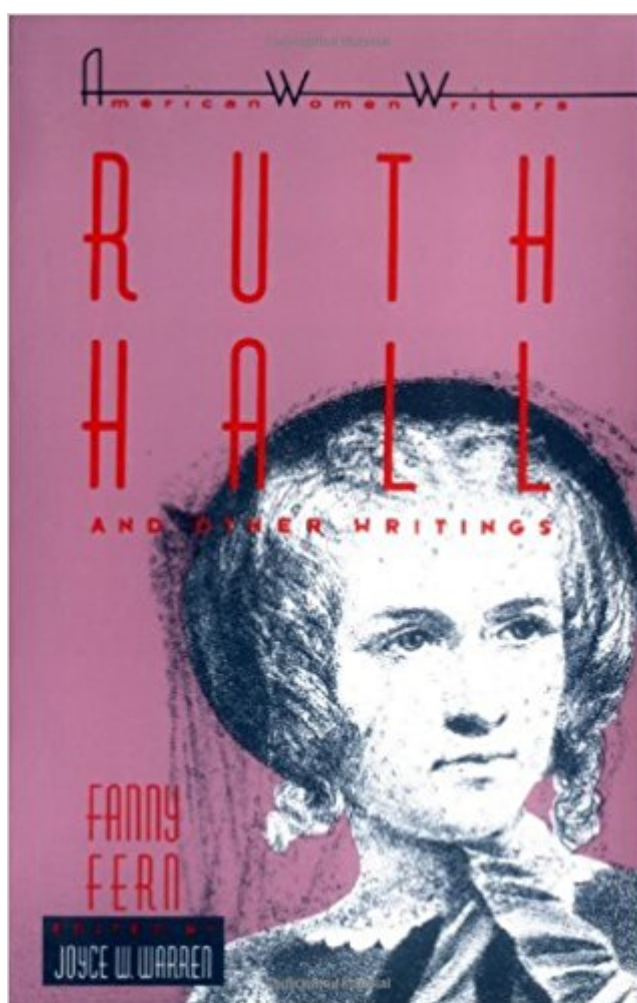


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Ruth Hall And Other Writings By Fanny Fern (American Women Writers)



Synopsis

When *Ruth Hall* was originally published in 1855, it caused a sensation. In it, Fanny Fern (Sara Payson Willis Parton) portrays a mid-nineteenth-century woman who realizes the American Dream solely on her own becoming the incarnation of the American individualist—regarded at that time as a role designed exclusively for men. Based on the author's life, the novel reflects her spirit of practical feminism—that a woman was only truly independent when she was financially independent. Fanny Fern was one of the most popular American writers of the mid-nineteenth century, the first woman newspaper columnist in the United States, and the most highly paid newspaper writer of her day. This volume gathers together for the first time almost one hundred selections of her best work as a journalist. Writing on such taboo subjects as prostitution, venereal disease, divorce, and birth control, Fern stripped the façade of convention from some of society's most sacred institutions, targeting cant and hypocrisy, pretentiousness and pomp. Fern portrays a mid-nineteenth-century woman who becomes the incarnation of the American individualist, something regarded as exclusively for men.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fanny Fern was the half-mocking nom de plume of Sara Willis, one of the most popular and well-paid newspaper columnists in the U.S. when *Ruth Hall* was first published in 1854. The sketchy plot and character development and brevity of the chapters attest to Fern's journalistic background, but the novel's depth of emotion and gritty portrayal of the depredations of poverty make up for its

literary shortcomings. The eponymous heroine is particularly refreshing: unlike many central female characters of the time, she is not punished for taking command of her own life. Even more stirring than the novel is the selection of newspaper columns, most of which are as pertinent today as they were 120 years ago. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"[This work] is complex, full of quirky ironies and subtle sarcasm, and, above all, it is fun!" -- Belies Lettres
In 1852, Fanny Fern became the first woman regular newspaper columnist in the United States; by 1855 she was the most highly paid newspaper writer in the country, male or female. While she was capable of producing the tear-jerking prose popular in her time, she was most famous for her biting, satirical commentary on everything from the weather to marriage to a woman's right to her own children. *Ruth Hall*, her first novel, is largely autobiographical and contains scathing portraits of her father, in-laws, and brother (the poet Nathaniel P. Willis) which earned her much criticism for her "unfeminine" attitude. The book concerns a young, happily married woman whose husband dies suddenly, leaving her with two children and no money. Neither set of parents is forthcoming with financial assistance and Ruth is left to fend for herself, which, after much trial, she does admirably, eventually establishing a name for herself as a writer. Hers is a female version of the American Dream, and Fanny Fern is careful to note exactly why that dream is more difficult for women to attain. She is just as careful not to let her heroine's success and security lie in marriage - Ruth succeeds on her own, with her children, usually without the help of men. She is a wonderful character, and Fanny Fern's prose sparkles with a delightful viciousness. Revenge can be sweet, and for Fanny Fern it was highly profitable as well: in its first few years *Ruth Hall* sold more than 70,000 copies. -- For great reviews of books for girls, check out *Let's Hear It for the Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14*. -- From *500 Great Books by Women*; review by Erica Bauermeister

One may not expect to find such a delightfully funny and touching book from such a long time ago, but this book has some true elements of comedy in it, all while preserving a core mission of understanding the delights and tragedies in one woman's life. This book can be read as a piece of history with slight fictional arrangements, and that makes it valuable for students and teachers. *Ruth Hall* reads bit like *Jane Eyre* in that the main character, as a woman, has many moments of pure hopelessness, followed by triumphs of character. *Ruth Hall* can be considered a Mary Sue for Fanny Fern, with a few slight differences. I'd recommend this book to anyone who is looking to understand the history of women's lives in America.

having never heard of Fanny Fern, I was mildly curious when assigned this book to read for my 'literature of the American Renaissance class' a few semesters ago. It's nice to see something of a renewed interest in Fanny Fern's work. In this same class we read 'Little Women' and I found both books highly enjoyable. However, Ruth Hall manages to stick its canines a little deeper into traditional chick-lit skins. Make no mistake, this book has some teeth, and rightfully so. Ruth Hall is essentially Fanny Fern's semi-autobiographical (but what I know, it's pretty much taken directly from her own life and experiences). A quick look at the plot: Ruth Hall loses her husband and is forced to deal with less than kind in-laws. She's a very talented writer and supports herself and her two children by writing newspaper columns. The novel recounts one woman's attempt to rise above social/gender discrimination and supposed gender roles to become one of the most successful writers (female or male) of her time. One can't help read Ruth Hall as a jab at Fanny Fern's detractors and naysayers. It's sort of an 'I-told-you-so-so-take-that!' and more power to her. I enjoyed this novel quite a bit (and yes, I'm a guy), despite the occasional lapse into melodrama and over-wrought sentimentality. Fanny Fern was indeed a skilled writer and should be looked at more carefully, both by academics and students. An often overlooked, nevertheless, important author.

I just finished reading this wonderful book for an Early American Literature course, and I think it is terrific! I had no idea what to expect going into the novel and was a little terrified of reading a "Little Woman"-y sort of story, but found myself to be pleasantly surprised by Fanny Fern's writing. This is a wonderful story which touches on many issues: women's rights, the struggles of the poor, authorship, and the question of what is true literature are just a few. Fern writes, though, so delightfully, incorporating these heavy issues into engaging anecdotes that it is hard to put the novel down once started. I cannot say enough about this piece!

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