

Fanny Fern's independent stance on social issues and her unconventional writing style were courageous—particularly for a woman—and she was criticized for them. Yet some critics recognized that the strength of her writing derived from her not being bound by the conventions of femininity which restricted many American women. A British review of *Fern Leaves* in 1853 praised her work because she was “totally without that affectation of extreme propriety which is popularly attributed to the ladies of the New World” (*Living Age* 485). And Nathaniel Hawthorne, also writing from abroad, wrote to his publisher in February 1855 that after reading *Ruth Hall* he wanted to qualify his earlier criticism of the “mob of scribbling women”:

In my last, I recollect, I bestowed some vituperation on female authors. I have since been reading “Ruth Hall”; and I must say I enjoyed it a good deal. The woman writes as if the devil was in her; and that is the only condition under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading. Generally women write like emasculated men, and are only distinguished from male authors by greater feebleness and folly; but when they throw off the restraints of decency, and come before the public stark naked, as it were—then their books are sure to possess character and value. Can you tell me anything about this Fanny Fern? If you meet her, I wish you would let her know how much I admire her. (*Letters to Ticknor* 1:78)