

Storytelling in Jeanette Winterson's

Lighthousekeeping

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The thing about a beloved book, if it's a good one, is that it shifts like music; you think you know it, you've read it so many times, of course you know it, but then you hear in the background, the thing you never heard in it before, and with the turn of a page you see a combination of words you know you've never seen before, you thought you knew this book but it dazzles you with the different book it is, yet again (146) .

The Whole Story and Other Stories, Ali Smith

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Dear Kenan, where would I be without you? To me you are an inexhaustible source of patience, support and stubborn love. Without your help, I would not have been able to finish this thesis.

Note on referencing

The following is a list of abbreviated titles used in this thesis.

- ACCG** *Jeanette Winterson; A Contemporary Critical Guide* “Introduction: Winterson and her Critics” Andermahr, Sonya
- BFT** “Chapter 12 Jeanette Winterson’s *Lighthousekeeping*” Andermahr, Sonya. *British Fiction Today*, Mengham & Tew.
- FIE** “From Innocence to Experience” Louise Tucker talks to Jeanette Winterson in *Lighthousekeeping*
- Happy** *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* Winterson, Jeanette.
- JW** *Jeanette Winterson* Andermahr, Sonya.
- LHK** *Lighthousekeeping* Winterson, Jeanette.
- Oranges** *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* Winterson, Jeanette.
- SL** *Studying Literature: the Essential Companion*, Goring, Paul, Jeremy Hawthorn, Domhnall Mitchell.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Tell me a story, Pew.

What kind of a story, child?

A story with a happy ending.

There's no such thing in all the world.

As a happy ending?

As an ending (*LHK* 49).

The telling of stories is an essential feature in Jeanette Winterson's novel *Lighthousekeeping*. Stories go beyond their endings. Perhaps there is a happy ending, but how can there be a happy ending without an ending? Real life intertwines with the fictional world conjured into life by Winterson's highly innovative and refreshing writing technique. Winterson has never been one to conform to existing conventions in literature, which can be seen in her experimentation with "fictional forms" (*JW* 17), which involves "parodic rescripting of popular and canonical genres" (*JW* 19). Meanwhile, her writing is characterized by reworking some well-known literary techniques, such as intertextuality and symbolism. She combines these traditional techniques with features often labeled as postmodern, which typically include experimentation with plot structure and the metafictional aspect.

Sonya Andermahr once described Winterson as having a "strong, first-person, unmistakable Wintersonian voice" (*JW* 153), in her fiction. The term "Wintersonian" can be expanded to incorporate all of the various features that make up Winterson's literary technique, making her work recognizable to the reader. However, because of her strong first-person voice, some critics have not been able to separate tale from teller, and have judged her work on a different basis than they perhaps should have. Consequently, she has faced harsh criticism by contemporary critics.

Winterson's choice to playfully alter between the fictional Winterson, and the real life Winterson in her writing, has shaped the development of the critical reception of her work. Following the trail of critical reception of her novels, from her debut *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* to the reception of *Lighthousekeeping*, many critics have repeatedly invoke Winterson's media image as a basis on which to judge her work.

As Andermahr states, "Winterson's work consistently attests to the power of storytelling in human life" (*JW* 27). In fact, this attestation stems from the experiences in her own life, "[m]y journeys [into books] were matters of survival; crossing nights of misery into days of hope. Keeping the light on was keeping the world going" (Winterson cited in *JW* 27). Keeping the light becomes a refrain in *Lighthousekeeping*, where Pew and Silver keeps the light of the lighthouse lit. In addition, Silver needs to keep her light going, when everything seems at its darkest in the novel; she keeps her spirits up by turning to storytelling, which she learned from the lighthouse-keeper Pew. Winterson is an author who in her storytelling and fiction, directly and indirectly has drawn on her own life experiences. She has rewritten herself repeatedly in her fiction and appears several times in her novels, including *Lighthousekeeping*.

Winterson claims that "the telling of stories is not about imposing an order" (*FIE* 4), which her nonlinear plot in *Lighthousekeeping* demonstrates. She thinks that "art is one way of discovering a genuine and unforced pattern in our lives and in the world around us and that's why writing can never be formulaic" (*FIE* 4). This approach is demonstrated in her fiction, which does not rely on established conventions. Rather, her writing suggests new connections in how fiction is read and interpreted. Winterson considers stories to be in constant change (*FIE* 2). Literary classics can be rewritten, legends reworked, even the story of her own life is not static, but is continually retold and interwoven in her fictional web of stories.

With *Lighthousekeeping* Winterson establishes her view of the novel, and in it, storytelling is given the highest value. The plot-driven narrative is discarded for a more experimental narrative structure, leaving the novel open for various interpretations. In this way, Winterson challenges and reworks storytelling as we know it and suggests a new understanding of storytelling.

In order to argue that Winterson challenges the notion of storytelling in *Lighthousekeeping*, it is necessary to place her in some context, both within her authorship, and in a literary, critical environment. This will be the primary focus of Chapter 2, which aims to offer a deeper understanding of why Winterson writes the way she does, and what aspects of her fiction contribute to the originality of it. Susana Onega states that “some knowledge of her life and background is indispensable for an understanding of her work, since one of the games she recurrently plays in her fictions is the confusion of her identity with that of her protagonists” (3). In fact, “playing a game” is a highly accurate description when it comes to how *Lighthousekeeping* is written. In the novel, Winterson constantly stretches her readers understanding of what constitutes a story.

When analyzing *Lighthousekeeping*, storytelling presents itself as Winterson’s grand theme and serves as a reminder of Winterson as a quintessential storyteller. All authors are storytellers. Yet, Winterson’s fiction appears different to the reader. Why this is the case will be the focus of Chapter 3.

Winterson’s interest in stories and storytelling is representable for the interest we all have in stories. From early childhood we are infatuated by stories. Being exposed to stories in various forms shape children’s perception of life, and the world around them. This is certainly the case for the protagonist Silver in *Lighthousekeeping*. Her upbringing with Pew at Cape Wrath revolves entirely around stories. Silver hears stories from Pew, who is an endless

source of tales, riddles and legends. She in turn needs to learn to tell her own story, because only then will she be able to overcome her obstacles and move on in her life.

We all have a desire to be entertained by a good story, whether in a book, a movie or a TV show. We seek the happily-ever-after, the sense of a never-ending story, because this leaves us with a feeling of contentment. In the twenty-first century, people are obsessed with their own stories, and sharing their stories with the world, often through various social media, blogs, and multimodal texts in general. In a way, all people are made up of stories, and carry them around. Therefore, an encounter with a stranger often leads us to wonder what their story is. Perhaps this is some of the motivation for reading a book today. The book offers an insight into a story; a flash of someone else's life and history. *Lighthousekeeping* does precisely this. It tells many stories, from different periods in time.

Literature and novels are nothing if not the physical preservation of stories in various forms. Babel Dark laments in *Lighthousekeeping*, "I am splintered by great waves. I am coloured glass from a church window long since shattered. I find pieces of myself everywhere, and I cut myself handling them" (*LHK* 166). Similarly, splinters of Jeanette Winterson's life are scattered in her novels. Winterson wants little attention devoted to the biographical aspects of her fiction; she wants her work to be read *purely* as fiction. However, some elements of her life-story echo in the novel. More importantly, the understanding of the novel's main topos can be found by looking into her life. Because her love for stories, storytelling and the preservation of these, function as her motivation for choosing storytelling as the novel's main theme. *Lighthousekeeping* preserves a number of stories, hereunder the intertextual written sources, and sources typically stemming from a more oral storytelling tradition such as legends.

Stories, which are passed on to us from early childhood, typically in nursery rhymes or songs, fairytales or any kind of children's literature, help children build a common ground or

understanding of the world. In a way, Winterson uses much of the same technique when she creates her fictional world in *Lighthousekeeping*. The stories Winterson constructs appear familiar and well known to the reader, because of her intertextual technique.

She draws on legends such as King Arthur and the Holy Grail, and the tragic love story of Tristan and Isolde. She often refers to the Bible, especially the book of Genesis where the character Babel Dark's name stems from. In the novel Babel can be seen as the tower of Babel, aloof, estranged and lonely. Pew describes him as "a pillar of the community" (*LHK* 26). The Bible story of Samson, Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, are also included. Real life adventures and events are also included, such as the Apollo moon landing and Scott's South Pole expedition. In fact, the novel is rich in intertextual references, which will be the focus of Chapter 4.

Winterson's extensive use of intertextuality is no coincidence. In general, literature has offered Winterson a possibility to exercise control over a world she perceives as unpredictable and out of control. She specifically reflects on this in her memoir:

Stories are compensatory. The world is unfair, unjust, unknowable, out of control. When we tell a story we exercise control, but in such a way as to leave a gap, an opening. It is a version, but never the final one. And perhaps we hope that the silences will be heard by someone else, and the story can continue, can be retold (*Happy* 8).

