Refashioning the Domestic Novel: Literary Form and Fanny Fern's Biopolitical[1] Imagination in *Ruth Hall*[2]

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Abstract

Drawing upon the Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (2008, 2018) explanation of the form of early American novels, Emily Steinlight's (2018) concept of "demographic surplus" and Michel Foucault's (1978/2007) concept of "population" and "mechanisms of security," this paper seeks to extend the discussion of the importance of the presence of the population in *Ruth Hall* and Fanny Fern's (1855/1997) imagination of a form of government suitable for mid-nineteenth century America. By doing so, I suggest that *Ruth Hall* can be considered a novel that shares the legacy of the literary tradition that was once believed to be exclusive to male writers.

Keywords: women's writing, American literature, domestic novel, popular fiction, the nineteenth century

Critics writing on Fanny Fern's (1855/1997) *Ruth Hall* identify a wide spectrum of issues that ranges from the flawed ideology of separate spheres and the protagonist's navigation within the male-dominated marketplace (Harris, 2006), her independence and individualism (Warren, 1993b; Temple, 2003; Sánchez, 2000), to literary ownership (Homestead, 2001). However, rarely do they focus on the subtle, yet crucial presence of the book's minor characters and their relation to the protagonist. In her introduction to *Ruth Hall and other writings*, Joyce Warren (1986/2005), one of the few exceptions, helps establish that "the minor characters that appear on the scene—the mantua maker, the boarding house loungers, Mrs. Waters, …are skillfully drawn portraits that simultaneously create a character and make a social comment" and that "the sympathetic characters in *Ruth Hall*— other than Ruth herself, her children, Mary Leon, John Walter, and Horace Gates— are the black servants, Irish laborers, simple farm women, Johnny Galt, and the 'unhonored' firemen" (p. xxviii). According to Warren (1986/2005), these minor characters serve as foils to Ruth's relatives (p. xxviii). By referring specifically to them, Warren focuses attention on this group as central to the understanding of Ruth's situation as a

widow, her maltreatment from relatives as well as those characters who are antagonistic to her.

Based on the context of 19th century female labor and economic value, Karen A. Weyler's (2005) "Literary labors and intellectual prostitution: Fanny Fern's defense of working women" helps further establish such link by pointing out that "a seamstress and a washerwoman" in the tenement who became Ruth's neighbors are, in fact, Ruth's "mirror image" and lucidly explains the context of mid-nineteenth century social and gender distinctions relevant to the understanding of surplus of female labor and mass immigration in light of the protagonist's struggle in the literary sphere (p. 109). However, Weyler only implies how the literary form is related to such similarity between the protagonist and a group of minor characters. Drawing upon Emily Steinlight (2018)'s argument that in crowding the fictional form with "unnecessary figures," literature attempts to figure out not only "alternative modes of perception and narration but also made it possible to imagine collective life in radically revised terms" (p. 11), this paper offers a new reading that helps connect different views on the novel previous critics have put forward and makes explicit how Fern employs a group of minor characters to revise the domestic novel form.

I contend that through the protagonist's changing status from a wife within a household to one virtually without economic support outside of a domestic situation, the novel brings to the fore what Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (2008) called "the problem of population" or the problem of accommodating "the larger category of universal humanity within the smaller category of the nation" (p. 676).[3] By positioning the protagonist in a situation similar to abject groups of population, Fern questions the model of the contractual relation that characterizes the disciplined household based on oppositional differences.[4] Also, she implicitly advances a new model of the head of household, and indeed, an alternative model of biopolitical government based on what Michel Foucault (1978/2007) calls "mechanisms of security," which enable the protagonist, as a representation of population, the ability to circulate freely (p. 64).[5] Doing so, Fern takes up a question that, according to Siân Silyn Roberts (2014), gains significant weight during the time of impending Civil War and was often engaged by mid-nineteenth-century American fiction: "how do we imagine a government that extends its protection to all those people who fall outside the contractual relation of citizen to community?" (p. 128).[6]

By problematizing the contractual household and focusing on the problem of population at work in the novel, I read *Ruth Hall* as derived from the tradition that, according to Armstrong (2006), "tried and, in some cases, notably failed to imagine the nation in familial terms" and which shares similar notions seen in novels published during the mid-nineteenth century such as Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables*, Melville's *Moby Dick,* and

Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (p. 110). Thus, rather than being categorized as a "minor literary work" or one that is among works considered, to borrow Jane Tompkins' (1985) words, "complex and significant in ways *other than* those that characterize the established masterpieces" (p. 126),[7] *Ruth Hall* requires a totally different and more appropriate way of assessing its success, one that actually shows how the novel takes part in the same tradition that often defines masterpieces or mainstream writers.[8]

This essay will develop in three steps. I will initially turn to Armstrong and Tennenhouse's (2008, 2018) explanation of the form of British domestic novels and that of their early American counterparts, as well as Foucault's (1976/2003, 1978/2007) explanation of the "mechanisms of discipline" and "the mechanisms of security" to lay the groundwork for an understanding of how Fern later revises the disciplined households that characterize the domestic novel. Building on Steinlight's (2018) explanation of the politics of "demographic surplus," I will then show the significance of the heterogeneous population group that Ruth later joins, and contend that Fern's focus on such group revises the domestic novel form that traditionally privileges individuals and implicitly underscores that population is central to the community (p. 11). Finally, I argue that Fern employs the literary marketplace, also known as "another site of gender discipline" (Weyler, 2005, p.102) and draws upon the character of John Walter, not only to advance an alternative model of publisher as critics often argue, but more importantly, also to posit a biopolitical government based on the mechanisms of security conducive to the shifting mid-nineteenth century America.

