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WILLSON, WENDY B. Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? An Adaptation of Dorothy Parker's Work, Reflecting Her Life and Times, Prepared for Readers Theatre Production. (1977) Directed by: Dr. David Batcheller. Pp. 84

Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? is an adaptation of Dorothy Parker's work, prepared for performance in readers theatre style. An examination of readers theatre, looking closely at its theatrical goals, is made to validate readers theatre use for the presentation of Dorothy Parker's literature. In examining the different technical processes involved in readers theatre a discussion pursues as to the different types of presentation possible within readers theatre and the resultant choices for this particular production.

An inquiry into Dorothy Parker's life provides the model for the selection of her works. A closer look is taken at her creative years as her works in Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? are used to reflect her emotional and intellectual state as well as her wit, for which she was famous.

The study of the information garnered from researching readers theatre and Dorothy Parker combined with close readings of all of Parker's work find their end result in the adapted script Dorothy Parker, Who Are You?

DOROTHY PARKER, WHO ARE YOU?
AN ADAPTATION OF DOROTHY PARKER'S WORK,
REFLECTING HER LIFE AND TIMES,
PREPARED FOR READERS THEATRE
PRODUCTION

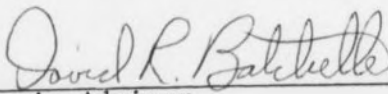
by

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A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
1977

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7

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.	36

LIST OF FIGURES.

CHAPTER I.

1. A SIMPLE THEOREM CONCERNING SOME FACTS

History	1
Statement	2
Literature Cited	3
Physical Examples	4
Conclusion	5

2. LINE OF REASONING.

Introduction	6
Background	7
Previous Work	8
Existing Facts	9
Conclusion	10

3. SIMPLE FACTS, AND THE FACTS

REFERENCES.

APPENDIX.

INDEX.

LIST OF REFERENCES.

APPENDIX.

INDEX.

LIST OF REFERENCES.

APPENDIX.

INDEX.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL PAGE.	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.	iii
CHAPTER	
I. A READERS THEATRE APPROACH DOROTHY PARKER	1
History	2
Staging	4
Literature Elements	5
Physical Elements	6
Conclusion	12
II. LIFE OF DOROTHY PARKER.	13
Introduction.	13
Beginnings.	16
Productive Years.	17
Declining Years	31
Conclusion	34
III. DOROTHY PARKER, WHO ARE YOU?.	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

CHAPTER I

A READERS THEATRE APPROACH TO DOROTHY PARKER

Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? is the title of an adapted version of Parker's works created for readers theatre. The theatrical form, readers theatre, is chosen because of its distinctive attitude toward the literary essence of a text.

The purpose of the production is to clarify, illuminate, extend, or provide insights into the particular literary text being presented.¹

The literature and the staging of the text will reflect the life of the author, her attitudes toward her own life and how these were affected by the times in which she lived and in which she wrote the bulk of her work. The poems, reviews and short story chosen will show her different sides, as well as her literary genius. Some of the works are dated, some of them trivial--a sign of the times--some of them famous. Note that Dorothy Parker's attitude toward men works well today within the feminist framework. Readers theatre allows for the freedom of a multi-level reflection of time, style, rhythm, and emotion.

Readers Theatre is not bound by time or space; the space is as limitless as the imagination and the time

¹Joanna Hawkins Maclay, Readers Theatre: Toward a Grammar of Practice (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 3.

can shift as easily as fog can slip in and out of a valley.²

History

The origins of readers theatre can be found in the fifth century B. C. with the wandering minstrels called rhapsodes. When the rhapsodes read the didactic and gnostic poetry which "had more than one character in them, a type of activity which approaches the art of the interpretative reading of plays was developed."³

During the middle ages, there is some evidence to show that the nun Hroswitha wrote plays which were presumably read by a group.⁴ During the medieval times historians see traces of readers theatre in the Easter-tide ceremony performed in the churches.⁵ With the rediscovery of the Greek and Roman plays at the beginning of the Renaissance some of the techniques of readers theatre were employed to read the scripts out loud. In 1806 Gilbert Austin recorded a dramatic reading in his book Chironomia.

²Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature (Glenview: Scott Foresman and Company, 1973), p. 2.

³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴Eugene Bahn and Margaret L. Bahn, A History of Oral Interpretation (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company), p. 174.

⁵Leslie Irene Coger, "Interpreters Theatre: Theatre of the Mind," Quarterly Journal of Speech 49 (April 1963): 159.

Another species of dramatic reading has of late years been practised in private companies assembled for that purpose. It differs from that just mentioned (one person reading a play) by limiting each individual to the reading of the part of a single character. In this entertainment, as on the stage, the characters of the drama are distributed among the readers according to their supposed talents; and each being furnished with a separate book, either the whole play, or certain select scenes from one or more, are read by the performers sitting around a table, whilst others of the company serve as the audience. The reading is performed by each in his best manner, the part allotted to each is often nearly committed to memory, and such gestures are used as can conveniently be executed in a sitting position posture. Higher efforts are here required in order to keep the auditors alive to the interest of the scene, thus divided and stript of all that aids delusion, and mutilated of its complete action. On these occasions . . . sometimes dresses are assumed or modified the more nearly to approach theatrical exhibition.⁶

By the early 1900s the form "readers theatre" was being used at the college level but was still not called readers theatre. Eventually this form was incorporated at the high school level. It is interesting to note that the term "readers theatre" was probably first used to label a professional production of Oedipus Rex in New York during the year 1945.⁷ Since this time other professional groups have performed readers theatre pieces such as Don Juan in Hell, John Brown's Body, Brecht on Brecht and even You're a Good Man Charlie Brown. The techniques used in the various performances were widely diversified.

⁶Gilbert Austin, Chironomia (London, 1806), pp. 203-204.

⁷Coger and White, Readers Theatre Handbook, p. 18.

Currently, readers theatre is becoming a more popular theatrical art form. Courses are offered widely at the college level using such titles as Readers Theatre and Advanced Readers Theatre.

Staging

There is no complete agreement as to how readers theatre should be staged. Readers theatre "is an unformulable amalgam of acting, public speaking, critical reacting and sympathetic sharing . . . critical illumination publicly offered in behalf of literature."⁸

Depending on the field of interest of the director, his resultant productions of readers theatre can be extremely diverse. The director whose field is oral interpretation will more likely adhere to off stage locus; meaning the focus is either with the audience or just a little above the audience's head, use of scripts, reading stands, minimal lighting, no costumes, sets, or make up. The physicalization takes place from the waist up with little emphasis on characterization. The director whose field is live theatre will work toward a much more visual interpretation of the literature with the use of props, make-up, memorized lines, on stage locus, lighting, movement of the actor other than just the waist up movement. There will be a more complete characterization done by the actor.

⁸Don Geiger, The Sound, Sense, and Performance of Literature (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1963), p. 86.

In the studying, compiling, and adapting of the script, Dorothy Parker, Who Are You?, it became apparent that somewhere between the two extremes of dramatic approach should be used. In this script, the emphasis is on the "text in performance"⁹ in an attempt to give the audience a more specific and sensitive look at Dorothy Parker, her work used as the interpreter of herself and her times. Raymond Massey, in discussing a readers theatre production of John Brown's Body, in which he performed, points out "we seem to have brought them (audience) the key to that too-long locked room where they had put away their own ability to imagine--to seem to do, to share."¹⁰

Literature Elements

In preparing a readers theatre performance the literature should be examined on three levels:

. . . the thematic level, a structure of subjects and meaning; the expressive or "dramatic" level, a structure of attitudes, actions and objects; the level of sound, a structure of meter, measure, rime, alliteration and other aspects.¹¹

It is the director's responsibility to discover the theme and introduce it to the actors so that the actor-reader,

⁹Coger and White, Readers Theatre Handbook, p. 8.

¹⁰"American Classic: John Brown's Body Is a Vivid Reminder of our Heritage," New York Herald Tribune, 8 February 1953, sec. 4, p. 3.

¹¹Geiger, The Sound, Sense and Performance of Literature, p. 32.

may have a through-line of interpretation.¹² In Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? the general through-line or theme is the woman whose works are being performed, her wit, her cynicism, her sorrows, her life. Less important themes will involve the times in which she lived and the attitudes popular during those times. A close exploration of the script with the cast will help in a better understanding of the "super objective" of the script.¹³

The dramatic level will once again deal with the director's approach to the literature with evaluations coming from individual reader's/actor's attitudes to the various selections he is to read. The director and the individual should work closely together. "We encourage our performers to eliminate their stereotyped and banal behavior so they are reborn as the persona or personae of the literature."¹⁴

To achieve the intimate personification of the short story and the more catholic experience of the poetry on and off stage locus will be used.

The directions of lines toward the audience, or the delivery of lines in a presentational manner, tends to universalize, or generalize, the experience; the

¹²Francis Hodge, Play Directing (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 18.

¹³Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1936), pp. 256-258.

¹⁴Leslie Gillian Abel and Robert M. Post, "Towards a Poor Readers Theatre," Quarterly Journal of Speech 59 (1973): 442.

direction of lines toward the characters on stage, or a representational manner, tends to particularize the experience.¹⁵

The short story will be staged in a more theatrical manner with on-stage focus used. Readers/actors will be asked to develop specific characterizations and to interact with one another. This does not mean that the short story will be staged in terms of physical movement. Total physical movement will be used only when necessary as readers theatre doesn't encourage total movement. "Most traditional Readers Theatre principles for stage movement specify a minimal amount of movement and blocking."¹⁶ The emphasis is on the "text" allowing the audience to use its own imagination to develop inward psychological understandings as conveyed by the text. Readers will move mainly from the waist up within the production. There will be some specific blocking notes but these will involve movements made to reflect transitions in the script, rather than in characterization.

The poetry will not be read in the character of Dorothy Parker but as having come from her pen, therefore a characterization is not so important in these sequences as is the vocal presentation. Off stage locus will be used. An example of vocal presentation can be found in

¹⁵MacLay, Readers Theatre, p. 20.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 97.

the professional performance of John Brown's Body. The use of twenty performers as a Greek chorus was used as support and emphasis giving more fullness to the performance of words. Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? does not need this particular technique but there will be some choral work within the poetry to lend variation to the performance and to emphasize certain thoughts. The orchestration of a piece of work is important in finding the full "dramatic dimension of the work."¹⁷

Physical Elements

After the examination of the literature by the director and his decisions as to the themes and super-objectives, he must then think in terms of the physical aspects of the production; the set design, costumes, sound, make-up, lighting, and props. The set design should reflect the atmosphere the director wants to create--an extension of his themes and superobjectives. Because of transitions within the script, Dorothy Parker, Who Are You?, it is desirable to have more than one playing area. Something similar to the staging for The Hollow Crown by the Royal Shakespeare Company would appear to work nicely for Dorothy Parker, Who Are You?

Four readers sitting at a coffee table located toward one side of the platform, with a pianist on the other side sitting at a piano with a harpsichord close by.

¹⁷Geiger, The Sound, Sense and Performance of Literature, p. 32.

