

## **The strategies of seeing differently in Kathleen Jamie's travel writing: *Findings* and *Sightlines***

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### **Abstract**

This article looks at the narrative techniques employed in two collections of creative non-fiction essays by the Scottish writer and poet, Kathleen Jamie. In *Findings* (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012) the narrator uses the theme of travel as a platform for expressing the liminality of natural and cultural zones. At the same time, the concept of motion and the boundless travel experience are often turned into their diminutive forms. In order to transgress the dual notions of outside/inside, human/nonhuman and the visible/unseen, Jamie employs a number of visual strategies. She introduces experimental methods of observation to free perception from the constraints of the dogmatic predictions which emerge from the automatization of sight. Jamie exposes our own illusions of what “natural” is or where exactly “nature” resides, prompting us to rethink our own position in the system. In this she often demonstrates the ethical environmental agenda of contemporary Scottish writers and exposes the intrusion of globalism into parochial zones.

### **Keywords**

Jamie, Kathleen, travel book, Scottish nature writing, ways of looking, defamiliarization, ecocriticism

## Inne sposoby patrzenia: Narracje z podróży w *Findings* i *Sightlines* Kathleen Jamie

### Abstrakt

W artykule podjęto kwestię realizacji technik narracyjnych w dwóch zbiorach eseistyki podróżniczej szkockiej poetki i pisarki, Kathleen Jamie. W cyklach reportaży podróżniczych *Findings* (2005) i *Sightlines* (2012) autorka używa tematyki podróży dla przedstawienia takich wątków jak liminalność i integralność sfer natury i kultury, przy czym nierzadko redukuje ona sam ideał podróżniczy do jego własnej miniatury. W przekraczaniu dogmatycznie pojmowanych binarnych koncepcji, Jamie często odwołuje się do sposobów widzenia i eksperymentuje z różnorodnymi technikami wizualnej reprezentacji przyrody. Sama "natura" wreszcie staje się spoiwem łączącym cykle podróżnicze, które wpisują się w etycznie zaangażowany nurt szkockiego przyrodopisarstwa.

### Słowa kluczowe

Jamie, Kathleen, reportaż podróżniczy, szkockie przyrodopisarstwo, sposoby widzenia, defamiliaryzacja, ekokrytyka

That's what the keen-eyed naturalists say.  
Keep looking. Keep looking, even if there's  
nothing much to see. That way your eye  
learns what's common, so when the  
uncommon appears, your eye will tell you.

Kathleen Jamie

### 1. Introduction

This article looks at the narrative techniques employed in the creative non-fiction essays by Scottish writer and poet, Kathleen Jamie. The author, who is well-known for her poetic project, has published two collections of short travel narratives,

*Findings* (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012), which describe Jamie's journeys over the years to both local, parochial zones, as well as the distant, less accessible regions of Greenland or the Outer Hebrides. The essays, which vary in length, can be read and analysed independently, but together they are compiled into a record of goings and home-comings, privileging the motifs of home, femininity, nature, human life and history. Additionally, given the concision and stylistic density of Jamie's techniques, the form of the essay itself seems to suit the fleeting experience of the place she wishes to explore.

Jan Borm, a researcher in travel writing studies, asserts that while generically the modern travel book belongs to non-fiction writing, it often operates through fiction practices, such as the use of extended dialogue, free indirect style, present-tense narration, or prolepsis. (Borm 2012: 3). This use of cross-generic devices testifies to the widely acknowledged hybridity of the travel genre. In her factual travel essays, Jamie also employs fictional techniques. In order to transgress the dual notions of outside/inside, human/nonhuman and the visible/unseen, she uses, for instance, such narrative strategies as synaesthetic metaphors, language which is intended to free perception from the constraints of the dogmatic. Furthermore, her experimental methods of observation frequently utilize the poetic device of defamiliarization. This allows her to escape the automatization of sight. Relying heavily on the sensory, especially on the dominant visual, Jamie proposes techniques which give us the intensity of looking with a "looser mind" at our interrelation with the environment. In doing so, she mediates between certain fallacious ideas of wilderness and the validity of scientific environmental knowledge. Therefore, it is not being elsewhere that is the main direction in *Findings* and *Sightlines*, but rather it is seeing differently.

