DOROTHY PARKER AND THE WOMEN SHE LOVED TO HATE

AN EXAMINATION OF FEMALE DRINKERS IN THE WORKS OF DOROTHY PARKER

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Parker, born Dorothy Rothschild, grew up splitting her time between New Jersey and New York before permanently settling in the Big Apple. Her childhood while outwardly appearing to be one of middle-class privilege was described by Parker with hate and distain for just about every aspect of her youth. Stuck between the marriage of a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, Parker quipped that if she ever wrote and autobiography, the title would be "*Mongrel."* At the age of five, Dorothy lost her mother and two years later her father would remarry to another Christian woman, who Parker would never accept as her own family. Even as an adult, Parker never forgave her childhood commenting, "all those writers who talk about their childhood! Gentle God, if I ever wrote about mine, you wouldn't sit in the same room with me" (Crowley, 1958). Her family history is notable as almost all of her written works are devoid of family or parent/child relationships.

Immediately following graduation from high school, Dorothy ventured into the city to pursue her dream of becoming a writer. Progress was slow but steady, first writing small verse and writing reviews as a critic for *Vanity Fair*. She would move on to become a staff writer at *Vogue*, still honing her skills at writing prose. It was during this time that she married her first husband, Mr. Edwin Pond Parker. While at *Vogue*, Parker networked with an astute bunch of writers, finally hunkering down for daily luncheons at the famed Algonquian Round Table. Known for her wit and ability to drink, Parker was a

female writer that stood toe-to-toe with her male literary peers. For the next 20 years, Parker would continue to be a prolific writer of poetry, literary/theater criticism, prose, short stories, plays, and screen plays.

Dorothy Parker was a prolific writer, but many of her works are not widely known. Undoubtedly "Big Blonde" is her most famous piece, which remains part of the American literary cannon. Most youth at one point or another will be exposed to Parker, and a small fanatical bunch will become super fans. Parker's works range from short verse and poems, to review, short stories, and her lesser known screen plays. Adding to the mystique behind Parker is her association with the Algonquin Round Table which helped to promote Parker to a level of literary celebrity that perpetuates today. Dorothy never expressed any interest in publishing an autobiography, but there are numerous lengthy biographies that offer and in-depth look into her past. In the realm of academic critique, there are less scholars writing about her literature than one would expect. She is frequently mentioned as one of the "addicted/alcoholic" writers from the 1920s-1930s, grouped as a feminist writer, and often critiqued for her portrayal of women in her poetry and short stories. One of the greatest disservices to the Parker legacy has been the misfortune for biographers to "pathologize the view of the drinking women" which in turn "overdetermines their representation of Parker's identity and artistic achievements (O'Heron 2008, 222). Similarly, Melzer also critiques that, "despite Parker's popularity and reputation, or perhaps because of it, her short stories have generally been regarded as

playful fictional satires, depicting stereotypical female behavior and providing little more than comic pieces of amusement for either public or academic audiences" (1997, 1).

This paper will make the argument that there persists a flaw in the continued academic critique of the work of Dorothy Parker. While Parker lead a life of incredible literary celebrity, critics have overextended the actions of Parker as a female writer and drinker who pushed the social norms of women in her public life and have applied these actions to her private life as well. This in turn has led to a hyper-biographical critique of the body of work that Parker produced, especially when examining the female drinker in her stories, often analyzed as being a reflection of Parker's personal struggle with alcoholism. Despite the persistent "Parker the alcoholic female writer" narrative, Dorothy Parker would have vehemently denied that she was an alcoholic and would have justified her drinking as a right afforded to her as a woman of a certain class and would have certainly differentiated herself from those that had a "drinking problem" or those with "questionable morals"—she was, after all, one of the most successful writers of her generation. Therefore, this paper will examine the role of the female drinker in the short stories and poetry of Dorothy Parker not as an autobiographical examination of the female alcoholic experience, but as a diverse assortment of female drinkers created on the basis of the collective female experience that function as a way normalize the female drinker, rather than to marginalize her.

In an examination of her works, "Parker's characterizations of women may appear cynical, amusing, hard, or stereotypical, but beneath the humor, the author affords the

reader the opportunity to explore the origins of these roles, and the condition of women's lives which have often led to their behavior, whether aggressive, self-centered, apathetic, or submissive" (Melzer, 1997, 7). We will use the characterization of the women Dorothy loved to hate as the basis of a textual analysis of the female drinkers in Parker's works, including, "Women A Hate Song," "Just a Little One," and "A Terrible Day Tomorrow." These readings are a reflection of the creation of Parker's female personae, "which can be more accurately describe as 'multiple personae'—not multiple personalities, but a palette of identities that relate to the narrator's image and the way it 'circulates' in public" (Helal 2004, 82)—previously referred to as the "collective female experience." Parkers works teach, "us about women not by sympathizing with their plight but by portraying the female experience, even in its most frivolous moments, and allowing us exquisite entry to feminine awareness" (Melzer 1997, 170).

Chapter Two
History of Female Drinkers

The history of female drinking during the pre-prohibition ear has not been well recorded. This is due, largely in part, to the immense amount of literature that was created to support the prohibitionist agenda. Prior to 1920, saloons and taverns were largely considered to be places largely populated by men, but what is often not reported is the presence of the female drinker within the same establishment. Prohibitionists would leave you to believe that the only women who would be in the same company of men would be prostitutes and those of loose morals. Additionally, female drinking was not considered to be a problem at this time; and in fact, the term "alcoholic" was predominately subjugated to describing only men as problem drinkers.

In the 1920s and 1930s, women still held traditional roles within the home, but a good number of women, especially those in the lower class, also held jobs outside of the home. The number of women who worked outside of the home had been gradually growing, expedited by job openings left by men going off to World War I and a need to ramp up war-time efforts. Women began to work in factories in greater numbers and slowly started to integrate into not only the once male-dominated workplace, but into social spaces, such as taverns. Specifically, within urban areas, female tavern customers were ordinary women, often either wage earners or wives and daughters who were local to the establishment. Powers notes, "the fact that a considerable number of working-class women dared to step out for a taste of the saloon's pleasures upsets much of the

conventional historical wisdom concerning gender roles, temperance, and the public comportment of women in this era" (1995, 46).

While many taverns had a front bar that was often packed with men, most establishments offered a side door that was frequented as a "ladies entrance" that led to a back room. This side entrance allowed women to come and go with a sense of privacy, allowed them to avoid the front areas of the bar which remained male-dominated and often packed two deep to the bar, and finally, it allowed for convenient access for the carry-out and rear dining areas.

During this time, it became more common for groups of working women to visit taverns for lunch while on the job. The advent of "voucher programs" supported by beverage suppliers provided a free lunch with the purchase of a 5-cent beer. Women would enter the bar, grab a sandwich, and swig back a cold one. While same-sex daytime drinking engagements were largely a function of the availability of a free meal that happened to be served alongside alcohol, during the evening, women were still discouraged from drinking in public places as a group and it was certainly not acceptable during the evening hours. If women wanted to share a cocktail amongst friends, it was only done in the privacy of their own homes or at women's clubs. It remained almost unheard of for a single woman to venture out to a tavern or speakeasy in the evening without the accompaniment of a man for fear that she would be mistaken for a prostitute or entertainer. In the evenings, it was only socially acceptable for a single woman to be

accompanied by her husband or to be at a social gathering with a mixed group of men and women, which was typically a formal affair. “Considerable pressure was placed on young women to drink at such affairs. Women who would not drink at the halls and social entertainments were often ostracized by men” (Powers 1995, 51).

The 1920s was an interesting time, since the decade began with a pervasive push by the temperance movement that marginalized drinkers and started to define the supposed immorality behind intoxication and habitual drinking. Their efforts led to the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment, with the Volstead Act setting the measures that would define prohibition starting January 17, 1920. Prohibition had little impact on the amount of alcohol that people actually consumed. While the new laws made changes around the distribution of liquor, they did not outlaw the consumption of alcohol that was gained through legal means. If anything, Prohibition increased the ambition of Americans to drink, and caused a dramatic spike in underground markets and speakeasies. Additionally, Prohibition did little to help those that acquired or already had an addiction to alcohol.

