

Female Struggle in the Victorian Literary Field:
An Analysis of Charlotte Riddell's Narratives



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Contents

Introduction.....4

Chapter 1: Charlotte Riddell’s Private and Professional Hardships.....7

Chapter 2: Autobiography as a Common Theme in Riddell’s Narratives.....14

Chapter 3: Gender Issues and Power Relations in Riddell’s Narratives.....24

Conclusion.....32

Works Cited.....35

Front Cover Picture:

Barraud, Herbert Rose. *Mrs. Riddell*. N. d. Photograph. *JSBlog*, 2014. Web. 4 January 2015.

*With looks bewildered and worn
And eyelids that weighed like lead
An authoress sat at her nightly toil
Spinning her brains for bread
Write write write
In poverty, hunger, - and when
Her trembling fingers failed
She sang this song of the Pen*

*My head aches as if it were splitting
I'm worn down to mere skin and bone
Strange shadows around me are flitting
Not one is so gaunt as my own
They are shadows of days long departed
When bright hopes of fame fill'd my head
When heedless and young and light hearted
I dream 't not of writing for bread*

Hannah Maria Jones – 1844
(qtd. in Cross 177)

Introduction

Charlotte Riddell, or Mrs. J. H. Riddell, is a female author who lived in the Victorian era. This encompasses the time in which Queen Victoria was reigning Britain, namely from 1837 to 1901. Riddell wrote across various genres, including ghost stories, the common Victorian sensation novel and the *Künstlerroman*. The latter two genres are, in Riddell's case, quite intertwined and a couple of her stories give the contemporary reader an insight into the struggles of female authors in the Victorian era.

During Victorian times, books and more specifically novels became increasingly popular. Women carry a significant and paradoxical role in this: on the one hand, female authors were equally, if not more present in the field of writing novels in comparison to men (Tuchman 7). On the other hand, women were more condemned than men in admitting they were writing, especially when it came to stating they earned money from it. Indeed, Tuchman states: "The paucity of women admitting that they were authors affirms that even as late as the 1860s middle-class norms prevented respectable women from acknowledging that they wrote for money" (52).

The abundant presence of females within the literary field did thus not mean that they had many rights to call upon. This was mostly due to the fact that the market for novels expanded and men increasingly started to dominate the business. Tuchman states that, "[T]he decade of the 1840s marks the emergence of both the Victorian novel and the production and distribution system with which it was associated" (7), which meant a professionalisation of the novel and the British publishing system. At the same time, literacy increased due to improved and more accessible educational systems. Therefore, writing became a fairly easily attainable profession for women, not only when they enjoyed writing but also when they needed an income. In addition to novels, it was fairly popular to send articles and columns to periodicals, since this provided a faster income (Onslow 106). However, as mentioned previously, admitting to writing for money

was not accepted within Victorian society. The explicit shame and condemning of female authors is evident in a letter from Robert Southey, addressed to Charlotte Brontë. He states: “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity” (qtd. in Wise 156). Southey echoes the main conception in Victorian society of female authors, namely that writing would interfere with the domestic duties of a woman and, even more suggestively, that it is an unfeminine profession. Catherine Gallagher goes somewhat further by stating that at the time, “the woman writer [who wrote for profit] was figured as a whore” (44). According to her, a connection was often drawn “between a certain kind of female literature, inflation, dishonest retailing, and usurious exchange [and] the woman of pure exchange: the prostitute” (ibid). Even well-known authoress George Eliot critiques on these female writers, and elaborates on their connection to inflation and dishonest retailing when she states: “[The majority of female authors’] novels sell [...] because they merely recirculate a conventional language. [...] All the matter [...] is drawn from novels and goes back into the making of more novels. Such women rake off profits without production, without labour” (qtd. in Gallagher 44).

It was thus rather difficult to be an average female author in the Victorian Era, especially regarding the existing criticism of the profession. Even though some of the most famous novelists can be linked to that timeframe, namely the Brontë sisters and George Eliot, these women and their popularity too often “obscure the reality of female authorship. Lack of education, lack of opportunity, lack of status and lack of property all combined [narrowed] the literary horizons of women” (Cross 203). Although analysed often, well-known female authors of the nineteenth-century do not necessarily symbolise the hardships of female authors in the Victorian era. The majority of female authors, including Charlotte Riddell, wrote to support themselves and their

families. Interestingly, some of Riddell's fictional work describes the Victorian literary field and female hardship therein. These texts can be specified as *Künstlerromans*, which are a type of *Bildungsroman* that deal with the development and life story of an artist (Murfin 39). Margaret Kelleher and Linda H. Peterson have investigated this by studying Riddell's novel *A Struggle for Fame*, which was first published in 1883. Their articles touch upon the autobiographical tone in this novel, as well as possible parallels with Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which was first published in 1857 and highly popular. However, these scholars do not go in-depth about the possible meaning of these *Künstlerromans*, as well as forget to read in-between the lines for a potential stand against gender-bias. In thorough research on Victorian female authors and their works, the name Charlotte Riddell is largely forgotten. However, around the 1860s and 1870s, she became quite famous. It is thus interesting to see what she has to say, in her fiction, on the publishing system she was a part of.

Therefore, this study will examine Charlotte Riddell's short story "Out in the Cold" and novels *A Struggle for Fame* and *The Rich Husband* in light of female struggle within publishing in the Victorian era. It will be argued that these texts can be read as autobiographical as well as evidential for stereotypical power relations and gender bias in the Victorian era. In the first chapter, Riddell's personal life will be investigated and specifically her writing and publishing history. In the second chapter, the novels and short story will be analysed in the light of their common autobiographical theme of female authors and their attempt to publish. In the third and last chapter, the texts will be studied with regard to power relations between the male and female characters and how these conform or oppose to the existing norm. In the conclusion, this study will shed light on a forgotten, successful female author and will in turn, hopefully, acknowledge the struggles many female authors in the Victorian era faced.