The story of Winterson's own life is well known, especially because of her debut novel *Oranges* (1985). Here the protagonist Jeanette shares her author's name and many common features from Winterson's life. Her upbringing with the somewhat eccentric Mr. and Mrs. Winterson, and the rest of her life, is vividly described in her memoir *Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal* (2011). Born in Manchester on 27 August 1959, her birth mother gave her up for adoption. She was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Winterson. They raised her into a

strict Pentecostal Evangelist faith where “she was expected to do militant religious work, to accept compulsory heterosexuality and to avoid developing her intellectual and artistic capacities” (Onega 3). Her upbringing by her adoptive parents can only be described as typical working class, in “the industrial north of England” (*Happy* 131) in the mill-town of Accrington, Lancashire (Onega 3). Her mother intended her to take up a career in missionary work, but she was cast out from the Pentecostal society at the age of 16 when she was found in bed with another woman (Onega 4).¹ After it became known that she was a lesbian, her adoptive mother threw her out of her home.

She took another step away from the future Mrs. Winterson had intended for her when she applied to study English at Oxford. Winterson describes this as “the most impossible thing I could do” (*Happy* 131). In the industrial north of England, men held the economic power. They were typically employed in blue-collar jobs, such as mining or factory work. Women held the family together and the community and this “material/domestic pattern was repeated everywhere” (131). Being a lesbian in this community was unacceptable, so was female ambition, “although the clever girls were encouraged to go to teacher training college, or to take their accountancy exams” (131). In her opinion, “three things formed the basis of my politics” (131): she was a woman, she was a working-class woman, and “a woman who wanted to love women without guilt or ridicule” (131). Staying in the small town, however much she respected her fellow northerners, was not an option for the ambitious Winterson: “I wasn’t looking to improve the conditions of my life. I wanted to change my life out of all recognition” (133).

Considering the position Winterson came from, going to the University of Oxford represented an opportunity to change her life radically. After all the tumults, she found herself beginning again. However, Oxford probably seemed as sensible a solution to her as anything else in the turn her life was taking. Because there, she could study the one thing that had

always made sense to her, and which represented a stable point in her life, namely literature. On her second attempt, Winterson was admitted to Oxford. Here she soon became familiar with the “prejudices and pleasures of an Oxford degree course” (*Happy* 137). Winterson found herself excited, hopeful and troubled by what the interviewer had asked her during her admission interview: did she think that “women could be great writers?” (137) This led her to question, “[a]s a woman would I be an onlooker and not a contributor? Could I study what I could never hope to achieve?” (138) She answered by concluding [a]chieve it or not, I had to try” (138). Today Winterson is a prolific author and this date she has published 20 books, including her memoir and books for children.² She is considered a significant figure in the field of contemporary British literature (*JW* 13). In 2006, she had an OBE bestowed on her, which epitomized the cultural establishments recognition of her significant role in the contemporary cultural life (13).

Chapter 2 Storytelling

According to Katie Elson Anderson, “[d]efining storytelling is not a simple matter” (1). Therefore, a definition of the expression “storytelling” is not set in stone, and it holds a number of different connotations. This is further complicated with “debates regarding the meanings of the word *story* and *teller*” (1). Definitions of the term storytelling are typically associated with a story being passed down in oral tradition, this tradition can be dated back to before the existence of the written word. Storytelling is also connected to for instance creative writing and digital storytelling. Courses on storytelling are now being taught in departments of anthropology, education, psychology and business and management, to mention a few (19).

There is a conflict in defining storytelling, which has its basis in whether “storytelling is the continuance of oral tradition only” (Anderson 3), to only affiliate storytelling with an oral tradition will exclude any written texts. This in itself creates a problem, because it is through the written works for example *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf* “modern culture has access to such oral traditions as the epic poem” (3). Ultimately, the Bible can also be added to the type of storytelling that stems from an oral tradition, but has been preserved in a written form.

The common foundation for understanding the term storytelling, which scholars agree upon, is that, “storytelling in its simplest form, is the act of communicating an event (or sequence of events) to an audience, using words and/or physical movement” (Anderson 2). Further, contemporary examples of non-traditional storytelling are ultimately, “original stories crafted by a storyteller” (2).³ Which is the type of story *Lighthousekeeping* represents.

The term narrative is often used when discussing storytelling (Andersen 7). It is within the field of narratology Winterson most extensively challenges her readers’ previous understandings of what a story is, and how it should be told. “A beginning, a middle and an end is the proper way to tell a story. But I have difficulty with that method” (*LHK* 23) says the narrator in *Lighthousekeeping*. Which is acutely demonstrated in *Lighthousekeeping*, and it is

in the way *Lighthousekeeping* is built up that it differs from a traditional story. Fairytales are examples of the type of stories which are chronologically built, and have certain conventions which follow the genre, in other words, a traditional story. However, only applying the terms *story*, *plot* or *narrative* becomes insufficient when analyzing *Lighthousekeeping*. Arguably, the book itself calls upon a wider perspective beyond these technical terms. Using the term storytelling will open the analysis of *Lighthousekeeping* up for a broader scope.

The word *story* and the phrase *tell me a story* is repeated throughout *Lighthousekeeping*. The phrase tell me a story in combination with chapter headings, function as structuring devices and build the novel's framework and narrative structure. The first five tell me a story -requests are addressed from Silver to Pew. The next five requests are to Silver from her lover, while the last one is addressed from Pew to Silver. All of these requests function as bridges in the sense that they bind these sections of the narrative together. In the novel, the expressions tending the light or keeping the light becomes metaphors for believing in the power of stories, and in the power of love. Andermahr points out that, "Winterson develops the novel's refrain – 'keeping the light' – as a metaphor for storytelling" (BFT 142). This is an example of how Winterson has worked with language "so that it is metaphor as well as meaning" (JW 129). Just like the lighthouses in real life function as a "string of guiding lights" (LHK 21), the bridges and chapter headings function as connectors in the novel, and help guide the reader through the complex narrative.

These phrases also remind the reader of the novel's storytellers; we are constantly reminded that there is a storyteller mediating a story or multiple stories, even though the main narrator changes in the novel. The requests function as structuring devices on two levels. Firstly, they say something about who the main narrator is at these given points in the novel. Secondly, it follows Silver's development into becoming the main storyteller. Initially she learns the stories from Pew, but at one point, she takes over and becomes the storyteller. It is

through Pew that Silver learns the value of stories and storytelling; “I can teach you – yes, anybody – what the instruments are for, and the light will flash once every four seconds as it always does, but I must teach you how to keep the light. Do you know what that means?’ I didn’t. ‘The stories. That’s what you must learn’” (*LHK* 40). However, only applying the terms *story*, *plot* or *narrative* becomes insufficient when analyzing *Lighthousekeeping*. Arguably, the book itself calls upon a wider perspective beyond these technical terms. Using the term storytelling will open the analysis of *Lighthousekeeping* up for a broader scope. This wider perspective has become necessary, because as Onega discusses, Winterson aims to stretch the possibilities of fiction, perhaps to the extent of suggesting a new novel form. Further, Winterson’s work can be seen as proof of the novel’s capacity for survival and renewal, and “may indeed be regarded as apt examples of the further turn of the screw given to the novel form” (Onega 13). Winterson’s experimental work is a contribution to the development of the twenty first century novel.

The format and layout of *Lighthousekeeping* also contributes to the idea of Winterson being an author who contributes to changing the idea of the novel. The very packaging of the Harper Perennial 2005 edition of *Lighthousekeeping* separates it from what have been the previous conventions. The novel’s additional material or paratext “marks a change from the way in which a *new* novel would have been packaged a couple of decades ago”(Hawthorn 2).⁴

At the beginning of the novel, a dedication, thanks, and an epigraph are included. On the book cover, quotes from reviews are printed. A plot summary is included on the back. These are all normal features in a novel. However, the “P.S Ideas, Interviews and Features” section included after the novel’s final page is a bit unusual. The first sub-section “About the author” draws attention to the author figure. The Louise Tucker interview with Winterson and the “Endless Possibilities” text where Winterson writes about *Lighthousekeeping* included in the second sub-section “About the book”, strengthens the connection between the author and

her readers. The third sub-section, “Read on”, lists other books by Winterson, and several writers and their works, such as *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. This points the reader to some of Winterson’s most central intertextual references. The “Find out more” section mentions actual places in the novel, including the Cape Wrath lighthouse. It also lists several webpages that provide information about lighthouses in Scotland, museums, and how to visit them. Winterson’s homepage is also listed. In summary, all of these factors contribute to the weakening of “the conventional boundary between the ‘world of fiction’ and ‘our normal everyday world’” (Hawthorn 2).

The last night Silver spends with Pew at the lighthouse, she contemplates “*Only connect*. How can you do that when the connections are broken? ‘That’s your job,’ Pew had said. ‘These lights connect the whole world’” (*LHK* 107).⁵ Perhaps suggesting that stories are not bound by time or space. Rather, it follows the storyteller’s journey towards making sense of the world. “Only connect” can also be seen as Winterson’s request to her readers, because the way *Lighthousekeeping* is built up leaves the joining of imaginative connections in her novel up to the reader, both in terms of making sense of the novel, and its narrative structure. Winterson points to this in the “From Innocence to Experience” interview: “Storytelling is a way of establishing connections, imaginative connections for ourselves, a way of joining up disparate material and making sense of the world” (*FIE* 4).