Some of the material was read by the actors while they were seated; but most of it was read by the actors in different positions on the stage at times two talking together, at other times one walking forward and telling a story, reading a poem or letter or giving a speech directly to the audience or leaning against the piano singing a song.¹⁸

The floor plan, as can be seen, is divided into three acting areas. [See Figure 1.] Stage left is a round table with four chairs. Four of the five actors will be seated there when the lights go up. This opening is to represent the Algonquin Round table. Downstage center is free and will be used for a transition from Dorothy Parker's early poems into examples of her reviews. Upstage left are the circular platforms where the short story will be dramatized. The narrator is located on the second platform throughout the presentation.

Other production elements which should be examined in terms of readers theatre productions are music, sound effects, projections, costumes, make-up, props and lighting. Multi-media readers theatre productions are not uncommon. A readers theatre program, Brecht on Brecht, made much use of projection.¹⁹ In Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? music alone will be used and that will be employed to set the mood before the program begins. Dorothy Parker put little emphasis on music in her life,

¹⁸Coger, "Interpreters Theatre: Theatre of the Mind," p. 161.

¹⁹Coger and White, Readers Theatre Handbook, p. 20.

therefore, the writer believes it is inappropriate to use throughout the show.

Costumes and make-up are always extension of character. Although there is rarely total characterization in readers theatre, it is necessary to consider what the readers/actors should wear. The make-up should be street make-up--pancake, eye shadow, some rouge. Because of the transition from wit to seriousness in Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? costumes pose some problems. Coger suggests that the readers/actors clothes should not distract from what is seen in the mind. In the Broadway production of Spoon River Anthology basic costumes were used with changes of scarves, shawls, and hats.²⁰ This particular execution of costuming would seem to work with the Dorothy Parker production. The women shall be dressed in basic black with either a fake flower at the shoulder, a boa, or a string of pearls. The men dressed in the twenties style suits, wearing hats. These accessories can be removed and used depending on the mood of the reading. All accessories will be eliminated during the reading of the short story.

The use of scripts in readers theatre is usual. It is important, however, that the reader know his script so that he does not develop such a dependency on his script that it detracts from his reading. Coger suggests that

²⁰Ibid., p. 97.

if notebooks are used that they be uniform in size and color. For Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? small black notebooks will be used and incorporated as props when actions calls for their usage. These will be the only hand props used in this particular production of Dorothy Parker.

"Lighting is the most common and most effective device to enhance Readers Theatre presentation."²¹ It is important to note that at all times the audience must be able to see clearly the face of the reader as part of the full meaning of the emotion of the script. In a production of I, Diary performed at Eastern Illinois University pinpoint spotlights were used for amplification and emphasis.²² This pinpointing will be used in Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? As the performance starts, the stage will be in darkness as the actors take their places. A spot will come up on the narrator as he briefly mentions Dorothy Parker. Another short blackout and the spot hits the man at the table who reads News Item. At the end of the short story Hazel will be pinpointed.

Other productions used variation in lighting to delimit different areas of the stage. The Hollow Crown

²¹Maclay, Readers Theatre: Toward a Grammar of Practice, p. 22.

²²Coger and White, Readers Theatre Handbook, p. 95.

production applied this method.²³ This method of lighting will be used in Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? to help generate the suggestions of mood, to give focus on the important characters and to give variety to the stage picture.

Conclusion

Readers theatre, although historically dated from the times of the Greeks, has only begun to find its place theatrically in the last forty years. The flexibility allowed in staging and the challenge of creating mental images for the audience introduce another form of theatre.

Readers theatre is not a substitute for conventional theatre. It is a different form, with focus on the written word. Stripped of outside trappings, it centers the whole interest on the author's text. It enriches theatre presentations by bringing to the stage varied types of literature. It is not limited to the play form.²⁴

²³Ibid., p. 95.

²⁴Coger, "Interpreters Theatre: Theatre of the Mind," p. 163.

CHAPTER II
LIFE OF DOROTHY PARKER

Introduction

Dorothy Parker died alone in her hotel room in New York City on 7 June 1967 at the age of 73. On June 8th, the New York Times published her obituary on its front page:

Dorothy Parker, the sardonic humorist who purveyed her wit in conversation, short stories, verse and criticism, died of a heart attack yesterday at the Volney Hotel, 23 East 74th Street.

In print and in person, Miss Parker sparkled with a word or a phrase, for she honed her humor to its most economical size. Her rapier wit, much of it spontaneous, gained its early renown for her membership in the Algonquin Round Table.¹

The reaction of the public to her death was more of surprise that her obituary should have been accorded such prime space by the New York Times rather than by the fact that she was dead. Brendan Gill explains this by saying that many writers are dead long before their actual death--Dorothy Parker's vogue had been the twenties and the thirties.² For the public she had been dwelling in a state of half-forgotten literary limbo for years. "Dorothy Parker? I thought she died years ago" was a frequent expression.

¹New York Times, 8 June 1967, p. 1.

²Viking Press, ed., The Portable Dorothy Parker, by a Foreword by Brendan Gill (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), p. xiii.

Her services were held at a funeral home on Madison and 81st Street in New York City, where her friends again praised her wit as can be seen by Lillian Hellman's eulogy.

Late at night, gulping what we called a watered extract of Scotch, she would put aside the gentle manner and let fly. Then I would roar with laughter that always ended in sober recognition that the joke hid a brilliant diagnosis of people, or places, or customs, or life. The remarkable quality of Dorothy Parker's wit was that it stayed in no place, and was of no time.³

And so, though Dorothy Parker died as one of her own half-forgotten characters in Ladies of the Corridor, she was remembered by her friends for her wit and gaiety. Surely, she would have been the first to understand their motivation, knowing they wanted to forget the drunken confused woman who sat disheveled among the feces of her untended dog in the room of an old hotel.

Keats, in assessing her position in American literature, does not mention her wit.

Three columns of poetry and two short stories are not an enormous literary legacy. Yet Dorothy Parker deserves a place in American literature for all that her total output was small and despite the fact that its quality is uneven.

She was quite right to think that her literary position would be based on her short stories and not on her poems. Her importance as a short story writer is that she was one of the first to report on the gathering tragedy of the twentieth century anomie.

Her generation was the first to enter upon the new world that began to emerge after the 1914-18 war. This

³New York Times, 10 June 1967, p. 12.

was essentially an urban world, formless, messy, full of slippery values. More perceptive than most of the people around her, she saw more clearly than they the absurdity of their lives . . . her own included.⁴

Keats continues to speak of the times through which she lived and evaluated her writings as the awakening of our national intellectual maturity.⁵ The roaring twenties he describes as our adolescence in which the name of the game was to talk smart and indulge in irresponsible fun. And Dorothy's friends and associates were the "Avant Garde of this attitude toward life."⁶

They were also, for the most part, young people on the way up: they would become successful, popular entertainers and writers of coy ephemera for the magazines including the New Yorker, and writers of inconsequential plays.⁷

Yet Keats does not put Dorothy Parker's talent into this category. She looked about her, recording what she saw in her search for the truth. And, she was one of the first to write down her findings in the short story of the twenties. The way in which she wrote and what she wrote became the conventional style of the thirties. The situations she saw, experienced, and wrote about were seldom bright but they were accurate.

In the twenties and the thirties her poems were memorized by high school girls nationwide. College students, male and female, quoted her. Her play reviews are

⁴John Keats, You Might As Well Live, The Life and Times of Dorothy Parker (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 303.

⁵Ibid. ⁶Ibid., p. 604. ⁷Ibid., p. 30.

still recalled as are her comments. Keats tells us that all of these things made for a national taste. Hers was a philosophy accepted by many.

The style that she and her friends created called for one to go through life armed with a wry, hard suspicion, to be always ready to acknowledge excellence but equally ready to express an informal contempt for all that was in any way bogus . . . meanwhile being just as ready to have a damned good time at every opportunity.⁸

So she went the same path as her friends but continued to research their lives and her own to find the truth of the effect of the new standards and moral concepts on the human condition.

John Keats summarizes the value of her literary estate by saying:

She wrote poetry that was at least as good as the best of Millay and Housman. She wrote some stories that are easily as good as some of O'Hara and Hemingway. She gave a voice and an attitude to each time through which she moved, and which, to a certain extent she also mirrored. She had a far better talent than most of her friends had, and she respected it and wasted it and seemed all the while to stand outside herself, watching herself kill the thing she called a gift from God.⁹

Beginnings

Dorothy Parker was born Dorothy Rothschild on 22 August 1893 of a Jewish father and a Scottish mother. Her mother died while she was in her infancy and, as a result she lived a lonely and loveless childhood. Her

⁸Ibid., p. 10.

⁹Ibid., p. 305.

father remarried but Dorothy always considered her step-mother a housekeeper and never referred to her except as "she." Dorothy apparently disliked her father also.

While at home was a dearly loathed father . . . "On Sundays he'd take us on an outing. Some outing. We'd go to the cemetery to visit my mother's grave. All of us including the second wife. That was his idea of a treat. 'We're all here, Eliza. I'm here. Dottie's here.'"¹⁰

After a time she became a boarding student at Miss Dana's School in Morristown, New Jersey. The school was a first-rate private school and a student was not admitted unless she were bright and obedient. The school served many of the richest daughters in America and Miss Dana saw to it that a development of a social conscience was brought about in her students. Dorothy Parker did not go to college, but she left Miss Dana's a well informed, educated and extremely pretty young woman. It was at this time that she began to write verse. "Like everybody else then, I was following in the exquisite footsteps of Edna St. Vincent Millay, unhappily in my own horrible sneakers."¹¹

Productive Years

The world Dorothy entered after her graduation was more Victorian than Edwardian, where right was right and

¹⁰Wyatt Cooper, "What Ever You Think Parker Was, She Wasn't," Esquire (July 1968): 57.

¹¹Ibid.

wrong was wrong yet great social changes were beginning. Socialism, the establishment of a Labor Department, and the Sherman Anti-Trust Act were being thought of seriously. It was the start of mass circulation magazines, the mass production of Henry Ford, the appearance of the consumer society. The social conscience of the United States listened to the words of the Muckraker's concerning working and slum conditions; since these things had been brought to her attention at Miss Dana's, Dorothy Parker was alert to them. All of her life her sympathy was to be with the exploited and in contrast, a dislike and suspicion of the rich which began early in her life, was to remain forever.

At the age of twenty-three she sold a poem to Frank Crownshield, editor of the Conde Nast publication, Vogue and Vanity Fair.¹² Shortly after this, he hired her to write captions for advertisements for Vogue magazine at a salary of \$10.00 per week, and later she went to work for Vanity Fair.

The impact of this compliment, the publication of her verse, which took a young girl into the very center of artistic and social life, rates an explanation.

Cleveland Amory defines Vainity Fair as follows:

¹²Cleveland Amory and Frederic Bradlee, eds., Vanity Fair, "Introduction: 'A Fair Kept,'" by Cleveland Amory (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p. 8.

The story of Vanity Fair itself is as good a story as any the magazine ever published. There never was, nor in all probability ever will be again, a magazine like her. . . . It is hardly a wonder that Mr. Crowinshield's Fair reflected not alone the clamor and glamour of the new cafe society and the Great White Way: she also symbolized nostalgically to the whole generation of not so grown up small town Americans and the jeunesse doree of the Gay Nineties and the Naughty Oughties. For Vanity Fair was America in transition . . . America in mid-passage, as it were, between the old Four Hundred and the new Smart Set.¹³

"Vanity Fair was Mr. Crowinshield"¹⁴ said Jeanne Ballot, his associate, and she continues to say that he had a sixth sense in finding unrecognized talent.

