



## Lighthousekeeping

*Jeanette Winterson*

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Motherless and anchorless, Silver is taken in by the timeless Mr Pew, keeper of the Cape Wrath lighthouse. Pew tells Silver ancient tales of longing and rootlessness, of ties that bind and of the slippages that occur throughout every life. One life, Babel Dark's, opens like a map that Silver must follow.

## **Lighthousekeeping Details**

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Author : Jeanette Winterson

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## From Reader Review Lighthousekeeping for online ebook

### Jo (An Unexpected Bookish Geek) says

"Love is an unarmed intruder."

I don't care what anybody says, nobody writes like Jeanette Winterson. I have read quite a few books from Winterson now, and I can safely say she is certainly one of my favourite authors.

Even at times where I lost track of the plot a little and I trailed off course, I still enjoyed the writing. It is powerful and mystifying and it's like just a mere sentence from this author, can speak to my soul.

This book was not as strong as "Written on the body" or "The Passion" but that is not a complaint. This book was stunning in it's own beautiful way, and it reminds me why Winterson seems to effortlessly take my breath away, with every book she has written.

"There was an ending - there always is - but the story went on past the ending - it always does."

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### Diane S ? says

Tell me a story, reader.

What story?

About reading this book and what it means.

Okay, then I will tell you about light and dark, sun and shadows, about the power of story telling in times of despair, about how two different people can inhabit the same person, like Jekyll and Hyde and about how sometimes fate throws in a curve and brings us full circle.

If you have read this you will understand the above sentences, if not I'll just say, Winterson is often challenging, beautiful sentences, mixed with the frustration of trying to understand what she is trying to convey. Non linear, not at all straightforward storytelling, fragmented thoughts and paragraphs with many side roads and detours, like reading an Ali Smith novel. Yet, put together an amazing story and a different way of telling one. Brilliant in ways, but definitely not for everyone.

As Pew tells Silver, " Never rely on what you can see. Not everything can be seen."

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### Velvetink says

well I gave it 4 stars before I finished as I loved the way it challenges standard narrative...BUT the last 2 chapters kind of blew that....like she just chuck in a few pages from her journal... so downgrading it to 3 stars.

\*\*\*\*\*QUOTES \*\*\*\*\* SPOILERS\*\*\*\*\*

He doubted her. You must never doubt the one you love.  
but they might not be telling you the truth.  
What do you mean?  
you can't be another person's honesty, child, but you can be your own.  
So what should I say?  
When?  
When I love someone?  
You should say it.

A problem shared was a problem doubled, he thought. people tried to help, but all they did was interfere. better to keep trouble contained, like a mad dog. Then he remembered the dog. They were his thoughts. he wouldn't tell anyone, ever.

Do you know the story of Jekyll and Hyde?  
Of course.  
Well then – to avoid either extreme, it is necessary to find all the lives in between.

Are we so utterly lacking in self-knowledge do you think?  
I wouldn't put it like that, Dark: a man may know himself, but he prides himself on his character, his integrity – the word says it all – integrity – we use to mean virtue, but it means wholeness too, and which of us is that?

This is not a love story, but love is in it. That is, loves is just outside it, looking for a way to break in.

We're here, there,, not here, not there, swirling like specks of dust, claiming for ourselves the rights of the universe. Being important, being nothing, being caught in lives of our own making that we never wanted. Breaking out, trying again, wondering why the past comes with us, wondering how to talk about the past at all.

There's a booth in Grand Central Station where you can go and record your life. You talk. It tapes. It's the modern-day confessional – no priest, just your voice in the silence. What you were, digitally saved for the future. Forty minutes is yours.

Now the sky was a dead sea, and the stars and the planets were memory-points, like Darwin's fossils. There were archives of catastrophe and mistake.

The fossil record is always there, whether or not you discover it. The brittle ghosts of the past. Memory is not like the surface of the water – either troubled or still. Memory is layered. What you were was another life, but the evidence is somewhere in the rock – your trilobites and ammonites, your struggling life-forms, just when you thought you could stand upright.