The Domestic Novel, the Contractual Household and the Mechanism of Discipline

To explain how *Ruth Hall* refashions the domestic novel, and thus the household and model of social relations that characterizes such household, I rely on Armstrong and Tennenhouse's (2008) elucidation of the domestic form in The Problem of population and the form of the American novel." They point out that the domestic novel was "peculiarly suited,…, for imagining a nation created one individual at a time. The individual's story would then appear to tell the story of a nation composed of individual heads of household, their children, and other dependents" (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2008, p. 677). Within such household, "rational, self-regulating individuals" thus "enter into contractual relations with one another" (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2008, p. 674). That is, the head of the household offers economic and legal protection to dependent members and their property in exchange for their voluntary submission to his authority in a similar manner that governments have duties to ensure the citizen's security (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2008, p. 677). Such model of the household and social relations is thus "conceptually bound to property"

(Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2018, p. 116) and achieves its coherence by constantly maintaining oppositional difference in order to designate "what is inside from what is outside" (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2008, p. 674).

Working in tandem with such relationship to produce a traditional household of self-governing individuals is what Michel Foucault (1978/2007) terms "the mechanisms of discipline" (p. 55). Serving as a technology that ensures territorial sovereignty up to the classical era, discipline, Foucault (1978/2007) explains, is highly centered, aimed at close and rigorous monitoring of behaviors to the extent that it "breaks down individuals, places, time, movements, actions, and operations" (p. 56) to enable necessary modifications, and emphasizes the enforcement of norms and conduct to maintain order (Foucault, 1978/2007, p. 46). Depending largely on establishing a model of desired behaviors, the operation of the mechanisms of discipline thus draws a line between "the normal" and "the abnormal" and attempts to impose conformity in "people, movements, and actions" (Foucault, 1978/2007, p. 57). Such mechanisms thus confine individuals to their assigned social roles and elicit compliance to sets of conducts considered as standards.

In contrast to the form of the domestic novel that often characterizes the British novel, both Armstrong and Tennenhouse (2018) argue that "early American novels had indeed developed a rather consistent set of rhetorical moves to challenge the assumption that 'property' could provide a stable basis of society" (p. 9). These moves, as both put forward, consist of "dispersal" (the process that takes away the protagonist's personal and material properties that anchor such protagonist to his or her identity) (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2018, p. 11); "population" (the group of minor characters taken as a "basis of the community," rather than merely supporting background individuals) (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2018, p. 11); "conversion" (the staging of an event that enables different characters to function together as a community) (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2018, p. 12); "hubs" ("relay stations" that allow people to forge new relations and continue their movement) (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2018, p. 12) and finally, "anamorphosis" (the novel's presentation of dual perspectives in light of a similar incident to account for diverse groups of population with different backgrounds and views) (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2018, p. 14). By approaching *Ruth Hall* with the notions that Armstrong and Tennenhouse (2018) elaborate, I argue that we can better understand how Fern experiments with the domestic novel form to account for the collective humanity in the novelistic universe.

Drawing upon Tennenhouse and Armstrong's (2008, 2018) explanation of the form of the British domestic novel, the American novel's revision of the former, and Foucault's (1978/2007) notion of the mechanisms of discipline, I will now explain how Fern replicates the structure of the British household that characterizes the British domestic novel in *Ruth Hall* only to later disrupt it.

Initially, Fern (1855/1997), reproduces the disciplined household dominated by Ruth's father, Mr. Ellet, "a man of property" (p. 97). Within this household, Fern shows that the contractual relation is restricting to its self-regulating female members. The short two paragraphs at the beginning of the novel in which Ruth's mother and her sudden death are mentioned in passing emphasizes her immobilized life consigned to self-subordination and silence. As a wife, the mother had a role so limited that Ruth could barely remember much about her. That she often felt "uneasy" and reacted unnaturally in her husband's presence reveals her willing subjection to his authority (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 4). Fern also underscores that such model of submissive womanhood is reproduced in Ruth herself. As a child, Ruth was instructed not to make a noise, but to sit "very still in the corner" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 5). Marking the Ellet household is the production and reproduction of a relationship which circumscribes its female members both emotionally and physically, and which requires them to constantly defer to the authority of its head and the norms it imposes.

To reinforce the consequence for a wife who cannot follow the prescribed role in such contractual household, Fern provides the reader with Mrs. Mary Leon, an acquaintance Ruth met by chance at a hotel where Ruth was staying with her husband Harry. Fern (1855/1997), offers a glimpse into Mrs. Leon's life as a "necessary appendage" (p. 57) to her husband by providing detailed description of his puritan-like strictness in all aspects of life:

> Her husband was a tall, prim, proper-looking person, … extremely punctilious in all points of etiquette, very particular in his stated inquiries as to his wife's and his horse's health, very fastidious in regard to the brand of his wine, and the quality of his venison; maintaining, under all circumstances, the same rigidity of feature, the same immobility of the cold, stony, gray eye, the same studied stereotyped conventionalism of manner (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 55).

His inquiries regarding the health of his wife (interestingly placed alongside that of his property—his horse, wine and venison) point to his concern over monitoring and evaluating details rather than her overall emotional and physical well-being. His decision to leave Mrs. Leon at an insane asylum while he travels to Europe because of her recurring complaints of a "nervous headache" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 56)—a symptom often indicative of difficulties to follow the socially prescribed roles for women, especially in the late nineteenth century—also confirms that he sees her as an object to be managed and regulated by medical authorities when falling short of the standards he establishes.[9] Mrs. Leon's suggestion to Ruth that the latter not impose such loveless contractual relations on her daughters because "[t]he chain is none the less galling, because its links are golden" indirectly underscores how Mrs. Leon regards her life as a

form of captivity despite its material comfort, even before her subsequent confinement in an asylum (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 57).

While introducing this disciplinary household within Ruth's family and that of Mr. Leon, Fern shows its operation in greater depth with the character of Ruth's father-in-law, Dr. Zekiel Hall. When Ruth's daughter, Katy, is tricked into temporarily coming under his care, her existence is arguably reminiscent of that of Ruth's mother, Ruth herself, and Mrs. Leon— a female child captive at the home of her actual grandparents. Indeed, the description of her grandparents' sitting room where Katy is ordered to spend most of her time underscores a sense of restriction that verges on suffocating its young member: "the air of this room is close and stifled, for the windows must be tightly closed, lest some audacious fly should make his mark on the old lady's immaculate walls" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 164). Fern charges the atmosphere with a sense of oppression and hostility to hint that a household which strictly regulates its members at the most detailed levels is both detrimental to their well-being and thus unlivable.

