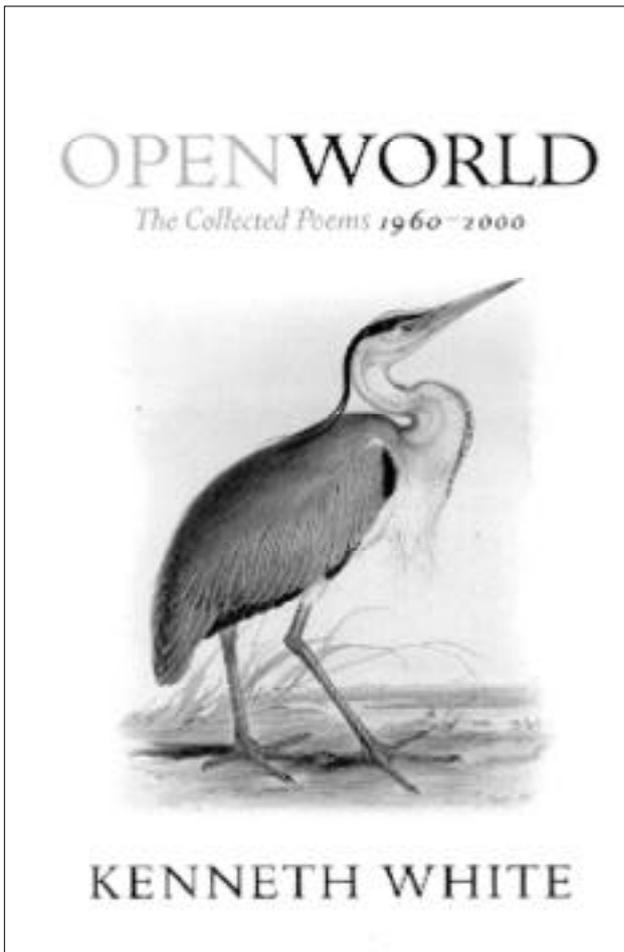


# SCOTTISH CENTRE FOR GEOPOETICS

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

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



## OPEN WORLD

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

## HOT FROM THE PRESS

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



## A Geopoetic Excursion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The Oracle*



PHOTOS TAKEN AT INCHCAILLOCH

ABOVE: Ian Wallace [www.scottishphotography.com](http://www.scottishphotography.com)

FACING PAGE: Elspeth Murray [www.elspethmurray.com](http://www.elspethmurray.com)

# INCHCAILLOCH

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

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

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

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

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

curled fern fronds  
sponge-like sphagnum moss  
and blaeberry bushes

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

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

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

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

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

we eat down by the beach  
and talk and laugh

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

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

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

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

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

*Elspeth Murray*



## SCOTTISH CENTRE RECENT TALKS

### Living On An Island

#### An Approach to Geopoetics

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

### Powerlines

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

## DIARY DATES

### Wiston Lodge Weekend

Friday 19–Sunday 21 September

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

### Forty Years of the White World

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

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

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

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

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