Before he wrote on the origin of Species, Darwin spent five years as a naturalist, aboard HMS Beagle. In nature he found not past, present and future as we recognise them, but an evolutionary process of change – energy never rapped for too long – life always changing.

Darwin said something to me once for which I was grateful. I had been trying to forget, trying to stop my mind reaching for a place where it can never home. He knew my agitation, though he did not know the cause, and he took me up to (Am Parbh) – the Turning point. Nothing can be forgotten. Nothing can be lost. The universe itself is one vast memory system. Look back and you will find the beginnings of the world. I wish I could be clearer, I wish I could say “ My life has no light. My life was eating me alive”

The rest of my life. I have never rested always run, run so fast that the sun can't make a shadow. Well, here I am – mid-way, lost in a dark wood – the selva oscura without a torch, a guide, or even a bird.

In 1859 Darwin published on the Origin of the Species. Wagner completed the opera Tristan and Isolde. Both are about the beginnings of the world.

In Tristan the world shrinks to a boat, a bed, a lantern, a love-potion, a wound. The world is contained within a word – Isold. The Romantic solipsism that nothing exists but the two of us, could not be further from the multiplicity and variety of Darwin's theory of the natural world. Here, the world and everything in it forms and is re-formed tirelessly and unceasingly. Nature's vitality is amoral and unsenti-mental: the weak die, the strong survive.

In the fossil record of our existence, there is no trace of love. You cannot find it held in the earth's crust, waiting to be discovered. The long bones of our ancestors show nothing of their hearts. Their last meal is sometimes preserved in peat or in ice, but their thoughts and feelings are gone.

Some wounds never heal.

The second time the sword went in, I aimed it at the place of the first. I am weak there – the place where I had been found out before. My weakness was skinned over by your love. I knew when you healed me that the wound would open again. I knew it like destiny, and at the same time, I knew it as choice. The love-potion? I never drank it? Did you?

I unlatched the shutters. The light was as intense as a love affair. I was blinded, delighted, not just because it was warm and wonderful, but because nature measures nothing. Nobody needs this much sunlight. Nobody needs droughts, volcanoes, monsoons, tornadoes either, but we get them, because our world is as extravagant as a world can be. We are the ones obsessed by measurement. The world just pours it out.

I used to be a hopeless romantic. I am still a hopeless romantic. I used to believe that love was the highest value. I still believe that love is the highest value. I don't expect to be happy. I don't imagine that I will find love, whatever that means, or that if I do find it, it will make me happy. I don't think of love as the answer or the solution. I don't think of love as a force of nature – as strong as the sun, as necessary, as impersonal, as gigantic, as impossible, as scorching as it is warming, as drought making as it is life giving. And when it burns out, the planet dies.

My little orbit of life circles love. I daren't get any closer. I'm not a mystic seeking final communion. I don't go out with SPF5. I protect myself.

