



In this extended summer edition you'll find news of Edinburgh International Book Festival events involving members of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, "*Landscape, Mindscape, Wordscape: a short introduction to Geopoetics*" by Kenneth White, and an extract from "*Wanders through Warsaw*" by Mike Roman which will soon be on our website:

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

### Edinburgh International Book Festival at Charlotte Square Gardens

**On Monday 11 August at 12 noon Jim McCarthy** will talk about his biography of Archibald Menzies, *Monkey Puzzle Man*, and his significance as one of Scotland's greatest plant hunters. He will be joined by Katherine Swift who will speak about how English gardens have changed over the centuries.



**On Monday 11 August at 5.30pm Alastair McIntosh** will give a free reading with other authors on the right to freedom of opinion and expression in the Amnesty International Imprisoned Writers Series and **at 7pm** will speak along with Michael Northcott about the need to end the cult of consumerism to address climate change as highlighted in his new book *Hell or High Water*.

**On Sunday 17 August at 5.30pm Norman Bissell** will give a free reading with other authors on the right to take part in the government of one's country in the Amnesty International Imprisoned Writers Series.

### On Monday 18 August at 10.15am

**Norman Bissell** will read poems from his collection *Slate, Sea and Sky, a Journey from Glasgow to the Isle of Luing* and will be joined by Gerry Loose who will speak about *Ten Seasons* which was inspired by his writer's residency at Glasgow's Botanic Gardens. Free coffee/pastries.

All events (except the free Amnesty International ones which are bookable on the day) cost £9/£7 concessions and can be booked at 0845 373 5888 or online at [www.edbookfest.co.uk](http://www.edbookfest.co.uk).



### Scottish Arts Council Inspire Fund

Unfortunately our recent application for development funding for our project Sensing the Elements from the Isle of Luing to the Port of Leith was unsuccessful. Only 13 proposals totalling over £3.7m out of 403 were accepted and we await more details and news of a further application round for the remaining £4.3m in September. Those successful included 'a site specific event combining the arts and extreme sports in Aberdeen, a 25ft high 'Big Man' walking through Scotland inspiring creativity among communities, and a performance by young Asian groups in Glasgow inspired by graphic novels and video games' (SAC News Release). Hi-Arts editorial verdict: 'At a time when confidence in the Arts Council has already taken a few dents, when arts funding is shrinking and the economic situation is very difficult, I suspect the announcement will have done little to inspire those working in the arts.'

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For previous Newsletters and links check out the International Institute of Geopoetics website: [www.geopoetique.net](http://www.geopoetique.net).

For all the latest news about the Scottish

Centre for Geopoetics go to

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

Please forward or copy this Newsletter

to others who may be interested.

## Courses and Centre Plans

Although this year's Edinburgh University summer term geopoetics course did not take place due to lack of numbers, we will be offering a residential and more experience-based summer course on the Isle of Luing from 4 to 11 July 2009.

The Isle of Luing Community Trust recently decided to develop its plans for a community café and exhibition building project on the engine shed site in Cullipool to create a more exciting and inspirational facility for the community and visitors, possibly also making use of other parcels of land owned by the Trust in Cullipool, and to progress these to planning consent. This would include space for the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics to provide a base for research and study purposes. Further information is available at [www.isleofluing.org](http://www.isleofluing.org).

## Websites

Please check out our website at [www.geopoetics.org.uk](http://www.geopoetics.org.uk) and register as a member to take part in our discussion forum. Your views on how to develop our work and encourage participation would be most welcome. As a member you are entitled to your own pages on our website, just send us details about yourself, your interests and how they relate to geopoetics.

