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## Introduction

### Scotland in France; France in Scotland

Cairns Craig

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This volume of the *Journal of Scottish Thought* derives in part from conferences held in Scotland (Glasgow and Edinburgh) and in France (Paris) in 2017 and 2018. The conferences were funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh as part of their Research Networks scheme and organised by Professors Ramona Fotiade and Alexander Broadie of the University of Glasgow. The central theme of these events was Franco-Scottish exchanges in existential philosophy and literature, and a key contributor to them was Kenneth White, Scoto-French poet, essayist and ‘intellectual nomad’, whose works were also the subject of several of the other presentations. White’s own contributions to the conference in Glasgow along with others focused on his work form the bulk of this issue, its aim being to explore the Scottish and French contexts of White’s writing career and intellectual development, as well as the implications of the theory of ‘geopoetics’ which led to his founding of the International Institute of Geopoetics in Paris in 1989.

As White himself has noted in his essay ‘Working in the Outer Reaches’ (*Collected Works*, Vol. 2, 297),<sup>1</sup> geopoetics emerged out of his engagement with the ferment of French and German philosophy and ‘literary theory’ in the decades after the Second World War, a ferment that made France, in particular – in Norman Davies’s words – ‘the most influential and the most universal culture of the continent’ (quoted ‘The New Europe’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 645). It was in part because of the intellectual energy White found in France, but which he considered Britain lacked, that he chose to settle in France in the late 1960s and to become engaged with the unfolding of post-war philosophy and theory as it developed from Sartrean existentialism into subsequent innovations such as structuralism (Barthes) and deconstruction (Derrida). Although dismissive of Sartre’s ‘humanistic’ philosophy (‘Working in the Outer Reaches’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 297), and of the ‘bohemian and bourgeois’ ethos of Parisian existentialism (‘Ideas of Order at Cape Wrath’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 349), White continues to use ‘existential’ as a positive term to describe

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter abbreviated as *CW* in the text; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

his own activities: thus in his autobiography, *Between Two Worlds*,<sup>2</sup> geopoetics is compared with ‘ecology’, and is described as a notion that ‘goes back farther, into a more general background, and opens up larger perspectives – existential, intellectual, cultural’ (‘Song of the South’, Chapter 8, 132), and the very title of the autobiography re-uses a phrase from the essay ‘Meditations in the Atlantic Library’, in which he describes his trajectory as ‘a movement, existential and intellectual, between two worlds’ (*CW*, Vol. 2, 459). The positive content of post-war existentialism is not the Sartrean *intellectuel engagé* who, in White’s view, is limited by a commitment to ‘immediate social engagement, often hastily and blindly’, but in existentialism’s original emphasis on self-discovery through action, on the fact, as Sartre suggests when ‘attacking the notion of a purely contemplative consciousness’,<sup>3</sup> that ‘perception is naturally surpassed toward action; better yet, it can be revealed only in and through projects of action. The world is revealed as an “always future hollow” for we are always future to ourselves’.<sup>4</sup> The travels recorded in White’s ‘waybooks’ and essays are not contemplative or spectatorial but consciousness in action, a ‘territorial investigation and existential wayfaring’ (‘Heritage and Role of a European Writer’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 315) that does not simply encounter the world but, like White’s intellectual nomad, ‘has broken his way out of the labyrinth and moves in what may at first seem a void, but which is perhaps the high energy field in which could emerge a (new) world’ (‘Minds in Movement’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 488). It is on the basis of its demand for existential action that White distinguishes geopoetics from the works of theorists such as Barthes and Derrida, whom he sees as trapped, even in the mode of deconstruction, in a ‘science of textuality’ (‘Ideas of Order at Cape Wrath’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 300), which encourages a positioning and re-positioning but can never break through to a new and different relationship to the world. The French theory of the mid- and late-twentieth century are most valuable, in the end, because they provide a route back to more fundamental thinking in the work of ‘Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger’ (‘Working in the Outer Reaches’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 297).

