DOROTHY PARKER'S GAMES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN:
A THEMATIC STUDY OF VICTIMS AND MANIPULATORS
IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES BY DOROTHY PARKER
with a checklist of Dorothy Parker's prose, exclusive of reviews

by

GAIL ANN GOLDBERG
B.A., McGill University, 1973

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES'
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
June, 1976

© Gail Ann Goldberg
1976
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **English**

The University of British Columbia  
2075 Wesbrook Place  
Vancouver, Canada  
V6T 1W5

Date **23 March 1976**
Abstract

The relationship between victims and manipulators is a basic theme in the works of Dorothy Parker. Rejected by her stepmother as a child, she grew up incapable of accepting love or affection, and spent her life alienating others on the off-chance that they too might hurt her if she allowed herself to care about them. This defensive attitude led her to view the world through a two-dimensional lens: one either "did" or was "done to"; one was either a victim or a manipulator.

Parker's short stories fall into two general categories. Some deal specifically with lovers, and the rest examine more general, nonsexual relationships. The second group appeared to offer more depth and variety, and so all her prose was examined with this aspect in mind. Because her poetry is concerned almost entirely with love, it seemed too limited to be explored in detail in a broad thematic study, such as this had become. The fact that the plays were all co-authored excluded them as well, although Ladies of the Corridor does deal with the victim-manipulator theme at some length.

The reading was based upon a checklist which I believe to be a complete listing of Dorothy Parker's non-critical prose. It was compiled from March 1974 until September 1975, and is based primarily upon the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, although many other guides and indices were
consulted as well. Cross-references and chance allusions were also important sources of information, even though many of the leads suggested by John Keats' book proved to be false.

Once the stories were read, classified, and selected, they were grouped into four categories—manipulator-oriented relationships, victimless manipulator characterizations, victim-oriented relationships, and portraits of manipulator-less (per se) victims—and discussed. This structure has certain inherent flaws, but it does point up the various balances struck between comic technique and serious intent, an important concept in these stories. It also gave a certain framework to the examination, helping to keep it from either becoming a narrow "grocery list" of descriptive criticism, or a sprawling monster galloping off in all directions at once (a very real problem in an examination of such an unscholarly, unstudied writer).

The main conclusion to be drawn from such a study seems to be that Dorothy Parker merits more serious literary attention. Her reputation as a wit has preceded her—not always positively, as she herself realised—and has perhaps prejudiced us against her genuine artistic worth. "Dorothy Parker: wasn't she the one who said . . . ?" Whether she was or not should be immaterial. She wished most to be remembered for her short stories; the least we can do is read them. If a study of this nature can make them more interesting or more accessible, it has served its purpose.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................. 1

Chapter I ....................................................... 14  
  Section 1 .................................................. 14  
  Section 2 .................................................. 44  

Chapter II ..................................................... 56  
  Section 1 .................................................. 57  
  Section 2 .................................................. 65  

Conclusion .................................................... 86  

Checklist ..................................................... 91  

Bibliography .................................................. 96
One evening Mrs. Parker arrived late at a party given by Herbert Bayard Swope, and observed the guests engaged in some sort of group amusement. Swope explained that the guests were "ducking for apples," and Mrs. Parker affected, "There, but for a typographical error, is the story of my life." \(^1\)

This anecdote might be considered quite amusing, were it not for the fact that Dorothy Parker probably believed her remark to be true. She had a miserable childhood, complete with a fairy-tale evil stepmother, and she spent most of her life trying to escape it. As Elizabeth Janeway notes in her perceptive article in the *Saturday Review*, "Families can be left behind, but Dorothy Parker carried Dorothy Rothschild with her for seventy years, and one gets the feeling that she loathed the poor creature as deeply as her stepmother had." \(^2\) The refusal to acknowledge any positive aspects in herself eventually rendered Parker incapable of seeing anything good in life, and much of her existence was spent in trying desperately to escape from any
possibility of happiness. Since nothing good had ever
happened to little Dottie Rothschild, it followed that
whatever happened to Mrs. Dorothy Parker must be bad as
well.

