

The Acerbic Wit of Dorothy Parker and Alice Roosevelt Longworth

Quest

March 2, 2012

Cheryl Taylor

“I can do one of two things,” said Theodore Roosevelt. “I can be President of the United States or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both”. Roosevelt, the nation’s effervescent 26th President who had charged up San Juan Hill, who insisted on digging the Panama Canal, and who ran an energizing, but ultimately futile, campaign on a 3rd party ticket simply could not contain Alice. Likewise, Dorothy Parker spread angst wherever she went – in print, at the Algonquin Roundtable where she lunched, at the McCarthy hearings, and all places in between. “Dorothy Parker”, said the sage, Alexander Woolcott, “is part Dickens’ Little Nell and part Lady McBeth”.

Alice Roosevelt (1884-1980) and Dorothy Parker (1893-1967) were contemporaries who had much in common and little in common, depending on your perspective. They were daughters of successful men, stepdaughters of cool, calculating women and wives of wealthy husbands. Neither had much formal education but they wowed their very different audiences with the breadth of their learning.

Alice and Dorothy (as I have now come to familiarly call them) were polar political opposites. Alice, a TR Republican, detested her Roosevelt President cousin while Dorothy actively worked on his campaign. Dorothy was an avowed socialist, earning her stripes protesting for Sacco & Vanzetti while Alice often entertained Richard Nixon in her home calling him a great conservative. And while both, simultaneously for a very short time, wrote for national publications, Dorothy bared her soul for her readers while Alice provided little more than a listing of who came for tea.

They were beautiful, flamboyant women who lived in an age when women were primarily known for appearing in print when they were born, when they married and when they died. These two were proto-feminists who would have blanched at the word.

Birth

Alice Lee Roosevelt was born on February 12, 1884 to Theodore and Alice Lee Roosevelt. Their first – and only – child was born while Theodore was serving in the New York State Assembly.

Two days after her birth, baby Alice's mother died from Bright's disease. On the same day, Theodore's beloved mother, Mittie, also died. This unfortunate dual

tragedy was the impetus for a third one. Days after burying his wife and his mother, Theodore handed Baby Alice to his sister Anna, and left for the Badlands. Alice would be almost four before being reunited with her father who, by then, had remarried his childhood sweetheart Edith Kermit Carow.

Dorothy Parker was born August 23, 1893, the daughter of Henry J. and Annie Eliza Rothschild. Dorothy was born in the West End of Monmouth County, New Jersey, a fact for which she never forgave her father since it did not allow her to be a “native New Yorker”. Her frail mother was seven months pregnant and in her forties when Dorothy arrived, “the last time I was early for anything” Parker later opined.

Henry was a successful garment manufacturer; a pioneer in the wholesale suit business, who had also obtained a doctorate in Talmudic studies. Annie Rothschild died in 1897 when Dorothy was four. With speed similar to Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Rothschild (who had 3 other children) remarried in 1899.

Education

Alice Roosevelt biographer James Brough states that “her father was Alice’s principal playmate when she was home. They played cowboys and built houses of wooden blocks while he spun yarns about Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone,

General Custer and Gettysburg. She learned history from him.”^(Brough, p. 53) When Roosevelt took the position of Assistant Secretary of the Navy in Washington, D.C., the family soon followed. During this time, Alice was enrolled in school. Three months later, she was packed off, once again, to Auntie Bye’s. That brief interlude in Washington, D.C. would be the only formal schooling Alice Roosevelt would ever receive.

There would be one more try, though. The senior Roosevelt’s threatened to send Alice to Miss Spence’s boarding school in New York. Alice said that she had “...seen Miss Spence’s scholars marching two by two ...and the thought of becoming one of them shriveled me. I said that if the family insisted, and sent me, I should do something disgraceful.” She didn’t go. ^(Roosevelt, Crowded Hours, p. 26) For the next 80 years, Alice’s education consisted of nannies, the President of the United States and the most illustrious thinkers in the world.

