



Atlantic Black

A.S. Patric

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In this haunting new novel, Katerina Klova and her mother are crossing the Atlantic by ocean liner. When Anne suffers a psychotic breakdown, Katerina is left alone on a ship full of strangers who span classes and stations, all of whom carry their ambitions, fears and obsessions with them. For a seventeen-year-old girl, the daughter of an ambassador, it's an exciting, frightening world to navigate.

Atlantic Black is a psychologically intense and affecting story of unexpected familial betrayal, of a mother and daughter's relationship, of a brother and father whose voices resonate from afar. Personal loneliness, love and loss, are tightly bound to the wider reality of a world set on a fateful course. The legacy of violence, and of how the First World War precipitated the Second World War reverberates as if 'tolling on the inside of a church bell'. Through the eyes of Katerina and her own family's place within a fracturing world, we see the way damage, yet also hope, are passed from one generation to another. A.S. Patric's writing is achingly tender, the tone merciless but heartbreaking in its compassion.

The story takes place over one day and night, New Year's Eve, 1939. The RMS Aquitania steams across the Atlantic Ocean. On the horizon, the world is about to explode.

Atlantic Black Details

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Author : A.S. Patric

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From Reader Review Atlantic Black for online ebook

Kimbofo says

Atlantic Black is the new novel by A.S. Patri?, whose debut, *Black Rock White City*, won the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 2016. That novel was set in Melbourne, Australia, in 1999 and told the story of a married Serbian couple coming to terms with a new life in a new country. But his latest novel couldn't be more far removed — in setting, style and time period — for the entire story takes place on a ship mid-way across the Atlantic Ocean on New Year's Eve 1938.

Written in rich, lyrical prose, Patri? turns his perceptive eye towards a Russian teenage girl on the verge of womanhood and shows us how her sense of freedom and bravura is tested in the brief space of a day and a night.

To read my review in full, please visit my blog.

Gerard Elson says

I have no doubt that *Atlantic Black*, Patri?'s masterpiece to date, will continue its gravid residence at the seat of my unconscious for many months yet. Like a kind of submerged Titanic, I can still feel it barrelling mysteriously along beneath the surface of my apprehension, tossing and agitating the waters of my mind. When I'm feeling braver, I will take another long, hard look at this vast gliding darkness to better discern its true form—or at least add definition to the shadow. For I'm not sure anyone could truly take in this wrenching, magisterial novel in one reading, or even two; that would be like Jonah swallowing the Leviathan.

Emily says

Some absolutely exquisite writing, if a little bit surreal. More of a character driven book than a plot driven one. The protagonist, Katerina, is a bit of an enigma though, and I found some of her actions perplexing. Truthfully, while I enjoyed reading it, I couldn't actually say what went on for sure. It all felt a little like an hallucination.

Ron says

Something goes a little bit awry with Time in this novel.

In ways that are both good and bad.

Bad ways?

Well, sorry to be picky, but *The Wizard of Oz* was released in cinemas *in* 1939, so it would have been difficult for someone to have seen it in December 1938. Likewise the unusual motherhood story of Lina Medina, who gave birth to her child (it's okay, this is not a spoiler) *in* 1939, so it would have been difficult for someone to have read an article about it prior to December 1938.

Those goofs aside, Time and the narrative playhead's shifting position in relation to it is a major structural and thematic element in this story, and Patric handles those shifts - where he fills in enormous swathes of backstory in a manner that comes on so suddenly you have to keep your wits about you - rather well.

Those are the good ways. And they work.

Protagonist Katerina Klova is a complex, rounded (if not fully filled in) character. We discover this as the plot clicks together, and the many convolutions of Time flicking backwards and forwards reveal to us new aspects of her personality and situation in life. At first it all seems like a merry jaunt at sea, and that we are just floating around, bumping into random stories about... well, things. But then those random stories start to connect up and - like a passenger on the Aquitania - we notice that we are not stationary in the water after all, but actually moving towards a destination. It's not just *What Katy Did at Sea*, but a bildungsroman that shows us a girl-woman who is testing the bounds of her life, just as she allegorically tests her freedom of the ship (*psst*... The ship is a metaphor, dude! Ships always are, man!).

Katerina is not afraid to experiment with all sorts of things (spoilers, Sweetie!). She seems - I think it's fair to say - to have a liberal attitude toward consequences. Those consequences do, however, quite often show up at her door, and then we see her growing and becoming more complex...

Some of the time, at least.

Some of the time she just changes her clothes and heads off into another apparently random interaction in the mosaic of apparently random plot points that end up making the pretty mural at the end.

And what is that mural?

There is a mystery at the heart of this story, sure, but I think you will be disappointed if you think the mystery is what this novel is about. It's really about Katerina, and why she is the way she is, and why she does the things she does.

I reckon.

It is a bildungsroman, after all.