Her life was a chaos of perpetual, almost total,
insecurity, and this in turn led to her often hypocritical
social behaviour. She strove to alienate people before
they could alienate her, unable to realize that many of
these people, given half a chance, might have become her
good friends. Janeway continues:

Any man in her life who made [the] mistake [of
loving her] brought himself down to the level of
despised little Dorothy Rothschild, a creature
who was unworthy of love. So, hating her and
confined within her, Dorothy Parker insulted the
men who loved her, for that love stamped them as
tasteless fools. The ones she loved were those
who lied to her, took her money, made love to her,
and married someone else. My own guess is that
more of them loved her than she knew, for she
must have frightened many away. When that happened
she suffered horribly, and wrote about it.

Lillian Hellman called this behaviour "embrace-
denounce," and tried to explain it when she described why
Dashiell Hammett refused to remain in the same room with
Parker:

I think the game of embrace-denounce must have
started when she found it amused or shocked
people, because in time, when she found it didn't
amuse me, she seldom played it. But Hammett
found it downright distasteful and I gave up all
efforts to convince him that it was the kind of
protection sometimes needed by those who are
frightened.

I am no longer certain that I was right: fear now seems too simple. The game more probably
came from a desire to charm, to be loved, to be
admired; and such desires brought self-contempt
that could only be consoled by behind-the-back
denunciations of almost comic violence.\textsuperscript{4} 

In spite of her insecurity and self-contempt, however, 
Parker knew that she was somehow different, that she was special--that she was an artist. Unable to fit into the mold her society had created for her, finding it impossible to remain true to herself while fulfilling the roles her particular social position involved; she became "a woman caught in a life which she turned against herself."\textsuperscript{5} Her hatred was paradoxical in that she spent most of her life desperately trying to convince and reconvince herself of her inferiority, ignoring rather than developing that artistic aspect of her self which was in reality better and finer than most of what it met.

The duality of detached artist and suffering individual shows itself in Dorothy Parker's writing. In "Robert Benchley and Dorothy Parker: Punch and Judy in Formal Dress," William Shanahan refers to her "sense of comic elements in essentially tragic situations," and to her "sense of the tragically absurd."\textsuperscript{6} John Keats comments continually on this "double vision" in \textit{You Might as Well Live}, and cites it as one of the main reasons for the failure of \textit{the Ladies of the Corridor} when he states that "Dorothy Parker's double vision was again fatally at work; within the episodes, comedy sat oddly and distractingly in the lap of tragedy."\textsuperscript{7} William Somerset Maugham, in the original introduction to \textit{The Portable Dorothy Parker}, notes that "Perhaps what gives her writing its
peculiar tang is her gift for seeing something to laugh at in the bitterest tragedies of the human animal." André Maurois' *Revue de Paris* comment on this aspect of Parker's writing is one of the most interesting; he uses it as the basis of her classification as a humourist:

"'Je suis un humoriste, m'a dit un jour Pirandello, parce que j'aperçois en même temps le côté comique et le côté tragique de la vie.' Si cette définition est exacte, Dorothy Parker est une humoriste, car elle peint à la fois les aspects douloureux et les aspects bouffons de l'amour." 

It follows, then, that satire would become Dorothy Parker's natural realm. It enabled her to berate what she hated in a socially acceptable manner, and much of what she hated she related directly to herself. Donald Ogden Stewart, at one time a close friend, noted that "She was so full of pretense herself that she could recognize the thing. . . . That doesn't mean she did not hate sham on a high level, but that she could recognize pretense because that was part of her makeup. She would get glimpses of herself doing things that would make her hate herself for that sort of pretense." Mark van Doren comments on her satire and its value at greater length, if on a less personal basis, in *The English Journal*:

Her concentrated loathing for the smug adulterer, the selfish old man, the dominating mother, the society woman who patronizes Negro artists, the tamely frigid wife, and the heartlessly curious friend by the private sick-bed--this loathing is given full and brilliant expression in "Mr. Durant," "The Wonderful Old Gentleman," "Little Curtis,"
"Arrangement in Black and White," "Too Bad," and "Lady with a Lamp," respectively. Such stories, by teaching us how to hate the vices which are really evil, the vices of hypocrisy and coldness, have a salutary, a cleansing power; and I suspect that Mrs. Parker is nowhere more valuable than she is in these contemptuous pages.