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## Katerina Charisi says

Η μεγ?λη μαγε?α σ' αυτ? το μικρ? βιβλιαρ?κι ε?ναι στην αφ?γηση. Ε?ναι τ?σο ιδια?τερη κι ?σο γυρνο?σα τις σελ?δες ?μουν σ?γουρη ?τι τη συγγραφ?α την ?χω ξαναδιαβ?σει. Δε θυμ?μουν ?μως πο?, π?τε και τι ε?χα διαβ?σει κι ?ρχισα να ψ?χνω στο διαδ?κτυο τα βιβλ?α της. Απ? τους ξεν?γλωσσους τ?τλους- γιατ? μ?νο τρ?α ?χουν μεταφραστε? στα ελληνικ? και το ?να απ? αυτ? δεν υπ?ρχει πουθεν? ο?τε ως αναφορ?- δεν μπ?ρεσα να το βρω. ?μως ?λεγα μ?σα μου ?τι δεν μπορε? να κ?νω τ?σο λ?θος. Την ?χω ξαναδιαβ?σει. Τελικ? ?ρχισα να ψ?χνω μ?σα στα ρ?φια μου κι ?στερα απ? αρκετ? ?ρα το βρ?κα. Ακ?μα και το ?νομ? της σε κε?νο ?ταν γραμμ?νο αλλι?ς. Στο «Β?ρος» που ?χω στη βιβλιοθ?κη μου αναφ?ρεται ως Ζιν?τ. Δεν θα ?κανα ποτ? το συνειρμ?, ?ταν το συγκεκριμ?νο βιβλ?ο το αγ?ρασα τυχα?α σε ?να παζ?ρι πριν δυο χρ?νια και το δι?βασα τ?τε. Φανταστε?τε το π?σο ιδια?τερη κι εντυπωσιακ? ε?ναι η γραφ? της, ?στε να την αναγνωρ?ζω απ? ?να ?λλο της βιβλ?ο, πριν δυο χρ?νια.

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## Lori Mitchell says

really can't get enough of winterson. this is a delicious little book, very easy to read...i finished it in a day.

favorite excerpts:

"What should I do about the wild and the tame? The wild heart that wants to be free, and the tame heart that wants to come home. I want to be held. *I don't want you to come too close.* I want you to scoop me up and bring me home at nights. *I don't want to tell you where I am.* I want to keep a place among the rocks where no one can find me. **I want to be with you.**"

"I know that the real things in life, things I remember, the things I turn over in my hands, are not houses, are not houses, bank accounts, prizes or promotions. What I remember is love - all love - love of this dirt road, this sunrise, a day by the river, the stranger I met in a cafe. Myself, even, which is the hardest thing to love, because love and selfishness are not the same thing. It is easy to be selfish. It is hard to love who I am. No wonder I am surprised if you do."

"I looked back at you. These moments that are talismans and treasure. Cumulative deposits - our fossil record - and the beginnings of what happens next. They are the beginning of a story, and the story we will always tell."

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## Charlotte May says

*"I am a glass man, but there is no light in me that can shine across the sea. I shall lead no one home, save no lives, not even my own."*

My second time reading Lighthousekeeping. It's a beautiful quiet tale that begins in a lighthouse in Scotland, with Pew and an orphan named Silver in the 1800s.

Though not rich in plot, this story focuses on people and our different sides, and the stories we tell to both ourselves and each other. Telling stories within a story. The main story we hear from Pew is about a man called Babel Dark and the two lives he lives.

*"Darkness was a presence. I learned to see in it, I learned to see through it, and I learned to see the darkness of my own."*

Robert Louis Stevenson and Darwin also both make appearances.

The writing in this book is wonderful - it enthrals and completely transports you.

I find a kind of peace when I go into this tale, and it's one I will return to again and again.

*"Don't regret your life child, it will pass soon enough."*

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### **Fionnuala says**

Yesterday I finally stepped out of the enchanted circle in La Mancha where I'd spent the last three weeks, and I thought about perhaps and maybe and possibly attempting to read another book, a different book, but sadly not an enchanted book because I had no more such books, and I wasn't happy about that.

So I picked this book. My initial feeling was that there couldn't be two books as diametrically opposed as Don Quixote and Lighthousekeeping. One is set in the sun-filled plains of early seventeenth-century Spain and treats of the adventures of chivalric knights and fair ladies, the other is set in mid twentieth-century Scotland among the sailors and fisherfolk of a wind-blown, cliff-perched town on a rocky coast; one is rich in words and chapters and volumes, the other as sparingly written as if every word had cost a small fortune and must do the work of a hundred.

Then I came to page 107 of Jeanette Winterson's book, and the phrase *Only connect*.