It was during the nineteenth century when the term alcoholic was first introduced into the literature—at first to describe the physiological effect of alcohol on the body and later to describe the inability to cease and/or abstain from drinking alcohol. There became a dichotomy in how people viewed these newly coined “alcoholics” as some believed alcoholism to be a failing of morale, while others began to adopt the view that alcoholism

was a disease. Regardless of its presumed cause, alcoholism was pervasively considered to be a male affliction. while women who publicly drank too much were considered morally bankrupt (Gomberg 1982, 9).

Dorothy Parker was one of the first notable females to challenge sociocultural norms of public drinking behavior. While her ability as a writer was never questioned, because of her drinking socially with men, she "was forced to live in the gap between her reputation as a fast woman with loose sexual morals, perpetually in pursuit of another man and a good time, and the struggle of her real life: to grow up and beyond that superficial image, to live well, and to make lasting art" (Millier 2009, 19). Biographers, "blame Parker deeply for her failure to conform to sterotypically feminine values—her lack of love for her family; her lack of interest in housekeeping and cooking; her childlessness, including her abortion and her bleated grief over her miscarriages; her numerous sexual affairs, some with married men; and, indeed, her masculine drinking habits" (Millier 2009, 21). While even Parker would agree that there may be some truth to the aforementioned misgivings, she made a point to differentiate herself, Dorothy Parker, as being in a separate and distinct class from those "other women," who she also grew to hate. Parker created the women in her story, perhaps partially drawing from what was familiar, but more importantly to satirize these misogynic characterizations of the female drinker, carefully separating herself from the fictionalized character.

It wasn't until well into the 1970s that academic literature began to explore women's issues in addiction specific to alcoholism, while addiction studies in men were abundant. Although there was previously a "subtle but pervasive acceptance of the 'woman as a problem' stereotype which is perpetuated by language psychology, and medicine and mental health" (Forth-Finnegan 2010, 22) the problem of alcoholism in women went largely unnoted. Instead, women who were alcoholics were considered to be acting outside of their socialized female norm.

Dorothy Parker was never one to pay attention to the norms or to put too much stock in what others thought of her actions. "To be a female drinking writer—even a journalist and writer of light verse—in the first half of the twentieth century was indeed different form being a male one (Millier 2009, 18). She was consistently pushing the boundaries as to what defined femininity and carved out her own niche in the literary world among her fellow male writers, who were more than happy to share a drink with her

Chapter Three
Dorothy Parker – A History of Drinking

Dorothy Parker was not always a drinker. As a young woman, she was an aspiring writer, focusing on writing poetry and fulfilling her dreams in New York City. At the time she met her husband, Eddie Parker, she absolutely detested the taste of alcohol and refused to partake in drinking. She married Eddie in 1917 and enjoyed several years of marriage. Dorothy and Eddie would frequently bee seen out around town happily eating and drinking—that is Dorothy doing the eating and Eddie doing the drinking. Dorothy mentioned in interviews that she didn't mind this behavior at first, as Eddie would be quite stiff and was funnier the more he drank. Overtime, a few drinks became a few drinks too many, and Dorothy soon became well aware of the "domestic hell" of being married to an alcoholic (Meade 2005, 54). Eddie would frequently offer Dorothy a drink and eventually she succumbed to his requests—as at the time she did not realize the extent of Eddie's addiction, or that his alcoholism required someone to drink with. Later, she would claim that "drinking together meant an hour or two of carousing revelry, cock-eyed behavior and wild outrageous times that broke up the arguing and scolding" (Melzer 1997, 71).

"At first, she drank Tom Collinses and pink ladies, the cloying cocktails popular with women, then moved on to whisky sours, sidecars, Manhattans, and eventually martinis" (Meade 2005, 55). Although Parker was known to glorify martinis, she ultimately loathed the taste of gin, preferring them dry and more infrequently than the

public was lead to believe (Fitzpatrick 2005, 63). Even so, a favorite cocktail quip accredited (but not copyrighted or confirmed to Parker) remains immortalized on bar napkins and tchotchkes to this day:

I love a martini – but two at the most.
Three, I'm under the table,
Four, I'm under the host.

Whether inspired by Parker or not, the sentiment behind this quatrain is well-earned by the "drinking celebrity" that was established over time by Parker. This is not the only time a "Parkerism" had made its way into drinking lure. It is rumored that once, while seeking a little hair of the dog, she was asked what she wanted for breakfast, and she replied, "just something light and east to fix. How about a dear little whiskey sour? Make it a double, while you're up." This phase was later adopted by Grant's Stand Fast as part of their marketing campaign in the 1960's with the slogan, "While you're up, get me a Grants" (Day 2004, 135).

During prohibition when homebrews and bootleggers were passing their liquors, Dorothy was sure to stick to a label—Haig & Haig Scotch became her drink of choice, though she would drink White Hearse in a pinch. Parker had several venues that she would frequent with her companions Robert Benchley and Donald Steward. Tony Soma's was their speakeasy of choice, and after closing out at Tony's, they would head to Jack and Charlie's Puncheon Club, which was later renamed to 21 and is still a

functional bar and restaurant to this day. While gallivanting around town, she was "seldom completely drunk, but seldom perfectly sober either" (Silverstein 2009, 31).

Of all the establishments that Dorothy liked to frequent, the Algonquin Hotel is the most legendary by all standards. In June of 1919, literary critic Alexander Woollcott was welcomed home from World War I with a luncheon banquet at the hotel. The organizer of the banquet was an old friend, who Woollcott had upset prior to his departure. The lunch was not set up so much to honor him, as to provide a platform to place friendly jabs and insults in front of a captive audience of his peers. Woollcott took the arrangement in stride and considering the fun the entire group had, declared that they should meet on a daily basis at the Algonquin. The group grew and was frequented by other notable writers, editors, critics, and actors. Initially seated in the from Oak Room, the group was moved to a round table in the back, and became known as the Algonquin Round Table. The members of the Algonquin Round Table did not share many unifying beliefs, short of a commonality for the creative arts, laughter, and the love of the drink. As biographer Gaines mentions, "none of them identified strongly with the Lost Generation, except perhaps for Dorothy Parker, who would have identified with anything that was lost" (1977, 20).

The group was certainly not for the faint of heart. Among friends, they referred to themselves as the "Vicious Circle" where no one was safe from criticism or the pranks that they pulled. Although the group was predominately male, Parker was readily

accepted into the group along with her friends Benchley and Stewart. The fact that Dorothy was a woman was no matter to the roundtable, as her tongue and wit was sharp as any of the men, and she could certainly hold her drink. Membership to the roundtable was not based upon the ability to drink, but many of the members "drank like sewers during Prohibition" (Keats 1970, 71), and many of them succumbed to alcoholism. Perhaps this environment made people feel at ease with their drinking. Dorothy said, "like every writer I know, I write when I'm not drinking—and I drank when I was not busy working. We drank our heads off, but we worked like holy hell" (Mead 1987, 132). The table stayed intact for roughly ten years before it disbanded. Parker, who remains one of the most memorable members, inexplicably went to great lengths to distance herself from the Algonquin Round Table, almost to the absurdity of claiming she "barely knew how to find the hotel at all." As Gill reminded readers of *The Portable Dorothy Parker*, "Not the least hint of the Round Table is detectable in the stories… the author keeps her distance, and sometimes it is a distance great enough to remind one of Flaubert" (1976, xix).

While she was involved with the Algonquin Roundtable, she was just beginning to blossom as a writer and was newly married. She worked her way up to be a regular contributor to *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, and was eventually appointed as an associate editor. Although her professional life was together, her personal life was in shambles. Eddie and Dorothy decided to call it quits on their marriage and separated in 1922.

Before finalizing their divorce, Dorothy was freely dating and was not so secretly seeing a married man. This relationship ended abruptly when Dorothy became pregnant and decided to get an abortion, to which the father contributed only $30. The abortion haunted her and she frequently spoke of the horrifying experience to any friends who would listen.

Following the abortion, she began to struggle with her first bout of severe depression. Biographer Marion Meade described how "she became intrigued with suicide and began to research the subject like a bloodhound sniffing out a scent. She took the trouble to pore over daily newspapers in pursuit of suicide accounts, hoping to find useful details. Far from frightening her, the universe of self-inflicted destruction seemed cozy and reassuring, almost spellbinding" (Meade 1986, 124). Unable to gain control of her preoccupation with death, she made her first suicide attempt in January of 1923. After a few glasses of Scotch and placing a dinner order, she used Eddie's old razor to slit both of her wrists and laid down to die. Her attempts to find death were thwarted by circumstance, as not long after, a deliveryman from Swiss Alps came with her dinner and upon finding the door ajar, entered the apartment where he found Dorothy with her wounds. She spent the next few days in the hospital and not long after, was back to dinner parties and the Algonquin with both of her wrists wrapped up in perfect little velvet bows.