He first published Gertrude Stein's "Have They Attack-ed Mary, He Giggled" and in the same year he suavely lured away from Vogue a shy young copywriter named Dorothy Rothschild by publishing in Vanity Fair her sprightly lyric "Men: A Hate Song." That same year he hired a young Harvard graduate who signed himself Robert C. Benchley, and published a satire piece by an unknown English boy named Noel Coward.¹⁵

As for art, Jeanne Ballot tells us that Crowinshield was one of the organizers of the New York Armory show; that in 1928 he helped to found the New York Museum of Modern Art and he reproduced in Vanity Fair the now familiar Picassos, Van Goghs, Gauguins, and Roualts, to mention a few. Vanity Fair was also the first magazine to recognize Negro personalities such as Paul Robeson, Ethel Waters, and Louis Armstrong.

¹³Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴Ibid., Frederic Bradlee, "Frank Crowinshield: Editor, Man, and Uncle," p. 11.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 11.

Dorothy Rothschild accepted the offer to join the staff of Vanity Fair and at the same time accepted the invitation to become the wife of Eddie Parker. The year was 1917; they were madly in love. Edwin Pond Parker was a bond salesman on Wall Street who came from an old conservative family in Hartford, Connecticut. During World War I Eddie joined the 33rd Ambulance Company. Before he was sent to Europe Dorothy spent each weekend with him. When he was sent to Europe she wrote to him daily. At the end of the war, he was assigned to the occupied Rhineland. This separation was to affect their marriage.

Dorothy's life at Vanity Fair became even more exciting when Robert Benchley and Robert Sherwood became a part of the staff. While P. G. Wodehouse was in Europe, Dorothy took his place as dramatic critic. Robert Sherwood acted as drama editor and Robert Benchley as managing editor of the magazine. They became intimate friends, lunching often at the Algonquin Hotel and becoming charter members of the famous Round Table. Later another trio joined them at lunch: Franklin Pierce Adams who wrote the "Conning Tower" for the New York Tribune, Alexander Wolcott, theatre critic for the New York Times, and Harold Ross who was then interested in starting a magazine for New York. Dorothy's reputation as a wit began to grow along with her association with these friends.

Amory Cleveland has described Dorothy at this time as being a small girl who wore a very large hat and horn rimmed spectacles which she instantly hid upon being approached.¹⁶ There is a small portrait of her in connection with the poem "Men: A Hate Song" in the Vanity Fair for the year 1917.¹⁷ Here we find the face of a beautiful and innocent young girl. The dark hair is parted in the middle of the head and swept back in deep waves on each side of her face.

In the Calvacade of Vanity Fair for the year 1919 there is a collection of play reviews by Mrs. Parker,¹⁸ as she now liked to call herself. She reviewed Clarence by Booth Tarkington with high praise for the author and for Helen Hayes, Alfred Lunt, and Glen Hunter who were its stars. The following is her review of Caesar's Wife.

Still, in the East, though fortunately out of China, is the setting of W. Somerset Maugham's play "Caesar's Wife," in which Billie Burke is starred. There are but few flashes of Mr. Maugham's brilliance in the dialogue, and the evening seems a long and uneventful one. Miss Burke, in her role of the young wife, looks charmingly youthful. She is at her best in her more serious moments; in her desire to convey the girliness of the character, she plays her lighter scenes rather as if she were giving an impersonation of Eva Tanguay.¹⁹

This review cost Dorothy Parker her job with Vanity Fair for Florenze Ziegfield, producer of "Caesar's Wife" and

¹⁶Ibid., Amory, "Introduction: A Fair Kept," p. 8.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 22. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 35.

Billie Burke's husband, complained to Frank Crownshield. Other producers had complained about the effect of Mrs. Parker's sharp writing on the success of their plays. Both Robert Benchley and Robert Sherwood quit their jobs on Vanity Fair as a protest to Dorothy's dismissal. Later Dorothy and Robert Benchley shared an office together; on the door was emblazoned one word: "Men."²⁰

It must have been a difficult time for her. Soldiers were returning from Europe while her own husband helped occupy the Rhineland. Dorothy and Eddie found it hard to hold their love and common interests by means of the mail.

At this time Dorothy Parker was described as a tiny woman. She was a completely feminine woman who would often place her hand upon the forearm of her conversationalist companion and would search his face with her lovely eyes hanging upon his every word.²¹ Keats says she wore a feather boa which managed to find its way into dinner plates and lighted cigarettes with reckless abandon and helplessness making every man desirous of keeping her safe from harm and danger. Yet her friends said she needed protection as much as a hornet's nest and Alexander Wolcott categorized her as an "odd blend of Little Nell and Lady Macbeth."²²

²⁰Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 57.

²¹Ibid., p. 45.

²²Cooper, "Whatever You Think Dorothy Parker Was, She Wasn't," p. 61.

Eddie Parker found little of the girl he had married when he returned. Dorothy had found a new way of life with flamboyant, exciting, and famous people who quite admired her sayings. Keats lists a most impressive list who attended luncheon at the Algonquin including Deems Taylor, Herbert Bayard Swope, Jascha Heifets, Edna Ferber, Harpo Marx, Beatrice Kaufman, George Kaufman, and Heywood Brown to include only a few. It was a heady and flattering experience for a young girl to have achieved a reputation of being a wit among such company. However, as an old woman, she told Wyatt Cooper, "It was no Mermaid Tavern I can tell you. Just a bunch of loudmouths showing off, saving gags for days, waiting for a chance to spring them."²³ Dorothy continued to say that Wolcott was ridiculous, Mencken impossible, and George Kaufman a mess. Wyatt attributes this to her contempt for the wisecrack, and it was his feeling that this caused her to condemn the reputation of the Algonquin wits.²⁴

During the Twenties, however, she felt differently, for her life drifted further from that of her husband and ended in divorce. Dorothy Parker gave up the office she shared with Robert Benchley, and there is no record of sales for verse or short stories during the years 1920-22.

²³Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 61.

²⁴Cooper, "Whatever You Think Dorothy Parker Was, She Wasn't," p. 110.

How she lived, no one seemed to know but she went every place and, like her friends, the entire point of her life seemed to be having fun and being witty.

In the evening, Dorothy and her friends might eat at Tony's (a speakeasy) or have a drink there and move over to Seventh Avenue where Mr. Benchley had found a little French restaurant completely without charm. After supper, they would go to a theatre. Later, they might all go to Neysa McMein's studio where Miss McMein made wine in the bathroom, and there discover George Gershwin, Ethel Barrymore, and Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald swelling the throng.²⁵

Years later, in an interview, Dorothy Parker said in response to the question, "What was it about the twenties that inspired you?"

Gertrude Stein did us the most harm when she said "You're all a lost generation." That got around to certain people and we all said, "Wheel! We're lost." Perhaps it all brought to us the sense of change. Or irresponsibility.²⁶

Keats attributes some of the fame Dorothy achieved to FPA's (Franklin Pierce Adams) the "Conning Tower" which, he says, placed a premium upon wit. According to him FPA made it a habit for people at a party to say, "Did you hear what Dorothy Parker said today?" That she could be ruthless with her friends, via her tongue, is a known fact of her life.

Brendan Gill explains, "early in life she had developed a strong bent for cutting ties with friends; to

²⁵Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 71.

²⁶Marion Capron, "Dorothy Parker," in Writers At Work, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 69.

the born wisecracker, uttering the one funny word too many is the last appetite that fails."²⁷ In spite of the fear that her friends had of her quick and relentless wit, they seemed to love her and to wish to protect her. "Whatever she did they accepted and tried to understand though each saw and interpreted her differently.

Dorothy Parker's life without writing continued until she fell deeply in love again. The young man was Charles MacArthur, a handsome and talented man who was reputed to be a womanizer. This fact distressed her friends as Dorothy began to talk in terms of cottages, flowers, and babies--thoughts she held to her always, but which were totally incongruous to her life style.

The writing she did she sold to the Saturday Evening Post. Mostly it consisted of her flippant verse and short pieces of prose. These pieces, though considered funny, had extremely sour messages. Again she was reflecting and recording her time as one in which inspirational reading consisted of books on how to get rich quick.

Life again turned bitter for her as her love affair went badly. Her friends did not take her too seriously saying that if a man loved her she was bored but if he looked at another woman she was ready to kill. She continued to say funny things. Everyone knew she was happiest when she was sad.

²⁷Gill, Foreword, The Portable Dorothy Parker, p. xi.

With the breaking up of her love affair, it is not known whether her attempt at suicide was brought on by a depression from her abortion or from her love life. At any rate, Dorothy Parker received her friends in the hospital with blue ribbons covering the bandages round her wrists.²⁸ Upon her return to her apartment she continued the wisecracking, chain smoking, cafe society life, though now she had begun to drink. No one felt very sorry for Dorothy Parker. Lillian Helman explains her heart as she saw it:

Her taste in men was bad, even for writer ladies. She had been loved by several remarkable men, but only loved the ones who did not love her, and they were the shabby ones. Robert Benchley loved her, I was told by many people and certainly I was later to see the devotion he had for her and she for him.

She had an affair with Ring Lardner, and both of these men she respected, and never attacked . . . a rare mark of feeling . . . but I don't think she was in love with them, because a respect somehow cancelled out romantic love There is no question she wanted it that way. She wanted the put down from everybody and anybody, and she always resented it and hit back.²⁹

And so Dorothy Parker continued to spend her days with the very talented and rich. Though she seldom sat at her typewriter, she did write a play with Elmer Rice entitled Close Harmony. The production lasted only a

²⁸Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 91.

²⁹Lillian Hellman, Unfinished Woman (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 217.

month.³⁰ A photograph of Dorothy Parker at this time shows her still very beautiful though the expression of sweet trust in the Vanity Fair photograph seems to have been replaced by one of intensity and wariness. With her bobbed hair she was in looks, as in attitudes, a woman of the Twenties.

In 1925 she published Enough Rope, a book of poems which went into eight printings and became a national best seller. The poems were flippant, self derisive, and some were sad.

The Small Hours³¹

No more my little song comes back;
And now of nights I lay
My head on down, to watch the black
And await the unfailing gray.

Oh, sad are winter nights, and slow:
And sad's a song that's dumb:
And sad it is to lie and know
Another dawn will come.

In 1929 she took an overdose of sleeping pills. Her friend, Robert Benchley, was seriously concerned. Apparently her behavior and appearance had gone downhill. The

³⁰Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 101.

³¹Dorothy Parker, Enough Rope (New York: The Viking Press, 1925), p.

total of this experience was recorded in the short story "The Big Blonde."³²

A short time after her second suicide attempt, Dorothy Parker began living with Seward Collins, a member of the society of the extremely rich that she had always hated. She went to Europe with him to write. The trip did not turn out well nor did she ever in her lifetime use Europe as a background for her writing.

