



# Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling

*Michael Boccacino*

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When the nanny to the young Darrow boys is found mysteriously murdered on the outskirts of the village of Blackfield, Charlotte Markham, the recently hired governess, steps in to take over their care. During an outing in the forest, they find themselves crossing over into The Ending, "the place for the Things Above Death," where Lily Darrow, the late mother of the children, has been waiting. She invites them into the House of Darkling, a wondrous place filled with enchantment, mystery, and strange creatures that appear to be, but are not quite, human.

However, everything comes with a price, and as Charlotte begins to understand the unspeakable bargain Mrs. Darrow has made for a second chance at motherhood, she uncovers a connection to the sinister occurrences in Blackfield and enters into a deadly game with the master of Darkling--one whose outcome will determine the fate of not just the Darrows but the world itself.

*Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling* is a Victorian Gothic tale about family ties, the realm beyond the living, and the price you pay to save those you love.

## **Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling Details**

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# From Reader Review *Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling* for online ebook

## Laura says

This was one of those "oh I wish there were a 4.5 rating" books!

When I started, I thought it would be *Rebecca* or *Jane Eyre*-esque: genteel widowed governess in a remote manor home with a recent widower and his two sons. But shortly into it I realized there was a serious dose of *Jonathan Strange* here.

We open with the murder of Nanny Prum. A witness swears there's a black man to blame, but the village constable thinks it was the work of a savage beast. One of the daily activities Nanny and the boys, James and Paul, did was to visit their recently dead mother's grave (they weren't dealing well with the death and somehow talking to her was going to help). Charlotte (aka Mrs. Markham) takes the boys there, too, but one day on their way back they wander into a fog and come out at a mysterious house, Darkling.

Clearly this isn't a normal house, because time passes differently here and Lilly, the boy's mother, is there to greet them. Charlotte's a little perplexed and worried about this (who wouldn't be?) but the house itself and their host, Mr. Whately, combine to calm her nerves a little while the boys visit their mother. Of course they return, and Charlotte starts to explore the house: there's the library with books that can lead to other worlds, paintings that do the same, a collection of "deaths" and little wax men/candles to help guide her. What Charlotte would really like to do, however, is take the boys home permanently and continue her late night chats with ~~Henry~~ Mr. Darrow, her employer. Darkling is in The Ending, a world of weird, gruesome creatures and one with some sort of civil war brewing. Trying to get the boys home, she loses them to The Ending and returns to Everton to tell Mr. Darrow that his dead wife and living children are in another world? dimension? universe? As any good father would, he agrees to go help her fight for them and they return to The Ending... and too much more would be spoilers.

So, on to the quibbles. The era in which the book is set isn't stated, but it's clearly a previous century. At one point, the author describes Charlotte's composure as "Victorian" which felt just a little too meta - if this wasn't the Victorian Age, it was pretty damn close. The game that Charlotte and Mr. Whately play is confusing: we see her moves (because she tells us what she's doing) but his are unclear. Since he didn't kidnap the boys, that wasn't a move but somehow it seemed as though it might have been. Finally, the politics of The Ending were a mess. Was the strife about death? the humans entering? something more?

However, both the world of Everton and The Ending (nicely balanced names, right?) were well-realized and at times I actually wanted to visit Darkling. Maybe.

ARC provided by publisher.

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## Stephanie says

**POSTED ORIGINALLY: Fangs, Wands and Fairy Dust**

**Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling**

**by Michael Boccacino**

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When the nanny to the young Darrow boys is found murdered on the outskirts of Blackfield, Charlotte Markham, the recently hired governess, steps in to take over their care. During an outing in the forest, they find themselves crossing over into The Ending, the place for the Things That Cannot Die, where Lily Darrow, the late mistress of Everton, has been waiting. She invites them into the ominous House of Darkling, a wondrous, dangerous place filled with enchantment, mystery and strange creatures that appear to be, but are not quite, human.

However, everything comes with a price, and as Charlotte begins to understand the unspeakable bargain Mrs. Darrow has made for a second chance at motherhood, she uncovers a connection to the sinister occurrences in Blackfield and enters into a deadly game with the master of Darkling, one whose outcome will determine not just the fate of the Darrows, but of the world itself.

Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling is a Victorian gothic tale about family ties, the realm beyond the living, and the price you pay to save those you love. [michaelboccacino.com](http://michaelboccacino.com)

JANE EYRE meets THE NIGHT CIRCUS meets ALICE IN WONDERLAND and Edward Gorey with a little Tim Burton thrown in for good measure. Seriously, this story was a surprise from quite early in the book. It starts off gloomy and very Gothic with an air of despair as befits a tragic governess. There are immediate questions and dire warnings. Of course, the Nanny has been murdered and wild animals are suspected because she's been torn apart; that would make for a very short book. The book is much more than a murder mystery, I asked Michael about that:

I think it's much more of a dark adult fairytale than anything else. There are Gothic trappings, certainly, but I think there's a fable-like quality that runs much more deeply (and consistently) through the narrative. I am a massive, incredible nerd about all things related to Neil Gaiman, Tim Burton, and Steven Moffat. I think each of them tell very complex, adult stories using familiar, nostalgic narrative devices, and it gives everything they write this sense of timelessness and melancholy... which I love.

From talking with Michael at a BEA event I knew the story would head down a spooky, spiderweb laden and dark trail filled with misty bogs and such. I was totally unprepared for the unconventional and wholly original mythology lurking on the other side of the mist separating two worlds. I asked Michael about the fables that serve as children's bed time stories. I asked him if he wrote them and he said he did. They're pretty remarkable.

While the world here is not rule driven, Michael certainly creates a fantasy unlike anything I have ever read. The voice he gives his heroine, Charlotte, is undeniably female. This is a goal rarely met by male authors. In fact, the only other writer I know who is consistently able to pull it off is Chris Bohjalian.

Because it was not what I expected I found myself wondering about Charlotte's sanity; I think that she would be worried about her sanity as well. Perhaps this is a dream? Michael says it is a real experience for the characters, but that there is plenty of allegory.

There are really three books in Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling: one is the everyday life of an upper class British family of the Victorian period. The second is the story of another plane of existence filled with myth and mist "The Ending." The human world and the The Ending are And then there are the fables. The story becomes a bit nebulous as the lines between life, death and the other side start to shift. There are things that go bump in the night, and the day as well.

Here is a brief excerpt from one of Michael's favorite scenes. Charlotte is walking with her young charges as they explore a map they dreamed of.

"...Dreams are my favorite things in the world. Sometimes they even come true, but sometimes we must learn when to wake up."

Paul ignored me and pointed excitedly at something up ahead. "There!"

The path ended at a small fallow creek, but began again on the other side to disappear around a dark, massive cage of roots at the base of an ancient oak tree. Whatever lay beyond the magnificent tree was obscured in a thick, roiling patch of fog. James wrenched himself free from my hand and leapt over the creek, bounding into the mist before I was able to stop him.

"James!"

I quickly hoisted my dress up to my waist and jumped over the brook, glancing back at Paul to wave him on. Together we chased his brother into the mist.

The air around us grew heavy with a dampness that remained even as the fog subsided, and we found ourselves in the middle of a vast orchard. While it had been daylight mere moments before, the moon now hung low in the sky, larger than I had ever seen. It was so vast and oppressive I felt that if I were to reach toward the sky I might be able to push the orb back where it belonged, high above on the black velvet mantle of the night.

"It's nighttime here." Paul was behind me, hugging himself against the cool air.

"Perhaps I misjudged the time,..."

Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling, page 54

The characters are somewhat who you would expect them to be , if life went on as expected, that is. But, when challenged, their true personalities, and strengths, come out, and they're anything but what you would expect.

I am confident in recommending this story to you. I've really never read anything quite like this dark and

unique tale. It's a mystical and mysterious journey through a dream of life that haunts the dead and undying.

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### **Sheila says**

This was a strange one. Don't read this book if you:

- \* Like historical accuracy. This book was set in "the past" (no clue when it was supposed to be), but everyone talked and acted modern.
- \* Want to read a gothic. There are elements here, certainly, but I would call this a dark fantasy instead.
- \* Like clear, sensical plots. This was jumbled.
- \* Like consistent characters with clear motivations (the protagonist in this book makes some bizarre, irrational decisions).
- \* Don't like horror. I wouldn't call this a scary novel, but there are definitely some gross parts!
- \* Like realistic emotions. Despite being confronted with horrible monsters and dead people, the protagonist is never more than mildly annoyed--never gibbering in terror. It's strange.