Dorothy Parker has been profiled by many biographers, none of whom shy away from her physical or emotional afflictions. There is no argument as to whether Dorothy was an alcoholic, but many have postulated about whether she struggled with a form of depression or was just morose. Frewin asserted:

> It seems clear that Mrs. Parker, with her classic swings of mood was, indeed, a manic depressive, a sufferer of recurrent psychosis in which periods of depression of the endogenous type were punctuated by periods of well-being and achievement, with burst of overactivity, sometimes loquacity or euphoria (irritability in some) amounting to mania, the swings moving from being overtly depressed to periods when she performed at an above-average level of originality and productiveness. (Frewin 1986, 168)

Eventually, Dorothy sought out the advice of Dr. Alvan Barach, the unofficial house psychiatrist of the Algonquian Table and the "Doctor to the Stars" of his era. Although Dr. Barach's psychiatric expertise may be called into question, it should not without note that he was an esteemed pulmonologist that is credited with the invention of the Iron Lung. Despite his potential shortcomings in psychiatry, he remained a trusted confidant and caretaker of Dorothy's. He made it clear that Dorothy had a severe alcohol disorder and that she needed to consider sobriety. At this point, Dorothy distinctly separated herself from those she identified as problem drinkers – as Meade noted, "drinkers such as Eddie—sloppy, blacking-out, falling-down, puking-in -the-street, peeing-on-the-floor drunkards—were alcoholics. She was a social drinker, always wearing a nice dress and hat, careful to get back to the hotel before she passed out" (2005, 156). Dorothy wasn't shy to admit that she on occasion may have been a bit tipsy,

but that didn't mean she had a problem. Alcoholism and addictions as a whole did not apply to a professional woman such as herself, those were afflictions of the working class and of the immoral. What she did was "a normal part of civilized life, and New York was a hard-drinking town" (Meade 2005, 214).

In early 1925, the trio of Benchley, Parker, and Stewart began to venture out on their own and by and large, removed themselves from the Algonquin Round Table. It was during this time that Dorothy began to deny that she was ever part of the group at all. Even after stepping away from the liquid lunch, this didn't result in a sobering of their lives and they were actually playing harder than the remaining loyal Algonquinites (Gaines 1977, 167). This also marked the year where Dorothy decided to make a second pass at ending her life. For months, she had been secretly going from New York into New Jersey where she was able to get an ample supply of Veronal, a barbiturate sleeping pill. She felt comfort in knowing that at any moment she had an exit. On one evening, she choked down pill after pill and once again, laid down to die. In what she self-described as her "final moments" Dorothy tossed her glass through her bedroom window into the middle of crowded street. When the landlord came to investigate the commotion, Parker was once again found "near lifeless" and hospitalized. Once released, Dorothy left for Europe to complete her recovery.

In the fall of 1926, Dorothy returned to New York City. Although largely departed from the activities of the Algonquin Round Table, she and Benchley still made

the rounds around town. On one particular occasion, Edmund Wilson remembered Dorothy looking a bit warn and found her to be, “fat and bloated, puffy-eyed” but yet still sharp as ever—winning “The Game” that night with a mention of Paris as a “Paroxymarvelous city” (Gaines 1977, 167; Day 2004, 174). Obsessed with death and drinking heavily, Dorothy’s presence was always known by the distinct heavy floral scent in the air. Dorothy favored the scent of tuberose, which she had specially ordered from Clyclax in London. The tuberose was not only an homage to the human corpse, as it was the fragrance of choice to mask the odor of corpses, but also provided a mask to the continuous smell of alcohol that clung to her (Day 2004, 134). Allen Saalburg recalled this as a period where Dorothy was “half-soused a good deal of the time, and that’s when her worsts qualities came out” (Meade 1987, 19). Despite all of this, she ended that year having published her most successful work to date, *Enough Rope*, which was met with praise from the critics.

Poetry was not enough for Dorothy and she expressed how deeply she wanted to write short stories or perhaps a novel. Never satisfied, Dorothy trudged through the daily grind, drank, and took a position at *The New Yorker* as the Constant Reader, because someone had to pay the bills. Vincent Sheean though highly of Parker and stated that “among contemporary artists, I would put her next to Hemingway and Bill Faulkner. She wasn’t Shakespeare, but what she was, was true.” At the same time, he was not shy to note her continued self-inflicted misery. “If the doorbell rang in her apartment, she would

react and say, ‘What fresh hell can this be?’ – and it wasn’t funny, she meant it. I think she drank because of her perception. She wanted to dull her perceptions. Her vision of life was almost more than she could bear” (Frewin 1986, 143; Keats 1970, 125).

Many of Parker’s days began in a haze and ended in a haze. She was not known to be an early riser, often struggling to be functional without a little nip of Scotch in the morning. Yet, ever the lady and upholding the standards of a woman, she took her pains in stride and rarely complained of her exuberance the prior night. “Most of the time she kept her hangovers to herself and insisted that she felt ‘perfectly fine,’ a phrase she repeated so regularly that she finally used it as a title for a short story (Meade 1987, 189). While at her post at *The New Yorker* as the Constant Reader, she wrote one of the most comical and true to form descriptions of a hangover. She would on occasion joke with Benchley that her hangovers were “so impressive it should be referred to as the ‘Royal We’ …it ought to be in the Smithsonian under glass” and coined the term for the most extreme version of a hangover as “the rams”. Parker offers the reader such a colorful explanation of the rams that it is apparent that she’d eaten “a few bad celery stalks” in her lifetime:

> The rams, as I hope you need never find out for yourself, are much like the heebie-jeevies, except that they last longer, strike deeper, and are, in general fancier. The illness was contracted on Thursday night at an informal gathering, and I am convinced it may be directly traced to the fact that I got a stalk of bad celery at dinner. It must have been bad celery, because you can’t tell me that that two or three sidecars, give or take a bottle of champagne, a couple of Benedictines-and-Brandies, taking seven hours to pass a given point, are going to leave a person in that state where she is afraid to turn around suddenly lest she see

> a little mean man about eighteen inches tall, wearing a yellow slicker and roller skates.
>
> Besides the continued presence of the Little Mean Man, there are such minor symptoms as loss of correct knee action, heartbreak, an inability to remain either seated or standing, and a constant sound in the ears as far-off temple bells. These, together with a readiness to weep at any minute and a racking horror of being left alone, positively identify the disease as the rams. Bad celery will give you the rams quicker than anything else. You want to look out for it. There's a lot of it around. (Parker 1970)

Fortunately for Parker, the rams were not terminal and she would live to see another day. 1928 brought about yet another successful work, *Sunset Gun*, a collection of verse and poetry. It also marked the end of an era for Eddie and Dorothy, who finally finalized their divorce. The following year was a series of highs and lows. Dorothy was continuously late on her submissions, becoming "careless of deadlines and markedly irresponsible about her commitments and promises to various editors" (Frewin 1986, 143). Despite this, many of the editors remained loyal to Parker and would tolerate her lateness as one of her eccentrics. These shortcomings did not go without notice by Parker. She was deeply vigilant about the quality of her work, but certainly separated the "quality" versus "quantity" of the work she was producing.

Dorothy confessed to a close friend at the time, Beatrice, and related that "she respected her talent, she had an absolute solid gratitude for it. [But] 'I'm betraying it; I'm drinking. I'm not working. I have the most horrendous guilt" (Frewin 1986, 143). In this confession she acknowledges her drinking as a hindrance to her ability to produce work,

but was yet to present a solution. She was feeling guilty, but certainly not guilty enough to make a change, and if a change wasn't needed, she was not an alcoholic. Part of her rationale that she was not an alcoholic came on the back of her most widely known piece of work, the publication of "Big Blonde" in *The Bookman*. The story won the O. Henry Award and has remained in continuous publication ever since. Biographer Meade postulated that at this point, Dorothy felt that "nobody could say that drinking interfered with her writing. She was in top form, and the proof of her control over drinking—for the last time, she was not an alcoholic—was that she could write 'Big Blonde,' a story about a drunk who could not control her drinking" (2005, 217).

