



The Patrick Melrose Novels

Edward St. Aubyn

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NATIONAL BESTSELLER

An *Atlantic Magazine* Best Book of the Year
A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year

For more than twenty years, acclaimed author Edward St. Aubyn has chronicled the life of Patrick Melrose, painting an extraordinary portrait of the beleaguered and self-loathing world of privilege. This single volume collects the first four novels—*Never Mind*, *Bad News*, *Some Hope*, and *Mother's Milk*, a Man Booker finalist—to coincide with the publication of *At Last*, the final installment of this unique novel cycle.

By turns harrowing and hilarious, these beautifully written novels dissect the English upper class as we follow Patrick Melrose's story from child abuse to heroin addiction and recovery. *Never Mind*, the first novel, unfolds over a day and an evening at the family's chateaux in the south of France, where the sadistic and terrifying figure of David Melrose dominates the lives of his five-year-old son, Patrick, and his rich and unhappy American mother, Eleanor. From abuse to addiction, the second novel, *Bad News* opens as the twenty-two-year-old Patrick sets off to collect his father's ashes from New York, where he will spend a drug-crazed twenty-four hours. And back in England, the third novel, *Some Hope*, offers a sober and clean Patrick the possibility of recovery. The fourth novel, the Booker-shortlisted *Mother's Milk*, returns to the family chateau, where Patrick, now married and a father himself, struggles with child rearing, adultery, his mother's desire for assisted suicide, and the loss of the family home to a New Age foundation.

Edward St. Aubyn offers a window into a world of utter decadence, amorality, greed, snobbery, and cruelty—welcome to the declining British aristocracy.

The Patrick Melrose Novels Details

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From Reader Review The Patrick Melrose Novels for online ebook

El says

Another great recommendation from The Professor. He recommended this specific edition which holds the first four books in the Melrose series (the fifth book, *At Last*, was published in 2011). He said that he had trouble putting the stories down once he started, and I have to agree with that.

Never Mind - This story broke my heart quite a bit. Patrick Melrose is a five-year-old boy, living in the cold shadow of his disgustingly rich parents who barely know the first thing about parenting. He endures abuse, physical and emotional, and because of this there are absolutely no redeemable characteristics of either of his parents. I wanted them both to die.

Not an easy story to read, but so well-written that it was hard to put down.

Bad News - Patrick Melrose is in his early 20s now, still struggling with the abuse forced upon him as a child, but also dealing with his own physical abuse - this time in the form of drugs. This is like one of those books from the 80s, when the drug culture was in the forefront of literature and movies, like Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* or Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*, though I believe *Bad News* took place a bit later than those other stories.

St. Aubyn wrote about drug abuse in more detail than I've seen for a while. We're all a little jaded because we've spent the last so many years reading Hubert Selby or Charles Bukowski or William Burroughs (or seen movies based on their books), so we know what drug abuse in literature is like, and it's hard to be shocked. I'm not going to say I was shocked. But I was certainly impressed. This guy made shooting up read like a fucking ballet. It was actually beautiful at times.

Some Hope - Probably the funniest of the bunch, though one of those dark, smirky kinds of humor. Like it's funny 'cause it's true kinda humor. *St. Aubyn* portrays the rich and wealthy with satirical honesty and all the pretention and pomposity that comes with the title of being Rich.

Patrick is older yet, he's in a different place and mindset than he was when we last met him in *Bad News*. The reader can't help but cheer him on. *But*. He now has a five-year-old son. Is he going to repeat the abuse that was inflicted upon him when he was five? Or is he stronger than that? Is he still clean?

I think this title, *Some Hope*, is the strongest of all the titles because there is a feeling of hopefulness throughout the text.

Not as strong a story as the first two, but worth the read for the mirror the author holds up to the characters.

Mother's Milk - I found this to be the weakest of the stories, strangely enough considering this one was shortlisted for the Booker prize or something and it's on the 1001 Books to Read Before You Die list. We find Patrick even a little older, with another child in the mix. Now his concerns are his elderly and ailing mother and also the hot ex-girlfriend who has been visiting.

I think what *St. Aubyn* did with the POV in the beginning of the story was interesting, but I think he failed ultimately in how he portrayed children. These are some precocious children, to say the least. Smartest damn kids I've ever read. I think sometimes that serves a good purpose, but I'm not sure if I understood that purpose here. They're smart kids, but this went beyond that. And it felt unconvincing.

Overall, I adored these stories. I think the first two stories are the best and most convincing of the bunch, though the third and fourth serve some sort of purpose, even if I didn't care for them so much. I haven't read the latest Melrose book, *At Last*, but am looking forward to it if for no other reason than to see what Patrick is up to now.

These stories are hard to put down. I'd compare them to other similar stories that are like trainwrecks, like *Tales of the City* or *Valley of the Dolls* (though certainly less histrionic than the latter). Certainly more literary than Maupin or Susann, but a fun read nonetheless, despite occasional very difficult scenes.