Despite all these things, I did like the book, and gave it a generous 3 stars. It is really strange, and reminds me a bit of Tanith Lee (though not as dreamy) or Neil Gaiman (though not as polished or emotionally deep). I enjoyed the monsters (gods?) in the alternate world (yay tentacles!), as well as the descriptions of the changing house.

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### **Donnelle says**

This book has a lot going for it, and very few things that I can criticize or nitpick. In regard to the latter, there are a couple of elements that aren't exactly the height of unpredictability; there is a fair amount of gore and gruesomeness (especially near the end); and the summary is not kidding when it states that it revolves around death, losing loved ones (particularly parents and spouses), grief and the grieving process, et. al. I know that some readers would rather steer of that kind of subject matter, so I thought it would be a good idea to caution those readers that the emphasis on those kinds of things is significant and lasts for the duration of the book. (That said, those aspects never become unbearable because they are not unrelieved - the author is quite skilled at interjecting unexpectedly dry wit to lighten things up at regular intervals.)

Now, on to all of the positives, and there are many:

The characters are well-written, and though events occur at a brisk pace, the characterizations do not suffer. We get to know their thoughts and personalities, especially those of Charlotte Markham, and as they wade through various stages of the grieving process and deal with unimaginable wonders and horrors, their humanity and the realness of their emotions still shines through. Though they are all, of course, fictionalized characters, their sadness, humor, resiliency and even despondency seem extraordinarily genuine and relatable. Charlotte herself is a very strong woman - she has to be, given all that she's been through and lost in her life - and she deals with everything with such bravery, cleverness, and even wit that it's a pleasure to follow her along her journey, even as she's navigating incredibly terrifying terrain.

The boys whom she teaches and cares for are true to life in that the teenage boy can be kind of sullen and a

bit of a bully to his younger brother, while the 5-year-old is simultaneously adorable, precocious, and full of energy (and sometimes mischief). Neither child's negative qualities or behaviors ever become overwhelming or gratuitously bratty. These are children who are dealing with the loss of their mother, and the circumstances that befall them courtesy of the House of the Darkling, and their loss and grief, hope and wonder, fear and courage, all come through in a way that feels very true-to-life. Their father (Henry) is perhaps the least developed of the characters, as his depression and grief have left him a shell of his former self, and one who tends to hide himself away rather than dealing with those around him (including his kids) whenever possible. He does heal a bit as events unfold, but his recovery is neither instantaneous nor uncomplicated, and thus feels organic. Further, though one wishes he would find the wherewithal to spend more time with his children, he is not what I would deem to be unsympathetic - he is simply drowning in grief, and he turns to solitude and drinking for much of the book to help him get through each day. You root for Henry to overcome his pain and make his family whole again, because it's so easy to care about all of them.

The villains of the piece - and there are (arguably) several - are, by turns, witty and sinister. I hesitate to say more about them for fear of giving away plot points, so I'll leave it at this: each villain is his/her own person (or "person," as the case may be) and each has a distinct, entertaining personality. There is even one who, though the personification of something which many people fear, actually proves to be rather droll and amusing.

The House of Darkling itself is a wonderful unique, fascinating creation in that it is essentially a giant cabinet of curiosities whose contents range from the fun and the ridiculous, to the beautiful, to the unutterably fearsome. The house and its contents are described in rich detail - the author definitely has a knack for utilizing imaginative and attention-grabbing prose. The world-building is also above par, in that it's so finely crafted that the author even includes fairy tales and a creation myth unique to the House's realm. As one might imagine, the atmosphere in this book is almost a character in and of itself, as we find out from literally the first page that something is not right, and the foreboding, fear, and trepidation build and build with each page. If you're looking for a book that would seem to be the very definition of Victorian Gothic, this one definitely fits the bill.

As for the pacing - time is not wasted on unnecessary plot points or superfluous descriptions. All of the events unfold quickly, without their import being sacrificed or underdeveloped in the slightest. It is because of this that, despite its heavy subject matter, the book is a very quick read, full of characters and situations that are so interesting that you find yourself not wanting to put the book down.

