

BOOKS

OPENING LINES

"I cannot read your mind. Truth be told, even if I could, I'm not sure I would want to."

— From "But You Knew That Already: What a Psychic Can Teach You About Life" by Dougall Fraser (Rodale, \$22.95)

Civil rights pioneer or terrorist?

By CAMERON McWHIRTER
cmcwhirter@ajc.com

Despite sustained public interest in all things relating to the Civil War, historians in recent decades have given short shrift to John Brown, the man believed by many to have sparked the conflict.

Brown never lived to see the conflict, but at his hanging in Virginia on Dec. 2, 1859, he foretold its coming. As he was taken to the gallows, the abolitionist handed a guard a note. It read in part, "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

Sixteen months later, Confederate troops were shelling Fort Sumter.

By that time, this small-time farmer had become — thanks to his botched attack on a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry — an important national symbol for all sides in the slaughter.

To outraged Northerners, Brown was Christ on the cross, dying to right the wrong of human bondage. To enslaved blacks, he was a prophet-warrior, fighting alongside the oppressed. To horrified white Southerners, he was a fiendish terrorist, a 19th-century Osama bin Laden intent on the overthrow of civilization.

Of course, the real Brown was more complex and less grandiose than any of those two-dimensional representations. Historian David Reynolds provides a masterful exploration of this fascinating and flawed character and his cultural impact on a divided nation. Reynolds, author of a prize-winning biography of poet Walt Whitman, sets out to restore Brown to what the author persuasively argues is his rightful place as a key figure in Civil War history.

For decades, historians have battled about Brown, with one side praising him and the other vilifying him. Reynolds succeeds for the most part in finding middle ground: seeing the good in Brown without excusing his bloody crimes.

Born in Connecticut in 1800, Brown spent much of his life as a struggling sheep farmer and surveyor. A Calvinist, he found purpose in the antislavery movement. Unlike most abolitionists, who were pacifists, Brown concluded that slavery, a system of violence, must be destroyed with violence. In 1855, he put his views to the test in Kansas, where pro-slavery and abolitionist forces were battling. Brown led his band into several skirmishes, and in one horrific night murdered five pro-

New biography finds middle ground in study of John Brown's life



BIOGRAPHY

John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights. By David S. Reynolds. Knopf. \$35. 578 pages.

The verdict: A masterful exploration of a fascinating, flawed character and his cultural impact.

slavery settlers — an act for which he was widely condemned, even by many abolitionists.

After leaving Kansas, Brown held meetings in the North and in Canada, recruiting volunteers and raising money for his plan to spark a slave rebellion in the South.

He believed the successful slave rebellion in Haiti was a model for freeing American slaves. His plan was, at the very least, naive: His men would seize weapons at Harpers Ferry and then distribute them to droves of slaves who would run from nearby plantations to aid in the uprising. Armed bands of slaves and abolitionists then would retreat to the mountains of western Virginia. From there, they would move southwest along the Appalachian Mountain range, inciting rebellion and destroying the plantation system from Virginia to Georgia.

On Oct. 16, 1859, Brown led 21 men in an attack on Harpers Ferry. But the large groups of slaves Brown anticipated would join him never showed up. (Most nearby slaves didn't hear about the raid until it was over.) Instead of fleeing when they could, Brown and his men stayed in Harpers Ferry. Soon most were killed or captured. Brown was taken after being beaten and stabbed with a sword.

Brown was so badly wounded that he was confined to a cot for much of his trial. He was found guilty of treason and other charges and sentenced to death by hanging.

With his every remark in jail carried in newspapers across the North and South, Brown became the leading spokesman for the antislavery cause.

And when war erupted, the hanged Brown became a hero for Northern soldiers. Rallies were held in his honor, and Union soldiers tramping south sang "John Brown's Body." In the South, Brown was cursed by Southern politicians and journalists as a Puritan fanatic.

In this thorough biography, Reynolds shows that Brown's importance as a cultural figure went far beyond what he did at Harpers Ferry or before in Kansas. Brown is important in American history, Reynolds writes, because he pointed — with gun in hand — at the central social dilemma ripping the nation apart.

