and thus enriched our understanding of Rodker and his ambitions as a small-press publisher of the English avant-garde.

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At Riverside [Press], eleven of his books, old and new, were on the press at the same time … there was a rush for movie rights. The bidding for ‘Scaramouche’ became furious … Nor did ‘Scaramouche’ stop with the movies. It has been ably produced on the stage … Even the opera rights have been sold.

This quotation from Houghton Mifflin publicist Esther Forbes in 1921 attests to the immense popularity of an author who has today been largely forgotten. Yet during his lifetime, Rafael Sabatini (1875-1950) wrote and published forty-seven books – mostly romantic historical adventure novels.

Sabatini’s life had its own exotic chapters. His English mother and Italian father were opera singers, and he spent his youth in Italy, England, Portugal, and Switzerland, easily adopting the languages of these countries and reading voraciously along the way. At seventeen, he settled in the busy port city of Liverpool and lived primarily in England for the rest of his life. He worked in the Intelligence section of the British War Office during World War I, became an editor and translator at Martin Secker, married twice, lost both his son and stepson in tragic accidents, restored his finances after being embezzled by an American accountant, and enjoyed his two non-literary passions, fishing in England, and skiing in Switzerland, until the final weeks of his life.

While in his twenties, Sabatini began to write stories. Without much effort it seems, he had them published in leading magazines of the day, which led to a contract from C. Arthur Pearson Ltd. to write a novel. *The Lovers of Yvonne* was published in 1902, and its positive reception paved the way for Sabatini to become one of the most successful novelists of the 1920s and 1930s, penning, “in florid style and with an enormous vocabulary” as Knight puts it, such classics as
the aforementioned Scaramouche: A Romance of the French Revolution (1921), which launched his international career, Captain Blood: His Odyssey (1922), and Venetian Masque (1934), along with biographical works: The Life of Cesare Borgia (1911) and Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition (1913) as well as plays, articles, and translations. His primary publishers were Hutchinson in the UK, and Houghton Mifflin in the United States.

His considerable life’s work is ably chronicled in The Last of the Great Swashbucklers: A Bio-Bibliography of Rafael Sabatini. This book does not claim to be a scholarly endeavour. It was compiled by two Sabatini enthusiasts with great respect for his achievements and a desire to assist collectors of the novelist’s works. Biographer Jesse F. Knight was a freelance writer described as “the foremost expert on the life and works” of Sabatini, and co-founder of the Rafael Sabatini Society. Sadly he died in 2008 prior to the the book’s publication. Bibliographer Stephen Darley is a retired businessman with a law degree and obvious passion and skill for tracking down Sabatini’s many publications. Bibliographical entries compose the majority of the book, with Knight’s biography of Sabatini appearing on the first thirty pages.

The biography is well-researched and makes for fascinating reading. It would have benefited from light editing to smooth awkward sentences and eliminate repetition. (The word “fanaticism” appears five times in five sequential sentences on p. 4, and, on p. 18, after three paragraphs describing in detail Sabatini’s skills as a fisherman and skier, we are told: “He was an expert at both fishing and skiing.”) But there is no denying the care that was taken to record important chapters in the author’s life and it is obvious that Knight found great delight in researching and writing this biography.

This biography was prepared “to provide Sabatini collectors with a one volume listing of his US and UK first editions.” The bibliography consists of eight sections: first UK and US editions and other “interesting” editions; selected UK and US reprints; checklist of significant books in paperback; checklist of contributions to books; checklist of writings about Sabatini; movie adaptations; and plays. In my view, it would have been better to have re-configured the first section to include the “selected” reprints, but the index makes it possible to find all versions of a particular work. Each entry in the first section includes a title-page transcription, contents listing, information on binding, dust jacket, printer, and notes. The notes, as one would expect, focus on the “collectability,” i.e., the rarity of an
item, with clear details provided to identify true firsts versus editions commonly mistaken for firsts. Darley is to be commended for his extensive efforts to track down elusive editions and dust jackets (nicely described, with artists of the jackets identified) and for sorting out complex bibliographical details about Sabatini’s publications.