To sum up: this is an extremely well-written, incredibly readable, unique book. This is clearly an author of no small amount of skill and imagination, and he has created a work that not only delves into the complexities of grief and death, it is also richly imagined and includes beautifully rendered new realms, creatures, and objects that inspire both wonder and fear, sometimes simultaneously. This is a wonderful book, and I have to say that after reading it, I eagerly anticipate Mr. Boccacino's next work.

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## **Chelsea Pitcher says**

Initial reaction: Wicked, twisted, dark and delicious. This was a wild ride!

Overall review: I loved this book so much. Boccacino is a master of descriptions, and I was immediately drawn into the lush dual landscapes of *Everton* and *The Ending*. One of the things that delighted me about

this story is that Boccacino would lull me into a false sense of security by creating a setting that felt vaguely familiar and relatable, and then wham! Everything shifted, the petals of the story unfolded, and suddenly I found myself staring into a world I couldn't have anticipated with a plethora of creatures I wasn't expecting. It was shocking, engaging, and altogether addictive.

Everything about this story kept me guessing. I couldn't have imagined where things would end up, couldn't have imagined the things Charlotte would endure and have to overcome. I especially loved the way her character changed and grew over the course of the novel, and I found myself cheering for her as she fought to discover the secrets of *The Ending*, and uncover the mysterious Man in Black.

There is so much more I can say, but with all the twists and unveilings in the story, I don't want to spoil anything. Suffice it to say that the jacket description is accurate—this is a story about a governess drawn into a web of death and deceit, and an age-old game that seems impossible to win. But there is also so much more! The characters are richly drawn and complex, the history of *The Ending* is a delight to discover, the relationships are heartbreakingly real, and the solutions are anything but black and white.

Little things I loved:

The last third of the book (in other words, the ending) is titled *The Ending* (but not for the reason you'd think.)

Paul and Dabney's relationship.

Duncan! I could see his smile so clearly in my mind, and he always had something interesting up his sleeve.

The strange castle with the woman in the aging, decadent dress. So creepy and well-described.

The stories-within-the-story. "The Seamless Children" may have been my favorite, but it's hard to say. They were all great!

In summation: Boccacino has such a talent for writing passages that are deeply sad and at the same time wickedly intriguing. It's difficult to even articulate the complexity of emotions I experienced while reading this book. A truly engaging, wonderful read!

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## **Ryan says**

I have never thought about reading a slightly lighter Lovecraftian tale told within the confines of a Victorian Gothic novel. It's not something that I even considered before, but now that I've read it, I'm slightly confused as to the reason why nobody thought of doing this before. Now when I say Victorian and Gothic, I'm still speaking of terms of being slightly lighter. None of the thematic elements really dominate the structure of the novel. Instead it's like the author used them as the basic outline of the structure, then filled those lines in with something else. What that something else is, I'm still not sure I have a word for it.

Now despite my apparent confusion, I'm here to tell you that I actually really enjoyed this one. Sadly, I can't really tell you the reason though. There are sometimes, no matter how much you think about or analyze something, you can't really explain your reaction to it. I know I liked it. I know I enjoyed getting to know *The Ending* and those that dwelled inside. I know I loved the way those denizens were structured after some



of Lovecraft's well know Elder Beings. I even liked the civil war the author forced them to fight. I never thought of the Elder Beings as being political or of having schisms amongst themselves. I also thought of them as monstrous beings bent on ending the world as we know it. The author took the world of Lovecraft and made it more human, something I didn't think I would like until I read it.

I think the only thing that would have made this book stronger, at least for me, is that I would have liked to see the "romantic" elements be a bit stronger. I guess I can't really enjoy a good Gothic novel without there being a strong romantic element. The main "romance" was between Charlotte and Mr. Darrow. It was never a relationship I ever bought into or liked, and it always felt as if it existed in her head more than anything else. It was a bit too forced for my taste, and because of the direction the book took, it was doomed before it left the ground. Similarly the minor romantic liaisons never felt all that explored and the one I liked the most was barely touched upon. One of their trips to Darkling, the oldest Darrow boy is introduced to a young man who belongs to a race of creatures that inhabit the world. The particular family takes a human visage, and the two hit it off. It's obvious from the get go that there is something between them from the start. Of all the relationships, it was the only one that developed a real sense of affection, though it was only shown a few times towards the end.