Both collections reveal human entanglement with the world of the outside and the inside, and Jamie's narrative strategies are used to mobilize the reader's attention towards the place in which human nature and that of the bird, fish, or spider con-

tinue the same spectacle of life. This realizes the concept of “attentiveness” which, according to Louisa Gairn (2008: 156-160), Jamie has placed at the core of her writing project. In her ecocritical presentation of modern Scottish literature, Gairn sees Jamie’s work as an attempt to redefine the human relationship with nature and a way of strengthening that connection through literature. And, finally, it is a tool for getting closer to the ever-shifting and elusive “truth”. Gairn observes how in post-war modernity certain “rural” or “pastoral” themes in Scottish literature and poetry came to assume a pejorative meaning. At present, however, far from being “escapist” in their reaction to contemporary modern life, a number of Scottish writers have addressed the most recent anxieties connected with human disconnection from the environment, a sense of imaginative crisis and psychological displacement. Jamie’s writing is placed among those Scottish writers and poets who are preoccupied with literal “mapping” of the place. But while Scottish literature has traditionally carried this “green” element, literary criticism or theory has not. Only recently, in the wake of environmental degradation, has ecocritical thought inquired into the role the natural world plays in shaping the human creation of culture and literature. Post-millennial writers and critics place this human involvement with the non-human at the centre of their literary projects (Dunnigan and McCulloch 2011: vi).

Kathleen Jamie effectively draws on a synthesis between ecocriticism and travel writing. The theme of travel itself is consistently used as a platform for expressing the liminality of natural and cultural zones. And the concept of motion, as for instance part of the narrative strategy of estrangement, is at times minimized to turn the boundless travel experience into its diminutive form. Without reducing the innate travel book dogmas of the vast outdoors, movement, and adventure, Kathleen Jamie endows her non-fiction sketches with what Urbain refers to as the “irony of claustrophilia”. She “gulliverises” motion to “around-the-corner” spatially bounded settings – or lim-

its travel to the space within the narrative. But the concept of “claustrophilia” is not exactly the direct opposite of vastness. Instead, it rather concentrates on the journey’s aim, which is practising “experimental methods of discovery” (Urbain 2012: 34-36). Through these estranging narrative devices, Jamie seems to find the possibility of self-discovery. She is the one who crosses the border, who loses the world and re-discovers it again, who goes, to use Urbain’s metaphor, through the eye of a needle to ask fundamental questions about the nature of being.

## **2. Observation interrupted and synaesthetic discovery**

If immersed in the broad context of the British travel book, the very title of the 2012 essay collection *Sightlines* is reminiscent of the famous travelogue by Bruce Chatwin *The Songlines* (1987). In the book that presents a quest along the routes of the Australian Outback in search of original, and lost, harmony with nature, Chatwin uses the idea of songlines, the founding concept of Aboriginal cosmology, to track the “primitive” human connection with the Earth and discover the “prelapsarian innocence of Man” (Głębocki 2010: 175). For Chatwin, one must travel light along the Dreamings sung across the country, and the geographical terrain itself “must remain unscarred”. This is his “earthbound philosophy”, which guides people and situates them in the place of their Ancestors (Chatwin 1988: 11). In the same way as Chatwin’s classic reads the land as a musical score, Jamie’s “sightlines” engage visual perception as a mode of comprehending human connection with our environs. The changed perspectives, unconventional angles, passing glimpses, and accidental sightings, all create the intricate cobweb of our interaction with the earth.

The text entitled “Aurora” describes the narrator’s journey to Greenland. In landscape descriptions Jamie’s gaze always manufactures a certain “maybe”. The meditative stance is constantly confronted with physical contact or sensory perception.