During the same timeframe, Dorothy Parker went toe-to-toe with her Protestant stepmother, who terrorized her new family with stories of hellfire and brimstone - and lost. At Mrs. Rothschild’s urging, in 1899, Dorothy was enrolled in the Blessed Sacrament Convent in New York City. She learned manners but did not, according to biographer Leslie Frewin, come to love Jesus. ^(Frewin p. 7) Dorothy later said

“convents don’t teach you how to read...but the convent taught me that if you spit on a pencil’s eraser, it will erase ink.” Dorothy was summarily expelled from Blessed Sacrament for retorting, when asked to explain the meaning of Immaculate Conception, that “it was a case of spontaneous combustion.” (Day, p.6)

In 1906, Dorothy entered Miss Dana’s Academy in Morristown, New Jersey where she studied the classics, and Greek, Latin and the History of Art. She engaged in current event discussions, and read Thoreau, Wilde, Carroll, and Fielding. And she learned how to write epigrams, a style of which she soon became the queen. Her attempt at formal education ended when Dorothy was 14. As was the case with Alice Roosevelt, she had no high school diploma.

Alternative Education

While both women became learned, carrying on thousands of conversations with hundreds of people about a myriad of subjects, it was their experiences with “alternative education” that helped frame their rich, interesting lives.

Alice Roosevelt sat – literally and figuratively – at the feet of her aunt Anna Roosevelt Cowles (Auntie Bye) until the latter’s death in August 1931. Bye was Theodore Roosevelt’s elder sister and confidante, possessing similar intelligence and eagerness to be engaged in all aspects of life.

Alice always believed that “if Auntie Bye had been a man, she’d have been President, rather than my father. “ Bye provided political advice to TR throughout his career, and she used her home and connections to support all his political efforts. Her salon was open to all “types”. Alice drily noted that Bye was more open-minded in who she let in – something her father could not be as her stepmother was “anti-fashionable”. “Bye” averred Alice, “didn’t feel that being fashionable was necessarily a little shady.” (Teague, p. 22)

Auntie Bye’s salon would be the model for Alice’s own – the locale of the famous pillow which read “If you don’t have something nice to say, sit next to me.” From the day she left the White House until she died nearly 80 years later, Alice followed the guidance of her aunt and maintained “stacks of books by her bedside so she would not fall behind in her knowledge of men and world affairs.” (Brough, p. 101) “I got no education and I’m rather glad I didn’t,” said Alice, “as it saved so much excitement for my antiquity!” (Cordery, p X.)

Dorothy Parker’s alternative education began in 1914 playing piano at a dancing school and, occasionally, teaching others to dance. Henry Rothschild’s business had crumbled forcing Dorothy to find any work possible. Finally, Rothschild died. Dorothy, who read about his death in the newspaper, did not attend the funeral.

Instead she concentrated on her work in the dance studio, studying words and rhyme – observations that would underpin her poetry.

Dorothy sold her first verse **Any Porch** to **Vanity Fair** in 1914 for which she received the munificent sum of \$12. **Vanity Fair's** editor Frank Crowninshield was Dorothy Parker's mentor. When he offered Dorothy a job for \$10 a week at **Vogue**, she remarked that the office "looks like the entrance to a house of ill-fame". When Crowninshield moved her to **Vanity Fair** in 1917, she said "Salary is no object. I want only enough to keep body and soul apart." (Day, p. 12)

Political Ideology

Alice and Dorothy were as apart politically as today's Santorum and Obama. Alice, reared in TR's bully Republican milieu, maintained her conservative stance, with one minor exception, throughout her life. Beginning in 1912, she attended every Republican convention, and in 1964 she voted for LBJ, thus crossing the party line.

Alice was appalled when, in 1908, her father declared he would not run for re-election to the Presidency in 1912. She was thrilled when he formed the Progressive (Bull Moose) third party. She considered the White House the Roosevelt's home and she wanted to retain her unfettered access.