Suddenly I was propelled out of the book I was reading and into other books I'd read in the past, into Forster and Woolf, and much to my surprise, right back to Cervantes. That subtle prompt had made me realise that Lighthousekeeping is full of stories just as Cervantes' great epic is full of stories, and that one of the main stories Winterson chooses to tell is none other than 'The Man Who Was Recklessly Curious', the long short story inserted into the first volume of Don Quixote. It took me a while to see the connection between the two versions but when I did, it was abundantly clear: both versions tell of men who have found love but who can't be content until their unreasonable jealousies have turned their love into loss.

Both books are also divided into distinct halves, the second half, though very different from the first in each case, nevertheless expands and continues the first. *Only connect*. Both books are concerned with the repeated sallying forth of their heroes, towards new adventures in one, towards new beginnings in the other. And there is a certain enchantment in Lighthousekeeping after all: solid becomes liquid, silver becomes mercury, light becomes dark, Jekyll becomes Hyde.

But those unexpected parallels between the two titles aren't the only coincidence around the reading of this book. If I picked up Lighthousekeeping yesterday, it's because I recently found it shelved among books I read years ago. *Only connect*. When I found it, I remembered why I had bought it. I had been to a book reading where Jeanette Winterson spoke about her writing and read from some of her work. One of the things she read was the first few pages of Lighthousekeeping. She explained a little of how she came to write it and spoke of the care she'd taken with word choices, that if a story is set on a rocky coast, then the imagery must be that of ships and the sea and the wind. Until I read it for myself, I could never have appreciated how beautifully she followed that plan and how well it works.

This book is as petite and enchanting as the fossilized impression of a seahorse. If I could keep it in my pocket, I would.

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*Only connect.* As a result of reading this book, I must now read *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. I love when one book leads to another.

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### **Gail Winfree says**

Without a doubt, Jeanette Winterson is one of the finest writers of contemporary literary fiction. “Lighthousekeeping” is a story about a young orphan girl taken in by a blind and mysterious lighthouse keeper who tells stories about a 19th century clergyman who leads a double life: “a public one mired in darkness and deceit, and a private one bathed in the light of passionate love.” As I write in my own novel, “The Reality of Being Lovers,” “Lighthousekeeping” is a love story, but you don’t know that until the end.

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### **Ione says**

If you've never read any Winterson before, this might be a good place to start, even though it's one of her most recent books. It's a fairly short novel, and the text is rather spare, but Winterson is skilled at creating memorable passages with just a few words. The novel encompasses several stories, opening with the tale of orphaned Silver, who is sent off to live with an old blind man named Pew in a lighthouse on the coast of northwest Scotland. Pew tells Silver different tales while he teaches her how to tend the lighthouse. The foremost story he tells is of the preacher Babel Dark, a tormented man who may have been the inspiration for Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The novel has many twists and turns, and the story of Silver and the story of Dark become intertwined, with a surprising bit of the Tristan and Isolde story thrown in at the end to further illuminate Winterson's overall theme of love and relationships. This is one of the most unique novels I've read in a long time, and if you like Modernist literature, you will probably enjoy this book. If you prefer straightforward narrative, then this is probably not the book for you.

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### **Cecily says**

An extraordinary, lyrical book that is about the power of storytelling in - and about - our lives.

Other themes are light/dark/blindness (literal and metaphorical), outcasts, and the contrast between permanence and immobility (symbolised by the lighthouse) and change (people and the sea).

The fictional characters (one of whom has strong parallels with Winterson - see below) have some interaction with real characters and their works (Darwin, Robert Louis Stevenson and Wagner), and a broadly realistic story is sprinkled with slightly fairytale-like qualities, especially at the start, which also has comical aspects! Yet somehow, Winterson conjures this odd medley into something coherent, beautiful and profound.

### **PLOT**

There are two main narrative strands, both set in the small and remote Scottish village of Salts, and its

lighthouse: mysterious Victorian priest, Babel Dark, and Silver, a girl orphaned in 1969.

Silver is the narrator, and the opening chapters reminded me of a Roald Dahl's children's story: she and her shamed mother live outside the village, in a house cut into the hill such that it has a sloping floor, furniture has to be nailed down, they can only "eat food that stuck to the plate", and their dog has developed back legs shorter than the front.