The ending probably won't surprise you, but that's not the point. At the end of *Titanic*, the ship sinks (spoiler alert), but that's not the point.

One last thing before I go. This novel - set on New Year's Eve of 1939 (i.e. December 31st 1938) - is promoted as being "an indelible portrait of humanity sailing towards war", and while it is certainly a series of vignettes of humanity (some of them dripping, literally, with blood, by the way), and they are all, indeed, sailing toward war, it could also be said that they are sailing toward the Space Race (although that comes quite a bit later), and the Space Race receives only slightly less mention than the much more imminent second World War. Aside from the goofs mentioned at the head of this review, the novel gives the impression of having been well researched, or at least that A.S. Patric has a (mostly) well organised 1930s

scrapbook or Pinterest board (who knew that the Harlem Globetrotters were around in the 1930s?), and that is a definite strength. But this reader, Dear Reader, would have expected that research to have led to a bit more discussion about the swirling clouds of war visible on the horizon.

Read it yourself and let me know what you think.

Thank you to Monash Library for providing me a copy of this novel free, gratis, and for nothing.

Lesley Moseley says

Wonderful writing ,and I'm not sure why it didn't engage me, even tho it was certainly worth reading.

Jo says

4.5 Stars. When I read his earlier works *Las Vegas for Vegans* and *Bruno Kramzer* , it was clear to me that A S Patric would go on to create literature that would be remembered by many. His writing style is uncompromising and thought-provoking. His debut in long form fiction *Black Rock White City* was stunning. Now with the publication of *Atlantic Black* he has given new meaning to 'haunting'. This is a novel to be read in, if not one, as few sittings as possible. Embarking on its reading is like being sucked into a vortex — there's no going back, only through. [Read full review >>](#)

Kerran Olson says

4.5* This book is very dark, and sort of hauntingly beautiful. Not a whole lot happens in terms of plot, and the book essentially just concerns Katarina over the course of a day and night aboard the Atlantic, but I was so absorbed in her character, her unreliable narration, and the descriptive language that I was completely engrossed. There was a sense of uneasiness throughout the book that worked really well and I'll definitely be reading more from this author.

Mandy says

Yep, five.

When I started this book I thought it was far too clever for me but the writing is so good that I pressed on and the gradually understood the complexity, nuances and intrigue. Patric has drawn fabulous characters, some we don't even meet as with Katerina's brother and father but are so vital to the story as it unfolds. This is a fascinating book but do not finish it at night. It is not a book to put on the beside table and then go to sleep. Katerina will not let you forget her. It is a book to close quietly and let it take hold for as long as it takes..... Besides, I could never sleep with salt water still on my skin.

Calzean says

This is a hard book to review. Katrina is travelling from Mexico to France on an ocean liner. It is New Years Eve 1939 - the dark clouds of war are on the horizon but on the ship there is gaiety as NY festivities go on. And it is this duality of life and darkness that makes this book quite something.

Katerina is travelling with her mother to meet up with her brother and father, an ambassador gone missing. Her mother has a breakdown and Katerina roams freely through the ship meeting people, reading letters from her brother and avoiding wandering hands. But Katrina is not totally innocent.

The writing is dark, fore-bidding, at times surreal. Religion, literature, letters and occasional pieces of superb dialogue are used.

It is a snap shot of people of all classes, ages, countries and while set in 1938/9, it is really an ageless story. It is how woman are preyed upon. The poor treated roughly. The evil that lurks in some people. The fragility of life.

The more I think about it, the more this book makes sense.

jeniwren says

I am finding it hard to articulate my misgivings with this one. Although it is well written I found the style kept me at a distance where I could care less about the main character and was never engaged with the story.

Tundra says

I have read a number of fabulous books this year but this is certainly one of the best. I truly felt like I was a silent observer on this Atlantic crossing. It has an amazing array of characters, who are woven together with absolute sureness, and it vividly captures a moment in time that is a turning point in history. This story would make an amazing movie although in some respects I feel like I've just watched it.

Lisa says

Atlantic Black is a book which repays patience. Don't start reading it expecting to understand everything that's going on, it will take its own time for all the pieces to fall into place.

The central premise is this: what happens if a precocious and superficially worldly teenage girl is suddenly all alone with no one to protect or guide her in a disinterested and irresponsible society? Patric's microcosm of society is aboard an ocean liner and Katerina is travelling with her mother from Mexico to Europe, when amid the revelry of New Year's Eve her mother is taken ill and Katerina is free to test out her independence, free from all constraints.

