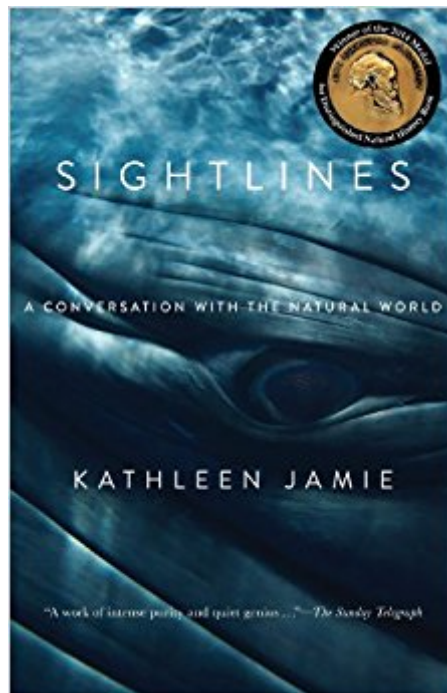


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# Sightlines: A Conversation With The Natural World



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2014 Orion Book Award for Nonfiction Winner of the John Burroughs Association 2014 Medal for Distinguished Natural History Book With her poet's eye and naturalist's affinity for wild places, Kathleen Jamie reports from the field in this enthralling collection of fourteen essays whose power derives from the stubborn attention she pays to everything around her. Jamie roams her native Scottish lochs and hills and sails north to encounter whalebones and icebergs. Interweaving personal history with her scrutiny of landscape, Jamie dissects whatever her gaze falls upon—from vistas of cells beneath a hospital microscope, to orcas rounding a headland, to the aurora borealis lighting up the frozen sea. Written with precision, subtlety, and wry humor, *Sightlines* urges us to keep looking. Keep looking, even when there's nothing much to see.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Award-winning Scottish poet and essayist Jamie writes of her immersions in nature and history in 14 finely tooled, scrubbed, rinsed, and polished essays. As shrewdly bemused as she is intently observant, as imaginatively interpretive as she is curious, Jamie travels to the Arctic, where she ponders time, vastness, and vulnerability. Jamie excavates her memories of the summer following her graduation from high school, when she worked at an archaeological dig, gleaning experiences that inspire far-reaching musings about our ancestors, art, and burial. She visits a raucous island colony of gannets, where the seabirds seem timeless, though disconcerting bits of plastic are woven into their seaweed nests. Jamie becomes entranced by a magnificent collection of suspended whale skeletons in a Norwegian museum and enchanted by the moon's pewtery, equalizing light. So fully does she give herself over to all that she witnesses, so unexpected are her

perceptions, that Jamie's lustrous essays recharge our appreciation not only for the world's beauty and mystery but also for the gift poetic writers such as Jamie possess for translating sensory input into gloriously calibrated, revelatory language. --Donna Seaman

Winner of the 2014 Orion Book Award for Nonfiction  
Winner of the John Burroughs Association 2014 Medal for Distinguished Natural History Book  
Winner of the Dolman Travel Book of the Year 2013  
Praise for *Sightlines* • Kathleen Jamie has built a writing life around paying attention. The 14 personal essays in *Sightlines* include explorations "methodically reported and lyrically written" of secluded places like a cave in Spain whose walls are covered with prehistoric art, and the remote island of Rona in northern Scotland. • "The New York Times" • "[Kathleen] Jamie may remind American readers of Annie Dillard for essays that explore the wilderness in detail but find power in the connections the writers make between what they observe in the wild and the way we live our daily lives. . . . The writing is exquisite." • "Cleveland Plain-Dealer" • "A lyrical work of profound insight." • "Kirkus Reviews" • "Award-winning Scottish poet and essayist Jamie writes of her immersions in nature and history in 14 finely tooled, scrubbed, rinsed, and polished essays. . . . So fully does she give herself over to all that she witnesses, so unexpected are her perceptions, that Jamie's lustrous essays recharge our appreciation not only for the world's beauty and mystery but also for the gift poetic writers such as Jamie possess for translating sensory input into gloriously calibrated, revelatory language." • "Booklist" • "This intelligent collection of 14 essays, informed by science and myth, heightened attention, and cultural dreams, is written with Scots brogue, language, and attitude that will give American readers a fresh view of nature." • "Publishers Weekly" • "Kathleen Jamie's *Sightlines* dissects the natural world with precision, humor, and love. The essays in this book not only inspire us to look more closely, but also have the power to open us up to a new kind of emotional experience of the planet." • "Orion" Magazine  
editors from the awards citation for the 2014 Orion Book Award for Nonfiction • Kathleen Jamie's *Sightlines*, a collection of brilliant and enticing essays about natural phenomena, tingles with life. John Berger called her a "sorceress," and so she is. • "Diana Athill, author of *Somewhere Towards the End*" • "The dance of Jamie's words enacts the mind in motion as it moves between the shifting, shimmering processes of nature and art." • "The Guardian" • "Jamie's prose is exquisite, yet never indulgent. . . . This is a book that will stay with you, as its sights and sounds have stayed with its writer. [A] work of intense purity and quiet genius, and we're lucky to have it." • "The Sunday Telegraph" • "A haunting new collection from one of our finest nature writers . . . Immensely beguiling. There are piquant descriptions that stop you in