Even with her great success, her mood swings continued between elation and melancholy, and despite her growing fame, she was lonelier than ever. With nothing keeping her in the New York, she went back to Europe in 1929 and retuned the following year. Although friends would report that her time in Europe was well-spent, she returned quite opinionated about the Europeans and their ways. On one evening, Dorothy was quite sauced and went on a tirade about the Spaniards harshly critiquing their customs in front of none other than Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway left that evening disgusted enough that he wrote a verse to commemorate the current state of his "friend" Dorothy:

> Little drops of grain alcohol
> Little slugs of gin
> Make the mighty notions
> Make the double chin—
> Lovely Mrs. Parker in the Algonquin

Loves her good dog Robinson
Keeps away from sin
Mr. Hemingway now wears glasses
Better to see to kiss the critics' asses

This was not the first time that Hemingway had spoken critically of Parker, but it did elevate her troubles to a rather public level that concerned her friends. According to several biographers, this precipitated Benchley suggesting that Dorothy consider going to Alcoholics Anonymous to help control her drinking. As the story goes, Dorothy went to a meeting and reported back on the experience. When Benchley later saw Dorothy at Tony Soma's (the speakeasy) he enquired how the meeting went, to which she responded: "It was lovely." He pressed on, asking if she would join Alcoholic Anonymous, to which she promptly responded: "Certainly not. They want me to stop now!" (Gaines 1977, 211). Although this account occurs in numerous sources, it should be noted that it is an anachronism as the organization was founded in the Midwest in 1935 as a men's organization and took several years to reach New York City—still the sentiment is not lost.

Parker published another collection of poetry, *Death and Taxes*, and shifted her writing towards short stories that would eventually be collected and published in *After Such Pleasures*. She was also tasked with writing a novel, and received a generous advance from the publisher. With the opportunity to finally write in full-length right in front of her, she never so much as submitted a draft. Reports from friends at this time noted that she was drinking on a daily basis both inside and outside of the home. Her

dubious control over her drinking was slipping and she made a fool of herself a few times, blacking out without being able to recall any of the previous day's activities (Silverstein 2009, 43). As if the drinking was not enough, she decided to make one last attempt at suicide by swallowing a handful of barbiturates while living at her residency in the Algonquin Hotel. Her reason for this despair: a breakup with a lover, and the fact that the proceeding months constituted "the year of hell" (Fitzpatrick 2005, 69).

Biographer Frewin suggested "her deep introspection, the overwhelming sadness that so often encompassed her life, the repeated suicide attempts, the disharmony of her private life, her morbid obsession with death, the seeming hopelessness of her private world, were all disturbing behavioral traits" (1986, 166) that showed no chances of ending as the nature of her life became cyclical. Some would argue that at this point Parker failed to meaningfully contribute to the American literary cannon. Parker's friend and publisher at the time, George Oppenheimer, found it increasingly difficult to work with her, but remained sympathetic as "she is a masochist, whose passion for unhappiness knows no bounds" (Frewin 1986, 89), yet remained an adequate writer. On more than one occasion after Dorothy dodged his calls, he would pay her a visit in person, Scotch in hand. Oppenheimer would open the bottle because "the more she drank, the less she liked what she had written, but a few drinks more and she mellowed, and got the proofs into shape" (Keats 1970, 151). It was no secret that Dorothy was a perfectionist, as she was quoted as saying that "it takes me six months to do a story. I

think it out and then when I write it sentence by sentence—no first draft. I can't write five words but that I change seven" (Silverstein 2009, 47).

Dorothy was not completely devoid of happiness in her personal life. In 1933 she met and married Alan Campbell, who was an actor and writer from Virginia. Dorothy followed Alan out to Colorado for a summer theater and onward to Hollywood as a writing team for Paramount Pictures. She was never shy that part of her motivation for content creation was dependent on being able to collect a paycheck. She had realistic expectations and said, "this is a fine thing to be doing, at my age, sitting here making up sissy verses about broken hearts and that tripe at a dollar a line—I want payment in chunks, not drips" (Day 2004, 106). Dorothy and Alan made a formable writing team and received a 1937 Academy Award nomination for the film *A Star Is Born* and later Dorothy earned a second Academy Award Nomination in 1947 for *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman*. Not surprisingly, both films featured women who struggled with success and alcohol, a topic not too far from home. While she found success on the big screen, she continued to write and released *Collected Poems: Not So Deep as Well*, *Here Lies*, and *The Portable Dorothy Parker*.

Alan may have been good for Dorothy's heart and pen, but he was not good for her liver. By all accounts, he encouraged her drinking by providing the best there was to have behind the bar and never leaving her with an empty glass. Alan, "could hardly deny that sometimes she overdrank, he did not recognize it as an uncontrollable compulsion.

He was unwilling to endorse her stopping and drank along with her so that she might have company" (Meade 1987, 309). The couple continued to write screenplays in California, but also maintained a farmhouse in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Their bi-costal drinking habits of glamour on the west coast and grit on the east coast did not translate well to the Pennsylvania farm life. Neighbors were amazed by how much the couple would drink. "They'd bring it in by the cases, and both of them used to run around with drinks in their hands even when there was no company there," Mr. Beer, a neighbor, said. "When they had people there, they had people who felt they had to drink because they were there, and that's what there was to do. They'd all get up past noon, and after their lunch or breakfast as it might have been, they'd start drinking until late at night" (Keats 1970, 214). Dorothy's friend and fellow writer, Lillian Hellman, said that Dorothy basically begged for her pride to be wounded by others, yet the most harm was self-imposed during this time. "She lived with a fretful husband in a rather oddly furnished house, quarreling with her friends, allowing herself to grow dumpy in barren middle age, wasting her time on silly scripts, stunning herself with alcohol and sleeping pills" (Keats 1970, 216).

Dorothy was always in a constant struggle with herself and her writing. Although she had proven herself in a variety of mediums, even well into the 1960s she was continuously struggling to write columns for *Esquire*. She frequently failed to turn in her assignments and when her managing editor, Mr. Haynes, chased after her, it was just one

excuse after another. Haynes commented that, “she seemed to sincerely detest writing. She truly hated to write. She’d just lie about how far along she was with a piece…her standards were higher than those of many other writers and she had a constant awareness of her deficiencies in meeting them.” Even with these shortcomings Hayes never doubted her ability to write as “her voice was as true and distinctive as in her writing in the twenties” (Keats 1970, 278). Biographer Keats concluded that this was the beginning of the end as, “perhaps she still thought herself to be able to drink all night and go clear-eyed to the typewriter the next day, as people in the twenties once thought they were able to do. But few people drink heavily just for fun, although a good many do so seeking exile or escape” (Keats 1970, 278).

Living the good life caught up with Alan first, as he died under questionable circumstances, involving alcohol and sleeping pills. Following the death of Alan Campbell in 1963, Dorothy returned for good to New York City to help find her center. Just as a myriad of drinks and pills had taken Alan’s life, they continued to wreak havoc on Dorothy as well. She was noted as being continuously in and out of the hospital for general illness, to intoxication, and falls from her intoxication. At this point, Dorothy was 70 years old, but her celebrity still had not escaped the public eye. In a 1963 work of “fiction” appearing in *Esquire*, Truman Capote wrote that “Dottie has been such a lush you’d never know when her face is going to end up in the soup” (Silverstein 2009, 65).

Not only age, but a few too many Scotches on her 71st birthday landed her a spot in the Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital after suffering from a fall (Meade 1987, 405).

Even after warnings and hospitalizations, Dorothy had no desire or perhaps ability, to maintain her distance from alcohol. In an interview, Parker Ladd recalled an evening in December 1965 where he and Dorothy were swigging back highballs well into the evening. While Parker Ladd had conceded his drinking ability and had resorted to dumping his drinks in the sink, Dorothy continued to finish hers until the entire bottle was empty. Not yet satisfied, Dorothy began rummaging around the house and closets until she finally found another bottle of Scotch—which was also subsequently emptied. Not surprisingly, she ended that year in the hospital as well (Mead 1987, 405).

Dorothy Parker continued to diminish as she edged towards 75 years of age. Many of her friends had distanced themselves, and only a few remained loyal, called to action only in the event of emergencies. Conversations with Parker were labor intensive, depressing, and often spiteful. Death, which had alluded her through numerous suicide attempts, finally found her on June 7, 1967 when she died alone of cardiovascular arrest in her New York City apartment.