Nonetheless, White came to be identified as an *intellectuel engagé* in his early years in France, losing his university post as a result of his public support

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<sup>2</sup> The English version of *Entre deux mondes: autobiographie* (Marseille: Le Mot et le Reste, 2021) is forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press as Volume 3 of White’s *Collected Works*; references include Chapter details but the page numbers are anticipated rather than actual.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen & Co., 1969), 321.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

for the student cause during ‘les événements’ of May 1968. Indeed, as he recounts in *Between Two Worlds*, his superiors considered him a dangerous ‘instigator’: ‘when one night somebody planted an anarchist Black Flag on the University roof, I was supposed to have done it, and when the rumour started to go around that bombs were going to be thrown, I was supposed to be getting them ready’ (Ch. 10, ‘The Revolt of ’68 and its Aftermath’, 159). Such misunderstandings of his political direction continued to dog his career even after he had launched his first books in French and started to write a regular column on contemporary literature for Maurice Nadeau’s *Quinzaine Littéraire*, with the result that Nadeau warned White to come to Paris only in an ‘armoured car’, because the literary Left was out to get him (*Between Two Worlds*, Ch. 13, ‘On the Literary Scene’, 195). At the height of their influence, Gilles Deleuze (who had been on the jury for White’s doctoral thesis) and Félix Guattari attacked White’s cultural politics in *Mille plateaux* (1980), suggesting that White’s invocation of parallels between Celtic traditions and some Eastern philosophies was equivalent to racism:

Car: comment faire pour que la thème d’une race ne tourne pas en racism, en fascisme dominant et englobant, ou plus simplement en aristocratism, ou bien en secte et folklore, en micro-fascismes? Et comment faire pour que le pôle Orient ne soit pas un fantasme, qui reactive autrement tous les fascismes, tous les folklores aussi, yoga, zen et karate. Il ne suffit certes pas de voyager pour échapper au fantasme; et ce n’est certes pas en invoquant un passé, réel, ou mythique, qu’on échappe au racisme.<sup>5</sup>

For what can be done to prevent the theme of a race from turning into a racism, a dominant and all-encompassing fascism, or into a sect and a folklore, into microfascisms? And what can be done to prevent the oriental pole from becoming a phantasy that reactivates all the fascisms in a different way, and also all the folklores, yoga, Zen, and karate? It is certainly not enough to travel to escape phantasy, and it is certainly not by invoking a past, real or mythical, that one avoids racism.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Quoted, White, *Dialogue avec Deleuze: Politique, philosophie, géopoétique* (Nancy: Isolato, 2007), 18–19, from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Nuit, 1980), 469–70.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 379.

Such an identification of White with the political Right was, however, to be reinforced by a public endorsement of White's work by Jacques Chirac, then the right-wing Mayor of Paris, who subsequently intervened to help get White appointed to a professorship in 'Twentieth-Century Poetics' at the Sorbonne (see *Between Two Worlds*, Ch.15, 'Radio Sorbonne Calling'). White had gone from being an anarchist of left-wing sympathies to being 'un ennemi publique' (a public enemy), regarded as an 'affreux fasciste, raciste celt, gourou sectaire' (appalling fascist, racist Celt, sectarian guru).<sup>7</sup> Even White's choice of a home in Brittany was taken to be emblematic of the kind of politics which had led Breton nationalists to collaborate with the Nazis during the Second World War: 'Did I not speak of the Celts, those notorious enemies of Mediterranean humanism? Given my interest in Asian thought, wasn't I a guru gathering together a dangerous sect? Since I talked about nature, wasn't I advocating a return to the earth, like Pétain?'<sup>8</sup> By the 1980s, White suggests, Deleuze and Guattari's (mis)reading of his work had insidiously undermined his public reputation, with the result that 'tous les journeaux de gauche me fermèrent leurs portes – sans que les journeaux de droite m'ouvrent les leurs' (all the left wing outlets had shut their doors to me – without the right-wing journals opening theirs); White's conclusion was, 'J'avais toute le médiacratie contre moi. Cela dure encore' (I had the whole mediocracy against me. And that is still the case).<sup>9</sup>