The novel’s juxtaposing forces are initiated already in the novel’s epigraph:

“Remember you must die”

MURIEL SPARK

“Remember you must live”

ALI SMITH (*LHK* 1).

These forces are continually problematized, challenged and reoccur throughout the novel. It also foreshadows the themes of this novel. An example of this would be how Winterson

includes Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde* both from 1859, "[b]oth are about the beginnings of the world" (LHK 169). However, they represent two very different views of the world. Darwin is described as "objective, scientific, empirical, quantifiable" (169), whereas Wagner is described as "subjective, poetic, intuitive, mysterious" (169). As Winterson expresses it "[t]he romantic solipsism that nothing exists but the two of us, could not be farther from the multiplicity and variety of Darwin's theory of the natural world" (169). These two representations are not aimed to be united, rather the reader is told "[d]ig deeper, there'll be a story, layered by time, but true as now" (171), perhaps suggesting that it does not matter which one of these two forces you believe or value the most; it is the story that should be valued above all. This example also points to a central element in Winterson's fiction, an element she shares with many of her contemporaries. Just like the modernist authors' works which were typically, "informed by an anxiety over the fragmented nature of experience and by a desire to unify it, postmodernists celebrate the fragmentation, the anxiety, and the impasse" (Koundoura 380).

Before publishing *Lighthousekeeping* in 2004, critical reception of Winterson's novels tended to revolve around one of two things. The first related to gender, hereunder feminism, and Winterson as a lesbian writer. The other aspect involved critics who concerned themselves with analyzing her as a postmodern author. *Lighthousekeeping* entails elements of both. However, in *Lighthousekeeping*, these two aspects can be seen to have been replaced by the storytelling aspect. Therefore, a broadened view of the reception of Winterson's work is necessary. Andermahr observes that "recently, critics are re-evaluating Winterson's work in the light of more nuanced accounts of contemporary experimental writing and her own apparent attempts in her recent work to reclaim storytelling from postmodern exhaustion" (JW 167). However, before the introduction of a more broadened and nuanced view began to

develop, some critics tended to adopt a more narrow and repetitive view when analyzing her her fiction, which often based itself on Winterson's personae.

As an accomplished author, Winterson has been identified with a wide range of personae in the media, starting with "the 'bright young thing' in the mid-1980s, the arrogant lesbian *enfant terrible* of the mid 1990s and the benign fairy godmother of recent times" (JW 153). The press coverage of her has had an "unwarranted and inordinate focus on her personality and sexuality" (153). With this in mind, it is understandable why Winterson's attitude towards the media and journalists has been rather tense. However, as Winterson herself points out, her working-class background had not prepared her for standing in the media limelight. In retrospect, she realizes that some aspects of the negative media image was a result of her own immature behavior. This complicated relationship partly springs from what she feels is a lack of understanding, a misunderstanding of her motives both on a personal level and in her work. She describes this in her memoir:

[a]nd later, when I was successful, but accused of arrogance, I wanted to drag every journalist to this place, and make them see that for a woman, a working-class woman, to want to be a writer, to want to be a good writer and to believe that you were good enough, that was not arrogance; that was politics (*Happy* 138).

Another main source for her frustration, which she mentions in interviews, is the judging of her work based on her image created by the media, rather than the work itself. A study of Winterson's critical reception show that at times this has certainly been the case, and actually perhaps still was the case in 2004 when *Lighthousekeeping* was published.

Critics such as Merja Makinen point to the two main areas in the reception of Winterson's work. In her book *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, the focus is on identifying Winterson as either a lesbian writer or a

postmodern writer (2). Lyn Pykett refers to this as placing Winterson's fiction in boxes (53), which undoubtedly limits Winterson's work. Feminism and lesbian theory are often identified as distinctive elements in Winterson's fiction (Onega 2). Winterson rejects the qualifications of her work as postmodernist fiction and lesbian fiction, especially the latter. She expects to be referred to as a writer, as are male authors (3). According to Onega, Silver is implicitly characterized as bisexual in *Lighthousekeeping*. The fact that Winterson aligns the love of Tristan and Isolde, Molly and Babel with Silver's own homosexual love for the nameless lady she falls in love with suggests that she "takes bisexuality for granted and considers the question of sexual orientation totally irrelevant" (228).

The two scholars who have written most extensively on Winterson are Sonya Andermahr and Susana Onega. They have both published each their monograph on Winterson, approaches her work with a very wide scope. Onega's *Jeanette Winterson* (2006) and Andermahr's introduction chapter in *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide* (2007) as well as *Jeanette Winterson* (2009) provides valuable insight into how academics have approached her work. As well as how media critics have received and reviewed her work publicly, as well as many other aspects on Winterson and her fiction. They all point to the same conclusion: the Winterson persona created by the media contributes to undermining her position as a respected writer.

Winterson's relationship with the popular press and the broadsheet media has fluctuated from unified praise to a very destructive and uncertain relationship. *Oranges* published in 1985 won her the Whitbread prize for a first novel, and launched her career into a critical environment of almost universal approval (ACCG 1). Both in the mainstream and alternative press, *Oranges* was praised for its originality, humor, and its beautiful language (2). The publication of *The Passion* in 1987 confirmed the opinion of most reviewers that "it was the work of an innovative writer already at the height of her powers" (Onega 54). It also

won her the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial prize. *The Passion* was praised for its stylistic richness, imaginative audacity, openly fantastic and lyrical kind of fiction (54). *Sexing the Cherry* won the 1989 E.M. Forster award, confirming the reviewers' opinion that Winterson was a talented representative of a new phase in lesbian fiction, engaging in a more complex reality than the lesbian literature had done over the past twenty years, and moving away from the themes of self-discovery and self-affirmation (Onega 79). The TV adaptation of *Oranges* in January 1990 established her high media profile, popular success, and critical acclaim (ACCG 2).

However, when *Written on the Body* was published in 1992, it was met with much negative criticism; the novel was generally seen as overwritten, melodramatic and derivative (ACCG 2). Her loyal feminist readers turned against her, claiming the book was insufficiently woman-centered (2). Evidently, "the bad press had a lasting effect on Winterson's reputation and thereafter almost universal ambivalence greeted her 1990s work" (2).⁶ The publication of *Art & Lies* in 1994 received an extremely mixed response. It was criticized for being both boring and incomprehensible, as well as lacking a storytelling element (2-3). However, others found it an "extraordinary piece of fiction" (2). Onega points out that *Art & Lies* marks the lowest point in what Winterson refers to as "a dark decade"(6). Winterson struggled with a growing fear of writer's block and mental collapse (6). Her collection of essays *Art Objects* (1995) "in which she defended her approach to writing and Art under the banner of high modernism" (ACCG 3) was seen mostly as pretentious and was subdued to mockery by critics. The reception of Winterson's next novel, *Gut Symmetries* (1997), received much of the same polarized critique. There was a division between those who saw it as an "interesting, linguistically inventive text and those who saw it as too experimental, self-indulgent and inward-looking" (3).

Winterson admits that she was somewhat responsible for the media commotion, because she often provoked the press, played games with them and took on various roles. These activities did not always work in her favor. The fact that she was openly lesbian in the public sphere from very early on in her career contributed to the attention she received in her personal life. Therefore, her reputation as an outspoken public figure and lesbian came to dominate reception of her work throughout the 1990s (ACCG 3).

In the meantime, Winterson diversified her writing. She wrote film scripts, journalism, and created a highly successful website. This increased her fan base enormously (JW 156). When Winterson published *The PowerBook* in 2000, her reputation began to improve. She considered *The PowerBook* to be the end of a cycle that started with *Oranges* (FIE 3). The publishing of *Lighthousekeeping* in 2004 began a new cycle in her writing or “a new exploration” (FIE 3). The reception of *Lighthousekeeping* in the broadsheet media continues the tradition of the mixed responses of Winterson’s fiction.

When analyzing the reviews of *Lighthousekeeping*, it becomes evident that the reviewers like to emphasize Winterson’s alleged arrogance. They also compare it to her previous work. Joanna Briscoe calls *Lighthousekeeping* “a flawed return to form”. She accurately points to how Winterson refuses to “make life easy for lazy readers” (Briscoe). The novel features “far fewer spreeds than usual into the unreadably pretentious” (Briscoe). She claims that the setting anchors *Lighthousekeeping*, as well as the lighthouse and the physical presence of Pew. She calls Winterson above all, a true innovative of form, and points to how “Winterson’s unique voice can’t be underestimated: in full force, the originality of her lyrical gift is breathtaking” (Briscoe). Briscoe further claims that “[a]t her worst, she reads as though comatose in the presence of her own poetic powers after a morning spent imbibing Virginia Woolf. At her best, she’s just as good as she seems to think she is” (Briscoe). This statement provides evidence for how Winterson is never rid of her 1990s media image. Briscoe

concludes that *Lighthousekeeping* should be admired and enjoyed, and that this is Winterson at “her fragmented but brilliant best”.

