A LAND

J HAWKES

Introduction by Robert Macfarlane
Collins Nature Library

Collins Nature Library

A Land

By

Jacquetta Hawkes

With an introduction by
Robert Macfarlane

Collins

Contents

A Land is Jacquetta Hawkes's seminal work, and a classic piece of British nature writing. It is the history of the shaping of Britain and its people from the first, lifeless pre-Cambrian rocks to the days of the ice-cream carton and the hydrogen bomb.

Hawkes paints a picture of the creation of Britain from the forming of the Earth's crust, through periods marked by the worlds of rock, water and air, to the emergence of living organisms that sense their surroundings. The worms and trilobites mark the beginning of the story of life that evolves through the great reptiles, dinosaurs and finally humans.

Widely lauded on its publication, this is an exposition of complex science that is not just comprehensible but also moving.

PREFACE TO 1951 EDITION

In this book I have used the findings of the two sciences of geology and archaeology for purposes altogether unscientific. I have tried to use them evocatively, and the image I have sought to evoke is of an entity, the land of Britain, in which past and present, nature, man and art appear all in one piece. I see modern men enjoying a unity with trilobites of a nature more deeply significant than anything at present understood in the processes of biological evolution; I see a land as much affected by the creations of its poets and painters as by changes of climate and vegetation.

The nature of this unity cannot be stated, for it remains always just beyond the threshold of intellectual comprehension. It can only be shown as a blurred reflection through hints coming from many directions but always falling short of their objective.

If in *A Land* I have often recalled my own childhood, it has not been so much from egotism as from a wish to steal that emotion which uses our own early memories for a realization of the most distant past. Certainly, for myself, in recalling the experiences of that remote, unknown child, I find I am being led back far beyond the bounds of personality and of my own life.

Precision in scientific detail is not, perhaps, of great importance for my purposes, but it has been my hope to avoid mistakes of known fact. In this endeavour I have been sympathetically supported by Dr Kenneth Oakley who read my

text at an early stage and did all that could be done to save me from geological error. I am also grateful to him and to the British Museum of Natural History for permission to use the chronological table printed at the end of the volume. Again, it was Dr Oakley who advised Maurice Wilson on the content of the maps.

I have been exceptionally fortunate in assembling the pictures which are an intimate part of this book. I was delighted when Henry Moore agreed to do the coloured drawings. Plate 2 may be said to exemplify what I have written about his own work, while Plate 3 is more closely allied with the text. In writing the passage about effigies lurking in the alabaster, I saw so clearly how Henry Moore could render the image that when, afterwards, he showed me his drawing I felt a most curious confusion between my anticipation and his fulfilment of it. I am grateful to Ben Nicholson for allowing me to use his Cornish landscape drawing, never before reproduced. Walter Bird devoted extraordinary enthusiasm as well as skill to his portrait studies of fossils; no woman sitter can ever have been photographed with more flattering admiration. He received every possible help from the staffs of the Natural History and Geological Museums at South Kensington.

For permission to use copyright material, I am indebted to: Messrs Faber and Faber, Ltd., for the extract from Norman Nicholson's 'River Duddon' on page 61, and for the extract from Robert Graves's verses in *The White Goddess* on pages 152–3; to Mrs Frieda Lawrence and Messrs William Heinemann, Ltd., for the extract from D. H. Lawrence's 'Work' on pages 156–7; to

the Oxford University Press for the extract from Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'Pied Beauty' on page 136; and to Messrs Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., for Sidney Keyes's poem 'Wordsworth' on page 222.

It now remains for me to thank my son Nicolas for the thought and labour he put into the preparation of the Index.