Fortunately, however, the Scotland that White had left behind in the 1960s was being transformed by the political consequences of the rise of Scottish nationalism, particularly in resistance to the impact of the right-wing British government of Margaret Thatcher. By a margin of 52% to 48%, Scotland had voted in a referendum in 1979 for the establishment of a devolved parliament, but this was blocked by an arbitrarily introduced parliamentary rule requiring support by more than 40% of the total electorate for a change to the British constitution, a block which the Thatcher government made clear was the end of the matter. Resistance was amplified by an increasingly active cultural sector funded in part by a devolved Scottish Arts Council, which had been separated from the British Arts Council in 1967. Ironically, the free market economics espoused by the Thatcher government were based on a neo-liberal agenda whose figurehead was Adam Smith, eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher-economist who, to many in Cold War America, represented the original

<sup>7</sup> *Dialogue avec Deleuze*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> *Between Two Worlds*, Ch. 13, 'On the Literary Scene', 195.

<sup>9</sup> *Dialogue avec Deleuze*, 33.

source of the virtues of free markets as the foundation of free societies. Smith, together with his friend and correspondent David Hume, were seen as the leading figures in what came to be known in the 1970s and 80s as ‘the Scottish Enlightenment’, a designation given prominence by North American academics who promoted eighteenth-century Scotland as the culture which had pioneered the understanding of modern technological societies, culminating in books such as Arthur Herman’s *The Scottish Enlightenment* of 2002, which was subtitled ‘The Scots’ Invention of the Modern World’. Scottish nationalists had rarely been enthusiastic supporters of Smith and Hume because they seemed to promote Scotland’s assimilation to English institutions and values, but if the Enlightenment were indeed *Scottish* then Hume and Smith became the figureheads of a period when, it appeared, Scots had exerted their greatest influence on the world. In the context of an increasingly hostile environment in France, White found himself suddenly in demand in Scotland, and emphasised the ways in which his own work was a continuation of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment:

Within the generally depressed literary intellectual and cultural context, there had been some good historical hind-sighting going on, a lot of it looking into the last creative and critical, intellectual and literary movement in Scotland that had anything like world significance: the Scottish School of the 18th century, part, a very lively part, of the European Enlightenment. It was to this movement, that comprised in its spectrum the philosophy of David Hume, the social speculation of Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, James Steuart and the geological studies of James Hutton, that, over two centuries of further research, I felt my own work deeply connected. There, radical questions of a political, intellectual and literary nature were being asked – and at least partly answered. It was on this ground I kept active, in various contexts and in various capacities, furthering what I thought of as the Alban Project. Alba – the white country: the original name of Scotland.<sup>10</sup>

Behind a Scotland shrouded in its ‘generally depressed’ cultural context, can be discerned a different country, an ‘original’ country that shares its name and values with White himself. Since ‘reconnecting’ with Scotland through the publication of *The Blue Road* by Edinburgh-based Mainstream Books in 1988, White has regularly emphasised not the French contexts of geopoetics, but its

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<sup>10</sup> *Between Two Worlds*, Ch. 16, ‘Reconnection with Scotland’, 236.

Scottish roots. Thus he attributes his own stylistic development as a writer to an ‘early knowledge’ of the work of the geologist James Hutton, so that ‘it was on the basis of Hutton’s tectonics, concerned with the open structure of strata and the introduction into these open structures of all kinds of heterogeneous matter, this collocation of matter being later subjected to dislocation, fracturisation, all sorts of transference and translation, that I gradually derived a style of writing, let’s say, employing the kind of linguistic shift I love, a *textonics*’. (‘What is World Writing’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 627–8). White places Hutton alongside Hume, as ‘the bottom line of the Scottish Enlightenment’, with ‘the one cleaning the mind-works, the other getting at earth-knowledge, as the principal Scottish precursors of geopoetics’. And White adds, ‘I speak there of two aspects, the earth-thing and the mind-thing, but in geopoetics they come together’, so that Hume and Hutton are not only the ‘principal Scottish precursors of geopoetics’ but geopoetics is itself a synthesis of the ideas of Scotland’s most original and influential thinkers.