A tragi-comic accident leaves Silver an orphan. After a short spell with a Dahlian spinster, she goes to live with Pew the blind lighthousekeeper, and the book loses the comedy, but retains some magic. "Some of the light went out of me, it seemed proper that I should go and live in a place where all the light shone outwards."

## NARRATIVE STRUCTURE, STORIES, STORYTELLING

Don't expect a single, linear narrative of a consistent style. "A beginning, a middle and an end is the proper way to tell a story. But I have difficulty with that method." It doesn't matter because "The continuous narrative of existence is a lie... there are lit-up moments, and the rest is dark."

Pew is a master storyteller, and Silver weaves his stories into the one she is telling. The boundaries of fact and fiction are often blurred within her world (as in this book itself, with its mention of real historical figures): Pew will describe doing something that happened before he was born, and when challenged, dismisses it as his second sight or "well, the Pew that was born then", whilst retaining the suggestion that in some mysterious way it was actually him.

Perhaps part of the reasons for Silver's blending of fact and fiction was prompted by this: a psychiatrist defines psychosis as being out of touch with reality, and her response is "Since then, I have been trying to find out what reality is, so that I can touch it."

The musings on stories are the most lyrical and magical aspects, and suggest the tangled ways in which they thread through our lives. "In fairy stories, naming is knowledge" and that is reflected in this story in several key ways.

Most stories never finish, "There was an ending - there always is - but the story went on past the ending - it always does". Similarly, "There's no story that's the start of itself, any more than a child comes into the world without parents."

"All the stories must be told... Maybe all stories are worth hearing, but not all stories are worth telling... The stories themselves make the meaning."

If you had forty minutes to tell your life story, what would you say? (This isn't a long book, but there's more than forty minutes' worth.)

The final chapters are more overtly philosophical, with less actual story. I think they're none the worse for that, but some may be disconcerted by the change.

## SILVER AS WINTERSON?

Winterson's first book, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>), was explicitly a fictionalised version of her childhood, and recently, she published the more factual "Why be

Happy when you Could be Normal?" (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>), but there are many aspects of Winterson in this as well: an orphan born in 1959, who finds solace in stories and libraries, "had to grow up on my own", and forges her own life. Some of the problems Silver encounters in later life also echo Winterson's own (view spoiler). She also finds the positive in the hardest circumstances, "We are lucky, even the worst of us, because daylight comes" (in "Why be Happy", she is grateful that the church taught her how important it is to concentrate on good things).

It goes further: the beloved mother in this "longed for me to be free, and did everything she could to make sure it never happened", and in "Why be happy", she makes an identical observation about the awful Mrs W (quoted in my review, linked above).

## WEAKNESSES

For such a carefully crafted book, it is a little heavy-handed at times. These are rare, minor faults in the overall context and content, and are recorded here more for my personal records than to spoil it for anyone else, hence the spoiler tag.

(view spoiler)

## QUOTATIONS AND NEW IDIOMS

- \* "A silent, taciturn clamp of a man."
- \* "She was one of those people for whom *yes* is always an admission of guilt or failure. *No* was power."
- \* "I was not much longer than my socks."
- \* "The wind was strong enough to blow the fins off a fish."
- \* "Our business was light, be we lived in darkness... The darkness had to be brushed away... Darkness squatted on the chairs and hung like a curtain across the stairway... I learned to see in it, I learned to see through it, and I learned to see the darkness of my own."
- \* "As dull as a day at sea with no wind."
- \* "Someone whose nature was as unmiraculous as a bucket."
- \* "He turned as pale as a skinned plaice."
- \* "The fossil record is always there, whether or not you discover it. The brittle ghosts of the past. Memory is not like the surface of water - either troubled or still. Memory is layered."
- \* When contemplating writing Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Stevenson posits (in this book) that all men have atavistic qualities: "Parts of themselves that lay like developed negatives? Shadow selves, unpictured but present?"
- \* "Women raising empty forks to glossy famished lips".
- \* "The light was as intense as a love affair."
- \* "I went outside, tripping over slabs of sunshine the size of towns. The sun was like a crowd of people, it was a party, it was music. The sun was blaring through the walls of the houses and beating down the steps. The sun was drumming time into the stone. The sun was rhythming the day."