Jacquetta Hawkes
Fitzroy Road,
London, NW1
December 1950

INTRODUCTION

BY ROBERT MACFARLANE

A Land begins with a warning, or perhaps a boast. 'I have used the findings of the two sciences of geology and archaeology,' declares Jacquetta Hawkes, 'for purposes altogether unscientific.' So – candidly, audaciously – starts her remarkable book, a deep-time dream of four billion years of earth-history, whose 'purposes' are to demonstrate that we are all 'creatures of the land', substantively produced by the terrain on which we live, and to advance a synthetic cosmogony of consciousness, culture and geology. Passionate and personal, *A Land* became a bestseller upon publication in May 1951, and remains one of the defining British books of the post-war decade. It reads now, sixty years on, like a missing link in the tradition of British writing about nature and landscape, but also as prophetic of contemporary environmental attitudes and anxieties. It seems both a period piece – as of its year as the Festival of Britain, the Austin A30 and *The Goon Show* – and Delphically out-of-time in its ecstatic holism. 'The image I have sought to evoke,' Hawkes writes – intones – in her preface, 'is of an entity, the land of Britain, in which past and present, nature, man and art appear all in one piece.'

Hawkes knew she had written an unclassifiable work. It is, she observed in 1953, 'an uncommon type of book, one very difficult to place in any of our recognized categories'. The difficulty of 'placing' it arises in part because it dons and

discards its disguises with such rapidity. It appears, at different points, to be a short history of Planet England; a geological prose-poem; a Cretaceous cosmi-comedy; a patriotic hymn of love to Terra Britannica; a neo-Romantic vision of the countryside as a vast and inadvertent work of land-art; a speculative account of human identity as chthonic in origin and collective in nature; a homily aimed at rousing us from spiritual torpor; a lusty pagan lullaby of longing; and a jeremiad against centralization, industrialization and our severance from the 'land'. It is all of these things at times, and none of them for long. Its tonal range is vast. There are echoes of the saga, shades of the epic, and tassels of the New Age. It is tagged throughout with poetry (Wordsworth, Hardy, Lawrence, Norman Nicholson). It is flamboyant enough that I can imagine it re-performed as a rock-opera. It brinks at times on the bonkers. Hawkes disarmingly refers to the book as a 'memoir', but if so it is one in which the autobiographer investigates her formation over the entirety of planetary history. It is a work of back-to-nature writing, which advocates a return not just to the soil but right down to the core. In its obsession with the 'clear outlines' and 'firm outlines' of landscape forms, *A Land* reads like Roger Fry on rocks, and in its preoccupation with synchronicities like Gurdjieff on geology. Its politics are occasionally troubling, but mostly animated by a federate vision of the nation as comprising loosely linked locales. It is not a muddle, exactly, for out of its contradictions arise its charisma. It is not wise, exactly, but its intensity approaches the visionary.

A Land's apparent solipsism and its disciplinary waywardness dismayed academic specialists when it was published, especially pure archaeologists, who reacted to Hawkes's projection of self into the book either with foot-shuffling embarrassment or with intellectual aggression. But such responses misunderstood Hawkes's ambitions. Harold Nicolson, whose rave review of *A Land* in the *Observer* helped turn the book into a bestseller, knew straightaway what he was dealing with. 'There is,' he noted with awe, 'a weird beauty in this prophetic book … it is written with a passion of love and hate.' H. J. Massingham compared Hawkes's prose to that of Donne's sermons, as having 'something of their imaginative range, their recondite knowledge, their passion of exploration, their visionary sense of integration'. *A Land* was, he concluded, 'a germinal book and may well herald a change in cultural orientation that bitter experience has made tragically overdue'.

Hawkes later attributed that 'passion' to the flux of her emotional life at the time of writing. *A Land* was composed between the spring of 1949 and the autumn of 1950. Her marriage to her first husband, the archaeologist Christopher Hawkes, was breaking up; she had recently met the man who was to become her second husband, the writer and broadcaster J. B. Priestley; and she had three years previously lost to sudden death her lover, the poet and music critic Walter Turner, to whom she had been devoted. By her own account, she was at a 'highly emotional pitch', which expressed itself as a 'vital energy' in the prose. *A Land*, she later recalled, came 'directly out of my being': 'Wars can stir up personal lives to

revolutionary effect … life took hold of me, and quite suddenly, my imagination was opened and my sensibility roused.' She sat down to write out of a wish to contribute something 'to our understanding of being and the overwhelming beauty and mystery of its manifestations'.