As a consequence of Hutton’s theories and their primarily Scottish exemplifications in his writings, Scotland itself exerted a formative influence on the discipline of geology, and the works of Scottish geologists such as Charles Lyell (whose *Principles of Geology*, published in the early 1830s, Charles Darwin took with him on his travels to the Galapagos islands), Hugh Miller (whose *Old Red Sandstone* of 1841 was a product of his experience as a stonemason), and Archibald Geikie (whose *The Scenery of Scotland* of 1865 provided geological explanations for the much-admired natural beauty of the Scottish countryside), were to inspire generations of rock and fossil collectors to explore Scotland’s coasts and mountains. They also made Scotland a necessary place of pilgrimage for geologists who could encounter there one of the oldest landmasses of the early phases of the Earth’s development. In his book *Écosse: le pays derrière les noms* (2001), White quotes the French geologist Marcel Bertrand from *la Revue general des sciences pures et appliqués* (Paris 1892), who insisted that ‘la chaîne calédonienne est une des plus ancienne, sinon la plus ancienne, que nous puissions reconstituer. On se trouve là en face de mouvements qui date de début des temps primaire’, which White translated in ‘The Re-Mapping of Scotland’ as ‘The Caledonian chain is one of the most ancient, if not *the* most ancient, that it is possible to reconstitute. One is faced there by movements dating from primary times.’ (‘The Re-mapping of Scotland’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 657); and White notes that ‘a French geologist whose work I admire has said that anyone interested in earth-formation should make a pilgrimage to it’ (‘A Highland Reconnaissance’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 198). If the

‘poetics’ in ‘geopoetics’ goes back to the Greeks – ‘A Fundamental Project’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 348) – and, in modern form, to the explorations of Rimbaud and Nietzsche (*Between Two Worlds*, ‘Sorbonne Calling’, Ch. 16, 218), the ‘geo’ of ‘geopoetics’ goes back to White’s home territory of Scotland, with the island of Arran, which he could see every day from his family’s house in Fairlie, as a prime example. Arran had been charted by Hutton himself in 1787 and re-explored by Charles Lyell in the 1830s when he was working on a new edition of *The Principles of Geology*. Lyell’s biographer notes that,

The geology of Arran was of particular interest to Lyell because Arran embodied an extraordinary broad range of the geology of Scotland in one place, especially of granite and trap rocks intruded among disturbed and altered stratified rocks . . . In fact, all the formations of Arran, including even the granite, were intersected by trap dikes indicating that volcanic activity had occurred extensively in the island after its principal geological features had been established.<sup>11</sup>

It was also of particular interest to White, not only because, as a boy, he had been a regular visitor to the island, but because it seemed to link his Scottish experience to his later life in France: ‘I recall asking myself too if there was any linguistic connection between the Val d’Aran in the Pyrenees and the Aran Isles of Ireland (and the Arran in sight of which I had been raised on the West Coast of Scotland)’. The linguistic echoes suggest geological parallels and White quotes his favourite nineteenth-century geographer, Élysé Reclus, to the effect that in the Pyrenees, despite its southerly location, ‘On many a peak of the Western chain one might imagine oneself in rainy Scotland’ (‘The Fronting Shore’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 239). Reclus was one of the many European intellectuals who, in 1890s, spent his summers in Edinburgh, attending the summer schools run by Patrick Geddes, evolutionary biologist and sociologist who tried to explain the relationship between human civilisations and their natural environments. Geddes formulated a conjectural history of cities (like the conjectural histories of human societies promoted by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers) as developing from ‘paleotechnics’ (destructive exploitation of both environment and human beings), to ‘neotechnics’ (non-polluting, post-fossil fuel technologies) to reach, at some time in the future, ‘geotechnics’ (when