Chapter Four
Parker's Female Drinkers

Dorothy Parker always said that the ultimate "purpose of the writer is to say what he feels and sees." The best pieces of literature tend to come from a place of comfort, knowledge, and experience; whether these stories joyous, funny, or despair, a writer's ability to transfer an experience or emotion to written word has the power to stir a relatable, raw reaction in the reader. Literary critics of Parker almost universally agree that the majority of Dorothy's work draws from personal experience. While I do not argue the autobiographic nature of her work, I believe that critics have mistakenly identified the female drinkers in the story as a reflection of Parker herself rather than a reflection of circumstance. While Dorothy was a heavy drinker, she never acknowledged herself to be an alcoholic and made a distinct effort to separate herself from the women of her stories. The female drinkers she wrote about, the women she hated, were never a mirror of her life, but rather a spectrum of experiences that helped to normalize the female drinker, thereby justifying her own drinking habits. She wrote her stories "with grave care and gave them a surface as hard and smooth as stone" as to separate herself from the women in her stories (Gill 1976, xix). By errantly misrepresenting Parker's work as autobiographic, critics "obscure Parker's testimony about the social and political truths of women's lives and drinking as a cultural practice" (O'Heron 2008, 93).

Other critics agree with this assertion, including Gilmore who says that "recognizing the claim that Parker's short stories about drinking should be read as simple confessions of her own experiences, devalues Parker's abilities as an artist and obscures the actual complexity of her approach to the autobiographical" (1987, 16). Parker routinely demonstrated the ability to write in numerous dimensions and would not be so contrite as to write veiled autobiographies. Critics also tend to forget that her writing came in two styles – both non-fiction in her journalistic columns and her separate works of fiction. While writing as the Constant Reader with *The New Yorker*, Parker adopted a more personal, approachable writing style and often inserted herself, or rather her journalistic self, to offer reviews and commentary. Hammill believes that to compare the two styles of writing is errant as "most of Parker's fiction…contrasts with her journalism in that her personality is erased from the text" (2007, 46). Additionally, many critics use Parker's known obsession with death and multiple suicide attempts as the catalyst for her writing, but critic Petit argues that although "Parker's suicide poems are often read as autobiographical, they also need to be read as part of women's literary tradition; the theme of suicide pervades nineteenth-century women's poetry" (2000, 113) and it is a mistake to categorically identify every suicidal female character as "Parker" when they are incredibly diverse women.

Finally, O'Heron offers that if we were to believe Dorothy Parker's biographers, all of the author's writing qualifies as autobiography (2008), yet time and again there are stories reported by autobiographers that are circumstance of her celebrity and are more

folk-lore or bar tales than truths. O'Heron offers that these stories were related to serve a distinct purpose:

> Dorothy Parker… sought a readership that would embrace her non-apologetic attitude toward her alcohol use. Parker's stories argue that alcohol is not the problem of her cultural moment or a problem for her in particular. Parker argues that the nation should police and prosecute American's lack of intellectual and artistic depth instead of criminalizing alcohol and those who drink it. In making this argument, Parker preserves alcohol as a necessary pleasure for herself and her friends, those in the "cultural know," who represent themselves as suffering daily as witnesses to the inanity of American youth culture in the 1920s and 30s. (O'Heron 2008, 29)

Parker's early works were simple captions and columns in the magazines. While the majority of this early work has gone uncredited, if reviewed with a careful eye, certain captions are unmistakably the work of Parker. Her first full length commissioned pieces were indeed written in the first person, but the motivation behind the content, "was rooted almost entirely in what she, or her editors, hoped would sell rather than in her own experiences or memories" (Meade 1987, 42). Additionally, many of her early columns were actually written from a male perspective as she looked to her male companion, mentor, and best friend Robert Benchley for inspiration. Dorothy was not shy to admit that she was not the most creative individual when it came to imagined characters, often basing her stories on those closest to her; in fact, one of her favorite places to hunt for character names was the obituaries (Melzer 1997, 16).

It often goes unmentioned how young Dorothy was when she was beginning her writing career, so it is only natural that a woman at 18 years of age had a different

understanding of the world than a woman in her 40s. Although Parker was known to be a bit eccentric, her moods exaggerated, and her alcoholism well-noted, her experience as a woman was not unique only to her, but shared by women across the country. In an oversimplification of Dorothy's subject matter and in a not-so-hidden attempt to align her life experiences with her work, Keats summarized her subject matter as, "abortion, the distance between rich and poor, social pretense, the stupidity of partying and gossip, the ridiculousness of an older women yearning after a callous young man, the tawdriness of an actress when seen off the stage, the cavalier way in which she treated servants, the banalities of suburban marriage, the emptiness of love affairs, the stupidity of drinking too much, the luckless lot of being a woman" (1970, 167). An attempt to align these subjects with her life is as simple as flipping through the index of any of the biographies. The milestones that are indexed are the most sensitive moments, but they tend to overwhelmingly feature the negative rather than the positive. Additionally, there is a pervasive effort to take an individual experience in Parker's life, generalize and compare it to a fictional character, when the experience should be more aligned to the cultural norms and the "female experience" that was representative of the time.

Millier offers that "while Parker's glittering satire and humor often directly concerned the drinking habits of her circle and her own failed love affairs, she affected a generalized tone and was almost too literally honest to be taken seriously in her suffering" (2009, 19-20), which is certainly accurate considering her pieces were fiction. It would be remiss not to note that Dorothy did, in fact, write herself into two of her

stories, “The Garter” and “The One on the Right” and they remain classic examples to her statistical approach, mocking the readers for their presumptions about her personal life and the assumed autobiographical nature of her work. A critique by Helal believes that these particular monologues, “reflect not only her own personal experience of becoming a public figure, but also the beginnings of a larger cultural phenomenon of literary celebrity” (2004, 78).

In “The Garter”, the narrator offers careful critique about the author in the third person, “oh, have you met Dorothy Parker? What’s she like? Oh God she’s terrible.” The story continues, addressing a multitude of rumors that were circulating about Parker at the time, that functions not only as a social commentary, but also mocking the critics that claimed that no woman could write the way she does— “you know, they say she doesn’t write a word of her stuff. They say she pays this poor little guy…”. Another story, “But the One on the Right” is a carefully constructed monologue that places Dorothy at a dinner party and narrates the events of the evening. Between the banality of conversation discussing the merits of the fish served at dinner, and that yes, everyone indeed does enjoy cucumbers, Dorothy takes a moment to make a poke fun at her own drinking habits, while simultaneously ridiculing the audience for expecting her to do something as contrite as to conform to their expectations. As an inner monologue, Dorothy narrates, “I could do a little drinking, of course, all by myself. There’s always that…but I don’t want to drink... I’ll get *vin triste*…all right you baskets, I’ll drink myself to death, right in front

of your eyes" (Parker 1995, 133). The language used in this passage is intentionally derisive, including the use of French phrases, which was a subtle nod to those who knew how the casual dropping of French phrases enraged her (Day 2004, 75).

Most of Parker's work that contains a female drinker has been scrutinized by critics or biographers in an attempt to compare the characterizations and actions to the non-fiction of Parker's life. One particular biographer, Marion Meade, has been widely criticized by Parker scholars for her insistence to use the fiction of Parker to "reverse engineer" biographical details and insights into Parker's life, which seems like self-severing affront to create a storyline that may (or may not have) been true. Other biographers offer a bit more realistic analysis of the "self" in Parkers work by conceding that the nature of the work is a dichotomy between the public and the personal image of Parker.

> "It was almost as if there were two Dorothy Parkers, one living on drink and parties and gossip, the other writing it all down with bitter precision. Her writing was so autobiographical as to be almost confessional: stories about abortion, of which she had a few, about older women going dotty over younger men, about empty love affairs and gossip and social pretense and the void of cocktail parties and morning-after—all the most grimly salient characteristics and of her own life. Masterfully and mercilessly she wrote what she perceived as dire truths about herself and those around her and continued playing out her fiction in her life." (Gaines 1977, 211)

Parker's work will continue to be at odds with critic's insertion of an almost "mythologized image of the viciously witty Mrs. Parker" and her perceived status as a celebrity drinker from the Algonquin Round Table—and eventually "the Parker legend exceeded her control and eclipsed her actual literally achievements" (Hammill 2007, 27).

