest in the arts and natural science through research and teaching approaches that owe much to Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). She is tutor and mentor on a Part-time Professional Training in Natural Science (in Scotland and Switzerland); an introduction to biodynamic horticulture (at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh) and teaches an *artistic-scientific-phenomenological* approach to schoolteachers in training (a new approach to science teaching and pedagogy). She facilitates related short courses open to all in Scotland and elsewhere.

**Rebecca Clifford** lives in rural Southern Ontario. She enjoys playing with form, word painting, creating new words, resurrecting archaic ones, responding ekphrastically to the work of others and, along with life's flotsam and jetsam, incorporating it into her work. Her work has appeared in national and international journals, newspapers, and e-zines. She is supported in these endeavours by her partner and a disdainful cat of questionable parentage. This work was first published in Merion West magazine (USA). As a sidebar, her father is a geologist. Every paperweight, every doorstep in the house is a rock. His PhD (Imperial College, London) was based on his work in Scotland.

**George Colkitto** lives in Paisley. An ex- Inspector of Taxes, Chartered Accountant, and Bookshop owner, he has had poetry in numerous UK magazines and anthologies. In addition to the UK, his work has been published in USA, Ireland, Columbia, Mexico and Peru. Successful in many competitions, his most recent successes are joint winner of Cinnamon Press Poetry Pamphlet Competition 2023 and 2025.

**Mark Gallacher** was born and raised in the Girvan, in Ayrshire, Scotland. His short stories and poetry are published in many literary magazines and anthologies in Canada, Denmark, the UK, and the USA. His short stories have been longlisted and shortlisted for the renowned Fish Short Story Prize, and the Retreat West Prize. His speculative short fiction was shortlisted for the *Cymera Prize for Speculative Short Fiction* in 2023, and again in 2025, placed Highly Recommended. His novel, 'Saved From The Fire' was published by Scottish publisher Ringwood Publishing. He won the *Wigtown Poetry Prize Runner-Up* award in 2021. He is married with two sons and lives in Denmark.

**Martin Goldie** lives in Argyll. His poems have been widely published in the UK and abroad, including The Poets Republic, The Candyman's Trumpet, Soor Ploom Press, the Scottish National Football Poetry collection, Dreich and the Morning Star. His poem 'Awful Confusion' was shortlisted for the Janet Coats Memorial prize in 2023. His poem 'Moss Dresit Black Hooses' was Highly Commended in the James McCash Scots Language Poetry Competition in 2024. His collection 'Unshackled' and a pamphlet 'A Kist of Treasure' were published by Seahorse Publications. He is currently working on a collection of poems to be published by Drunk Muse Press in 2026.

**John Hegley** was born in North London to whose environs he has returned, after education in Luton, Bristol and Bradford, Yorkshire. He has for many years been involved in the creation of songs, poems, books, radio programmes, festival performances and cardboard animals. A former BBC on-line poet and poet in residence at Keats House, he was one of the guest performers at a women's prison, in Medellin, Columbia, he was nominated for the Edinburgh Fringe Perrier Award and described in The Independent as 'awesomely mundane'.

**Megan Hollingsworth**, MS, is a writer with an interdisciplinary education in applied health science and environmental studies. Influenced by her Quaker upbringing and Engaged Buddhism, Meg initiated the creative spiritual practice Extinction Witness in 2012 to express and support grief associated with anthropogenic species extinction and genocide. Her writing has been published in online journals and print anthologies. She is the author of *Frog Song* (October 2023) and is currently an East West Psychology doctoral student at California Institute of Integral Studies. Meg enjoys playing haiku on purpose and lives in Montana with her son. [www.meganhollingsworth.com](http://www.meganhollingsworth.com)

**Axel O. Karamercan** was born in Izmir, Turkey, in 1988, is a Turkish-French philosopher, poet, and translator. He completed his PhD at the University of Tasmania in 2018, working with Jeff Malpas on Heidegger's topology of language and dwelling. Deeply influenced by the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Kenneth White, he is the author of *Denizsiz Günlerin Dili* (*Language of the Days Without the Sea*), where he reflects in his native language on the disappearing geopoetics of the Aegean Sea. He is affiliated with the University of Edinburgh, working in comparative philosophy, and will visit Kwansei Gakuin University in Japan in 2026.

**Dr Ullrich Kockel** is Professor of Creative Ethnology at the Institute of Northern Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands, Professor Emeritus in the School of Social Sciences at Heriot-Watt University, a Visiting Professor of European Ethnology at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Emeritus Professor of Ethnology, University of Ulster and former Editor-in-Chief, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*. His overarching research interest is sustainable local/regional development, especially the appraisal, planning and management of cultural resources, approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. In 2017 he was elected as a Council member of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and to the editorial group of *Stravaig*.

**Robin Leiper** is a psychologist and psychotherapist living between Galloway and Glasgow. His poetry has been published in various magazines and anthologies in Scotland and South Africa. He won the Seahorse pamphlet competition of 2022 and the Wigtown Festival Fresh Voice award of 2023.