Dorothy Parker's too-keen insight into her own preposterous behaviour and that of many of her contemporaries knifes through her work, carving our reactions as deftly as it does the unfortunate figure under attack. The women who appear in her short stories are all acceptable social types--some are even considered by their peers to approach epitome--but every one is rejected in the end. Sometimes the dismissal is hilarious and satirical, as in "From the Diary of a New York Lady"; often it is more subtle and painful, as in the semi-autobiographical "Big Blonde." It is, however, inevitable. Parker deals with losers, and even her most attractive characters have some trait which, in spite of their apparently secure positions, dooms them to eventual failure in the reader's eyes. The author considered herself a failure and traces for her readers other failures, making certain that they see themselves in these characters as they reject them. She projects a world in which there is no winning, only coping; a world whose inhabitants can be judged only by the manner in which they deceive themselves, the length of time for which and the levels at which they are able to maintain their deception. Janeway comments:

[The stories] disturb one by being so full of
contempt: not just anger against a philistine world that closes its eyes to freshness and joy, but loathing for the inhabitants of that world. And this in itself does away with the freshness, joy, and openness she seems to be praising. No one in her stories really has a chance to get out of the trap. The dice are loaded and the deck is stacked. This is more than a refusal to look for happy endings; it's an insistence that happiness doesn't exist, a commitment to making sure that it never will.12

In one way, then, Dorothy Parker's fictional world might be described as being peopled by two main character types: victims and manipulators. Most people are the victims of others, of chance, or of themselves; the manipulators are those who have learned to cope. This study is an examination of the two groups.

The relationship between victims and manipulators may not be the most interesting or the most accessible aspect of the Parker cannon, but it is the most basic. Grounded in the individual's inability to respond truthfully and meaningfully to people on most levels, the author's developing artistic perceptions conceived of life as an exercise whose only possible rule-of-thumb was "Do unto others before they have a chance to do unto you." In the poetry and the stories concerning lovers it seems to be taken for granted that the men are the victimizers, making these stories not as thematically interesting, and therefore not under consideration here, but Parker and her contemporaries excused this behaviour at the same time as they bewailed it:

"General Review of the Sex Situation"
Woman wants monogamy,
Man delights in novelty.
Love is woman's moon and sun;  
Man has other forms of fun.  
Woman lives but in her lord;  
Count to ten...and man is bored.  
With this the gist and sum of it,  
What earthly good can come of it?  

(p. 115)

"Unfortunate Coincidence"

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.  

(p. 96)

"Comment"

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 Roumania.  

(ibo.)

"Two-Volume Novel"

The sun's gone dim, and  
The moon's turned black;  
For I loved him, and  
He didn't love back.  

(p. 239)

"News Item"

Men seldom make passes  
At girls who wear glasses.  

(p. 109)

"Song of One of the Girls"

Here in my heart I am Helen;  
I'm Aspasia and Hero, at least.  
I'm Judith, and Jael, and Madame de Staël;  
I'm Salome, moon of the East.  

Here in my soul I am Sappho;  
Lady Hamilton am I, as well.  
In me Recamier vies with Kitty O'Shea,  
With Dido, and Eve, and poor Nell.  
I'm one of the glamorouslaâdiess  
At whose beckoning history shook.  
But you are a man, and see only my pan,  
So I stay at home with a book.  

(ibo.)

The acceptance or rejection of such standards today is not at issue here: the question is one of process. By examining the various victims and manipulators, and the
relationships they enter into, we as readers can learn more about how and why we and others act as we do, and we can become better, more objective judges of our behaviour. Seeing and rejecting the actions of an unattractive character, then realising that we have often responded to the same situation in the same way, we can take steps to change our conduct to something more acceptable to both our society and to ourselves.