Chapter 1: Charlotte Riddell's Private and Professional Hardships

Publishing novels and short stories proved to be difficult for Charlotte Riddell. In this chapter, the reasons for these hardships will be analysed which will provide an outline of Riddell's life in order to pre-establish a possible autobiographical basis within her novels *The Rich Husband*, *A Struggle for Fame* and her short story "Out in the Cold". The fact that Charlotte is of the female gender proved to be an obstacle for publishing her stories; however, within her private life she did not seem to suffer from this gender-based inferiority. In fact, for the people around her, she was quite indispensable. Furthermore, her choice of genre and style of writing were both quite unconventional, especially for the nineteenth century, which is important to take into consideration. A couple of interviews and biographical sketches from the nineteenth century on Riddell have remained accessible, and therefore texts from Ellis and Thackeray, and an interview by Blathwayt will be used in this analysis. In addition, contemporary sources fill in the gaps which these nineteenth century texts can lay bare. Cross, Kelleher, Peterson, Srebrnik and Tuchman have all mentioned and researched Riddell to a certain extent, and thus these resources will be used in an attempt to provide a complete analysis of Riddell's hardships, both privately and professionally.

Charlotte Elizabeth Lawson Cowan was born on 30 September 1832 in Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland. Her father James Cowan was the High Sherriff of County Antrim; however, after his death, Charlotte and her invalid mother were left behind with little financial means. In 1855, four years after her father's death, Charlotte moved to London with her mother. Here, Charlotte began to try to earn a living as an author (Kelleher 118). This proved to be difficult. Her first published novel is *Zuriel's Grandchild*, a three-volume work which was published by Newby in 1856 (ibid) after numerous rejections. Charlotte mentions this difficulty in publishing in an interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in which she says: "All my publishers would look

upon my writing as a joke at first” (Blathwayt). She published her first work under the pseudonym of R. V. Sparling. Her second novel *The Moors and the Fens* was published two years later, in 1858, by Smith, Elder. This novel was presented under the name of F. G. Trafford. *The Rich Husband* and *The Ruling Passion*, both also published in 1858 by Bentley and Charles Skeet, respectively, were printed under the pseudonym of Rainy Hawthorne (Kelleher 118). Charlotte states as her reason for the use of pseudonyms that “it was not considered quite the thing for a lady to write in her own name” (Blathwayt). After publishing three more novels with Charles Skeet under the name of F. G. Trafford, the Tinsley brothers published three of her most successful novels, namely *George Geith*, *Maxwell Drewitt* and *Phemie Keller*, between 1864 and 1866. These novels were the last texts she published under a pseudonym. The remainder of her works, from 1866 onwards, were published under her husband’s name, Mrs. J. H. Riddell, since by that time she had married. Interestingly, the majority of her publishers were not very prestigious within the Victorian publishing world (Srebrnik 74), even though Charlotte experienced a considerable amount of fame during her most successful years in the 1860s and 1870s.

In 1857, a year after her mother had passed away, Charlotte married Joseph Hadly Riddell, who was a civil engineer. Apart from her writing, she “went to work as a clerk in the various unsuccessful businesses undertaken by her husband” (Srebrnik 73). His declining career caused the Riddells to solely rely on Charlotte’s income from writing. An example of this is when, in 1871, in a “memorandum of agreement, between Mr. Joseph Hadley Riddell, acting for himself as for his wife Mrs. Charlotte Riddell [...] and Messieurs Henry S. King & Co. of 65 Cornhill, London, the Riddell’s [sic] accepted a loan of £285 in exchange for the copyright, stereotype plated and moulds of a dozen novels, including Riddell’s famous *George Geith of Fen Court*” (Peterson 110). Therefore, Mr. and Mrs. Riddell took out a loan with the use of

Charlotte's professional achievements. Although not much has been made public about their relationship, there is little evidence that Charlotte was regretful about her marriage with Mr. Riddell. Firstly, she printed her husband's name on the majority of her works, even after his death in 1880. S. M. Ellis argues that "as a true Victorian woman she was willing to merge her identity with that of her husband" (Ellis 281-2). However, for Mrs. Riddell this was not because of weakness or inferiority, especially because, on the one hand, she kept using his name "despite the clouds that overwhelmed Mr. Riddell in his closing years, when his name could be of no possible service, but entirely the reverse, at the launching of a book" (Ellis 282). On the other hand, by that time Riddell had acquired most of her fame and had published the majority of her novels under her married name. Choosing another pseudonym or her maiden name would therefore, perhaps, not have been a favourable decision, even if her husband's name carried a bad reputation. Secondly, she is known to "have struggled with paying off her husband's debts to his family after his death in 1880", even though she "was under no legal obligation to do so" (Cross 195). This suggests the strength of Charlotte's character and perseverance in not only her career, but also in her private life.

In the Victorian era, the public and private divide in society started to blur when the author, instead of just the book, became a subject of interest. Riddell was aware of this, and "had photographs taken for *cartes de visites*, allowed herself to be interviewed for magazines such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Lady's Pictorial*, and attended soireés where she held court as one of the literary lion(esse)s" (Peterson 111). These interviews do not only show society's interest in her, they are also crucial in providing an insight into Riddell's career and opinions, not in the least because it aroused a certain critique in her when, for instance, the interview in the *Gazette* was published in 1890. In a letter to a friend, she writes: "Herewith the 'Interview', which is supposed to have taken place *here* – wherefore the 'low-ceilinged room' the 'charming' Mr.

Blathwayt evolved out of his own 'internal consciousness'. The editorial scissors have I fancy been used so freely that my statements have got a little mixed" (qtd. in Ellis 311).

This strong character is also evident in Riddell's choice of genre by and her constant justification for it in the press. Riddell's works can be categorised in various distinct genres, but she was most famous for her sensation novels with a "City background" (Cross 194), in which she often wrote about lower-middle-class characters. However, she intended her works to be read by "higher socio-economic groups" (Srebrnik 76). This was unique for the time, since the ruling urban gentry had a strong preference for works about the upper-middle classes. More importantly, as Srebrnik argues, Riddell wrote from "the point of view of middle- and lower-middle-class wives and working women" (ibid), which in turn emphasised the delusive distinction between the public and private sphere. The perception of a public and private sphere places women in the private and men in the public sphere; especially regarding the job they were or were not carrying out. However, in the nineteenth century, women from the lower classes already worked outside the home, which placed them in the public sphere. In turn, this blurred the existing distinction which the higher classes attempted to maintain. Even though Riddell stresses her connection to men; how she "always find[s] them easier to describe than women" (Blathwayt) and how she "[desires] to appeal to male readers drawn from every segment of the middle class" (Srebrnik 75), the female readers of the Victorian era were her biggest audience. The main reason for this is her unique approach towards the reality of married and working life, which parallels that of many women in that time frame.

