

Lighthousekeeping

by Jeanette Winterson



About the Book

My mother called me Silver. I was born part precious metal, part pirate.

Orphaned and anchorless, Silver is taken in by blind Mr. Pew, the mysterious and miraculously old keeper of the Cape Wrath lighthouse. Pew tells Silver ancient tales of longing and rootlessness, of journeys that move through place and time, of passion and betrayal. His stories center on Babel Dark, a local nineteenth-century clergyman who lived two lives: a public one mired in darkness and a private one bathed in a beacon of light. Pew's stories are, for Silver, a map through her own particular darkness, into her own story and, finally, into love. With **Lighthousekeeping**, Winterson begins a new cycle and a return to the lyrical intimacy of her earliest work. One of the most original and extraordinary writers of her generation, Winterson has created a modern fable about the transformative power of storytelling.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the novel's opposing epigraphs. In what way do both quotations speak to Silver's mandates? What understanding of life's instabilities does Silver express in the opening paragraphs of **Lighthousekeeping**?
2. Who are Silver's beacons? In Silver's mind, does her mother light any paths for her, or does she extinguish them? Is Miss Pinch a purveyor of only dark episodes?
3. What ironies do the characters' names possess, from Babel to Pew? Does the town (called Salts) yield only bitterness?
4. Jeanette Winterson has been widely praised for innovative approaches to voice, time, and point of view when creating a storyline. What is the effect of the enfolded stories in **Lighthousekeeping**? How does Pew's storytelling tone compare to Silver's?

5. Babel Dark wouldn't marry Molly because he didn't trust her. Does his religious hypocrisy empower him or undermine him? What does his treatment of his wife reveal about the nature of abuse?
6. What parallels exist between Silver and Molly's daughter, Susan?
7. What makes Silver so captivated by the Dark legends? How do these legends compare to the other narratives she relishes, such as *Death in Venice*, the account of Captain Scott's final mission, or Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*?
8. When Silver asks Pew to tell her a story that begins again, he says this is the story of life. At what points does her life story begin again? To what extent do all life stories begin again?
9. Why can't Silver's Psychiatrist for Young Offenders discern the logic in her thinking? Do you perceive Silver as a rational person on the lam from an irrational world, or is her story surrealistic? Is imagination inimical to rational thought?
10. Miss Pinch said Pew was an orphan from Glasgow; what is your understanding of his identity? What do you think of his conversations with Babel Dark about the liaisons with Molly in the lighthouse?
11. What enables Silver to be loved at last? What enables her to trust her lover and create beauty with her, while Dark's experiences with Molly were equal doses of anguish and beauty? What is the effect of Silver telling her love story in second person?
12. Already drowned, Dark releases the seahorse and sets out to be reunited with Molly. How do you interpret his final scene?
13. Discuss Silver's homecoming to the lighthouse and her reunion with Pew and DogJim. How does her understanding of life at that point compare to when Pew first took her in?
14. What literary techniques does Winterson use to blend historic narratives with Silver's contemporary one? What balance does she strike between humor-especially in word plays-and pathos?
15. The love stories portrayed in Winterson's previous novels have spanned cybersex and the French Revolution. Read as a continuum, what truths and possibilities about love does her fiction resolve?
16. In terms of ancestry, fantasy, or your favorite literature, which narratives have most shaped your identity? What story have you told throughout your life?

Author Bio

Born in Manchester, England, Jeanette Winterson is the author of more than 20 books, including the national bestseller *WHY BE HAPPY WHEN YOU COULD BE NORMAL?*, *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT* and *THE PASSION*. She has won many prizes including the Whitbread Award for Best First Novel, the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, the E. M. Forster Award, and the Stonewall Award.

Critical Praise

"A brilliant, glittering piece of work, the kind that makes you gasp out loud at the sheer beauty of the language."

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