If we schematize the stories to be discussed, we notice the emergence of a curious internal balance. The first section of Chapters I and II details various manipulator-victim relationships, the product of isolated, often thoughtless acts. The second section more closely describes the individuals or character types involved in these relationships. One is left with a sense of fatal inevitability after reading the stories comprising this section: the characters have all experienced their situations before, and whether they realise it or not, the reader feels certain that they will again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter I, Section 1</th>
<th>Manipulator</th>
<th>Victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Lanier</td>
<td>Gwennie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Martindale</td>
<td>Mrs. Christie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crugers</td>
<td>Miss Wilmarth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Ewing</td>
<td>Big Lannie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Matson</td>
<td>Curtis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Whittaker</td>
<td>The Bains</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Durant</td>
<td>Rose; his family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Hazleton</td>
<td>Miss Nicholl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter I, Section 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman in &quot;Diary&quot;</td>
<td>Woman in &quot;Arrangement&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman in &quot;Arrangement&quot;</td>
<td>Mrs. Carrington, Mrs. Crane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Chapter I, Section 1, which deals with the relations between specific victims and manipulators, and Chapter II, Section 2, which focuses on the character of the victim, the stories all tend to be low-key. In Chapter I, Section 2, however, Misrule reigns when the scheming ladies go off on their own, just as it does in Chapter II, Section 1, when the anonymous manipulator rubs her hands in glee as she stands over her hapless victim.

These nameless manipulators may be despicable, but they are a fascinating group. The victims, on the other hand, would demand more serious consideration, whether or not they manage to hold our attention long enough for this consideration to develop. Questions of balance are delicate ones, and even Dorothy Parker sometimes misjudges her literary dart shooting. Because of her intense commitment to the cause of the victim she sometimes loses her perspective, wallowing in the oversentimentality of a story like "Clothe the Naked" and writing poems like "Rainy Night," which she later admitted were written as she tried to "[follow] in the exquisite footsteps of Miss Millay, unhappily in [her]
own horrible sneakers. Such lapses, on top of her reputation as a "wit," did nothing to bolster her self-confidence either as an individual or as a writer.

Because of her giant personal insecurity, Parker is reluctant to inflict a strict, explicitly-stated "moral vision" upon her readers. Yet one does emerge. It emphasizes the lack of direction, the futility of hope and the general, overwhelming absence of God in life as she sees it. Neither her characters nor her readers are offered any other way of seeing the world: the one she created was the only one she knew. Wit, humour and compassion do, however, temper her message, allowing the reader some freedom to decide how much bitter satiric medicine he wishes to swallow in any given dose. The instructive stuff is there and waiting, but it need not be taken all at once.

In *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, Marion Capron asked Dorothy Parker if she thought her verse writing had been beneficial to her prose. The author replied, "Franklin P. Adams once gave me a book of French verse forms and told me to copy their design, that by copying them I would get precision in prose. The men you imitate in verse influence your prose, and what I got out of it was precision, all I realize I've ever had in prose writing." This self-disparaging statement is of course not true, but it does make us conscious of her writing style—the author's manipulation of the reader, as it were. Because this is a thematic study
rather than a stylistic analysis, not very much emphasis will be placed upon the prose. Some representative passages will be examined, however, in order to heighten the reader's awareness of some of Parker's more commonly applied literary techniques.

Dorothy Parker's writing served as a personal catharsis which was, at the same time, a strong social indictment. André Maurois once more says it best when he suggests that "Sans doute, ces malheureuses sont ridicules, semble nous dire Dorothy Parker. Mais ne sommes-nous pas tous ridicules? Leurs vies sont manquées? . . . Eh bien! et les nôtres?"15
Notes: Introduction

1 Dorothy Parker, as quoted in The Algonquin Wits, R. E. Drennan, ed. (New York: The Citadel Press, 1968), p. 120.


3 Ibid.


5 Janeway, p. 31.

6 William Shanahan, "Robert Benchley and Dorothy Parker: Punch and Judy in Formal Dress," Rendezvous, 3 (Spring 1968), 33, 34.