Jessica says

So far, reads like Alan Hollinghurst's excruciatingly fucked up and much richer second cousin, in the best possible way. Seems to explore the unstated hypothesis that having to earn a living is what distracts most people from destroying their children, themselves, and everyone around them. Also definitively answers the question of whether the most lurid and cliched subjects can be not just salvaged but made new, relevant, and moving through brilliant English prose. (Spoiler: yes.)

Lauren says

I just began reading this collection of the first four books in the quintet of Patrick Melrose books, and I am STUNNED by what an amazing writer St. Aubyn is. Every paragraph contains a gem, and his characterizations are brilliant, as is his character development... and the way he handles the heaviest subject matter you can imagine.

I've been wondering, "Where has Edward St. Aubyn been all my life?" And then I remember, "Right, right. Pedophiliac, homosexual incest. Not the usual fare of my friends and colleagues."

UPDATE: I just finished book one. Searing. Amazing. Witty. Brutal. I'm delving into Book 2 now.

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Just finished these four novels, and I'm onto the last one now. They are BRILLIANT -- probably the best thing I've read. Ever! (Did I just say that?) More detailed review to follow. (I hope.)

Pamela says

Holy effing cow. These four novels -- it's hard to say whether they read as four separate works or one large one; I tend to the latter opinion -- amount to some of the most powerful work I've read in years. St. Aubyn combines extraordinarily bleak and painful subject matter (parental sadism and neglect, rape, addiction) with robust comedy (yes, believe it) and exquisite prose. But it's more than that St. Aubyn can tell a harrowing and resonant story--it's that he dares to take on a wildly ambitious theme: the sheer terror of existence, for all of us. I'm awed, humbled, inspired. Read these one after another without stopping.

brian says

toward the end of *some hope*, a snooty princess spells out what these novels are all about:

'It must be funny having the same name as so many other people,' she speculated. 'I suppose there are hundreds of John Halls up and down the country.'

'It teaches one to look for distinction elsewhere and not to rely on an accident of birth,' said Johnny casually. 'That's where people go wrong,' said the Princess, compressing her lips, 'there is no accident in birth.' She swept on before Johnny had a chance to reply.

dark, hysterical, moving stuff.
st. aubyn ain't no Waughnabee.

of course, there's always this;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wal-q...>

George Witte says

I can't recommend this book highly enough...but it's not for every reader. Anyone who writes, or wants to write, should read these four novels and the concluding fifth, *At Last*. Read with a highlighter in hand because you will want to mark at least one sentence, one line of the cutting, witty, mordant, pitch-perfect dialogue from every single page. Readers of Martin (and Kingsley) Amis, Evelyn Waugh, and the darkest of the John Cheever novels and stories will be utterly gripped by these novels and the trials of the central character, Patrick Melrose. As other reviewers have noted, the book begins with a shocking scene--one that lesser novelists would have held to the end, for the predictable Big Revelation with much emoting--but which here is treated with terse, brutal candor. Yes, there are slow patches, yes, a few repetitive scenes and words (characters "gasp" their lines of dialogue too many times) and yes, sometimes one wishes that parts of Patrick's struggle could be conveyed with a little less excruciating detail. But overall, this is one of the best-written, most-rewarding new books I have read in the past several years.

Szplug says

A pair of recent reviews of *At Last* prompted me to take-up this tetralogy that I purchased, on a whim, a couple of months ago. Said whim was driven, in large part, by my attraction to the stark cover; and with the further experience of physically grasping and admiring the thing in my very hands, I find myself beguiled by this book's aesthetics—a cover design as black as Satan's pupils floating box islands of a neon pink that speaks of electrocuted roses or Rosé deepened to a homogenized lacquer via the aeration of mundane excess; the limpid paper deckle edged and redolent of off-white virgin reams having been put through their paces; serif fonts sufficiently small to avoid clownery whilst yet perfectly proportioned to the swift unveiling of upper-class monstrosity that takes place within. From a purely sensory point of view, *The Patrick Melrose Novels* provides a continuous current of pleasure, one which makes me loath to set it aside and move on to more promising and anticipated fare. However, due to a lack of compulsion to continue with the remaining pieces engendered within subsequent to my completion of *Never Mind*, the opening novel of the collection, it may indeed be a while before I muster the mustard to put the entirety of this work—one of art, bodily if not narratively—to bed.

Andres says

I read the whole thing cover to cover in like a week, so it does not bore you. That said, I'm feeling hard pressed to find something fascinating to say about these books. It follows the life of your typical messed up person, starting with early childhood with an abusive father and a disengaged mother, progressing through drug addicted young adulthood, drug-free further adulthood and finally married with children. The many demons that haunt the protagonist never really cease haunting him, they simply take turns and adapt to his changing situation. There is very little catharsis granted him, not when his father dies, and not when his mother is on the brink, either.

The books showcase what is purportedly the lifestyle of the British upper crust, with its many warts. They are full of vacuous people, betrayals, addictions, abuse, scams and parties, in fact, one of the books takes place almost wholly at a party the protagonist attends.