Upon her return to the United States she began to write book reviews for her friend Harold Ross who had started the New Yorker Magazine. Her reviews were signed with the name Constant Reader and reflected her writing style and philosophy. She reviewed The Journal of Katherine Mansfield with an article entitled "The Private Papers of the Dead." The review was written with great sensitivity and compassion in high praise of the author herself. Others such as Elinor Gly and Nan Britton did not fare so well. As in her poetry, her reviews had a "jab for the stomach" ending. An example is the review of A. A. Milne and his Pooh stories. She signs off with "Tonstant Weader Fwowed Up,"³³ a direct comment on the childishness of Milne's writing. These reviews added another dimension to her reputation.

³²Dorothy Parker, Laments for the Living (New York: The Viking Press, 1930), p. 169.

³³Viking Press, ed., The Portable Dorothy Parker, p. 518.

Her early and lasting respect for the work of Ernest Hemingway is clearly stated in her review of his "Men Without Women."³⁴ She had met him in New York and in Europe. He cruelly rejected her offer of friendship, yet she continued to like his work and in particular his short stories. His words for the writer in New York found in Green Hills of Africa haunted her all her days for she had great respect for her own talent.

Writers should work alone. They should see each other only after their work is done and not too often then. Otherwise they become like writers in New York, all angleworms in a bottle, trying to derive knowledge and nourishment from their own contact and from the bottle. Sometimes the bottle is shaped art, sometimes economics, sometimes economic-religion. But once they are in the bottle they stay there. They are lonesome outside the bottle. They do not want to be lonesome. They are afraid to be alone in their beliefs, and no woman would love any of them or pool it with hers, or make something with her that makes the rest unimportant.³⁵

In 1928 Dorothy Parker published Sunset Gun. The verses reflected the restless, changing, and promiscuous times.

The Ballade at Thirty-Five³⁶

This, no song of an ingenue,
This, no ballad of innocence;
This, the rhyme of a lady who
Followed ever her natural bents,
This, a solo of sapience
This, the sum of experiments . . .
I loved them until they loved me.

³⁴Ibid., p. 458.

³⁵Ernest Hemingway, Green Hills of Africa (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1935), pp. 21-22.

³⁶Dorothy Parker, Sunset Gun (New York: The Viking Press, 1935), p..

She met her friends at the speakeasies as usual, joined the march for Sacco and Vanzetti, and had an affair with a businessman who reminded her friends of Edwin Parker.³⁷

In her stories we find her attitude and opinions of her friends and life about her. "You Were Perfectly Fine" illustrates Dorothy's attitude toward the times as she questioned the actions of the young woman recounting the ill deeds of a young man who had been "badly bent" the previous evening. Dorothy continued to drink heavily and her friends found her sentimental wanderings boring and abhorrent. Again these characteristics of her are found in two of her stories, "Just a Little One" and "Big Blonde." The latter story won the O. Henry Prize for the year 1929. Both stories appear to have type-cast Dorothy Parker for the heroine, in which she saw the pointlessness of life around her.

Dorothy Parker weathered the stock market crash and the beginning of the national Depression found her riding the crest. Royalties on her new books of verse came in full tide and with the winning of the O. Henry prize for "The Big Blonde," her short stories were accepted widely for publication.

Her drinking continued. For her lovers, she was beginning to choose much younger men. She continued to pursue gaiety and her friend, Robert Benchley, feeling

³⁷Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 134.

that breakfasting on whisky sours was over doing it, suggested that she talk with Alcoholics Anonymous. She did and he asked if she was going to join. "Certainly not. They want me to stop now."³⁸ Yet to a friend she said of her talent, "I'm betraying it. I'm drinking, I'm not working. I have the most horrendous guilt."³⁹

In 1931 her third collection of poems, Death and Taxes, was published. Her acclaim was great. Keats said that she was thought of as a literary goddess, a molder of opinion and the darling of the Vicious Circle.⁴⁰

Declining Years

In 1932 she took Alan Campbell as a lover and the next year she married him. Dorothy was plump, still pretty and forty, while Alan Campbell was twenty-nine years old. Alan needed her for her talent and reputation and Dorothy needed him for his youth, his cooking and cleaning, and to take care of her.

They went to Hollywood as a writing team and together earned \$5,000.00 a week. Lisa Mitchell credits them with fifteen pictures including "A Star Is Born."⁴¹ Although Dorothy Parker was back with her old friends, Benchley and Fitzgerald at the Garden of Allah, she hated the Hollywood of Stars and longed for New York. While the money poured

³⁸Ibid., p. 161.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 303.

⁴¹Lisa Mitchell, "Dorothy Parker as the Lady of Wit in a Life of Sorrow," Los Angeles Times, 19 December 1976, Book Review Section, p. 3.

in, they bought a Bucks County farm in Pennnsylvania. Dorothy became pregnant and was very happy until she lost her baby.

Dorothy's political activities were of concern to Alan Campbell though he understood his wife's desire to help the underdog. At the age of forty Alan went to war. Dorothy, in 1943, tried to go into the Women's Army Corps but was refused because of her age. She then tried to be a war correspondent, but for political reasons was denied a passport. Dorothy tried, as she had done with Eddie Parker, to be with Alan Campbell. In 1943 she wrote the short story "The Lovely Leave" which was surely a love song to her husband. Again, like Eddie Parker, Alan did not come home with war's end. Dorothy divorced him.

Robert Benchley's death in 1945 broke her heart and for a time she gave herself over to aging and drinking. It was rumoured that Dorothy was cracking up although Viking Press had published The Portable Dorothy Parker. She was hired by Universal Pictures to work on the script Smash Up, said to be the story of her life. Dorothy involved herself with a much younger man. They collaborated on several different pieces, all unsuccessful. She returned to New York, apparently broke, where she wrote the play The Ladies of the Corridor in collaboration with Arnaud d'Usseau. The play was not a success though it was later sold to the New Yorker magazine as a short story.

Dorothy Parker could certainly have been found in the play.

Marion Capron, who interviewed her at the Volney Hotel, gives a description of her life there:

Dorothy Parker lives in a midtown New York Hotel. She shares her small apartment with a youthful poodle which has the run of the place and has caused it to look, as Mrs. Parker says apologetically, somewhat "Hogarthian": newspapers spread about the floor, picked lamb chops here and there, a rubber doll--its throat torn from ear to ear--which Mrs. Parker lobs left handed from her chair into the corners of the room for the poodle to retrieve--as it does, never tiring of the opportunity.⁴²

Dorothy Parker remarried Alan Campbell and returned to Hollywood to work on scripts. This was difficult for anyone whose name appeared on the studio list of those suspected of being Communists. Dorothy's name was on that list.

She and Campbell applied for unemployment compensation. They lived on \$600.00 a month and the amount the royalties that her books and poems brought. Dorothy Parker did no writing during this time. The last story she had published was "The Banquet of Crow" in the New Yorker during 1957.⁴³ Esquire Magazine asked her to review books for them, paying \$750.00 a review.⁴⁴ The reviews began in December 1957, however, she missed in January, February,

⁴²Capron, "Dorothy Parker," p. 71.

⁴³Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 293.

March, and April of 1958. This irregular practice continued through 1962. Yet Esquire paid her each month, glad to get her copy when available.⁴⁵

In 1964 Alan Campbell died. Sleeping pills had been added to a bout of heavy drinking. Authorities termed his death an accident. Dorothy spent that remaining summer in Hollywood, returning to the Volney Hotel and the "Corridor of Ladies" that fall.

Conclusion

What has been discussed in this chapter on the life and times of Dorothy Parker will be incorporated into the Readers Theatre production of Dorothy Parker, Who Are You? Wyatt Cooper sums Dorothy Parker well.

Biographies will be written about her, then more will be written after that, and people will say they're marvelous and maybe they will be, but I'm willing to start taking bets that they won't get anywhere near the truth of her. How can they: the truth of her was that complex and complex truths resist examination . . . Dottie was an original. She was unique. None of the words fit.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 279.

⁴⁶Cooper, "Whatever You Think Dorothy Parker Was, She Wasn't," p. 111.

CHAPTER III

DOROTHY PARKER, WHO ARE YOU?

(AT THE OPENING, THE STAGE IS BLACKOUT. THE CAST QUIETLY ENTERS AND POSITION THEMSELVES 4 DOWNSTAGE LEFT AT THE TABLE AND THE ACTOR WHO IS THE NARRATOR TAKES HIS PLACE STAGE RIGHT ON THE SECOND CIRCULAR PLATFORM. [SEE FIGURE 1] SPOTLIGHT COMES UP ON THE NARRATOR. THE REST OF THE STAGE IS STILL BLACKOUT.)

Narrator: In print and in person, Miss Parker sparkled with a word or a phrase, for she honed her humor to its most economical size. Her rapier wit, much of it spontaneous, gained its early renown for her membership in the Algonquin Round Table. . . .¹

(SPOT IS TAKEN OUT AND THE MAN SITTING AT THE TABLE IS PINPOINTED WITH AN OVER HEAD INSTRUMENT.)

"News Item"²

Man: Men don't make passes
At girls who wear glasses.

¹New York Times, 8 June 1967, p. 1.

²Viking Press, ed., The Portable Dorothy Parker (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), p. 109.