Riddell's writing style is also important to note. Even though she produced a fair amount of text in a short time, she was still regarded a slow writer. For example, when a publisher inquired about a novel she promised to write, she replied that it was finished: "'Good,' said Mr. Bentley, 'then may we have the manuscript to-morrow?'" 'Oh, NO!' returned Mrs. Riddell; 'what

I meant was that the tale is completed in my head, to the last conversation; but I have now to write it down on paper, and that will take a considerable time” (qtd. in Ellis 297). In addition, a large amount of Riddell’s novels can be called sensation novels. The sensation novel, a common Victorian literary genre, often combines realism with romance and includes incidents of violence, madness and sexual conflict (Rubbery). Even though it was a popular genre, it was not considered a part of high culture. In contrast to the popularity of Riddell’s choice of genre, her most well-known feature in writing is her elaborate character descriptions: “even minor characters are sharply, and frequently sardonically, observed” (Kelleher 119). This was unconventional for a woman, since, as Anne Thackeray wrote in 1874, “analysis of emotion instead of analysis of character, the history of feeling instead of the history of events, seems to be the method of the majority of penwomen” (77). Therefore, Riddell had a style of writing which could be considered masculine, especially within the nineteenth century.

Riddell’s uncommon approach to the sensation novel is one of the main reasons she had difficulty publishing her work and, more importantly, for the many negative reviews she received on her novels during her time. Interestingly, Peterson argues that “Riddell was, in fact, ahead of her time and would have found a more receptive professional audience in the 1890s when reviewers began to call for novels with insight into the habits of thought and habits of action of the commercial and professional classes” (100). However, at the end of the nineteenth century, Riddell’s reputation and career were in decline. Kelleher provides the reason for this in the form of Pierre Bourdieu’s opposition between the “sub-field of large-scale production” and the “sub-field of restricted production” (qtd. in Kelleher 117). She argues that Riddell’s literary career belonged to the former, which was less valued, regarding “the size of her literary output, the type of fiction she produced and [her] audience” (119), of which the latter Kelleher identifies as being of the lower classes in Victorian society. In addition, at the end of the nineteenth century the

three-volume novel, which Riddell and other female authors so often produced, declined in its popularity as men professionalised the literary field and started producing the high-culture, single-volume novel (Tuchman 82). This novel and its story were shorter and, as Tuchman states, “imbued with the supposed virtues of culturally elite men” (ibid) and, in turn, men started to dominate the literary field.

These two factors account for the main reason for Riddell’s decline in fame and prestige. As a result, she spent her last years impoverished. Her friends applied to the Royal Literary Fund around 1900 to seek financial support for her. Her state is described as “very failing in health” (qtd. in Kelleher 128) and the appeal describes various tragedies which Riddell faced throughout her life, such as “the failure of a publisher owing her large sums”, which is said to be William Tinsley, and “her husband [being] unfortunate in business. She not only paid his debts but kept him for many years during which time he was a complete invalid” (ibid). J.M. Barrie, a committee member of the Royal Literary Fund, completed the application by citing two novels, namely *George Geith* and *The Junior Partner*, the latter of which, ironically, was actually titled *The Senior Partner*. Important to note is that, around the same time of her application to the Royal Literary Fund, she also became the first pensioner of the Society of Authors, which “was clearly a substantial achievement, both financially and [symbolically]” (Kelleher 129).

Charlotte Riddell passed away in Kent, England on 24 September 1906, in “greatly reduced financial circumstances”. She died from cancer, after having lived in seclusion for twenty years (Kelleher 119).

In conclusion, Charlotte Riddell’s life was one of many hardships. She attempted to provide for her invalided mother by moving to London and selling her written works. During her entire lifetime, even when she enjoyed considerable fame, it proved a struggle to publish her novels and short stories. Her husband was unsuccessful in his career and this forced the Riddells

to sell their rights of a majority of Charlotte's literary achievements. The unconventional style of writing she practiced is one of the main reasons for the difficulty she experienced in the publishing world. However, in the 1860s and 1870s, Riddell grew quite popular and was well known for her novel *George Geith*, specifically. The three-volume novel, in which she specialised, decreased in popularity at the end of the nineteenth century, which simultaneously meant the downfall of Riddell's career. Her life story tells rather grimly; the harsh reality of a female author in the nineteenth century is indeed not often addressed. However, a selection of Riddell's works, which were inspired by her own experiences, touch upon this unromantic, unforgiving reality, and an analysis thereof will possibly restore some of the honour which Riddell never truly received.

Chapter 2: Autobiography as a Common Theme in Riddell's Narratives

In Charlotte Riddell's novels *The Rich Husband* and *A Struggle for Fame*, and in her short story "Out in the Cold", female authorship and the publishing world are recurring themes. *The Rich Husband* was published in 1858 and is about Judith Mazingford, an unhappily married woman who attempts to earn money by writing in order to provide for her invalid sister. The story also includes Miss Ridsdale and Alice Crepton, Judith's aunt and niece respectively, who both try their hand at writing as a profession as well. *A Struggle for Fame* was first printed in 1883 and begins with a description of the arrival of the Irish Glenarva Westley and her father, Mr. Westley, in England, with the dream of pursuing Glenarva's writing career. The book follows her difficult journey in this. "Out in the Cold" is included in *Handsome Phil & Other Stories*, which is a collection of Riddell's short stories that was published in 1899. The narrative is about Annabel Saridge, who moves from Ireland to England with her mother, after her father has died. They are left in poverty and Annabel tries to earn money through her writing, which has been her passion since she was young. Riddell herself moved to London in 1855 and went from publisher to publisher trying to get her books printed and obtain an income, which proved to be difficult. This hardship is a returning topic within the discussed texts. Therefore, this part of Riddell's fiction can be classified as *Künstlerromans*, since it implies a parallel with her own experiences with the Victorian publishing system. In addition, the texts all have a third-person narrator and, since these texts suggest an autobiographical approach, this narrator could share convictions with Riddell. Therefore, in this chapter, the shared themes of writing and publishing as a female author in the Victorian era will be analysed, in order to prove that Riddell's texts are fictionalised memoirs of her own life.

