Scaramouche Short Guide

Scaramouche by Rafael Sabatini

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Characters

S caramouche is as much a psychological study as it is an adventure novel. The dimensions of Andre-Louis Moreau and Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr rank them as two of Sabatini's finest creations. Indeed, Scaramouche should be viewed as a psychological journey of self-discovery.

The distinguishing attribute of a Sabatini hero is "the vision" that "pierces husks and shams to claim the core of reality for its own." Time and again, Sabatini used this as a benchmark of the heroic. Captain Blood is like Moreau. Cesare Borgia, a character in many of Sabatini's fictions, has profound insight into the motives of men.

Throughout, Moreau is viewed as a cynic; he himself claims as much. But in reality he cares too deeply — so deeply that he is compelled to hide his emotions, to hide the things that mean the most to him. Hence, he is always donning masks. Scaramouche is an apt mask, and when Moreau dons the trickster's apparel, he exclaims, "It is the first time in my life that I look what I am."

Moreau begins the novel by cynically using revolutionary rhetoric to further his personal goal — the destruction of Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. Gradually "he came fully to believe in those things in which he had not believed when earlier he had preached them."

Sabatini was no less careful in his depiction of evil. He infused Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr with a stature few villains have attained. Ironically, while Moreau uses the revolution for a personal vendetta, the Marquis maintains nobly that what he did was not for personal gain, but rather to defend his class, the aristocracy. He faces death, as he faced life, "without fear and without deception." And Moreau himself defends the Marquis by deciding that he was, after all, "nurtured upon a code of shams," and not completely at fault.

That Sabatini wrote more than an adventure novel is evident in the climax of Scaramouche. With all of Paris crumbling around them, Sabatini could have dwelt on the characters' flight from the French capital. Recognizing, however, that the true climax of the novel pivoted on the revelation of the relationship of Moreau and the Marquis, Sabatini wisely brought the book to a swift conclusion, ignoring the obvious peril Revolutionary Paris could have for them. By doing so, Sabatini shifted the novel from the realm of adventure and focused on the psychological aspects of the story.

Social Concerns/Themes

Rafael Sabatini was skillful at combining political issues of high drama with the intense personal quests of the characters. This is as true in Scaramouche as it is in Captain Blood (1922), Bellarion the Fortunate (1926), or The Banner of the Bull (1915), to name but a few of his novels. Scaramouche focuses upon the French Revolution as The Carolinian (1924) deals with the American Revolution. While the Monmouth Rebellion sets in motion the plot for Captain Blood, it is the conclusion of Mistress Wilding (1910). Bellarion rises to eminence in the turbulent time of Cesare Borgia, and The Banner of the Bull is set during the same time. Within these dramatic times the characters strive for their own personal goals.

The French Revolution is more than merely a backdrop to the story of Scaramouche. Rather, it is at the core of the story — almost a character itself.

Andre-Louis Moreau is the novel's pivotal character. A young man without patrimony, he seeks to avenge the wanton murder of his dearest friend by a cruel and ruthless aristocrat, the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. Unable to find justice in the courts of pre-revolutionary France, Moreau incites the populace of Brittany to rebel against the privileged class. The irony is that he has not "the illusion of liberty" that the revolutionists have. "It was no part of his concern to set about the regeneration of mankind, or even the regeneration of the social structure of France."

His desire is simply personal revenge.

This desire for revenge is further heightened when he discovers that the contemptible Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr seeks to wed the woman Moreau loves, the independent Aline de Kercadiou. After fanning the flames of rebellion, Moreau flees. Like Scaramouche, a stock figure in Italian Cornmedia Dell-Arte, he is forever stirring up trouble then dashing to safety.

Throughout Scaramouche, Sabatini argues for an aristocracy not of birth but ability. "Man is the child of his own work. Let there be no inheriting of rights but from such a parent. Thus a nation's best will always predominate, and such a nation will achieve greatly," Moreau proclaims. At another time he states, "I desire a society which selects its rulers from the best elements of every class and denies the right of any class or corporation to usurp the government to itself — whether it be the nobles, the clergy, the bourgeoisie, or the proletariat. For government by any one class is fatal to the welfare of the whole." This vision of the self-made, self-governing man — efficacious and confident — accounts for at least some of the popularity of Scaramouche in America and even in England, where after World War I there was a rising consciousness of the inequities in a class-structured society.

Scaramouche is in many ways a study of the French Revolution. Moreau realizes that the well-spring of the revolution is not the down-trodden. "The suffers were ever the proletariat," he observes. "The men who sought to make this revolution, the electors —

here in Paris as elsewhere — were men of substance, notable bourgeois, wealthy traders." They envied "the privileged, talked largely of equality — by which they meant an ascending equality that should confuse them selves with the gentry." Meanwhile, "The proletariat perished of want in its kennels." As the Revolution plunges toward chaos, repression and slaughter, Moreau recognizes that the future of the Revolution is futile. "The reins of government will be tossed to the populace, or else the populace, drunk with the conceit with which the Dantons and the Marats have filled it, will seize the reins by force. Chaos must follow, and a despotism of brutes and apes, a government of the whole by its lowest parts. It cannot endure, because unless a nation is ruled by its best elements it must wither and decay."

However, Scaramouche is more than a textbook of the French Revolution. It is a thrilling story, tightly-knit and elegantly told. The climax of the novel is contained in the very first paragraph of the book.

Techniques/Literary Precedents

Sabatini considered verisimilitude to be a central feature of good historical fiction and went to great lengths to develop his skill in this area. He was fond of trying to convince the reader that what was being presented was history, not fiction. He frequently cites fictitious references. For instance, in Scaramouche, Sabatini quotes letters that Andre-Louis wrote and he mentions a book the character wrote called his Confessions. The Sea Hawk (1915), supposedly, is taken from "eighteen enormous folio volumes" of history written by Lord Henry Goade.

Another of Sabatini's favorite techniques, one he freely admits he learned from Dumas pere, was to mingle real characters with fictional ones, actual events with created ones, in order to blur the distinction between fiction and history. So Mirabeau, Robespierre, and Danton — all architects of the Revolution — appear on Sabatini's stage.

Adaptations

Sabatini has been at once lucky and unlucky in the adaptation of his novels to film. There can be little doubt that the film versions of Scaramouche, Captain Blood, and The Sea Hawk have kept Sabatini's titles familiar to the public.

On the other hand, these very films often have little to do with his books.

In 1923 Rex Ingram directed the first screen version of Scaramouche, starring Ramon Novarro as Moreau, Alice Terry as Aline de Kercadiou, and Lewis Stone as the Marquis de la Tour d'Azyr. A 1952 version, directed by George Sidney, starred Stewart Granger, Eleanor Parker, and Mel Ferrer.

Related Titles

Sabatini used the French Revolution in no less than seven novels, as well as many short stories. However, as a blend of passion, psychological insight, technique, and bravado storytelling, he never surpassed Scaramouche. At one time, Sabatini thought of turning Scaramouche into a trilogy. It never materialized, but he did publish a sequel in 1931, Scaramouche the Kingmaker. While technically adequate, most of the fire and passion of the first novel is missing, and Andre-Louis's concern for his future wife's fidelity becomes somewhat tedious. The Lost King (1937) focuses on the search for a successor to Louis XVI. The Marquis of Carabas (1940) is a fine, but little-known Sabatini novel. During the desperate days of 1940 it was generally overlooked.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994