**Review**

**Haunted Houses:**

**Fairy Water and The Uninhabited House**

Edited by Professor Andrew Smith, *Haunted Houses* by Charlotte Riddell is a collection of two short stories—Fairy Water and The Uninhabited House.

Both Fairy Water and The Uninhabited House address the common problem of renting out haunted properties. The author uses amusing satires to throw light on the economic depression of that period (1840s–1870s) in England. She is humorous in her way of criticizing the wealthy classes. The narrator of Fairy Tale, Stafford Trevor, is a barrister who purchases the notorious haunted house Crow Hall. Not affected by the place’s bad reputation, he got the house because he ‘meant to make money out of it’. The storyline further sees the poor plight of Mrs Trevor, the widow of Stafford’s cousin, Captain Geoffrey Trevor, whose tragic life throws light on the gender-bound authority where economic and social powers are allotted to the male professional classes. Afterwards, the development of a love story and the comical ignorance of the narrator to the brewing romance also imparts a humorous flavour to the story in parts. At the end of the tale, the ghost of Fairy Water leads the narrator to a buried treasure, hinting that the treasure of the dead might be useful to compensate those in need of the fortune.

In The Uninhabited House, we are introduced to a feisty Miss Blake, the owner of the haunted house River Hall. Not yet of the legal age, the responsibility of handling the haunted estate was passed to the hands of her aunt, Miss Susannah Blake, who put it in the hands of her attorneys, Messrs. Craven and Son. Unfortunately, the tenants of the house after coming to know of the ghostly tales leaves the premises soon after and the property earns the reputation of a haunted house. After Mr Craven gives up on the idea of ever getting a tenant, the narrator appears on the scene and takes it on himself to stay at the cursed place and discover the secrets that afflicted River Hall. Like in Fairy Water, the plot centres on the misuse of wealth and property, which ultimately gets redistributed and leads to a happy marriage instead of an ‘economically coerced one’. At parts, the story seems like a mystery. The ending, though, is sappy and proves to be a disappointment.

In both the stories, the key theme is money. The ghosts of Riddell’s stories are mostly receded to the background and seem to play only a peripheral role in the plots. Riddell’s ghosts appear more to advance warnings to rectify misdeeds committed in the past by compensating those in need of the fortune.

A famous Victorian novelist, Charlotte Riddell has many ghost novellas and short stories to her credit. Her treatment of the plots is entertaining and witty. Though well-constructed, the language is conventional and might not be too reader-friendly. Horror tales, in my opinion, should ideally build up a spine-chilling atmosphere and creep out readers. So, for horror story lovers, it is advisable not to go by the title of the book. The ghost appearances are not too much, most of it being lost in the midst of other significant themes, and the element of sending ‘a chill down your spine’ or ‘scaring you out of your wits’ is absolutely missing. The pace of the stories is slow and one might soon lose interest in the plot.

**Here is why I would not recommend to publish this manuscript**:

1. The development of the plots fails to generate any curiosity.
2. More of classical Victorian themes such as forlorn lovers, secret marriages, lost estates, cruel wills, and life in old England.
3. Archaic language may not be too convenient for readers today.
4. The thrill gets diluted in the frame of the complex plots.
5. Not particularly chilling and quite slim on the horror side.
6. Plots advance too slowly.