I kept expecting some point to the whole thing, and maybe I was too busy reading and missed it. Online blurbs state that the series is somewhat autobiographical, in which case I do not envy the author one bit. And perhaps there was no point to the books except to chronicle the protagonist's life throughout the four stages I mentioned before. Which brings me to my final, and main, problem with the series. It is disjointed. The first book shows us the protagonist as a child in an abusive household. The next one jumps us to early adulthood seasoned with a really bad drug habit. The following one jumps again some years and finds Patrick older, still single and suddenly drug-free. Finally we find him married with 2 children.

One is left wondering how, exactly, Patrick transitions from the stage we had left him in at the conclusion of the prior book, and the stage he is magically in, in the subsequent one. I sometimes had the nagging suspicion that these gaps may have been more interesting than the parts the author chose to include in the series.

But you are all getting the impression that there wasn't a whole lot of good stuff, and that's not true. Some of the moments in the books are full of pathos, or triumph, or tragedy or a healthy dose of clueless stupidity. Maybe even a bit of evil in the abusive father, though one gets the impression that he had suffered abuse himself, and as many abuse victims do, they grow up to become perpetrators perpetuating the cycle.

I picked up this series after seeing a favorable review somewhere, and don't really regret reading them. In fact, I am about to pick up the 5th and final volume in the series right now. So I liked it that much.

Anyway, that is my honest opinion of these books. Definitely "liked" them, but can't really go and say I "really liked" them, hence the 3 instead of 4 stars.

AvvαΦ says

E' stata una piacevolissima scoperta quest'epopea familiare – o questo moderno Bildungsroman – preso per curiosità, più che dando credito alla fascetta e alle innumerevoli lodi di scrittori contemporanei.

Ciò che colpisce e lega subito è la scrittura bellissima, elegante e profonda a un tempo nel tratteggiare caratteri, stati d'animo e situazioni, oltre al tema o i temi cardine, affatto banali o facili da trattare. Si parla di abusi sui minori, in questo libro, e la crudissima scena narrata quasi all'inizio non può non lasciar storditi, a

pagina 50 e dintorni ho interrotto la lettura e l'ho ripresa dopo un po' di tempo. Si parla anche di una discesa negli abissi più profondi del dolore, della dipendenza da stupefacenti, di legami familiari malati o carenti e della possibilità di spezzare le proprie catene, e, in sostanza, si parla di Patrick, prima bambino abusato dal padre, poi adolescente e ricco giovane preda di una tossicodipendenza feroce, fino alle soglie della maturità con un tentativo di riscatto.

Il fatto che St Aubyn abbia trattato il tema dell'abuso sui minori – dato peraltro autobiografico – con apparente distacco e sarcasmo tutto britannico, è un elemento che, a mio parere, non banalizza ed eleva il testo a livelli di eccelsa letteratura, chissà il macello grondante di autocommiserazione lacrimevole ne avrebbe fatto uno scrittore meno dotato, o più mediterraneo. Il suo stile divertente e tragico a un tempo rende godibile anche il II libro, dove si descrive con dovizia di particolari la vita da tossico in cerca di dosi, chiuso nei bagni e in giro per NY City ...con... (non voglio spoilerare, ma la trovata è macabra e divertente a un tempo come nel miglior Amis).

Eppure, pur nell'altero, stoico distacco assunto nella tragedia, uso comune nella classe sociale e nell'isola dell'autore, arcinota per il piglio fiero che la sua popolazione tiene in ogni frangente (*Grace under Fire*), non si può non provare un'intensa simpatia per Patrick e per la sua solitaria lotta per non soccombere (alla crudeltà del padre, all'indifferenza della madre, alle sirene inebrianti e mortifere delle droghe, al suo ambiente elevato ma vuoto, perfido, privo di qualsiasi sincera empatia umana).

Il libro è stato paragonato, per la scrittura brillante e la satira dell'aristocrazia britannica, a Evelyn Waugh e Oscar Wilde, senz'altro giusto è l'accostamento, ma qui più che una satira a una certa classe sociale, pur presente –, con un attacco perfino al cuove della Covona, nella pevsona della sovella della Vegina (!) –, c'è la critica ad una parte di mondo (gli Adulti), chiusa nel loro personale dolore o fallimento o vuota indifferenza, di fronte alle sofferenze di un bambino o peggio, impegnata a cercare di distruggere l'altra parte di mondo (l'Infanzia, La Pura Innocenza).

Sarebbero moltissime le cose ancora da sottolineare, voglio solo aggiungere che ho ammirato moltissimo l'abilità dell'autore di descrivere carrellate di caratteri e personaggi indimenticabili, per la loro varietà e intrinseca, mai banale, autenticità. Tra questi, basti ricordare solo i due cattivi che, come in ogni fiaba che si rispetti, sono un po' orchi e un po' antagonisti del piccolo eroe protagonista: uno è il padre David Melrose (crudele, eccentrico, misogino, egoista e molto altro, forse anche depresso) e il di lui amico Nicholas Pratt, rampollo di nobile famiglia ma un idiota perfetto, con un paio di soli talenti all'attivo: sposarsi e divorziare a manetta e abbinare i giusti calzini al resto dell'ambaradan. Notevole anche l'abilità e la schiettezza nel ritrarre un ambiente sociale (mi chiedo se St Aubyn venga ancora vicevuto a Covte, di tanto in tanto, o viva in un pevenne confino, degna sovorte del veietto dissaccatove) chiuso nei loro *clubs* o residenze di campagna, fraternizzati da una maschia, gaudente alleanza o da una femminile e snobisticamente pomposa e fatua parvenza di socilaità, che da sola varrebbe la lettura con effetti davvero esilaranti.