Perhaps the most apparent textual evidence that Riddell based her stories on her own experiences is when, in the texts, the third-person narrator discusses the method the female

characters apply to their writing. For example, in *The Rich Husband*, Judith explicitly writes from personal experience. The narrator states:

The pain [Judith] described she had experienced; the struggles she recounted had been made by herself; the wrongs had been inflicted on her; the faults she was conscious of, in her own ill-regulated nature. No marvel, that the colouring was like flesh and blood – that the interest was absorbing – the story too much resembling reality ever to be taken for fiction. (293-94)

In addition, this technique is also described further on in the novel when the narrator says: “In some books the portraits sketched in pen and ink seem taken from life. Every face – every word – every thought – every sentence, appears stamped by the magic of ideality with the firm touch of actuality. To the true author, no character is a fictitious one” (403). This implies that Riddell took her personal experiences and fictionalised them, and that her texts can thus be seen as autobiographical. As we shall see, this strategy occurs elsewhere in Riddell’s fiction as well.

Riddell’s main female characters in the texts all experience a remarkably strong perseverance regarding their writing careers. In the first chapter it was established that Riddell enjoyed this trait of character herself and it is thus interesting to analyse the manner in which Riddell reflects this in her characters. Specifically, having to go to publisher after publisher is a recurring theme in Riddell’s texts, as it was in her own life. For instance, in *The Rich Husband*, Judith’s experience with starting out as a writer is described as being “strewed with rejections, bordered with thorny [sic] criticisms [and] rendered difficult by unsuspected obstacles” (119). Her first rejection is by Mr. Kearn, who is described as “one of those wolves in sheep’s clothing who go about the world lacerating the hearts of tender young authors, with an indescribable show of kindness and painful adherence to truth” (ibid). Barbara Onslow argues that this experience with Mr. Kearn is drawn from Riddell’s own acquaintance with Mr. Newby, whom Riddell

published with in her early days and who is said to have been “astonished to discover she was the author of *George Geith*” (Onslow 263), her most famous novel. In *The Rich Husband*, Mr. Kearn turns out to be one of many to reject Judith’s work: “There seemed a conspiracy against her: she got her aunt to try her connection, but it was a very small and peculiar one, and no good was to be effected there. Then she wrote to the first houses in London, and received no answers – then to various journals, which declined her communications, with thanks” (121). In turn, her aunt suggests giving up writing altogether, as she herself cannot get any articles accepted. She says: ““Even I, who have been doing a little for so many years, can scarcely make five pounds in as many months”” (134). However, the rejection by Mr. Kearn and other publishers only emphasise Judith’s persistent character and her love for writing: “Mr. Kearn seemed to have put a blister on her spirit, and to have roused it up considerably, by the process. [...] [S]he recommenced work with greater energy than ever, proving conclusively, to her aunt’s satisfaction, that there is nothing so good for grief as a counter-irritant – nothing so great a stimulant to exertion as a little wholesome opposition” (120). This gives some credibility to Onslow’s argument that Kearn is based on Newby, since Riddell failed to gain support for her new work from the latter, and found her success at other publishers after this, most likely painful, rejection.

In *A Struggle for Fame*, the character of Mr. Vassett, a publisher, depicts the rough world of publishing. When the narrator says, “The publisher received all new writers with a manner which implied that, as there were already far too many candidates for literary honours, it was ridiculous to expect any help from him to introduce another” (108), the judgmental tone of Riddell is notable in the manner in which the narrator describes Vassett. The fact that he is portrayed as an arrogant man has a rather ironic effect on his character. This becomes clear when the narrator describes Vassett’s manner of working and rejecting: “Mr. Vassett [...] had felt the public pulse so long, he could say with a sort of unerring certainty, ‘This will never sell,’ ‘Yes, I

have no doubt it is very admirable, and so forth, but I should prefer that some other person lost money over it” (111). However, when Glenarva, in her first attempt to publish a story, receives a personal rejection, Vassett’s arrogance has a reverse effect on Glenarva: ““I *must* go on writing!””, she says in front of Vassett to her father. ““Whether you fail or succeed?””, he replies, which she powerfully rebuts with: ““*Till* I succeed or fail”” (121). Again, the female perseverance is evident here, despite of, or perhaps even because of, the difficulty experienced in publishing. This is also evident in “Out in the Cold”, when Annabel sends off her manuscripts to a friend with connections, who “did the best he knew [but] the result was *nil*” (140). Annabel’s immediate reaction is that she ““shall not give up”” (141). She suffers a time of “wary waiting, of hope deferred, of rejection, of acceptance without any remuneration” (ibid), but continues to write until she earns money from it. The fact that this perseverance is a recurring matter in the narratives emphasises the possibility that Riddell could have been inspired by her own personality when she created these female characters.

Just as Riddell, most female characters in the discussed texts move to London for their writing career. Moving from Ireland to England, after the death of her father, was difficult for Riddell, which she explains in an interview when she says: ““Coming as strangers to a strange land, in all London we did not know a single creature. During the first fortnight, indeed, I really thought I should break my heart. [...] I could not eat; I could not sleep; I could only walk over the ‘stony-hearted streets’ and offer my manuscripts to publisher after publisher”” (qtd. in Ellis 271). This conveys a certain fear of destitution and, perhaps, even a sense of homesickness. In the least, the discomfort of living in London can be retraced in all three stories. In *A Struggle for Fame*, Glenarva experiences this after she moves from Ireland to England, when the narrator states: ““Glen’s pillow was wet with tears, shed because of the terrible homesickness some natures never experience, but which to those that do seems as bad as death”” (302). Further on in the novel,

when Glenarva realises the hardships of female authorship, she regrets “having left the sure safe haven of a place where, though poor, they were loved and respected” (304). Furthermore, the description of London having “stony-hearted streets” suggests that Riddell did not consider London a place of love and security. This is emphasised in *The Rich Husband* when the narrator states that in London, “you will find yourself more alone there than would be the case if you were standing in the middle of a Scotch moor, without a human habitation within a dozen miles of you” (7). In connection to Glenarva’s longing for Ireland in *The Struggle for Fame*, in “Out in the Cold” Annabel is known to write stories in an Irish setting and this is elaborately described in the text as well: “Anyone reading her stories now, can see the trembling harebell and inhale the primrose’s faint scent; can wander in imagination over mountains clothed with the purple heather, and dip knee-deep in bracken down hillsides leading to valleys verdant as only those of the Emerald Isle can ever appear” (139). This description of Ireland is far more vivid and positive than the descriptions of London that are present in the texts. This can imply that Riddell had a certain longing for her home country. Moreover, it suggests that living in London was difficult for the authoress.

