



Bellarion

Rafael Sabatini

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Set against a backdrop of pre-Renaissance Italy, convent-bred orphan Bellarion is sidetracked almost immediately upon setting out on a journey from the monastery at Cigliano to study at Pavia. The adventure and practical lessons he finds along the way replace the further education he craves.

Bellarion Details

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Author : Rafael Sabatini

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From Reader Review Bellarion for online ebook

Julie Davis says

I know this book is much loved but it is not my favorite among the Sabatini works. I'd actually give it 2-1/2 stars but rounded it up because ... well ... Sabatini.

I liked Bellarion as the naive, classically educated wanderer whose native intelligence leads to an unsuspected ability to solve problems and strategize, especially in statehood and warfare. My problem is that the story ground to a halt because of the numerous battles and sieges recounted. I understand it is based on real history and real people (except for Bellarion) but I feel good storytelling should have been able to communicate a lot of these events without taking me through it blow by blow.

It's no Scaramouche or Captain Blood or The Seahawk. However, it is a good story overall and with my battle skimming abilities I enjoyed it.

Bill says

Now this one of all the Sabatini I've read recently was the most interesting, if a bit of a shocker. I think he may have really pushing his envelope here as he got closer to home history. Oh, he usually skirts around the edge of morality, but without having his protagonist push certain limits. They're always the pirate with a code of honor, forced into the kill, and such. So, when Bellarion killed a man in cold blood just a few short chapters in, with very little compunction, it was a good jolt out of the usual Sabatini framework. The whole book feels that much more fresh, and dare I say Italian thanks to the departure. Add in that Bellarion is on the edge of physical cowardice (although not one, of course), and you've got a hero (but never anti-hero) that stands out from the rest. Of course, it may be the constant diet of Sabatini novels that's making this break more interesting to me; I'd be interested to know what it feels like with less Sabatini exposure.

knots says

Whenever anybody talks about Rafael Sabatini's best works, Scaramouche and Captain Blood are often recommended. But Bellarion in my opinion is as good as any of them. Extra star for a hero who uses his brain rather than his brawn, the haughty princess who disdains him till the last minute. Plus the political manoeuvrings and the historical setting. What's not to love?

Bill says

Gorgeously written! The beginning was a little slow but defiantly gets interesting and complicated soon. It is not a blow through kind of book and even though I have a wide vocabulary I try to have a dictionary nearby. Also, Sabatini assumes the reader knows Latin – I don't but I am starting to learn.

Leslie says

Wonderful historical fiction of the swashbuckling adventure type!

Remus says

Another epic to the scale of Captain Blood, the Carolinian and Scaramouche in that the protagonist embroils himself into the fate of a major historical event. Sabatini does not forget any of the many major and minor characters have their actions effect the story all the way through. Unfortunately the least likeable is the protagonist; too perfect and unrelatable. The plot was good but the scenes which we are presented with read like many long sessions of jury duty. Too many detailed arguments to justify Bellarion's actions occur. And again the romantic interest has contempt for the main character until the very end.

The villains are plentiful and show how hard it is to find one working for good instead of personal gains. This book is an entertaining way to learn about medieval Milanese history. As for the sword fights, they are left for your own imagination the battles are all large scale instead of individually focused.

Seth says

Probably my favorite book by my favorite author. Sabatini is the master of the historical fiction, and this is a nicely woven tale that includes all kinds of great themes: coming of age, love, fighting, misunderstandings, early 15th Century Italy, etc. A real treat to read and re-read (if you're a big fat sap like me).

Lucy says

i have mixed feelings about this book.

a long time ago i read scaramouche, another similar book by the same author which i enjoyed. However in I am not sure whether I would like it so much if I reread it. I would still recommend that book over this one (more swashbuckling).