According to Anita Sethi’s review of *Lighthousekeeping*, “[t]he message in this bottle isn’t particularly original, but the bottle itself is finely wrought and the message rushes out from it forcefully” (Sethi). Charlie Lee-Potter is exclusively positive in her review:

“*Lighthousekeeping* is an entrancing, gleaming crystal of a book” (Sethi). She claims that this is “Winterson close to her best, spinning fairy stories with the lightest touch, treating us to a virtuoso display of imaginative fiction” (Sethi).

In contrast, Benjamin Kunkel’s review of *Lighthousekeeping* is exclusively negative. In his opinion, the novel is exceedingly allegorical, metaphoric and symbolic, containing a “mounting catalog of what Winterson’s people are like, and a dwindling sense of who they are” (Kunkel). He states that “[t]he novel concentrates the worst qualities of her writing. It eschews description, characterization, scene/setting and psychology -- the components of fictional reality -- in favor of drifts of metaphor and drooling pillow talk”. Kunkel’s review completes the picture of Winterson being an author who is exposed to a multitude of criticism.

Critics of Winterson’s work often identify the same three autobiographical traits that have shaped Winterson as an author: her working-class background, Pentecostal upbringing, and lesbian identity. However, while studying Winterson and her works, her love for stories, storytelling and literature stand out as the fourth essential trait that has contributed to the shaping of her identity as an author. The storytelling theme in *Lighthousekeeping* partly arises from what storytelling has meant to Winterson on a personal level. Maria Koundoura points out that “[d]espite her use of ‘fictional nobodies’ as her protagonists, Winterson’s novels always have an extratextual reference to somebody; in her case it is always the author” (379).

Winterson often emphasizes retelling oneself as fiction, and not getting too locked into the facts. In the “Endless Possibilities” interview, she says “to read ourselves as fiction is much more liberating than to read ourselves as fact. Facts are partial. Fiction is a more complete truth. If we read ourselves as narrative, we can change the story that we are. If we read ourselves as literal and fixed, we find we can change nothing. Someone will always tell the story of our lives – it had better be ourselves” (*FIE* 20). This is also something she deals with in her memoir, here she says that “[t]o avoid the narrow mesh of Mrs Winterson’s [her adoptive mother] story I had to be able to tell my own. Part fact part fiction is what life is. And it is always a cover story. I wrote my way out” (*Happy* 5-6). Here Winterson presents her career path as something she had to do, not something that she decided upon or just became. “I wrote my way out” most likely refers to her debut novel *Oranges* where she dealt with her own background story. By writing her debut novel, she escaped “the narrow mesh” of Mrs. Winterson’s version of the story, and learned to write her own. Winterson says she has written over her story and continued to rework it in her fiction. Considering that she did not meet her biological mother until the late 2000s, *Lighthousekeeping* also falls in the period in her life where she was still looking for missing pieces in her own story.

Pew says to Silver, “if you tell yourself like a story, it doesn’t seem so bad” (*LHK* 27). In this sense, writing becomes a therapeutic act. Considering Winterson’s background, the telling of stories has from a very young age come to be a very central part of her life. As she says: “I believe in fiction and the power of stories because that way we all speak in tongues. We are not silenced” (*Happy* 9).

When Winterson lived with her adoptive parents, she was not allowed to read fiction, because her adoptive mother found this to be a very dangerous activity. Considering the impact books and literature had on Winterson’s life, perhaps she was right to worry. Books are ultimately what enabled Winterson to preserve and tell her life story. “[M]y mother didn’t

want books falling into my hands. It never occurred to her that I fell into the books – that I put myself inside them for safe keeping” (*Happy* 36). Winterson’s utterance coincides with what many critics have come to identify as a typical trait of her work; “[h]er fiction draws on aspects of her own autobiographical experience” (*JW* 153). Naturally, in typical Winterson fashion, this is not done in a straightforward manner.

Despite Mrs. Winterson’s restrictions, Winterson still managed to work her way through most of the English literature classics from A-Z in her local library. This further nurtured Winterson’s love for literature and she realized that “[y]es, the stories are dangerous, she [Mrs. Winterson] was right. A book is a magic carpet that flies you off elsewhere. A book is a door. You open it. You step through. Do you come back?” (*Happy* 38) Young Winterson bought books, smuggled them inside her room and hid them under her mattress. One night Mrs. Winterson found all of Jeanette’s paperbacks, and especially Lawrence’s *Women in Love* in particular confirmed her view of all writers being Satanists and pornographers. Consequently, she burned all the books in the backyard. Winterson recollects:

I watched them blaze and blaze and remember thinking how warm it was
[B]ooks have always been light and warmth to me. I had bound them all in plastic because they were precious. Now they were gone. In the morning there were stray bits of texts all over the yard and in the alley. Burnt jigsaws of books. I collected some of the scraps (41).

This particular episode in Winterson’s life makes her wonder if this is “why I write as I do – collecting the scraps, uncertain of a continuous narrative” (42). Even though Winterson here calls upon her own uncertainty, this argument is erroneous. Only a writer with great knowledge of literary tools, is able to play with narrative conventions as she does in *Lighthousekeeping*. The departure from narrative conventions in *Lighthousekeeping* is a conscious choice on Winterson’s behalf.

The novel's protagonist, Silver, is brought up with Pew at the Cape Wrath lighthouse, cut off from a normal everyday life. Therefore, she encounters all sorts of difficulties when entering the real world. For instance, she is not able to join the library in Bristol, due to a lack of permanent address and proof of her identity. Despite not being able to take books out on loan, she goes to the public library reading room every day. Silver never reaches the end of a story before another person takes it out on loan (*LHK* 139). Therefore, she begins to copy the stories she reads as fast as she can in silver colored notebooks, which inevitably results in "endless beginnings" (139). Silver becomes so obsessed with reading Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* that, after reluctantly leaving it at the counter, she runs to the library next morning "like a pilgrim seeking a miracle at a shrine" (139), only to find out that the librarian has taken the book with her the same night. This makes Silver go to extreme measures to get hold of it.

This is an example of how literature and books often are presented as miraculous, essential and emotional subjects, both in *Lighthousekeeping* and in Winterson's memoir. Winterson was rather contradictory, considering the restrictions Mrs. Winterson had set for her, sent to the Accrington Public Library every week to collect her adoptive mother's "stash of murder mysteries" (*Happy* 36). Reading crime novels was Mrs. Winterson guilty pleasure. It is here Winterson first encounters T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* by an accident. Then she begins to cry, "[t]he unfamiliar and beautiful play made things bearable that day" (39). Winterson considers literature to offer "a language powerful enough to say how it is. It isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place" (40).

Storytelling, to both Winterson and Silver, becomes a refuge, somewhere you would go to find comfort, quintessential in both their lives. Storytelling also suggests companionship between Silver and Pew, they bond over stories, one of the first things Silver says to Pew

when she comes to live with Pew at the lighthouse is “[t]ell me a story and I won’t be lonely” (LHK 27).

In the same way that Silver desperately tries to copy down the stories she reads in the library in order to save and keep them, Babel Dark also tries to preserve his stories by keeping two journals: “the first, a mild and scholarly account of a clergyman’s life in Scotland. The second, a wild and torn folder of scattered pages, disordered, unnumbered, punctured where his nib had bitten the paper” (LHK 57). These diaries are handed down to Silver from Pew, and in this way, Dark’s story is preserved.

Babel’s story is also passed on to Silver through Pew’s oral storytelling, in this way the oral storytelling tradition is preserved. The tradition of keeping the stories alive is aligned with keeping the light, as Pew brings Silver up lighthousekeeping. Keeping the light becomes a metaphor for believing and keeping the stories alive. The oral storytelling tradition is presented as very essential. In *Lighthousekeeping*, a lighthouse keeper’s identity was closely connected to how many stories they knew, because every lighthouse had a story to it (39), and that was mainly how the sailors knew the lighthouses apart. Keepers are presented as an endless source of stories, “[t]here’ll not be a light you pass where the keeper didn’t have a story for the seamen” (39). These stories were also told by the lighthouse-keeper at the inn when the seamen came ashore. “These stories went from man to man, generation to generation, hooped the seabound world and sailed back again, different decked maybe, but the same story” (39).

Chapter 3. Wintersonian storytelling

3.1 Features

Winterson's use of language is often presented as one of her most distinguishing features and it contributes to the originality of her fiction. "I made my own concise versions of nineteenth-century novels – going for the talismanic, not worrying much about the plot. I had lines inside me – a string of guiding lights. I had language" (*Happy* 42), says Winterson in her memoir. There is no doubt that *Lighthousekeeping* constitutes what Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell describe as a certain type of prose fiction: "[w]ith some prose works it is immediately obvious that language is being employed in an unstraightforward manner, and that part of the value of reading the work lies in an engagement with its language" (*SL* 26). This can be seen in an example such as: "he had let himself in, and drunk alone from a barrel of rum behind the bar so thick with dust that if you stood a glass on the top of it, the glass sank like a ghost ship in the fog" (*LHK* 61).

