

The Ideal Situation in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*: A Feminist Viewpoint

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Abstract—this research provides an insight into American women's lives and the historical incidents in the nineteenth century. Within the nineteenth century, there was absence of equality between women and men. In nineteenth-century society, men were accepted to be stronger than ladies, both physically and mentally. This research strengthens the existing theory about women's writing. It can also be used as a starting point in further research to obtain more perfect women's writing research results. Via a context-oriented technique, our research plans to investigate the effective ways through which Ruth fought against patriarchal society to achieve her freedom and her dreams from feminist theoretical viewpoints. According to the analysis, *Ruth Hall* is the public expression of rage by a feminist and is used as a political-strategic instrument. She believes that God gave women the right to be intelligent and acquire talent so that, as Fanny Fern has, they should be able to use this ability by writing. The novel was willing to clarify how some females were able to resolve the injustice they were left with.

Index Terms—domesticity, feminism, gender, self-reliance, social class

I. INTRODUCTION

Female writers have the power to empower other women and influence history. The challenges that they faced as writers and as women in the nineteenth century generally came from critics who “did not believe that women could express more than half of life” (Showalter, 1985, p. 79). These writers typically spoke out against the patriarchal society and the traditional gender roles that women were forced upon. According to Tongra (1995), Fanny Fern was mainly a social critic who stood firmly for such causes as women's rights, women's education, and equal opportunity for all, regardless of gender, age, and ethnicity. Joyce Warren (1994) claims that “Ruth Hall was a revolutionary book because it threatened to subvert the male-dominated power structure of society by suggesting that women get some money for themselves” (p. 129). Ruth slowly claws back pride and power, as the nineteenth-century women's fiction attempts to persuade women that they can recreate themselves (Harris, 1991). As a widow, Ruth struggles to get any good work. The frustrations are vividly portrayed in the novel, from the low wages for skilled workers and home sewing work to the complicated application procedure for a school teaching post.

The text negotiates these values to encourage female resistance and improve women's role in nineteenth-century society. Marginalization places women at the margins of society, while resistance transpires when new strategies found in thinking, and living with others. Ruth's resistance is a tool to revolt against unfair social norms and traditions. Nineteenth-century culture strategically used fear as a weapon to oppress and marginalised women. The feminist proposals “expressed in the debate some of the major pending issues of feminism, such as diversity and multiple forms of combined discrimination” (Leon, 2002, p. 27). Friedan (1963) states that “women frameworks and language is used to express their economic, social, political and sexual subordination to men” (p. 132). Ruth Hall is one of these frameworks that fight against subordination Fanny Fern, through her novel, interpreted the meaning and power of freedom. She took feminism's power as a topic by using the feminist literary approach. Ruth Hall spreads a vision that emphasises individual rights, allowing women like Ruth to maintain their existence in the public domain. Ruth Hall challenges the stereotypical society to achieve her ideal life. She leads a fair life by beginning a career to keep her daughters. As powerful female figure woman, she hoped for a better future, as “she was too sensible a girl to weep a lot” (p. 11).

Overall, Fern's *Ruth Hall* states that women deserve freedom. The ideal situation, she peruses, is mainly to be socially and financially free. She fears nothing to achieve her dreams and free herself from the confined domains of the nineteenth century. Her original motivation is to win over society's oppression, and so she works her way out of the domestic sphere.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Autobiographical Personae in *Ruth Hall*

Like many sophisticated female figures, Sara Payson, who wrote and created a free feminine domain, is a leader.

That character launched her into one of the most lucrative jobs that any American journalist of the nineteenth century enjoyed. She released the novel *Ruth Hall* at the peak of her popularity, a novel that merged autobiography and fiction by using three fictionalized but autobiographical voices Ruth Hall, Floy, and Fanny Fern. As per the autobiographical consensus of Lejeune (1986) (an early contribution to the theory of autobiography), autobiography and fiction exist as distinct entities and mislead audiences when merged. Lejeune argues on auto biographers telling the reality when they construct autobiographical identities. For example, Anderson (2006) exposes the challenge of accurately describing oneself, announcing that “there is only writing in the end” (p. 12). Stating that personalities are much more paradoxical than can be grasped by the autobiographical I, Anderson (2006) states that no author can clearly seize the persona that the writer relate; thus, writer cannot be authentic. The personal autobiography is even more questionable to Sayre (1994), claiming that “the person who writes is never precisely the same as the person who has lived. In a sense, every auto biographer is a “ghost” (p. 16). Patron seems to truly understand that when she begins her novel, she cannot resist fictionalizing herself. Rather than escaping “truth” problems, she capitalizes on what might be considered fiction inevitabilities by fragmenting the self into different voices and lives in conflicting universes.