Dorothy's aggressive drinking was still considered in line with "the fun-loving heavy drinkers of the twenties and thirties, and an alcoholic would have been a derelict on the Bowery—not an utterly charming, witty little woman who was such great fun to be with…if the next day Dottie was down in the dumps, well, that was the price of staying up late and having a hell of good time" (Keats 1970, 167).

How much of Parker's life experiences made it into her literature will continue to be debated among Parker scholars. However, one should be mindful of Dorothy's opinion as she once told Quentin Reynold, "rather than write my life story, I would cut my throat with a dull knife" (Day 2004, 52). Seemingly unimpressed by her own autobiographical history, there undoubtedly remain unmistakable and unavoidable shadows of her personal life in her writings.

Parker carries the reputation of being able to embrace a uniquely female experience that was revolutionary for her generation. One of the elements of her writing that made her unique from other female authors was the way in which she was able to leverage her celebrity to "both reinforce and transgress acceptable gender roles both in print as well as in public (Helal 2004, 81) which was something the male writers of her time were unable to do. Dorothy wrote many of her stories through the lens of a female, but was never had an underlying feminist agenda in her writing. Dorothy claimed "I'm a feminist and God knows I'm loyal to my sex, and you must remember from my very early days, when this city was scarcely safe from buffaloes, I was in the struggle for equal

rights for women. But when we paraded through the catcalls of men and when we chained ourselves to lamp posts to try to get our equality—dear child, we didn't foresee those female writers" (Meade 2006, 577). Academics have looked at Parker's works from several different feminist perspectives and many of them were careful to acknowledge that they were not trying to take a constructed criterium of feminist writing and force her into works into a specific genre, but rather to use it as a tool to acknowledge the ways in which Parker's work challenged gender roles and inspired the work of other female writers.

Parker is quoted man times over with her simple prayer of, "Dear God, please make me stop writing like a woman. For Jesus Christ's sake, Amen." The writing mentors that she held in highest esteem were all male writers and "she had little to gain by identifying her writing with her gender, particularly when critics tended to compare her with male, rather than female, authors" (Petit 2005, 26). Simpson acknowledged that is was "Parker's trademark mouth that gave her entry to a masculine domain she evidently aspired to join, but much of her work is devoted to complaining relentlessly about the terms by which women are forced to operate in a male-dominated world" (Simpson 2005, 188).

Chapter Five
Women: A Hate Song.

"Woman: A Hate Song" was Dorothy's first critical analysis of women. The poem was written at the behest of Crowenshield who was looking for some new material for his magazines. After Dorothy submitted the piece, it was considered to be so scathing that it was published under the pseudonym "Henriette Rousseau" because of concerns as to how the poem would be received by the public. The poem was published in the August 1916 edition of *Vanity Fair* and began: "*I hate women. They get on my Nerves.*" What follows is a list of all of the women that Dorothy loved to hate: the Domestic ones, the human Sensitive Plants, those who are always in Trouble, the Well-Informed ones, the ones who simply cannot Fathom, and the unfailingly cheerful ones." Fortunately, the public response to the piece was tremendous and the wit of Dorothy eventually won over the admiration of Crowenshield, who requested more pieces that would primarily appear in *Vanity Fair* and *Life Magazine*, which were both owned by Conde Nast. Dorothy wrote numerous hate songs over the next eight years from topics ranging from men, husbands, wives, movies, actors, actresses, relatives, slackers, bohemians, bores, parties, the younger set, and college boys.

When it came to an examination of fellow women, "the eye with which she observed her own sex was beady and unclouded" (Day 2004, 74). She held the women she wrote about to the same level of accountability as she held herself, and expected women to act in a certain manner while socializing and in public. In "Women a Hate

Song" she uses a plural pronoun to describe each type of woman—this is not a single shortcoming of any specific female, but a characterization of a type of person. It is also notable that the poem lacks any timeline or specific progression, and one can imply from this that the "women" she hates can be fluid, that a woman can be one or more of these six profiled personalities at any point in her life. This poem is an excellent example of the type of women that Parker would profile in years to come. "In her gallery of miniatures, she would etch the many aspects of feminine rage; the loneliness of the career woman; the emptiness of women who don't marry but wish to, of those who do marry who find themselves chained to unhappiness and end in divorce, of women with lovers who fail them, of those who desperate for love form any source and at any price" (Day 2004, 102).

"Women: A Hate Song" makes no mention or implications of alcohol in this poem, but upon careful consideration and examination of each one of these women lays the framework for a woman who may also be a female drinker. There is argument that a careful reading of this poem could be used for a cross-textual analysis of the female drinkers in Parker's short stories. The "domestic" woman reads closely to Mrs. Hazelton in the "Bolt Behind the Blue", a woman who was financially secure with a child and enjoyed afternoon lunches where she would, "stroke the delicate cocktail glass and warm her spirit in its icy contents" (Parker 1995, 333). The human sensitive plants—the bundle of nerves, can be compared to the female narrator in "Just a Little One" (see chapter 6) or the woman in the petunia hate from "Dialogue at Three in the Morning" whose

monologue ends with her cheeks striped in tears. Those that are always in trouble, "usually the have husband trouble; they are wrong; they are women whom nobody—understands" appears in "Glory in the Daytime" as Lily Wynton, an actress who after reminiscing about her failed marriages, her ailments and how "nobody understands what I suffer from" (Parker 1995, 225) who polished off a bottle of brandy in the middle of the day prior to her performance. Then you have the well-informed one, whose description has a striking similarity to the "Young Woman in Green Lace" who has recently returned from France and while at a dinner party just "can't help" speaking in French and things quite highly of herself and has forgotten "what people here drink anyway" as if her time abroad has dulled her memory after all the exposure to the high flatulent French wines—she settles on gin, then goes out and "gets stinking" with her dinner companion. Then there is the one who simply cannot fathom (Hazel from Big Blonde), and the unfailing cheerful ones, the woman in the leopard coat from "A Terrible Day Tomorrow" that is analyzed in chapter seven.

All of the women who Dorothy Parker claimed to hate in 1919 make appearances in her short stories, all the way through her last published short story "The Bolt Behind the Blue" published in *Esquire* magazine in December of 1958. The intent behind these comparisons is simply to show that to take Parkers should not be taken as fully autobiographic in nature, since shadows of these female drinkers were present before her well documented public and literary career. She used her "characters to satirize, more bitterly than playfully, the limited roles available to American women during the 1920s

and 1930s, decades when the predominant image of the American woman was sexually free, even promiscuous flapper"' (Bunkers 2005, 153). Many of the women that appeared in Parkers stories were also drinkers, which were not autobiographic, but an attempt to normalize female drinking among these characters. "because of the essentialist binary that structure and dictated social ideas of gender, Parker's celebrity status—and indeed her success—depended on a complex renunciation and recuperation of femininity" (Helal 2004, 79) which was wholly independent of whether or not her female characters were drinkers.

Chapter Six
Just a Little One

The short story “Just a Little One” was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1928 as part of the Constant Reader series. The title of this story came from a joke amongst the members of the Algonquian Round Table as Dorothy frequently asked for “just a little one” – a scotch with a touch of water – during the early hours of the afternoon (Meade 2005, 214). The work was part of a collection of writing that came at a time that was fraught with a “tumultuous social life, staying up late, drinking a lot, but nevertheless producing some of her own work” (Melzer 1997, 51). This story contains numerous underlying themes in Parker’s life, most notably her propensity to spend long hours drinking in speakeasies. (Melzer 1997,16)

“Just a Little One” is a monologue written from the perspective of a female sitting at a bar meeting her friend, Fred. This point of view uses the feminine voice while leaving it up to the reader to fill in the gaps where the male voice would be; flawlessly transitioning between Fred’s interludes and the female’s half of the dialogue. This technique allows the reader to have a complete understanding of the female’s physical and emotional being. It is important to recognize this nuance, as it is one of several ways that Parker empowers her character as a female drinker as a way to neutralize gender norms.

As with other stories, Parker highlights the male-female dynamic; however, in this instance, she blurs the gender constructs. Unlike other writers of the time, the story

demonstrates the perpetuity of the female drinker, without assigning blame or fault to the female narrator of the story. Parker's choice of drink selection, pace of the drinking, number of drinks consumed, and the resulting intoxication of the characters, offers a subtle social commentary in her descriptions of the female drinker, which deviate from other writings of the same era that maintain the male-female gender norms.