8 William Somerset Maugham, "Variations on a Theme," from the original introduction to The Portable Dorothy Parker, as quoted in The Portable Dorothy Parker: Revised and Enlarged Edition (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 600f. All references to Parker's works will be taken from this edition (NVP), and their page numbers included in the text, unless otherwise noted.


10 Donald Ogden Stewart, as quoted in Keats, p. 62.

11 Mark van Doren, "Dorothy Parker," The English Journal, 23, No. 7 (September 1934), 542.

12 Janeway, p. 31.

14 Ibid.

15 Maurois, p. 12.
Chapter I: **The Manipulators**

As noted above, the stories comprising the manipulator group can be divided quite neatly into two sections: portraits of characters closely associated with specific victims, and more abstract portraits of general types. The stories to be dealt with under the first heading are "The Custard Heart," "Song of the Shirt, 1941," "Clothe the Naked," "Horsie," "Little Curtis," "The Wonderful Old Gentleman," "Mr. Durant" and "The Bolt behind the Blue." In the second category we find "Arrangement in Black and White," "From the Diary of a New York Lady" and "Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Crane." "Soldiers of the Republic" will also be discussed here, since it concerns Parker's view of herself as a manipulator in relation to a victimized society.

-Section 1-

The members of the first group of manipulators might easily be called the Establishment "Rich-Bitch Matrons"--Mr. Durant seems to qualify in spite of his sex. These people are all tyrannical baby autocrats, not-very-benign despots, who lead their lives genuinely unaware of the havoc
and pain left floating in their wakes. We are reminded of F. Scott Fitzgerald's characterization in *The Great Gatsby*:

"They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made..."¹

In these stories, however, the cleaning-up is usually expeditious rather than proper, and the reader is then left to sort things out according to his own sense of propriety. Moral outrage develops from a strong reaction against the so-called protagonist, rather than from any sense of involvement with a specific victim, and thus Parker's struggle toward a development of objectivity and independent judgement in her audience, the goal of any satirical writer, is carried one step further. When we do become involved with the victim in these manipulator-oriented stories they lose their impact, as is the case with "Clothé the Naked" and "Soldiers of the Republic." Involvement with the victim at this stage would sidetrack us from the precise, detached irony with which her manipulators are laquered, and so Parker wisely attempts to keep it to a minimum here.

In "Dorothy Parker's Idle Men and Women," Norris W. Yates states that in Parker's stories "her acidity bit most often into the gilt and brass of a certain type of American personality, the self-absorbed female snob."² "Gilt," "brass"
and "self-absorbed female snob" describe very well all the "heroines" we will deal with in this chapter, but none better than Mrs. Lanier in "The Custard Heart," and Mrs. Martindale in "Song of the Shirt, 1941."

Mrs. Lanier is a professional wistful, "dedicated to wistfulness, as lesser artists to words and paint and marble" (p. 319). There is a Mr. Lanier: "he had even been seen" (p. 320). This does not, however, preclude Mrs. Lanier's entertaining various groups of young men whose main purpose in life seems to be the sheltering of her heart from the terrible realities of life. Invariably one young man will begin to stay later than the others, then to arrive earlier, then be the only young man to whom Mrs. Lanier is at home--and then, abruptly, she will be at home to all but him. The faces may change, but the pattern will remain the same.

The departures are all predicated upon the same event: Mrs. Lanier's longingly-expressed desire for a child, and the interchangeable young man's hotly-asserted intention to do something for her.

"If only I had a little baby," she would sigh, "a little, little baby, I think I could be almost happy." And then she would fold her delicate arms, and lightly, slowly rock them, as if they cradled that little, little one of her dear dreams. Then, the denied madonna, she was at her most wistful, and the young man would have lived or died for her, as she bade him.