The book was an eccentric move for her to make in terms of its register. She had, from an 'absurdly tender age', wanted to become an archaeologist. Born in Cambridge in 1910, her childhood home was located on the site of both a Roman road and an Anglo-Saxon cemetery. She grew up in an 'extraordinarily reserved' family, who were 'as silent as trees in our emotional lives', but hugely intellectually dedicated (her father was a Nobel Prize-winning biochemist, Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins). At nine, she wrote an essay declaring that she would be an archaeologist; she was duly admitted to Cambridge University to read archaeology, graduated with a first-class degree, and promptly travelled to Palestine – then under the British Mandate – to take part in the excavation of a Palaeolithic-era cave dwelling on Mount Carmel. In 1933 she married Christopher Hawkes, then an Assistant Keeper at the British Museum, later to become Professor of European Archaeology at Oxford, and for the seven years until 1940 she worked as an independent archaeological researcher, writing 'only the most severely technical of articles and books'. But 'the upheavals of WW2' and then her love affair with Turner caused Hawkes to become distrustful of academic archaeology's distrust of the imagination. The success of *A Land* launched her

as a public intellectual, and she remained well known for the rest of her long life as a broadcaster, writer and culture-broker.

In person, Hawkes was a distinctive mixture of austerity and ardour. Priestley, early in their acquaintance, described her as 'ice without and fire within'. 'Mostly, people apprehended the ice,' remembered her son, Nicolas. She spoke slowly and deliberately; 'daunting' was a word often used of her by those who did not know her well. But Hawkes was also transgressive. Aged sixteen, she founded a 'Trespassers Society', dedicated to the disregard on foot of private property. While an undergraduate, she organized what was then the first ever rugby-football match between teams from the all-female Girton and Newnham colleges (the University Proctors resisted; she pushed; they yielded – but insisted that the match be held at dawn; in spite of the early kick-off, several hundred male spectators turned up). She seems to have been bisexual throughout the 1930s, wrote a controversial and erotically frank memoir in the 1970s, was friends with Henry Moore, Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland, and visited Robert Graves in Mallorca to sit in swimsuits upon the beach and discuss Graves's theory of the White Goddess mother-myth. She was someone for whom the feeling human body was the first principle of the thinking human mind, and who – as her son put it – had a 'great capacity for physical response not only to people, but also to nature and the land'.

It is with a feeling human body that the first chapter of *A Land* begins: 'When I have been working late on a summer night, I like to go out and lie on the patch of grass in our

back garden … this hard ground presses my flesh against my bones and makes me agreeably conscious of my body.' It is a modest opening to an occasionally grandiose book. From that patch of grass – on Primrose Hill in North London – Hawkes sends her mind out journeying. Her mind moves downwards, as if the soil were continuous with her skin, down through the humus and topsoil, down into the bedrock of London Clay. Her mind also moves upwards, as if the air were continuous with her skin, up through the 'fine silhouettes of the leaves immediately overhead', up past the 'black lines of neighbouring chimney pots' and upwards at last to 'stray among the stars'. And her mind also moves sidewards, out across 'the huge city spreading for miles on all sides', out along 'the railways, roads and canals rayed out towards all the extremities of Britain'. It is a brilliantly managed scene, simultaneously expanding present space and deepening past time. It also allows her to return to the book's true origin (and implicitly her own), the birth of the earth: 'I must begin with a white-hot young earth dropping into its place like a fly into an unseen four-dimensional cobweb, caught up in a delicate tissue of forces where it assumed its own inevitable place, following the only path, the only orbit that was open to it.'