Narrated by the female drinker, the story begins with an unnamed female meeting up with a male friend, Fred, at a speakeasy in 1928. As is typical in Parker's works, the woman's marital status goes unmentioned, but from the context of the story, the reader senses an unresolved intimacy between the woman and Fred: at one point, the narrator implies that she would know Fred's touch anywhere, and later, tension builds when another woman, Edith, becomes a topic of conversation. The unnamed woman and Fred are meeting under amicable terms, and they express satisfaction, and even delight, at the state of the speakeasy and their opportunity to see one another. The woman holds a conversation with Fred that is seemingly pleasant and with minimal interruption. When the narrator stops to question Fred, or when Fred interrupts her, Parker uses changes of sentence structure to signal that gap in the narrative. The interruption of the narration signals to the reader to fill in what Fred's comments may have been to result in the narrator's response.

This story starts at hello and travels neatly along the course of the man and woman getting completely intoxicated by drinking a minimum of seven scotches a piece

over the course of the four-page monologue. The pace of the story is yet another example of how time "hangs" in the atmosphere of the speakeasy. The reader is given no outside cues, such as patrons leaving the speakeasy, a "last call" at the bar, or any other temporality to keep track of the time. Instead, the pace of the drinking, or more specifically the drink count, provides a timeline for the story. This intentional freezing of time creates a stagnant feeling – as this type of drinking could happen at any time of the day as just part of the female drinker's regular routine. The pair could be meeting at 2:00 PM or 2:00 AM, which leaves the reader to determine the actual time. Additionally, Parker's decision not to define the time of day places no social constructions on the male and female drinkers, namely a female being out at a late hour. During this period, drinking outside of the home was only socially acceptable if the female was in the presence of a male companion and this male companion needed to be a socially suitable companion.

The passage of time begins with the first drink order. Fred prompts the order, to which the female responds:

> Why, I don't know, Fred – what are you going to have? Then I guess I'll have a highball, too; please, just a little one. Is it really real Scotch? Well, that will be a new experience for me. You ought to see the Scotch I've got home in my cupboard; at least it was in the cupboard this morning – it's probably eaten its way out by now. I got it for my birthday.

This passage immediately establishes Fred as the dominant drinker in the story. He prompts the female to drink, who responds that she has no idea what she is having. Later

in the story, the reader becomes aware that the female drinker is able to handle a large volume of liquor, implying that drinking in this quantity is a regular affair. Therefore, her deferral to the man to choose the drink falls in line with the female characterization in the 1920s; men selected their drink based on their favorite brand, or a drink that they gravitated towards, whereas women enjoyed alcohol for the feeling of drunkenness. Also by questioning whether the Scotch is real, she defers to the man's opinion and expertise on the subject. "Women are passive consumers who drink in the shadows of men and who need their approval to drink. Often men provide women with drinks suitable for women; men are the experts on the brand, bottle, and the drink." (Lindgren 2016, 8). The female drinker's ultimate decision to request a highball is an attractive choice. On one hand, she matches the drinking prowess of her male partner, but by requesting "*just a little one,"* she continues to defer to the man acknowledging that although her drink is a masculine choice, the request to water it down feminizes it as well.

Prior to finishing their first drink together, the woman inquires as to whether Fred will be having another scotch quipping, "solitary drinking is what causes half the crime in the country," and that she will also request a second highball to match her male drinking companion; however, she again requests that the drink be watered down. Fred prompts a subsequent drink order and the female drinker does defer to the male again if she really ought to have another, and she does – just a little one.

If the reader is keeping track of the drink count, at this point the pair has

consumed no less than four drinks each. Since the passage of time is questionable, it is difficult to assess how quickly the pair will become intoxicated; however, because the drink orders appear to be overlapping, it would be safe to assume that they are drinking at a steady pace. It is here in the story that Parker begins to differentiate herself from other writers in the characterization of the female drinker. Basic physiology would have the reader expect the female to begin to become intoxicated quicker than the male companion would, yet Parker does nothing to call attention to the current state of the female drinker. The most typical characterization of a drunk female was her emotional outbursts, such as pouting or crying. Additionally, writers would point out the physical decay of the female, such as their sloppy hair, smudged makeup, stumbling walk, or a change in language signaled by loose, slurred, or just nonsensical speech.

Parker initially portrays the female drinker as a "responsible drinker" who is assessing the potential effects that the alcohol may have upon her, continually deferring to the male to continue drinking. As Parker writes it, the male approves the continued drinking, and there is never a question about the level of intoxication of the female. As the story continues, the discussion between the male and female becomes looser as the drunkenness begins to set in, which is where the stereotypical drunken female is first noted:

> I haven't got a friend in the world. Do you know that, Fred? Not one single friend in this world. All right, what do you care if I'm crying, I can cry if I want to, can't I? I guess you'd cry, too, if you didn't have a friend in the world. Is my face very bad? I supposed that damned mascara has run all over it. I've got to give up using

mascara, Fred; life's too sad. Isn't life terrible? Oh my God, isn't it awful? Suddenly, the female drinker is seemingly no longer a female drinker, and now exemplifies the socially constructed drunk female, commenting on her appearance and having an emotional outburst. However, just as quickly as Parker assigned a gender role to the female, Parker writes in an interesting twist, "[Oh my God, isn't it awful?] Ah, don't cry, Fred. Please don't. Don't you care baby. Life's terrible, but don't you care. You've got friends. I'm the one that hasn't got any friends. I am so. No, it's me. I'm the one." Just as quickly as the female drinker became a stereotypical female, Fred has lost all credibility as a man. Fred's character, by crying, has now completely shattered the gender stereotype, crossing from being the male dominant, to being completely demasculinized– even feminized in this passage with the female drinker reassuring him of his own worth. It is my belief that this passage was added by Parker as a gender equalizer. Although her female character is conforming to the "drunken female role" so has the male, thus negating the gender roles.

The pair continues to drink five…then six…both at the suggestion of Fred with the female drinker agreeing – albeit, "just a little one." As the story concludes, the final drink is ordered by the female drinker, "Let's have a drink and then let's you and I go out and get a horsey, Freddie – just a little one darling, just a little one."

Although critics tend to point to the male social control in Parker's stories, I think this story is an excellent example of shared control over the drinking. The reader is privy

only to the conversation on the female behalf; and, although he gaps in the writing acknowledge potential interaction with Fred, the cadence of the narration leads the reader to believe that large gaps of conversation are not missing. Parker has written the dialogue so that the reader never misses Fred, as his responses fit neatly between the surrounding text. If this is the assumption, then there is not much forcing of the hand to get her to continue from drink one to seven. The exchange between the female and male are brief, as if equally acknowledging the need to consume more alcohol. Although the male drove the drinking for the first six or seven rounds of drinks, the female drinker suggests and orders the final round of drinks. At the conclusion of the story, Parker transfers the control of the drinking from the male to the female so swiftly that it could easily go unnoticed.

As the pair progress in their drunkenness, Parker does not change the female's characterization. She does not slur her speech, refer to clumsiness, or comment on spilling a drink, stumbling about, etc. The only time a loss of female physical control is mentioned is very early on in the story when she confides to Fred that "he'll take care of her" if the Scotch gets the best of her. The dialogue does tip the reader off to their drunkenness instead by the changing topic of conversation, and the "alcoholic depression" that sets over them in the middle of the dialogue. Even at the female's lowest point, when she cries and has essentially defaulted to the socially stigmatized drunk female, Fred joins her in camaraderie as he also begins to cry. One could argue that not

only is the female drinker feminized, but that Fred is hyper-feminized by his loss of masculine control. I would extend the argument that due to this hyper-feminization, the gender lines remain blurred throughout the remainder of the story.

Chapter Seven
A Terrible Day Tomorrow

The short story "A Terrible Day Tomorrow" was published in *The New Yorker* in 1928. The setting of the scene is in a speakeasy between a man and his girlfriend. Narrated in the third-person objective, this story is essentially a he said/she said conversation between the pair. Unlike the drinking female and Fred in "Just a Little One", the reader is able to fully follow the conversation that takes place. This story relies heavily upon the gender stereotypes of the time, but still does not fail to illustrate the progression of the female alcoholic in the story, and her refusal to be redirected into treatment. Of Parker's works, this story provides the most in-depth discussion of alcohol and the effect on the person and the person's relationship throughout the story. As the characters converse between themselves, the male drinker drives not only the alcohol consumption in the story, but the notion that one– or both– of them should "go on the wagon" and reduce their intake of alcohol. This story illustrates how one drink can easily turn into five, and the bargaining and rationalization that is an ongoing battle between the alcoholic and their drink.

