

Charalampia

Some Reviews of *Charalampia*

Charalampia was published in the *Cornhill* magazine in December 1916 – in a period when British merchant ships were being harried and sunk by German U-boats and the dreadful carnage of the Somme was unfolding. It seemed hardly the time for the head of an armaments firm to be producing a fairy story.

Kenneth Warren, in his biography of Falkner [1995], refers to it as “*a tale of attractive if bewildering imagery, a love story, though of medieval rather than modern romance*”. In a general assessment of Falkner’s works in 1960, **Sir William Haley** praises the work highly: “*I have read the story many times and it always seems to me that there is a parable or an allegory in it if only one could seize the clue. I wish I knew at exactly what date it was written. There is a beauty, a mellowness, and an artistic artlessness that gives the whole tale an air of simplicity and wonder.*”

Charalampia was called Princess, ‘but this was not right, for her father was only a duke’. She was fifteen years old; her hair was as if one had beaten gold and copper together; she had freckles; she was wayward and headstrong. The Prince of Caucasia asks for her hand, but she refuses to accept his condition that she must learn Persian. She also wants to see the world before she marries. Her father decides she should stay at a convent and *Charalampia* agrees when she hears that they will pass by the cell of a certain hermit who will give her a cure for her freckles. The story ends when, *Charalampia* having decided that convent life is too hard for her, she returns and eventually marries the Prince of Caucasia.

Charalampia was not republished until **Geoffrey Grigson** (a great fan of Meade Falkner) included it in *The Mint, Number 2: A Miscellany of Literature, Art and Criticism* in 1948. More recently, in 2000, it was brought out again in the Tartarus Press edition, with *The Lost Stradivarius* and *A Midsummer Night’s Marriage*. **Mark Valentine**, in his introduction, argues that “*in many respects [it is] a celebration of the arcanery of another Christian faith, that of Orthodoxy. This tale has the tone and some of the phrasing of a child’s fairy tale, but it also engages with the exotically mystic in its setting in the half-pagan, half-Christian world of early Byzantium....The theme, essentially the pagan one of ‘gather ye rosebuds while ye may’, though given a more pious gloss, may perhaps reflect a certain ruefulness on the part of a man close to retirement, who had devoted himself to duty and commerce at the cost of gentler occupations*”.



There have been two articles on *Charalampia* in the Society’s **Journal**:

Number 4: July 2003

Dale Nelson - Antiquarian Allusions and Inventions in *Charalampia*

Number 14: July 2013

George Woodman - *Charalampia*: a quasi-Byzantine romance?