This territory of adolescent risk-taking has already been mined, memorably in Kirsten Krauth's *just_a_girl*, (see my review) where Krauth's character in her adolescent hubris uses internet technology to encounter the kind of monsters all parents fear. But Patric has abandoned the interconnected 21st century to show us this adolescent quest for independence at its most elemental. RMS Aquitania is not a contemporary cruise ship ... instead it is an ocean liner suspended wholly in the isolation of the Atlantic Ocean in winter. The year is the fateful 1939 and the only form of communication is the telegraph, open to passengers only during business hours. This is not a scenario where Katerina can text or phone her friends and family or chat to

them on Facebook, and she has to negotiate her way round a ship full of complete strangers. Knowing as we do the peril that can befall grown women on cruise ships, this scenario has all the ingredients for disaster, and Katerina has only her own resources and judgement to fall back on...

The strangers she confronts come from all stations of life, including the wealthy leisured class to which Katerina belongs, working people including the staff, and all sorts in between. Not all of them are benign. So, we see Katerina oscillate between concern for her erratic mother and her delight in her independence. Although worried about her mother's mental health, Katerina relishes her freedom and tests the boundaries by acting like an adult. There are symbolic changes: she goes about wearing high heels and her mother's elegant dresses and fur coats; and she signs for meals in the dining room although she doesn't know how to order because her mother has always done it for her. But there are also behavioural and attitudinal changes: She demands service from staff who are used to treating her as a child under the care of her mother, and she behaves aggressively towards them when they hesitate to do what she wants. More crucially, she puts herself at risk by going about alone when there are, as always, men who will prey on women who are alone and vulnerable.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2017/10/08/a...>

Sharon Letchford says

I really can't stand this kind of book. Maybe I'm just a bourgeois type of reader but I expect an actual story when I'm reading a novel. There is an undercurrent of an intriguing story here but it never reveals itself fully, just hangs close enough to tantalize then slips away along with the protagonist (and what happens to her is dismally predictable, I could only foresee two possible endings all the way through, and one of them happened to be correct).

I understand what some reviewers have said about it... what appealed to them... but the themes (which are themes I like) are presented here in what seems to me to be a pretentious manner.

Atlantic Black is more a series of ramblings about life and death than a novel. It is more like poetry than prose and perhaps that's why I don't like it (other than the predictability). I never could stand poetry either.

Cass Moriarty says

Alec Patric (A.S. Patric) won the Miles Franklin for his novel Black Rock, White City, and this next book – Atlantic Black (Transit Lounge 2017) – is another literary wonder that transports us to a particular time and place, and into the mind of a specific character. In this case, it is 17-year-old Katerina Klova, daughter of an ambassador, embarking on an ocean voyage across the Atlantic. The entire story takes place over a day and a night, the last day of 1938 and the eve of the New Year, and the dawning of 1939. Katerina is aboard the RMS Aquitania, a luxury vessel steaming across the vast seas towards a world that is about to change beyond recognition with the horrors of the approach of another world war.

Half of Katerina's family – her father and brother – are absent (initially we are uncertain as to the reasons, but much is revealed as the novel progresses), and Katerina is travelling with her mother, Anne, who suffers a psychotic break at the very beginning of the story. She is bundled off to the ship's hospital or infirmary, and the adolescent Katerina is left to wander the decks and rooms of the immense vessel, encountering other passengers and crew both friendly and sinister, with chance encounters teasing the edges of our knowledge about her and her family's circumstances, and the fate of those she loves. The novel is peopled with a cast of

memorable and unique individuals, each playing a cameo role in Katerina's peregrinations throughout the evening.

Katerina is a complex character, at one level innocent and naïve, but at another level strangely worldly. She smokes opium, for example, and certainly thinks rather deeply about those she encounters. She is a character suffering both the actions of others against her, and also enacting her own agency towards getting what she wants.

The book gives a detailed depiction of life aboard a ship of that era, both the luxurious berths with accompanying service, and the more lugubrious scene of life below decks, with animals transported to zoos, cargo of all manner, dingy crew quarters and seedy and manipulative sorts.

As Katerina navigates her way through the world of strangers and strange customs, and as the world around her disintegrates and fragments with the shadow of conflict, we are given a distinctive and insightful view into her mind, her thoughts, her desires, her dreams, her regrets and her fears. The ending is both unexpected and surprising; it hangs there on the page, with questions unanswered, a void of possibility. After having walked so closely with Katerina for an entire novel through only 24 hours, the prospect of leaving her at the conclusion of the novel is a wrench; she has stayed with me, haunting my thoughts.

A.S. Patric is a master of not telling, and it is the absences and white spaces of this novel that magnify its significance.

Pam Tickner says

This is book is black on many levels, the blackness of the night sea surrounding the ocean liner on New Year's Eve, the possibility of turbulence mirroring the thoughts and deeds of many of the passengers and crew. The writing and originality of the story is powerful. You don't always know what is going on, but then the story is told by Katerina, a fractured 17 year old young woman, who, as she recalls the events leading up to this day, and flounders through an opium haze, also doesn't know what is happening. A climatic end as Katerina realises her mother has shut her out of her life and kept her in the dark about the truth of her family.