La saga troverà continuazione in un prossimo libro, ancora non pubblicato in Italia: *At Last*. In trepida attesa, magari con in programma una rilettura..

Malena Watrous says

Simultaneously hilarious and devastating--my favorite, brutal combination--wringing out laughter that hurts. As a friend put it, "These are the fucked up descendants of the downton abbey crew." There is this incredible tension between Patrick Melrose's hyper-articulate linguistic self indulgence as he describes the torments of his childhood and subsequent addictions and misery, and the almost inchoate line that he repeats, "No one should do that to another person," this wounded cry at what was taken from him, how he ended up the way

that he did. The point of view swerves constantly, brilliantly, and yet this somehow feels purely like Patrick's story, fragmented into novellas from each major episode of his life, childhood through middle age. I don't think I've ever seen a writer break so many "rules" of writing so effectively. He does everything you're told not to, and it adds up to undeniable literature but also just a fantastic read. The only place my attention lagged a little was in Book 3, *Some Hope*, where the party/rotating POV trick reminded me a lot of the first novella, and I got slightly impatient with meeting so many new partygoers and mostly just waiting for Patrick to finally unburden himself of his secret to someone. When he did, it was a great moment. Still, I was restless until getting to *Mother's Milk*, where I can't believe how he pulled off (with great liberties taken) the point of view of a newborn. Weird, wonderful, elegant, sharp, entertaining, revolting, harrowing stuff. A scathing look at the human desire to overpower and dominate other people.

Sara Mazzoni says

Mi sono decisa a leggere questa raccolta di romanzi brevi solo dopo aver visto l'adattamento televisivo *Patrick Melrose*, con Benedict Cumberbatch. Mi aveva colpita il mondo narrativo di questa saga familiare: una classe aristocratica decadente che sembra partorire solo mostri e persone profondamente danneggiate. Seguendo il personaggio di Patrick dall'infanzia alla mezz'età si segue il suo lunghissimo e complicato tentativo di emancipazione da tutto questo. Vi anticipo che solo il primo dei romanzi mi è piaciuto davvero e che la serie tv è senza dubbio migliore.

1) **Non importa** : una mazzata nello stomaco. Le origini del personaggio Patrick Melrose, qui infante, sono terribili. Un viaggio dentro la mente distorta del padre orco e della fauna che lo circonda negli anni '60. Emerge chiaramente un motivo di fondo: l'uomo dell'upper class descritto da St Aubyn è un sadico convinto che essere crudeli col prossimo sia il miglior modo per distinguersi dal popolino e dalla borghesia che si arrampica. Agghiacciante pensare alla base autobiografica di questi racconti. Interessante la scelta fatta per la serie tv, in cui questo romanzo diventa il secondo capitolo della storia, e non il primo, spiegando a ritroso la formazione di un personaggio tragico come Patrick.

2) **Cattive notizie** : encomiabile il lavoro fatto dall'adattamento televisivo, che ha risollevato il materiale originale trasformandolo in un pilot eccellente. Sulla carta, non funziona allo stesso modo. Fedele cronaca della vita da tossico, riesce a restituirne lo squallore in un flusso di coscienza costellato dai meccanismi fisiologici del personaggio: la ricerca spasmodica di vene ancora fruibili, le ondate di cocaina invadono il sangue, alternate a quelle di eroina; poi ricomincia la ricerca di un venditore affidabile. Il problema è che dopo una sessantina di pagine il romanzo ha già esaurito tutto quello che aveva da dire.

3) **Speranza** : raggiunta la metà del poderoso volume non ero più tanto motivata a continuare la lettura. Ci ho provato lo stesso, perché il terzo capitolo si annunciava più vicino al primo nella struttura: un'alternanza di punti di vista racconta una sola serata in cui tutta la famigerata upper class dell'aristo-disperazione converge a una mastodontica festa. Si fa leggere, ma sembra sempre indeciso tra essere un dramma oppure una raccolta di aforismi. Dà la fastidiosa sensazione di ascoltare qualcuno che vuole essere arguto a tutti i costi.

4) **Latte materno** : inizia dal punto di vista del bambino Robert, figlio di Patrick, durante una vacanza estiva nella famigerata villa di sua nonna. Per me è stato il colpo di grazia, non ce l'ho fatta neanche a finirlo. Per struttura, è il più originale dei quattro, ma arrivati a questo punto i contenuti suonano troppo ripetitivi e la visione del mondo di Robert non riesce a compensare, anzi. La storia di Patrick Melrose mi ha stufata, la sua resa sulla carta è irrimediabilmente noiosa e la prosa mediocre di St Aubyn non aiuta.

Vittoria della televisione sulla letteratura: David Nicholls e Edward Berger salvano tutto il meglio del testo di St Aubyn, editano via il resto e ambientano, modificano, potenziano. È uno di quei casi in cui non ha

senso leggere il libro prima perché l'adattamento è nettamente migliore.