Dr. Hall employs a disciplinary mechanism that aims at managing individuals one at a time and fixes members of the household to an assigned social category of "a good girl" when interacting with Katy (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 178). Together with Mrs. Hall, he attempts to control Katy's mind and body. In contrast to the village children who are "free and fetterless, danc[ing] and shout[ing] at their sports," Katy is instructed to sit immobile "for many an hour" on her "little cramped limbs" in front of her rigid grandparents and reminded that "little girls must be seen and not heard" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 165). At the same time, Mrs. Hall also forces Katy, whom she thinks of as "belong[ing] to her" to do whatever task she ordered (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 237). In addition to their attempt to control Katy's body, the Halls are also shown trying to govern her mind by demanding that Katy should love them more than her mother. When met with refusal, the head of the household readily boxes Katy's ear to enforce compliance. In essence, as with the rigid Mr. Leon who puts his wife in an asylum when her symptoms indicate a failure to comply, Dr. Hall sees Katy as an item of property to be managed in an attempt to turn her into a household member who strictly observes the prescribed roles (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 178).

Contractual Households and Their Operation

Unlike a number of female characters who find life as a wife in a contractual household a form of captivity, Fern pairs Ruth with the finest form of a husband in Harry Hall and renders her marital life blissful. Yet, shortly after Ruth becomes Harry's "little pet of a wife," his fatal illness disrupts her orderly domestic world sustained by Harry's property and economic support (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 97). By the logic of such a household, Ruth automatically becomes the responsibility of her male relatives, all of whom live "in prosperous circumstances" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 97). However, Fern shows that the

contractual relation which seems to guarantee the economic and political protection of its dependent members can be abandoned altogether.

Each male figure in her family contrives a plan to shirk his responsibility to Ruth, despite knowing that it will be difficult for her and her children to survive. Harry's father, Dr. Hall, persuades Ruth's father, Mr. Ellet to withhold any form of help so that he can subsequently assume full control of her children. When granddaughter, Katy, asked him for financial assistance, Mr. Ellet intimidates her to the extent that she mistakes her request for a brazen and demeaning act of theft (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 113). In addition, Ruth's brother, Hyacinth, "the prosperous editor of the Irving Magazine," refuses to give Ruth an opportunity to work as a writer (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 146). Ruth's male relatives seem to make a concerted effort to impoverish her and as Susan Belasco points out, they appear "one-dimensional" and have "no redeeming qualities whatsoever" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. xl). Fern seems to employ such figures as failed family heads to directly question the contractual relation.

Fern also demonstrates that such contractual relation that defines domestic household constricts its members' freedom of association. To reaffirm their identity as a privileged class, they have to consistently repudiate the mass of humanity in the story whom they regard as, to employ Mary Douglas' (1966/2001) words, a "pollution" or "anomaly" that threatens the purity of the propertied caste (pp. 3, 5). This operation is found throughout the story. Dr. Hall's remark on Ruth's Irish workman, Pat Donahue, at the beginning of the story vividly encapsulates the privileged members' repulsion of such group: "I hate an Irishman as I do a rattlesnake. An Irishman is an incomplete biped—a human tower of Babel; he was finished up to a certain point, and there he was left" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 44). Not only does Dr. Hall's description reveal his antagonism toward Irishmen, but it also notably shows his perception of them as having only partial personhood. The animal comparison also underscores his conceptualization of them, to use Ivan Kreilkamp's (2018) description of animals and nonhuman creatures in the realist novel as, "exist[ing] away from the center, at the margins: in forms, embodiments and characterizations that are minor, ephemeral, precarious, short-lived and disadvantaged" (p. 2). As with Dr. Hall, Mrs. Skiddy, a tenement owner, treats her immigrant housekeeper with contempt, referring to her as "that lazy-looking red-faced German girl" and groundlessly criminalizing her by suspecting her of causing "mischief" during her employer's absence simply because she is of a different nationality (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 135). Later, Ruth's friend also readily shows her disdain towards Ruth's new indigent neighbor as reflected in her remark, "Just look at that red-faced Irish girl leaning out the front window on her elbows, and see those vulgar red bar-room curtains" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 99). Fern shows how privileged members of the contractual household disparage population, projecting

otherness onto a group they consider, in Steinlight's (2018) words, "a backdrop for fashioning of personal identity" (p. 19).

Once Ruth loses economic protection and begins her rapid social descent into such a heterogenous group of population, she becomes, to borrow Giorgio Agamben's (1995/1998) terms, "an inclusive exclusion" that their own community needs to include only to reaffirm their privileged position through an oppositional relationship (p. 7). Fern provides several instances that highlight Ruth's demeaning status as an outcast to her family. When her impoverished daughter addresses Ruth's well-to-do cousin as "cousin John," he feels that he "could have wrung the little wretch's neck" and regards Katy's friendly greeting as "provoking" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 121). In the same vein, Hyacinth who "recently married a rich and fashionable wife," refuses to associate with Ruth for fear of tarnishing his caste (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 100). Her cousin Leila, also wishes that Ruth "would go off into the country, or somewhere" because her husband, Snyder, who is "connected with the Tidmarshes, and that set" might be disdainful of the notion that Ruth has joined the working class (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 121). Even Ruth's unnamed friend, who was initially planning to visit her, abruptly changes her mind upon seeing the poor condition of Ruth's boardinghouse, claiming that "if Ruth Hall has got downhill so far as this, I can't keep up her acquaintance" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 99). Fern reveals that the need of Ruth's family members to constantly maintain such oppositional relationships renders them averse to Ruth and her daughters whom they regard as outsiders within their own community.

Becoming the One among the Many[10]

While the first third of the novel appears to present Ruth's life as a protagonist in the domestic novel with the population as merely part of an indistinguishable multitude,[11] the remainder of the book seems to focus on Ruth as one among the nameless many, shifting the population to the foreground of the reader's attention. Once abandoned by the two contractual households which were supposed to offer Ruth a social position as a daughter or daughter-in-law, she is rendered virtually homeless and verging upon the possibility of becoming part of mass life with no property or economic protection. Readers may observe how the shift in Ruth's concerns—from those at the story's beginning which represent aesthetic tastes hinted at in the way she brightens her home with her natural talent to those related to simple basic needs and matters of sheer survival—underlines her abrupt transition.[12] This is further highlighted by the fact that she cannot be with one of her daughters due to the lack of means to sustain her family. This dramatic change of status is poignantly marked by the fact that after Ruth's father-in-law virtually refuses to support her, Fern for the first time provides a full description of the nameless characters populating the crowded tenement opposite Ruth's place, a group that makes only unobtrusive

appearances prior to Ruth's social descent, as if to imply that the boundary that previously marked Ruth as privileged and separate from mass humanity no longer exists.