Winterson's writing and how she uses the English language is a very characteristic part of her writing and storytelling. It has a particular use of rhythm, and is often described as lyrical and beautiful. Consequently, her work reads almost like poetry. Even though she does not write poetry herself, she takes a great personal interest in poetry and her website has its own poetry column where she regularly posts poems and poets she appreciates. On her website she says that for her, poetry is like a shot of espresso; it gives her energy and clears her head.⁷

Winterson's critics often discuss poetic influence in Winterson's writing. A parallel is often drawn between Winterson's own literary affiliations: the writers belonging to a modernist literary tradition, and their influence in her writing. For instance, Lyn Pykett draws

on this connection when she argues that “Winterson’s fiction is an instance of Eliot’s continuing influence (for good or ill) on the English language. All of Winterson’s fiction inspire to an Eliotean precision of language” (58). T.S. Eliot is one of the great modernist writers, alongside Virginia Woolf and James Joyce who Winterson pays homage to in her essay collection, *Art Objects*. Pykett further argues that “[a]t its best, Winterson’s fiction has the exactness of language which she so admires the great Modernist writers” (60). “The moon shone the night white” (*LHK* 61), is one example to illustrate this type of language use.

Pykett points out that *Oranges, Sexing* and *The Passion* have “at times, a linguistic precision and vitality, a new way with words — sometimes playful, sometimes lyrical — which makes us sit up and listen, read slowly, and glory in the power of words to conjure a world into existence, and to create an alternative reality” (60). Pykett published her article before *Lighthousekeeping*, but many of her points can be found when analyzing the novel. Pykett’s description of Winterson’s language as playful and lyrical is an example of such a point, because it serves as a highly accurate description of Winterson’s use of language.

Winterson’s way with words is very prominent when she describes the setting or the characters in *Lighthousekeeping*, because she uses formulations that stand out as somehow new and unknown to the reader, which catches the reader’s attention. Here she describes the setting of *Lighthousekeeping*: “Salts. My home town. A sea-flung, rock-bitten, sand-edged shell of a town. Oh, and a lighthouse” (*LHK* 5). The casual mentioning of the lighthouse, almost like an afterthought, is done with some irony. The part of the narrative set in Salts, revolves around the Cape Wrath lighthouse. This casual reference is also included by Winterson to point the reader to one of her most central intertextual references, namely Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*. It is interesting to see how Winterson often paints a vivid picture with few words, like in the example just mentioned describing Salts. She

describes the church of Salts in the same style: “[c]liff-perched, wind-cleft, the church seated 250” (43).

The first night after her mother dies, ten-year-old Silver is lying alone at Miss Pinch’s house Railings Row trying to sleep. Instead of succumbing to the rather grim prospects for her future, she thinks to herself “[w]e are lucky, even the worst of us, because daylight comes” (*LHK* 9). When Silver reunites with Pew at the lighthouse towards the end of the novel this exact sentence is repeated, creating an echo within the readers’ mind, tying the ending of the novel with its beginning. Winterson often uses the technique of repeating words or synonyms of that word to set describe the setting in her fiction. Here she describes Silver’s first day at the lighthouse with Pew:

[o]ur business was light, but we lived in darkness. ... Darkness came with everything. It was standard. My clothes were trimmed with dark. When I put on a sou’wester, the brim left a dark shadow over my face. When I stood to bathe in the little galvanized cubicle Pew had rigged for me, I soaped my body in darkness. Put your hand in a drawer and it was darkness you felt first (20).

She further describes how “[t]he darkness had to be brushed away or parted before we could sit down. Darkness squatted on the chairs and hung like a curtain across the stairway” (20). With this, she efficiently describes how Pew and Silver lived at the lighthouse. The repetition of the darkness residing in the lighthouse alludes to the darkness that has taken hold inside Silver after her mother’s passing. This is also implied at the end of this chapter where Silver says “[t]here were two Atlantics; one outside the lighthouse, and one inside me. The one inside me had no string of guiding lights” (21).

Sometimes Winterson’s use of repetition is done to the extent of creating a Wintersonian vocabulary, for instance in the sentence “Pew was serious and silent, his eyes like a faraway ship” (*LHK* 40). In the novel, Pew is a man of the sea. The first time he picked

Silver up it was in a blue boat, alone. He tells Silver of the 200 year old cursed McCloud brig, when the new McCloud ship sails past the lighthouse. On the day they launched the new McCloud, the crowd could see the broken sails and ruined keel of the old McCloud in the new one (*LHK* 47). A ghostship “hanging like a gauze on the upper deck” (47). One can certainly imagine the grey eyes of old, blind Pew, based on Winterson’s image. Images like these help built Pew as the mystery man he is portrayed as. This sentence is repeated several times throughout the novel: “[e]yes like a faraway ship, Pew was sleeping” (103), and later “[h]e smiled, his eyes like a faraway ship” (230), creating a singularity in the images portrayed of Pew.

Another characteristic Wintersonian feature is her tone, her use of humor and irony that is as easily detectable in *Lighthousekeeping* as it is in her other work. The Winterson voice is present from the very beginning of the narrative, telling with humor how Silver and her mother “lived in a house cut steep into the bank. The chairs had to be nailed to the floor, and we were never allowed to eat spaghetti. We ate food that stuck to the plate – shepherd’s pie, goulash, risotto, scrambled egg” (*LHK* 3). She also tells us that Silver’s father, who was a fisherman caught in a bad storm harbored with them one night: “[h]is splintered hull shored him for long enough to drop anchor inside my mother” (3).

Hawthorn claims that “a jokey quality” (5), can be traced throughout the novel. A typical example of this would be, “[j]ust as I was heading for the Reading Room, an assistant with a moustache – she was a woman but she had a moustache, which is usually a bad sign” (*LHK* 143-144). Apparently, this is a common trait among postmodern writers. “I have a list of titles that I leave at the desk, because they are bound to be written some day, and it’s best to be ahead of the queue” (*LHK* 144). An example such as this one has the effect of “undermining artistic seriousness and ‘aura’” (Hawthorn 5), In other words, perhaps they do not take themselves so seriously.

However, Hawthorne also connects this novel's tone to a typical Wintersonian juxtaposition: "although, importantly, there are moments of passion, intensity and insight tha[t] are powerful and moving in the novel" (5). Winterson often narrates events that are serious with a humorous tone. An example of a scene that combines both the humorous and insightful quality of the novel, would be when Silver travels to Italy and goes through a deep personal crisis. When Silver arrives in Capri, she hears someone calling "Bongiorno Silver!" (*LHK*156). This turns out to be a "beady beaky bird" (155). Silver further describes how she "wanted that bird" (157). It turns out that this is because the bird calling her name reminds her of who she is and her identity. She struggles to find a new stable point in her life after she is forced to leave Cape Wrath. When Silver returns to the Italian woman's apartment to steal the macaw bird in the middle of the night, the bird regards her and says "Pretty boy! Pretty boy!" (157) Silver retorts, "[w]ho cares about gender at a time like this?" (157).

For six months, Silver lives nervously on her part of the island refusing to go home because she could not put the bird in quarantine (*LHK* 157). Eventually the police find her, and the Italian doctor sends her home on Prozac and "a series of appointments at the Tavistock Clinic in London" (158). The Italian woman feels sorry for Silver: "she might have lost a parrot but she was not cuckoo" (159). Obviously, a mental breakdown is not funny in itself, but Winterson manages to describe it with humor. Silver's psychiatrist asks her if she thought the bird was talking to her, whereupon she among other things concludes, "I wasn't talking to the bird. The bird was talking to me" (160). Silver tells how after this "[t]here was a long pause. There are some things that shouldn't be said in company. See above" (160). Even though Silver's breakdown is mediated to the reader in a humorous tone, it does not necessarily undermine Winterson's purpose for including it. The breakdown is a result of Silver's life events. Winterson went through a similar personal crisis in her own life. In this

crisis, Silver never loses faith in stories and love, unlike the character Babel Dark who, unable to unite his two conflicting selves, loses his faith in both love and life, and dies.

“Frequently a text establishes its topic by reiterating blatantly a series of sememes belonging to the same semantic field (*key words*)” (Eco 26). Eco’s accurate description is directly applicable to *Lighthousekeeping*. In addition to functioning as elements in the framework of the novel, the word story or stories can be seen as *key words* in the novel. Key words are words used to establish the topos, topic or theme of the novel. Here are some selected examples to illustrate: “The story begins now ...” (*LHK* 11), “That’s not the end of the story” (204), “[t]his is a love story” (209), “depending on what story you were telling” (31), “[t]hat’s another story” (73), [t]hey were never finished these stories, always beginning again ...” (93). It is even on Silver’s apprentice list for lighthousekeeping “14) 8pm. Pew tells me a story” (37). All of these examples and several others contribute to establish storytelling as the main theme of *Lighthousekeeping*. This is also pointed out by Winterson, “*Lighthousekeeping* is a story about telling stories. A story about what stories are, and how they affect us” (20).