Il finale è pubblicato separatamente nel volume *Lieto fine*.

Suzanne says

The Patrick Melrose Novels are Amazing. I've reviewed the others individually and this review is of Mother's Milk. If there were another 5 stars to make this a 10 star book, I might be satisfied.

Patrick Melrose, a recovering drug addict marries Mary, a Madonna like character who is not only a loving wife, but an unloving wife and the best mother to their two precocious children and probably not the best mother, too. My short summary is only as confusing as Melrose's family is and every other family is.

Patrick, as an adult, can not get over his fear, anger, desire for love, lack of self worth and addictions. He blames his abusive dead father and his abused mother for her lack of protection and her withholding nature. He adores his children but is jealous of the fact that they are children and being their father means that he has to grow up. Growing up for Patrick, is getting rid of most drugs, but continuing to drink beyond excess. He is part of the sandwich generation. He is squeezed by his attempts to care for his young children and his mother who is decaying due to several strokes.

Patrick's older son begins the narration. He is born. He, like his father, would like to retreat to the womb. Robert, is like his dad . He wants to know why and then begins his argument. Robert and Patrick prefer to mimic life rather than getting involved in it. His younger son , Thomas is all id. He looks for danger. He controls everything. Robert and Thomas are the two halves of Patrick.

Part of the achievement of St Aubyn is tackling these and about thirty other issues. The rest of the achievement or maybe the greater part is his prose which often sounds like poetry and the way he seamlessly shows the reader the various sides by changing narrators. St. Aubyn comically and bitterly describes Patrick' world, Patrick's attempts to make it right and Patrick's difficulty in dealing with it .

Patrick Brown says

What do you want from fiction? The more I read, the more I realize that what I want, what fiction does for me, is allows me to live in another person's mind. To be able to see the world as someone else sees it, that's what I'm looking for when I open a novel. The other pleasures of the novel -- style, voice, etc. -- all flow from the consciousness of the characters.

In recent years, very few books have given me the glimpse into a character that The Patrick Melrose novels have. Told over a period of 50 or so years, these books follow the life of Patrick Melrose, the only child of David and Eleanor Melrose. And while Patrick himself would be worth the price of admission, it's the cast around him that really brings the picture to life. The grand snob Nicholas Pratt is especially wonderful to read, though any of a number of characters would make a fine protagonist in another novel.

The tone of these books -- at once contemplative and witty -- is a miracle unto itself. The first book in the series, *Never Mind*, reads, at times, like a horror novel. Terrifying things happen in it, and yet, one finds oneself laughing on nearly every page (emphasis on the *nearly*). St. Aubyn not only has a master's grasp on character and dialog, but he changes perspective in surprising and daring ways. It's not uncommon in these books to be in the head of Patrick's son Robert for a few paragraphs and then to suddenly find oneself seeing

the scene through the eyes of Patrick's wife, Mary. If this sounds like it might be jarring, it isn't, though don't ask me how that's possible.

These books feel so lived, so alive and authentic, that, cliché as it sounds, I didn't want them to end and dragged out the reading of *At Last*, the final book in the series, for as long as I could. Don't deprive yourself any longer--read them today!

Julie Ehlers says

I can understand why the U.S. publisher decided to release these four short novels in one volume: Once the fifth book was ready to be released, some excitement needed to be drummed up on this side of the Atlantic, but getting readers enthused about *four* separate novels by an author they'd never heard of before, in preparation for a fifth, was a tall order. Better, for that purpose, to release the first four as one long book.

That justification aside, I don't necessarily feel it works to read these four short books as one long one—the change in tone from novel to novel is jarring in a way it wouldn't be if there were months or years separating their release, as there was in the UK. So I feel like the only way to review these is as separate books, all with their good points and their flaws.

Never Mind starts off slowly but is eventually shocked to life with the devastating event that propels the entire series. To St. Aubyn's immense credit, this scene is exactly as horrifying as it should be. It's followed, somewhat incongruously, by a dinner party studded with lots of enjoyable rapier wit. These qualities make this installment a great encapsulation of the best aspects of the entire series, now that I think of it.

Bad News fast-forwards to Patrick Melrose as a young adult and is a detailed glimpse of his hellish life as an addict. The druggie stuff is undeniably entertaining, but Patrick is a bit difficult to sympathize with. This difficulty is a harbinger of things to come—for me, it recurred throughout the rest of the novels in the volume.

Some Hope featured one segment that was absolutely astonishing to me in its emotional openness, and which I hoped signaled a new turn in the story. (It didn't.) It also featured a party at a country house that contained some amusing dialogue, but I felt this was weaker than the previous two novels.

Unfortunately, *Mother's Milk* was probably just as weak as its predecessor. While there were some poignant bits about caring for an aging parent, Patrick and his wife were insufferable to me. I can't stand full-grown adults who hate all their friends and mock them behind their backs. Psst... you're a grown-up. If you don't like these people, *make new friends*. I realize this is a personal pet peeve, but this installment was so underwhelming that I didn't seek out the final book, *At Last*, which was published separately. Maybe I'll get to it someday.