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## Jeanette says

This is exactly the kind of morose and drilling of the fact that life is impermanent exercise that I probably dislike far more than 90% of other poor writing experiments for every degree of word craft and skill in their telling.

Yes, it is poetic at times and the story, when it was there or re-arrived, held an interest or two. But as I noted in the comment written as I approached the very end- not a fan. Do I lack imagination? Most probably. Do I like structure in a tale about tales. Absolutely.

She can write. And I've liked some of her stuff when she sticks to a structure.

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### **Montse Gallardo says**

De lo mejor que he leido últimamente. Ningún comentario que pueda hacer creo que le vaya a hacer justicia. Pura poesía en prosa.

Y no es una lectura fácil en el sentido de que no es una historia lineal; son muchas historias, que son la misma, pero diferentes; en la que hay saltos temporales, personajes distintos, escenarios diferentes, pero siempre un mismo anhelo, el amor. Y ese amor -su búsqueda y su pérdida, el saberse merecedor del mismo (o no) o el saber cómo transmitirlo, cómo recibarlo, cómo decirlo- creo que es el hilo conductor de este libro.

La relación de Silver y Pew es una delicia; dos personas solitarias que se encuentran por el azar, aunque probablemente estuvieran destinadas, y que construyen una relación a base de rutinas, historias y amor. Las historias que cuenta Pew, que más tarde construye Silver y que no son otra cosa que la vida de personas que existieron, tal y como se cuenta en cada historia... o no.

La vida es la historia que contamos de nosotros mismos. Contar historias es construir vidas.

Un libro absolutamente recomendable

Jeanette Winterson (segundo libro que leo de ella) pasa a ser una de mis escritoras favoritas

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### **Miquel Reina says**

I read Lighthousekeeping thanks to a recommendation of an editor I met some time ago and I still remember when she said to me: you have to read this book because it has something special that I know you'll appreciate. The truth is that I had never read any of the books of Jeanette Winterson, but the words of the publisher made me feel very curious.

The story caught me instantly. The book was almost like a love at first sight, in which each of the pages dragged me like a giant octopus into the depths of this gentle character, innocent and yet strangely unsettling. Lighthouse keeping is an unpretentious novel but full of a subtle narrative and deep characters had made that this book becomes one of my favorite ones. I recommend it to all those readers who like diving into simple stories, almost like a fairy tale, but full of subtleties, fuzzy feelings, and subtle thoughts. For me, it's a little gem of the contemporary literature.

Spanish version:

Leí la niña del faro gracias a la recomendación de una editora que conocí hace tiempo. Recuerdo que me dijo: tienes que leer este libro porque tiene algo especial que te encantará. La verdad es que no había leído nunca nada de la autora Jeanette Winterson pero las palabras de la editora me picaron mucho la curiosidad. Me atrapó al instante. El libro fue casi como un enamoramiento a primera vista, en que cada una de las

páginas me arrastraba como un pulpo gigante a las profundidades de un personaje tierno, inocente y a la vez, extrañamente inquietante. La niña del Faro es una novela sin demasiadas pretensiones pero su narración y personajes han hecho que se convierta en uno de mis libros favoritos. Lo recomiendo a todos aquellos a quién les guste zambullirse en historias sencillas, casi como si fueran cuentos, pero repletas de sutilezas, sensaciones difusas y sutiles pensamientos. Para mí es una pequeña joya de la literatura contemporánea.

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### **Esther says**

Un libro precioso, recubierto por un halo de emociones de principio a fin.