As the couple enter the speakeasy, it is immediately clear to the reader that the couple are familiar with the speakeasy, as the male drinker addresses the bartender by name, Gus. The couple orders their first drink and requests that the server hurry along, since the male has to get home early as "he's got a terrible day tomorrow". The couple commits to

remaining dressed in their overcoats and mufflers, stating that they are only there for a quick drink. When the drinks arrive, the female comments, “Oh, it’s lovely… Oh it’s strong though.” The male drinker retorts that, “They are pretty powerful. It’ll do you good. Can’t hurt anybody, if you have just one or two, and get to bed early. It’s this staying up till crack o’ dawn that knocks the hell out of you.” This statement by the male drinker is the first effort to remove the blame of drinking away from the consumption itself and instead towards the actual time of day and/or sleep allowance that one gets. They both agree with this sentiment and continue on with their banter.

The following exchange is the first of many instances where the couple begins bargaining for their drinking habits. They decide on a second round and the male comments that, “I should have told him to hurry. We’ve got to get out of here right away. What a day I’ve got tomorrow.” The female agrees, and the male responds by telling her to “Loosen your coat, why don’t you?” Instead of progressing to the end of their night, they are slowly settling in, removing their coats, and removing their mufflers. Undressing their outer clothes together shows a commitment to one another to see each other through to the end of the night. Already onto the second drink, when they are brought to a table the female drinker again exclaims, “Oo, they taste strong, Lord knows what they’ll do to us,” again immediately followed by the man’s assurance that they, “can’t hurt you, if you do like this–just have a couple and then go home.”

At this point, the couple *is* already onto a couple of drinks and violating their initial

agreement of just one quick drink. This notion is validated by the male's insistence that he is, "not going to get plastered and stay out all night any more. Except maybe Saturday nights." Again, bargaining is a collective tool and they both agree as a couple that this is a fair negotiation. Up to this point in the story, the male is definitely driving not only the alcohol consumption, but all of the limitations that he is putting upon his (and her) future libations. In the moment, he has a continual assurance that their alcohol consumption is within the parenthesis—it is just their future drinking that is of concern. He goes so far as to suggest that perhaps he, and even she, should give up drinking for a while. He notes that this future drinking is "enough to poison you" and states that he "doesn't see how we're allowed the stuff we drink. I'm going on the wagon. Come ahead and finish your drink. Want another?"

Again, a statement of cessation is followed by a prompt for a drink. A similar pattern is seen as the couple orders up the third drink of the night, now fully removed of their jackets and outerwear. The female drinker comments as to how she seems relatively unaffected by the drinks and the male retorts that it is because, "we've all been drinking too much." Interestingly, there is no division between he and she in the drinking pattern. Although language such as "baby", "nurse" and "dear" feminizes the character, perhaps lending into the feminization of the lady, there is no such boundary put in place of the female drinker. As three drinks moves to four, comments are now made about how

smooth the new specials are.

At this point, there also is a shift in the syntax of the conversation in the story. The sentences, which gradually started out languid and lucid, are slowly becoming choppier, abrasive, and abrupt. The male becomes more aggressive in his language and begins to swear a bit. It is also at this point where he moves from passively suggesting that she should finish her drink to aggressively commenting on her drinking style. He says to, “drink it quick. Seek like this. You’ll never get anywhere, sipping a drink. Come on now, one more swallow. Good girl.” He continues to push her to finish her beverage so that he can progress to drink number four. This male dominated exchange goes without pushback from the female drinker, as she obliges him and continues onto the next beverage. The story continues with the language getting looser and loopier, followed by a nonsensical fight between the couple that turns into a he/said she said argument over whether they love one another. As drink number five rolls around, they continue to argue, with the male drinker becoming even more aggressive, asking the female if she is “ashamed of yourself, talking to me like the way you did? Weren’t you a bad girl? You know you sent for me like a regular bulldog?” before trailing off into the nonsensical and being distracted by a refreshed cup. His belittling comments, although very strong are focused not at all on her drinking behavior, nor as a result of it, but more on the context of the conversation itself. Three quick sentences later, they are off again, talking about the importance of going to bed on time, with the male drinker ushering along the female

to yet another drink. This story is ended with the sentence “And so on.” indicating the perpetual nature of the situation.

At the conclusion of the story, one of the key points the reader should focus on is that no matter how dynamic the male/female counterparts oppose each other on several levels throughout the story, they remain equal in their inability to cease drinking and commit to sobriety. Throughout the story, the male drinker remains fully masculinized. His job, and importance of this job, is stressed before the continuation on to each drink, while the female never is assigned any responsibility. The male drinker readily finishes his drink, whereas the female needs to be prompted to speed up her consumption to keep pace with the man (albeit willingly). And finally, the male consistently uses aggressive, male dominant language both directly towards the female drinker and in general conversation.

Even with all of this contrast, at no point is the volume of alcohol between the male and female compared or commented on. Additionally, when discussing limitations to be put on further consumption of alcohol, there are no limitations that are set specific to the female in the story. The male driven conversation about consumption almost unanimously first addresses his drinking and passes along the guidance to the female, which is then confirmed by the female herself. Also, at no point is the female drinker made out to be a slob or un-ladylike. In fact, it is the male drinker who curses, sings, and shows more signs of drunkenness throughout the text, rather than the female drinker.

The argument continues, that even as an objectified female drinker, Parker does not create a direct stigma or force the female drinker into a situation where she is ostracized or criticized for her decision. Feminist critics argue that the gender lines are crossed in a story where the drinking is so male dominated, that the only way a female could avoid stigmatization is by fully crossing the gender barrier into a male role. However, I would argue that as a role that Dorothy Parker championed herself, this is not a role that is being criticized by the characters in the story, but one that is naturally embraced and accepted, even if that role is one that with the critical flaw of being a female drinker.

Chapter Eight
Conclusion

Dorothy Parker was a prolific writer of both poetry and short stories who offered a writing style that was unique to the feminine experience, which offered priceless insight at a time when male authors dominated the literature. As Day acknowledges, “in many ways, she was one of the first feminist. And yet—perhaps because of the times in which she lived and had her subversive being—she never glossed over the realities of the see saw of the sexes, however unpalatable and personally in convenient they might be” (2004, 72). Parker was brutally honest in her writings, but her mastery of wit and satire allows the reader to laugh along with even the harsh critiques she had to offer.

At a time when the literary field was dominated by male writers, Parker was one of the first females to successfully cross the gender barriers. She had a way of maintaining her femininity in here public life, but was able to write and drink like a man. She also had the ability to show, “American women that it was permissible to be self-assured, outspoken, bold, and witty—to be proud to have a min and to speak it in whatever word came to it” (Day 2004 193). Her acceptance among the literary greats and the Algonquin Round Table gave her a credibility and celebrity that was previously unheralded. Her witty comments and dinner party banter became almost legendary to the point where people were constantly wondering… what will she say next?

However, this celebrity came with concessions as well. Parker's drinking was publicly chronicled, sometimes mocked, and certainly pushed the boundaries for what was considered to be the social norm for a woman. Seldom sober, but always in control, she managed to keep her alcoholism in check and "everyone though well of her for this, because the ability to hold one's liquor was a criterion of the twenties. No one was willing to then state that excessive smoking and drinking are slow ways of committing suicide" (Keats 1970, 92). Fortunately for Parker although her quantity of work may have slowed from time to time due to the drinking, the quality of her work remained at par with her peers.

Parker was a master with words, arguably the wittiest poet of her time, and created a new form of narrative for short stories that captured both and inner monologue and external conversation that allowed sarcasm to ooze throughout her stories. Numerous scholars have written about her life and works with a critical eye examining her characterization of women in her stories, the role of alcohol, gender roles, and the interplay between her biographic history and the characters in her story. Often too critical of her personal life due to celebrity, there are several instances where biographers and scholars have made assumptions about Parker's writings that went against everything Parker believed in. Parker not seek to reflect herself in her work, but rather used her experiences to create stories, with often female leads, that allowed her to provide a platform of social commentary. Further, although a known drinker, Dorothy made no

attempts to criticize, judge, or chastise the female drinkers in her stories; rather, she made an active attempt to diversify and normalize the characterization of the female drinkers in her story, allowing the characters to drive the story, not their drinking.

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