

## 74 QUOTATIONS



Dorothy Parker

(1893-1967)

Dorothy Rothschild Parker is one of the most popular wits in America, emerging in the 1920s to become an icon of the brilliant independent New Woman. Depicted frequently as a witty character in fiction and movies, she grew up isolated before she reached the age of 5 by the death of her mother and by hatred of both her Jewish father and her stepmother. Parker was educated at a Catholic elementary school and then at a finishing school, she played piano to earn a living and she sold her first poem to *Vanity Fair* at age 21. She later wrote for *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, and the *New Yorker*. She married a Wall Street stockbroker in 1917 but they were soon parted by his service in World War I, one of her three marriages. Parker was a founding member of the famous Round Table of wits who met for lunch at the Algonquin Hotel, along with Charlie MacArthur, Alexander Woollcott, Art Samuels, and the comedian Harpo Marx. They were joined by the clever Robert Benchley. Parker had affairs with MacArthur, Woollcott, and Benchley, got pregnant each time and had 3 abortions, leading to depressions, alcoholism and several attempts at suicide. She went to Hollywood and became involved in various civil rights causes being exploited by the Communists. In 1936 she founded the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, a Communist front with about 4,000 mostly wealthy members that is said to have contributed as much to the Soviet Communist Party as the entire American working class. Parker freelanced successfully as a screenwriter until she refused to cooperate with the U.S. Congress and got blacklisted by the movie studios as a Communist. In her will she left her estate to the Martin Luther King, Jr. foundation. Her executor, the Communist playwright Lillian Hellman, contested the will but lost. *The Portable Dorothy Parker* (1944) is one of only three in the *Portable* series to remain continuously in print, along with Shakespeare and the Bible.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, autobiographical, men, women, love, women writers, Feminism, drinking, writing, literary criticism, money, restraint, Hollywood, the Blacklist, wisdom, loneliness, suicide, death, three epitaphs:

### YOUTH

Time doth flit; oh shit.

I went to convent in New York and was fired finally for my insistence that the Immaculate Conception was spontaneous combustion.

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

Brevity is the soul of lingerie.

All I need is room enough to lay a hat and a few friends.

Ducking for apples—change one letter and it's the story of my life.

The first thing I do in the morning is brush my teeth and sharpen my tongue.

I'm never going to be famous. My name will never be writ large on the roster of Those Who Do Things. I don't do anything. Not one single thing. I used to bite my nails, but I don't even do that anymore.

I don't care what is written about me so long as it isn't true.

If I didn't care for fun and such,  
I'd probably amount to much.  
But I shall stay the way I am,  
Because I do not give a damn.

#### MEN

Look at him, a rhinestone in the rough.

There was nothing more fun than a man.

His voice was as intimate as the rustle of sheets.

I require three things in a man. He must be handsome, ruthless, and stupid.

Some men tear your heart in two,  
Some men flirt and flatter,  
Some men never look at you,  
And that clears up the matter.

#### WOMEN

A girl's best friend is her mutter.

Men seldom make passes / At girls who wear glasses.

Beauty is only skin deep, but ugly goes clean to the bone.

She looks like something that would eat its young.

The woman speaks eighteen languages, and can't say No in any of them.

[When told that a certain woman would not hurt a fly]: Not if it was buttoned up.

If all the girls who attended the Yale prom were laid end to end, I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

Women and elephants never forget.

## LOVE

Scratch a lover, and find a foe.

Love is like quicksilver in the hand. Leave the fingers open and it stays. Clutch it, and it darts away.

By the time you swear you are his, shivering and sighing,  
And he vows his passion is infinite and undying--  
Lady, make a note of this: One of you is lying....

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 Maria of Romania....

Why is it no one ever sent me yet  
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?  
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get  
One perfect rose....

Whose love is given over-well  
Will look on Helen's face in Hell;  
While those whose love is thin and wise  
May view John Knox in paradise....

Now I know the things I know,  
And I do the things I do;  
And if you do not like me so,  
To hell, my love, with you!

It serves me right for keeping all my eggs in one bastard.

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

## WOMEN WRITERS

To those who write fantasies—the Misses Baldwin, Ferber, Norris—I am not at home. As artists they're not, but as providers they're oil wells; they gush.

I've never read a good tough quotable female humorist, and I never was one myself.

## FEMINISM

I'm a feminist, and God knows I'm loyal to my sex... 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.

## DRINKING

I'd rather have a bottle in front of me, than a frontal lobotomy.

I like to have a martini,  
Two at the very most.  
After three I'm under the table,  
After four I'm under the host.

or

I wish I could drink like a lady;  
I can take one or two at the most.  
Three and I'm under the table,  
Four and I'm under the host.

#### WRITING

The pure and worthy Mrs. Stowe  
Is one we are all proud to know  
As mother, wife, and authoress--  
Thank God, I am content with less!

If you're going to write, don't pretend to write down. It's going to be the best you can do, and it's the fact that it's the best you can do that kills you.

Wit has truth in it; wisecracking is simply calisthenics with words.

#### LITERARY CRITICISM

This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly. It should be thrown with great force.

This wasn't just plain terrible, this was terrible with raisins in it.

You can't teach an old dogma new tricks.

#### MONEY

I've never been a millionaire but I just know I'd be darling at it.

Salary is no object; I want only enough to keep body and soul apart.

The two most beautiful words in the English language are "Check Enclosed."

Take care of the luxuries and the necessities will take care of themselves.

I'd like to have money. And I'd like to be a good writer. These two can come together, and I hope they will, but if that's too adorable, I'd rather have money.

The Monte Carlo casino refused to admit me until I was properly dressed so I went and found my stockings, and then came back and lost my shirt.

Money cannot buy health, but I'll settle for a diamond studded wheelchair.

#### RESTRAINT

If with the literate I am  
Impelled to try an epigram,  
I never seek to take the credit;  
We all assume that Oscar said it.

And I'll stay away from Verlaine too;  
He was always chasing Rimbauds.

#### HOLLYWOOD

A little bad taste is like a nice dash of paprika.

The only ism Hollywood believes in is plagiarism.

He [Robert Benchley] and I had an office so tiny that an inch smaller and it would have been adultery.

Authors and actors and artists and such-- / Never know nothing, and never know much.

Katherine Hepburn ran the whole gamut of emotions from A to B.

You can lead a horticulture, but you can't make her think.

#### BLACKLIST

I don't think this "blacklist" business extends to the theater or certain of the magazines, in Hollywood it exists because several gentlemen felt it best to drop names like marbles which bounced back like rubber balls about people they'd seen in the company of what they charmingly called "commies."

[E. M. Forster] once wrote something I've always remembered: "It has never happened to me that I've had to choose between betraying a friend and betraying my country, but if it ever does so happen I hope I have the guts to betray my country."

#### WISDOM

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.

#### LONELINESS

The best way to keep children home is to make the home atmosphere pleasant—and let the air out of their tires.

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

#### SUICIDE

They sicken of the calm, who knew the storm.

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.

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.

## DEATH

It's not the tragedies that kill us; it's the messes.

[On being told of President Calvin Coolidge's death]:  
How can they tell?

He lies below, correct in cypress wood,  
And entertains the most exclusive worms.

It costs me never a stab nor squirm  
To tread by chance upon a worm.  
"Aha, my little dear," I say,  
"Your clan will pay me back some day."

## THREE EPITAPHS

That would be a good thing for them to cut on my tombstone:  
Wherever she went, including here, it was against her better judgment.

Excuse my dust.

This is on me.

Some of these quotations are excerpted from  
"Dorothy Parker, *The Art of Fiction*" (1956)  
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