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### **Emily says**

Δεν κατ?φερα να βρω πολλ?ς αρετ?ς στο βιβλ?ο.  
Η γραφ? που τ?σο εκθει?ζεται, δεν με εντυπωσ?ασε καθ?λου.  
Και κυρ?ως, δεν με κινητοπο?ησε συναισθηματικ? στο παραμικρ?..  
Παρ?μεινα αμ?τοχη στις ιστορ?ες και δεν τις βρ?κα ο?τε καν πρωτ?τυπες.  
Για να ε?μαι δ?καιη, ξεχ?ρισα μερικ?ς προτ?σεις απ? το σ?νολο, που διασ?θηκαν στα μ?τια μου :  
- Ο Νταρκ ?νιωθε τον γνωστ? π?νο π?σω απ? τα μ?τια του. Τα μ?τια του ?ταν κ?γκελα και π?σω απ?αυτ? παραμ?νευε ?να ?γριο, ατ?ιστο ζ?ο.  
- Ε?μαι ?να πολ?χρωμο τζ?μι, το τζ?μι στο παρ?θυρο κ?ποιας εκκλησ?ας, που ?χει εδ? και πολ? καιρ? σπ?σει. Βρ?σκω κομμ?τια του εαυτο? μου παντο?, και ?ταν τα πι?νω κ?βομαι.  
?σως ?ταν η συγκυρ?α. ?σως ?φταιξε η παρ?λληλη αν?γνωση με το "ρωμα π?γου" της περ?που συνομ?λικης της, Yoko Ogawa που ?κανε τη σ?γκριση ασ?γκριτη.  
Θα το ξαναπροσπαθ?σω στο μ?λον.  
Προσεγμ?νη και ?μορφη η ?κδοση απ? το "Μελ?νι", χωρ?ς στοιχε?α για το εξ?φυλλο.

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### **Melody says**

I know - I'm "currently reading" 3 books already. But only one of them is fiction - so that's really the only one I count. And it's 892 pages long! I'm enjoying *Shadow Country* , but its work to read. This book is play. I'm not very far in *Lighthousekeeping*. In fact I picked it up just for a little distraction from the weight of *Shadow Country*, just planning on reading the book jacket and putting it right back down. Then I moved on to the first page ..."My mother called me Silver. I was born part precious metal part pirate." (Aren't we all?) I started feeling a little breathless and mesmerized and swirlily eyed and moved on to the next short section. I'm a sucker for a book broken into short sections and this one just flows from one little tiny section to another. I'm not sure how I'll pace myself between this book, *Shadow Country*, the Total Immersion swimming book and the Chi running book (which I haven't touched in so long I'm not sure where it is). But I know which one of this reading stack will make me get that calm little smile of pleasure when I'm reading it.

Review:

I have zipped and zagged about this book: It's a story within a story within a story. It's about the power of stories. It's a fable. It's poetry. It's about light and dark. It's about Jekyll and Hyde. It's about Pirates and

Silver. But finally I have to say it is what it is. It's whatever you get from it. You can just sit back and enjoy the language and the salty, fuzzy images Winterson creates for you:

Railings Row is a terrace of houses set back from the road. They reared up, black-bricked and salt-stained, their paint peeling, their brass green.

Or you can appreciate the subtle humor in the dialog between Pew and Silver:

Miss Pinch says you came from the orphanage in Glasgow.  
There's always been a Pew at Cape Wrath.  
But not the same Pew.  
Well, well.

You can count the references to the dark and light, good and bad, this and that, here and there, then and now – and get a rather large number.

You can furrow your brow and wonder when the heck the story took place since there are both references to lighthouse keepers and Starbucks coffee.

Or you can just enjoy *Lighthousekeeping* like you would a painting or a nature walk or a lovely Pinot Noir from the Oregon coast. And that's what I finally settled into.

