

## Un poète à l'Université de Liège

### Kenneth White and geopoetics

A Thursday in early October, 5.30 p.m. at Salle Wittert. Kenneth White was in Liege as President of the Biennale de poésie<sup>1</sup>. On the invitation of the **CIPA** (Centre Interdisciplinaire de Poétique appliquée, see <http://www.cipa.ulg.ac.be/>), he agreed to give what amounted to a triple lecture at the University of Liège: on geopoetics, on his relation to Scotland, and on a couple of his poems and their translation into French.

A tall guy, with frizzled hair, a warm handshake, a large smile. He spoke in excellent French all through, so it may be abusive to write this short synthetis in English. Actually he explained that he uses this adopted language (he has lived in France for over 40 years) for his lectures and essays, the vanes in the arrow of his work, while the shaft consists of narrative prose (both 'way-books' and 'stay-books'), and the head of poems, which he writes only in English, with his wife Marie-Claude White as his best translator.

Back in the 1980s he founded a movement (and an institute, which is now archipelagic) called geopoetics, with the mission of developing a general discourse on our poetic presence to the world, a discourse that has to be energised by the power of poetic thinking (an essential part in philosophy) and by the nomadic power of transversality, of crossing boundaries, of meeting other cultures, not in a spirit of vain curiosity nor to be absorbed in them, but to combine approaches, to move closer to some form of (unattainable) universality.

Speeding along the motorway of Western culture, he pointed out that geopoetics crosses over the categories established by Aristotle and bridges the gap first introduced by Plato between sense and sensibility; that in the wake of the best Renaissance thinkers it attempts to forge a new language for a new relation to nature and the world; that it offers the possibility to do away in our minds at least with the hateful and now suicidal urge to control and exploit and despoil nature, and all those others who live differently (an urge which started with the Jewish account of creation and was all too efficiently comforted by the modern split between subject and object, leading to the amazing developments of Western technologies). In the contemporary hypermarket of contentment presented as a supreme value geopoetics can allay a sense of disarray and offer another way of breathing and living in this our world.

To find out more about geopoetics, check the website <http://www.geopoetique.net> (and an interview in the online journal *Temporel* #3 at <http://temporel.fr>), read White's books (particularly *Le plateau de l'albatros* (Grasset, 1994) and books about Kenneth White, for instance Michèle Duclos, *Kenneth White, nomade intellectuel, poète du monde* (Université Stendhal, Grenoble, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Du 4 au 7 octobre 2007, la vingt-cinquième Biennale Internationale de poésie accueillait au Palais de Congrès de Liège des poètes venus du monde entier. Placé sous la présidence de Kenneth White, cette édition avait pour thème de réflexion : Poésie, fruit défendu ? Ouverture et résistance ?