Winterson herself identifies “boundaries, desire, time, identity” (Reynolds and Noakes 25) as her key themes. But at the same time she is very cautious about pointing out the importance not to get “locked into them” (25). The themes described by Winterson can be traced into *Lighthousekeeping*.

Julie Ellam argues that “[i]dealized, inevitable love is the thread that connects her [Winterson] writing together” (1). Further, she identifies Winterson’s stock in trade to be inviting other literatures to tell her love stories. According to Ellam, “this device culminates in the overt dependency in *The PowerBook* and *Lighthousekeeping* on works by other writers as well as her own earlier novels” (9). However, Winterson’s intention of including

other literatures, stretches beyond an “overt dependency” or a need to tell her stories through existing stories. Rather it is done to highlight and problematize different themes in the novel. Such as her inclusion of Richard Wagner’s opera *Tristan or Isolde* demonstrates, it is used to symbolize one example of a word view.

Ellam points to how Winterson’s characters “often search for love in a desire for unity, rather than a conclusively happy ending” (3). The love story about Babel Dark and Molly O’Rourke is one example of such a story where the lovers strives towards unity. The last time Molly goes to see Babel she concludes, “[s]he had tried to earth him [Babel]. Instead she had spilt him” (*LHK* 101). Their love story does not end in an happy ending; “Dark opened the door. She did not turn round” (102). Whereas Dark has no love or desire towards his wife, it is Molly O’ Rourke that is his true love, “she turned round, he loved her. It was very simple; he loved her. Why had he made it so complicated” (*LHK* 99). Fighting his own demons Babel ends up hurting Molly. After she finds Babel in his official life in Salts, she leaves never to return and Babel loses the one thing in his life that had given him hope.

Identity is a recurring theme for Winterson in her fiction. Like many of her protagonists, Winterson has searched for her own identity. As she describes in her memoir, “[a]dopted children are self-invented because we have to be; there is an absence, a void, a question mark at the very beginning of our lives. A crucial part of our story is gone” (*Happy* 5). In *Lighthousekeeping*, Silver is searching for her own identity, in terms of never knowing or finding out who her father is. Silver is forced to continually reinvent herself in the novel. She leaves her childhood home to live at Cape Wrath with Pew after her mother’s death. However, when the lighthouse was automated, she and Pew were forced by the Lighthouse Board to leave. These events lead up to Silver’s identity crisis.

The identity theme can also be connected to a more embracing theme in the novel: where do we all come from? The question of the beginning of the world stands very central in

Lighthousekeeping. This is evident in how Darwin, the father of the evolutionary theory, is included as a character in the novel, in contrast to Babel Dark and Pew, who represent the opposite force, the creationist side, and the story of Genesis. Dark tells Pew about his conversation with Stevenson, “I told Stevenson I did not believe that Man was descended from the Ape, or that he shared with such a creature a common inheritance” (*LHK* 186).

Winterson’s rather wide description of boundaries as one of her key themes, can be found in multiple elements in the novel.

Lighthousekeeping shares many of the typical traits of a *Bildungsroman*. A *Bildungsroman* typically follows the protagonist from youth to maturity, from dependence to independence. A *Bildungsroman* is also known as a novel of education, “this narrates the journey of a young person from adolescence and inexperience to a state of greater self-knowledge” (*SL* 209). In Silver’s case, this state of self-knowledge is what Pew tries to teach her, namely the value of keeping the light. Keeping the light becomes a metaphor for believing in love and the undisputed power of stories. This is “a journey of discovery” (209) that Silver goes through, which in the end leads her to become a “more fully formed or mature identity” (209).

In *Lighthousekeeping*, we follow Silver’s life journey from childhood into adult life. In a *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist typically encounters a number of challenges or obstacles that need to be overcome in order to reach mature identity. The first major crisis point for Silver is when her mother dies in an accident.

Silver’s mother shares many of the characteristics with mothers that have appeared in previous Winterson novels, such as in *Oranges*. These mother figures are almost impossible not to align with the real life Mrs. Winterson described in Winterson’s memoir *Happy*. This can, for example, be seen when Silver’s mother describes Silver as having “eccentricities” (*LHK* 5), but as it turns out these are really her own: “[s]he was the one who hated going out.

She was the one who couldn't live in the world she had been given. She longed for me to be free, and did everything to make sure it never happened" (5). This is similar to the situation Winterson experienced in her own upbringing when Mrs. Winterson intends a missionary life for her daughter and keeping her in the religious community.

Silver develops her new life as a lighthouse-keeper's apprentice. These plans come to an end when the lighthouse is automated. Silver realizes "I would have to begin again – again" (*LHK* 105). Silver quickly finds out that her upbringing puts her in an awkward position with the rest of society; she is an orphan, owns no identification papers, and is unable to find a job. A lost Silver journeys to Capri, ends up stealing an old woman's bird, and is sent home to a psychiatric clinic in London. This is arguably where *Lighthousekeeping's* quixotic element comes to life, and according to Onega, Silver's nervous breakdown symbolizes the turning point when "the heroine's ideals and values are reversed, giving way to the inward-looking process, when the ego has to confront the depths of its own psyche and establish links with the inner self" (210). Twenty years after leaving Cape Wrath Silver returns, leaning over the rails of the lighthouse she reflects, "[e]very four minutes the light flashed in a single clear beam, visible across the sea and across the sea of time too. I had often seen this light. Inland, land-locked, sailing my years, uncertain of my position, the light had been what Pew had promised – marker, guide, comfort and warning" (*LHK* 209). In other words, Silver, who had to reconsider her worldview several times over the past 20 years, has been able to keep the light in her inner self, and journeys back to Salts with her new mature identity.

3.2 Structure

As pointed out by Hawthorn, the novel's "very unusual technical aspects" (1) can be described as postmodernist and is one of the main reasons for why *Lighthousekeeping* challenges previous understands of storytelling, because "it is hard to find a conventional plot in the novel – not least because it spans over such a long period of time" (5).

Alongside the complex narrative structure, the physical appearance of *Lighthousekeeping*, with its many breaks, pauses, and white spaces contributes to the unconventional feel of the novel. Winterson says, “I continually break my narratives. Nothing depresses me more than seeing a page with no breaks in it [...] I like the spaces and the pauses that you can make” (Reynolds and Noakes 15). She points to how this keeps the reader alert and breaking the narrative “offers forceful interruptions to people’s concentrations” (15). This will keep the reader “looking for the story” (15).

The novel *Lighthousekeeping* contains 236 pages and a P.S. section of 28 pages. The novel does not have numbered chapters. However, a new section of the novel is initiated with a white blank page and capitalized letters, such as “TENANT OF THE SUN” (*LHK* 59). There are eight chapter headings which divide the novel. In addition to the chapter heading, pages which only contain a few sentences, such as

Tell me a story, Silver.

What story?

The story of how we met (189).

These pages will be referred to as *bridges*. The novel has eight of these bridges. They all appear in the same format, except the last one, which appears in the text.

Peter Brooks emphasized that what interests him the most is “the dynamic aspect of narrative ... which moves us forward as readers of the narrative text, that which makes us—like the heroes of the text often, and certainly like the authors—want and need plotting” (35). A story typically demands a narrative structure. Nonetheless, Winterson’s experimentation with plot is done to the extent that it can be questioned whether the author *certainly* wants and needs plotting.

Winterson playfully introduces her embedded narrative set a hundred years back in time in the following manner: “I suppose the story starts in 1814” (*LHK* 11). “The story

begins now – or perhaps it begins in 1802 when a terrible shipwreck lobbed men like shuttlecocks into the sea” (11). “So the story begins in 1802, or does it really begin in 1789” (13). Winterson further complicates this by suggesting:

Already I could choose the year of my birth – 1959. Or I could choose the year of the lighthouse at Cape Wrath, and the birth of Babel Dark – 1828. Then there was the year Josiah Dark first visited Salts – 1802. Or the year Josiah Dark shipped firearms to Lundy Island – 1789. And what about the year I went to live in the lighthouse – 1969, also the year Apollo landed on the moon? (23)

Here Winterson suggests a number of possible beginnings for her story, in a combination with intertwining actual and historical events, places, and people with her fictional scene. This has the effect that “they all challenge conventional ideas about plot: in other words, the idea that a story has – or should have – a beginning, a middle, and an end” (Hawthorn 7). This further presents the reader with a variety of years and possible starts to the story, though the reader might feel that this is no longer a singular story, but several.