It reminds me of other famous bodily dissolves in the nature-writing tradition, particularly that of Richard Jefferies, whose memoir-autobiography *The Story of My Heart* (1883) opens, ecstatically, with Jefferies lying on the 'sweet short turf' of a Wiltshire hill in high summer – irradiated by 'the great sun', 'rapt and carried away'. He feels himself to be 'absorbed into

the being or existence of the universe', and senses 'down deep into the earth under and high above into the sky and farther still to the sun and stars … losing thus my separateness of being'. 'Full to the brim of the wondrous past,' he concludes, 'I felt the wondrous present.' Hawkes inverted his terms. Full to the brim of the wondrous present, Hawkes feels the wondrous past. And where Jefferies was abolished, Hawkes is extended. 'I imagine,' she writes later in *A Land*, 'that I can feel all the particles of the universe nourishing my consciousness just as my consciousness informs all the particles of the universe,' which consciously or otherwise recalls Emerson's incident of transcendence on a wintry Boston Common in 1836: 'Standing on the bare ground … uplifted into infinite space – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.'

This is why those who suspected Hawkes of solipsism were guilty of misreading: in fact, she offers an account of selfhood in which, molecularly and emotionally, 'every being is united both inwardly and outwardly with the beginning of life in time and with the simplest forms of contemporary life'. The 'individual' (from the Latin individuus, meaning 'indivisible') is not unique but soluble, particulate, fluid. Her book is dedicated to proving that 'inside this delicate membrane of my skin, this outline of an individual, I carry the whole history of life'; she is merely one of the outcrops or features of the 'land'. 'Consciousness must surely be traced back to the rocks,' she argues. It is this strong central idea of 'unity' which explains

many of the narrative techniques of the book, dedicated as they are to performing as well as describing this proposition of inter-connectedness. By her own logic, her book is itself a geological formation, no more or less extraordinary than a fossil or a pebble. *A Land* should be read, she suggests at its close, as 'the simple reaction of a consciousness exposed at a particular point in time and space. I display its arguments, its posturings, as imprints of a moment of being as specific and as limited as the imprint of its body left by a herring in Cretaceous slime.'

The sections of *A Land* in which Hawkes advances her thesis of collective consciousness – she would later, under Priestley's influence, read widely in Jung, whose complete works formed part of their shared library – have dated least well. Partly because no one writing today would think of proposing such a grand unified theory of existence, and partly because Hawkes becomes most breathless and least careful when she is expounding these ideas. 'It is hardly possible to express in prose,' she reflects, 'the extraordinary awareness of the unity of past and present, of mind and matter, of man and man's origin which these thoughts bring to me.' True enough. She describes visiting Henry Moore's studio and there experiencing a vision 'of this unity [that] was overwhelming'. Her overwhelmedness leads to some startling turns of phrase. Geologists and archaeologists are alike for Hawkes because they are both 'instruments of consciousness who are engaged in reawakening the memory of the world' (which job description presumably came as a surprise to the drier professors in geology and archaeology departments around the country). Mountains are

'colossal assertions of nature' and 'the foundations both of our consciousness and of this land' (a sentiment with which I am predisposed to agree, but which is nonetheless a colossal assertion).

Written out of passion and supercharged with sensitivity, *A Land* often finds itself on the edge of melodrama or whimsy. Hawkes was aware that she had 'just … escape[d] disaster' in terms of her style, but felt too that the risks had been necessary. The history of the earth 'has to be told in words', she notes early, and 'the senses must be fed'. This was the challenge Hawkes set herself: to administer 'a continual whipping of the vitality' in order 'to keep the words as true expressions of consciousness, to prevent them from turning into some dead march of the intellect'. Mostly, she laid on the lash with panache.