Other relevant websites are:

[www.geopoetique.net](http://www.geopoetique.net)  
[www.kennethwhite.org](http://www.kennethwhite.org)  
[www.hi-arts.co.uk](http://www.hi-arts.co.uk)  
[www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)  
[www.morethanus.co.uk](http://www.morethanus.co.uk)  
[www.gerryloose.com](http://www.gerryloose.com)  
[www.textualities.net](http://www.textualities.net)  
[www.outoftheblue.org.uk](http://www.outoftheblue.org.uk)  
[www.seilnaturespaces.live.com](http://www.seilnaturespaces.live.com)

## Open an Island boxes and Books

These attractive boxes containing poems, photographs, artwork, songs, talks and information about the Isle of Luing have been sent out to those who took part in our 2007 Weekend there and to all residents. They have been favourably received by islanders and Scottish Natural Heritage who part funded them, and can now be purchased for £11 with free postage from Norman Bissell.

Also available with free postage from him:

***On the Atlantic Edge* by Kenneth White** at £6.95 comprises the three Hi-Arts International Fellowship lectures and a fourth on 'World Writing'.

***The Radical Field* by Tony McManus** at £7 is the most thorough analysis of the work of Kenneth White and geopoetics in English to date.

***Slate, Sea and Sky, a Journey from Glasgow to the Isle of Luing* by Norman Bissell with photographs by Oscar Marzaroli** at £11 is a first poetry collection which follows the author's life journey.

For these three books cheques should be made out to 'Norman Bissell'.

***Grounding a World. Essays on the work of Kenneth White* edited by Gavin Bowd, Charles Forsdick and Norman Bissell** at £8 contains comprehensive critical analyses of many aspects of White's work.

***Geopoetics: place, culture, world* by Kenneth White** at £5 provides a good introduction to the theory-practice of geopoetics.

For these two books cheques should be made out to 'Alba Editions'.



## Landscape, mindscape, wordscape

### *A short introduction to geopoetics* by Kenneth White

(Allocution for the reception of the Grinzane-Biamonti Prize at the Villa Nobel, San Remo, Italy, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008)

In this title and subtitle, around the term *landscape*, which is the key-word the pivot-word, I've added three neologisms of which I felt the need: mindscape (*paesagio mentale*), wordscape (*paesagio verbale*) and, gathering it all together, geopoetics (*geopoetica*). If I felt the need to invent these neologisms, it's because I think our relationship to the outer world has to be re-thought, re-grounded, re-expressed. At the moment, the only concept familiarly available is ecology, invented by the biologist Haeckel in 1866. I'm all for ecology. I think the basis of all education should be geography, ecology, and the movement from territory to territory presented in travel-writing, giving a sense of open world. But I don't think that ecology is an adequate term for the expansion of thought and culture necessary today. Even if we add to it adjectives such as « human », « spiritual » or « deep » (some of which lead to all kinds of aberrations), we still don't have an adequate language, a satisfying thought-process.

It's a very short approach to this huge theme that I felt it appropriate to present to you this afternoon.

That man is a gregarious, social animal is axiomatic. We need one another, we need society. But we also need something else – a relationship to the non-human. Every deep and lasting culture has always known this. In Amerindian culture, for example, every member of the social group, in this instance the tribe, was invited to leave the group at least once in his or

her life, and go out into the desert, up into the mountains, or deep into the forest. What took place there was a meditation on the forces and forms of nature. And the result of it was a larger sense of identity. The woman who was given a personal name at birth, in the tribe, took on another name, a cosmic name shall we say, something like: She who felt the rain in her face, She who met the north wind. And a poem would be composed – to maintain the memory of that experience. After it, a return would be made to the tribe, but with a larger being, which also made for better *social* living. If too much insistence is made on the exclusively social, the result is suffocation followed by violence.

For an example closer to us, and to talk Latin in place of Iroquois, take the significance in our territories of the *genius loci* (the spirit of place). The *genius loci* was based on a relationship to nature, a sensation of natural forces, more or less anthropomorphised, in a given territory. I'm thinking of all those altars raised in the area in which we're talking, dedicated to that Alpine wind, the Mistral, a meteorological force, magnified, mythified. The *genius loci* gave the individual an expanded sensation of living, the community a sense of dense and intense locality, and the territory a cosmic, cosmopoetic reference to the universe.