When TR lost the 1912 election to his one-time protégé, William Howard Taft, Alice planted a voodoo doll in the White House lawn and lamented that Taft's inaugural address "was noted for an abundance of lack and shortage of luster."^(Teichmann, p.77) Later, she crowed, "There are days when I like Nellie Taft so much. I feel sorry that she doesn't have a more attractive husband."^(Teichmann, p. 72)

When Taft was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, he remarked "I don't remember that I was ever President". Alice countered, "Neither does the country". Alice never forgave Taft the slight of beating her father, and then changing his policies.

While TR recovered from the election loss by tramping the wilds of Africa, and lecturing European royalty, Alice plotted his comeback in 1920. TR's death in 1919 irrevocably ended the dream of returning to the White House. Alice's attention now turned first to the possibility of electing her brother, Theodore Jr., then her husband, Speaker of the House Nicholas Longworth, and finally her *special friend*, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee William (Bill) Borah to the nation's highest post. While none of these efforts would be successful, Alice's salon would teem with the movers and shakers of Washington's world for decades as these political ambitions, and others, were tested.

Alice commented on those who DID reach the brass ring of the Presidency, and those who tried:

On Warren Harding of whom another Senator said “Harding is now a world leader but he’s the best of the second raters”, Alice growled “Saying Harding is second rate is one of the biggest compliments anyone can pay him”. And learning of the Republican’s choice of Harding to stand for the Presidency, she said “Harding looks like a debauched Roman emperor.” (Teichman, p. 109)

As the scandals around Harding became public – a mistress, an illegitimate daughter, indiscretions in White House closets – Alice wryly noted, “My God we have a President of the United States who doesn’t even know BEDS were invented...and his campaign was ‘back to normalcy.’” (Teichman, p. 117).

When Coolidge took office in 1923, Alice commented that Grace Coolidge’s experience once teaching in a school for the deaf and mute “...made it easier for her to live with Calvin.” (Teichman, p. 122) Alice and the taciturn President, nevertheless, shared an abiding friendship amid ongoing banter. She appreciated Coolidge’s New England sense of morals and emphasis on family values saying that “The atmosphere (in the White House) was as different as a New England front parlor is from a back room speakeasy.” (Cordery. P. 290)

In 1932, the worst of all possible worlds came about when the Democrats elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the Presidency. “There we were – look at us!” Alice told a *New York Times* reporter. “We were perfectly content. And what happens? A fifth cousin comes along and gets into the White House... Franklin, whom we called ‘feather duster’ hops into the Presidency!”

Alice so detested the idea of FDR as President that she – who abhorred the notion of being a “joiner” - joined the board of the GOP Women’s Division to work against him. Despite her efforts and those of a cadre of former First Ladies – Grace Coolidge, Lou Henry Hoover and Alice’s septuagenarian stepmother Edith – FDR won the first of four elections. For the next 12 years, Alice was still invited to the White House, but not very often.

At one of those rare occasions, FDR told Alice he would soon sign a bill to save \$50 million. “That’s a drop in the bucket,” she sneered, “compared to what you are costing the country.” ^(Cordery, p. 375) She described Franklin as “one-third mush and two-thirds Eleanor”.

During the 1936 election campaign, Alice used her daily column for the McNaught Syndicate to strike this jab at her cousin. “You can always tell when Mr. Roosevelt is feeling at the top of his form by his tendency to identify himself with the great.

Last January, he completely identified himself with Andrew Jackson, and on occasions he has confused his personality with that of Thomas Jefferson.”

(Cordery,p.387)

Alice summarized her thoughts on the whole Franklin is the wrong Roosevelt or Roosevelt stand-in in the White House by this pronouncement: “My father died in 1919, so there never was any conflict between him and Franklin, because Franklin hadn’t emerged. He very possibly wouldn’t have emerged if my father hadn’t emerged and my father might not have emerged if Czolgosz (Soul goes) hadn’t killed McKinley. Were it not for Czolgosz, we’d all be back in our brownstone-front houses...and I would have married for money and been divorced for good cause.”

