



## Reader's Guide



*The Wilderness*  
is Samantha Harvey's first novel

# The Wilderness Samantha Harvey

Published by Jonathan Cape  
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## About the author

Samantha Harvey was born in England in 1975. She has lived in Ireland, New Zealand and Japan writing, travelling and teaching, and in recent years has co-founded an environmental charity alongside her novel writing. She completed with distinction the Bath Spa Creative Writing MA course in 2005, where she was shortlisted for the PFD prize. *The Wilderness* is her first novel. It was shortlisted for the Orange Prize 2009 and won the Betty Trask Prize 2009.

## The Wilderness

It's Jake's birthday. He is sitting in a small plane, being flown over the landscape that has been the backdrop to his life - his childhood, his marriage, his work, his passions. Now he is in his early sixties, and he isn't quite the man he used to be. He has lost his wife, his son is in prison, and he is about to lose his past. Jake has Alzheimer's.

As the disease takes hold of him, Jake struggles to hold on to his personal story, to his memories and identity, but they become increasingly elusive and unreliable. As Jake, assisted by 'poor Eleanor', a childhood friend with whom for some unfathomable reason he seems to be sleeping, fights the inevitable dying of the light, the key events of his life keep changing as he tries to grasp them, and what until recently seemed solid fact is melting into surreal dreams or nightmarish imaginings. Is there anything he'll be able to salvage from the wreckage?

## Discussion points

As the novel progresses Jake becomes an increasingly unreliable narrator and many questions are left unanswered did this leave you feeling intrigued or disorientated?

Which of Jake's relationships do you think were most important to him?

Which of the themes of the book do you think that the 'wilderness' of the title is most relevant?

What is your response to the review that claims '*Samantha Harvey barely puts a foot wrong in telling this crushing tale*'?

*The Wilderness* interweaves two narratives, Jake 'present' and Jake 'past', why do you think the author chose to develop the story in this way?

## Themed reading

*Gilead* Marilynne Robinson  
*The Story of Forgetting* Stefan Merrill Block  
*Iris* John Bayley

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