<sup>11</sup> Leonard G. Wilson, *Charles Lyell: The Years to 1841: The Revolution in Geology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 430.



human beings learn to be fully at home on the Earth) ('Looking Out: From Neotechnics to Geopoetics', *CW*, Vol. 2, 128). Geddes is another precursor of geopoetics, but he is also another in the long line of Scots who have lived and worked in France and taken their inspiration from French culture, a line that stretches from Duns Scotus's attendance at the Scots College in Paris in the thirteenth century (Scotus's theory of *haecceitas* played a significant role in the development of twentieth-century existentialism), through George Buchanan's playwriting and Latin poetry in sixteenth-century Bordeaux (where he tutored Montaigne), to the many exiled Jacobites in France after James II's defeat by William of Orange in 1689, and the failures of the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, including among them Sir James Steuart, the 'mercantilist' economist whose *Principles of Political Oeconomy* was published in 1767 and was the main target of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* seven years later. Hume, of course, wrote his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) in La Flèche in Anjou in the 1730s and, in the 1920s, Patrick Geddes set out to reconstitute the medieval Scots College on the outskirts of the city of Montpellier in the south of France. In effect, White has constituted his own life trajectory not as a disruption of the life he might have led in Scotland but as the continuation of a distinctive tradition of Scottish intellectuals in France: such 'wandering Scots' may be 'extravagant' (Thoreau: 'I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extravagant enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced'; 'The Archaic Context', *CW*, Vol. 2, 18), or 'eccentric' ('they move out, along an eccentric, ecstatic road' into a landscape 'with elements of lost culture, until the body-mind arrives in a space illuminated with hitherto unseen light and through which blows the wind of the void'; *Between Two Worlds*, Ch. 15, 'The Eumerasian World', 211), but what their 'stravaiging' recovers are the fundamental insights originally offered by Duns Scotus's philosophy:

Moving freely in an open mental landscape, he sees the things of the earth as extraordinarily *there*. He doesn't ask of a thing *what* it is (to identify it and insert it into some category), he looks at its *isness*, doesn't define it, leaves it in the openness. The thing may be a stone, or a moment of whiteness: hawthorn blossom, a breaking wave, cloud, snow on the heights. What we have there is an *ultima Thule* of intelligence, and at the same time a complete presence in the world. ('The Re-Mapping of Scotland', *CW*, Vol. 2, 661)

Being ‘between two worlds’ is actually an opening on to the one world, the existential world, the ‘open world’, the ‘white world’ that is as yet unconstrained and unconditioned by any pre-existing human meanings.

On the stepping stones between Duns Scotus and modernity, White’s emphasis on the acceptance of the *isness* of what we encounter rather than trying to come to a judgment about it, suggests a connection to another Scottish poet, James Thomson, who, in his sequence *The Seasons*, published in the 1720s and 1730s, first encouraged the appreciation of the wild and of wilderness as opposed to the cultivated and enclosed nature of the formal garden.<sup>12</sup> Note, for instance, in a passage such as the following from ‘Winter’, the geographic attention to the action of a river in a landscape that is being overwhelmed by its force:

Wide o’er the brim, with many a torrent swelled,  
 And the mixed ruin of its banks o’erspread,  
 At last the roused-up river pours along:  
 Resistless, roaring, dreadful, down it comes  
 From the rude mountain and the mossy wild,  
 Tumbling through rocks abrupt, and sounding far;  
 Then o’er the sanded valley floating spreads,  
 Calm, sluggish, silent; till again, constrained  
 Between two meeting hills, it bursts a way  
 Where rocks and woods o’er hang the turbid stream;  
 There, gathering triple force, rapid and deep,  
 It boils, and wheels, and foams, and thunders through. (ll. 94-105)

And here, also from ‘Winter’, is what might be Thomson’s version of ‘the white world’:

Thence winding eastward to the Tartar’s coast,  
 She sweeps the howling margin of the main;  
 Where, undissolving from the first of time,  
 Snows swell on snows amazing to the sky;  
 And icy mountains high on mountains piled

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<sup>12</sup> Thomson wrote in the ‘Preface’ to the second edition of *Winter*, ‘I know no subject more elevating . . . more ready to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment, than the works of Nature. Where can we meet with such variety, such beauty, such magnificence? All that enlarges and transports the soul!’.