I was going to ramble on about the causes behind the civil war, the landscape that Mr. Darrow and Charlotte traveled through on their last foray into the world, and the way Death is introduced; but I won't. All these elements are interconnected and I think it best that a reader discover them on their own. I was even going to touch upon the idea of a parent striking the deal that Lily Darrow made in order to see her children once again. But her character and her motivations are, once again, best left to the reader to explore themselves. What I will say is that whether you end up enjoying the book or not, Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling will be more than worth the time.

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### **Audra (Unabridged Chick) says**

Here's the thing: if this is a Victorian-ish inspired alterna-reality, then this book rocks. However, if it is meant to be a Victorian historical, with supernatural elements *à la* Henry James, then this book is kind of a big fail. From the start, the setting of the story is fuzzy: I just assumed it was Victorian, from the cover design and the ghostly mystery, but there's nothing specific in the text to place it there, and so my reading -- and review -- might be totally off.

Reminiscent of DuMaurier's *Rebecca* at the start -- from the similar-sounding first lines, to the heroine's dreams of houses burning, and the heavy emphasis on the estate of Everton -- this novel lacks the chilly tension and creepy mystery that makes *Rebecca* so fun. Boccacino seems fairly enamored of Charlotte Markham, his governess-narrator, and Mr. Darrow, master of Everton, but Boccacino doesn't offer the reader enough time to grow enamored of them as well, and so the inappropriate romance feels foisted and odd.

The heroine is a widow; her employer a widower. Both lost their spouses about a year ago or so, both attest to the deep and abiding love they have for their deceased spouses, and yet, Boccacino inserts a romance novel-ish frisson of desire. "At times our sessions together would only end when the sun threatened to appear over the horizon; at others they would continue on until...an accidental touch of one hand against the other charged the space between us with something unspoken and unacknowledged." (p16) For the rest of the novel, Charlotte has a breathless eagerness to be cleaved to Mr. Darrow with a few weak protestations that she doesn't want to appear to be a seductress.

Rather than have a *Jane Eyre*-ish desire for the governess and master to end up together, I found myself telling a friend that Charlotte's interest in Darrow and her musings on life at Everton reminded me a bit of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* -- early on in the story, she's quick to imagine herself the mistress of the house simply because she cares for the master's children. Were Charlotte our anti-heroine, this build up would be deliciously wrong, but it's clear Charlotte is meant to be sympathetic, beautiful, and good.

I could harp on my problems with Charlotte, but I won't (and I did so in my Goodreads status updates), so I'll offer a few comments on the rest of the book. Boccacino creates a Victoriana playground for his characters to inhabit: the village of Blackfield is quaint, quirky, picturesque, and without class strata; the dream world of Darkling is a phantasmagoria-ish place of evil knickknacks, shifting landscapes, and tentacled overlords. When I could let go of my aggravation at the historically inaccurate behavior of our heroine, I really enjoyed the world-building, and the creepy atmosphere of the story.

So, needless to say, I've got complicated feelings about this book. Despite my complaints, however, I am eagerly anticipating Boccacino's next novel (not sure if one is in the works, but if there is...). If his character development matches his world-building, then we'll be in for a treat.

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## **Leslie says**

Charlotte Markham, the newly hired governess to young James and Paul Darrow, finds herself taking on additional responsibilities when Nanny Prum is discovered murdered in the nearby forest. The children's mother has recently passed away and their father has little time for them.

Charlotte, now both governess and nanny, spends much of her time with the boys. As a break in the monotony of their lessons Charlotte has them describe their previous night's dreams in a drawing. Paul claims to have visited his mother's new home and draws a map detailing its location in a nearby woods. Charlotte takes the children on a walk following the directions on the map and along the way they cross over to The Ending, a mystical place in another world where they are greeted by Lily, the boys' mother, looking very much alive.

Lily has made a sinister bargain with the owner of The House of Darkling where she now resides. The boys are not to tell anyone they have seen her, it's part of the deal she made, and that is all she will say. She begs Charlotte to bring the children back for another visit. Charlotte suspects that some of the evil that has been plaguing the local town is connected to The Ending, but agrees to return anyway for the sake of the children. Charlotte soon becomes caught up in her own deadly game with the master of Darkling. As she begins to put her plan in place, the true horror of Darkling is revealed.

