

BOOK DISCUSSION KIT



Captain Blood

by Rafael Sabatini

Summary

Doctor Peter Blood's quiet life is shattered when he is convicted of treason for helping a wounded nobleman in the 1685 rebellion against King James II. Loaded onto a slave ship bound for Barbados, he escapes both slavery and a brutal plantation owner during a Spanish pirate attack.

Author Information

Rafael Sabatini was born April 29, 1875 in Lesi, Italy. Both his English mother and his Italian father were teachers and former opera singers. Sabatini lived all over Europe before settling near his mother's family in England. Though it was the last of the six languages he learned, Sabatini chose English for his work.



Sabatini began his writing career with short stories, but eventually went on to author novels. His first, *The Lovers of Yvonne*, was published in 1902. A few years later he married a Liverpool merchant's daughter, Ruth Goad Dixon. Though Sabatini wrote constantly, publishing numerous works, it wasn't until *Scaramouche* in 1921 that he became truly famous. The novel was an international bestseller, prompting immediate reprintings of many of his earlier works, including the popular novel *The Sea Hawk*. He added to this success the next year, with the publication of one of his best-known works, *Captain Blood*.

In 1927, Sabatini's only son, Rafael-Angelo, was killed in a car crash. His marriage survived only a few more years, ending in divorce in 1931. Four years later, Sabatini married Christine Goad, his former sister-in-law.

Sabatini battled illness throughout the last decade of his life, forcing him to work at a slower pace, though he still published several more novels. He died in Switzerland on February 13, 1950, and was buried in Adelboden, Switzerland.

Selected titles by this author:

- *The Lovers of Yvonne* (1902)
- *Bardelys the Magnificent* (1905)
- *The Trampling of the Lillies* (1906)
- *The Shame of Motley* (1908)
- *St. Martin's Summer* (1909)
- *Mistress Wilding* (1910)
- *The Sea Hawk* (1915)
- *Scaramouche* (1921)
- *Fortune's Fool* (1923)
- *Bellarion the Fortunate* (1926)
- *The King's Minion* (1930)
- *Scaramouche the King-Maker* (1931)
- *The Black Swan* (1932)
- *Scaramis* (1936)
- *The Marquis of Carabas* (1940)
- *King in Prussia* (1944)

About the Novel

The setting of the novel relies on the ill-fated Monmouth Rebellion and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. James Scott, the Protestant Duke of Monmouth, was the illegitimate brother of the Catholic King James II. Claiming to be the rightful heir to the throne, Monmouth accepted support from worried Protestants and attempted to take the crown. His rebellion ended with a disastrous defeat at the Battle of Sedgemoor on July 6, 1685. Monmouth was captured on July 8, and executed a week later. His supporters were tried for treason in what has become known as the "Bloody Assizes" under the leadership of Lord Chief Justice George Jeffreys. Hundreds were executed, or died of typhus in their cells. Approximately 800-850 men were transported to the West Indies as slave labor.

Many outlaws became heroes, or vice versa, through the shifting alliances of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. King James II was ousted from the throne and replaced by William of Orange and his wife Mary, who was King James' daughter. Worried about the possibility of a Catholic dynasty, and none too happy about James' ties to Catholic France, his Protestant Parliament invited the equally Protestant William and Mary to invade and seize the throne. William obliged them, leading a Dutch fleet across the Channel in November 1688. By February 1689 it was all over, with William and Mary crowned joint monarchs. Convicts like Pitman were able to return home. One of King James' staunchest supporters, Judge Jeffreys, was incarcerated in the Tower of London. Suffering from a number of chronic illnesses, he died in the Tower later that year.

Many elements of Captain Blood's personal story come from the account of Henry Pitman, a doctor who was part of Monmouth's forces. In the wake of the failed rebellion, Pitman was one of the convicts sold into slavery in Barbados. He eventually escaped, only to be captured by pirates. Winning his freedom, he returned home to England, where he wrote his account. It was published in 1689. (A copy is included in this book kit, for those who wish to read it.)

The character of Captain Blood also owes much to two other historical figures, the pirate and privateer Captain Henry Morgan and the Irish Colonel Thomas Blood. Captain Morgan led a fleet of ships against the Spanish throughout the Caribbean. He eventually succeeded his uncle in the post of Lt. Governor of Jamaica. Thomas Blood was by all accounts a charming rogue, who is best remembered for his brazen, if unsuccessful, attempt to steal the Crown Jewels of England.

The novel *Captain Blood* was followed by two later works, *Captain Blood Returns* and *The Fortunes of Captain Blood*. Neither of these works is a true sequel. Each is a compilation of stories from Captain Blood's career on the high seas. They all take place during the time span of the original novel.

Titles in this series:

- *Captain Blood* (1922)
- *Captain Blood Returns* (or *The Chronicles of Captain Blood*) (1931)
- *The Fortunes of Captain Blood* (1936)

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The Scarlet Pimpernel series by Baroness Emmuska Orczy

Alexander Dumas

Edgar Rice Burroughs

Historical Overview

The 1920s were an era of rapid change in both the U.S. and internationally. In the wake of World War I, Britain acquired Germany's colonies, bringing the British Empire to its height. By 1922, the Empire ruled one in four people and covered a full quarter of the globe. An unusual number of assassinations caused upheaval in the governments of several countries. The ensuing instability, along with crushing economic woes, led to the rise in power of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party in Germany, the fascist party in Italy and the Communist Party in Russia. The stage was being set for World War II, as Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin were taking control in Europe. During this time, the British Government was occupied with independence movements in Ireland, Egypt and India, as well as the newly-mandated Jewish state in their territory of Palestine.

