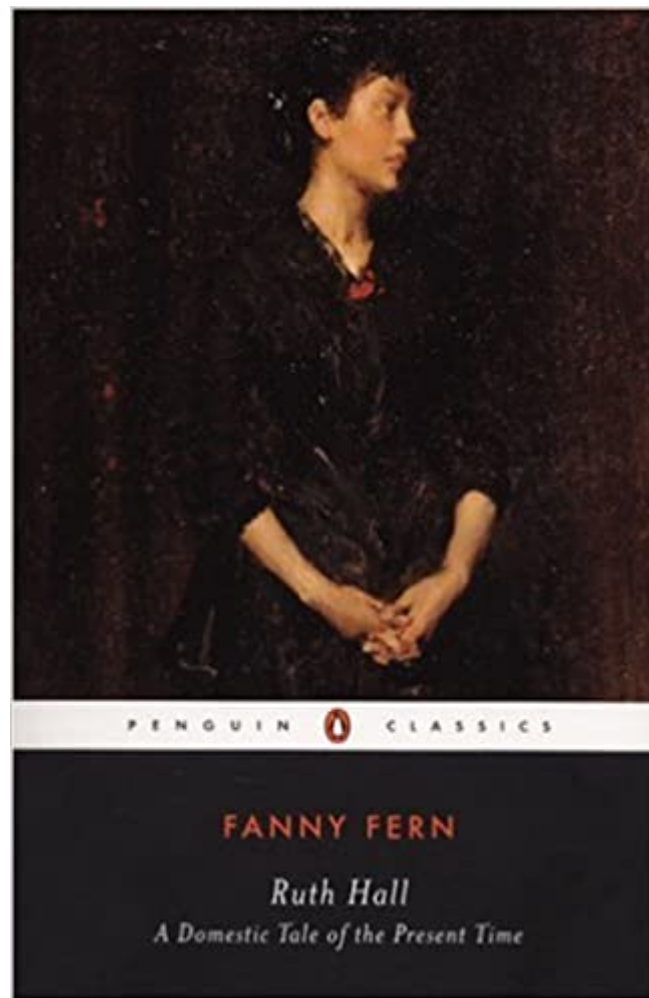




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# Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale Of The Present Time (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

In *Ruth Hall*, one of the bestselling novels of the 1850s, Fanny Fern drew heavily on her own experiences: the death of her first child and her beloved husband, a bitter estrangement from her family, and her struggle to make a living as a writer. Written as a series of short vignettes and snatches of overheard conversations, it is as unconventional in style as in substance and strikingly modern in its impact.

## Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Reprint edition (February 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140436405

ISBN-13: 978-0140436402

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.7 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 22 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #50,888 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #98 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists](#) #100 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > United States > Classics](#) #243 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Biographical](#)

## Customer Reviews

Fanny Fern - Sara Payson Willis --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Purchased this for a 19th-century Americanist class, put off reading it until it was assigned... then finished it in a matter of hours. I don't want to spoil any of it, but I loved the plot, the heroine was wonderful, and I thought the writing style was brilliant. I am definitely reading this again!

The writing is dated, but what are you going to do? They all wrote like that back then. I didn't especially love the book at first because the characters seemed stock characters, the heroine seemed unrealistic. But then I googled the author and it turns out the book was so biographical that when the true authorship came out (Fanny Fern is a pen name) there was a big uproar because all those stock characters were easily recognizable as Fanny's true in-laws, father, and brother. People were upset that she wasn't dutiful and loyal to those awful relatives so while it seems in the book

that the author glories in making the heroine a doormat, the act of writing the book and exposing all those people was a huge rebellion. And if you pay close attention, there are things in the book that you don't ordinarily see mentioned in books of this time - like the description of brothel the heroine was forced to live across the way from in her effort to find lodging she could afford.

If you are reading this book for your class, be American lit or maybe Women Writers, do not worry. Chances are you're really going to like this one. The narrator is witty, the characters are lovable (unless we are supposed to hate them) and the plot progresses faster than most novels of this time period.

I loved Ruth Hall! It follows a woman trying to support her family by trying to become a writer for the newspaper. It is a sentimental novel, and it is successful within that genre because you want Ruth Hall to succeed for her daughters. She battles rude in-laws, financial problems, an apathetic father, and being a woman trying to make it in the newspaper world which was dominated by men at the time. Do you think the novel is a feminist novel, or does Fern believe women can only succeed in the newspaper world if they stick to their feminine attributes? Read and find out!

I was pleasantly surprised while reading this book. It's of course sad that women still face many of the struggles depicted in this book, which was written 150 years ago. But the heroine, Ruth, faces her obstacles head-on admirably, and without complaint. Ruth is strong, courageous, and intelligent, much more so than her ill-fated husband, Harry. I've read many books from the nineteenth century in which the female heroines are portrayed as meek and inconsequential, never raising their voices against their injustices. Ruth does fit this picture when she's married, never complaining about the abuses she suffers at the hands of her parents-in-law, not even after her father-in-law, a doctor, refuses to treat her daughter as she lay dying. But once Ruth is a poor widow, forced to provide for her two remaining daughters after her family refuses for help her, she fights against a society that is prejudiced against any woman trying to earn a living. She makes her voice heard, and eventually finds overwhelming success. The story is made up of ninety short chapters. The chapters are sometimes less than a page long, being for the most part snatches of conversation that perfectly capture a year in a few sentences. There are characters who are introduced, who discuss the heroine or her many adversaries, and are never heard or seen again, having already served their purposes. Some may find this format choppy or confusing, but I felt that it fit the story very well. We are often seen through the eyes and conversations of others, so the author uses a technique that is

very true to life. Ruth reminded me often of Jane Eyre or Fanny Price. She is deeply religious, and God and prayer are a constant source of comfort and strength. This was perhaps my only complaint about the book. Many of the chapters ended with prayers and morals, and as a non-religious person, I found this tiring. Here is an example: "The arrow shot at a venture may to thine eye fall aimless; but in the Book of Life shalt thou read many an answer to the wrestling prayer, heard in thy closet by God alone." ~pg. 157 I would recommend this book to anyone who is a fan of nineteenth century literature, especially Charlotte and Anne Bronte, and also to people interested in feminist literature. Although this book does not feature any liberated women by our modern standards, Ruth still stands as a wonderful example of a woman fighting for respect in a man's world, something that all modern women can identify with.

Easy and pleasant read, I really enjoyed it and it made me both teary eyed and laugh! A bit of knowledge about the author enhanced the experience. The book addresses some important issues when it comes to the women's position in the 19th century; work or male provider, marriage; happy or oppressive, can a woman make it on her own? and so on. It's timeless when it comes to envy, jealousy, struggle, success etc etc. Enjoy! :)

If I didn't have to read it for school I probably wouldn't have picked it up. I'm glad I got to read something out my comfort zone. It was really a great book.

I had to read this for a college course, and I am so glad that we were assigned this! I could not put it down! The story is wonderful, with a twisting plot that pulls deeply on your emotions. Great read!

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