Part Victorian Gothic and part dark fantasy, this is a wonderfully creepy tale told from Charlotte's point of view. With beautiful writing and lyrical prose we are introduced to an amazing land populated by a cast of unusual and sometimes ghastly creatures in an alternate world called The Ending, a place where time doesn't exist, and where no one can die.

The story was richly detailed with well-developed characters and just enough world building to set the tone, bringing out the macabre aura of The Ending. Lily would read bedtime fairy tales to the children from a book called Laura Parker Wolfe's *Tales of The Ending*, creepy stories within the story. I loved the atmosphere the author created, the descriptions of the alien residents of Darkling, noises in the night, objects that came to life, moving walls that open and close at will, strange paintings that become animated and a most unusual

library.

Initially the story has a Jane Eyre feel to it but soon becomes more magical as we spend time in The Ending, with the tale turning darker as it progresses. Even though it does have some moments of horror, there is enough mystery, charm and even weirdness to appeal to a wide range of readers. An enjoyable book which I heartily recommend. I am looking forward to future work from Michael Boccacino.

Posted on my blog: <http://t.co/rLiiksFl>

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## **Laura says**

“I have seen beyond the bounds of infinity and drawn down daemons from the stars...I have harnessed the shadows that stride from world to world to sow death and madness...”

(“From Beyond”, H.P. Lovecraft)

Charlotte Markham is haunted by death. As a young child she witnessed a man in black appear at her sick mother’s bedside before she took her last breath, then again whilst her father’s heart gave out and finally when her husband saved her from their burning house. And although she suspects that the man in black is death she is unsure why she is privy to his visits.

After the death of her husband, Charlotte finds work at Everton House as governess to the two Darrow children; it is on the grounds at Everton that her fellow employee and friend, Nanny Prum, is found murdered. Nanny Prum’s murder sets in motion a series of events which places Charlotte as both Nanny and governess to the children.

After a series of unexplainable events, the children set off on a quest to follow a map based on Paul (the eldest Darrow child) dream which leads them deep into the forest on Everton Estate. It isn’t before too long that Charlotte and the children find themselves enveloped in mist; an invisible threshold separating two worlds, the living and The Ending. It is here at The Ending that they come across the House of Darkling where, the late mistress of Everton, Lily Darrow has patiently been waiting.

The House of Darkling is full of strange and wonderful things, a place where death does not exist and of which, The Ending’s inhabitants crave more than their own immortality. Although the House of Darkling frightens Charlotte, she finds herself drawn to its many wonders including its master, Mr Whatley, who seems to hold the secrets to not only the mysterious death of Nanny Prum but of her past and the man in black.

Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling breathe life back into gothic fantasy, reminiscent of the genius of H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allen Poe, Baudelaire, Neil Gaiman and Tim Burton. Boccacino’s prose is simply beautiful and I found myself lost in the conjured nightscape of The Ending and its unusual inhabitants.

For a debut novel, this was brilliant, both in its writing style and original storyline. This novel was indeed strangely intoxicating and I found myself finishing it within the day. I simply can’t believe I left it sitting on my “to read” bookshelf for so long! I would recommend this novel to anyone who admires the abovementioned likes of Poe, Lovecraft and Burton; you will be enchanted by the gothic horrors of The Ending.

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## Chrissieskleinewelt says

Rezi: <http://chrissies-kleine-welt.de/?p=1393>

Charlotte Markham arbeitet als Gouvernante bei der jungen, wohlhabenden Familie Darrow. Selbst aus vermögendem Hause stammend wurde sie durch ein Unglück in diese Rolle getrieben. Schnell hat sie die beiden Jungen James und Paul ins Herz geschlossen, die vor nichtmal einem Jahr ihre Mutter verloren haben. Ihr Vater verliert sich in der Trauer um seine Frau und so brauchen beide Söhne besonders Aufmerksamkeit. Als dann die Nanny der Kinder zu Beginn des Buches grausam ermordet wird, nimmt sich Charlotte den Kindern nun vollends an und versucht an den quirligen, kleinen James und den trauernden, verschlossenen Paul heranzukommen, die noch Monate später jeden Tag zum Grab ihrer Mutter pilgern, um dort mit ihr sprechen zu können.