In the U.S. the 'Roaring Twenties' were in full swing. Court challenges to Prohibition laws further restricted legal alcohol production, stretching the ability of police to enforce the laws. Federal law enforcement received a mandate to aid states in prosecuting illegal liquor production and distribution. Meanwhile the mafia families were gaining power through their ability to control the illicit trade. In 1922 the notorious Al Capone took joint control of Chicago's Colosimo Mob, gaining full control when his partner retired three years later. Paying off police and corrupt politicians, the power of the Mob would remain essentially unchallenged until the end of the 1920s when President Herbert Hoover took office and directed Federal officials to target Al Capone.

Prohibition was a result of political pressure brought to bear by a variety of religious and progressive organizations that gained influence in the early 1900s. The Women's Temperance Movement was prominent among these groups, and was also instrumental in passing the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. The empowerment of women further shook up American society, and gave rise to the Flappers. These young women purposely broke every societal rule. They cut their hair, wore short skirts, smoked, drank alcohol, and regarded authority with disdain. They were an ironic opposite of the women who had formed the temperance societies and the oppressive standards they represented.

Historical Events of 1922

Feb 21	Egypt is granted independence by Great Britain.
Feb 27	The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously upholds the recently ratified 19 th Amendment, granting voting rights to women.
Mar 2	In India, a British court sentences Gandhi to 6 years in prison for disobedience.
Mar 20	The first U.S. naval aircraft carrier, the <i>U.S.S. Langley</i> , is commissioned.
Apr 3	Joseph Stalin is appointed the General Secretary of Russia's Communist Party.
Apr 16	Treaties officially recognize the newly formed Soviet Union. Annie Oakley sets a women's sharpshooting record by breaking 100 clay targets without a miss. In further defining the U.S. prohibition laws, home-brewing of alcohol is declared illegal.
May 23	Walt Disney incorporates Laugh-O-Gram films, his first film company.
Jun 14	Warren Harding becomes the first U.S. President to use radio broadcasting when he dedicates the Francis Scott Key memorial in Baltimore.
Jul 24	Adolf Hitler delivers a speech in Munich protesting the new 'gag law' enacted by the government to quash criticism. He uses the speech to blame Germany's problems on the Jewish population.
Aug	<i>Captain Blood</i> is first published.
Sep 11	The British mandate of Palestine is approved by the League of Nations.
Oct 24	A constitution for an Irish Free State is adopted by the Irish Parliament.
Oct 31	Benito Mussolini is named premier of Italy.
Nov 1	After 623 years of aggressive rule, the Ottoman Empire is abolished.
Nov 4	Howard Carter discovers the hidden tomb of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamen.
Nov 11	In the wake of multiple suspensions, Babe Ruth signs a contract addendum agreeing to limit his drinking.
Nov 24	The Italian Parliament gives dictatorial power to Mussolini for one year.
Nov 25	Hirohito named Prince-Regent of Japan.
Dec 10	Nobel prizes are awarded to Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein.
Dec 23	The newly formed BBC Radio begins daily news broadcasts.

Discussion Questions

1. Though he is painted as larger than life, Peter Blood is also shown to be a flawed hero. Where do his flaws get in his way? Where do they aid him? Do his flaws make him more or less heroic?
2. Captain Blood could definitely be considered an 'outsider'. Why do we love the outlaw and the outsider so much in English and American literature?
3. The backbone of the story is Peter Blood's inability to go along with society. Is there ever a time when Peter is not in conflict with the society around him?
4. Captain Blood was a soldier and a pirate. Do you see any conflict between these professions and his doctoring?
5. The road to romance is a rocky one for Peter and Arabella, but are their greatest stumbling blocks provided by society or by their own prejudices?
6. A number of social issues are examined in the book. One of the first is the treatment of enemy combatants when they are wounded or detained. How do you believe this theme is reflected in current politics and events?
7. Turning political prisoners into slaves is an aspect of the story that is particularly troubling. What do you think about the way slavery is portrayed? Do you think that Sabatini shows preference to a particular group or type of slave?
8. Through the injustices of slavery, Sabatini clearly demonstrates the results of desperation fueled by oppression. Where else is this demonstrated in the tale?
9. What does Sabatini appear to believe about the role of fate in the lives of people?
10. This book was written in 1922 about events that took place in 1685. How do you think the writing style was influenced by the age of the events in question?
11. Privateering between Spain and France is featured in several chapters. It was used in the Revolutionary War and is still popular in certain parts of the world today. What are the implications of governments hiring private vessels during times of war? Is this state-sanctioned piracy?
12. At the end of the book, Blood is made the governor of Jamaica. Is this a good ending? Is it a fair reward for the acts he performed in the book? What do you think some of his first acts as governor might have been?