Despite a journalistic writing style that Fern, (1855/1997) herself acknowledges is intended to avoid "long introductions and descriptions" (p. 1),[13] she devotes nearly one full chapter, paragraph after paragraph, to precisely and meticulously detailing a close-up view of the politically disenfranchised life of those abandoned by the contractual household as seen through the windows of each floor of a deteriorating building in Ruth's new neighborhood:

> Opposite was one of those large brick tenements, let out by *rapacious* [emphasis added] landlords, a room at a time at *griping* [emphasis added] rents, to *poor* [emphasis added] emigrants and others, who were *barely able to* [emphasis added] prolong their lease of life from day to day. At one window sat a tailor, with his legs crossed, … cutting and making coarse garments for the small clothing-store in the vicinity, whose Jewish owner *reaped all* [emphasis added] the profits. At another, a pale-faced woman, with a handkerchief bound round her *aching* [emphasis added] face, bent over a steaming wash-tub, which a little girl of ten, *staggering* [emphasis added] under the weight of a basket of damp clothes was stringing them on lines across the room to dry. At the next window sat a *decrepit old* [emphasis added] woman, feebly trying to soothe in her palsied arms the wailings of a *poor sick* [emphasis added] child. And there, too, sat a young girl, from dawn till dark, scarcely lifting that pallid face and weary eyes—stitching and thinking, thinking and stitching. God help her! (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 111).

Why does Fern suddenly shift her attention to those noted by Alex Woloch (2003) as "different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe," who barely have a presence earlier? (p. 13).

To address this question, Steinlight's argument *in Populating the novel: Literary form and the politics of surplus life* (2018) is relevant. Steinlight (2018) contends that nineteenth century literature renders the figures in crowds and masses "not just perceptible but elemental to narrative" (p. 19). As she elaborates, by drawing upon such figures, novelists call for a way to "accommodate human life on an expanding scale" and "imagining the future of common existence" among heterogeneous population (Steinlight, 2018, pp. 11-12). Fern's very focus on this group reveals her concern for, to borrow Armstrong & Tennenhouse's (2008) words, "the problem of population" (p. 676). Rather than presenting the collective of humanity as perceived by Ruth's relatives and friends from privileged class, Fern's use of adjectives underscoring

their destitute status shows her sympathy. In doing so, Fern refuses to see them as "a phobic object" as has often been the case with opinions of crowds (Steinlight, 2018, p.19), and instead implicitly calls for a revision of the model of the household to include such unprotected groups and a different technique of population management.

By removing Ruth from her household at the beginning of the second half of the novel and aligning her predicament with the excluded group, Fern stresses the humanity that both groups share. At the beginning of the novel, Fern allows the reader a contrasting view of Ruth, who "would sit at that little window," as the future bride of a respectable propertied man (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 3), and in a later scene with Ruth as a property-less widow in a boarding house, "[sitting] down at the small window to watch for Katy" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 111). Expanding on her misery, Fern juxtaposes the latter image with each window "full of pale, anxious, care-worn faces—never a laugh, never a song—but instead, ribald curses, and the cries of neglected, half-fed children" in the tenement opposite (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 111). Similarly, Fern puts Ruth's cousin, John, a young doctor who had previously scorned Ruth, in the same dire financial predicament that Ruth faces, living in a boarding house and finding himself struggling to keep his medical career alive, and himself economically afloat (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 257). By showing that a member of the privileged class can slip into the opposite side due to contingency, Fern implicitly challenges the social categorization that separates the two.

By aligning Ruth's situation with that of the population, Fern makes a case that this group has always been the fundamental constituent of society. As the novel was written during a time of demographic, social and economic upheaval that significantly affected the make-up of society, it is no accident that Fern occasionally inserts the presence of German and Irish characters in addition to other underprivileged and vulnerable groups such as poor women and children and the sick in the novel. Attempting to flee the famine that plagued their country in 1845-1849, a large number of impoverished Irish emigrated to the United States and took "the lowest-paying, most menial, least secure jobs" and accounted for almost half the total number of immigrants into the country (Anbinder, 2016, p. 149). As Weyler (2005) notes, the US economic depression during the years 1837-39 together with mass immigration left a large "surplus of female workers" (p. 104). Alice Kessler-Harris (as cited in Weyler, 2005) also points out that due to the ready availability of labor, wages generally decreased while costs of living increased, thus adding to the economic burdens on a group left to subsist on their own (p. 104). With significant change in the fabric of the American society, as Roberts (2014) argues, "the eighteenth-century mechanisms for social good—sympathy, the contract, compassion, and so on—seemed less likely to succeed as models for social cohesion" (p. 116). Fern thus employs the protagonist as a member of a population to argue for an alternative

model of household and a government that cares for collective humanity and enables their free circulation.

Ruth's Navigation of the Literary Marketplace

As Ruth attempts to become a writer, her navigation of the literary marketplace shows that the structure of the world in which editors govern writers and oversee submissions is analogous to that of the domestic household, a system Weyler (2005) called "the paternalism of the publishing industry" and "another site of gender discipline" (pp. 100, 102). In this sense, Ruth's struggle for economic freedom as a beginning writer virtually mirrors her predicament as a woman confined to the domestic sphere. Such parallelism reveals that Fern not only addresses "the problem of population" (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 2008, p. 676) but also attempt to reformulate the head of the household, and by extension, the mode of government by positing the model of an alternative editor. She initially draws upon two instances of editors who hire Ruth at an early career stage to emphasize how such a disciplinary model restricts their members and fails to allow them to circulate freely.