(Brough, p. 295).

Much of Alice’s famous political vitriol was leveled at FDR, because he was elected four times, thus, in her mind, crossing the line of respectability. At the 1944 Republican convention, she swiped “The Republican party is here to elect a President and not retain a dictator.” Others were also not spared her rapier thoughts. Wendell Willkie, a Wall Street lawyer who turned from a Democrat into a Republican, ran for President in 1940. Alice commented on this Hoosier native, “He sprang from the grass roots of the country clubs of America.” Ohio Governor

John Bricker was under consideration as the 1940 Republican candidate.

“Bricker,” said Alice, “is an honest Harding.” And, “the trouble with Bricker is when he puts his foot in his mouth, he always forgets to take the horse off.”

(Teichmann. P. 179)

When asked her thoughts about Minnesota Governor Harold Stassen, she commented “He has one foot in Taft’s camp, and one foot in Dewey’s, and a third with Willkie.” (Teichman, p. 179) Of course, she is famous for noting that Thomas Dewey, the 1944 Republican candidate for the Presidency, “looks like the little man on the wedding cake.”

About Dwight D. Eisenhower, Alice purred, “(He) was a pleasantly avuncular figure, ideal, I suppose, for the times, but there were certainly no sparks there.”

When Ike announced his candidacy again in 1956, Alice growled, “Well, I see he’s thrown his halo in the ring again.” (Cordery, p. 442)

Jack Kennedy and Richard Nixon were two of Alice’s favorites. She thought the Kennedy’s restored glamour to ‘her’ White House and Nixon had gumption. And of Jimmy Carter nominated by the Democrats in 1976 Alice ingenuously inquired, “Oh, the new one who’s always so happy and smiles so much?” (Teichman, p.)

Alice reserved particular umbrage for Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy. Originally she was intrigued by the now infamous Army-McCarthy hearings. She was, however, appalled by McCarthy's aura of evilness. This is piercingly alluded to in an exchange she had with him. McCarthy told her "I think I'll start to call you Alice". Her always perfect posture got more precise and she barked, "My gardener may call me Alice, the trash man on my block may call me Alice, the policeman may call me Alice, but you Senator McCarthy may call me Mrs. Longworth!" (Cordery, p. 445)

Dorothy Parker's first exposure to "politics", if you could call it that, occurred when she was at Miss Dana's School for Girls. "She couldn't reconcile the immense wealth of the Carnegie's, Rockefeller's and Ford's, "says biographer Frewin. Parker thought the world held far too many rich and too many poor people, and her issues with these social imbalances would manifest themselves decades later as she flirted with socialism and communism.

Dorothy's foray into making her politics known came in 1927. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were on death row in Massachusetts. Dorothy journeyed to Boston to protest their execution, and was arrested and put in jail. With typical

Parkerian aplomb, she cracked to reporters: “I thought prisoners who were set free got five dollars and a suit of clothes.” (Day, p. 163)

Dorothy’s liberal attitudes found places of expression when she began working in Hollywood in the 1930’s. She co- founded the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League in 1936. Later, she was intimately involved in establishing and governing the American Screenwriters Guild. The woman who detested screenwriting thought it was crucial to protect those who wanted to take on that occupation! Dorothy said that expecting Hollywood moguls to care about the rights of screenwriters was “like trying to get ‘kissed’ in your mother’s house. Somebody was always in the parlor, watching.” (Day, p. 164)

In 1937, as a correspondent for the *New Masses*, Dorothy went to Spain to cover the Civil War. Commenting on the needless death and destruction, she said “Last Sunday morning, a pretty, bright Sunday morning...there was a great pile of rubble, and on the top of it a broken doll and a dead kitten. It was a good job to get those. They were ruthless enemies of Fascism.”(Day. p. 167)

By 1939, Dorothy decided that many of the groups with which she had once been affiliated were drifting too close to the evils she had seen first-hand of Fascism. Although she resigned her memberships, she remained very visible on one key list

– the FBI. When WWII broke out, Dorothy applied for a war correspondent permit but was denied it because of her “possible subversive” tendencies.