I don't want to be too harsh on this series. The writing was really very good, and hopefully you can tell from the above that there's a lot to recommend these books. Ultimately, though, they just didn't quite live up to the hype for this reader.

Christian says

The most fun I've ever had reading about incest, heroin addiction, narcissism, cruelty and dementia. The

blackest of comedies, written in beautiful, elegant prose, with razor-sharp dialog and heartbreaking, finely-drawn characters.

If, like me, you can't imagine enjoying yet another book about decadent rich Brits, I implore you to set your class prejudices aside and let yourself sink into the lush, awful world of the Melroses. Patrick's journey from child victim, to wanton self-destroyer, to desperately good-intentioned parent and husband is a hero's journey for our time. His brilliant yet monstrous father, his lost and stubborn mother, his wise and tragic children, they are all unforgettable. You will root for him and his family to rise above the hard, ugly truths of our lives, knowing that none of us ever really do, but understanding at the end that maybe in kindness and forgiveness we can find the thread that leads out of the maze of personal history and into a life worth living. I loved this book.

Steve says

Investors talk often about risk-return tradeoffs. The more volatile an asset is, the higher the expected return has to be to want to hold it. The four short books packaged together as *The Patrick Melrose Novels* are at the extreme end of the risk-return spectrum. Edward St. Aubyn took big chances hoping the rewards would be commensurate. He risked alienating readers at every turn with characters who are loathsome or over-exposed. And with the depth of the interior development, the potential losses (and gains) in credibility were magnified. Fortunately, from this investor's point of view, the gamble paid off. It helps to have a taste for an acerbic wit. Realize, too, we're not talking about vinegar here; more like sulfuric acid.

In novel number one, Patrick is only five years old, living with his family in the south of France where the money from his mother's side of the family allows them to live *haute* on the hog. Forgive me for flogging the metaphor, but such dining offers no guarantee against indigestion. Patrick's father, David, is the primary cause, though his lush of a mother can be faulted, too, for her lack of intervention. David came from an aristocratic English family. He had at one time been a talented pianist and had also been trained as a physician (though one who must have had his fingers crossed when he took the Hippocratic Oath). By the time of this story, he was vile and abusive. Hard-not-to-cringe abusive, in fact. Patrick was a bright boy and, by nature, quite brave, but he lacked the power to stand up to his father.

Much of the first story took place at a dinner party attended by David's imperious friends. Zingers like this were bandied about:

'Nothing but the best, or go without'; that was the code he lived by, as long as the 'go without' didn't actually happen.

'The dead are dead,' he went on, 'and the truth is that one forgets about people when they stop coming to dinner. There are exceptions, of course -- namely, the people one forgets *during* dinner.

'But that's what charm is: being malicious about everybody except the person you are with, who then glows with the privilege of exemption.'

These people were deplorable snobs, but I figured it was OK to laugh with them as long as I laughed at them, as well. Another subject in this first book was not at all laughable. Many reviews mention it explicitly, but I won't in case any of you want to read it as I did without knowing. The impact is likely greater that way.

In the second of the four novels, Patrick is in his early twenties and his life is a mess. He's on a trip to New

York to collect his father's ashes. A dead father is not the source of his trouble, though – a rather nasty drug habit is. His trust fund money is running out fast as he attempts to achieve a delicate balance of smack, coke, booze, ludes, pot and speed. The logistics in maintaining just the right high are complicated, as are any attempts to function in front of his father's old friends. This was an important novel for the context it gave regarding both Patrick's life and that of his father who was also a product of family dysfunction.

Book three, called *Some Hope*, delivers what the title suggests. Patrick is a little older and a lot less addled. The toxicity in this one stems from the shallow lives of the upper crust. A grand party in the English countryside is the primary setting, and one of the attendees is Princess Margaret. St. Aubyn had met her in real life and evidently took advantage of the royal distaste for libel suits because he painted her as the epitome of self-importance with unmitigated disdain for any who were less than sufficiently sycophantic. The cast of smug and disagreeable personalities in this book was a large one. In the end, many had simply merged into a single type. I took this book to be an exercise in self-discovery for St. Aubyn whose own background was not what you'd call 'common'. He had to identify and ridicule the haughty behavior to set himself apart from it, at least partially. (He's godfather to Earl Spencer's son – Lady Di's nephew – and still a bit of a toff.) His character, Patrick, comes across as well-educated, wicked, and funny; and still intractably damaged.

The fourth book, *Mother's Milk*, was short-listed for a Booker. I'm sure that many would find it unfair to single out this one alone for the honor since the first three did so much to take the story to that point. By now Patrick is married and the father of two remarkable boys who share his best traits. His wife dotes on them so thoroughly that there's no affection left over for him. The bottle becomes his most intimate friend, with a mistress running a distant second. Patrick's mother gives him trouble, too. She attempted to fill holes in herself by way of charity and ended up being taken in by the oleaginous charms of a New Age spiritualist who convinced her to donate the family estate to his cause. Patrick was essentially disinherited when his soft-headed mum fell prey to the charlatan.