Ruth's first editor, Mr. Lescom, owner of a newspaper appropriately named, The Standard, is characterized by "tyrannical benevolence" and finds its resonance in the contractual household where Ruth was once a member (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 190). His management of his publishing house breathes life into Foucault's (1978/2007) explanation of the mechanisms of discipline (pp. 44-46). Rather than giving Ruth the liberty to create her best quality work, Lescom forces her to follow his exhausting orders, specifically determining the length and number of articles that Ruth is to write per week. When Ruth falls short of his imposed requirements, he insists on conformity, ignoring the suitability of the topic, the content, as well as the amount of time and energy each task requires. At the same time, Lescom takes advantage of Ruth by paying a sum not proportionate to the value of her work. The contract he forces Ruth to make with him— one in which "*[f]riendship* has nothing to do with business" and "a bargain is a bargain " (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 189) — essentially replicates the oppositional relationship that defines the contractual household in which Ruth's father has complete emotional authority over her mother and Ruth herself.

Fern (1855/1997) shows that Lescom's exacting requirements and management pose harm to Ruth physical and mental health:

> Scratch-scratch-scratch, went Ruth's pen; the dim lamp flickering in the night breeze, while the deep breathing of the little sleepers was the watchword, *On*! to her *throbbing brow and weary fingers* [emphasis added]. One o'clock—two o'clock—three o'clock—the lamp burns low in the socket. Ruth lays down her pen, and pushing back the hair from her forehead, leans faint and exhausted against

> the window-sill, that the cool night-air may fan *her heated temples*… [emphasis added]. A sweet peace steals into *her troubled heart, and the overtasked lids* [emphasis added] droop heavily over *the weary eyes* [emphasis added]. (pp. 160-161)

Ruth is so exhausted that she barely has the ability to toil further. Fern's detailed description of the different parts of Ruth's body emphasizes her weariness and hints that the work is breaking her down. The use of repetition to describe her act of writing and the passing of the time ("scratch-scratch-scratch" and "one o'clock-two o'clock-three o'clock") also underscores how a supposedly creative and subjective work is turned into a tedious and backbreaking struggle (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 160). In essence, rather than a business partner, Ruth is treated as Lescom's human property with whom he enforces labor and extracts economic value. At the same time, Lescom's refusal to advance the payment Ruth desperately needs underscores his failure as a publisher to those working under his wing. By doing so, he puts the life of Ruth's daughter, Nettie, who is sick, at risk— a decision reminiscent of Dr. Hall's who dismissively refuses to care for his late granddaughter, Daisy, despite his full ability to help.

If Mr. Lescom represents the failed model of the editor, Fern employs the character of Mr. Tibbetts, Ruth's editor at The Pilgrim to stress how he poses a further threat to Ruth's career prospects. Not only does Tibbetts pay Ruth a meagre remuneration, but he also impedes her circulation by forbidding her from leaving his establishment and threatening to violate her intellectual rights and property should she do so. When Ruth opts for more promising work as a writer for John Walter, he vows to "get out a cheap edition of [Ruth's] articles, and spoil the sale of [her] book" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 202). Both editors' management of their writers reveals a top-down relation and their desire to, as Homestead (2001) succinctly puts it, "control the reproduction and circulation of [Ruth's] newspaper's sketches" (p. 221). Fern emphasizes that working under these two editors, Ruth, though a very talented writer, is barely able to support herself. Failure of their hierarchical way of managing those working within their respective publishing houses bears resemblance to the mechanisms of discipline.

Fern's Biopolitical Model of the "Household"

While presenting Lescom and Tibbets as editors whose oppressive management fails Ruth, Fern reformulates the model of editor, and thus proposes an alternative mode of government, that ensures Ruth's circulation through the character of John Walter. To understand how Fern refashions such a model to directly deal with the problem of population at large, I find helpful Foucault's (1978/2007) elucidation of a mode of biopolitical government based on the "mechanisms of security" that emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century to address the contradictory notion of the town which has the right to

govern itself yet is only free and autonomous under territorial sovereignty (p. 64). Rather than defining population as collective groups of subjects inhabiting a territory and depending on sovereign will to "take life or let live" similar to a government based on the mechanisms of discipline, Foucault (1976/2003) suggests that a biopolitical government based on security regards a population as living beings bound to various factors, aiming "to make live and to let die" (p. 241). Its duties include ensuring the overall well-being of its population and enabling their circulation, filtering the good from the bad and making its best effort to allow their continual movement from one place to another while simultaneously preventing potential threats that might compromise its flow (Foucault, 1978/2007, p. 65). Unlike a government based on the mechanisms of discipline which constantly and rigorously regulates individuals, a security government does not impose such relationship of submission which forces self-subjugation to an authority.

It is in the character of Walter that Fern personifies the biopolitical government for which Foucault later provides the theoretical vocabulary. Fern, (1855/1997) initially marks Walter's difference from Ruth's oppressive father, and the authoritative Mr. Leon by showing that he respects his wife's opinion and converses with her on equal terms (p.181). In contrast to Lescom and Tibbetts, Walter treats Ruth as a part of his network of affiliation and thus a potential business partner in the fullest sense of the term. The contract he establishes with Ruth, characterized as "partly business and partly friendly reasons," attests to his commitment to mutual collaboration and benefits (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 183). To highlight Walter's conviction which goes beyond the concern over the quality of Ruth's work, Fern (1855/1997) emphasizes that he cares for Ruth's physical well-being and is troubled by the unreasonable demands on her by Lescom and Tibbets:

> […] [S]he now writes for The Standard, and The Pilgrim, four pieces a week for each; eight pieces in all; that is too much work for her to begin with; she cannot do herself justice; she ought not to write, at the outside, more than two pieces a week; then she could polish them up, and strengthen them, and then render them as nearly perfect in execution as they are in conception (p. 181).