'The history of the earth's crust … has a rhythm,' writes Hawkes; so does her prose. Put an ear to it and listen, and you will certainly hear echoes of Ruskin (especially the geological passages of *Modern Painters*) as well as Thomas Browne, there in Hawkes's long, building, sonorous sentences, and there too in the melancholia which darkens the book. Curiously at odds with her celebration of the 'enduring unity' of the 'eternal present' are her allusions to the 'sadder processes of decay', her dismay at mortality and at 'the wastage of brief lives'. When she writes of how, with the development of consciousness –

> *the isolation of the human being lay at the end of the road that was then chosen, yet even now the citadels of individual self-consciousness are always being stormed*

by death, and even in life we surrender them every day to sleep. Sometimes when I am tired and consumed by a longing for sleep, a gentle but irresistible invasion from the outer world seems to take possession of me and I feel that consciousness wishes only to flow back into that world and dissolve there …

– she sounds (tender, elegiac, late-day) like Browne before her and like W. G. Sebald to come.

Hawkes was insistent that her book not be mistaken for 'a popularization of science', but she did manage to bring prehistory brilliantly – popularly – alive. She pushed the distant past and the living present into vibrant contact: the Old Red Sandstone of Herefordshire has 'the glow of desert suns' invested in its grain; the little island of Ailsa Craig, formerly the plug of a volcano, is now a gannetry in which 'pale-eyed birds press their warm feathers against the once boiling granite'. As her biographer Christine Finn nicely puts it, to Hawkes 'the [Neanderthal] skeleton, lying asprawl on the slopes of Mount Carmel, was a human being not so dissimilar to those excavating it. The rooms at Skara Brae were still alive with Neolithic voices. The Lascaux cave paintings anticipated a Palaeolithic hunter returning to complete another image. The marks left by antler-picks in Grimes Graves were fresh with chalk-dust.'

Her book is filled with strange rhymes, recapitulations and elective affinities: Hawkes explains how 'Jurassic water snails' helped 'medieval Christians to praise their God', what

ammonites have to do with the plate-armour of fifteenth-century knights, and why the hypertrophied nose antler of an early species of deer offers a precise analogy with twentieth-century Western European consciousness. She possessed the synecdochic imagination of the gifted archaeologist, able to reconstruct whole beings from relict parts, and the near-mystical vision of the crime-scene investigator, able to attribute complex cause to simple sign.

Hawkes was committed to presenting prehistory not as static diorama but as vivid process. She felt prehistory dynamically, bodily – and so she devised a style that would permit her to evoke drama. Often, she borrowed her writerly techniques from cinema (she was a Governor of the British Film Institute at the time of writing *A Land*) and she also figures her own representations of the distant past in cinematic terms: orogeny is described using images of accelerated time-lapse from 'nature films'. 'If only some powerful ciné-camera could long ago have been set up on the moon,' she reflects, and then begins to spool in prose through the film that would have been recorded by this impossible lunar eye. She writes, beautifully, of how by the end of the Palaeozoic, mammals and birds 'were beginning to show faintly, like the ghost shots of the cinema, in the bodies of their reptilian ancestors'. In order to dramatize the laying down of chalk deposits in warm Cretaceous seas – one foot of chalk settling every thirty thousand years – her imagination fast-forwards the process such that she sees it 'as a marine snow-storm, the falling of flakes through one of the clearest seas ever known'.

She also daringly uses anthropomorphic empathy, imagining that she might 'interpret the experience' of trilobites, or see with the eyes of the earliest amphibians. It's easy now to sense why sentences such as 'something akin to human emotion ran along those newly evolved spines when *Dinichthys* hurled himself among the helpless shoals [of Devonian fish]' – caused academic archaeologists to hurl her book at the wall; it's harder but more worthwhile to consider why they appealed to so many of her readers. There are brilliant passing *aperçus*, as when she observes of the pre-Cambrian era that as 'colour had not as yet been concentrated in leaves, petals, feathers, shells', the only colour was 'of open skies, and of sunrise and sunset'. Think of that; more than three billion years of an almost hueless earth. Perhaps the finest set-piece of the book is her three-page present-tense evocation of the Carboniferous landscapes:

> *It is sombre in these swamps, for the foliage is dark green and there are nowhere any flowers. Yet there is scent in the air. Here already is the rich aromatic breath of resins … In many places the trees grow straight from the tepid water that carries a dull film where clouds of pollen have blown across it … Over the streams and pools, through the oppressive greenish light, with a clittering of glassy wings, twist gigantic dragonflies, the largest insects the earth will ever know.*

There follows a compressed account of the deposition of the Coal Measures – 'the toll of decay mounts with the centuries'

– and then, suddenly, impertinently, Hawkes herself is back again, tired of her own superb oration: 'It is a drowsy scene to contemplate, and sleep muffles me.'