This refusal to rely on strongly conceptualized ideas of the outside always emanates with a surprising discovery. The observation yields new findings because perception frees itself from the constraints of the dogmatic. This is illustrated, for instance, by how the narrator's remarks on the tundra and the threatened existence of polar bears suddenly give way to a diagnosis: against the white pinnacles of the glacier "the ship [though white] looks dirty, too, the way sheep suddenly look dirty when it snows" (Jamie 2012: 4). The meditative observational mode is unexpectedly interrupted by the unwitting eye that captures variations in the shades of white. The aesthetic power of the concepts secured in readers' imaginations, here concerning whiteness, are lost and turned into an illusion, succumbing to relativity. Jamie's discoveries seem to aim at eradicating the excessive knowledge which burdens the traveler's mind. This knowledge indeed can never come to its full understanding on a journey, and in the course of the narrative is always doomed to be disrupted by benign observations. Longer descriptive passages are fragmented by instantaneous and fleeting sense-related visions. In this way the axiomatic converses with a sudden awareness of the outside. For instance, the silence of the icebergs, which has for a long time been part of the artistic and literary topoi, serves here as a vehicle for self-observation.

Slowly we enter the most extraordinary silence, a radiant silence. It radiates from the mountains, and the ice and the sky, a mineral silence which presses powerfully on our bodies, coming from very far off. It's deep and quite frightening, and makes my mind seem clamorous as a goose. I want to quell my mind, but I think it would take years. I glance at the others. Some people are looking out at the distant land and sea; others have their heads bowed, as if in church. (Jamie 2012: 4)

The above passage operates on the unquestioned binarities of silence – noise, calmness, agitation. The sound references are augmented by the sense of sight ("radiant") and touch

(pressure against the physical body). And the “mineral” quality of icebergs evokes yet another dual concept: the mobility of inanimate objects. Finally, the scene depicts the common practice among Westerners to turn Arctic icebergs into objects of veneration.

Jamie’s descriptions of Greenland are full of liminality and fluctuations, which are achieved through literary synaesthesia<sup>1</sup>. This is the poetic method of sense-related representation. The author creates semantic sequences which bring together concepts from the various senses: sight, touch, hearing, smell. In his analysis of synaesthetic metaphors, Sean Day explains that in synaesthesia one sense is represented in terms of another. And interestingly, he demonstrates that, in the English language, metaphors employing touch and sound predominate (Day 1996). As a literary method synaesthesia creates a new representation of perception, which is extended beyond the working of a single sense. The description does not belong then to one primary sense but to a synaesthetic sense. In this way synaesthesia halts comprehension. Its effect can be illustrated by how Jamie evokes taste, colour and sound: “Right now I’m thinking if we could taste the green aurora, it would fizz on the tongue and taste like crème de menthe” (Jamie 2012: 14). Consequently, owing to the use of sound words like “whoosh”, “whistle”, or “fizz”, the aurora borealis turns into a mutable phenomenon: “Another iceberg, and another. Some people say you can smell icebergs, that they smell like cucumbers. You can smell icebergs and hear your own nervous system. I don’t know. Although they pass slowly and very close, I smell nothing but colossal, witless indifference” (Jamie 2012: 10). The unresolved “I don’t know” is a refusal to ascertain or to assume intellectual authority. While Jamie demonstrates her acute sensual awareness of the presence of the icebergs,

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<sup>1</sup> On the phenomenon of synaesthesia and various fields of research on the subject, visit, for example: <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/synesthe/>>.

she denies them the status of “organic” beings. Instead their “deadening” presence is referred to as “utterly meaningless”. They “suggest nothing but a white nihilism” (Jamie 2012: 6-7). The travelling self is unable to escape her own anxiety or free herself from the projections of human culture and imagery upon the outside world. But as a writer Jamie, by intertwining sensual perception and utilizing synaesthesia, manages to escape, if only temporarily, the dominant function of sight and the pitfalls of objectification.

