

“The Atlantic is the classic ocean of our imaginings, an industrial ocean of cold and iron and salt, a purposeful ocean of sealanes and docksides and fisheries, an ocean alive with squadrons of steadily moving ships above, with unimaginable volumes of mysterious marine abundance below. It is also an entity that seems to be somehow interminable. Year in and years out, night and day, warm and cold, century after century, the ocean is always there, an eternal presence in the collective minds of those who live beside it”.

“The outline of the Atlantic Ocean that we know today was fixed perhaps ten million years ago, and though to us and our cartographers it appears to have retained its boundaries, its coastlines, and its “look” ever since the days of Columbus and Vespucci and the great German map of Martin Waldseemüller that first defined it, it has been changing, subtly and slightly, all the time. Coastlines in the east continue to advance, those in the west to retreat. Things fall apart: the center cannot hold. The Mid-Atlantic Ridge continues to disgorge untold tonnages of new ocean floor; some of it appears above the water’s surface and creates new islands and reefs. And the islands that do exist continue to move, slowly and slightly, away from the sea’s center”.

“By ten million years ago the great split was done, and the Atlantic was fully born. At some time in the distant future-but not the unknown future, as we shall see-the rocks that opened will close and the sea will be forced to go elsewhere, and it will find another home. The vast earth-ocean, with its essentially and eternally constant volume of seawater, will be obliged by continental movement to reconfigure itself, and in time other shapes and sizes of its constituent water bodies will appear. The Atlantic that was born will in due course also die”.

“But that will not be for a very long while. In the meantime, the Atlantic Ocean, Mare Atlanticus, the Great West Sea, is like an enormous stage set. It was ten million years ago just as it is today: a sinuous snakelike river of an ocean, stretching

thousands of miles from the Stygian fogs of the north to the Roaring Forties in the south, river with deeps in its western chasms, dangerous with shallows in eastern plains, a place of cod and flying fish, of basking sharks and blue-finned tuna, of gyres of Sargasso weed and gyres of unborn hurricanes, a place of icebergs and tides, whirlpools and sandbanks, submarine canyons and deep-sea black smokers and ridges and seamounts, of capes and rises and fracture zones, of currents hot, cold, torrential, and languorous, of underwater volcanoes and earthquakes, of stromatolites and cyanobacteria and horseshoe crabs, of seabird colonies, of penguins and polar bears and manta rays, of giant squid and jelly-fish and their slow-and-steady southern majesties, the great and glorious wandering albatrosses”.

“The stage, now so amply furnished with all this magic and mystery, has been prepared for a very long while. The supporting cast of players, all the beasts and plants, have now mostly made their entrances. The Atlantic Ocean is open wide, its physical condition fully set, and all is ready for the appearance on stage of the creature that will give full force to the human idea of the great sea”.

“For what promises or threatens to be in relative time just the briefest moment only, the central character is set to step into the light. Mankind is finally about to confront the gray-heaving reality of all these mighty water. To see at last, just what is going on”.



Atlantic is a biography of a tremendous space that has been central to the ambitions of explorers, scientists, and warriors, and continues profoundly to affect our character, attitudes, and dreams. Simon Winchester, a trained geologist and inveterate globetrotter, makes the Atlantic come vividly alive. Spanning the ocean's story from its geological origins to the age of exploration – covering the Phoenicians sailors who ventured past the Pillars of Hercules, the Vikings, the Irish, the Basques, John Cabot, and Christopher Columbus in the north, and the Portuguese and the Spanish in the south – and from World War II battle to today's struggles with pollution and overfishing, Winchester with wisdom and wit tells the thousand year relationship between the Atlantic and humans. Blending history and anecdote, geography and personal memories, science and story-telling, his narrative is epic, intimate and awe inspiring. More than a mere history, this is a sea saga, an unforgettable journey of unprecedented scope by one of the most gifted writers in the English language.

Information

Atlantic

Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories

Simon Winchester

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Simon Winchester

Simon Winchester is the acclaimed author of many books, including *The Professor and the Madman*, *The Man Who Loved China*, *A Crack in the Edge of the World* and *Krakatoa*. Those books were *New York Times* bestsellers and appeared on numerous best and notable lists. In 2006, he was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by her Majesty the Queen. He lives in Manhattan and in western Massachusetts.