In “Writing a Self,” Schmidt (1992) suggests that “Parton's multiple voices build a room for self-representation while securely protecting her behind what he calls fictional layers, layers that allow Parton to preserve her core identity while constantly regulating her real, crafted self” (p. 19). Harris (1988) positions her discussion of the fictional identities in *Ruth Hall* into a debate about the double style of the narration of Parton, a duality marked by different styles of writing: one style is marked by its romanticism and its attention to traditional femininity and domesticity, and the other by its irony and possible submission. In *Ruth Hall*, Harris and Schmidt accurately define multiplicity; a simple change would enable a more precise understanding of this aspect of Parton's work. As Schmidt (1992) states, instead of Parton hiding within layers of fiction, I believe that Parton employs both fictional and autobiographical elements to claim her existence. That is, as the core of her autobiographical novel, across her three personae or self-variations, Ruth Hall, Floy, and Fanny Fern, Parton creates a multi-layered, fascinating, and magnificently mysterious identity. The audience understands Ruth's nature by the insight in other protagonists' discourse, often through direct comparison with the other characters. It is essential, however, that during the first half of the novel, Ruth does not define herself, “leaving the process of defining Ruth entirely to the other characters” (Harris, 1988, p. 619). Ruth's silence represents Parton's previous personal experiences. She resided in isolation before shifting to writing, subject to family and social constraints, and criticizes a society that allows external voices to define women completely. Via Floy, Ruth manage to prove her vital social existence; Floy is a persona that Ruth can freely shape, to communicate with audiences. To both Ruth and her readers, who together describe Floy, Floy becomes a physical entity. These fictional readers create connections with Floy; they connect in quite concrete ways with her, and she becomes tangible through those experiences.

The novel aims to construct, not to repeat, so she eliminates the restraints of authenticity by removing her tie to the “reality” and thinks of a world that follows its laws. Nevertheless, Parton gives the self-authority by using autobiographical elements. Parton describes her transition as a woman and author through autobiography factors, and she gets the appropriate neutral position through aspects of fiction to undergo additional development. Her self-discovery is a lifelong journey that is in constant change. The use of fictionalized self by Sara Parton makes her an essential predecessor to the author.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are formulated to organize the investigation of domesticity. The objectives illuminate the investigation path to strengthen women's position in the nineteenth century:

1. To investigate Ruth's moral, social, and ethical marginalization in the novel.
2. To suggest the practical means through which Ruth can achieve self-realization and social freedom in the repressive domestic sphere.
3. To explore the ideal situation which Ruth aims to achieve for herself and for nineteenth-century American women.

IV. RUTH HALL'S IDEAL SITUATION

A. *Aspects of Ruth Hall's Ideal Situation*

Ruth Hall challenges the stereotypical society to achieve her ideal life. She leads a fair life by establishing a career to keep her daughters. She found employment; Ruth Hall had been accepted in the office of “The Standard” (p. 147), she got a job to support her family just like men. Ruth got a powerful character, “She had the courage to call things by their names and the independence to express her boldly” (p. 156). She feared nothing to achieve her dreams and free herself from the nineteenth-century confined domains. Ruth reclaimed her daughter, announcing that “the mother can, the mother will, I have already earned enough for their support” (p. 214), standing against the well-known men's tyranny. “She struggled bravely and single-handedly” (p. 206) to secure her existence and to protect her daughters. Ruth did not want to find an independent social sector but to express her inner thoughts to the public domain. Ruth wanted to succeed in her personal life and spread her experience among the public. She wanted to inspire other society members, encouraging them to “consider what is to be done” (p.11). “Public were busying themselves in conjecturing who “Floy”

might be," her readers said that "those pieces have got the real stuff in them" (p. 158).

Ruth used her realistic sense of life to establish a strong bond with her readers. One reader addressed her once, saying, "God bless you, my unknown sister," while another said that "Floy that I am not mistaken in thinking that we both lean on the same rock" (p. 159). Ruth is one of them who is able to achieve her idle situation; that's why she achieved imminent success. Now Ruth's hair "flow about her face" (p. 211); she can be free now. She can "dance from room to room with a careless glee of a happy child" (p. 54), Ruth dreams of freedom, and it is the time to enjoy her achievement. Ruth is "unable to repress the flow of spirits consequent upon her newfound freedom" (p. 51). Ruth is now free; she can support her daughters and express her personal views. Her children will not suffer as she did; she will provide them with better chances. She did not even hear the whir - whir of the odd lodger in the attic" (p. 199). Ruth's idle life became full of success and freedom; her immense success started to spread to her community as well. Now her articles spread all over the whole city and she is now very well known. Ruth receives love letters, friendship, and business that "prove that she has won the public ear" (p. 177). Ruth starts to affect society; the audience wonders if she enjoys her triumph half as much as them. Her impact reached out to the male domain; a male reader wrote a letter saying, "I am a better son, a better brother, a better husband, a better father" (p. 211). She hoped to secure a free domain and encourage others to follow the same practices for her. She is able to recognize her own oppression by stepping over a tyrannical society. Ruth Hall provides a useful model of fearless expression, as she encourages women to relinquish false notions of justice and delicacy through claiming their rights.