What i actually liked about this book: the faux historical setting and references - the atmosphere is quite exciting - this book we have northern Italy in 15th century, where men may make their name and fortune in mercenary companies. (and again in scaramouche he chooses French revolution, another time of turbulence where again a talented no-name could establish a name for themselves thru social upheaval). The use of contemporary allusions and references, of books Bellarion might have read, fictional and real, of real historical figures, makes it quite interesting. I also enjoyed the florid, old-fashioned writing style (bc to be fair, despite the choice of words, he is no Thomas Hardy and gets to the point). And language is fun, and the author and his characters are witty. Legal, tactical and philosophical musings also fun. Tone makes light of characters, which i enjoy (think Jane Austen) but i know some of my friends hate.

So things i didn't like...

You could level a charge of being too good/gifted/handsome etc at the main character. i didn't rly have a problem tho, imo he was flawed.

Bice(Beatrice)/Lenore-scaramouche. Are his other books the same? There is this female character who is motivated only by greed. A treacherous, powerhungry, ambitious gold digger type. Basically a tragic heroine. (fyi in this book some allusions were made about beatrice and (view spoiler)) She is contrasted with the morally pure and rather naive Princess Valeria. Still I'd rather have 2 female characters than one, and they were both pretty interesting.

But idk. I kind of agreed with the advice Beatrice was giving her husband and Bellarione. Even if it was motivated by her own self-interest, killing off the duke earlier probably would have saved a lot of people a lot of grief and been for the best.. prudent (for safety) and kind (for the ppl of milan) advice. Also since the story was not presented from Valeria's pov it was hard to sympathise with Valeria's wrongheadedness. I suppose I can see how she would come to those conclusions, but reading it, I just felt exasperated with her. Too stupid.

add to this i didn't really care about facino or his loyalties and parts of the story were not too exciting.

Dan Adams says

I wasn't expecting so much from this book; well, at least not as much as I got from Rafael Sabatini's better-known stories, Captain Blood, The Sea Hawk, and Scaramouche; but after a slow start, which turned out to be a slow, sure unfolding of the splendid characters and storyline, Bellarion really took off, building with great cleverness of word and deed, until the thrilling end. I give it Five Stars, which for me means that I would recommend the book, would read it again, and that I will purchase a hardcover copy for my bookshelf.

Pandora says

I enjoyed this one but, would only recommend it to people who already like Sabtini. This is one of his larger cast novels with chracters comining in and out. The novel is set in Italy so all the characters names are in Italian which for me is not as easy to keep straight. Two of the characters are brothers and they names are almost idenitical. Probably on a second read through the novel would be easier to read through.

Bellarion is a young innocent who is about to make a side trip into the real world. He quickly loses his innocents ways and learns how to become a trickster. The heroine Princess Valrie of course misunderstands Bellarion's intentions but, she still manages to remain a woman of worth. It is a fun read full of Sabtini twists and trickery. I would clasify this as Sabtini light like Scarmouche. The story of Bellarion mixes Sabtinin themes of his negative views of monkish life, his sly political observation, and the lenghts love will drive a man.

(On second read through on July 28 2013 - The names were easier to keep straight. Bellarion though does not have much sword play as was in The Lion's Skin and Scarmouche. Instead the hero gains fame as a military leader. So epic battles are fought rather than the intimate sword play.)

Some quotes:

"It was he supposed, a manifestation of that romantic and unreasonable phenomenon known as chivalry. If he extricated himself alive from this predicament, he would see to it that whatever follies he committed in the future, chivalry would certainly not be amongst them."

Then a few pages later this quote about Bellarion's resolve.

"Despite his resolves, and although still far from being out of peril with the chance of salvation no more than in sight, he was already at his knight-errantry again."

On a brutal but wise tyrant

"...and he knew how to levy taxes that should enrich himself without impoverishing his subjects, perceiving with an intuition beyond his age that excessive taxation serves but to dry up the sources of a prince's treasury."

Similar to Capt. Kirk's philosophy

"And yet is the peace of the cloisters really better than the strife of the world? Is not as much service to be done in righting wrongs? Is not peace stagnation? Are not activity and strife the means by which a man may make his soul?" See *Classic Trek - The Apple*.

