
Dorothy Parker

Complete Stories

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Author: Dorothy Parker

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Description

As this complete collection of her short stories demonstrates, Dorothy Parker's talents extended far beyond brash one-liners and clever rhymes. Her stories not only bring to life the urban milieu that was her bailiwick but lay bare the uncertainties and disappointments of ordinary people living ordinary lives.

Insightful reviews

Will: I was oddly disappointed in this. Not in the quality of the writing, which is superb. The author sets out to accomplish a task, and the technique of writing is bent and twisted to her will, achieving her vision exactly as her mind's eye must have seen it. My complaint is simply with her intended effect. I didn't enjoy it.

So it's great writing, but I didn't care for the message. She was such a profoundly unhappy person, tormented by life's whims, being a woman in the times she lived, the spectre of depression in an age without silver ribbons, and the clichéd but never unfaithfully tragic alcoholism she shared with so many of her profession. You can taste all this like a metallic spoon in the soup of her craft. For some, this will tinge it with naturalistic realism. For me, even sadness can still hold the promise of eventual hope. But you won't find it in these stories.

Sue Bridehead (A Pseudonym): Another book I'm never going to finish reading in one session. Parker's stories are clever enough, but not exactly great... and they're mainly all the same. They get very monotonous if attempted all at once. I'll go back to this from time to time and eventually get to the end... though it may take me the rest of my life.

M. Milner: These days, I suppose Dorothy Parker is best remembered for witty verse, blistering one-liners and maybe her work as a screenwriter in Hollywood. But she was also one hell of a writer, particularly in the short story form. In a time where most writers were self-important white men, Parker was a wit and talent who crossed mediums. In a burst of creativity, she wrote drama reviews, light verse and short stories for a succession of magazines (mostly the New Yorker), a lot of them real good.

Which is both the blessing of a book like this. It collects not just the cream of her stories, but everything she published, right down to a handful of early sketches. While it doesn't touch on her other talents - no reviews, no verse - it allows you to trace her progression as a writer, from her early sketches to her late, darkly humorous stories.

Parker wrote most of these for the New Yorker, so there's a very 20s New York vibe at work: speakeasies, upscale urbanites, and lots of social cues. People speak of how well they treat their servants, who are lucky to get a day off a month and the remnants of their castoffs; couples go out for a drink and get royally sloshed, all while proclaiming the virtues of staying sober.

A common criticism of Parker is how she must've been unhappy or how she descended into a

pool of, I dunno, drink and sadness or something. I guess they imagine she lived in a scene straight out of a Lana Del Rey video. I sort of see where they're coming from – there are a number of depressed people here - but I never got that impression at all.

A good example of this is her story “Lolita,” which is about an unhappy mother, an unexceptional daughter and the rich man who falls for her. The crux is a broken relationship and the mother’s caustic relationship – she professes wishing the best for her daughter, but wants nothing more than to see her relationship fail – but Parker doesn’t write it like a dark, sad tale.

The daughter’s life is blossoming and the mother can’t accept that change. In Parker’s hands, the story is more about refusing to let go and the perils of growing bitter – the juxtaposition of the two great, since we can see how it’s destroying the mother’s life and we know she won’t let it go.

There is a certain sadness at work here, but it’s usually presented in a way that seems strangely modern: missed messages and mixed signals. Parker wrote in a time of rough phone connections and telegrams. People misunderstand a message on a bad connection or pretend they aren’t home – in a manner that echoes a broken relationship. I can’t say with certainty what Parker would’ve thought of Snapchat, Group DMs or subtweeting, but I imagine it would’ve been a lot like what she wrote nearly 90 years ago.

I think more to the point about Parker and her perception is her use of point-of-view. While most of the time she uses an omnipresent third-person, there are a few stories where she instead goes into first-person, often with a character she shares a name with: “The Garter,” “The Waltz,” “The Little Hours.”

In these stories, Parker shows the same themes and ideas as her other stories – miscommunication, social cues, etc – and uses them to great effect. In “The Waltz,” Dorothy dances with a klutz who keeps stepping on her feet and can’t get away from a party she doesn’t want to be at – but she doesn’t say no or try to leave in a comedy of manners.

For nitpickers and over-zealous critics, the way these stories are presented makes easy pickings for people to project on her. When she had trouble sleeping, did she really start thinking about La Rochefoucauld? Who knows? And more importantly, who cares? I think it’s safe to say Parker wasn’t a memoirist. As Regina Barreca notes in her introduction, “when an author’s words are confused with her deeds, they too often act as substitutions for a truly conscientious consideration of her work and life.”

Indeed, a collection like this shows that while Parker’s output slowed over the years – the bulk of these stories come between 1926 and 1933 – the quality remained fairly consistent. Stories like “Song of the Shirt: 1941,” “Lolita” and “The Lovely Leave” are still pretty good.

My Penguin copy has a nice introduction by Barreca, who examines the themes of Parker’s stories, her life and how people often conflate the two, plus a handful of early sketches by Parker that I more or less skimmed through; they’re amusing, but not really essential.

Miriam: So deliciously bitter. Bitter, bitter, bitter. Very funny, very mean. I learn the intro last, and it had anything to assert that I had form of began brooding about myself: humans ("small" or "narrow"-minded critics) think of Parker's tales to be approximately "small" or "narrow" topics, yet that is nearly beside the point. they're a couple of small social global and a constrained variety of people, yet they're approximately a lot more. Like self-delusion and cruelty and passive-aggression and superficiality masquerading as substance. and she or he calls B.S. on all of it. stable for her. And so they are not small. they're approximately how humans take care of their circumstances, and the tales are timeless. The figures she describes are recognizable instantly--add a few cellphones and fb and remove Prohibition, and it nonetheless reads the same. i do not comprehend that that makes me like humans any better, however it makes me savour the pointy observational abilities of Dorothy Parker.

Amber: Made me are looking to drink in the course of Prohibition.

Dallisonam: i began analyzing this publication at random and was once drawn in via the wit and perception into the psychology of the chronically pretentious. the tale that captured my curiosity was once approximately an inane lady who had simply lower back from a three week journey to France and stored "accidentally" asserting phrases in French, simply because she had it appears forgotten English, her local language. i love the cynical depictions of the thoroughly pretend the United States within the 50s and 60s, yet her tales received a bit redundant after a while.

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