Mrs. Lanier never mentioned why her wish was unfulfilled; the young man would know her to be too sweet to place blame, too proud to tell. But, so close to her in the pale light, he would understand, and his blood would swirl
with fury that such clods as Mr. Lanier remained unkill'd. He would beseech Mrs. Lanier, first in halting murmurs, then in rushes of hot words, to let him take her away from the hell of her life and try to make her almost happy. It would be after this that Mrs. Lanier would be out to the young man, would be ill, would be incapable of being disturbed (p. 323).

Gwennie, her maid, is the one constant in Mrs. Lanier's life and, as far as Mrs. Lanier is concerned, exists only in relation to her and for her express protection. Even the old, well-beloved family chauffeur must leave when he begins to look his unaesthetic age. His replacement is a Mellors type named Kane who becomes "a positive comfort" (p. 325) to Mrs. Lanier, but he disappoints her cruelly by disappearing just as Gwennie comes down with a strange sort of cold which leaves her eyes "heavy and red and her face pale and swollen" (ibid.).

The reader quickly realizes that Kane had seduced Gwennie and left her when he discovered she was pregnant, but Mrs. Lanier remains unaware of what is happening around her, even joking about the healthy "cuteness" of Gwennie's expanding waist, all the more remarkable for the fact that Gwennie still seems to be suffering from that cold (p. 326). When Mrs. Lanier begins to rehearse her baby speech one evening as Gwennie pins up her hair, the poor maid loses control. Dropping the hairbrush she runs from the room, but she is still so sensitive to the vulnerable Mrs. Lanier that she apologizes profusely as she leaves. Her actions
do, however, have what may be termed a positive effect:

Mrs. Lanier sat looking after Gwennie, her hands at her wounded heart. Slowly she turned back to her mirror, and what she saw there arrested her; the artist knows the masterpiece. Here was the perfection of her career, the sublimation of wistfulness; it was that look of grieved bewilderment that did it. Carefully she kept it upon her face as she rose from the mirror and, with her lovely hands still shielding her heart, went down to the new young man (p. 327).

Mrs. Lanier's total, unthinkable lack of comprehension is matched only by Mrs. Martindale's; indeed, the latter's almost deliberate stupidity may be said to surpass it. Just as Mrs. Lanier is the personification of wistfulness, Mrs. Martindale is The Big Heart: "The size of Mrs. Martindale's heart was renowned among her friends, and they, as friends will, had gone around babbling about it" (p. 65). She is deeply committed to many charities, doing everything she possibly can for the war effort, at great personal sacrifice:

All the flags looked brand-new. The red and the white and the blue were so vivid they fairly vibrated, and the crisp stars seemed to dance on their points. Mrs. Martindale had a flag, too, clipped to the lapel of her jacket. She had had quantities of rubies and diamonds and sapphires just knocking about, set in floral designs on evening bags and vanity boxes and cigarette cases; she had taken the lot of them to her jeweller, and he had assembled them into a charming little Old Glory. There had been enough of them for him to devise a rippled flag, and that was fortunate, for those flat flags looked sharp and stiff. There were numbers of emeralds, formerly figuring as leaves and stems in the floral designs, which were of course of no use to the present scheme and so were left over, in an embossed leather case. Some day, perhaps, Mrs. Martindale would confer with her jeweller about an arrangement to employ them. But there was no time for such matters now (p. 65f).
This passage, one of Parker's most stingingly precise and vehemently indicting, deserves some stylistic comment. Repetition of both words and sounds and use of ironic understatement are the two techniques which strike us most at first glance. "And," for example, is used eleven times in one hundred seventy-five words, seven times in the first hundred. In the second sentence it emphasizes the colours which make up the flag, rather than the idea it represents: we would expect the phrase "red, white, and blue." Parker uses this fragmentation to draw our attention to Mrs. Martindale's superficial patriotism, to her concentration on the components and the connectives rather than on the concept with which she is supposedly so preoccupied. In the fourth sentence "and" further underlines Mrs. Martindale's character and position in society by creating the structure which lists in specific yet casual triplets the jewels and trinkets she takes for granted. Her off-hand attitude is supported by the shift of diction in Parker's use of the word "quantities" in line six, and by the phrases "just knocking about" and "the lot of them" in lines seven and nine. Irony is first hinted at by the clause "Mrs. Martindale had a flag, too," in line four; it becomes progressively more overt through the "charming" of line ten, the cutting "and that was fortunate" of line twelve, the "of course" of line sixteen and the "perhaps" of line eighteen, and it springs up fully grown in "But there was not time for such
matters now," the abrupt last sentence of the paragraph.