For the female characters in the texts, moving to London was often out of necessity for an income. In turn, obtaining an income is a recurring, autobiographical theme in the texts. In “Out in the Cold”, Annabel and her mother are left in poverty after her father dies. This event may be taken from Riddell’s own life when, as discussed in the first chapter, Riddell becomes the principal wage earner after her father passes away. Annabel’s dependence on her income from writing is evident when she falls ill and is incapable of writing anything: “Much against her will, she was obliged to break into a sum of money she had painfully saved against that day which must arrive for all” (144). This suggests that she had to use her savings for her own funeral in

order to pay for her bills and food. This dependence on a self-earned income is also evident in *The Rich Husband*, when, for example, Judith asks her aunt Miss Ridsdale:

‘Aunt, what are you writing?’ ‘Stories,’ answered the other briefly. ‘Yes, I know that,’ answered Judith; ‘but why so eternally?’ ‘Because money is very scarce,’ explained her aunt, pausing in her occupation, and looking earnestly in the face of her questioner – ‘because my dead sister’s husband, and my dead sister’s children have need of all the little I can make’. (115)

Miss Ridsdale is the first female character in the novel that writes for money in order to provide for her family. At that point, Judith is not aware that she will find herself in the same position some years later, when she cannot obtain money from her abusive husband and sets to writing in order to gain an income to help her invalid sister. The narrator’s description of this event states: “It was the thing men call chance which made an authoress out of Judith; the train had been laid by nature years previously, but the want of money proved the match thereto, and once ignited, it burned steadily on, till the lamp of genius was quenched in the night of death for ever” (117-18). This observation resembles Riddell’s personal life, since she commenced writing as a hobby, but turned to it as a profession out of necessity.

In *The Rich Husband*, Riddell’s opinion on this fate implicitly shines through when the narrator analyses:

Life’s chances turn on the merest atom of a pivot – and so, we doubt not, there are scores now earning their bread by the labours of their pen, who would never have tried their hand at authorship but for some strange chance or domestic misfortune. [...] It is not going too far to affirm, that had fate so ordered it, some of our worst writers might have become first-rate chemists, engineers, or architects, and many an incompetent medical man have

astonished the world with the marvels he could perform by the aid, not of pestle and mortar, but of pen and ink. (117)

This observation carries a slightly regretful tone, which suggests that Riddell may have aspired to do more things with her life if there had not been the need to provide for herself, her mother and her husband. However, the necessity of this income in Riddell's life, and the reality in how it was to be obtained, becomes clear in the same novel when the narrator states: "It is all very well to take to bookmaking for amusement; but to write for bread, with idiocy gibbering beside you – with death lying in the next room – with thoughts a degree blacker than your ink flowing through your heart! This is no child's play; these are too often the realities of literature as a profession!" (220). The exclamation marks and outspoken statement ask for a more serious approach to the average author during the nineteenth century.

Riddell's opinion on the rejections and bad reviews she received during her lifetime becomes evident when the narrator in *The Rich Husband* states:

To keep driving the eternal quill across the paper – not for fame, not for pleasure, not for money, but for life; to feel that if this article be not approved, that manuscript accepted, the doctor must remain unfee'd, the necessaries proper for the invalid be still unprovided; to write of imaginary scenes of anguish, when, Heaven knows, there may be one more tragical than any you ever dare commit to print enacting before your eyes, and then in after days to turn away sick from the tell-tale paper, because you feel you are making fiction out of reality, opening afresh the bitter fountains of the past, and drawing thereout waters of anguish for the present. And yet the world scoffs at the novelist's occupation, and calls it frivolous, because it deems that we write of things not as they are and were, but as they seem to be; because, misled by its ignorance, it will not believe that

all who take to literature as an occupation, not as a pastime, have, indeed, ‘Learnt in suffering what they teach in song’. (220-21)

The narrator challenges the common view of nineteenth-century authors and shows the hardships of this particular profession. The lengthy, powerful description implies that Riddell may have written this from her personal convictions. In addition, this is also implied when the narrator mentions the moment when “you feel you are making fiction out of reality” (ibid). This parallels with the first quotation in this chapter, since it shows that personal experience of these women was used as an inspiration for their writings.

In *A Struggle for Fame*, the same opinion on the Victorian publishing field is expressed by the scene in which Glenarva visits Mr. Vassett, together with her father. Whilst ignoring Glenarva, Vassett tells her father, “[Society] has an idea that young ladies cannot possess the amount of experience necessary to produce a readable book. For her age your daughter’s style is good, [...] it is, therefore, not impossible that in the course of a few years –” (119), at which point Glenarva exclaims she cannot wait that long. When she states, “Years! And she had thought to commence making money that week, that day, that hour!”, she realises that authorship and publishing are not as easily accessible as she thought, as well as that the plans of maintaining her father’s estate with her newly acquired income will have to wait. The concept of losing her home in Ireland because she cannot get her works published connects to the other two texts, since all three women have to obtain an income through writing in order to provide for someone or something important to them. In addition, this scene in *A Struggle for Fame* implies that average female authors in the nineteenth century did not receive much respect within the publishing world, whilst the other two stories contain examples about the bad opinion of authors outside this world as well.