Over the centuries and the millennia, along what I call the highway, the *autostrada*, of civilisation, we have witnessed a progressive loss of this relationship to landscape. Already Heraclitus was saying that « man is estranged from what is closest to him ». Aristotle, in the *Physics*, speaks, interestingly, of place: « It is difficult to speak of place ... If place is a definite entity, it also has a strange power. » But he practically leaves it aside, because it didn't fit into the categories he was establishing, and which were to govern thought for centuries.

To look at the question from a political angle, and taking a specific Italian example. when Augustus, out to found the Roman empire, divided Italy, in his *Breviarium* to begin with, then *manu militari*, into eleven regions, not only did he change the status of the individual who, from

« native », the inhabitant of a territory, became a citizen, that is, subjected to regular military service and a centrally administered tax-system, he also changed the whole conception of space. What came about was a peripheralisation-provincialisation of ex-centric regions, a progressive political concentration on urban masses and the eradication (except of course in more or less fantastical folklore) of the *genius loci*.

The whole context becomes critical at the beginning of modernity, that is, with René Descartes. What Cartesianism brings about is a split between subject (*res cogitans*) and object (*res extensa*). In the course of modernity, the subject becomes more and more subjective, wrapped up in phantasms, ending up prostrate on the psychoanalytic couch. While the object, the outside environment, is more and more considered as simply raw material, raw space, to be exploited.

The first to react against this split, private individuals feeling they'd been deprived of all living relationship, indeed of a whole world, were those we call the Romantics. I'm thinking of Hölderlin who, in his *Hyperion*, says of his protagonist: « What you want is a world ». And of those English romantics such as Wordsworth, who tried to find a world in the Lake District of Northern England, or Shelley, author of that wildest of Romantic poems, the « Ode to the West Wind », who, as you know, lived here in Italy what were to be the last years of his life, drowning in the gulf of La Spezia in 1822.

This deep dissatisfaction with a split context and the desire to find a re-connexion become even more radical with those whom I call the intellectual nomads. Less sentimental, less moralistic, less pantheistic than most of the Romantics, they make an abrupt break with the *autostrada* of modern civilisation, follow erratic tracks, try to enter new territory and open up new space. I'm thinking of Nietzsche, who breaks with Germany, reaches out to heights of sensation and intelligence on the Engadine plateau in Switzerland, and writes much of his radical cultural analysis in Turin and Genoa. And of Rimbaud, one of whose most symbolical and significant passages was across the

St Gothard in the direction of Milan in the winter of 1878. In his desperate search for new (and ancient) ground, Rimbaud says that if he has a taste left for anything at all, it's for « earth and stones ». As for Nietzsche, one of his last phrases was: « Brothers, remain true to the Earth. »

All this is prelude to what I call geopoetics.

Where it began in my own immediate experience was a landscape, which I can't separate from a seascape, consisting of about twenty square miles, on the west coast of Scotland. I'd be about fourteen years old. I was at ease in the village, but felt it lacked something. So I'd spend days, and parts of nights, in the fields, woods, moors and rocky hills back of the village. I'd follow the tracks of animals, I'd sit with my back to a tree in a beech copse watching the evolutions of herons, I'd imitate the cries of land and sea birds, I'd walk across the emptiness of the moors accompanied only by the wind, feeling outside myself. To sum it up, what I experienced there was an enlarged sense of being, and I was looking for a language in which to express it. Without knowing it yet, I was getting back into a sensation of things that had been deep in Scotland, but which modern Scotland had lost. It's there in early Celtic poetry. And it's not by chance that it was a Scot, John Muir, who was at the basis of landscape-preservation in America with the founding of the National Parks system.

Since that initial experience, I've crossed many landscapes. Since we're here in Italy, let me salute those I know best in this part of the world: the Dolomites, the Northern Lakes, the Venetian archipelago, the valley of the Po, the Ligurian coast.