This concern is further indicated by his attention to the "general comfortless appearance" of Ruth's room as well as "the little bowl of bread and milk" Ruth and her daughter have to sustain themselves upon his short visit (Fern, 1855/1997, pp. 209-210). To discourage readers from thinking that Walter might treat Ruth as a separate case because of her special talent as a writer, Fern temporarily shifts from an omniscient point of view to that of Walter to highlight his sincerity towards Ruth and emphasize that he regards Ruth as one among

many struggling writers. He is well aware that "[i]nexperienced writers seldom get more than a mere pittance" and that Ruth needs sufficient time to relax "as every writer needs" (Fern, 1855/1997, pp. 181, 184). Such concern for writers in his publishing house or even those elsewhere, as well as his effort to remunerate them fairly reflects the mode of management that tries to both maximize the writer's capacity for creative work and their circulation, while minimizing the potential risk of poverty and starvation.

Instead of strictly overseeing the production and reproduction of Ruth's work like Lescom and Tibbetts, Walter provides her with ample freedom that enlivens Ruth's creative spirit. He allows her the liberty to write "on any subject, and of any length" and arranges for the payment she deserves (Fern, 1855/1997, p.184). His request of only one article a week highlights his intention to make working conditions more favorable to Ruth's physical and mental health and shifts her concern from having enough energy to focus on a demanding amount of work within a limited time to meticulously refining craft of writing. In fact, after Ruth signs a contract with Walter, no information is given regarding the details of his instructions concerning Ruth's work. Such omitted description of his role in this regard further points to his intention to serve more as a facilitator than as an editor who imposes control over the way his writers operate. As with a biopolitical government based on an apparatus of security, Walter only intervenes when necessary and beneficial to Ruth, such as when he deals with Lescom on Ruth's behalf to ensure that she avoids situations that place her at a disadvantage. He also proposes that Ruth works for him for only one year so that she could benefit from competitive offers from other prospective employers once better known (Fern, 1855/1997, p.188). In this sense, Walter does not simply provide "the protection of influential male publishers" or "intervene in Ruth's life in more personal ways" as Martha J. Cutter (1999, p. 37) points out. He offers Ruth the freedom of mobility within his publishing house and, more significantly, enables her to circulate freely in the literary marketplace.

Scholars of the novel often discuss how Walter helps Ruth progress in the literary marketplace (Sánchez, 2000; Temple, 2003; Weyler, 2005). There is, however, much less focus on the brief yet illuminating interaction between Ruth and Walter at the end of the novel where both contemplate Ruth's literary success as she is on her way to a new home. This scene, I would argue, is pivotal to the understanding of Fern's proposal of an alternative model of relationship and household through Walter and, more importantly, highlights in novelistic terms an important aspect of a government based on security that Foucault could only theorize:

> One of the greatest luxuries of true friendship is the perfect *freedom one feels* [emphasis added], irrespective of the presence of another, to indulge in the *mood* of the moment—*whether that mood be grave*

> *or gay, taciturn or loquacious, the unspeakable deliciousness of being reprieved from talking at a mark, hampered by no fear of incivility or discourtesy* [emphasis added]. Ruth had found this a great charm in the society of Mr. Walter, who seemed perfectly to understand and *sympathize with her varied moods* [emphasis added] (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 271).

Walter allows Ruth the liberty to be spontaneous rather than forcing her to align her thoughts and emotions with his in the way that Ruth's father, Mr. Leon, Mr. Tibbets and Lescom do. At the narrative level, Fern slows down the fast progression of the plotline and takes the time to set forth the different moods Ruth experiences as she reflects on the friendship that she has developed with Walter and his unconditional acceptance of each different frame of mind she expresses. His sympathy towards Ruth is not confined to only those sentiments that please him. Ruth's emphatic remark, "But then, if Mr. Walter were honest, if he *really* felt such a brotherly interest in her, how sweet it would be to have him for a brother, a—real, warm-hearted brotherly brother, such as she has never known," highlights this quality of being emotionally attuned to Ruth (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 186). Such affinity, entirely lacking in her brother Hyacinth, is central to a viable model of the head of a household.

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While left as an outcast member of her community, Fern shows that being among the group of population is an unintended benefit. Once Ruth becomes part of the population, it is such group of minor characters that readily extend emotional support and sympathy to her and her children. Ruth's Irish nursery mate, Biddy M'Pherson, unconditionally offers to work for her without wages, and when Ruth is unable to pay for her board, reaffirms that she will occasionally visit Ruth (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 75). The conversation between Betty and Gatty, the two African American servants at Ruth's cousin's house, also reveals their sincere concerns about Ruth's situation as a widow with a young family (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 102). In a similar vein, Mr. Bond, a stranger living in Ruth's boarding house promptly steps in and provides sick Nettie with homeopathic remedies that help her recover (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 162). Having destabilized the system of contractual relation anchored by property, Fern reveals a new form of horizontal relationship extended to Ruth by diverse population[s] after she undergoes, to borrow Armstrong and Tennenhouse's (2018) term, "conversion" (p. 12).

To understand the new relationship that Ruth forms outside the household, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1980/2005) notion of the rhizome is helpful. In contrast to the hierarchical relations which fix one to a specific position, the rhizome is defined by multiplicity and within it, one can connect to another boundlessly and

without restriction (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2005, pp. 7-8). As a result, the rhizomatic model is that of "alliance" rather than "filiation," and "has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2005, p. 25). Characterized by decentered and horizontal relationship, no unit of a rhizome is more important than another and is thus replaceable once disconnected (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2005, p. 9). In essence, the rhizome embodies the notion of the crowd as opposed to individuals subsumed under oppositional relation.

Unlike the way Ruth's relatives and friends regard and treat those outside their purview in an oppositional relationship, Ruth is also able to identify and connect with the population. By taking up a career as a writer and becoming a member of the population herself, Ruth indirectly forges a new form of relationship beyond the immediate but restricted circle of her household and the community in which she was deeply embedded. Ruth is able to, in Gale Temple's (2003) words, find "extended community" in the "mass readership that feels the same way about the social realm as [she] does: that it is terrifying, fraught with others who dislike them and what they represent, want to hold them back, want to annihilate them so that their own tastes and desire can ascend" (p. 134). As with *the Scarlet Letter*'s Hester Prynne who becomes a connecting point to those neglected and left outside the exclusive protection of a Puritan home headed by a dominant male figure (Roberts, 2014, p. 137), Ruth functions like a hub or a central point which links different members of the audience, particularly afflicted women and children neglected by the contractual relation. She offers understanding and consolation through the shared personal experience that she discussed in her articles. Homestead (2001) notes that by not presenting the content of Ruth's writing but instead providing the various responses it elicits, Fern stresses Ruth's "true nature" as reflected by her readers (pp. 226-227). However, I would argue that such move also significantly emphasizes the diverse new affiliations that Ruth is able to establish once outside the limited community of the contractual household.