Although Parker's ostensible role is that of non-evaluative reporter, we realise that she feels little but contempt for her main character. Her disgust and our enjoyment are both heightened by the multicoloured meanings in which she cloaks her true feelings.

The imagery of the passage is visual, as it is in most of Parker's descriptions. When read aloud, however, the passage proves to be pleasing to the ear as well—a second, albeit unacknowledged, benefit from her poetic experience. In the second sentence, the first example of alliteration and symmetrical metre appears in "vivid they fairly vibrated": the sounds of the accented v's and the f (voiceless v) bind the phrase into a unit which itself vibrates; the balanced dactyls also contribute to this effect. Parker repeats the balanced alliteration in line thirteen—"the flat flags looked sharp and stiff"—using the heavy spondee to heighten the contrast between those flags and the iambic one described in the line before: "devise a rippled flag."

The alliteration of "formerly figuring" in line fourteen stretches toward the "floral" of the next line through the help of the strict metre of the first clause of that sentence: "There were numbers of emeralds, formerly figuring as leaves and stems in the floral designs," giving the whole a soft, rounded completeness.

In the paragraph preceding this passage we were
introduced to Mrs. Martindale's big heart; here we are introduced to the lady herself. Parker's skill allows her to transmit her disapproval by means of seemingly innocent, objective descriptions of the attitudes and thought patterns of her characters, thus apparently permitting her readers to shape their own evaluations from a fairly broad range of emotions. The perceptive reader will of course recognize the irony and match the author's contempt, while the not-so-finely turned reader will admire Mrs. Martindale for her staunch patriotism in the face of such personal deprivation. Both groups, however, will be struck by Parker's description, and being thus drawn in, will be forced to commit themselves to the story and to form some definite reaction to it.

Mrs. Martindale's greatest sacrifice is her work. Every weekday afternoon finds her at Headquarters, sewing hospital jackets for the wounded soldiers overseas. She hates the work, she is no good at it, but she forces herself to the task, waiting anxiously for Headquarters to close for the summer and free her. However, countless additional jackets are desperately needed, and Mrs. Martindale's big heart volunteers to finish twelve more before the autumn (the twelve do not include the one she has half-finished).

When Mrs. Martindale returns home she goes immediately to her sitting room, whose colour has been painstakingly matched to her eyes and hair, and, as she struggles to
finish the neck binding, she is summoned to the telephone. An acquaintance who is leaving town for the summer anxiously asks if Mrs. Martindale might possibly have some work for "her" Mrs. Christie. Mrs. Christie's daughter has been crippled by infantile paralysis and therefore the work must be something she can do at home, but she will pick up and deliver, and she is "so quick, and so good" (p. 72). Mrs. Martindale finds herself at a temporary loss, but she promises to do her best:

Mrs. Martindale went back to her blue-gray quilted satin. Again she took up the unfinished coat. A shaft of the exceptionally bright sunlight shot past a vase of butterfly orchids and settled upon the waving hair under the gracious coif. But Mrs. Martindale did not turn to meet it. Her blue-gray eyes were bent on the drudgery of her fingers. This coat, and then the twelve others beyond it. The need, the desperate, dreadful need, and the terrible importance of time. She took a stitch and another stitch and another stitch and another stitch; she looked at their wavering line, pulled the thread from her needle, ripped out three of the stitches, rethreaded her needle, and stitched again. And as she stitched, faithful to her promise and to her heart, she racked her brains (p. 73).