One of the oddest contradictions of *A Land* is between its island patriotism and its planetary holism. On the one hand, Hawkes urged her readers to imagine themselves in ways which make mockery of the idea of individual beings, let alone of nations. Seen from the perspectives of deep time and 'unity', the notion of the nation seems ridiculous, and fighting for a 'country' as ludicrous as going to war on behalf of a raindrop. She writes sardonically of 'our composed Britain', and her (now outdated) geological maps show the migrations and divisions of the world's land-masses over billions of years. She seems less a 'European' – as she at one point proclaims herself to be – more an inhabitant of the supercontinent of Gondwanaland. Again and again she reminds us of the extreme contingency of human existence: volcanoes 'speak of insecurity', are reminders of 'our participation in process'. The idea of the individual is 'a fiction', and we are part of a group of fictional individuals who by chance happen to inhabit 'that small part of the earth's crust known to us as the British Isles'.

On the other hand, *A Land* was emphatically and triumphantly the story of Britain. It was published in the damp summer of the Festival of Britain, that great post-war carnival of backslapping and chin-upping, with its well-intentioned rhetoric of 'the land' and 'the people', its mobilising of a 'blessed heritage of farmers, sailors, poets, bravely advancing into the age of radar and jet propulsion'. On the South Bank, the Skylon

pointed its space-age finger skywards above the Dome of Discovery, and the Oyster Creek Branch Railway clattered up and down on its tiny track near the Telekinema. The Festival's aim was to provoke recovery and promote progress in a war-battered nation. It was a rebuke to ruin: 'a tonic for the nation', in the phrase of its co-founder, Herbert Morrison. The language of the Festival (to which Hawkes was a key advisor) and more generally of that summer of regenerative patriotism rings out often in *A Land*, there in Hawkes's insistence that Britain become self-sufficient again agriculturally, there in her vaunting of the 'local communities' and 'regional difference', and there most audibly in her declaration that '[t]he people of this island should put their hearts, their hands, and all the spare energy which science has given them into the restoration of their country.' The dream-tour that ends the book – taking the reader over the South Downs, across the East Anglian wheat-bowl, up through West Riding and the Yorkshire Moors, which sniffs the Pennines 'for a faint but palpable tang of wildness', and then passes on up to the 'mountain regions' – ends with (of course) a close-up of the long line of chalk cliffs: Britain's Cretaceous bastion, its white shield raised against invaders, its symbol of pride and of insularity.

So the 'land' of the book's title is in part the same 'land' that Arthur is fighting for in T. H. White's *The Book of Merlyn*, an allegory for the war-time defence of England: 'the land under him', which he loves 'with a fierce longing'. And it is a similar 'land' to the one that J. B. Priestley often invoked in his wartime radio broadcasts: the 'sense of community' and the 'feeling of

deep continuity' that he experienced out in the 'English hills and fields', alongside 'ploughman and parson, shepherd and clerk'.

The patriotism of *A Land* leads to some awkward moments: there are queasy-making asides about the 'shaping of a racial consciousness', or 'the racial stock' of Britain, which feel especially odd given Hawkes's demonstration elsewhere in the book of what nonsense the ideas of 'stock' and 'race' seem when viewed from a prehistoric perspective. One can see why Henry Williamson, the troubled author of *Tarka the Otter*, might have written Hawkes the fan-letter he did, composed in his writing hut in Georgeham, North Devon. For while the book would certainly have appealed to the pacifist Williamson of the 1910s and 1920s – who was longing for a theory of human identity that might transcend nationalism and dissolve war – aspects of it would also have spoken to the Williamson of the 1930s to 1950s; admirer of the Hitler Youth, member of the British Union of Fascists, regular contributor to the Mosley-sponsored periodical *The European*, for whom a passionate engagement with the land had curdled into a version of *Blut und Boden* belonging.