Needless to say, the icebound landscape invites postponement of movement, so contrary to the hurried and fleeting experience of modern travel. The meditation of the place necessitates a non-Western way of looking, which calls for re-orientating traditional concepts of the dimensionality of objects. The Arctic zone in travel literature is frequently turned into a sphere of liminality. This is constructed on three premises: halted movement, attentive observation, and self-discovery made possible through meditation. The Arctic is elusive both physically as landscape and metaphysically as an idea (Holland and Huggan 2000: 100-101). Through the narrative strategy of synaesthesia Jamie’s writing demonstrates frequent shifts of meanings anchored in the human imagery of the region. But the mapping of the place allows also the recognition of liminality in her feminine self: “There’s something in the lights I recognize – a restlessness, a dissatisfaction with their own arrangements”, says Jamie and identifies the fluorescence not with “a finished work but a redrafting, recalculating” (Jamie 2012: 12-13). The fluidity of the aurora borealis corresponds with the fluidity of the human mind, of the feminine shifting self, and of her writerly quest for reinvention.

Reading “Aurora” brings connotations with Peter Matthiessen’s *Snow Leopard*. The transience and elusive perception, the sudden dissolving of images, the shifts of vision between sharpness and not-seeing reflect Matthiessen’s Zen practice of insight. His well-known travel classic abounds in synaesthetic



effects in which the auditory and the visual unite to represent the constant interaction of elements. The tactile sounds are endowed with agency. Here the “unearthly” sounds of the Himalaya Mountains radiate through the landscape and the narrator’s body to illuminate the world like light (Matthiessen 1980: 36). But while Matthiessen seeks the prolonged awareness of a Buddhist, a kind of universal continuity of the observing “I”, and uninterrupted union with the elements, Jamie only notices a flickering moment. The momentary and sudden recognitions and the short-lived shallowness apparently subvert the depth of the insight. Without the pretence of seeking permanence, she only finds human transience.

The text succumbs to its own rhythm in which knowledge, especially facts about climate, loom methodically to summon the attention and “attentiveness” of readers. The floating procession of icebergs goes beyond the realizations of the aesthetic or metaphysical and serves an ethically engaged purpose.

I float on the surface of knowledge, too. Of climate science, for example. The ice cap is miles deep. In 2003, a team who’d spent seven years drilling through the Greenland ice to fetch up core samples at last hit bedrock. The ice bottom of the core is 20,000 years old. They were bringing the deep past out of its silence. Here are people who crawl about on glaciers, measuring speeds and surges, and the calving of the icebergs. Together they bring worrisome news from the farthest remotes. I sail on the surface of understanding, a flicker here, a silence there. (Jamie 2012: 17)

The icebergs seem “sinister” now and the narrator feels a sudden goose-like “urge to be away, to head south”. As the ship is sailing away the bergs are disappearing in its wake, to be finally reduced to a vanishing “Cheshire Cat” gleam. The disconcerting knowledge of climatic change lingers on, though, even if the image which summoned it inevitably degenerates and can only remain protected in the space of the imagination.

The author’s travel in search of nature, affirms the philosophical arguments of Elisabeth Grosz. She sees nature, not

as a direct opposition of human culture but rather as a force that incites and enables the human system of culture. Instead of exclusion and distinction, Grosz calls for replacing the binary relationship between nature and culture with that of elaboration and emergence.

It may be inaccurate to regard nature and culture as two mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive categories, that is, as binarized or oppositional terms in which one takes on the right to define the other as its negation or deprivation; this is to regard them as contained categories, each of which has given boundaries and no space of overlap. Instead, it may prove fruitful to understand them as terms whose relation is defined by emergence. Nature is the ground, the condition or field in which culture erupts or emerges as a supervening quality not contained in nature but derived from it. (Grosz 2005: 44)

The separation of culture from nature owes its intensity to the structuralist and post-structuralist theories that dominated twentieth-century thought, “the era of constructionisms”, and secured the priority of man-made systems. Little that existed beyond the cultural system was recognized. Culture had a limiting and diminishing effect on natural forces in that it selectively presented those features of the natural world which were of interest to the human constructed system. In this sense it reduced the complexity of the natural to what could be rendered controllable. Culture, or literature for that matter, argues Grosz, is the human response to the problems the natural world poses. It attempts to filter and interpret unpredictable and uncontrollable nature, whose resistance to control is immanent (Grosz 2005: 47-52). Jamie’s ways of looking at the environs are a method in which our culture, Western culture, responds to the changes within nature – and a way of admitting how simplistic our understanding of it has always been.

