

SOIL

Tim Cresswell was born in Cambridge in 1965 but didn't stay there long. Since then he has travelled, first as part of an Air Force family and then as a student and academic. As a geographer he is the author of five books on place, mobility and other key ideas in geographic thought. Since 2006 he has been Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. He lives with his wife and three children in Acton, west London, but in 2013 they are relocating to Boston where Tim will transform into Professor of History and International Affairs at Northeastern University. *Soil* is his debut collection of poems.

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Tim Cresswell

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Soil

The Fox and the Skyscraper

Oh fox, in Japan they speak of *Kitsune*,
with nine full bushy tails, who waited
one hundred years to turn into a woman,
a beautiful lover to encounter alone
in the twilight. And in Arkansas,
Uncle Remus wove yarns of the trickster,
Bre'r Fox, who mixed tar with cloth
to fool a rabbit. Here we sing you,
oh *Reynardine*, the ware-fox, who wandered
late with shining teeth, luring
farmers' daughters to his castle
in the mountains. And the nameless fox
who went out on a winter's night
and prayed to the moon
to give him light before he reached
the town-o. And the fox who ran
as fast as he could and caught and ate
the gingerbread man. And the fox
who couldn't get the highest,
sweetest grapes. And *Fox in Sox!*
And the fox in Southwark
who climbed the stairs and ladders
seventy-three storeys to
the top of the Shard, grazing
on half-eaten kielbasa and jellied
pork-pie crusts discarded

by the carpenters and glaziers,
and every fox cell in hairs, nose
and notched ear hummed
as he sat, exhausted, rank
as any fox, gazing
out across London.

A Glass of Water

They say this glass of London water passed through eight bodies
before mine.

Starting near Heathrow. A Sikh cabby. The morning shift.
Then teacher between classes, a young woman, Kiwi, fit to burst.
A Southall market seller, bagging mangoes and bitter gourd.
A man who lives on a Brentford boat, pissing straight into the
Thames.

Kevin, who drank six pints last night and has a killer thirst.
A gardener at Kew tending orchids, blooming just one day.
Carrie, just up from bed, still red-raw from energetic sex.
And old man Andy, up the road, downing morning pills.

They say my body is sixty percent this. Blood. Spit. Plasma. Piss.
A constant whoosh and sluice. Tidal. Tethered to the moon
like a walking, thinking sea. I half expect to stretch and flop —
a water balloon about to pop and drench my neighbour
on the Tube with my multitude of juices
in waves — six small splashes then a seventh monster —
enough to drown the Underground.

Phase Shift

A light turns on. Through a window a man in shorts is ironing —
two towers stand dark against the Acton evening —

red tiled roofs, terracotta chimney pots — a line of lights sinking
in strict tempo to Heathrow, beyond the spires and officeblocks.

The man is folding shirts, his life marked by the widespread
presence of mammals and flowering plants —

the rumble of a skateboard, the humdrum of cars on the Westway.
He is a geological force to be reckoned with.

The door closes behind him, the light still on. A cat creeps
along a walltop, across the road, down an alley. Sodium lights pop.

The street submits to echoes and foxes. In the morning
the dustbin men appear with their dayglo and intricate systems

in a place that could spend millions of years buried
and still blackbirds wake me up in spring,

in this city that reveals through crushed structures
that it is unlike melancholy, for instance.

Rowan

One spring of blossoms —
pink petals littered the streets
from our first floor window — then

they chopped down
the cherry trees
outside our house.

In from the hinterlands
came Mountain Ash,
Rowan —

municipal trees
with feathered leaves
and tight-fisted berries

for drunken birds to guzzle.
Everywhere, they loiter
unnoticed, ubiquitous,

filtering urban air.
Tidy. Low maintenance.
Respectful.

But think of them far north
or at higher altitude,

red berries

against snow:

all shamelessness
and attitude.