your tracks . . . but the real power of the writing derives from the steady increment of detail and the honesty of her responses to the natural world. • "The Sunday Times (London) • Her written words make readers see with a clarity bestowed by only a few most gifted writers. . . . It is not often that the prose of a poet is as powerful as her verse, but Jamie's is. There are people uninterested in books about remote places and wild creatures; but to the rest of us [this book] will be a treasure. • "Literary Review • There is such a precision, of both thinking and seeing, displayed in these works that you would have to be a very obtuse kind of reader not to realize that Jamie is a poet. • "The Scotsman • At which point I put the book down again and thought: ^I wonder if I would actually kill to be able to write, or think, like that. ^ It's like this pretty much all the way through. • "Nicholas Lezard, The Guardian • This is a lovely book, full of gentle joy and anger and an almost spiritual wonder for and affinity with the natural world. It is written in crystalline language that enhances perception, and explores the essence, ultimately, of our human existence in relation to the rest of the natural world. • "Words with Jam Further Praise for Kathleen Jamie and Her Previous Books • A sorceress of the essay form. Never exotic, down to earth, she renders the indefinable to the reader's ear. Hold her tangible words and they'll take you places. • "John Berger, author of Ways of Seeing and About Looking "Whether she is addressing birds or rivers, or the need to accept loss or, sometimes, the desire to escape our own lives, her work is earthy and rigorous, her language at once elemental and tender." • "2012 Costa Poetry Prize citation "A book of unparalleled beauty, sharpness of observation, wit, delicacy, strength of vision and rare exactness of language." • "The Daily Telegraph, on Findings • Kathleen Jamie is a supreme listener • | in the quietness of her listening, you hear her own voice: clear, subtle, respectful, and so unquenchably curious that it makes the world anew. This is as close as writing gets to a conversation with the natural world. • "Richard Mabey, on Findings • [A] remarkable collection of essays about sites where nature and non-nature intersect. American readers can now meet a sensibility who attends to the living world, and the world as made in language, with wily intelligence. • "Boston Review, on Findings • Whether writing about darkness and light playing in the Neolithic ruins in the Orkneys, human body parts displayed in glass jars at Edinburgh's Royal College of Surgeons, or gardens that grace that city's rooftops, Kathleen Jamie is a clear-eyed and lyrical witness. • "Orion magazine, on Findings • Utterly luminous. • "The Independent, on Among Muslims • The leading Scottish poet of her generation. • "The Sunday Times (London)

Interesting writing. Diverse stories. You can pick it up and put it down easily.

I found this book, by a skilled wordsmith best known for her poetry, to be a delightful and rewarding discovery in reading. This collection of essays, contemplations, short memoirs, vignettes is never boring. It reveals much of Jamie's relationship to the natural world told through several experiences she has had on what you might call "personal fieldtrips." I particularly liked the stories about St. Kilda and Ronan, both Scottish Islands that were once inhabited but later abandoned. The book also offers the benefit to those with little reading time of being in chunks that they can read and savor over a period of weeks or months. I highly recommend this book.

A must read

Wonderful sense of the poetics of the natural world in all its forms

A very different type of travel book - one that follows change through time, birds and whales. It's nice to know there are still writers like her about and I will read more by her.

Recommended for anyone interested in biology/nature. Poetically and enthusiastically written. I have nothing more to say even though you require 10 more words.

I have mixed feelings about this collection of essays on nature by award winning poet, Kathleen Jamie. Jamie is clearly a master craftsman of language with a fascination for nature. I don't know if I would classify her as a full-on nature writer. This book is classified as "history" although it reads in places like a memoir and in other places like a travel book. It definitely does not read as poetry. Sightlines contains 14 personal essays spanning many years of the author's life, reminiscences, and travels going as far back as high school. She covers everything from birds and the moon to whale skeletons and icebergs. I appreciate many of her observations on the natural world. After her mother dies, the author moves her attention to other areas of nature like cancer and takes a side journey learning about pathology and bacteria. She wrestles with the idea of nature being not always beautiful, kind, or glorified when there is also an ugly side to it. In other words, the world is not simply schools of happy dolphins frolicking in the ocean looking adorable. What this was for me was a travel memoir but mostly through the roller coaster perceptions of one person. Although beautifully written, I did not feel connected to nature or that I was seeing nature vividly. It may be that I was expecting feelings of awe like the feelings I have sometimes reading National

Geographic or watching documentaries on nature like Winged Migration or Planet Earth. In the end, I think the gist of this collection is the idea that nature should be experienced not only for its beauty but for its coldness, vastness, lack of sentiment, and cruelty. I get it.

This is definitely not what I expected. Based purely upon the title and the cover, I was expecting this to be a rather scientific read. I wanted to learn more about the natural world that Jamie was coming into contact with. While there is quite a bit of the clinical scientific writing, this is far more of a memoir than anything else. Jamie takes her readers through a journey that looks at nature but also at the events that move through her life and the emotions that she attaches to them. In some cases, it reads like a travel book with places you must see before you die, and others focus deeply upon cancer and her mother's death. Overall, I would have liked to be sucked in through Jamie's beautiful poetic prose about one thing or another, not everything mixed up together.

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