The series ends with a fifth book called *At Last*, but that was not included in this volume. I'll review it separately. As you're no doubt aware, I'm running long as it is.

In case it's not already obvious, Edward St. Aubyn is Patrick Melrose. He had the same abusive father, the same mother who turned the blind eye in his youth and later gave away their estate, and the same struggles with addiction. In fact, St. Aubyn said he's lucky to be alive. One day in his early 20's he woke from a stupor with a syringe in his arm containing what surely would have been a fatal dose had he been unimpaired enough to administer it hours earlier. It's easy to see how these novels could be viewed as a form of therapy. St. Aubyn decided to present what might otherwise have been a "misery memoir" as fiction instead. He said, "It's more flexible. It goes beyond the mere shrill advancement of a complaint or a confession. I'm more interested in the dramatic truth of how something like cruelty occurs. That can be presented much more persuasively through fiction."

These books are all about identity. As St. Aubyn said in the same interview, they address 'Why we are as we are, and whether we have any choice in the matter. The entire Melrose series is explicitly about that, whether we can lead a voluntary life. The most primitive definition of freedom is being able to place your attention where you choose, and Patrick is someone who is drastically unable to do that. His attention is usurped by memories, by addictions, by obsessions.' Does this deplorable determinism persist throughout? We'd all have to have read the entire series to discuss that. As of book four, though, Patrick was still sorting it out:

Nobody ever died of a feeling, he would say to himself, not believing a word of it, as he sweated his way through the feeling that he was dying of fear. People died of feelings all the time, once they had gone through the formality of materializing them into bullets and bottles and tumours. Someone who was organized like him, with utterly chaotic foundations, a quite strongly developed intellect and almost nothing in between desperately needed to develop the

middle ground. Without it, he split into a vigilant day mind, a bird of prey hovering over a landscape, and a helpless night mind, a jellyfish splattered on the deck of a ship. 'The Eagle and the Jellyfish', a fable Aesop just couldn't be bothered to write.

Patrick is complicated. I enjoy that, even when the complications are messy. What I enjoyed even more was the writing. I've already included a few passages, but want to include a few more to show that it's witty, wise and urbane.

'It's I-find-everything-boring, therefore I'm fascinating. But it doesn't seem to occur to people that you can't have a world picture and then not be part of it.'

He was just one of those Englishmen who was always saying silly things to sound less pompous, and pompous things to sound less silly. They turned into self-parodies without going to the trouble of acquiring a self first.

Debbie's father, an Australian painter called Peter Hickmann, was a notorious bore. Patrick once heard him introduce an anecdote with the words, 'That reminds me of my best bouillabaisse story.' Half an hour later, Patrick could only count himself lucky that he was not listening to Peter's second-best bouillabaisse story.

Four bright, shiny stars for this collection. I can't quite give it full marks, though, because at times it got to be too much. A lighter touch might have played better over the long haul. I realize that books focused on exorcising demons require evil at cask strength, but the 'bad' to be analyzed in this was just so bloody ubiquitous. At times the cleverness got in the way, too. A character or a trait might have been described as both X and Y where X and Y were negatively correlated and slightly ironic. It was appealing the first few times, but a tad over-used in the end. Even so, when I look back at all the highlighted lines, I realize there were many fewer misses than hits. Recommended for those who can handle occasional excesses for the pleasures of high-risk returns.

Hanneke says

Page 329. So, that's it. I will not continue with this book. It is rare that you read a book that has not a single likeable person in it. The main character is repulsive, all people around him disgusting, scheming, mean and, if that sounds interesting, no, even if you wish it would, it is not. The story develops like in an extra glossy very mean gossip magazine. If the intention of the author is to make you sick of these people, he certainly succeeded with me. Sorry, perhaps you have to belong to the British upper crust to appreciate the book.

Judith Hannan says

This book, as I mentioned in my recent blog, raised the question for me more so than any recent book I have read, of what it means to say a book is good. Without a doubt the writing in *The Patrick Melrose Novels* (a quartet of novels), an inspection and indictment of the privileged English class, is exquisite. St. Aubyn is a keen observer but he also delivers his observations to the page in ways that are unique and also serve the story (as opposed to some writing that seems more like decoration.) The problem comes when you ask yourself how much you like the characters, can you live with them for over 600 pages, and can they teach

you anything about the world and yourself. The reader doesn't so much as like the characters in these novels, as get to know Patrick so well that you it matters what happens tonhim next. The first two books are filled with horrific scenes--a father molesting his son, the now older son's 24-hour drug fueled trip to America to claim his father's ashes. Here is where friends have told me that they have put the book down. But Patrick has something important to say and we are obligated to hear him. Approaching his father's room to be punished Patrick, "... tried to work backward from his father's rage to what his own crime might be...As Patrick slowly crossed the floor he tried to think of some way to placate his father. Maybe if he said something clever he'd be forgiven, but he felt extraordinarily stupid and could only think over and over: two times to equals four, two times two equals four."