When the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) called artists to account for their activities, Dorothy was among them. In 1952, subpoenaed to appear before HUAC, she described the committee members as “rats gnawing at empty holes”. When the FBI interviewed her, Dorothy told them, “Look I can’t even get my dog to stay down. Do I look to you like someone who could overthrow the government?” She didn’t go to prison, but she was effectively blacklisted. (Day, p. 169)

Dorothy Parker would return to Hollywood briefly in the early 60’s with her second/third husband as a screenwriting team. They were to adapt a play starring Marilyn Monroe. Their final script would be so rewritten that Dorothy commented “they took (it) and hooked it up with dope pushers, two murders and, straight out of Fanny Hurst, the harlot with a heart of goo.” (Day. 179) The movie never played.

Long before most of these events, Dorothy Parker wrote a poem titled **Frustration**, which might have effectively summarized her experiences with social justice issues: ““If I had a shiny gun, I could have a world of fun, speeding bullets

through the brains of the folks who give me pains; Or had I some poison gas, I could make the moments pass Bumping off a number of People whom I do not love. But I have no lethal weapon – Thus does Fate our pleasure step on! So they still are quick and well, Who should be, by rights, in hell.” (Meade, *The Portable Dorothy*

Parker, p. 231)

Men

Sketching the lives of two of the most famous women of the twentieth century somehow just wouldn't be complete without discussing an area of interest that fascinated, and in one case literally nearly consumed, them...men. Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Dorothy Parker were surrounded by men from their middle teens until their dotage. Whether this was a result of their physical attractiveness, their name recognition or simply the sheer pull of propinquity, is anyone's guess. What *is* evident is that men were everywhere – in some cases causing humiliation, in others building up prestige, in all cases providing a topic to focus on continuously.

Prior to her marriage, the beautiful Alice Roosevelt was the toast of Washington, D.C., and all points beyond. She was the Angelina Jolie of her day, if what we mean by that is incessant following by the paparazzi forerunners. Even those of more sophisticated tone and balance, however, were always wondering what

“Princess Alice” was up to, what she was wearing, what new antic had she performed now. People followed her fashions and began wearing “Alice Blue Gowns”; gasped when it was learned she was caught speeding in a car in New York *without a chaperone*; and were positively titillated when they discovered she smoked!

(Regarding the latter habit, TR and Edith constantly forbade Alice from smoking underneath their roof so she climbed out the window onto the top of the White House and triumphantly proclaimed “There, now they can’t say I’m smoking under their roof!” 80+ years later Alice would show a hint of regret for all her years of smoking as first breast cancer and then emphysema caught up with her. She took in stride, though, her 1970’- era mastectomy proclaiming herself “the only topless octogenarian in Washington, D.C.”

In 1905, Alice served as her father’s representative on a formal state-sponsored trip to East Asia. On this four-month trip, Alice spent much time locked in verbal sparring with the handsome, much-older Ohio Congressman Nicholas Longworth. In one of her few extant letters, written to the Congressman in September 1905, she sniped, “You say that it is because I get on your nerves by ...saying conspicuously common things – if that is the case it is very decidedly the pot

calling the kettle black as no one could accuse you of over-refinement in any direction!” (Cordery p .131)

Regardless, immediately upon her return, the Roosevelt’s announced the engagement of Alice to Congressman Longworth and plans were made for the Wedding of the Century on February 17, 1906.