### **3. Defamiliarizing the familiar, defragmenting the consistent**

Urbain observes that it is not traversing physically from “here” to “there” that turns one into a traveller, but it is the capacity of turning “here” into “there”. It is not to respond to the call of the outside but rather to the call of the inside. One such practice is “exoticising the everyday”. This is the method of representing the familiar so that it emerges as strange. It is “creating the feeling of elsewhere in the here and now” (Urbain 2012: 30-38). This technique of defamiliarization, which by the Russian Formalists was referred to as *ostraneniye*, uses the destabilizing method and changes commonly accepted parameters into unfamiliar ones. This change requires some pause in the mechanical perception of the world. The purpose of altering perception is to escape the automatization and habituation of knowing. This makes observation more difficult but, at the same time, prolongs its effect (Shklovsky 1917: 2).

In “Surgeon’s Hall”, a narrative that wavers between the theme of nature and the human body, Jamie uses the strategy of defamiliarization. When visiting the Surgeon’s Hall Museum in Edinburgh she kneels and stoops to view parts of the human body preserved in jars. They resemble fruit or “the bands in polished agate”. Slices of kidney with mercury shots evoke the image of bracket fungus. In observing, in this “bending and looking” she “suspends” her judgment (Jamie 2005: 129-135):

Unless you have a professional interest, it’s possible that the only bodies you’ve been intimate with, have scrutinised have been the bodies of lovers or children. The act of unhurried, unmediated examination has hitherto been an act of love. (...) [These bodies] all call for the same plain tenderness. (Jamie 2005: 131)

In her slow progression among the exhibits, specimens of human life, she remains soundless and respectful, but never fails to ask questions that startle: “Where, I wonder does one acquire the corpse of a toddler?” (Jamie 2005: 136) When she

scrutinizes a row of skeleton fetuses arranged by size and age, questions about life, disease, and suffering bring the sudden recognition that nature is not “out there” but inside. The intimacy of her gaze evokes the concept of elsewhere or rather another world, a different time, another life.

In the essay “Pathologies”, the narrator uses the theme of a journey through the world diminished to a tissular cancerous growth. Here Jamie forsakes the pre-conceived binary categories of “here” and “there”, “natural” and “human”, “expanse” and “diminutiveness” without exterior obsessions or absolute claims about the concept of travel. She brings to our attention questions of scale and perspective (Alexander 2015: 10), and reduces the topographical to the minuscule. Here, defamiliarization is a way of comprehending. The author refuses to accept an abridged understanding of the word “nature”: “it’s not primroses and otters” (Jamie 2012: 24). Obscured by the abstract concepts used by environmental academics or by metaphysical attempts to re-connect with nature, the word is often lost to misunderstanding, and we are doomed to an infinite search for what “nature” is. Its primary meaning, though, lies in our own body, the animal body, and in its intimate beauty as well as diseased deformations. In a histology lab, examining liver cells, Jamie uses a hawk’s-eye view to scrutinize the ordered healthy liver tissue. She draws “a map of the familiar”. The healthy and “ordered” liver tissue is a countryside with riverbanks and an estuary at low tide (Jamie 2012: 30). Without changing the object of her observation, she proposes to employ a different way of observing. Geographical metaphors relativise the prescriptive points of reference. In “Pathologies” the inside of the human body is being examined out of this body while its “owner” is waiting out there at the pathology ward for the results of the examination. Through this disorienting arrangement, the inside and outside are reversed and finally integrated. They coalesce to form a universal image of nature.