Williamson wrote to Hawkes in February 1952, having had to wait 'for months' to get hold of a copy of *A Land* due to its popularity. He read it, he told her, 'during a fortnight of pre-midnights by the copper oil lamp of this hut', and reacted with 'enthusiasm and delight & indeed wonder' to her 'sentences, paragraphs and chapters'. Flattering to the point of unctuous, he acclaimed her 'perfect book': 'You indeed have married poetry with science, and … revealed what wonder there is in the seed

of the poppy and the luminous seed of the Milky Way.' He thought that both the Lawrences (T. E. and D. H.) would have 'loved' *A Land*, before bowing and scraping his way backwards out of the letter: 'Is this presumption on the part of a minor "nature writer"? … You surely have had such praise and fame that I feel I must not obtrude upon your consciousness any further, having rendered my tribute unto Caesar, Yours faithfully, Henry Williamson.'

It isn't difficult to suggest a set of relations for *A Land* within British writing of nature and place: W. H. Hudson would be there, Jefferies of course, Williamson himself, and so on back to the devout Scottish quarryman, Hugh Miller, for whom geology was near to poetry and noticing was a form of worship. And Hawkes's problematic dislike of urban living and industrialization is part of a strain of dark British bucolic that runs back through D. H. Lawrence to Thomas Carlyle. When she writes bitterly of the 'degraded ugliness' of 'derelict parts of industrial Britain', and of the 'desolation' and 'foul … air' of 'the grey slag heap' as 'the worst that has happened to the land', she recalls Lawrence in *Twilight in Italy* (1916) denouncing our 'industrial System' as a 'vast massive superstructure of falsity' that 'is not us', as Lawrence recalls Carlyle sixty-three years earlier declaring that 'British industrial existence' is 'fast becoming one huge poison-swamp of reeking pestilence physical and moral'.

But I have come to think of Hawkes as more interestingly familial with the American essayists – Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Loren Eiseley – who in the late-1940s and '50s were

becoming wildly famous with their personally inflected and lyrically written scientific essays. They were – to borrow the subtitle of Eiseley's *The Immense Journey* – 'imaginative naturalists', and their originality and appeal came from their infusion of cutting-edge science with first-person narrative. It's for this reason that I proposed *A Land* to be a missing link: it stands, along with Carson and company, at the beginnings of what is now uneasily known as 'environmental writing': ecologically literate, ethically minded and politically explicit work.

In 1946 Loren Eiseley had begun to publish the essays that would be collected as *The Immense Journey* (1957), a classic that has now sold more than a million copies. Eiseley once described himself as 'a fox at the wood's edge'; like Hawkes, he moved beyond academia's perimeter and so earned the mistrust of academics; like her, he was acclaimed for his 'poetic' and 'cinematic' imagination. In the title essay of his book, he sits 'in the mountain sunshine' on a hillside, smoking his pipe, listening to prairie dogs and imagining himself back into the Palaeocene, fifty million years earlier – projecting himself across a dimension he is not fitted to traverse in the flesh. In 1948, Aldo Leopold had published *A Sand County Almanac*, describing the land around his home in rural Wisconsin and advancing his influential idea of the 'land ethic', according to which we should construct a mutually responsible relationship with the non-human inhabitants of the land. And in July 1951, two months after *A Land* appeared, Rachel Carson published *The Sea Around Us*. It sold nearly a quarter of a million copies

Copyright

First published in 1951 by The Cresset Press Ltd

This edition published in 2012 by Collins
An imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
HarperCollins*Publishers*
77–85 Fulham Palace Road
London W6 8JB

www.harpercollins.co.uk

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-00-745746-5