Nick, as he was known, was a ladies’ man, a gambler and always a drinker. In 1905, Nick’s parties with famous people, concert violin performances and exquisite wines from the Longworth’s family cellar were charming. Twenty years later, the “fun” of alcohol, partying and many, many other women had worn thin with Alice. When the Volstead Act was passed in 1919 prohibiting the sale of alcohol, Alice commented that “the men who voted dry and drank wet were with us in large numbers.” (Cordery.p. 294) Clearly, she was talking about her own man.

On February 14, 1925 Alice gave birth to her only child, Paulina. While the putative father of Paulina was, Nicholas Longworth, the unspoken assertion was that the baby’s father was, in fact, the senior senator from Idaho, William E. Borah. Bill Borah served in the United States Senate for 33 years. He was a legendary bear of man, known as the ‘Lion of Idaho’ for his mane of thick hair.

He fit all of Alice's requirements for a man: highly intelligent, extremely articulate, passionate about his commitments, and 19 years older. Bill Borah was a man unafraid to stake out unpopular positions. Alice Longworth and Bill Borah were an intellectual match, a pair who loved history and literature, and were drawn to fight for the same issues.

Their hundreds of letters defined their political positions and discussed the welfare of their daughter. For decades they attended Republican national political conventions and each – in their own ways – worked to have Borah considered for nomination as President, a goal never achieved. Yet, even one so close to her did not escape Alice's pointed commentary. In a 1935 newspaper column, **The National Scene**, Alice wrote that the Senator "...spoke with renewed vigor. But it was not the same voice that has crowded the Senate galleries for so many years. Possibly it suffers in radio transmission." (Cordery, p. 388) The one truly witty comment relating to Borah was one repeated by Alice's contemporaries, who mockingly referred to *her* as "Aurora Borah Alice"!

Nicholas Longworth died in 1931 and Bill Borah in 1940, neither of them achieving the Presidency. Alice, never one to be without an imposing man of bombast in her life, soon became the "very best friend" of labor leader John L. Lewis, President of

the United Mine Workers. Lewis, Alice commented, “loved making trouble and I loved watching him make it.” (Teichmann, p.190)

Throughout her long life Alice Roosevelt associated herself with powerful men, those who could make a difference in the political arena. She, who once had been seriously considered for the Vice Presidency, who carried the family legacy of outspoken support of Republican ideals, found her greatest victories in supporting the work of men who looked, acted and thought exactly like the father she always longed to love her unconditionally.

Dorothy Parker’s experiences with men were legion. Early in her career, she began her lifelong associations with men who travelled in her circles of creativity. Dorothy was a “new” woman, who approached relationships with men head-on, craving both intellectual and physical connectivity. Sadly, most of the time she only received the physical connectivity, and a broken heart.

In the poem **Unfortunate Coincidence**, she lays out the result of these experiences, “By the time you swear you’re his, shivering and sighing, and he vows his passion is infinite, undying – Lady, make a note of this: one of you is lying”. And in **Comment** she adds a bit more humor, “Oh, life is a glorious cycle of

song, a medley of extemporanea; and love is a thing that can never go wrong: and I am Marie of Romania.” (Meade, **The Portable Dorothy Parker**, p. 96)

Dorothy Parker was linked to famous writing names of the 1920's - Benchley, Fitzgerald, Collins, Taylor, Charles MacArthur. It is the romance with the married, fickle MacArthur that sent Dorothy down her trajectory of depression, causing the first of her three suicide attempts. In **Two-Volume Novel**, she pines, “The sun's gone dim, and the moon's turned black; for I loved him, and He didn't love back.”

(Parker, p. 145)

The theme of death carried her volume of poetry, **Sunset Gun**. In **Rhyme Against Living**, she sighed, “If wild my breast and sore my pride, I bask in dreams of suicide; If cool my heart and high my head, I think, “How lucky are the dead!”