Etwas Unheimliches scheint in der Ortschaft umzugehen. Paul verliert sich immer mehr in der Sehnsucht nach seiner Mutter. Eines Tages zieht das Dreiergespann los. Charlotte möchte den Jungen beweisen, dass ihre Mutter nicht mehr erreichbar ist, damit sie den Verlust endlich verarbeiten können. Sie begeben sich an einen Ort, den Paul geträumt hat und staunen nicht schlecht, als sie dort auf ein Anwesen namens Darkling treffen, wo immerzu Nacht zu sein scheint. Und an der Schwelle der Tür empfängt sie dort niemand anderes als die Mutter der Jungen.

Lily Darrow hat aus Liebe zu ihren Kindern den Tod besiegt, so scheint es, doch hat jede Medaille nicht zwei Seiten? Was hat Lily dafür geben müssen?

Normalerweise würde ich mich nicht als Coverkäufer bezeichnen, da es mir in erster Linie auf den Inhalt des Buches ankommt. Ich müsste jedoch lügen würde ich behaupten, dass mich die Gestaltung dieses Buches nicht angezogen hat. Eine düstere, magische, märchenhafte Welt verspricht es mir, also etwas, das mir sehr entgegenkommt.

“Charlotte und die Geister von Darkling” ist eine Mischung aus Urbanfantasy, atmosphärischen Schauplätzen, schwarzem Humor und einem Krimi. Wer ein spannendes Abenteuer erwartet, der wird enttäuscht sein. Charlotte geht die mystischen Dinge, die sie dort erfährt, mit Skepsis und Forscherdrang an und möchte hinter das Geheimnis von Darkling kommen. Die Geschichte wird aus ihrer Sicht erzählt, so dass ihr Charakter logischerweise der am meisten ausgebaute ist. Nach und nach erfahren wir von ihren Beweggründen, ihrer Familiengeschichte und den tiefen Abgründen ihrer Seele. Michael Boccacino versteht es hier eine durchaus sympathische Protagonistin zu erschaffen, die zwar teilweise recht drastische Arten der Kindererziehung androht, dennoch eine intelligente, trauernde und hoffende Frau darstellt.

Auch die Nebencharaktere stellt der Autor gut dar, einige Charaktere erschienen mir jedoch etwas zu sehr aufgesetzt, zu überspitzt gezeichnet. Dies fand ich etwas schade, da es der Autor durchaus versteht dies bei anderen Charakteren zu vermeiden und diesen Tiefe zu verleihen.

Wer Krimis mag, wird auch dieses Buch mögen. Wer dem Charme von Krimis jedoch nicht wirklich erlegen ist, der wird auch seine Probleme mit Charlotte haben. Für meinen Geschmack war das Buch einfach zu spannungsarm. Charlotte geht an die seltsamen Dinge sehr recherchierend, sehr sachlich heran und möchte hinter die Fassade blicken. Dies ist erstmal keine schlechte Idee, jedoch wird dies eben kaum mit spannenden Szenen gewürzt. Daher treten nach meinem Erachten immer mal wieder kleinere langatmige Teile auf.

Michael Boccacino hat mit diesem Buch eine durchaus interessante Idee gehabt, die man gut und flüssig lesen kann, die aber eben auch etwas anderes liefert, als sie verspricht.

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## Cassandra says

Das Buch wirft mich in einen Zwiespalt. Ist es eher gut oder eher schlecht?

Eins ist sicher, es ist dunkel und sehr verworren - zumindest habe ich das so empfunden.

