

Dorothy Rothschild Parker

August 22, 1893 – June 7, 1967

**Celebrated Conversationalist renowned for her literary contributions
and founder/member of the “Algonquin Round Table”**



Dorothy Parker Rothschild represented one of the most accomplished feminist and successful literary writers in women’s history. Living from 1893-1967, she became known as one of the most brilliant writers from the early 1900s. Born in West End, New Jersey, and attaining her success from New York, she became one of the most brilliant writers that revolutionized American thinking then and after.

Dorothy Parker lived a full and prosperous life, even though she did not have a happy childhood. Growing up, having bad relationships with her father and stepmother, she never had the privilege of growing up with a mother. Her mother died on July 20, 1897, when Dorothy was only

four years of age, and her father died shortly after on December 28, 1913. Right before the death of her father was the passing away of her “brother Henry, who died on the passage home from a vacation with his wife Lissie aboard a first class steamship the Titanic, which sank in 1912.” (source link dead)

As a sad woman, stung with depression and alcoholism her entire adult life, she had a successful and productive life. In 1916, at the age of 23, she joined the editorial staff of *Vogue*. Then in 1917 she started working for as a theater critic for *Vanity Fair*, who had published her first poem entitled “Any Porch,” (1914), in which she received \$12.

Vanity Fair became a significant variable in her life in that she met her associates whom she would form the Algonquin Round Table/Vicious Circle, an intellectual and renowned literary circle. Because of unfair reasons, Dorothy was let go in her position at *Vanity Fair* in which case her colleague and later her closest confidant, Robert Benchley, also resigned; Parker and Benchley then became partners in a writing firm called “Park-Bench.” At a luncheon in the Algonquin Hotel they met an elite group of intellectuals who became part of their literary circle. Similar to the “Radical Women of Greenwich Village,” she portrayed the liberated feminist of the 1900s. But unlike those women, Parker’s roots were not from a wealthy family, who were attempting to escape their repressing elite high class society in which they may have grown up or their possessive families and/or husbands. The Algonquin Round Table exemplified one of her most

brilliant and accomplished achievements, for this brought together the most brilliant literary writers of that time, including Robert Benchley, Robert E. Sherwood, James Thurber, George S. Kaufman, Edna Ferber, Franklin P. Adams, and many others.

In 1917, she also met her husband, Edwin Pond Parker, a young stockbroker, who she divorced in the same year. She married again in 1934 to Allan Campbell, with whom she formed a screen writing team at Paramount Pictures. Divorced after 16 years of marriage, Parker remarried Campbell again in 1950 and stayed with him until his death from a heart attack in 1967.

Susan Shapiro argues that she may have written her own eulogy, which may have included quotes from her poem “The Braggart,” stating,

“You will be frail and musty
with peering, furtive head,
While I am Young and Lusty
Among the roaring dead.”

A witty and brilliant conversationalist, Dorothy Parker contributed to many works of literature including newspaper columns, reviews, screenplays, satirical verses, and books; she is especially known for short stories, poems, and powerful quotes. Her tone is ironical, poignant, and often cuttingly witty and cynical. Many of her works were written from a practical point of view, and her pessimistic writings still carried the weight of powerful prose. Regina Barreca wrote, in the introduction to Parker’s *Collected Stories*, that “Parker’s wit caricatures the self-deluded, the powerful, the autocratic, the vain, the sill, and the self-important; it does not rely on men and small formulas, and it never ridicules the marginalized, the sideline or the outcast. When Parker goes for the jugular, its usually a vein with blueblood in it.”

According to Barreca, many of the critics of her time painted her as having “sold out” and “wasted herself by writing about narrow topics.” Nevertheless, her works paved the way for other realist writings by intellectuals, and other writers, which transformed American thought. As a woman before her time, she represented a select few women who became independently successful with her witty and satirical writings. This was a difficult accomplishment during this period that was moving away from Victorian ideals—a time when women were just beginning to see that women can have their individual identities separate from their male counterparts.