"You may dispose of me very easily . . ." Brown said shortly before his death, "but this question is still to be settled — this Negro question I mean — the end of that is not yet."

Cameron McWhirter writes for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

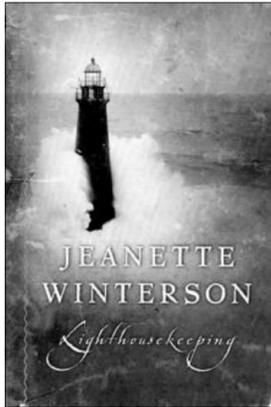
Storyteller lights way to what matters most

By MARK HAYES
For the Journal-Constitution

In these days of the Global Positioning System, it's easy to overlook the practical purpose of the lighthouse — to provide a beacon of safe guidance to ships at sea during the dark and dangerous nights. In English novelist Jeanette Winterson's new work, "Lighthousekeeping," those towers of maritime navigation acquire a rich and deeply rooted importance.

The novel's narrator, Silver ("I was born part precious metal, part pirate.") is an orphan in Salts, a small town on the north coast of Scotland where folks pass the time eating oatmeal and haddock. Arrangements are made for Silver to apprentice with the peculiar lighthouse-keeper of Cape Wrath, an ancient blind man named Pew. Readers detecting references to "Treasure Island" can have more haddock.

In the first half of the novel, the lighthouse at Cape Wrath is not yet obsolete, and Pew teaches Silver the straightforward details of his official job. But it turns out there is more to being a



FICTION

Lighthousekeeping. By Jeanette Winterson. Harcourt. \$23. 232 pages.

The verdict: A beacon in the darkness.

lighthousekeeper than just oiling the big lamp. Pew demonstrates to Silver that his more useful purpose is to tell stories, the tales of sailors and ships and seafaring adventure.

Just as a lighthouse provides a known point in the darkness that guides ships to safety, so too do stories

provide guidance to people lost in the darkness of their own lives.

As Silver grows up, Pew begins to reveal to her the bits and pieces of the most interesting story of Salts, the minister Babel Dark, a remarkable personality from the previous century. Cruel, isolated and aristocratic, Dark would disappear from his church duties in Salts for two months every year. As Silver comes to understand the story of Babel Dark, she sees that her own life need not be as lonely as it is nor her world so unkind.

"Lighthousekeeping" is rich in ideas and literary allusions. Romance is considered through the retelling of the medieval tales of Tristan and Isolde. The good and evil natures of humanity are examined through references to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Charles Darwin and his "Origin of Species" make an appearance. "Lighthousekeeping" is shot through with the awareness of the supremacy of stories, presided over by Pew, who is a god of storytelling, even as his lighthouse is automated and he is made obsolete. Pew

is Silver's guide into the metaphysics of the tale well told.

With the lighthouse now run by machines, Silver must strike out on her own and seek her fortune in the world with no map to guide her save her trust in stories. In the end, what Silver finds to steer her life is her search for love, for names exchanged in the darkness. As she explains, "I think of love as a force of nature — as strong as the sun, as necessary, as impersonal, as gigantic, as impossible, as scorching as it is warming, as drought-making as it is life-giving. And when it burns out, the planet dies." What she wants, finally, is only to connect with another person.

Intimate, romantic, elegant and charmingly literary, Winterson's new novel is a poetic narrative that reaffirms the power of storytelling to provide hope when times are most desperate, and to give life — and light — when matters seem most dark.

Mark Hayes is a teacher and writer in Miami. His reviews and commentary can be heard regularly online at WDNA.org.