Seem to the shivering sailor from afar,  
 Shapeless and white, an atmosphere of clouds.  
 Projected huge and horrid o'er the surge,  
 Alps frown on Alps; or, rushing hideous down,  
 As if old Chaos was again returned,  
 Wide-rend the deep and shake the solid pole. ('Winter', ll. 902–912)

It is a passage which might be read as an anticipation of White's 'chaosmos', but in the 1720s it represented something entirely new in English-language poetry. As Samuel Johnson declared in *The Lives of the Poets* (1779):

[Thomson] looks round on nature and on life, with the eye which nature bestows only on a poet; the eye that distinguishes, in every thing presented to its view, whatever there is on which imagination can delight to be detained, and with a mind that at once comprehends the vast, and attends to the minute. The reader of the *Seasons* wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shews him, and that he never yet has felt what Thomson impresses.

Thomson applied the lessons of Newton's observational science to make his readers see the world differently – or, in White's terms, to see a new and different world – and in doing so precipitated the transformation of human beings' relationship with the natural world that we now think of as 'romanticism'. That it was a Scot who led the way in this transformation is not just because the Scottish universities in the early eighteenth century when Thomson was a student – he entered Edinburgh University in 1715 – were much more sympathetic to Newton's ideas than either Oxford or Cambridge,<sup>13</sup> but that Scots of that era lived in the cultural ethos of Jehan Cauvin, or John Calvin, and the religious world of Calvinism. James Thomson's education was directed at making him a minister in the Church of Scotland and, therefore, an expositor of Calvin's theology, and Calvinism was, as Marjorie Hope Nicholson demonstrated in *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*,<sup>14</sup> in large measure responsible for offering an alternative to traditional Christian notions of the natural world corrupted by the Fall and made even more ugly by the

<sup>13</sup> On 'Scottish Newtonianism', see George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961), 111–12.

<sup>14</sup> *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Aesthetics of the Development of the Infinite* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959).

Flood. Calvin, however, insisted that,

We have in this world a conspicuous image of God . . . a theatre of divine glory . . . Discriminately is this world called a mirror of divinity not because there is sufficient clearness for a man to know God by looking at the world, but he has thus revealed himself to us by works, in these, too, we ought to seek him . . . The faithful, however, to whom he has given eyes, see, as it were, sparks of his glory shining in every created thing.<sup>15</sup>

Modern expositors of Calvin disagree about whether such a perception of God in His works is available to everyone, or only to those already instructed by their reading of the Bible, but in either case the natural world was also God's book and revealed, to those who could attend to it, God's continued creative presence in the world. Thus despite the fact that Hutton proposed a theory of the earth in which the earth itself was being continually worn away and then replenished by the sediment that had accumulated in the depths of the sea, with the result that, in the famous words of his *Theory*, 'we find no vestige of a beginning – no prospect of an end', he nonetheless continued to insist that,

The globe of this earth is evidently made for man. He alone, of all the beings which have life upon this body, enjoys the whole and every part; he alone is capable of knowing the nature of this world, which he thus possesses in virtue of his proper right; and he alone can make the knowledge of this system a source of pleasure, and the means of happiness.<sup>16</sup>

Specifically Scottish religious traditions thus not only underpinned the emergence of the science of geology, but infused themselves into a Scottish

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted from Edward A. Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 137. The assumption that the natural world provides a sufficient route to the discovery of God is, for instance, challenged by T.F.Torrance in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), quoting the following from the Commentary on Hebrews: "The invisible Godhead is indeed represented by such displays, but that we have no eyes to perceive it until they are enlightened through faith by internal revelation from God".

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Broadie (ed.), *The Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Canongate: 1997), 779.