She wishes females to relate their own lives with Fern's novel and define that rage at male members is acceptable and possible. A female reader once said, "We shall meet Floy, but it will be where tears are wiped away" (p. 159); Ruth and the reader became a unit fighting for their rights. Ruth Hall created a successful female that manage to win over tyrannical and hypocritical men in her quest for professional and economic independence. Ruth is personally acquainted with her readers. Resistance is a duty for Ruth to spread awareness among other women. Ruth's idle situation is understood as a basic fact of the domestic heroine's emotional victory. Represent some of the lively, important debates of the nineteenth-century, Ruth as the women expressed oppression, hope, and victory about the obstacles and possibilities for change in the conditions of women's lives. Ruth Hall demonstrates that white middle-class women can achieve their dreams and aspirations in men's dominant sphere. As a protagonist who did share her traits and values in achieving her freedom, Ruth set it as a role model by her readers. The shift from oppression to freedom fuels a radical change with the restrictive society. She proved that her experience deserves recognition and appreciation. Ruth's idle situation provided a cultural model that encouraged the revolution against the repression of females in nineteenth-century society. Ruth's calling for her rights and her freedom created a new framework for the mid-nineteenth century's expression of female rights. Indeed, her struggle claimed an equal right to feel and express moral outrage at that time. Ruth desired the freedom to retain her daughters, and she was managed to do so because of her strong beliefs and personal qualities.

B. Ruth's Ideal Situation in Terms of Independence

Independence is a primary and recurring theme which reflects Hall's desire to achieve her freedom. Ruth achieved her freedom far away from the restrictive society. Freedom is introduced directly as an outcome of resistance and marginalization. It begins with Hall's aspiration to free herself, and ends "nearing the port of independence" (p. 156). Her original motif is to win over society's oppression; she works her way out of the domestic sphere. "She knew that to climb; she must begin at the lowest round of the ladder" (p. 143). The main character, Ruth, is constantly seeking ways to achieve independence. Since her husband's death, she has always depended on herself and eventually became an unwanted burden. Ruth has been through many painful situations throughout the novel and understands the need for independence. Ruth "struggled on and single-handed" (p. 206) to achieve her ontological sense of life. She "had made an ample fortune, at any rate" (p.228), to support her daughters and lead her life individually. The conflict results in rebellious independence for Ruth and her family. The theme of independence in Ruth Hall presents a new reading of nineteenth-century American society. Ruth develops her notion of independence as a powerful feminist tool. Personal Independence allows Ruth to perform differentiated social roles, including along gendered lines. Independence is a dominant theme that allows her to express herself as social and political identity, as a woman whose perspective and interest may differ from men's.

Men's oppression of her becomes a "manly act" that "doesn't move her" anymore (p. 181). Ruth's independence is how women can be accepted in society; this can be achieved through education, knowledge, and hard work. Independence should not be defined as an individualistic situation but as an essential element in flourishing social existence Fanny Fern manages to describe the independence of women through the main character, Ruth, who has freedom in her thoughts without being restricted by her society. Ruth did not manage to gain her independence, but she encouraged others. All the events that Ruth had gone through in her life, because of her independence, had a result that finally made her aware of the truth and brought it to wisdom and freedom. The theme of independence is a vital element within the novel of Ruth Hall. The thematic feature depicted a deeper level of female capabilities in general and Ruth in specific. The theme has a philosophical limit along with stylistic usage.

C. Ruth's Ideal Situation in Terms of Language

Fanny Fern used symbolism as a literary element to flesh out her characters and clearly explain Ruth's ideal