At the same time, Fern shows that Ruth's reaction to each letter reveals her regard for her audience and is not based on oppositional difference that produces subordination and inferiority but instead is inclusive of all in need of comfort. As Jennifer Harris (2006) mentions, Ruth "does not counsel pity," but "promotes a form of sympathetic identification that necessitates action and accountability" (p. 355). As Ruth's writing shows, she "describe[s] so feelingly the other side of the picture" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 265). Learning that one of her readers, Mary Andrews, is an orphan, an unloved wife of an alcoholic and a soon-to-be mother, Ruth plans to reach out by responding immediately. It is only when she meets with antagonism and hostility such as that of William Stearns (a figure reminiscent of Katy's oppressive grandfather) that Ruth decides to withhold communication (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 214). Many responses from her

readers affirm her sympathetic understanding for "the poor, the sorrowing and the dependent" and "a tender love for helpless childhood" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 213), and her encouragement for her male audience to be "a better son, a better brother, a better husband, and a better father" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 235). In essence, Ruth's articles offer an alternative form of relationship outside the household.

A number of scholars argue that the picture of Ruth's newly acquired bank stock officially announces her economic status as a propertied woman. Additionally, such grand visual presentation, I would argue, contrasts sharply with Ruth's detached emotion and humility, reinforcing the fact that she does not regard her newly acquired property as a fact that anchors or forms her identity in an oppositional relation. It is thus no surprise that she is "so little elated" by it and instructs her daughters not to reveal her identity as the pseudonymous Floy (Fern, 1855/1997, pp. 247, 270). However, with Walter's remark that "[l]ife has much of harmony yet in store for [Ruth]," such image is related more closely, I would argue, to Ruth's new status as a subject with greater mobility (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 272). Through Walter, Fern suggests that such management based on the mechanisms of security allows Ruth possible future identities that promise peace, freedom of circulation and domestic contentment.

If Ruth Hall's as an independent woman at the end of the novel marks her as the beginning of a more adaptable subject made possible by "a biopolitical government" represented by Walter, Fern (1855/1997) seems to develop such notion in greater depth within the character of Nettie. Although described as "Ruth second, in face, form and feature" (p. 239), Fern, (1855/1997) marks Nettie as fundamentally distinct from her self-regulating mother as well as her sister Katy as Nettie is free of the rigid imposition of self-mastery. Fern (1855/1997)'s reference to Nettie as "a chatterbox," points to her lively and free spirit (p. 249). Despite sharing many of Ruth's qualities, Nettie also embodies those that Ruth only develops much later in the literary marketplace. That is, Nettie is not only "loving generous, sensitive, and noble-hearted," like Ruth, but is also "courageous, impulsive, independent, irrepressible" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 254). While Susan K. Harris (1992) argues that "independent" is "the keyword" for Nettie (p. 126), I contend that the quality of being "impulsive," –mentioned twice in the novel— also marks Nettie's unique quality as a new female subject –one that is never fixed or subsumed under certain norms or rules of behavior (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 246). Nettie's suggestion to Katy to "strike" the grandmother who beats her harshly and her declaration that she wants to "cut grandma's head off" stress how Nettie refuses to obey the norm-bearing figure (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 246). Fern's (1855/1997) description of Nettie as being "a little bright fairy" (p. 234) and "incorrigible" and having "her own queer ways" further underlines her

spontaneous, untamed vitality and non-conformist nature (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 247). In essence, Nettie seems to share qualities that render her a similar figure to *The Scarlet Letter*'s Pearl and Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. According to Roberts (2014), Pearl is endowed with "mutability," or a "capacity to be an altogether different entity depending on place, occupation, or circumstance," while Topsy serves as an "animating presence who cannot be disciplined without first undergoing a sentimental transformation at the hands of little Eva" (pp. 128, 129).

Towards the end, the fact that Ruth continues to maintain her status as an inclusive exclusion to her family and removes herself from her community to settle in a new home in a different part of the country indirectly marks the model of household, and by extension, the model of the nation, as exemplified by her family as not sustainable to Ruth.[14] As Ann D. Wood (1971) notes, Ruth's departure is "presumably to conquer wider fields, and there is a sense that she is taking farewell of her own past roles as sentimental orphan, loving wife and suffering widow, as well as of her husband's memory" (p. 22). Her visit to Harry's grave and her attention to "a vacant place left by [his] side" (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 272) reinforces Harry's quality as a "noble" husband who enables Ruth's free circulation as a wife despite a life bound to property (Fern, 1855/1997, p. 67). Nevertheless, Fern casts doubt on such contractual relationship as a suitable model of household and the nation, through the contingency of Harry's sudden death and proposes an alternative to such model in the character of Walter. This rare, substitute male figure shares the same noble qualities as Ruth's late husband, Harry, yet also supports her independence through his management style akin to the mechanisms of security that characterize biopolitical government.

Reading the novel in view of Armstrong and Tennenhouse's (2008, 2018) explanation of the British domestic novel form and its American counterpart, Emily Steinlight's (2018) notion of surplus population, and considering Foucault's (1976/2003, 1978/2007) concept of government based on the mechanisms of discipline and security, we see that Fern implicitly problematizes the model of the contractual relationship and household that characterizes the British novel form. In portraying a "domestic tale" protagonist initially secured and sheltered within the comfort of a contractual home only to later disperse her family and place her among members of the population, Fern deliberately breaks with the previous domestic tradition that celebrates property as a safeguard and essentially calls for a revision of such model of contractual relation to include the diverse groups of population left outside the household. The text, to borrow Steinlight's (2018) words describing a similar context, is thus one that "animate[s] a vast and heterogeneous human aggregate that a contractual model of society could no longer govern" (p. 3). Through her thought experiment with the characters of John Walter, Ruth Hall, and

subsequently, Ruth's daughter Nettie, Fern is able to advance an alternative model of government and subject that is more conducive to America as the country underwent socio-political changes.