I do not agree with a few stylistic decisions. Contents listings have unnecessary punctuation and repetition: “p. [1], half title; p. [2], list of books” would be much easier read as “[1] half title; [2] list of books”. And in the section of articles about Sabatini, article titles should not be in upper case, although it is somehow charming to see RAPIER ENVY, ANYONE? shouting from p. 125.

More importantly, there are instances where, for clarity, additional information is warranted. The “US Photoplay Edition” of The Sea-Hawk is described as a reprint published by Grosset & Dunlap, but pagination and contents are not given, so we cannot be sure if it is a reprint of the first UK edition, a reprint of one of the first two US editions (if so, which one?), or an entirely different edition printed from a new setting of type. The “UK Movie Tie-In Edition” of the same book is similarly under-described. In a non-scholarly bibliography one would not necessarily expect to find distinctions between edition, issue, and state, particularly when the term “new edition” is so regularly bandied about by publishers when referring to reprints, but the absence of a few extra details does cause confusion in these and other entries.

What must also be clarified are conflicting statements about Sabatini’s personal papers. Knight describes their disappearance as “one of the great mysteries” about the author. Five pages later, Darley thanks a bookseller “who purchased a treasure trove of Sabatini material that contains a very large and interesting collection of personal papers.” No explanation is given for this apparent contradiction.

While outside the limits of this bio-bibliography, it should be noted for readers of the Papers / Cahiers that Sabatini was extremely popular in Canada, where his first publisher was Thomas Allen (ca. 1906 to the mid-1920s), followed by McClelland & Stewart, which issued at least twenty-five of his titles as early as 1922 and well into the 1940s. A Harlequin edition of The Sea Hawk was published in 1953.

Oak Knoll press is to be commended for the beautiful production of this hardcover, cloth-bound book with its elegant dust jacket, printed on quality paper, with photographs and colour reproductions of dust jackets of characters in colourful period dress, set against dramatic backgrounds of burning ships, castles, and battles.
Sabatini’s novels were sold around the world and made into popular movies (treat yourself to the YouTube versions of the sword fights from *Scaramouche* and *Captain Blood*). His books are now available in electronic form, and obviously are in demand by collectors (a first US edition of *Captain Blood* in dust jacket was listed on a rare books site for $8500 USD in 2010). While historical romance may not be everyone’s cup of tea, book historians need to pay attention to Sabatini’s substantial success, and owe a debt to Knight and Darley for telling the fascinating story of this author and his work.

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Cette courte synthèse s’adresse aux historiens et historiennes de la période contemporaine, mais offre de fréquents aperçus sur l’époque moderne et même plus avant. Judith Lyon-Caen et Dinah Ribard font d’abord état des usages traditionnels de la littérature en histoire. Les textes littéraires sont depuis longtemps utilisés en tant que sources, notamment lorsque les archives non littéraires se font plus rares, comme pour les antiquisants et les médiévistes. L’histoire sociale et l’histoire des mentalités en ont largement profité. Les romans ont attiré beaucoup d’historiens : pensons à la Comédie humaine ou aux Rougon-Macquart, perçus comme indispensables pour connaître la société française du xixe siècle. Plus récemment, la sociologie de la littérature a fait émerger tous les acteurs du champ littéraire, dans la période moderne comme dans la période contemporaine.

Ce premier chapitre se termine un peu curieusement par un exposé, par ailleurs très bon, sur le métier d’historien. Les auteurs ont senti le besoin de préciser que ce métier est à la fois une pratique (trouver des traces, construire des objets) et une écriture (mettre en scène des récits, des personnages, des intrigues). Toutefois, si l’écriture historique « combine discours et récit » (p. 31), elle ne produit pas pour autant des fictions. L’histoire peut partager certaines stratégies et certains procédés avec la littérature, mais Lyon-Caen et Ribard