The story is told through Silver’s first person perspective. However, when the narrator introduces the Darks it is no longer Silver who is narrating, but Pew: “Miss Pinch was a direct descendent of the Reverend Dark. There were two Darks – the one who lived there, that was the Reverend, and the one who would rather be dead than live here, that was his father” (*LHK* 10). In the novel, the narrator directly addresses the reader: “[h]ere you meet the first one, and the second one will come along in a minute” (10-11). This has the effect of raising the reader’s attention. One implied purpose of reading fiction, or watching movies, or going to the theater is that the reader does this to escape reality for a while. By immersing oneself into the story, one is supposed to forget that this is fiction. Interestingly enough, Winterson here does the complete opposite. She reminds the reader that he is reading. In addition, it arguably entails an element of irony; the narrator’s words is meant to guide the reader, but does not initially

help the reader understand the way she has built the narrative. Winterson introduces Babel Dark's father in the same way "[t]here was a man named Josiah Dark – here he is – a Bristol merchant of money and fame" (12).

An intrusive narrator is defined as "[a] narrator who breaks into the narrative to comment upon a character, event or situation The term is often reserved for situations in which the intrusion is felt to break into an established narrative tone or illusion, although it is also used in a purely technical sense to describe 'own voice' comments from a narrator which may hardly be remarked by the reader because of their homogeneity with the rest of the narrative" (SL 258). Here it is done in a more obvious and deliberate way with the intention of making the reader notice, this can be seen from the use of dashes. An understanding of the latter author intrusion requires an observant reader to see the connection between these two.

The interesting question is who is making the intrusion? Is this the narrator intruding or is this Winterson's own voice? This question connects itself to interpreting *Lighthousekeeping* as a metanarrative. According to Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell, the terms metanarrative and metafiction to a certain extent overlap, "because any work of fiction which contains a metanarrative will contain a metafictional element" (SL 264). For simplicity, we will apply the definition of metanarrative, "a narrative which talks about other embedded narratives, or a narrative which refers to itself and to its own narrative procedures" (SL 264).

Many textual evidences of this trait can be found in *Lighthousekeeping*. The author intrusion noted above is one example. However, the most obvious evidence for interpreting *Lighthousekeeping* as a metanarrative is Winterson's extensive commentary on storytelling in the novel. A typical example of this is, "[i]t was a long story and like most stories in the world, never finished. There was an ending – there always is – but the story went on past an ending – it always does" (LHK 11). Hawthorn points to how Winterson has not put her

knowledge of the theorizing within the field of narratology behind the novel, but actively discusses it in the novel (6).

Chapter 4 Intertextuality

In Winterson's debut novel *Oranges*, the real-life story of Jeanette is told alongside a fairytale story of Winnet Stonejar. An inset fairytale was included in the seemingly traditional way of telling two stories in parallel, a double-strand technique. It was Margaret Reynolds who referred to this in an interview with Winterson. When describing *Oranges*, Reynolds says, "it's not monolithic, because you tend to do this double-strand technique" where "you have the first person, but then you have the fairy stories interweaving" (15). This is also something Winterson uses in *The Passion*, *Sexing the Cherry* and in *The PowerBook*: "a story and then lots of other stories set against it" (15). In *Lighthousekeeping* Winterson continues this multiple stories technique. This technique connects to the way Winterson employs intertextuality in her novel.

In Winterson's novel *Lighthousekeeping*, intertextuality is a very prominent feature. As it reappears in many shapes and forms, it might seem fundamentally obvious, however, as some academics have pointed out, Winterson's dynamic use of intertextuality offers various scopes into the analysis, and contributes to the diversity of the novel.

Arguably, *Lighthousekeeping* can be interpreted as a palimpsest text, "A text in which hidden or repressed meanings can be found between the lines or under the surface" (SL 277). With this as a starting point, one can begin to investigate how Winterson uses her intertextual references to "say something" in the novel.

According to Hawthorn intertextuality is "[a] relation between two or more text which has an effect upon the way in which the *intertext* (that is, the text within which other texts reside or echo their presence) is read" (182). From this straightforward definition, there are numerous approaches to this critical idiom. Julia Kristeva is often said to have coined the intertextuality term. According to Toril Moi, the Kristevan concept of "intertextuality" had its roots in her reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's work, hereunder "dialogism" (34). Gerard Genette

and Roland Barthes have also made significant contributions to the debate about intertextuality. Barthes famously labeled all texts as intertexts: “[a]ny text is a new tissue of past citation. ... the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation-marks” (quoted in Hawthorn 183).

Winterson is very much aware of the theorizing of literature within academia, she comments on this repeatedly in interviews, with her use of intertextuality, it is as if she is implicitly saying, “you think you know everything about intertextuality, well let me prove you otherwise”. Expressed in the words of Mengham and Tew “[t]he work of writers like Jeanette Winterson seemed to be fuelled by the desire to exceed the limits imposed by given subject positions” (103). Another point which contributes to further opening up the intertextual analysis of *Lighthousekeeping* is the fact that “Winterson’s fiction has always been elaborated from the work already done by other texts in questioning the reproduction in culture of existing ideologies of gender, race and class” (103). With this in mind, the question arises that perhaps Winterson’s use of intertextuality is done with the intention of further questioning this reproduction. This view of her fiction leaves the intertextual analysis of *Lighthousekeeping* open for some interesting perspectives.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is what role the reader plays in an analysis of intertextuality. As Umberto Eco concludes, “[n]o text is read independently of the reader’s experience of other texts. Intertextual knowledge (see especially Kristeva, 1970) can be considered a special case of overcoding and establishes its own intertextual frames (frequently to be identified with genre rules)” (21).

This raises another interesting question: does Winterson as a storyteller base her writing on a specific type of reader? For instance, Andermahr would be a typical example of an academic reader. However, would another reader have been able to see the same

intertextual connections? This is precisely what makes Winterson such an interesting case study since the dynamic nature of her work leaves it open for multiple interpretations. In Winterson's work a multicity can be found, which constantly changes, much like the perception of an object would, based on altering perspective. To paraphrase James Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, nothing is simply one thing (Woolf 202).

John Lechte points to Kristeva's claim of intertextuality being misunderstood, it does not refer to two or more signifying practices (104). Further, "[t]o reveal the process of intertextuality requires the study of various utterances in the text" (104). Interestingly enough, Winterson's own vision of intertextuality mirrors both the idea of intertextuality as a process and a dialogue. "Books speak to other books; they are always in dialogue. Books that we have now affect the way we read books that were written earlier, at any other period, because books are a continual commentary on themselves. This is one of the reasons why the process is always dynamic, not static, why it moves, why it's exciting for the reader and for the writer" (*FIE* 2). Considering Winterson's long and intense love affair with stories, books, poems and literature, her playful use of intertextuality can also be seen as her way of honoring or paying homage to some of her own favorite stories and storytellers. Maybe her way of doing this is including them in her own stories, in this way storytelling becomes a never-ending dialogue. The possibilities are endless.

Storytelling connects itself to both a written and oral tradition, which becomes evident in Winterson's use of legends, or stories that have more typically been carried on by an oral storytelling tradition than in written form.

He [Babel] loved the story of the Grail coming to the Court of King Arthur at the Feast of Pentecost. He loved it, and it made him sad, because that day every knight had pledged to find the Grail again, and most lost their way, and even the best were destroyed. The Court was broken. Civilization was ruined. And

why? For a dream-vision that had no use in the world of men. The story pressed in on him (*LHK* 115).

The ancient Arthurian legend about King Arthur and the Holy Grail seems at first glance to be included as Babel Dark's favorite story by mere coincident. However, the legend of King Arthur and the Holy Grail is precisely "a long story, and like most stories in the world, never finished" (11). It has been reworked and rewritten just like Winterson narrates at the beginning of *Lighthousekeeping*.

4.1 Robert Louis Stevenson

"Close your eyes and pick another date: 1 February 1811. This was the day when a young engineer called Robert Stevenson completed work on the lighthouse at Bell Rock. This was more than the start of a lighthouse; it was the beginning of a dynasty" (*LHK* 24). This is a typical example of how Winterson plays with what is fact and what is fiction in her novel. The details around the Lighthouse Stevensons, and Robert Louis Stevenson in particular, is worth some attention. It refers to one of the most prominent intertextual references in the book, namely the writings of Robert Louis Stevenson.

In the biography *The Lighthouse Stevensons* by Bella Bathurst Winterson's details from *Lighthousekeeping* are confirmed "[f]inally, on the first of February, the Bell Rock lighthouse was lit for the first time" (98). However, the building of the lighthouse at Cape Wrath was a result of the Northern Lighthouse Board's "parliamentary authority to build lights when and where it was considered them necessary" (116), and not the result of Josiah Dark's dream of building a lighthouse there. The information Winterson includes on the Stevensons, such as "'lighthouse' read 'Stevenson'" (*LHK* 24-25) and "[t]hey were the

Borgias of lighthousekeeping” (25) is a very accurate description of the Stevensons. The building of the Bell Rock lighthouse, which was considered an extremely difficult build, lead to the fact that “between 1812 and 1833 [Robert Stevenson] was responsible for eighteen new lights all round the coast, including Cape Wrath” (Bathurst 116-117).