Reading *Ruth Hall* through critical and theoretical lenses, I agree with Joyce Warren (1993c) that "the traditions of women's writing should be regarded not as subordinate to the tradition of male individualist fiction" (p. ix). However, I see *Ruth Hall* as part of Fern's oeuvre beyond an "existing parallel to [the latter]" as Warren (1993c) suggests (p. ix). Its subtle engagement with the questions of governmentality, nation and nation-building through the contingency within Ruth's household and later in the literary marketplace makes its concerns similar to novels written by prominent American male authors in the 1850s. Thus, rather than a novel that constitutes a separate heritage, *Ruth Hall* arguably has a firm position within the same wide scope of literary tradition where many prominent male writers of Fern's time were thought to have an exclusive place.

Footnotes

The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewers and language editor of *Thoughts* for their suggestions for improvement. Thanks are also due to Dr. Ingo Peters and Ajarn Thomas Catucci for providing careful and detailed feedback in the earlier versions of this paper.

[1.] The term "biopolitical imagination" is used in the title of the introductory chapter in Emily Steinlight's (2018) *Populating the Novel: Literary Form and the Politics of Surplus Life*. Drawing upon Thomas Malthus' theory of population that an ever increasing demographic inevitably overwhelms society's ability to provide sustenance, Steinlight uses the term to refer to how the novelistic form exposes a situation where the "accumulation of life perpetually surpass[es] society proper" (p. 3).

[2.] *Ruth Hall* is an autobiographical novel of Fanny Fern (pseudonym of Sara Payson Willis), which portrays the life of a middle-class protagonist who became impoverished after the death of her husband and abandonment by her family. The novel details her struggle as a writer in the literary sphere to sustain her family and her subsequent success with the help of the publisher John Walter.

[3.] Armstrong and Tennenhouse (2008) explain that Foucault differentiates the notion of "population" from "other concepts of collective humanity" (p. 684). Foucault (1978/2007) states "The population is not, then, a collection of juridical subjects in an individual or collective relationship with a collective will. It is a set of elements in which we can note constants and regularities even in accidents, in which we can identify the universal of desire regularly producing the benefit of all, and with regard to which we can identify a number of modifiable variables on which it depends" (p. 74).

[4.] In such relationship based on oppositional difference, the dominant group sees the less privileged in antagonistic terms and has to constantly produce otherness to secure their privileged position. In *"Society Must Be Defended,"* Foucault (1976/2003) refers to such operation as an "internal racism," which is one that, rather than being directed against its outside enemy, "society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products. This is the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization" (p. 62).

[5.] Throughout the paper, I use the terms "circulate" and "circulation" in the same sense as Michel Foucault (1978/2007, p. 49) in his book *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*. Foucault (1978/2007) employs the terms "in the very broad sense of movement, exchange, and contact,

as form of dispersion, and also as form of distribution" (p. 64) and characterizes safe circulations of population as a goal of the mechanism of security (Foucault, 1978/2007, pp. 49, 65).

[6.] Credit is due to Sian Silyn Roberts (2014) whose chapter "Population and the Limits of Civil Society in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*" in *Gothic Subjects: The Transformation of Individualism in American Fiction, 1790-1861* offers an insightful discussion of the problem of population.

[7.] Herman Melville (as cited in Warren, 1993a) remarks to a contributor in the United States Review in 1851 about what he considers a "good writer": "Let him write like a man, for then he will be sure to write like an American." Such notion encapsulates the sentiment towards what is considered "canons" during the mid-nineteenth century (p. 1). In *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, F. O. Matthiessen (1941/1968) named the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman as "masterpieces" which inaugurate what he calls "a renaissance" during the years 1850-1855 during which *Ruth Hall* (1855) was first published (Fern, 1855/1997, p. vii). For feminist critics who highlight how women's writing was treated as a separate American tradition, see Nina Baym (1978)'s *Women's Fiction: A guide to novels by and about women in America, 1820-1870*; Nina Baym (1981)'s Melodramas of beset manhood: How theories of American fiction exclude women authors; Joyce Warren (1993a)'s Introduction: Canons and canons fodder; and Jane Tompkins (1993)' *Sensational designs: The cultural work of American fiction, 1790-1860*.

[8.] I argue that the approach of drawing upon Armstrong (2006) and Armstrong and Tennenhouse's (2008, 2018) works and focusing on how Fern revises the novel form allows readers to move beyond the categories of "popular fiction" and "canonical works."

[9.] Such symptom of nervousness is common in the medical discourse of the late nineteenth century which, according to Joel Pfister (1991), "reflects professionalization of gynecology just beginning to gear up in the 1840's" (p. 37). I see Mr. Leon decision as an attempt to "normalize" his wife in the same vein that Pfister (1991) finds the doctor-husband who put his wife in a secluded house due to her "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's the "Yellow Wallpaper" (p. 37).

[10.] Credit is due to Alex Woloch (2003) for his title, *The one vs. the many: Minor characters and the space of the protagonist in the novel*, from which I derived this section's name.

[11.] According to Armstrong (2006), the domestic novel's task is "to rewrite [the domestic woman] as a category that women would want to occupy and men to wed and be with but not occupy" (p. 104).

[12.] Gale Temple (2003) points out that as a wife, Ruth demonstrates taste and refinement in the way she decorates the new home she shares with her husband and that she displays the skills of one who is an artist by nature (pp. 140-141). However, Ruth's concern for refinement and beauty completely shifts once she is outside the home.

[13.] The fact that Fern not only uses the novel form, but one with the writing style akin to serial fiction with short chapters which move at a fast pace also underscores her decision to use the form that is implicitly, according to Steinlight (2018), "a material effect and medium of the mass population through which it circulates" (p. 10).

[14.] Temple (2003) sees Ruth's leaving for a new home as "tragic in ways similar to the forced isolation she suffers throughout the novel" (p. 150). However, I argue that Ruth's departure significantly highlights the failed model of the household and relationship that her family demonstrates.

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