In the final book, St. Aubyn will again get inside the head of children in a remarkable way. Here is a scene from the birth of Patrick's first son from the newborn's point of view. "Why had they pretended to kill him when he was born? Keeping him awake for days, banging his head again and again against a closed cervix; twisting the chord around his throat and throttling him; chopping through his other's abdomen with cold shears; clamping his head...dragging him out of his home and hitting him; shining lights in his eyes and doing experiments; taking him away from his mother...Maybe the idea was to destroy his nostalgia for the old world. First the confinement to make him hungry for space, then pretending to kill him so that he would be grateful for the space when he got it,...with only the bandages of his mother's arms to wrap around him, never the whole thing again, the whole warm thing all around him, being everything.

In fact, what St. Aubyn can do so well is be every character, from the most minor to key players. Some of the most compelling and propelling writing infuses the chapter on Patrick's drugged 24 hours. The most complex writing is in the final book, Mother's Milk, where St. Aubyn can be Patrick, his mother, his mother-in-law, his children and his wife Mary, although Mary is probably more archetype than real.

If I were to point out a weakness it would be that, by separating each book by a decade or so, St. Aubyn doesn't have to cover a lot of territory that would have to be covered if his were a single opus, ie, how he got clean, how he met Mary, etc. And the third book, Some Hope, is more intermezzo than story--a review of the privileged class and Patrick's current relationship to it.

My copy of The Patrick Melrose novels is underlined with so many fabulous lines, places where I have gasped because, even in this world, I have found places where I have recognized myself. There are places where I argue with Patrick, question Mary, want to soothe the children. I am looking forward to reading At Last, the final installment in the book of Patrick's life.

Tara says

OMG. apparently, the same reactions as many other reviewers, and "stunned" is the main one. have only read the first five chapters, and could hardly put down. and it isn't a quick page turner for plot, but the writing is so exceptionally beautiful that makes it a page turner. and as i was trying to put into sentences all the wonderful words such as enchanted, shocked, heightened senses, lucid, vivid, aesthetic, profound, philosophical, i realized that all the other reviewers have done the very same thing. that is, as a reader and in the presence of st aubyn's writing via the patrick melrose novels, you're elevated to a whole different level of senses, mind and emotions!

if you're interested in english aristocrats (or the many times more intense/dark side of the likes of downton abbey), this would have to be on your reading list, to be read now!

~~~~~review upon completion~~~~~

There are just too many great things about these stories. They're not for the faint of heart, and not to be read as a source for cheerfulness. If you're someone that wished you were born to different parents, and struggle to be very different from them (and to find out that with the best intentions, you've only changed a bit), then this would be an interesting book for you as well.. it's so that you'll experience the "misery loves company" type of stories, but with a lot more insights and clarity. Perhaps, it'll save you from many sessions with your therapist :)

But all that aside, you could read just to be illuminated by the beautiful prose that carries with it all the ironies, wit, and sharp observations about life in a very intellectual manner. There are just too many great insights and you could go on and on highlighting your book, copy down quotes, etc. I felt that way but didn't want to put down the kindle to jot down notes... and as I come to a close, finishing the last few pages, I realized how the potent language carried its way through to the very end:

"In the end it was unfair on everyone being who they were because they couldn't be anyone else." - thought by Robert, the eight years old son. Really, an eight year old could say this?!

"If she belonged to the tribe who always heard the siren call of the choice they were about to lose.."

"Do nothing!?" said Thomas "I mean, how do you do nothing? Because if you do nothing, you do something!" - said by the three years old son! Isn't that such a perfect statement? LOL!

And by all means, these are not the most lyrical, there're plenty of that throughout, but you'll have to read it to find out for yourself :)

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## **Gary the Bookworm says**

If you've ever wondered what became of the Dedlocks of Chesney Wold you need look no further than this quartet of novels by Edward St. Aubyn. According to him, they changed their name to Melrose and fled to the South of France. We first meet Patrick Melrose as a lad of five in *Never Mind*. Poor Patrick battles against a brilliant, criminally-sadistic father and his criminally-negligent, rich American wife, who is capable of mothering only in the abstract. As much as Dickens predicted the decline of the Gentry, even he might be shocked by the antics of the Melrose clan and their guests during a weekend of boozing and debauchery.

In the next book *Bad News*, we watch in fascinated horror as Patrick grows into adulthood while he sinks into addiction. As he jets between two continents, we marvel at his brilliance and are crushed by his dissolution. This might seem like a journey to avoid, but he is such good company. He shares his attempts to fend off madness by ingesting every mind-altering substance ever invented. He recounts a weekend in Manhattan in his 20's, which could be described as a long day's journey into Disco Hell: Imagine a date between Mary Tyrone and Jay McInerney.

Obviously this can't go on forever, so the third and fourth books, *Some Hope* and *Mother's Milk* are concerned with his experiments in sobriety and parenting. His father haunts him throughout, but it is mother who strikes the final blow when she squanders his inheritance. In my efforts at self-improvement (view spoiler), I attempted to highlight particularly brilliant passages to share. I had to abandon this when I counted forty in the first book alone. You're just going to have to discover them for yourself. And after you're completely hooked, as I am, you can console yourself in the knowledge that the fifth Patrick Melrose novel,

*At Last: A Novel* is as close as a click on your kindle.  
Here's an excellent review of it:  
<http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics...>

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