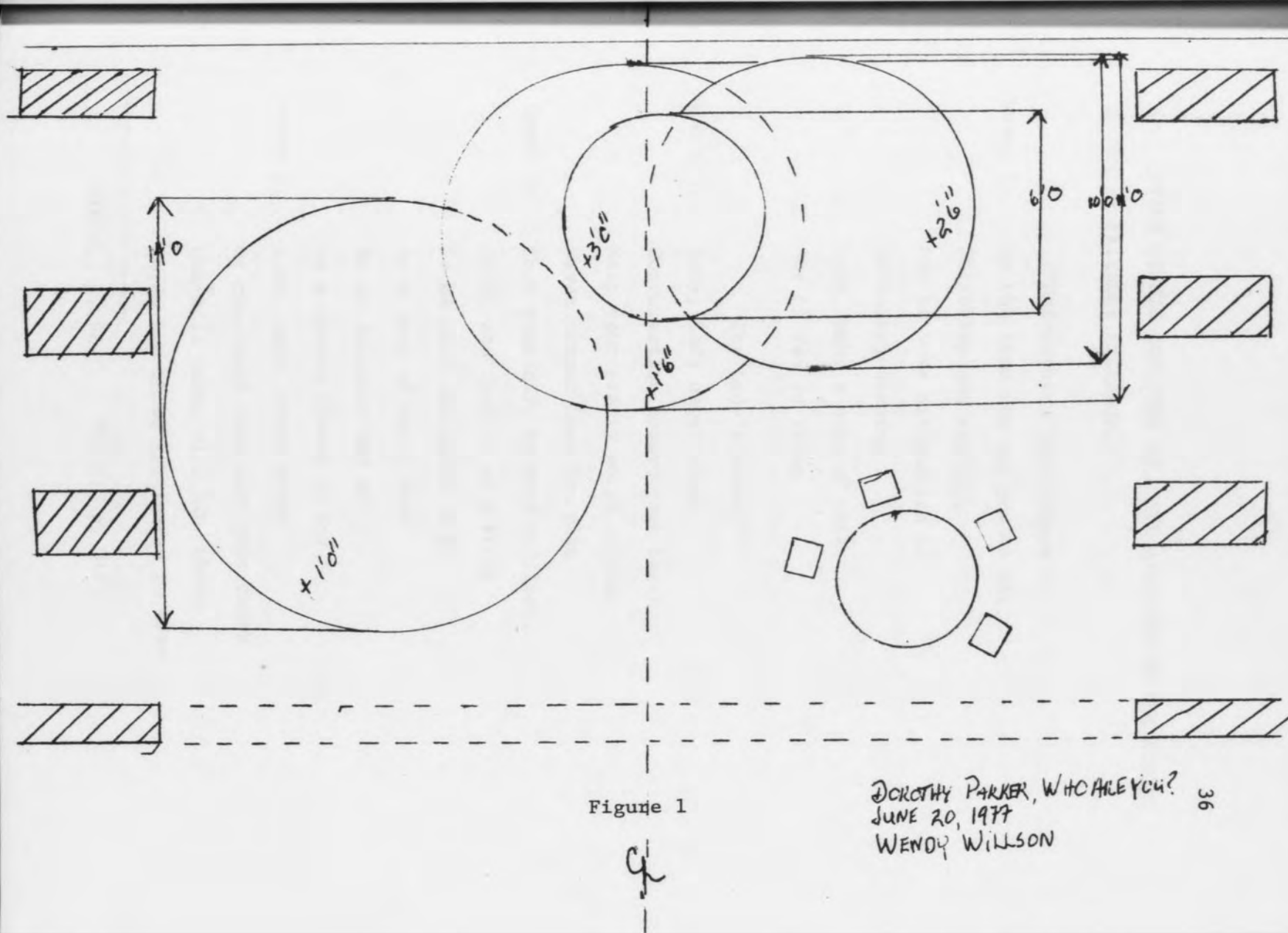


Figure 1

G

DOROTHY PARKER, WHO ARE YOU?
JUNE 20, 1977
WENDY WILLSON

(STAGE LIGHTS ARE CUED UP. THE ATTITUDE OF THE ACTORS
IS ONE OF FRIENDLY EXCHANGE.)

"Unfortunate Coincidence"³

Woman 1: By the time you see you're his,
Shivering and sighing,
And he vows his passion is
Infinite, undying . . .
Lady, make a note of this:
One of you is lying.

"The Lady's Reward"⁴

Woman 2: Lady, lady never start
Conversation toward your heart;
Keep your pretty words serene;
Never murmur what you mean.

Woman 3: Show yourself, by word and look,
Swift and shallow as a brook.
Be as cool and quick to go
As a drop of April snow;
Be as delicate and gay
As a cherry flower in May.

Woman 1: Lady, lady, never speak
Of the tears that burn your cheek
She will never will him, whose
Words had shown she feared to lose.

³Ibid., p. 96.

⁴Ibid., p. 317.

Man: Be you wise and never sad,
You will get your lovely lad.

(STAGE RIGHT ACTORS FREEZE AS ATTENTION GOES
TO THE NARRATOR. THE NARRATOR'S ATTITUDE
MIGHT BE THAT OF AN EAVESDROPPER.)

Narrator: Dorothy Parker, a true reflection of her time,
was first published by Frank Crowninshield in
Vanity Fair during the year 1917. Her poem
is entitled "Men: A Hate Song."⁵

Woman 1: I hate men. They irritate me.

Woman 2: There are the Serious Thinkers . . .
There ought to be a law against them.
They see life, as through shell-rimmed glasses,
darkly.
They are always drawing their weary hands
Across their wan brows.
They talk about Humanity
As if they had just invented it;
They have to keep helping it along.
They revel in strikes
And they are doing a wonderful thing for the
Great Unwashed, . . .

⁵Cleveland Amory and Frederick Bradley, eds.,
Vanity Fair (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p. 22.

They are living right down among them.
 They can hardly wait
 For the Masses to appear on the newsstands,
 And they read all those Russian novels
 The sex best sellers.

Woman 3: There are the Cave Men . . .
 The Specimens of the Red-Blooded Manhood.
 They eat everything very rare,
 They are scarcely ever out of their cold baths,
 And they want everybody to feel their muscles.
 They talk in loud voices,
 Using short Anglo-Saxon words.
 They go around raising windows,
 And they slap people on the back,
 And tell them what they need is exercise.
 They are always on the point of walking to
 San Francisco,
 Or crossing the ocean in a sailboat,
 Or going through Russia on a sled . . .
 I wish to God they would!

Woman 1: And then there are the Sensitive Souls
 Who do interior decorating, for Art's sake.
 They always smell faintly of vanilla
 And put drops of sandalwood on their cigarettes.
 They are continually getting up costume balls
 So they can go

As something out of the "Arabian Nights."

They give studio teas

Where people sit around on cushions

And wish they hadn't come.

They look at a woman languorously, through
half-closed eyes,

And tell her, in low, passionate tones,

What she ought to wear.

Color is everything to them--everything;

The wrong shade of purple

Gives them a nervous breakdown.

Woman 3: Then there are the ones

Who are Simply Steeped in Crime.

They tell you how they haven't been to bed
For four nights.

Woman 2: They frequent those dramas

Where the only good lines

Are those of the chorus.

Woman 1: They stagger from one cabaret to another,

And they give you the exact figures of
their gambling debts.

Woman 3: They hint darkly at the terrible part

That alcohol plays in their lives.

Woman 2: And then they shake their heads

And say Heaven must decide what is going to
become of them . . .

Women 2 and 3: I wish I were Heaven!

Woman 1: I hate men. They irritate me.

Narrator: Dorothy Parker was in good company at Vanity Fair with Robert Benchley and Sherwood Anderson as her companions. They became intimate friends and often lunched together at the Algonquin Hotel. They became charter members of the famous Algonquin Round Table. Others who joined them were Franklin Pierce Adams who wrote "The Conning Tower" byline for the New York Tribune, Alexander Wolcott, then theatre critic for the New York Times and also Harold Ross who was interested in starting a New York magazine. With these people Dorothy began to assume her reputation. FPA got so he would quote her in his column almost daily. One day Dorothy Parker was challenged to a word game . . . use the word "horticulture" in a sentence. She replied immediately, "You can lead a horticulture, but you can't make her think."⁶

⁶John Keats, You Might As Well Live, The Life and Times of Dorothy Parker (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 46.

"Indian Summer"⁷

Woman 1: In youth, it was a way I had
 Woman 2: To do my best to please,
 Woman 3: And change, with every passing lad,
 All: To suit his theories.
 Woman 1: But now, I know the things I know.
 Woman 2: And do the things I do;
 Woman 3: And if you do not like me so.
 All: To hell, my love, with you!

"Men"⁸

Man: They hail you as their morning star
 Because you are the way you are.
 If you return the sentiment,
 They'll try to make you different;
 And once they have you, safe and sound,
 They want to change you all around.
 Your moods and ways they put a curse on;
 They make of you another person.
 They cannot let you go your gait;
 They influence and educate.
 They'd alter all that they admired.
 They make me sick, they make me tired.

⁷Viking Press, ed., The Portable Dorothy Parker,
 p. 107.

⁸Ibid., p. 109.

Narrator: Others enjoying the pleasures of the luncheons at the Algonquin were Edna Ferber, George Kaufman, Harpo Marx, Jasch Heifetz to name a few. Always to be seen there were actors and actresses, and all those people who made up the core of the early twenties. At night Dorothy Parker and her friends would often go to supper and then to the theatre ending up at Neysa McMein's studio where Ms. McMein made wine in her bathtub. There Dorothy would encounter people like George Gershwin, Ethel Barrymore, and the Fitzgeralds, Scott and Zelda.⁹ The style that Dorothy and her friends created call for one to go through life armed with a wry, hard suspicion to be always ready to acknowledge excellence but equally ready to express an informal contempt for all that was in any way bogus . . . Dorothy's friends often were afraid of her all too sharp tongue. At the same time they were just as ready to have a good time with her at every opportunity.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., p. 305.

"Coda"¹⁰

Woman 1: There's little
 Woman 2: in taking
 Woman 3: or giving
 Woman 1: There's little
 Woman 2: in water
 Woman 3: or wind
 All: This living, this living, this living
 Was never a project of mine.
 Woman 1: Oh, hard is the struggle,
 Woman 2: and sparse is the gain of the one at the top,
 Woman 3: For art is a form of catharsis
 All: And love is a permanent flop,
 Woman 1: And work is the province of cattle,
 Woman 2: And rest's for a clam in a shell,
 Woman 3: So I'm thinking of throwing the battle . . .
 All: Would you kindly direct me to hell?

"Philosophy"¹²

Man: If I should labor through daylight and dark,
 Consecrate, valorous, serious, true,
 Then on the world I may blazon my mark;
 And what if I don't and what if I do?

¹¹Viking Press, ed., The Portable Dorothy Parker,
p. 240.

¹²Ibid., p. 107.

"Summary"¹³

Woman 2: Every love's the love before
 In a duller dress.
 That's the measure of my lore . . .
 Here's my bitterness:
 Would I knew a little more,
 Or very much less!

"Second Love"¹⁴

Man: So surely is she mine
 Woman 3: you say, and turn
 Your quick and steady mind to harder things . . .
 Man: To bills and bonds and talk of what men earn . . .
 Woman 3: And whistle up the stair, of evenings.
 And do you see a dream behind my eyes,
 Or ask a simple question twice of me . . .
 Man: Thus women are
 Woman 3: you say; for men are wise and tolerant,
 in their security.
 How shall I count the midnights I have known
 When calm you turn to me, nor feel me start,
 To find my easy lips upon your own
 And know my breast beneath your rhythmic heart.
 Your god defer the day I tell you this:

¹³Ibid., p. 313.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 229.

My lad, my lad, it is not you I kiss!

Narrator: Dorothy Parker's love life filled her with disillusion. Her beginnings were happy, her endings tragic. She was married twice and had several very unhappy love affairs. On more than one occasion she attempted suicide as a result of these disasterous affairs. Lillian Hellman says that Dorothy Parker always chose the wrong men to fall in love with.

"Two Volume Novel"¹⁵

Woman 1: The sun's gone dim, and
The moon's turned black;
For I loved him, and
He didn't love back.

"A Dream Lies Dead"¹⁶

Woman 2 A dream lies dead here.

and 3:

Woman 3: May you softly go
Before this place, and turn away your eyes,
Nor seek to know the look of that which dies,
Importuning Life for Life

¹⁵Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 228.

Woman 2: Walk, not in woe,
 But, for a little, let you step be slow.
 And, of your mercy, be not sweetly wise
 with words of hope and Spring and tenderer
 skies.

Women 2 A dream lies dead; and this all mourners
 and 3: know

Woman 3: Whenever one drifted petal leaves the trees . . .
 Though white of bloom as it had been before
 And proudly waitful of fecundity . . .
 One little loveliness can be no more;

Woman 2 And so must Beauty bow her imperfect head
 and 3: Because a dream has joined the wistful dead!

"Sanctuary"¹⁷

Man: My land is bare of chattering folk;
 The clouds are low along the ridges,
 And sweet's the air with curly smoke
 From all my burning bridges.