Throughout literary history, many people have written works which have added to the tradition of the American Jeremiad. Much of Dorothy Parker’s literature is a good example of the American Jeremiad which has revolutionized American culture and beliefs contributing to what it is today. Her work has had a tremendous influence on women’s history. There have been continuing arguments over our nation’s founding principles: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Parker’s ideas brought to life a profound realist depiction of sexism and life that is experienced in America. She stated, referring to the renegades of the 1920s,

They come clean with the news that war is a horrible thing, that injustice still exists in many parts of the globe even to this day, that the very rich are apt to sit appreciably

prettier than the very poor. Even the tenderer matters are not smeared over with romance for them. They have taken a calm look at this marriage thing and they are there to report that it is not always a lifelong trip to Niagara Falls. You will be barely able to stagger when the evening is over. In fact, once you have heard the boys settling things it will be no surprise to you if any day now one of them works it all out that there is nothing to this Santa Clause idea. (Parker, quoted in introduction to *Dorothy Parker: Complete Stories*, p.xi.)

Her writings changed writing styles in literature from poems, to songs and other writings, for years to come and this style and sound even influenced recent prose. The following are some quotes which are still popular today:

“The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.”

“Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses.”

“The only ism Hollywood believes in is plagiarism.”

“I don’t care what is written about me as long as it isn’t true.”

“This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly.
It should be thrown with great force.”

“Take care of luxuries and the necessities will take care of themselves.”

“Sorrow is tranquility remembered in emotion”

“You can’t teach an old dogma new tricks.”

Parker illustrated the real effects of poverty, economic and spiritual ideas upon women who had lacked education as a result of social class and sex. It was a bold new style which spread dramatically, especially in the 1950s among the “Beat Generation.” There are many women who have tried to bring realist ideas to America through poetry, stories and other literature. None have been as witty and yet blunt as Dorothy Parker. Parker writes the poem to show her disappointments towards an American society and her bad luck with men, as seen in a majority of her poetry.

Some of Parker’s more popular poetry and some of my favorites included:

Resumé

Razors pain you; Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you; And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren’t lawful; Nooses give;
Gas smells awful; You might as well live.

1919-1929 by Dorothy Parker.

Fighting Words

Say my love is easy had,
Say I’m bitten raw with pride,
Say I am too often sad--
Still behold me at your side.
Say I’m neither brave nor young,

Say I woo and coddle care,
Say the devil touched my tongue--
Still you have my heart to wear.
But say my verses do not scan,
And I get me another man!

Threnody

Lilacs blossom just as sweet
Now my heart is shattered.
If I bowled it down the street,
Who's to say it mattered?
If there's one that rode away
What would I be missing?
Lips that taste of tears, they say,
Are the best for kissing.

Eyes that watch the morning star
Seem a little brighter;
Arms held out to darkness are
Usually whiter.
Shall I bar the strolling guest,
Bind my brow with willow,
When, they say, the empty breast
Is the softer pillow?

That a heart falls tinkling down,
Never think it ceases.
Every likely lad in town
Gathers up the pieces.
If there's one gone whistling by
Would I let it grieve me?
Let him wonder if I lie;
Let him half believe me.

Braggart

The days will rally, wreathing
Their crazy tarantelle;
And you must go on breathing,
But I'll be safe in hell.

Like January weather,
The years will bite and smart,
And pull your bones together
To wrap your chattering heart.

The pretty stuff you're made of
Will crack and crease and dry.
The thing you are afraid of
Will look from every eye.

You will go faltering after
The bright, imperious line,
And split your throat on laughter,
And burn your eyes with brine.

You will be frail and musty
With peering, furtive head,
Whilst I am young and lusty
Among the roaring dead.

During these periods of the 1930s and 1940s women who had been outcasts in society were falling away from Victorian ideals. Parker was one woman who made this possible with the influence of much of her literature.

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[The Vicious Circle: Who's Who of the Algonquin Round Table ...](#)

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