

SCOTTISH CENTRE FOR GEPOETICS

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

Newsletter 16 May 2005

It may seem that we have been in hibernation recently but our busy preparations over the winter are now bearing fruit with our publication of *Grounding a World. Essays on the work of Kenneth White*, our Islands Weekend in May, Book Fair Event, Falkland estate visit in June and a Geopoetics Weekend Course at Edinburgh University in November. We hope these will be of interest to you and that some initial members' profiles/letters will encourage more.

***Grounding a World. Essays on the work of Kenneth White* edited by Gavin Bowd, Charles Forsdick and Norman Bissell.**

After its successful launch at the National Library of Scotland on 22 April, the Glasgow launch will take place on **Tuesday 17 May at 6pm in Hillhead Library 348 Byres Road Glasgow.**

Refreshments will be served. **RSVP if you are coming to 0141 959 6033.**

If you wish to order a copy of the book send a cheque for £9.95 including p&p made out to Alba Editions, Graham Urquhart at the address below.

Our Islands Weekend 6-8 May 2005 on the Isle of Luing is fully subscribed with 28 attending. The event is attracting great interest on the island and participation by islanders. It is intended that a special issue of *island* magazine will result from

the talks, discussions, walking, writing, artwork etc.

Visit to Falkland Estate, Fife on Saturday 18 June 2005. If you wish to attend, contact Graham Urquhart or Norman Bissell.

Saturday 14 May 5.15pm at Assembly Rooms, George Street Edinburgh.

Word Power Books' 9th Independent Radical Book Fair includes a **discussion on *Grounding a World* and Geopoetics** hosted by Rachel Blow and Norman Bissell. All Welcome. See Events on <http://www.word-power.co.uk>.

A Weekend Course - Geopoetics - Place, Culture, World - will take place on 19th and 20th November 2005 at the Edinburgh University Office of Lifelong Learning. Enrolment from June: 0131 650 4400.

English Network for Geopoetics

Following a successful inaugural conference in Manchester in March in which Rachel Blow and Norman Bissell took part, an English Network for Geopoetics (ENG) has been set up. Contact Ian Prior 0121 447 8518 ianjprior@aol.com for details.

Nominations for Treasurer

We are very grateful to Richard Browne who has been our hard-working Treasurer since 2002 and who has decided to demit office from May 2005. Members are invited to nominate themselves for the post of Treasurer ASAP.

New Fras Publication just out

Kenneth White and the Awkward Squad by Hugh Learmont, a reply to the Scottish Review of Books' infamous review of Kenneth White's poetry and prose, £2 including p&p, cheques made out to John Herdman, from Fras Publications, Atholl Browse Bookshop by the Station, Blair Atholl, Perthshire PH18 5SG.

Best to buy now before it becomes a collectors' item!

Membership Profiles

As of the last AGM in Dunbar, we are seeking contributions on people's backgrounds and connection to Geopoetics. So, if you haven't already, please send a few lines...

Profile - JAMES MCCARTHY

After a career in professional conservation at home and abroad, early retirement in 1991 has given me the opportunity to indulge myself in other activities. Two of these have been travel and writing and I have tried to link these because of a life-long interest in exploration, especially that which Camilo Jose Cela described as 'vagabundage' or solitary wandering with no very particular purpose. This is not too dissimilar to the subject matter of

White's 'waybooks' which are closest to my own concerns. The solitary element is important because the interposition of companions inevitably reduces the opportunity of interacting with other environments and cultures. (I have a particular interest in the psychology and motivation of explorers, which forms an important sub-plot in my most recent book *Journey into Africa - The Life and Death of Keith Johnston - Scottish Cartographer and Explorer 1844-79*. (Whittles Publishing 2004)

Hardly surprising that among my writing heroes are Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert Cunninghame-Graham, John Buchan, Laurens Van der Post, Jonathan Raban, Bruce Chatwin, Antonin Artaud, Alastair Reid, and other travellers - all of these combine in different ways the necessary balance between contemplation and adventurous action. I have moved on from the factual analysis of environmental issues (specifically natural heritage) which was an essential requirement of a science-based organisation charged to advise government, to the more 'poetic' and aesthetic stimuli which our environment can provide for personal enrichment. Following this through, I hope that my next writing on an early 19th century slave narrative will be geopoetically informed by a 200-mile camel trek in the Sudanese Sahara early in 2005.

How I became interested in Geopoetics. GRAHAM URQUHART

I suppose I think of it as some kind of stop or nodal point on

some sort of web, path, journey, or way where connections and relationships become apparent.

First encounter with Kenneth White was at Edinburgh International Book Festival in early 1990's (?) after Mainstream had published *Travels in the Drifting Dawn*. Enjoyed his reading immensely – the energy, enthusiasm, erudition and imitations of gulls! Most of the cultural references went over my head ... Duns Scotus? At the time, was heavily immersed in Sartre, Camus, Beckett, the Beats etc. Gave *The Bird Path* to a friend from Galicia. Received some Galician bagpipe music in return ... connections of the wider Celtic archipelago?