Narrator: Not only did Dorothy Parker write poetry but
 she was also a drama critic for Vanity Fair.
 I might add, a sharp-tongued drama critic at
 that. As a matter of fact, Dorothy Parker lost
 her job as a result of a review she wrote about

¹⁷Ibid., p. 297.

Billie Burke. Flo Ziegfield, husband to Billie Burke, "pulled a few strings" and had Dorothy Parker removed. She wrote many book reviews for the New Yorker magazine under the title Constant Reader and even wrote book reviews for Esquire during the Fifties and very early Sixties.

Woman 1: (RISING AND CROSSING DOWN CENTER) From the New Yorker magazine, October 8, 1927. "The Private Papers of the Dead."¹⁸ I think that The Journal of Katherine Mansfield is the saddest book I have ever read. Here, set down in exquisite fragments, is the record of six lonely and tormented years, the life's end of a desperately ill woman. So private is it that one feels forever guilty of prying for having read it.

Her journal was her dear companion. "Come, my unseen, my unknown, let us talk together," she says to it. Only in its pages could she show her tragically sensitive mind, her lovely quivering soul. She was not of the little breed of the discontented; and she was of the high few fated to be ever unsatisfied. Writing was the most precious thing in life to her, but she was never truly pleased with

¹⁸Ibid., p. 451.

anything she had written. With a sort of fierce austerity, she strove for the crystal clearness, the hard, bright purity from which streams perfect truth. She never felt that she had attained them.

This is the book of a writer. Not, I mean, that they're chummy bits of "Literary gossip" or John-Farrar-like anecdotes of the bookmen of her acquaintance. But Katherine Mansfield could look on at herself, so to say, and see even in her physical sufferings material for her pen. "I must remember it," she says, after a racking agony of lumbago, "when I write about an old man." "Let me remember," she prays of a smoky rain, a violin note, a shiny, blue day. There are plans for sketches of characters. These are not set down in the dreadful manner of the two-story-a-week writers who carry obnoxious notebooks about, snapping at "copy." She wrote them in her journal, this journal that was for her alone, because here was her life, because the writer and the woman were not and could never be two separate things.

The photographs of her that illustrate the journal are of deep interest. The first was

taken in 1913; the last shortly before her death ten years later. She grew always more beautiful for her suffering.

Journal of Katherine Mansfield is a beautiful book and invaluable one, but it is her own book, and only her dark sad eyes should have read its words. I closed it with a little murmur to her portrait on the cover. "Please forgive me," I said. (CROSS UP RIGHT AND SIT ON TOP PLATFORM.)

Narrator: One of Dorothy Parker's least favorite authors was A. A. Milne as can be seen by her review of October 20, 1928, which appeared in her Constant Reader column in The New Yorker. "Far From Well."¹⁹

Man: (CROSSING DOWN CENTER)

The more it

SNOWS - tiddely - pom,

The more it

GOES tiddely - pom

The more it

GOES tiddely-pom

On

Snowing

And nobody

¹⁹Ibid., 517.

KNOWS - tiddely - pom.

How cold my

TOES - tiddely - pom

Are

Growing.

Woman 2: (CROSSING DOWN CENTER) The above lyric is culled from the fifth page of Mr. A. A. Milne's new book, The House At Pooh Corner, for, although the work is in prose, there are frequent droppings into more cadenced whimsy. This one is designated as a "Hum," that pops into the head of Winnie-the-Pooh as he is standing outside Piglet's house in the snow, jumping up and down to keep warm. It "seemed to him a Good Hum, such as in Hummed Hopeful to Others." In fact, so Good a Hum did it seem that he and piglet started right out through the snow to Hum It Hopefully to Eeyore. Oh, darn . . . there I've gone and given away the plot. Oh, I could bite my tongue out.

As they are trotting along against the flakes (WOMAN 3 COMES FORWARD AND JOINS MAN) Piglet begins to weaken a bit.

Woman 3: Pooh, I was just wondering. How would it be if we went home now and PRACTISED your song, and then sang it to Eeyore tomorrow . . . or . . .

- or the next day, when we happen to see him.
- Man: That's a very good idea, Piglet, we'll practise it now as we go along. But it's no good going home to practise it, because it's a special Outdoor Song which Has To Be Sung In The Snow.
- Woman 3: Are you sure?
- Man: Well, you'll see, Piglet, when you listen. Because this is the way it begins. "THE MORE IT SNOWS, TIDDELY - POM . . . "
- Woman 3: Tiddely what? (BEGIN CROSSING STAGE RIGHT WITH POOH--FREEZE.)
- Woman 2: She took, as you might say, the very words out of your correspondent's mouth.
- Man: Pom. I put that in to make it more hummy.
(WOMAN 3 AND MAN BEGIN CROSSING AGAIN TO PLATFORMS. FREEZE ON WOMAN 2 LINE.)
- Woman 2: And it is that word, "hummy," my darlings, that marks the first place in The House at Pooh Corner at which Tconstant Weader Fwowed up.
(ALL CROSS TO PLATFORMS. MAN AND WOMAN 3 GO TO THIRD LEVEL, WOMAN 2 TO BOTTOM LEVEL. AS THEY ARRIVE THE NARRATOR BEGINS.)
- Narrator: Dorothy Parker is now famous for her short story. She has been compared to such people as Hemingway. The Big Blond,²⁰ probably

²⁰Dorothy Parker, Laments for the Living (New York: Viking Press, 1930), p. 169.

her most famous short story, won the O'Henry prize for the year 1929. Dorothy Parker appeared to type-cast herself as The Big Blonde Life in the Twenties.

(ALL FOCUS IS NOW STAGE RIGHT WITH ALL MEMBERS OF THE CAST SITTING ON THE DIFFERENT LEVELS. LIGHT LEVEL DROPS ON LEFT SIDE OF THE STAGE. ON STAGE FOCUS.)

Narrator: Hazel Morse is her name. She used to be a large, fair woman of the type that incites some men when they use the word "blonde" to click their tongues and wag their heads roughly.

Woman 1: I prided myself upon my small feet and suffered for my vanity, boxing them in snubtoed, high-heeled slippers of the shortest bearable size.

Narrator: The curious thing about her were her hands, strange terminations to the flabby white arms splattered with pale tan spots . . . long, quivering hands with deep and convex nails. She should not have disfigured them with little jewels.

She was not a woman given to recollections. At her middle thirties, her old days were a blurred and flickering sequence, an imperfect film, dealing with the actions of strangers.

Woman 1: In my twenties after the deferred death of my hazy widowed mother, I was employed as a model in a wholesale dress establishment.

. . . It was still the day of the big woman and I was then prettily colored and erect and high-brested. My job was not a burden and I met numbers of men and spent numbers of evenings with them, laughing at their jokes and told them I loved their neckties. Men liked me, and I took it for granted that the liking of many men was a desirable thing. I was a good sport. Men liked a good sport.

Narrator: No other form of diversion, simpler or more complicated, drew her attention. She never thought that she might be better doing something else.

Woman 1: When I had been working in the dress establishment some years I met Herbie Morse. He was thin, quick, attractive, with shifting lines about his shiny, brown eyes and he had a habit of fiercely biting at the skin around his finger nails. He drank largely; I found that entertaining. I always said to him after the night before "Oh, what a peach you had. I thought I'd die, the way you kept asking the waiter to dance with you." I liked him

immediately. I was enormously amused at his fast, slurred sentences, his quoting of phrases from vaudeville acts and comic strips; I thrilled at the feel of his lean arm tucked firm beneath the sleeve of my coat; I wanted to touch the wet, flat surface of his hair. He was as promptly drawn to me. We were married six weeks after we met.

Narrator: Hazel wanted to be married. She was nearing thirty now and she did not take the years real well. She had spread and softened a little and her darkening hair made her think to dabble with peroxide. There were times when she had little flashes of fear about her job. She had had a couple of thousand evenings of being a good sport with her male acquaintances. It had come to be more work than fun.

Man: After Hazel and I were married we took a little apartment far uptown. There was a Mission-furnished dining-room with a hanging central light globe in liver-colored glass; in the living room were an "overstuffed suite," a Boston fern and a reproduction of the Henner "Magdalene" with the red hair and the blue draperies; the bedroom was a grey enamel and old rose with my photograph on Hazel's

dressing-table and Hazel's likeness on my chest of drawers. Hazel cooked . . . and she was a good cook . . . and marketed and chatted with the delivery boys and the colored laundress.

Narrator: Hazel loved their flat and she loved her life, she loved Herbie.

Woman 1: It was a delight, a new game, a holiday to give up being a good sport.

Man: For a time, I had enjoyed being alone with her. I found the voluntary isolation novel and sweet.

Woman 1: If my mood was quiet, I did not talk. If tears came to my eyes, I let them fall.

Man: Then it palled with a suddenness. It was as if one night, sitting with her in the steam-heated living room I would ask no more; and the next night I was through and done with the whole thing.

Woman 1: Wedded and relaxed, I poured my tears freely. It was delicious to cry after having laughed so much.

Man: I was annoyed by her misty melancholies. At first, when I came home to find her softly tired and moody, I would kiss her neck and pat her shoulder and begged her to tell her

Herbie what was wrong. She loved that. But time slid by, and I found that there was never anything really, personally the matter.

Woman 1: I would cry long and softly over newspaper accounts of kidnapped babies, deserted wives, unemployed men, stray cats, heroic dogs. My mind revolved upon these things and the tears would slip down over my plumping cheeks.

Man: Ah, for God's sake Hazel, crying again. All right, sit here and cry your head off. I'm going out . . . And then I would slam out of the flat and come back late and drunk.

Narrator: She was completely bewildered by what was happening in her marriage. First they had been lovers; and then, it seemed without transition, they were enemies. She never understood it.

Man: I was longer and longer arriving at the apartment at night. She went through agonies of picturing me run over and bleeding, dead and covered with a sheet. Then she lost her fears for my safety and grew sullen and wounded.

Woman 1: When a person wanted to be with a person, he came as soon as possible.

Narrator: Hazel desperately wanted Herbie to want to be with her.

- Woman 1: It was often nearly nine o'clock before Herbie came home to dinner. Always he had had many drinks. He'd be loud and querulous and bristling for a fight.
- Man: What am I expected to do . . . sit around this dump on my tail all night? Then I'd slam out again.
- Woman 1: I wanted a nice home. I wanted a sober, tender husband, prompt at dinner, punctual at work.
- Narrator: Hazel became frightened.
- Woman 1: Several times when Herbie came home in the evening, I was determindly dressed . . . Let's go wild tonight, what do you say. A person's got lots of time to hang around and do nothing when they're dead.
- Man: So we would go out, to chop houses and the less expensive cabarets. But it turned out badly.
- Woman 1: I didn't find it funny anymore to watch Herbie drink. I could not laugh at his whimsicalities, I was so closely counting his indulgences. Ah come on, Herb, you've had enough haven't you? You'll feel something terrible in the morning.
- Man: All right, crab, crab, crab, crab, crab. That's all you ever do. What a lousy sport you are.

Narrator: Hazel couldn't recall the definite day that she started drinking. There was nothing separate about her days. Like drops upon a windowpane, they ran together and trickled away. She had been married six months, then a year; then three years.