Chet Herbert says

Classic Sabatini at his best. Bellarion rivals Scaramouche as my favorite. The master of historical adventure fiction who gives Dumas his greatest challenge. Eloquent, philosophical, witty, riveting. Brilliant.

Suzannah says

Bellarion, sometimes called The Fortunate, starts out as a young novice from an Italian monastery who is sent to study in Pavia, the great city of learning near Milan. Then in Casale, the capital of Montferrat, an unexpected adventure sends Bellarion fleeing for his life right into a garden where he finds the Princess Valeria, who, plotting against her evil usurper of an uncle, is in danger of going in over her head. Bellarion, somewhat to his own surprise, immediately puts all his learning, trickery, and boundless cheek at her service, and in the adventures that follow, as he goes on to Milan, is adopted by its governor, and rises quickly to become one of the most cunning and powerful mercenary captains in Italy, the secret he keeps from everyone else is the fact that he is still in Valeria's service.

Read the rest of my review at my blog, [In Which I Read Vintage Novels](#)

atlas15 says

Pure enjoyment. That warm feeling of satisfaction that only Sabatini creates. Adventure writing at its finest!

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in February 2001.

By modern standards, Sabatini's prose is rather florid, but it is ideally suited to this tale of early fifteenth century Italian politics. It was a larger than life time, with swaggering condottieri, Machiavellian plotting, and high stakes in politics and war; and Sabatini portrays it atmospherically.

Bellarion, his hero, is a young man of extremely poor origins brought up in a monastery. After naively falling in with a false friar on a journey to Pavia, he becomes a fugitive in the principality of Montferrat, and then by chance involves himself in the complicated affairs of its ruling family. By showing himself a master of political manoeuvre, he begins a rise to power, eventually commanding his own army of mercenaries.

The big problem with Bellarion, once the reader is used to the style, is the central character. He is too good to be true, constantly able to outguess all those around him. His only flaw, in terms of the attitudes of his time, is a lack of any desire to excel personally as a leader; though not lacking in courage, he knows that his physical prowess in the field of battle is low, and is unwilling to expose himself to danger unnecessarily. Sabatini's heroes do tend to succeed through use of their brains rather than through their bodies; he consistently supports the intellectual over the physical.

Pygmy says

Oh fabulous! I do believe that of the various time periods Sabatini writes in, I enjoy his pre-Renaissance Italy the most. Bellarion exemplifies the classic Sabatini hero-- gifted with staggering intelligence matched only by his confidence; a steady composure in the face of every kind of stress; a dark cynicism of the world and men; completed finally with a single, powerful dash of romantic nobility that never ceases to surprise him or those around him.

Perhaps the story might seem a little too far-fetched, for a naive, bookish acolyte to transform into one of the richest, ruthless, and overall successful mercenary captains in Italy in the span of a mere 5 years. But Sabatini takes care not to turn Bellarion into a Gary Stu, and Bellarion's anti-hero qualities work overtime to heighten anticipation, as he insults, deceives, and affronts everyone around him in the process of achieving an ultimately selfless goal.

The only other flaw I might raise is that the sacrificial love he holds for the Princess Valeria seems rather unjustified, considering the brevity of their first encounters, the distinct difference in intelligence between the two (although, to be fair, no one in the story can match Bellarion in that way), which leads to her persistent condemnation of his every act and word for almost the entire book. But watching Bellarion spin circles around his peers and opponents, squeak his way out of death more than once, and wrestle his way from obscurity into bombastic success is more than worth the suspensions of disbelief required.

Sabatini's language is gorgeous and clever, and I didn't mind one bit having to look up words, sometimes four or more in a chapter, because of the richness in understanding a turn of phrase. Definitely a must-read for anyone looking for a little intellectual stimulation with their dashing, adventurous entertainment.