It is important to note that Riddell, a few months before she passed away in 1906, stated

in an interview: “Looking back I *must* say, as a rule, [the publishers] were all very kind to me. I was too ignorant and heartsore to understand how gracious they were to my simplicity, even more than to my youth” (Black 17). This contrasts with the negative picture all three texts paint of publishers and the female characters who have to deal with them. However, it is unlikely that Riddell dramatised her fiction to the extent that the stories do not resemble her own life, since so many aspects of the texts align with what is known about her. In addition, the hardships that the female characters in the texts experience are known to be applicable to the majority of female authors in the Victorian era (Pykett 26) and thus Riddell’s fiction is not dramatised to the extent that it is unreliable. Onslow suggests that perhaps an interview made Riddell more cautious of her opinions, or that time dulled her memory (7). The latter is likely, since, as I have established in the first chapter, Riddell lived in seclusion for her last twenty years.

In conclusion, in her fiction Riddell’s opinions on female authorship, the Victorian publishing world and settling in England are present through the main female characters as well as the third-person narrator. The hardships the women in these stories endure share similarities with Riddell’s own experiences, which are, for instance, the necessity of an income and using their talent for writing for this. In addition, the harsh reality of the publishing world is depicted through the many rejections and unpleasant encounters with publishers. Since Riddell had to go from publisher to publisher herself, for as long as she lived, her written fiction paints a reliable picture of what it must have been like to be an average female author in the nineteenth century, even though Riddell gave a milder view many years later. Moreover, the manner in which Riddell uses the third-person narrator to express her opinion is apparent. Lengthy descriptions about the profession of authorship are given in which the narrator provides the reader with a critical view of the publishing world and the manner in which authors are treated. Since these texts and their

characters resemble the reality of Riddell's hardships, it is plausible to state that this narrator conveys Riddell's view on the struggles she met with in her professional life.

Chapter 3: Gender Issues and Power Relations in Riddell's Narratives

The hardships Victorian female authors endured can be connected to the idea of gender bias and power relations between men and women. In the previous chapter, I have analysed the struggles of women within the literary field in Charlotte Riddell's novels *The Rich Husband* and *A Struggle for Fame* and in her short story "Out in the Cold". However, the female characters in these texts not only have to prove their abilities within the literary field, they also face prejudices and discrimination within their private lives. There are three main themes that connect to the concept of gender within Riddell's stories. Virginia Woolf's idea that women need a room of their own in order to be able to write is a recurring topic. Even though Woolf wrote her essay at the start of the twentieth century, she describes the Victorian literary field and the role of female authors therein extensively, and a parallel can be drawn between this and Riddell's texts. In addition, the feminist concept of the gaze is present in Riddell's works as well. Laura Mulvey discusses the idea of the male gaze and explains its link to male dominance within society. Textual examples of the concept of the gaze provide the reader with an understanding of power relations within the narratives. Moreover, the opinions of the main female and male characters on marriage are in contrast with each other and this suggests an opposition between men and women in the stories, as well as a certain yearning for individuality by the female characters. Interestingly, by addressing themes which started to be a topic of discussion largely since the twentieth century, Riddell was rather ahead of her time. On the whole, an analysis of these three gender-related themes can provide an insight in the role of women within the narratives.

Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, which is regarded a feminist text that makes a stand for women writers. One of Woolf's main arguments in her essay is the need of an own, private space in order for the female author to fully immerse herself in her work. She states: "If a woman wrote [before or during the nineteenth century], she would have to write in the

common sitting-room. And, as Miss Nightingale was so vehemently to complain—‘women never have an half hour [...] that they can call their own’— she was always interrupted” (99-100).

Therefore, the fact that a woman is always interrupted, because she is not granted privacy, affects her writing. In addition, Woolf has a critical view of the way in which women, and female authors specifically, were regarded in the Victorian era. This becomes clear when she touches upon the fact that many authoresses used a masculine pseudonym: “[Female authors] did homage to the convention, which if not implanted by the other sex was liberally encouraged by them [...], that publicity in women is detestable. [...] Anonymity runs in their blood” (76). In both of Riddell’s novels and her short story this idea is evidently present. For example, in “Out in the Cold”, Mrs. Saridge advises Annabel to stay quiet about her passion for writing, especially to her father: “‘If you *must* write,’ added Mrs. Saridge, ‘do not let anyone know’” (223). Annabel continues to write, but only when the rest of the household is resting: “It was only when night came, and everyone else in the house had retired to rest, that the patient maiden reduced to words those fancies she had been silently evolving in her brain throughout the day” (ibid). Annabel’s nightly writing connects to Woolf’s ideas about the necessity of a private room and the silencing of nineteenth-century female authors. Only when the rest of the house is asleep, is Annabel able to work on what she enjoys most, because only then does she have the privacy she needs and does she escape the judgmental ideas of the society she lives in.

In *The Rich Husband*, Judith’s niece Alice also finds herself writing at night: “The clock had just chimed one quarter to eleven, but still the young aspirant for literary honours was sitting writing; she never dreamt of weariness. Night was the time when phantoms born half of reality and half of ideality in that mysterious world lying dimly in the brain of poets, authors, musicians, and painters, came forth from their hiding places” (402). This suggests that Alice is most inspired at night, when she is not interrupted.

In *A Struggle for Fame*, Glenarva commences writing during the late hours as well. She is unsure about her chosen career path; however, once the household has gone to bed, she is able to have a clear mindset: “‘I will write,’ she said, standing in a flood of moonlight; and, opening her little desk there and then, she began” (225). In addition, in the same novel, the bad opinion of female authors held by society is expressed by Mr. Vassett, a publisher, when he states: “The sooner a stop was put to the whole business [of ladies writing novels] the better for society. How much more suitable the spinning wheel and the working of tapestry” (129). As Woolf claims, the lack of support for authoresses is what pushed them into anonymity. Evidently, Riddell’s texts show that the profession of authoress came with negative prejudices and that the female characters had to be inventive in creating their own private space to write and to escape these prejudices.

Mulvey’s concept of the gaze is focused on the power relations between men and women. She states:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (346)

Therefore, the male gaze upon the female body objectifies the latter in order to provide for the needs of the former. This idea can be retraced in all three of Riddell’s narratives. For example, in “Out in the Cold”, Annabel’s father, Mr. Saridge, is slowly losing his eyesight. The narrator touches upon this in connection to Mr. Saridge’s opinion on female authors: “If when blessed with the sight he objected to female authors – as ‘persons who had unsexed themselves’ – to what portentous dimensions might not his aversion grow when unable to see at all?” (222-3). Mr.