Apart from adopting geographical discourse to refer to parts of the human body, the effect of estrangement is achieved through the illusion of movement in which the geographical references of north and south indicate the transfer between healthy and deadly cancerous cells. This is “mapping” the cellular landscape through a microscope:

Then we were swinging north, crossing the river, which was a vein rising into the liver from the intestine. On the river’s north bank, we stopped and hovered over a different kind of place, densely-packed, hugger-mugger, all dark dots that seemed too busy for comfort. Frank [the doctor] didn’t have to tell me that this was the tumour. (Jamie 2012: 31)

As Ashcroft explains, the defamiliarizing strategy constructs a place anew, redefining it for the observer. This reconstructing of the familiar stretches the limit of interpretative paths and brings new layers of meaning. But because the resulting description verges on the ultimate strangeness, it constructs a place whose representation is hardly possible because it evades definition. This, in turn, reveals the “epistemological powerlessness” of a travel writer, the narrator’s own inability to explain the nature of being (Ashcroft 2009: 237). Readers witness this ineffectiveness at reaching for the truth. At the same time, observation seems the only accessible strategy in the infinite quest for answers.

When she examines the *Helicobacter pylori* infection, language and landscape conspire to provide the topography of the stomach lining. Jamie depicts a mock pastoral scene, in which the bacteria are “grazing”. It is “the country beneath” filtered through “a gorgeous sapphire blue” (Jamie 2012: 33). Aesthetic perception, or rather the aesthetics of infection, occupies the central place in the passage. Seeing becomes a form of artistic expression. This is the art of looking. As in Shklovsky, perception which derives from estrangement, separated from automatization, becomes the source of experience (Crawford 1984: 210).

An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it, its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it. (Shklovsky 1917: 5)

In the narrative Jamie uses the metaphor of movement to journey to “strange new shores. The nature within. Nature we’d rather do without” (Jamie 2012: 36). The defamiliarizing device offers a new vision of the human body which is reflected upon so intensely that it becomes a foreign strange shore. But later, out of the pathology lab, she drives home and engages with the outer world of the real river and tide. It makes us realize that what we customarily take for nature and landscape are only totemic versions of reality.

This motif of “inside” and “outside” nature recurs in *Sightlines* again in the essay “La Cueva”, in which the narrator describes her visit to Cueva de los Murciélagos in Spanish Andalusia. The place is famous for its Palaeolithic drawings of animals, Neolithic artefacts and one of the largest bat colonies in the region. In the narrative Jamie explores our lost kinship with the animal world and our perennial human propensity to think in metaphors about the surrounding world. The technique of estrangement is again employed to expose our illusionary concepts of “nature”.

In the course of the narrative, she follows the guide and “can pick up certain words: aqua, water, murcielagos, bats – a clutter of whom, like a scrunch of black pubic hair, hang from the roof above” (Jamie 2012: 165). This illustrates that early in the essay she uses the imagery of the inside of the human body. She moves through “the gallery of uncanny forms” and attempts to “map them onto things we know in the world outside”. Again the meanings of “outside” and “inside” seem to collide and overlap:

Now we’re looking at stalagmites, by the soft lamplight. Some are seven or eight feet high, clotted, fatty shades, but hard and damp.

They're like huge pathological specimens, the kind preserved in jars in anatomy museums, leached of colour. Perhaps that's what gives the cave its solemnity: it feels like we're doing something intimate, transgressive, which we can speak only about in whispers. We have entered a body, and are moving through its ducts and channels and sites of processes. The very chamber we stand in is streaked with iron-red; it's like the inside of a cranium, a mind-space, as though the cave were thinking us. (Jamie 2012: 166)

