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Saracinesca is a novel by F. Marion Crawford, first published as a serial in Blackwood's Magazine and then as a book in New York (Macmillan) and Edinburgh (Blackwood) in 1887. Set chiefly in Rome of twenty years earlier, the novel paints a rich picture of the period, detailing the spiritual and economic problems of the aristocracy at a time when its influence and status were under attack from the emerging forces of modernity. This romance tells the tale of Giovanni Saracinesca and his courting of Corona d'Astradente, complete with intrigue and sword fights (Crawford was an expert fencer). It can be categorized as a work of historical fiction in that it relates a time when the author was only a child, and also in the sense that the particulars of that time and place are carefully delineated. In a sense, Crawford had been researching for this book all his life: his parents had witnessed the brief 1848 revolution, and his cousin, in her memoirs of Crawford, insisted that "[t]here is little doubt that Crawford as a boy had heard first-hand descriptions of [the] exciting events" of the 1860s.

Saracinesca proved to be both an immediate hit and Crawford's greatest critical success. It was also a commercial triumph: he negotiated separate contracts for the serial printing and the simultaneous American and British publication, as well as future royalties. He followed it with two brilliant sequels, Sant' Ilario and Don Orsino, the three of which are usually considered a trilogy. Subsequent sequels, such as Corleone, continue the saga of Saracinesca family, but with a diversion from the previous focus on the drama and status of family members into heavily plotted, incident-heavy melodrama. Characters from Saracinesca and its sequels also appear in A Lady of Rome (1906) and The White Sister (1909).

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saracinesca is the first book by f. marion crawford i have read. i found it in a used book shop. i cannot tell you of my surprise about how enjoyable it has been. it was published in the 1890s and yet the language is not dated at all. in fact the narrative is riveting. especially midway through the book a sword duel that is a page turner. i must be honest that the book has the quality and comic atmosphere of the 1970s movie "the three musketeers". it is not slapstick, but it definitely moves quickly, deftly , and with narrative suspense and surprise. the book chronicles the roman aristocracy during the 1860s . it tells of the wooing of a high born duchessa, a social climbing villain who is a political subversive and a fortune hunter , an italian artist turned soldier, an aristocrat in love with the duchessa, an influential catholic cardinal and these characters tell their stories against the panoply of 19th century rome. one note f. marion crawford was an american who lived in italy. he was the son of thomas crawford who sculpted the statue "freedom" that tops the dome of the capitol of the united states. he was also the nephew of julia ward howe who wrote "the battle hymn of the republic".

This is a romance set in Rome in 1865-6. It's about a prince who loves a duchess, but she's married, and...if I say any more it'll ruin the story for you since the plot isn't very deep. It's very well written and moves along at a good pace. At the beginning and a couple times later in the book Crawford writes about European politics, and he does it so well that I wish that he did it more. He could have easily given Giovanni some sort of occupation and worked in some intrigue, but he preferred to write page after page about what a character is thinking or feeling. This book is the first of a tetralogy, and at the end Crawford says that "to carry on the tale from this point would be to enter upon a new series of events more interesting than those herein detailed...", so hopefully the succeeding books will have more to them. (The other books are Sant'Ilario, Don Orsino and Corleone.) This book is well worth reading, though, so I recommend it to anyone who likes romances, especially historic ones.

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