

Just as there is love at first sight between people, Vaclav Cilek writes, there can be love at first sight between a person and a place. A landscape is more than a location, it is one party in a relationship—even when the spirit of a certain setting is not perceptible to those who visit. But whether we travel to experience rapture or excitement, to discover truth and beauty, or to be dazzled, we search for the essence of faraway landscapes to gain perspective on our own place within the world. To Breathe with Birds delves into the imaginative and emotional bonds we form with landscapes and how human existence—a recent development, geologically speaking—shapes and is shaped by a sense of place. In subtle and lyrical prose, renowned geologist and author Vaclav Cilek explores topics from the history of asphalt to the spirits we imagine in trees, from geodiversity to the mathematics of snowflakes. Weaving earth science and environmentalism together with memoir and myth, his chapters visit resonant locations from India to Massachusetts, though most are deeply rooted in the river-laced, war-scarred landscape of Cilek's Czech homeland. These reflections are accompanied by Morna Livingstons evocative photographs, which capture the beauty and strangeness of natural and human-made forms. The first book-length appearance of Cilek's work in English translation, To Breathe with Birds offers insightful perspectives on the symbolism of landscapes as we struggle to conserve and protect the depleted earth.

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