Saridge's gaze on female authors shows the power relations that are present between men and women. Namely, when he looks at a female author, either literally or figuratively, he disregards them as human beings. More specifically, his gaze depersonifies these female authors because of his conceptions of what a woman is supposed to do in society. The fact that Mr. Saridge is literally losing his gaze symbolises the fact that Annabel, after her father dies, pursues her writing career. The loss of his gaze is, in turn, also the loss of power over his daughter and female authors in general. In *A Struggle for Fame*, Mr. Vassett gazes upon Glenarva when she is in his office. At first, this gaze is rather dismissive: "Yet as Mr. Vassett looked his expression changed. She was a child – bah! The notion of that young thing writing! It was too absurd" (117). However, this negative opinion quickly turns around when Vassett becomes aware of Glenarva's feminine features: "The glint of golden hair, the soft curves of the girlish face, the half-eager, half-bashful glance she cast appealingly at him [...] reminded him of a past long gone" (ibid). The manner in which the narrator describes Vassett's thoughts on her hair and her face is objectifying; it suggests that Vassett forgets about Glenarva and looks at her features as independent objects.

This manner of looking upon a woman as an object is also present in *The Rich Husband*, and then especially in the relationship between Judith and her husband Mr. Mazingford. They find themselves in an unhappy and abusive marriage, which is foreshadowed early on in the novel when Mr. Mazingford asks Judith to marry him: "He pulled a chair opposite to her at the question, and taking abrupt possession of it, remained for a moment with hands clasped, and body slightly bent forward, steadfastly regarding her. She had to let her eyes sink under that glance" (97). This shows the power of the male gaze on a woman, as Judith is obliged to surrender. When they get married, Mr. Mazingford uses Judith, and specifically her beauty, to impress his friends. He exhibits her, which is described when the narrator states: "Habited in

purple and fine linen, with sparkling rings on her fingers, and pearls circling her slender throat, she had to sit there, and be shown as the uncommonly fine wife Mr. Mazingford had wedded – as the handsomest woman in Wales, or in England, or anywhere” (147). Therefore, she is used as an object for guests to gaze upon and is presented as the possession of Mr. Mazingford. However, interestingly, the idea of the male gaze is turned around in this particular novel. Multiple times, Judith is described to have a powerful gaze of her own. The first time this occurs, “Mr. Mazingford beheld a look in her face he had never seen previously – a look which she gave him frequent opportunity of analyzing and observing in after-times. It had in it a kind of settled contempt and indomitable defiance, and immovable determination. [...] It was the first thing Judith discovered to have power over him” (153). The idea of a female gaze that overpowers an abusive husband can be considered liberal, especially in the time that Riddell wrote this novel. The power of this gaze returns in the novel when Mr. Mazingford attempts to regain control over her: “He gazed up in her face, and tried with staring steadily at it for a moment, to beat her down; but Judith was not to be beaten down” (240). In this example, the woman and specifically the female gaze is stronger than the man, which is an effective and rather progressive approach to the power issues which are taking place in the novel.

Interestingly, in both *A Struggle for Fame* and *The Rich Husband*, the female characters are opposed to marriage and refusals are not uncommon. The difference in opinion on this between the female and male characters can give the reader an insight into conventional power relations, as well as how these are dismantled. For example, in *A Struggle for Fame*, Mr. Dufford asks Glenarva to marry him, to which she replies, ““Oh! I could not possibly, thank you”” (250), after which she “unceremoniously [repossesses] herself of the hand he had taken in his own” (ibid). A short moment after that, she uses this hand to clutch her dress, “as if the rag of muslin was the only thing left between her and perdition” (252). Glenarva’s need for personal freedom is

evident here and Dufford attempts to conquer this by regarding her as his possible possession. For example, he regards her as an object when he thinks: “There was something to be made of her. [...] Yes; he could mould, and train, and fashion her. It would be a gracious task, a work of love, to cut Glen into the conventional pattern” (252). His perceived dominance over Glenarva is again evident when he makes a plan after her refusal: “Well, all he could do now was to strive to repair his error, get the father on his side, and then, backed by the paternal approval and authority, take an opportunity of again attacking the daughter’s heart” (276). This shows that Dufford sees Glenarva as a person with fewer rights than himself and without a valid opinion. Interestingly, Glenarva’s father does not conform to this idea of the overpowering male. When Glenarva and himself discuss the proposal, he says: “My love, it is your own future you have to give or withhold. [Mr. Dufford] said a great deal [...] which had little or nothing to do with the real matter in hand. Because the real matter is, Glen, whether you like him or could like him. If you do not and could not, there is no more to be said” (281-2). This assertion allows Glenarva to regain some of her freedom and independence, especially since after this utterance she exclaims that she thinks she can make a future for herself by writing (282). This, again, shows her independency and symbolises the empowerment of the female character.

In *The Rich Husband*, Alice regards marriage and her freedom as two opposites as well. When Dr. Duvad proposes to her, she refuses by stating that she wishes to be free for some more time: “I won’t marry just yet. [...] I want to be free. [...] I mean that I wish for a time to be free and independent, and – and able to do as I like; and I won’t marry just yet” (362-3). Interestingly, Duvad respects this decision and they continue their relationship until Alice feels ready to marry. In contrast, in the same novel Judith is often described as the possession of Mazingford. When they are just about to marry, the latter states: “She was to be his, this young, beautiful creature, to have and to hold, to form, exhibit, make a show of. [...] When he was lord

and master over her, when she looked up to him, and acknowledged a higher monarch than herself; when her will was moulded to his will, then, Mr. Mazingford felt the desire of years would be accomplished” (142). This suggests a longing for power by Mazingford and specifically the desire to mould Judith into the woman Mazingford has in mind. However, to a certain extent Judith regains control in this situation. She is outspoken about the reason why she marries him, namely to be able to provide for her invalid sister. This way, Mazingford is forced into a certain submissive position: “Perhaps it was the utter unselfishness of the love which prompted her thus to barter away her freedom, that flung a halo of nobility around the mercenary transaction; perhaps it was the very price she fixed upon herself which made Mr. Mazingford feel he was getting her cheap” (141). In addition, Judith’s father, just as Glenarva’s, is supportive of his daughter’s freedom: “‘No,’ answered Mr. Renelle, and the monosyllable was decidedly uttered; ‘No: I cannot urge her one step along the road to matrimony. I will never force her into it. She shall do in that respect precisely as she pleases. I will use no arguments, no entreaties – she may marry you or not, just as she likes, but I will never force her to be your or any man’s wife – never’” (130). Interestingly, in this passage the male, Renelle, gives power to the female, Judith, and the former is consciously doing so. In turn, this does not only empower Judith but also her father.