**Philomena Manifold** is an artist, geologist, and science communicator whose work explores the hidden stories of landscapes. She is the author and illustrator of *Written in Stone: Reading the Rocks of the Great Ocean Road*, a book that combines geology, art, and storytelling to reveal deep time in accessible and beautiful ways. Philomena translates complex natural histories into lyrical and visually engaging forms such as maps, books, and public works through drawing, photography, printmaking, painting, and writing. Her creative practice reveals geology as intimate and alive, inviting people to encounter the earth as science, art, wonder, and story.

**A J Marshall** is a PhD candidate in multidisciplinary Volcanology, straddling the line between (in)human geographies and geologies. With a background in creative writing, feminist studies, and geology, AJ Marshall is working to create a poetry portfolio, and collaborate with Māori artists, to provide alternative understanding of volcanic processes informed by scientific research.

**Carol McKay** writes poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction which have been published widely for over 25 years. Awards include the Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship. <https://carolmckay.co.uk>

**Eveline Pye** is a retired university lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics. She also taught Research Methods to undergraduates in Environmental Science. Her first poetry collection, *Smoke That Thunders*, Mariscat Press (2015), explored her experiences in the Zambian Mining Industry. Her

second pamphlet, *STEAM*, was a collection of STEM poems published by Red Squirrel (2022). Her latest publication, *Reaching the Light*, explores a fractured childhood, Seahorse Publications (2024).

**Philippa Ramsden** has combined a career in international development with a compulsion to write. She is fascinated by everyday moments, striving to capture these in poetry, narrative non-fiction, short story and memoir. Life and work in Nepal, Mongolia, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Rwanda over nearly two decades continues to provide memories and inspiration. She returned to Scotland in 2017 somewhat adrift and has now settled in East Lothian, writing and gently unfurling. Her writing has appeared in publications, including by Open Book Reading, Hedgehog Poetry Press, Dreich, The Hoolet's Nook, Snapdragon, Black Nore Review and Tyne & Esk Writers.

**Hugh Salvesen** has been a member of The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics since 2023. He lives in Edinburgh, recovering from a career in the British Diplomatic Service, and now enjoys working as a tourist guide.

**Ruth Reid** is a poet based in Kintyre, Scotland, who brings a depth of lived experience to her poetry. She is interested in myth, memory, and impermanence, Scottish folklore, history, and the shifting landscapes of both place and identity. Her work is both rooted in the past and attuned to contemporary questions of displacement, justice, and cultural change, interrogating how stories, both inherited and forgotten, continue to shape the present.

**Glenda Rome** is a filmmaker from rural Dumfries. She moved to Edinburgh at 18 to study photography and film, graduating in 1999. Since then, she has worked as a freelance cinematographer and editor on a wide range of projects — from short dramas and documentaries to music videos and films exploring environmental and social justice themes. Her work often focuses on giving a voice to those who are underrepresented, with a strong emphasis on nature, the environment, and poetic visual storytelling. *Expressing The Earth* marks her debut as a feature director.

**Hugh Salvesen** has been a member of The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics since 2023. He lives in Edinburgh, recovering from a career in the British Diplomatic Service, and now enjoys working as a tourist guide.

**Caroline Schofield** is an artist interested in places, land, nature, well-being and healing. She is currently moving towards a sustainable arts practice predominantly using plants and earth pigment found and grown locally. Using these pigments changes the way she paints. She feels called to give the materials more space to speak for themselves and have their own creative agency. Caroline's work involves spending long period outdoors and building a relationship with specific places and people in north Wales where she currently lives, and the places she travels to on western edges of the UK and Eire. Her training as an eco-therapist and her concerns about environmental degradation are woven into her work. She is aware of how her neurodivergent mind has a strong connection to the 'more than human' world. Earth pigments are a pathway which connects her to place, specifically those of her genetic and ancestral Brythonic origins in northwest England and North Wales. She also takes inspiration from time spent in Scotland and Eire.

**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 Janani 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>

**Leath Tonino** from 9,000 feet in the Elk Mountains of Colorado, USA. His poem *A Ledge's Treasure* was written in the slickrock desert of Utah, deep in the backcountry. Leath Tonino is the author of two essay collections, *The Animal One Thousand Miles Long* and *The West Will Swallow You*. A freelance writer, his prose and poetry appear in *Orion*, *Outside*, *National Geographic*, *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*, and dozens of other journals, magazines, and anthologies.

**Martin White** is President of the European Cultural Route *In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson*. He is currently studying Kenneth White's connections with Stevenson. He is an erstwhile professor at U of I.

**Caroline Watson** works from her studio in Paisley making drawings and mixed media works on paper about connection and attachment to place with a particular interest in urban green spaces. 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](http://www.carolinewatsonart.com) @carolinewatsonpaisley

**Karunajaya Sally Watson** lives in Helensburgh on the west coast of Scotland where she enjoys walking in the hills and being by the sea. She particularly loves sunsets over water. She teaches mindfulness, meditation and yoga and writes short stories, poems and haiku inspired by everyday life and the natural world. Her love of folklore, myth, and wisdom traditions led her many years ago to Buddhist practice, and in 2021 she was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order, receiving the name Karunajaya at ordination. She is an inveterate Scribbler and is glad to have found geopoetics!



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