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### **Kasia James says**

I loved this book - perhaps because it came at a time when my head was very busy with other stuff. It's a breath of salted air in your lungs. If you like nice linear, predictable books with a defined structure, then this one is not for you. But if you're happy to be wound in the seaweed curls of Winterson's prose poetry then this book is a delight.

The version I read (the Kindle edition) also has some excellent interviews with the author, which are inspiring and really help to understand how she writes. In these days when the 'write every day whether you feel like it or not' philosophy is in vogue, it is really refreshing to hear a writer talking about how her best writing comes from the unconscious, and that you need to give that time and space to develop - it can't be pushed into a regime.

Highly recommended.

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### **Kirsten says**

I kind of wanted to like this more than I did; I really love Winterson's writing, and her language here is as beautiful as ever. The problem I had with the novel is that it felt that there were several stories going on here, none of which were ever fully fleshed out or made real to me. I greatly enjoyed reading it, but when I finished I didn't feel like I had read a full novel; instead, it felt more like a series of vignettes waiting to be fleshed out.

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## PattyMacDotComma says

4★

Nobody writes quite like Jeanette Winterson. Even when I lose the plot literally, which I did, I enjoy reading her. It's a mix of stories, and I'm not sure I got all the connections. I enjoyed the blend for the first three quarters of the book but seemed to drift off at the end. Still, she's a 4★ read.

10-year-old Silver and her single mum live in a house on a hillside so steep that they sleep in hammocks and eat food that will stick to the plate (peas roll away forever), and they tie themselves together to get up to the house.

When Silver is orphaned, she is fostered out in the tiny village of Salts to Pew, a blind lighthouse keeper. Yes, blind. But he says to her once, "*You have the handicap of sight, it's true. . . . Never rely on what you can see. Not everything can be seen.*"

She falls in love with Pew's stories, with books and the library, which she's not allowed to join. She is so frustrated at borrowers checking out books she's only started, that she finally steals one.

Alongside this story, we follow the tale of Babel Dark, a philandering preacher in Salts in the 1800s who, much to the delight of Charles Darwin, discovers fossils high on the seaside cliffs, evidence that supports Darwin's The Origin of Species, leading to fame for the village.

Robert Louis Stevenson, the famous author (Treasure Island, and The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde) was the grandson of Robert Stevenson who built this and other lighthouses, which opens up discussion about lighthouses and the nature of man - the light and the dark.

On the whole, a mystifying, thought-provoking book..

P.S. An example of her style from near the end, in Silver's adulthood:

*The boat was vacuum-packed with Albanians, four generations to a family: great-grandmother, air-dried like a chilli pepper, deep red skin and a hot temper; grandmother, all sun-dried tomato, tough, chewy, skin split with the heat; getting the kids to rub olive oil into her arms; mother, moist as a purple fig, open everywhere – blouse, skirt, mouth, eyes, a wide-open woman, lips licking the salt spray flying from the open boat. Then there were the kids, aged four and six, a couple of squirts, zesty as lemons.*

Love it!

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## Helene Jeppesen says

After having finished "Lighthousekeeping" which I've had recommended to me by several friends, I'm left with an overall impression of vague disappointment. The novel simply didn't live up to my high

expectations, and I have a theory why that is.

The writing in this novel is absolutely impeccable! Especially the first couple of chapters took my breath away, and there is no doubt that Jeanette Winterson knows her craft. However, whenever I sit down to read a novel I want to be told a story that drags me in. Beautiful writing is always a plus, but not when the story becomes too messy and intricate, and I felt like that was the case with "Lighthousekeeping". In this novel, we are taken back and forth between several lives and destinies which all intertwine, but to be honest I was most interested in reading about the protagonist Silver and I unfortunately didn't get as many pages on her as I was hoping for.

This novel has definitely intrigued me to read more by Jeanette Winterson. It's unique, and it deals with some interesting topics such as loss, memory and identity. I quite liked this novel (hence my 3-star-rating), I just didn't love it as much as I was hoping for, but I hope that'll be the case with one of her other books I'm going to read.

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