



Questions for Book Group Discussion of *Shame the Devil*

1. Fanny Fern's motto was "Speak the Truth and Shame the Devil." Do you think she always lived by that motto?
2. Each chapter in *Shame the Devil* begins with an epigraph of Fanny Fern's own writing. Which pieces do you like best? Did any of her works surprise you? How would you describe her writing style?
3. The novel utilizes the perspectives of several peripheral characters based on real people, including N.P. Willis, James Parton, Grace Parton, Mary Eldredge, Catharine Beecher, Nathaniel Willis, Grace Willis, Ellen Willis, Louisa Jacobs, Lucy Bumstead, Oliver Dyer, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and, of course, Walt Whitman. Which of these characters best help readers understand Fanny Fern? Why?
4. In less than one year, Fanny Fern lost several close family members including her husband, daughter, mother, sister and sister-in-law. How do you think this affected her and her future writing career? How do you think you might have handled such grief?
5. Discuss the role that trauma, abuse and suffering played in the lives of Fanny Fern and the book's other characters.
6. The book sometimes uses a stream-of-consciousness style. Do you find this an effective storytelling device?
7. Fanny Fern wrote often about the social issues of her time, including poverty, health care, divorce, child rearing/custody, gender roles, marriage, materialism, education and work opportunities. Do any of her opinions still resonate with you regarding twenty-first century society?
8. Discuss how Fanny Fern's experiences in the workplace are similar to or different from your experiences in the workplace.
9. Fanny's relationships with other women were complicated. Discuss how these relationships affected her self-esteem and/or her writing career.
10. Likewise, Fanny's relationships with men were complicated. How and why did they help or hurt her personally and/or impact her writing career?