situation. Symbolism shaped fern's writing style, and she used it to advocate for a feminist perspective in the nineteenth century. Through symbolic language, Ruth's hate for injustice and desires for liberation are depicted throughout the novel. Audience stated that Ruth Hall manages to effect 'every phase of the human heart" (p. 214), contacting Ruth's collective experience, which led to her Idle situation. The heart phase stands for all the societal oppression, life obstacles, and the harsh individualistic behaviors Ruth has overcome. Ruth's audience expressed her effect upon life, for her that "repay many weary hours" (p.211). The writer used weary hours to indicate the hard time that Ruth bypassed to achieve her freedom. Like a restless spirit, Ruth fought to earn her desired way of life. The symbolic language is used to connect oppression, resistance to freedom. Ruth expressed her journey from oppression to freedom through her "magic pen" (p. 188), stating that personal talents and insistence could be a way out of a confined domain. Ruth had an optimistic view that was clarified through symbolic language when she advised her daughter, "You mean how frightened you were after the fire," coding her wise perspective for the previous obstacles. Using symbolic language was able to construct a vivid and realistic sense of achieving her ideal existence. The way events are expressed in language is defined by an author's writing style, which is not accidental, trite, or secondary. The impact of a writer's use of language and literary elements is crucial to understanding Ruth Hall's content. Ruth's revolutionary attitude is skillfully revealed through the use of symbolism. The novel's symbolism and language speak for women's liberation, which gives the feministic approach a depth that explicit and straightforward language cannot match. These literary stylistic elements enable the reader to comprehend more abstract concepts. The novel creates the ability to communicate the females' goals on several levels and various people.

Ruth Hall's descriptive language enriches and deepens the meaning of the female experience. The reader gains a clearer sense of what the author seeks to portray through description, narration and the use of metaphors. To convey the concept of freedom, the author has employed a variety of styles. The writer generated imagery to inspire emotional compassion for partitioned females using skilled figurative lexicon and figures of speech to persuade the reader through emotional appeals of feminine free domain conveying the capabilities of women in the nineteenth century. The language described Ruth's ideal situation and her feelings towards freedom. Ruth's spiritual relief by achieving her idle life was illustrated in illustrative imagery as in "she has stood singing on its breeze she has laid weeping in its gloomy valleys" (p. 214). Ruth now overcomes every obstacle, and tears are replaced with joy. After suffering from oppression and harsh living conditions, Ruth has a luxurious life, "flowers strewn her pathways" (p. 214). The descriptive style has successfully depicted the impact of resistance in Ruth's life. Ruth "dreams that she roves" with her children "through lovely gardens," and she is currently rolling with them in her carriage. Her mornings are "bright and fair" (p. 246); she can enjoy her triumph regardless of being a female. The language acts as a tool for summarizing Ruth's Experience, as in "old memories were thronging thick and fast, upon past joys, past sorrows, past sufferings and the heart which felt them all so keenly" (p. 247). Through language, readers can realize that challenging conditions will end one day, and it will be just memories. The descriptive language and the use of metaphor reflected Ruth's idle situation and her freedom. The language was used to describe Ruth as "as the golden orioles, whose hanging nests swayed to and from amid the glossy green leaves" (p. 21). The writer, through language, inspects Ruth's life and her inner feelings to allow a realistic conceptual frame. Ruth did not want to simply find an independent social sector but to express her inner thoughts to the public domain. Ruth wanted to succeed in her personal life and spread her experience among the public. Fanny Fern used language to spread this quest to the domain and fuel the revolutionary spirit. Through language devices, the author conveys vivid images and creates the drama of Ruth's achievement. Ruth Hall was able to influence the audience's perceptions and thinking to some extent. The novel enables us to comprehend and sympathize with people who live lives that are either quite unlike our own or very close to our own.

V. CONCLUSION

Usually, females are not weaker than men, but mostly because they lack education. Worpole (1983) says "Working-class writing in all its forms offers an invaluable range of understanding of the dominant forms of oppression and division and is an integral part of an active and participatory working-class politics" (p. 50). This research strengthens the existing theory about women's writing. It is also a starting point for further research on women's writing. This research can help readers to better understand the lives of women in a patriarchal system, including how they survive and acquire equal rights with men. Many novels have led to unprecedented changes in society. Literature reflects norms and values of society and reveals the ethos of a culture, as well as the processes of sophistication and struggle (Duhan, 2015). Society is formed by a group of individuals with reliable and consistent relationships. The study evaluates and observes the female's quest for freedom and helps women to achieve their freedom.

The feminist theory studies women authors and their writings and resistance. Feminist discourse revolves around several main concepts, such as resistance, freedom, power, equality, dream, and womanhood. Feminists resist unfair social conditions and the suppression of their rights. They demand the power to decide their fate and lives. They dream of equality and living in equal functional and political spheres. Ruth Hall is a real implementation of feminist values. The protagonist struggles for her freedom and dream of equality. Fanny Fern portrays a perfect "true woman" identity. Fern's application of gender and oppression in her novel is the genuine application of feminist values. She created a heroine who compares to some of the heroes of men's fiction, one who overcomes great odds to achieve success. The

study defines the ideal situation based on freedom, independence, and social rights. Exploring Ruth's experience, in fact, means exploring the feminist approach generally.

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