Various dabblings, readings and writings in philosophy, poetry, and literature ... perhaps not through conventional routes ... Rimbaud / Nietzsche through Patti Smith ... Thoreau through John Cage ... Joseph Beuys through George Wyllie.

Began to appreciate the 'geo'. As a confirmed city dweller began to enjoy modest walking excursions. Arrival of young son meant holidays in Scotland. Waterfalls, hills, trees and islands began to mean something. Began practicing Tai Chi about three years ago and reading Taoist texts ...

Perhaps most importantly, research into the social thought and urban interventions of Patrick Geddes ... emphasis of how the local and global are always connected ... how social processes and spatial form are related.

Keeping up with Kenneth White's published work (in English) at various EIBF readings ...

The key catalyst: picking up a leaflet at Kenneth White's latest reading on his visit to Edinburgh ... seeing Norrie Bissell's name and remembering a piece in *The Edinburgh Review* 'Geddes issue' on Open World poetics.

Filled in the form ... sent it off here I am.

Profile - BILL EDDIE

Bill was born and raised in Glasgow where, from an early age he developed a passion for birds and plants. After a period working in museums in Scotland and Canada he graduated in Botany from Aberdeen University and went on to do postgraduate research in plant systematics. Following a four-year teaching period in Papua New Guinea, he received his PhD at the University of Edinburgh for his work on the bluebell family Campanulaceae. This was followed by molecular research at the University of Texas in Austin. Disillusioned by current developments in science, Bill now concentrates on part-time teaching at the Office of Lifelong Learning (University of Edinburgh) where he runs courses on bird-watching, plantlife and wildlife in art. He is a keen birder but definitely needs to get out more. He is interested in a wide range of topics, mainly relating to the development of the arts and sciences, and struggles to indulge in bird-painting. His interest in geopoetics is relatively recent and was fostered by reading Kenneth White's *On Scottish Ground*. He is

receptive to White's ideas because of his strong commitment to world conservation, and the need, particularly in Scotland, to develop eco-literacy in adults and schoolchildren.

**Letter - KATHARINE STEWART
- author of *A Croft in the Hills*,
Mercat Press**

I've been to Kenneth White's lectures at the Edinburgh Book Festival since he first came several years ago and have so much enjoyed them all. I have copies of nearly all his books, most of them signed in his own original way! I'm so glad he's coming home more often now.

I'd love to [have] come to the walk on the John Muir Way, as Muir is another fellow-traveller whose work I have followed. I'm afraid distance prohibits.

Geopoetics – the earth speaking – that's what has transformed my whole life. I saw Kenneth on the television the other evening speaking about early Celtic poetry and I think he appreciates the work of Neil Gunn, as I do. I hope we may one day have him here to talk to us. He has Highland roots, I believe, through his mother.

That positive, happy outlook, being thrilled with our world, that's what we need.

Profile - MIKE ROMAN

I became interested in geopoetics through teaching English abroad and my passion for poetry and philosophy. Stints in Paris, Napoli, Istanbul, Dakar, Doha and more

recently Tripoli have inspired me to creative ends, most notably poetry, photography and prose. Since returning from Libya, I have engaged in a study of the city, helped by my love for city strolling and my penchant for Zen, and my increasing awareness that we tend to know places which lie further away from us better than those literally on our doorstep. My main studies at University were concentrated in languages and psychology and still are. At the moment I'm studying Russian and Japanese in an effort one day to enjoy the likes of Basho and Tarkovsky in their original format. Psychogeography is another area, connected to geopoetics, where I have written about extensively especially whilst stuck up the Persian Gulf in 2002 for the year preceding the invasion of Iraq. My work teaching abroad has enabled me to learn more of the world than I could have otherwise. It has also inspired me endlessly to be more creative and also in my slow coming understanding of nature and our place and relationship within it. Other areas of interest include cinema and cycling, though not at the same time, and rowing.

Profile – LESLEY MAY MILLER

I believe it was Tessa Ransford who told me about the geopoetics meetings in the National Library; so I went along. I am a visual artist working in several media. Until a year ago I lived in the Borders where I had a sculpture garden. Now by the sea, I imagine my work will be water related and on a smaller scale. I have recently made a start in botanical painting. I do write poetry

occasionally. My interest in travel led to a bicycle journey to India in the 80s. Seeing the world is

wonderful but even better is the people one meets along the way.

Subscriptions: New and Due

All annual subscriptions are now due unless paid since April 2004.

Please send your name, address, e-mail and phone numbers with a cheque for £10/£5 unwaged, payable to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics to either contact below.

Contacts:

Norman Bissell, director, 340 Lincoln Avenue Glasgow G13 3LP tel. 0141 959 6033 or at norman@rbissell.fsnet.co.uk

Graham Urquhart, secretary, 16 Main Street Limekilns Fife KY11 3HL tel. 01383 872907 or at gurquhart@madasafish.com.

Previous Newsletters and links can be found on the International Institute of Geopoetics website: www.geopoetique.net.

Please copy this Newsletter to those whom you think may be interested.