(Parker, p. 148)

Years later, Dorothy would consider these tormented verses some of her very best work, a prime example of her melancholia. Dorothy Parker, who came of age at the turning of the 20th century, was considered by those who read her erudite poetry, short stories and magazine articles to be a woman of the world. She worked and danced and endlessly drank with the glitterati of the times, but in her heart she simply wanted to be someone's wife.

Dorothy grabbed the first opportunity that came her way when she married Connecticut- born and bred Edwin Pond Parker. Eddie quickly left for WWI and returned a drunk, addicted to morphine, who couldn't face living with his famous wife. Several years later, Parker married Alan Campbell, a handsome, struggling actor eleven years her junior, divorced him and then remarried him. Their tempestuous marriages would be wracked with insults and recriminations, and depression. In her poem, **Resume**, she sums up her experiences with love: "Razors pain you; Rivers are damp; acids stain you; and drugs cause cramp. Guns aren't lawful; Nooses give; Gas smells awful; You might as well Live."^(Parker, p. 51)

Professional Lives

Although she never formally worked "outside the home", as the euphemism goes, Alice never *ceased* to work. After Nicholas Longworth's death, Alice's photo graced women's magazines until she actually *told* someone that Pond's Cold Cream had paid her \$5,000. Then she was gently eased out. She wrote a column for *Ladies Home Journal* but her verbal turns of phrase never carried themselves to the written word, and ultimately they paid her \$2,000 to end it.

Alice would have been described by writer Malcolm Gladwell as a "connector" – someone "(who had) an extraordinary knack of making friends and

acquaintances. Their importance is also a function of the **kinds** of people they know.” (Gladwell, p.46) Biographer Teichmann said Alice had “snob power”. Alice’s salon was where **everyone who was anyone** in Washington, D.C came, dropped a tidbit and left with more than one. Her teas and dinners featured the same menus over and over, but no one focused on that. They were there for whatever verbal “dish” Alice was serving. Politics and intrigue consumed Alice from her late teens through her nineties. She was the last of Theodore Roosevelt’s children to die, and the only one who really had the heart and soul for the life of Washington’s perpetual dialogue.

Dorothy Parker, on the other hand, was never anything *but* a full-time professional woman. *Vogue, Vanity Fair, The New Yorker, Ladies Home Journal, Saturday Evening Post*...during her lifetime Dorothy’s words appeared in almost every major literary magazine in the country.

Much of her famous wit was displayed when she served as drama critic for *Vanity Fair*. If she didn’t like a play, she said, “If you would get the best out of the evening, by all means leave after the first act, take a brisk walk round the Reservoir and get back just as the curtain rises on the last act. You won’t miss a

thing.” (Frewin, p. 57) And for a play which particularly pained her Dorothy remarked,
“*The House Beautiful* is, for me, the play lousy.” (The New Yorker, March 21, 1931)

From 1927 to 1933, Dorothy worked as the book reviewer for *The New Yorker* using the pen name “Constant Reader”. After reviewing A.A. Milne’s new book, Dorothy purred “And it is that word ‘hummy’, my darlings, that marks the first place in *The House at Pooh Corner* at which Tonstant Weader fwowed up.” (The New Yorker, October 20, 1928) On Aimee Semple McPherson’s *In Service of the King*,” Well, (Mrs. McPherson) has written a book. And were you to call it a little peach, you would not be so much as scratching its surface. It may be that this autobiography is set down in sincerity, frankness and simple effort. It may be, too, that the Statue of Liberty is situated in Lake Ontario.” (The New Yorker, February 25, 1928)

And finally on Emily Post’s *Etiquette*, she yawned that her experience reading the book gave her “the sweetly restful moment of chancing on a law which I need not bother to memorize, let come no matter what.” (Frewin, p. 117)

By the time she died, Dorothy Parker had written nearly a hundred short stories, 400 poems, dozens of screenplays and hundreds of articles. Most people (not in this room, of course) can’t identify a Parker creation by name. But almost anyone will be able to recite one Parker witticism. Perhaps one of these is your favorite:

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

“That woman is so highly educated that she speaks 18 different languages and can’t say ‘no’ in any of them.”