Woman 1: I hated the taste of liquor. Gin, plain or in mixtures, made me sick. After experimenting, I found that Scotch whisky was best for me. I took it without water, because that was the quickest way to its effect.

Man: I pressed it on her. I was glad to see her drink. We both felt it might restore her high spirits, and our own good times together might be possible again. Atta girl, let's see you get boiled, baby. But it brought us no nearer. When she drank with me, there would be a little while of gaiety and then, strangely without beginning, we'd be in a wild quarrel. We'd wake in the morning not sure what it had all been about, foggy as to what had been said and done, but each of us deeply injured and bitterly resentful. There would be days of vengeful silence.

There had been a time when we had made up our quarrels, usually in bed. There would

be kisses and little names and assurances of fresh starts.

Narrator: Now there were no gentle reconciliations between Hazel and Herbie. They were friends only in brief generosity caused by liquor, before more liquor drew them into new battles.

Man: Once I gave her a black eye. I was horrified next day at the sight of it. I didn't go to work. I followed her about, suggesting remedies and heaping dark blame on myself. But after we had a few drinks . . . "to pull ourselves together" . . . she made so many wistful references to her bruise that I shouted at her and rushed out and was gone for two days. Each time I left the place in a rage, I threatened never to come back.

Narrator: Hazel didn't believe Herbie, nor did Hazel consider separation.

Woman 1: I could no longer bustle and potter. My tears I shed were for myself. I walked about the rooms, my thoughts running round and round Herbie.

Narrator: In those days began the hatred of being alone that Hazel was never to overcome.

Woman 1: You could be by yourself when things were all right, but when you were blue you got the

howling horrors. So I began to drink alone, little, short drinks all through the day. It was only with Herbie that alcohol made me nervous and quick in offense. Alone, it blurred sharp things for me. My life took on a dream-like quality. Nothing was astonishing.

Narrator: A Mrs. Martin moved into the flat across the hall from Hazel. She was a great blond woman of forty. Some people said Hazel would be like her when she was forty.

Woman 1: We made friends quickly, became inseparable. We drank together to brace ourselves after the drinks the night before.

Woman 3: Hazel never confided her trouble to me. She let it that her husband's business kept him much away. I didn't think it important; husbands played but shadowy parts in my circle. I had no visible spouse; I let each person decide for themselves whether he was or was not dead. I did have an admirer, Joe, who came to see me almost nightly. Often he brought several friends with him . . . "The Boys" they were called. "The Boys" were big, red, good humored men, perhaps forty-five, perhaps fifty.

Woman 1: I was glad of the invitations to join the parties with "The Boys." Herbie was scarcely ever at home at night now. If he did come home, I did not visit Mrs. Martin. An evening alone with Herbie always meant a quarrel, yet, I would stay with him.

Narrator: Hazel always thought that, maybe, this night, things would begin to be alright.

Woman 1: The boys brought plenty of liquor along with them whenever they came to Mrs. Martin's. Drinking with them, I became lively and good-natured and audacious. I was quickly popular. When I had drunk enough to cloud my most recent battle with Herbie I was excited by their attention. Crab was I? Rotten sport, was I? Well, there was some that thought different.

Narrator: Ed was one of "The Boys." He lived in Utica . . . had "his own business" there, was the awed report. . . but he came to New York almost every week. He was married. He showed Hazel the then current photographs of Junior and Sister, and she praised them. Soon it was accepted that Ed was Hazel's particular friend. Ed liked Hazel, she was a good sport. He staked her when they played poker. She was

lucky. Frequently Hazel went home with a twenty dollar bill or a ten dollar bill or a handful of crumpled dollars.

Woman 1: I was glad of the money. Herbie was getting something awful about money. To ask him for it brought an instant row.

One afternoon I came home from Mrs. Martin's to find Herbie in the bedroom. He had been away for several nights, evidently one prolonged drinking bout. His face was gray, his hands jerked as if they were on wires. On the bed were two old suitcases, packed high. Only my photograph remained on his bureau, and the wide doors of his closet disclosed nothing but coat-hangers.

Man: I'm blowing, I'm through with the whole works. I got a job in Detroit.

Woman 1: Good job?

Man: Oh yeah, looks all right. There's some dough in the bank. The bank book's in your top drawer. You can have the furniture and stuff. God damn it, I'm through, I'm telling you, I'm through.

Woman 1: All right, all right. I heard you, didn't I? Like a drink before you go?

Man: Cockeyed again for a change, aren't you?
That's nice. Sure, get a couple of shots,
will you?

Woman 1: While I was in the pantry preparing the drinks,
I poured just a little extra for myself and
drank it off before I returned to the bedroom.

Man: Well, here's mud in your eye.

Woman 1: Mud in your eye.

Man: Well, got to get a train at six.

Woman 1: Well I'll see you to the door.

Narrator: Hazel followed him down the hall to the door
and running loudly through her mind was a song.
She never liked it. Night and daytime . . .
Always playtime . . . Ain't we got fun?

Man: Well . . . well, take care of yourself. You'll
be all right will you?

Woman 1: Oh, sure.

Narrator: When the door closed Hazel went back to the
pantry.

Woman 3: Hazel was flushed and lively when she came in
to my place that evening. The boys were here.
Ed was here too. He seemed to be glad to be
in town. He was frisky and loud and full of
jokes. I noticed Hazel spoke quietly to him.

Woman 1: Herbie blew today, Ed, going to live out west.

Man: That so? . . . Think he's gone for good, do you?

Woman 1: Yeah. I know he is. I know. Yeah.

Man: You going to live across the hall just the same? Know what you're going to do?

Woman 1: I don't know. I don't give much of a damn.

Man: That's no way to talk. What you need . . . you need a little snifter. How about it?

Woman 1: Yeah. Just straight.

I won \$43.00 that night. When the game broke up, Ed took me to my apartment. Got a little kiss for me? he says.

Man: When I left in the morning, I took Hazel's photograph with me. I said I wanted her picture to look at, up in Utica.

Narrator: Hazel put Herbie's picture in a drawer, out of her sight. When she could look at it, she meant to tear it up. Hazel was fairly successful in keeping her mind from racing around him. Whiskey slowed it for her. She was almost peaceful in her mist. Hazel accepted her relationship with Ed without question or enthusiasm. When he was away, she seldom thought of him. He was good to her; he gave her frequent presents and a regular allowance. She was even able to save.

Woman 1: When the lease of my apartment neared its end, Ed suggested I move. So I took a little flat

in the Forties. A colored maid came in every day to clean and make coffee for me . . . I was through with that housekeeping stuff. The coffee was all I had until I went out to dinner, but alcohol kept me fat. Prohibition was only for jokes. I could always get all I wanted. I was never noticeably drunk but seldom nearly sober.

Man: I brought Hazel to Jimmy's for the first time. There I introduced her to many men and women. She formed quick friendships. I was proud of her popularity.

Woman 1: I fell into the habit of going to Jimmy's alone when I had no engagement. I was certain to meet some people I knew and join them.

Narrator: The women at my place, Jimmy's, looked remarkably alike, and this was curious, for, through feuds, removals and opportunities of more profitable contacts, the personnel of the group changed constantly. Yet always the newcomers resembled those whom they replaced. They were all big women and stout, broad of shoulder and abundantly breasted, with faces thickly clothed in soft, high-colored flesh. They laughed loud and often, showing opaque and lusterless teeth like squares of crockery.

There was about them the health of the big yet a slight, unwholesome suggestion of stubborn preservation. They might have been thirty-six or forty-five or anywhere between. The aim of each was to have one man, permanently, to pay all her bills, in return for which she would have immediately given up other admirers and probably would have become exceedingly fond of him; for the affections of all of them were, by now, unexact, tranquil and easily arranged. This end, however, grew increasingly difficult yearly. Hazel was regarded as fortunate.

Man: I had a good year, increased Hazel's allowance and gave her a sealskin coat. But Hazel had to be careful of her moods with me. I insisted upon gaiety. "Hey listen, I got worries of my own, and plenty. What you got to do, you got to be a SPORT and forget it."

Woman 1: When my relationship with Ed had continued nearly three years, he moved to Florida to live. He hated leaving me; he gave me a large check and some shares of sound stock, and his pale eyes were wet when he said good-bye. I did not miss him. When he came to New York he hurried directly from the train to see me. I

was always pleased to have him come and never sorry to see him go.

After Ed left, Charley became the main figure in my life. I classified him and spoke of him as not too bad. There was nearly a year of Charley; then I divided my time between him and Sydney, still another frequenter of Jimmy's; then Charley slipped away altogether. Sydney was a little, brightly dressed, clever Jew. I was perhaps nearest contentment with him. He amused me always; my laughter was never forced. He admired me completely. He thought I was great, he often told me, because I kept gay and lively when I was drunk.

Narrator: Then Sydney married a rich and watchful bride, and then there was Billy. No . . . after Sydney came Fred, then Billy. In her haze, Hazel never recalled how men entered her life and left it.

Once she had news of Herbie. He had settled in Chicago, he looked fine, he was living with some woman . . . seemed to be crazy about her. Hazel had been drinking vastly that day. She took the news with mild interest, as one hearing of the sex piccadilloes of somebody whose name is, after a moment, gropingly familiar.

Woman 1: Must be damn near seven years since I saw him.
Gee, seven years.

More and more my days lost their individuality. I never knew dates, nor was sure of the day of the week. I was tired so much of the time. Tired and blue. Almost everything could give me the blues. Those old horses I saw on Sixth Avenue . . . struggling and slipping along the car tracks, or standing at the curb, their heads dropped level with their worn knees. The tightly stored tears would squeeze from my eyes as I teetered past on my aching feet in the stubby, champagne-colored slippers.

Narrator: The thought of death came and stayed with Hazel and lent her a sort of frowsy cheer. . . .

Woman 1: It would be nice, nice and restful to be dead.

Narrator: There was no settled, shocked moment when Hazel first thought of killing herself; it seemed to her as if the idea had always been with her.

Woman 1: I slept, aided by whiskey, till deep into the afternoons, then lay abed, a bottle and glass at my hand, until it was time to dress to go out for dinner. I was beginning to feel towards

alcohol a little puzzled distrust, as toward an old friend who has refused a simple favor. Whiskey could still soothe me for most of the time, but there were sudden, inexplicable moments when the cloud fell treacherously away from me, and I was drawn by the sorrow and bewilderment and nuisance of all living. I played voluptuously with the thought of cool, sleepy retreat. I dreamed by day of never again putting on tight shoes, of never having to laugh and listen and admire, of never more being a good sport. Never. But how would I do it? It made me sick to think of jumping from heights. I could not stand a gun. There was no gas in my flat. I looked long at the bright blue veins in my wrists . . . a cut with a razor blade, and there you'd be. But it would hurt, hurt like hell, and there would be blood to see. Poison . . . something tasteless and quick and painless . . . was the thing. But they wouldn't sell it to you in drug stores, because of the law.

Narrator: Hazel had few other thoughts.

There was a new man . . . Art. He was short and fat and exacting and hard on Hazel's patience when he was drunk. But there had

been only occasionals for some time before him, and she was glad of a little stability. Too, Art must be away for weeks at a stretch, selling silks, and that was restful.