‘environmentalism’ in the works of Thomas Carlyle in Britain (Carlyle introduced the word ‘environment’ into the English language<sup>17</sup>) and the migrant Scottish founder of the environmental movement in North America, John Muir. Here is Muir’s description of Mount Hoffman, a place apparently bereft of natural beauty:

How boundless the day seems as we revel in these stormbeaten sky gardens amid so vast a congregation of onlooking mountains. Strange and admirable it is that the more savage and chilly and storm-chafed the mountains, the finer the glow on their faces and the finer the plants they bear. The myriads of flowers tingeing the mountain top do not seem to have grown out of the dry, rough gravel of disintegration, but rather appear as visitors, a cloud of witnesses to Nature’s love in what we in our timid ignorance and unbelief call howling desert. The surface of the ground, so dull and forbidding at first sight, besides being rich in plants, shines and sparkles with crystals . . . The radiance in some places is so great as to be fairly dazzling, keen lance rays of every colour flashing, sparkling in glorious abundance, joining the plants in their fine, brave beauty work – every crystal, every flower a window, opening into heaven, a mirror reflecting the Creator.<sup>18</sup>

For Muir, the ‘hills and groves were God’s first temples, and the more they are cut down and hewn into cathedrals and churches, the farther off and dimmer seems the Lord himself.<sup>19</sup> Untouched nature provides us with a direct access to a ‘Godful wilderness’.<sup>20</sup> In ‘Minds in Movement’, White himself acknowledges Calvin – but not many Calvinists – as believing that ‘the Fall concerned only man, and that the outside world was still God’s creation, still good’ (*CW*, Vol. 2, 480). Muir, like his American admirer, Ralph Waldo Emerson about whom White has written many times, was from a strongly Calvinist background, and despite the opprobrium heaped on Calvinism in the twentieth century for what White himself describes as its ‘aesthetic malnutrition and moral *rigor mortis*’ (‘The Scot Abroad’, *CW*, Vol. 2, 97), there

<sup>17</sup> See Ralph Jessop, “Coinage of the Term Environment: A Word Without Authority and Carlyle’s Displacement of the Mechanical Metaphor,” *Literature Compass*, 9/11 (2012): 708–20.

<sup>18</sup> *My First Summer in the Sierra, The Wilderness Journeys* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), 88.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

was a strand to Calvinism which directed its adherents' attention to the natural world as a text illustrative of an ongoing divine act of creation. As Robert H. Nelson has argued in *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion VS. Environmental Religion*, American environmentalism, from Thoreau, Emerson and Muir, to many of its most influential modern proponents, has had deep Calvinist roots, including 'such twentieth-century environmental leaders as Rachel Carson, William O. Douglas and David Brower'.<sup>21</sup>

In his essay 'The Birds of Kentigern' White recalls a stained-glass window in the church he attended as a boy, a window that gestures to the inadequacy of the written text as compared with the text of the natural world:

Kentigern (his Gaelic name meaning: head, *ceann*, of the house, *tigh*, of the moon, *ern*) was a Celtic saint with still, as was the case with so many Celtic saints, a good deal of the pagan in him. In the (Protestant) church I frequented as a child, there was a glorious stained-glass window devoted to the legend of Kentigern. It showed him doing penance on the shore, the penance consisting in his reading aloud from a book to the heedless, scavenging and caterwauling gulls. This window, which was so often my refuge during the long-winded sermon, fascinated me, and it constitutes one of the primitive psychic ideograms in my mind: man, book, seashore, gulls. (*CW*, Vol. 2, 62)

Reading the Bible in nature reveals how limited it is as compared to the Book of Nature. Opening the printed Book is only a prologue – though perhaps a necessary prologue – to opening the book of the world. Calvinism, we might say, opened to Scots a French route back to the natural world that had been lost in other Christian traditions, a route back to that Alban world that White has sought to bring to light through geopoetics, that finds Scotland in France and France in Scotland, before going on into the existential world that opens up beyond both.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert H. Nelson, *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion vs. Environmental Religion* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010), 109.