Moreover, in the same novel, after two months of being married Mazingford realises Judith has a strong character: “[The] uneasy conviction stole over him, that he had ‘caught a tartar’. Not a virago nor a shrew; not a cunning, manoeuvring woman, nor a vindictive vixen; but a girl of rather under twenty, possessed of an indomitable will and an unconquerable temper; influenced by no child’s fancies, few feminine weaknesses, incapable of being ruled by anybody, or of being won by him” (143-44). His longing “to break the proud spirit, to bend the strong will, to make Judith Mazingford his submissive, dutiful wife” (144) is thus proving to be more

difficult than he initially thought. In turn, this suggests that Judith is still able to keep a certain individuality and power within her abusive marriage. In general, the concept of marriage causes opposition between male and female characters within Riddell's narratives. However, there are certain exceptions to this rule, especially regarding the fathers of these women. In addition, the marital conflict is created by a certain longing for freedom by the female and a desire for power by the male characters.

In conclusion, an analysis of the power relations between male and female characters provides the reader with an insight into the role of women within Riddell's narratives. Firstly, the fact that most of the female characters practice their writing careers at night anticipates Woolf's argument that women need a room of their own. In addition, the negative approach towards female authors by men aligns with Woolf's statement that women were discriminated against in the literary field and, in turn, pushed into anonymity. Secondly, the dominant male gaze, which is present in all three narratives, can be linked to Mulvey's essay. In many instances in Riddell's texts, women are objectified and forced into submission under the powerful male gaze. Interestingly, in some instances the female gaze proves to be more powerful. This suggests a compelling and perhaps even feminist narrative, which can be seen as progressive for the Victorian era. Lastly, the connection of marriage to the loss of freedom and independence, which some female characters make, causes them to refuse proposals. Again, this theme brings forward strong and outspoken female characters within the texts. On the whole, when Riddell's stories are analysed from a gender studies perspective, there is proof for a progressive standpoint within the narratives. This suggests that Riddell was ahead of her time regarding the field of feminism.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how Charlotte Riddell coped with struggles in her private as well as her professional life and how she incorporated these hardships in her literary works. Namely, these conflicts can be retraced in her novels *A Struggle for Fame* and *The Rich Husband* and in her short story “Out in the Cold”. In addition, in these narratives Riddell is progressive towards stereotypical power relations and other gender-related issues.

Riddell had to provide for her invalid mother, and later her unsuccessful husband, by turning to writing as a profession. This was not easy for Riddell and even when she became quite famous, it remained difficult for her to get her works published. Firstly, her gender did not work in her favour: female authors were not very popular within the Victorian literary field. Secondly, the style of her novels, with a City background and its focus on the lower classes of London society, were rather progressive and not favored by the powerful higher classes. In addition, after the peak of Riddell’s career in the 1860s and 1870s, the three-volume novel declined in its popularity and, in turn, the demand for Riddell’s novels decreased as well. On the whole, Riddell’s life is characterised by a constant struggle for income.

In the discussed fiction by Riddell, an autobiographical tone is suggested through the main characters as well as through the third-person narrator. The female characters in the narratives all pursue a writing career and their hardships share similarities with Riddell’s own experiences. Recurring themes are the necessity for an income and the harsh reality of the literary world, including the many rejections the women receive considering their works. This aligns with the fact that Riddell, for as long as she lived, had to go from publisher to publisher to get her works printed. In addition, the third-person narrators in the texts often give lengthy descriptions about, and in turn a critical view of, the life as an author in the Victorian era. It is plausible that the opinions of these narrators parallel with Riddell’s own convictions, since the narratives share

many similarities with the author's life. Therefore, these texts provide an insight into what it must have been like for an authoress to live during the Victorian era.

Moreover, Riddell was progressive in her construction of gender-based power relations and this results in strong female characters in the texts. Virginia Woolf's argument that women need a room of their own to write is anticipated by Riddell's narratives, in which most female authors practice their careers at night. In addition, the women's refusal of proposals and the link of the loss of freedom to marriage which they make, is apparent. Riddell's handling of these concepts shows the individuality and strength the women in the narratives possess. Furthermore, the presence of the gaze demonstrates this as well. Laura Mulvey relates the male gaze to the dominating power relations between men and women and Riddell anticipates on this in a rather progressive manner. Even though in multiple instances the powerful male gaze is present in Riddell's texts, in some cases this idea is also reversed. This results in an overpowering female gaze, which forces the man into submission.

On the whole, Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame*, *The Rich Husband* and "Out in the Cold" can teach the contemporary reader about the hardships of a female author in the Victorian era. All texts provide an insight in the Victorian publishing system and the manner in which women used this phenomenon to provide for themselves and their families. The texts also present a progressive standpoint considering gender-related issues and can therefore be considered rather feminist and ahead of their time. This paper has attempted to establish the above, in order to expand the limited existing research on the role of women within the Victorian literary field.

Further research could explore, perhaps, other forgotten female authors like Riddell and analyse existing parallels or oppositions between their style of writing and personal hardships. In turn, this could provide the contemporary reader with a more complete impression of the lives of Victorian authoresses and their role in society at the time. In addition, multiple works by Riddell

are not easily accessible anymore. It would be interesting to see if her lost works, if retraceable, align with the analysed texts in this paper. Again, this may add to the existing knowledge of Victorian female authors. More extensive research on this topic could then, in turn, restore some of the credibility that these women, including Charlotte Riddell, deserve.

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

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