Woman 1: I was convincingly gay with Art, though the effort always shook me. "The best sport in the world" he would murmur, deep in my neck. "The best sport in the world."

One night while in the dressing room at Jimmy's I met my old friend Mrs. Martin. There, while designing curly mouths on our faces we compared experiences of insomnia.

Honestly, I wouldn't close an eye if I didn't go to bed full of Scotch. I lie there and toss and turn and toss and turn. Blue! Does a person get blue lying awake that way?

Woman 3: Say listen Hazel, I'm telling you I'd be awake for a year if I didn't take veronal. That stuff makes you sleep like a fool.

Woman 1: Isn't it poison or something?

Woman 3: Oh, you take too much and you're out for the count. I just take five grains . . . they come in tablets. I'd be scared to fool around with it. But five grains, and you cork off pretty.

Woman 1: Can you get it anywhere?

Woman 3: Get all you want in Jersey. They won't give it to you here without a doctor's prescription.

Narrator: The next day Hazel went to New Jersey. In Newark, she went to two different drug stores and bought little glass vials containing ten white tablets stacked on each other.

Woman 1: When I got home, I put the little vials in the drawer of my dressing table and stood looking at them with a dreamy tenderness. There they are, God bless them. Hey Nettie (she was the colored maid who was busy in the living room) be an angel, will you? Run round to Jimmy's and get me a quart of Scotch.

During the next few days, whiskey ministered to me as tenderly as it had done when I first turned to its aid. Alone, I was soothed and vague, at Jimmy's I was gayest of the groups. Art was delighted with me.

Narrator: Then one night Hazel had an appointment to meet Art at Jimmy's for an early dinner. He was to leave afterward on a business excursion, to be away for a week. Hazel had been drinking all the afternoon. She felt in high spirits. But as she came out into the street the effects of the whiskey deserted her completely and she was filled with a slow,

grinding wretchedness so horrible that she stood swaying on the pavement, unable for a moment to move forward. It was a gray night with spurts of mean thin snow, and the streets shone with dark ice. As Hazel crossed Sixth Avenue, consciously dragging one foot past the other, a big scarred horse pulling a rickety express-wagon crashed to his knees before her. The driver swore and screamed and lashed the beast insanely, bringing the whip back over his shoulder for every blow, while the horse struggled to get a footing on the slippery asphalt. A group gathered and watched with interest.

Woman 1: Art was waiting for me when I reached Jimmy's. I told him what I had seen. He told me to pull myself together, and sit down. Well, I drank hard and I tried hard, but I couldn't overcome my melancholy. Others joined us and commented on my gloom and I could do no more for them than smile weakly. I made little dabs at my eyes with my handkerchief, trying to time my movements so they would be unnoticed, but several times Art caught me and scowled and shifted impatiently in his chair. When it was time for Art to go to his train

I left too. He told me to go home and sleep myself out of it and for God's sake, try and cheer up by the time he came back in to town.

Narrator: In her bedroom, Hazel undressed with a tense speed wholly unlike her usual slow uncertainty. Then she took the two little vials from the drawer and carried them into the bathroom. The splintering misery had gone from her and she felt the quick excitement of one who is about to receive an anticipated gift.

Woman 1: I uncorked the vials, filled a glass with water and stood before the mirror, a tablet in my fingers. Suddenly I bowed graciously to what I saw in the mirror and raised my glass to it. "Well, here's mud in your eye."

It took me a long time to swallow all twenty of them. They seemed to stick half way down my throat. I studied the movements of my gulping throat in the mirror. "For God's sake, try and cheer up by the time I get back in town, will you?" Well, you know what he can do. He and the whole lot of them.

I stretched my arms high, gave a vast yawn and wondered if death would strike me down now or whether it might take an hour or so. Guess I'll go to bed. Gee, I'm nearly

dead. (LAUGH.) Gee, I'm nearly dead.
That's a hot one.

Woman 2: I came in late the next afternoon to clean the apartment and found Mrs. Morse in her bed. But then that wasn't unusual. I finished cleaning the living-room so I went to the bathroom to clean it. While I was cleaning I couldn't avoid making a tiny clatter as I was arranging the objects on the dressing-table. I thought sure I had wakened her so I glanced over my shoulder to see. As I looked, a sickly uneasiness crept over me. I moved to the bed and stared down at the sleeping woman.

She was lying on her back, one flabby white arm flung up. Her stiff hair hung along her face. The bed covers were pushed down exposing a deep square of soft neck and a pink nightgown, its fabric worn uneven; her great breasts, freed from their tight confiner, sagged beneath her arm pits. Now and then she made knotted snoring sounds, and from the corner of her opened mouth to the blurred turn of her jaw ran a lane of crusted spittle.

I tried to wake her but she made no move. I shook her shoulder . . . wake up, please wake up.

Well, I ran out into the hall to the elevator door, keeping my thumb pressed on that black button until the elevator arrived. I grabbed the attendant, a friend of mine, and led him back to the apartment. He tiptoed to the bedside and began prodding the unconscious woman. Hey, he cried to me, out like a light. We'd better fetch the young doctor who lives on the ground floor.

The doctor was in and none too pleased at the interruption. He had a yellow and blue striped dressing-gown on and was lying on his sofa, laughing with a dark girl.

Half-emptied highball glasses stood beside them and everything indicated a long stay.

Man: Always something, couldn't ever have time to yourself. Well, I put some bottles and instruments into a case, changed out of my dressing-gown and followed the maid and the elevator boy. I went into the apartment and directly to the bedroom with those two following right behind me. The woman's sleep was deep and soundless. I looked at her closely and then plunged my thumbs into the lidded pits right above her eyeballs and threw my weight into it. The maid screamed

behind me but the woman on the bed gave no sign under the pressures I applied. I pulled the bed clothes back and began pinching her behind her knees. Still nothing. I asked the maid what the woman had been drinking. She went to see and came back with two vials. Oh, for the Lord Almighty's sweet sake, what did she want to go taking that tripe for? Rotten yellow trick, that's what a thing like that is. Now we'll have to pump her out, and all that stuff. Nuisance, a thing like that is; that's what it amounts to. Here, boy, take me down in the elevator. You wait here. She won't do anything. She won't die. You couldn't kill her with an axe.

Narrator: After about two days, Hazel came back to consciousness and began to comprehend what had happened.

Woman 1: Oh, Lord, Oh Lord . . .

Woman 2: What have you been trying to do, Mrs. Morse? What kind of work is that, taking all that stuff? That's no way to act, taking all those pills. Thank your stars you are here at all. How do you feel?

Woman 1: Oh, I feel great. Swell.

- Woman 2: That's no way to take on, crying like that. After what you have done. The doctor says he could have you arrested doing a thing like that. He was fit to be tied.
- Woman 1: Why couldn't he let me alone. Why the hell couldn't he have?
- Woman 2: That's terrible, swearing and talking like that after what people have done for you.
- Woman 1: Oh, I'm sorry, Nettie. You're a peach. I'm sorry I've given you so much trouble. I couldn't help it. I just got sunk. Didn't you ever feel like doing it? When everything looks lousy to you?
- Woman 2: A pretty picture card came for you. Maybe that will cheer you up.
- Woman 1: It was from Art. On the back of a view of the Detroit Athletic Club he had written:
"Greetings and salutations. Hope you have lost that gloom. Cheer up and don't take any rubber nickles. See you on Thursday."
I dropped the card to the floor. Misery crushed me as if I were between great smooth stones. There passed before me a slow, slow pageant of days spent lying in my flat, of evenings at Jimmy's being a good sport, making myself laugh and coo at Art and other Arts:

I saw a long parade of weary horses and shivering beggars and all beaten, driven and stumbling things. My feet throbbed as if I had crammed them into the stubby champagne-colored slippers. Nettie, for heaven's sake, pour me a drink, will you? Bring in the bottle.

When Nettie brought me the drink I looked into the liquor and shuddered back from its odor. (THE LIGHTS ON STAGE ARE DIMMING AND A SPOT IS ON HAZEL. THROUGH OUT THIS SPEECH THE LIGHTS GO DOWN AND THE SPOT BEGINS TO PINPOINT TOWARD HAZEL'S FACE. THE LAST THING THE AUDIENCE SEES IN THIS READING IS THE FACE OF HAZEL.) Maybe it would help. Maybe, when you had been knocked cold for a few days, your very first drink would give you a lift. Maybe whiskey would be my friend again. I prayed without addressing a God, without knowing a God. Oh, please, please, let me be able to get drunk, please always drunk.

Narrator: Hazel lifted her glass. (BLACKOUT . . . SPOT IN ON NARRATOR AND LIGHTS COME UP AGAIN. WOMAN 1 HAS COME OFF THE HIGH PLATFORM AND JOINED THE REST OF THE CAST.)

Narrator: More perceptive than most of the people around her, Dorothy Parker saw more clearly than they the absurdity of their lives . . . her own included.²¹

"Rainy Night"²²

Woman 3: Ghosts of all my lovely sins,
Who attend too well my pillow,
Gay the wanton rain begins;
Hide the limp and tearful willow.

Woman 2: Turn aside your eyes and ears,
Trail away your robes of sorrow,
You shall have my futher years . . .
You shall walk with me tomorrow.

Woman 1: I am sister to the rain;
Fey and sudden and unholy,
Petulant at the windowpane,
Quickly lost, remembered slowly.

Woman 2: I have lived with shades, a shade;
I am hung with graveyard flowers.

Woman 3: Let me tonight arrayed
In the silver of the showers.

Woman 1: Every fragile thing shall rust;
When another April passes

²¹John Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 303.

²²Viking Press, ed., The Portable Dorothy Parker, p. 86.

I may be a furry dust,
 Sifting through the brittle grasses.

Woman 1 All sweet sins shall be forgot;
 and 2: Who will live to tell their siring?
 Woman 3: Hear me now, nor let me rot
 Wistful still, and still aspiring.

Woman 2: Ghosts of dear temptations, heed:
 Woman 3: I am frail, be you forgiving.
 Woman 1: See you not that I have need
 All: To be living with the living?
 Man: Sail, tonight, the Styx's beast;
 Glide among the dim processions
 of the exquisite unrest,
 All: Spirits of my shared transgressions.
 Man: Roam with young Persephone,
 Plucking poppies for your slumber . . .

Woman 3: With the morrow,
 Woman 1: there shall be
 Woman 2: One more wraith among your number.

Narrator: In 1925 Dorothy Parker wrote a poem, The Small Hours²³ which she lived with her whole life.

Woman 3: No more my little song comes back;
 And now of nights I lay
 My head on down, to watch the black

²³Ibid., p. 75.

And wait the unfailing gray.
Oh, sad are winter nights, and slow;
And sad's a song that's dumb;
And sad it is to lie and know
Another dawn will come.

Narrator: Dorothy Parker did little writing of her own after the early thirties. Dorothy Parker had a far better talent than most of her friends had, and she respected it and wasted it and seemed all the while to stand outside herself, watching herself kill the thing she called a gift of God. The truth of Dorothy Parker was her complexity and complex truths resist examination.²⁴

²⁴John Keats, You Might As Well Live, p. 305.

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