

Dorothy Rothschild Parker Biography

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Contents

Dorothy Rothschild Parker Biography.....	1
Contents.....	2
Biography.....	3

Biography

Dorothy Rothschild Parker (1893-1967), American humorist, was known for her biting prose and verse satires. Numerous critics expressed admiration for her unique talent.

Born in New Jersey to Scottish-Jewish parents, Dorothy Parker attended Miss Dana's School there and finished her education at the Blessed Sacrament Convent in New York City. During 1916-1917 she was on the editorial staff at *Vogue*, and from 1917 to 1920 she was an editor and drama critic for *Vanity Fair*. Fired from the last position for her caustic, devastating reviews of several important plays, she began her popular column, "Constant Reader," in the *New Yorker*, where she continued her witty attacks on the contemporary literary scene.

After collaborating with Elmer Rice on an unsuccessful play, *Close Harmony* (1924), Parker left the *New Yorker* as her first collection of verse, *Enough Rope*, became an instant best seller. She devoted herself to writing short fiction and verse, and her story "Big Blonde" won the O. Henry Prize in 1929. A second volume of poems, *Sunset Gun* (1928), was followed by her first collection of short stories, *Lament for the Living* (1930). Displaying a fine perception of human nature as well as a general cynicism regarding life, Parker had already become famous for her mordant quips, such as: "Guns aren't lawful;/ Nooses give;/ Gas smells awful;/ You might as well live."

In the early 1930s Dorothy Parker moved to Hollywood to write movies, meanwhile continuing her literary career. Her major output during this period included a collection of verse, *Death and Taxes* (1931); a volume of short stories, *After Such Pleasures* (1932); *Collected Stories* (1942); and *Collected Poetry* (1944). The last two surveys of Parker's literary talent are characterized by their sardonic, elegantly dry commentaries on the fickle quality of fortune. "She is not Emily Brontë or Jane Austen," noted Edmund Wilson, "but she has been at some pains to write well and she has put into what she has written a state of mind, an era, and a few moments of human experience that nobody else has conveyed."

Parker's intense involvement with political and social issues, which brought her before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee in 1951, limited her literary efforts in later life. However, she did find time to teach at the University of California. In a final gesture she bequeathed almost her entire estate to Martin Luther King, Jr., and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.