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## Jennifer Hufford says

The author describes the novel on his web site with the comment, "Think of it as 2 cups Jane Eyre, 6 oz of Lovecraft, and a tbs of Tim Burton", which I think is a perfect description. Also throw a bit of The Turn of the Screw and the movie, The Others, into the mix. Charlotte Markham has been a governess to James and Peter Darrow at the Everton estate for the past nine months when their Nanny Prum is violently and mysteriously murdered in the forest one night. Charlotte takes over as nanny to the boys. The widowed Mr. Darrow keeps to himself, but over late night talks in his study, he and Charlotte form a bond that promises to be more than friendship someday. Mr. Darrow lost his wife, Lily, the previous year, as did Charlotte her husband Jonathan. One day Charlotte takes the boys on a walk through the forest when they encounter a misty orchard with strange fruits. On the other side of the orchard they're met by Lily Darrow and the enchanted House of Darkling, both of which exist in the place for the Things That Cannot Die. The master of the House of Darkling, Mr. Whatley, is an ominous figure. Charlotte and the boys return several times to Darkling to visit Lily, who asks that they keep her presence a secret from Mr. Darrow, but over time it becomes clear that Mr. Whatley has marked Charlotte to take part in a dangerous, mystifying game with dire consequences for the loser. At stake – the Darrow family, Charlotte herself, the nearby town of Blackfield (where Charlotte's friend Susannah has had nightmarish encounters with a shadowy figure)... and possibly the world itself. I can't say more without giving away too much, and the delight of this book is the unexpected twists and the author's surprisingly vivid imagination. The images are vivid, unforgettable, gruesome in many cases... I could see Tim Burton having a lot of fun with this. I rarely read fantasy novels but I took a chance on this one and I'm very happy I did. I look forward to Boccacino's next book.

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## Arielle Walker says

### 3.5 stars

This book had so much potential! If you saw my status updates you'll know how excited I was for it when I started reading it. However, by the third part of the book I had pretty much lost track of what was going on - and almost stopped caring because of this.

The prose was beautiful, lush and descriptive. *Overly* descriptive. In many ways, it reminded me of Kirsty Eagar's *Night Beach*, in that the fantasy part of the story made very little sense but yet was beautifully rendered. Boccacino's Ending was detailed and imaginative, but I kept feeling that he had imagined it so precisely that he assumed we knew exactly how it worked - just as he did - and just had to be shown how it looked.

For example, the creatures in the Ending were described right down to the last tentacle, but I remain in the dark as to what they actually *were*. I couldn't work out who Mr Whatley was, *what* Mr Whatley was, why he was sometimes bad and sometimes good and sometimes neither and then there was another bad guy but was he actually the bad guy I don't know and then there were people being blown to bits and ripped apart but

that's not unusual or scary just enough to make the main character mildly angry because she has to go on a long quest with Mr Darrow who she loves but oh no she doesn't love and makes a habit of kissing even though his wife is alive but she's actually dead and he loves both of them but then the children are in danger but then they aren't because there's a wedding which all the injured people are attending even though they're sort of dead but they aren't because they don't die but they want to die but not to get blown up and oh god what on earth is happening???

That last paragraph pretty much sums up my feelings towards the last half of the book: it completely lost me. Some books work being nonsensical (Alice in Wonderland; Hitch-hiker's Guide), but even they are somewhat rooted in fact or, at the very least, coherency. That Charlotte Markham and the House of Darkling lacks that coherency is hugely disappointing because I honestly adored the first third, and still enjoyed the second. I do love Boccacino's writing style, and perhaps the sporadic nature of the last half is due to his previous work as a poet - I hope that his next fiction attempt makes more sense than this one, because I am not ready to give up on him. I will eagerly read his next novel offering, and in the meantime seek out his poetry to tide me by.

I am determined to like this book, and this author- hence the extra half a star.

Full review here

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### **Melanie says**

Dark, twisted and clever. Is there anything more satisfying than a battle of wits?

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### **Vicki says**

While this book was very beautifully written, I lost interest because the purpose was unclear. The book was akin to reading someone else's dream once the characters were in Darkling, with unclear physics, characters' intentions (who's evil and who's benevolent?), and purpose (what is Darkling and why are Charlotte and the children there? what is the cause/purpose of the war?). One event followed another, without any clear logic or "rules" that the reader could follow. The political conflict in Darkling that was instigating a war was apparently a major part of the story, but it was not clearly defined, so there was no clear reason for the fighting, and no clear indication on which was the good or bad side, or even a general preference to who would win. I'm perfectly fine with novels not following "real life" logic, but some alternative logic must be followed or the story doesn't make sense. I finished it to see if it was all explained in the end, but I was disappointed to find out that it wasn't.

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