It's from a varied experience of landscape, allied to mindscape (a word I prefer to philosophy, because more grounded) and to wordscape (which means more than style, and implies a sense of communication not only between man and man, but between man and the universe, bringing into writing the rhythms and shapes of the environment) that I have come to the general theory-practice of geopoetics.

The aim of geopoetics, and of all my books, whether they be narrative, essay or poem, is to open up new cultural space, by developing that original relationship between the human mind and the earth I have evoked in various ways, and thus make for the habitation of a more deeply lived world.

Thank you for listening to me.

## **Wanders through Warsaw by Michael James Roman**

### **Preamble**

It has always struck me as enjoyably peculiar the orthographic similarity between the words 'wonder' and 'wander'. Peculiar because despite their completely distinct etymological roots it might be said that they are still in fact nodes of the same plant.

In both cases, it is movement that is the stem from which both words diffuse. With wonder, in its capacity to marvel, it is a turning of the mind; with wander, in its power to gather ground, a turning of the foot. Emphatically then, the mind, in winding out the possibilities thrown before it, wanders as it wonders.

Anyroad, whatever contentious links may be sought to unite two words, the following essays and poems (in a form that perhaps wanders too) present something not just of a wandering of Warsaw, but of a wondering of Warsaw too. Not so much discoveries as 'un-coveries', these wanders (or 'spacer' as the Polish would refer to them) remove the concrete from Warsaw's sullied face (indeed, at times, revel in the concrete) and find gems concealed therein. This is the beauty of city living, that in amongst the mechanics of congestion and labour, there are to be found things of great depth and attachment to the earth. And it is only through wandering the city that these diamonds midst the rough can be found.

*It is a great art to saunter.*  
Henry David Thoreau

### **The Wander Beyond**

As a Scottish teacher of English in Warsaw, one of the first words I teach

to my students (in fact possibly the only word since vocabulary is something of a self-taught enterprise), whether their level be elementary or proficiency, is the word 'stravaig'. Likewise, when embarking upon a foreign country and a foreign language (all too aware of how much the lexicon of a language can reveal through its descriptions of movement), one of the first words I learn is/are the word(s) for 'walk' (which incidentally, in Polish, is 'spacer', pronounced *spatzer*) and its offshoots. The reasons for teaching the word 'stravaig' will, I hope, become apparent throughout the course of this short essay which, like the stravaig, is replete with ideas connected only by the walk itself.

Although used in the same vein as the word 'walk' the stravaig is never simply a walk. The stravaig, a Scottish sculpting of the old English word 'extravaig' (from the Latin 'extra' and 'vagari' meaning to wander outside or beyond), denotes not only the physical activity of travelling outwards but also a cerebral one of removing the cranial corset imposed on us by traditional linear thinking. The stravaig indulges all that a restrictedly linear foot (and mind) might not - it welcomes tangents, deviations, digressions, detours, divagations; it wanders down off-ramps, and alleyways, cuts laterally across parks and fields; gets beyond the pathetically limited 'city' that consists of a couple of blocks and three or four points of interest; the stravaig is open to the asides, the arounds and the abouts of city and country. There is a curiosity in the stravaiger that welcomes the city as a conglomeration of monstrosities (as well as a forest of ideas). Though it is not all about the city. The stravaiger's territory is not so limited. In wandering outwards, and indulging the vagaries of an animated body, everything comes into play during the stravaig. And in out-wandering (in 'planetting') the stravaiger becomes an inexorable function of the Earth.

At the school in the district of Imielin one evening, in a moment of reciprocal word-swapping, it comes as no surprise that the Polish word for playing truant is 'wagary' (pronounced *va-garry*).

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**Your views on the contents of this Newsletter or on any aspect of geopoetics would be most welcome.**

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Please send your name, postal and e-mail address with a cheque for £10/£5 unwaged, payable to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, to the secretary.

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