By estranging the description of the cave, Jamie delays our understanding of what the place is and offers new possibilities of creating meaning. The practice, therefore, mobilizes the reader's attention towards our pre-conceived ideas, evoking again the "the nature within" rather than without. The implied assertion is that the concept of "nature" might be just as well the construct of our culture in the same way as the concept of "wilderness" was inspired and nurtured by the Romantics. This argument, which casts suspicion on modern environmentalist movements that see "wilderness" as a measure of civilization and place man outside that wilderness, has been frequently repeated by literary critics, and retains its currency at present. The resulting dualistic vision of the binary opposition man/nature fails to recognize the human place in it (Cronon 1995: 11).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Drawing on Peter Hulme's concept of "deep mapping",<sup>2</sup> Jamie's narratives succeed in evoking a sense of place, and representing "what lies beneath as well as above" (Hulme 2009: 133). Jamie borrows from the layers of geology, topography, history, and memory, which all emanate with what oftentimes remains

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<sup>2</sup> Hulme uses the subtitle of the 1991 *Prairy Erth (a deep map)* by American writer William Least Heat-Moon, who in his halted journey through Chase County, Kansas, successfully mingles self-discovery with a sense of place.

unspoken or unseen: the persisting stories of the past, the hidden tangible artefacts, the presence of ancestors, and the continuity of time, space, culture, and nature. The discovery of place is invariably tangled with inward-looking narratives to produce a “thickness” of description, to invoke Clifford Geertz’s term. In her “deep mapping”, travel is a mode of coexisting with the outer world, and mobility never reduces her writing to the theme of the journey alone. Nor does the attentiveness to place determine the narratives completely or eradicate the self. On the contrary, it emerges frequently to form an ethically involved observer who wonders at the multitude of questions the human race faces and the inadequacy of “only two possible answers: True or False” (Jamie 2005: 135).

Her narrative techniques, such as experimenting with literary synaesthesia or defamiliarization, develop what Neal Alexander (2015: 10) calls “an ethics of noticing”. Its desired effect is to make “unseen landscapes” visible, and Jamie reaches it by halting and prolonging readers’ comprehensions of what the described place and the natural world are or, at least seem to be. This strategy results in seeing us as part of nature and situating us within, not outside, the environment.

Finally, in *Findings* and *Sightlines* the scope of her engagement includes such themes as globalization, national identity and gender. In Jamie’s writing they constitute the cobweb that links us to place and the writer herself is known to have made attempts to redraft and redefine her own work, refusing to be categorized or labeled as a “woman writer” or “Scottish writer”. She is also among those contemporary Scottish writers who explore the possible meaning of “home” beyond questions of “Scottishness” or national loyalty. “Home” comes to indicate “good neighborhood”, the coexistence of humans and their natural environment (Gairn 2008: 158-167).

Terry Gifford, too, indicates the power of the hybrid quality in Jamie’s narratives, which cross the limiting label of “bioregional literature”. Here “environment is culture, just as culture is the constructor of ecology”. To illustrate the strata of mean-



ings inscribed by Scottish nature writers and poets onto the environment, Gifford explains:

The image of a Sitka spruce, for example, represents a fine tree, a thick forest, an overgrowth of historic buildings, a loss of native speakers, an English colonization, a capitalist erasure of the short-eared owl, or new habitat for the crested tit—all emotionally charged representations that are deeply felt by different readers. (Gifford 2009: 871)

Emotive narratives are written by situated writers and for situated readers, who share a similar concern both regionally and globally. Frequently Jamie exposes our own illusions of what “natural” is or where exactly “nature” resides, prompting us to rethink our own position in the system. She indicates the points of intersection between our human projections and nonhuman world and exposes the moments in which we switch on an automatic mode of perception, a Romantic legacy. “Nature” is not to be treated as an escape from civilization, which, as the author notices in her observations, permeates even the most remote and inaccessible parts of the landscape. In *Findings*, facing plastic artefacts found on the shore of a small Outer Hebrides Island, she nullifies the virtues of durability. What keepsake will better preserve the trip to CeannIar, she asks, “a bleached whale scapula” or “a doll’s head”? – both delivered by the ocean (Jamie 2005: 67).

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