Best sellers

HARDBACK FICTION

1. "No Place Like Home" Mary Higgins Clark
2. "The Mermaid Chair" Sue Monk Kidd
3. "Revenge of the Sith" Matthew Stover
4. "The Da Vinci Code" Dan Brown
5. "Saturday" Ian McEwan
6. "Ya-Yas in Bloom" Rebecca Wells
7. "Honeymoon" James Patterson and Howard Roughan
8. "The Broker" John Grisham
9. "With No One as Witness" Elizabeth George
10. "The Year of Pleasures" Elizabeth Berg
11. "The Rising" Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins
12. "Impossible" Danielle Steel
13. "The Five People You Meet in Heaven" Mitch Albom
14. "Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close" Jonathan Safran Foer
15. "Pretty Woman" Fern Michaels

HARDBACK NONFICTION

1. "My Life So Far" Jane Fonda
2. "The World Is Flat" Thomas L. Friedman
3. "Blink" Malcolm Gladwell
4. "Memory and Identity" John Paul II
5. "A Deadly Game" Catherine Crier with Cole Thompson
6. "On Bull----" Harry G. Frankfurt
7. "America (The Book)" Jon Stewart, Ben Karlin and David Javerbaum
8. "Conspiracy of Fools" Kurt Eichenwald
9. "Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way" John Paul II
10. "Idiot" Johnny Damon with Peter Golenbock
11. "Plan B" Anne Lamott
12. "Pope John Paul II: A Tribute" Robert Sullivan and the editors of Life
13. "Blood Brother" Anne Bird
14. "Collapse" Jared Diamond
15. "Men in Black" Mark R. Levin

ADVICE, HOW-TO AND MISC.

1. "The Purpose-Driven Life" Rick Warren
2. "Winning" Jack Welch with Suzy Welch
3. "Your Best Life Now" Joel Osteen
4. "French Women Don't Get Fat" Mireille Guiliano
5. "The South Beach Diet" Arthur Agatston

PAPERBACK FICTION

1. "Nighttime Is My Time" Mary Higgins Clark
2. "R Is for Ricochet" Sue Grafton
3. "The Kite Runner" Khaled Hosseini
4. "Blind Alley" Iris Johansen
5. "Full Bloom" Janet Evanovich and Charlotte Hughes
6. "Therapy" Jonathan Kellerman
7. "Angels & Demons" Dan Brown
8. "The Paid Companion" Amanda Quick
9. "The Last Juror" John Grisham
10. "Divine Evil" Nora Roberts

PAPERBACK NONFICTION

1. "The Tipping Point" Malcolm Gladwell
2. "Reading Lolita in Tehran" Azar Nafisi
3. "The Devil in the White City" Erik Larson
4. "The Making of 'Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith'" J.W. Rinzler
5. "Crossing the Threshold of Hope" John Paul II
6. "The Fabric of the Cosmos" Brian Greene
7. "Witness to Hope" George Weigel
8. "Leap of Faith" Queen Noor
9. "Guns, Germs and Steel" Jared Diamond
10. "Dreams From My Father" Barack Obama

ADVICE, HOW-TO AND MISC.

1. "30-Minute 'Get Real' Meals" Rachael Ray
 2. "Bad Cat" Jim Edgar
 3. "What to Expect When You're Expecting" Heidi Murkoff, Arlene Eisenberg and Sandee Hathaway
 4. "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" Robert T. Kiyosaki with Sharon L. Lechter
 5. "The Power of Now" Eckhart Tolle
- New York Times; additional information by AJC staff



In 2000, Clark, then 72, signed a five-book, \$64 million contract, making her the highest-paid female author in the world per book, according to most industry estimates.



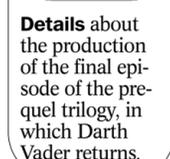
Books by and about the late pope are selling briskly, to no one's surprise. And publishers, ever mindful of a market in thrall, already are poised to pull together books on the new pope.



Business and career advice from the former CEO of General Electric, with help from his trophy co-author.



The owner of a South Carolina B&B is distracted from a handsome guest when she becomes a suspect in her ex-husband's murder.



Details about the production of the final episode of the prequel trilogy, in which Darth Vader returns.



This collection of tips on teaching one's children how to get rich and stay rich marks week 235 on the list.

What I'm Reading

"I'm a very eclectic reader. Right now I'm reading a wonderful book called 'The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn' by Janis Hallowell, and I'd certainly recommend it. Prior to that, I read Tim O'Brien's wonderful, wonderful 'In the Lake of the Woods.' Wow. What a book. Best book I've read in years."

— Elizabeth George, author of "With No One as Witness"