“There are twist and turns in any life, and though all of the Stevensons should have built lighthouses, one escaped, and that was the one who was born at the moment Josiah Dark’s son, Babel, made a strange and reverse pilgrimage and became Minister of Salts. 1850 – Babel Dark arrives in Salts for the first time” (*LHK* 25). Following by casually introducing Robert Louis Stevenson in the narrative “1850 - Robert Louis Stevenson is born into the a family of prosperous engineers – so say the innocent annotated biographical details – and goes on to write *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *The Strage Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*” (25). Here she also points to two of *Lighthousekeeping*’s main intertexts *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Robert Louis Stevenson did actually write, “[w]henever I smell salt water, I know I am not far from one of the works of my ancestors” (Bathurst xiii), like Winterson states in *Lighthousekeeping*. However, that Stevenson met Babel in Salts 1886 just before his death “and some say it was Dark and the rumour that hung about him, that led Stevenson to brood on the story of Jekyll and Hyde” (*LHK* 26) is an example of how Winterson playfully engages other works of fiction into her own narrative.

From Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* Winterson has found inspiration for her protagonist Silver, “[m]y mother called me Silver. I was born part precious metal part pirate” (*LHK* 3). One can only imagine her name stemming from *Treasure Island*’s Long John Silver. Silver’s trusty companion, DogJim is the namesake of the boy Jim Hawkins. The blind lighthouse-keeper Pew, shares his name with the less sympathetic Blind Pew.

In Winterson's portrayal of Babel Dark's personality, it seems she, like Stevenson, was fascinated with exploring the dark side of the human psyche. This is evident in the descriptions of Babel. He rapes and abuses his wife while, at least initially, he is devoted and loving towards Molly, holding his blind daughter, and he rather selflessly saves his dog Tristan. Robert Mighall points to how Jekyll is situated within the world of respectable physicians and legislators. Here he "attempts to make an absolute division between the respectable and the disreputable, the righteous and the libertine, the social and the sensual/sexual" (xxv). When Babel and his wife attend the Great Exhibition in London "wearing his Man of God clothes, he was respectfully motioned through wherever he went" (*LHK* 78). Babel also lives his life in an absolute division, he does not tell Molly about his wife and children in Salts, he visits Molly and the child in April and November, in Bristol he goes by the name Lux. He instructs Molly never to follow him to Salts. Yet, she does, and discovers his parallel life.

Winterson's epigraph in *Lighthousekeeping* sets forth one of the most central themes in the novel: contrasts. The quotations 'Remember you must die' – Muriel Spark and "Remember you must live" – Alice Smith, foreshadow the conflicts that Winterson problematizes in the novel. This is not necessarily a conflict that is reconcilable, which is illustrated in the story's conflicted character, Babel Dark.

Babel Dark alludes to a somehow familiar character or type in literature. Namely, a man who is in internal conflict, forced to face the difficulties of combining his own belief system with the outside trials and tribulations a man of the flesh may face. Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* includes a clergyman tormented by an internal conflict. Just like Dark, he leads a dangerous division of the self which physically and mentally drives him slowly but surely to his death. Reverend Dimmesdale preaches piety and pureness from his pulpit, while he knows in his heart that he has committed the cardinal sin: adultery.

Because of this, he reaches much the same conclusion as Dark in the end; “To the untrue man, the whole universe is false” (Hawthorne 97).

When Babel’s dog Tristan falls over a cliff-edge chasing a seagull, he rescues him by lowering himself down onto a cliff. There he makes a confounding discovery, “[t]he wall of the cave was made entirely out of fossils” (*LHK* 116-117). From the cave, he digs out an ancient seahorse, which he brings with him in his pocket. Keeping the seahorse finding to himself, he sends another piece to the Archeological Society and within two weeks “scores of palaeontologists were boarding” (118) wherever there was room in the small town of Salts. In typical Wintersonian style, even “Darwin himself came to examine the cave” (119), where he gained evidence to support some of his theories in the *Origin of Species*.

The fossil finding leaves the already torn Babel in further distress; “[h]e had always believed in a stable-state system, made by God and left alone afterwards. That things might be endlessly moving and shifting was not his wish” (*LHK* 120). Darwin tries to console Babel, but without effect; “[i]f the movement in him was like the movement in the world, then how would he ever steady himself. There had to be a stable point somewhere” (120). At this point in the novel Babel’s internal conflict has escalated to the point that he concludes, “God or no God, there seemed nothing to hold onto” (120). At this stage, the love of his life, Molly has left him.

The conflict between creationism and Darwinism alludes to the conflicting sides in – Babel, “Salts; a sea village, a fishing village, where every wife and sailor had to believe that the unpredictable waves could be calmed by a dependable god. Suppose the unpredictable wave was God?” (*LHK* 121). The conflict within Babel drives him towards suicide “he wanted to walk slowly out to sea and never come back. There was only one thing he would take with him, that was the seahorse. They would both swim back through time, to a place before the flood” (122). Whether this meant that Babel rejected God, and accepted Darwin,

remains unanswered. Without Molly, who represented the light in his life. He had nothing to live for. “He breathed in, wanting the cold night air, but it was salt water he breathed. His body was filled with salt water. He was drowned already. He no longer came up for air (222).

4.2 Virginia Woolf

“Turning, she [Mrs Ramsay] looked across the bay, and there, sure enough, coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke, was the light of the lighthouse. It had been lit” (Woolf 68). This particular quote can be seen so symbolize Woolf’s switch in perspective. Through her use of the stream of consciousness technique, Woolf provided insight in the character’s minds and their perspectives on the world. Winterson makes use of the lighthouse symbol in a similar fashion “the stories I want to tell you will light up part of my life, and leave the rest in darkness. ... there are lit-up moments the rest is dark” (*LHK* 134).

The lighthouse represents a point of stability in both novels. And certainly to the characters, “Dark was walking on the headland. The light flashing every four seconds as it always had. His body was timed to it” (*LHK* 221). “[S]he looked out to meet the stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke” (Woolf 70). As can be seen in these two examples, within the representation of the lighthouse many interesting similarities can be found in *To the Lighthouse* and *Lighthousekeeping*.

In general, a lighthouse serves the purpose of helping ships to navigate, and especially to help prevent shipwreck in stormy weather. This aspect of the lighthouse is well represented in *Lighthousekeeping*, Pew tells Silver how before the lighthouses were built and mapped

“wreckers lured ships onto the rocks to steal the cargo” (*LHK* 38). However, as Pew says, to people of the sea “[t]he lighthouse is a known point in the darkness” (38).

However, the lighthouse also holds important allegorical meaning in both narratives. “I couldn’t go back. There was only forward, northwards into the sea. To the lighthouse” (*LHK* 19), says Silver. The intertextual reference to Woolf this early in the narrative is no coincidence. Woolf is perhaps the writer Winterson admires the most. In *Art Objects* she says “[w]hen I read Virginia Woolf she is to my spirit, waterfall and wine” (65). Apart from the obvious connection to the work itself, this intertextual reference stands for many of Winterson’s main ideas and motifs in *Lighthousekeeping*.

5 Conclusion

“I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me” (Woolf 100), wrote Virginia Woolf in *The Waves* (1931). These two simple lines can be seen to embody Winterson, her storytelling and *Lighthousekeeping*. From the very beginning with *Oranges*, Winterson was “made”. Here she began leaving traces of herself in her fiction. Reading too much of the author into their fiction is a known fallacy, and certainly an approach Winterson rejects. However, it is within the “innocent annotated biographical details” (*LHK* 25) of her life that a possible answer can be found as to why storytelling holds the prominent position in her fiction, above all in *Lighthousekeeping*.

In Winterson’s life she has had to “begin again – again” (*LHK* 105). But by understanding and looking at life as a story, and learning to tell her own stories, she survives. Her stories of course, can be found in her novels.

With *Lighthousekeeping* Winterson suggests, a form of storytelling without the traditional plot-driven order. This leads to a structure in the story that in many ways resembles the stream of consciousness narration technique. The stories need no consecutive order, this is not of the essence. However, the stories’ content and meaning are. This element can also be found in her use of intertextuality that creates intertextual ripples spanning from the Bible and the Holy Grail to Virginia Woolf and Robert Louis Stevenson. Her dynamic and playful interaction with these sources suggests that a novel can contain familiar tropes and characters, such as the Jekyll and Hyde character. However, presented in a new packaging, this results in innovation and rediscovery, a new way of seeing these stories, and not obvious repetition as some choose to see it. In this way, the story begins again, “[t]hat’s the story of life” (*LHK* 93), Pew says. “But is it the story of my life?” (93), questions Silver. “Only if you tell it” (93) states Pew.

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Endnotes

¹ This is often described as the reason for Winterson's repeated use of the Bible as an intertextual source in her work.

² See <http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/books/> for a full bibliography.

³ Anderson mentions urban legends, personal narratives and vernacular storytelling as examples of non-traditional forms of storytelling (2).

⁴ Term from Gérard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (1997).

⁵ This phrase is identical with the epigraph of E.M. Forster's novel *Howards End* (1910).

⁶ These being *Art & Lies* published in 1994, her collection of essays *Art Objects* (1995), and *Gut Symmetries* (1997).

⁷ <http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/journalism/poetry/>