“Miss (Katharine) Hepburn ran the whole gamut of emotions from ‘A’ to ‘B.’”

“Most good women are hidden treasures who are only safe because no one looks for them.”

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

“You can lead a horticulture but you can’t make her think.”

I don’t know if high school English classes will ever hail Dorothy Parker as a member of the “Canon”, and I have no idea how many young women today know that once the *First Daughter of The Land* celebrated a transcontinental trip by taking potshots at telegraph poles with her revolver. I do hope that the clever remarks of these two bright contemporaries will encourage people to learn more about them, to marvel at the two very distinct paths they trod and at the trail they blazed for the rest of us.

I have thought about their contributions at length, particularly since we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Quest. In their time, neither

Alice Roosevelt Longworth nor Dorothy Parker would have been invited to be a member of Quest. But it is because of Alice and Dorothy and other inquisitive, savvy and sometimes sassy women, that I have the honor to give this speech. I thank them for that and close with Dorothy's poem that sums up both her life and Alice's, "**Inventory**: Four be the things I am wiser to know: Idleness, sorrow, a friend and a foe. Four be the things I'd been better without: Love, curiosity, freckles and doubt. Three be the things I shall never attain: Envy, content, and sufficient champagne. Three be the things I shall have till I die: Laughter and hope and a sock in the eye". (Meade, "Inventory", p.44)

Selected Bibliography

- Brough, James. **Princess Alice: A Biography of Alice Roosevelt Longworth.** Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1975.
- Capron, Marion. "Dorothy Parker". *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews.* Ed. Malcolm Bradley, New York: Viking, 1957. Rpt. in *Women Writers at Work.* Ed. George Plimpton, New York: Penguin, 1989.
- Cordery, Stacy A. **Alice: Alice Roosevelt Longworth from White House Princess to Washington Power Broker.** New York: Penguin Books, 2007
- Day, Barry. **Dorothy Parker in Her Own Words.** Lanham, Maryland: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004.
- Dorothy Parker Complete Poems.** Introduction by Marion Meade. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Felsenthal, Carol. **Alice Roosevelt Longworth.** New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1988.
- Frewin, Leslie. **The Late Mrs. Dorothy Parker.** New York: MacMillan Publishing Co.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. **The Tipping Point.** New York: Little, Brown & Co, 2000.
- Longworth, Alice Roosevelt. **Crowded Hours: Reminiscences of Alice Roosevelt Longworth.** New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.
- Longworth, Alice Roosevelt & Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. **Desk Drawer Anthology: Poems for the American People.** Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc, 1937.
- McMillan, Florence. D. **Thorns Among Roses.** Paper presented to The Chicago Literary Club. March 16, 2009.

Meade, Marion. **Dorothy Parker: What Fresh Hell is This?** New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

Parker, Dorothy. **Complete Poems.** New York: Penguin Group, 1999.

Parker, Dorothy. "Kiss and Tellegen". In **The New Yorker.** City published: New York: F-R Publishing, Co. February 21, 1931.

Parker, Dorothy. In **The New Yorker.** City published: New York: F-R Publishing, Co. March 21, 1931.

Parker, Dorothy. "Far from Well". In **The New Yorker.** City published: New York. F-R Publishing, Co. October 20, 1928.

Parker, Dorothy. "Our Lady of the Loudspeaker". In **The New Yorker.** City published: New York. F-R Publishing, Co. February 25, 1928.

Parker, Dorothy. "The Professor Goes in for Sweetness and Light". In **The New Yorker.** City published: New York. F-R Publishing, Co. November 5, 1927.

The Portable Dorothy Parker. Introduction by Marion Meade. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Teague, Michael. **Mrs. L: Conversations with Alice Roosevelt Longworth.** Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1981

Teichmann, Howard. **Alice: The Life and Times of Alice Roosevelt Longworth.** Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979.