Again, pity for Mrs. Christie and for her crippled daughter is not what Parker is striving for. Any strong emotional response would distract the reader from her portrait, and detract from its effectiveness. The lurid details serve instead to point up Mrs. Martindale's profound inability to see beyond herself, to relate to other human beings on any level other than the most superficial. In his article entitled "Dorothy Parker Revisited," Ross Labrie...
states: "Harmlessly shallow in themselves, perhaps, Mrs. Lanier and Mrs. Martindale symbolize power within American society, power which is capriciously used to serve the demands of pampered hearts and indulged enthusiasms. For those women who manage to survive the withering effects of their roles, either through the freedom of affluence or through individual energy, there is the role of emotion, generally childlike and always peremptory—a law unto itself. This is made to seem inevitable in a civilization which is obsessed with things and fundamentally uninterested in the interior life."

It is this feeling of inevitability in the behaviour of her Establishment matrons which makes the Parker stories concerned with them so paradoxical. These women must realise what they are doing, they must be conscious of the essential baseness of their lives and actions, the reader cries: they must be acting out of perversity. Only when the reader sees that this is not true can he receive the full artistic and socially critical impact to be found in most of Parker's stories. She does not write about the way things are supposed to be, but about the way they are, and the sooner her audience realises this, the more it will appreciate and learn from her satire.

"The Custard Heart" and "Song of the Shirt, 1941" are full-face portraits of their Establishment-manipulator protagonists, but "Horsie" and "Clothe the Naked" take
their perspectives from the victim's point of view. The heroines here are both members of the lower classes. Although Miss Wilmarth is a trained nurse and, as such, "could not be asked to dine with the maids" (p. 273), she is obviously not in Camilla Cruger's class. Big Lannie "went out by the day to the houses of secure and leisured ladies to wash their silks and their linens. She did her work perfectly; some of the ladies even told her so" (p. 360). Big Lannie is black. Miss Wilmarth supports her mother, who "doesn't get around very well any more" (p. 273), and the aunt who keeps her mother company. Big Lannie takes care of her bastard grandson Raymond, blind since birth.

Their perspectives are all these stories have in common, however. Whereas "Horsie" is a tightly-structured, highly-crafted description of a woman condemned to polite toleration through no fault of her own, "Clothe the Naked" is a capital-L Liberal ghetto romance with a trick ending reminiscent of some of O. Henry's weaker stories. Pathos sometimes comes dangerously close to bathos, and often it is only the reader's mood which decides which effect has been achieved. The scene in which Raymond goes outdoors for the first time after a long, cold winter, dressed in the clothes Mrs. Ewing has chillingly condescended to give Big Lannie, is a good example of this unnecessary tension:

It was not the laughter he had known; it was not the laughter he had lived on. It was like great flails beating him flat, great prongs tearing his flesh from his bones. It was coming
at him, to kill him. It drew slyly back, and then it smashed against him. It swirled around and over him, and he could not breathe. He screamed and tried to run out through it, and fell, and it licked over him, howling higher. His clothes unrolled, and his shoes flapped on his feet. Each time he could rise, he fell again. It was as if the street were perpendicular before him, and the laughter leaping at his back. He could not find the fence, he did not know which way he was turned. He lay screaming, in blood and dust and darkness (p. 368).

What could have occasioned such ridicule? Why, Raymond is wearing Mr. Ewing's cast-off formal suit.

The ending of "Clothe the Naked" is as banal and unoriginal as it is out of character with the described behaviour of the ghetto inhabitants. If we believe the contention that, "Had anyone come into Big Lannie's room to take Raymond away to an asylum for the blind, the neighbors would have fought for him with stones and rails and boiling water" (p. 363), the story falls apart at their overreaction. If we do not, the story has been pointless. It is the story's basic premise--that in a poor ghetto such as the author describes, anyone, especially a blind child, would be treated in this fashion--which is faulty. Mrs. Parker's bleeding heart is showing, and she must pay the artistic price. Although she does make some points about racial inequality, they are lost in the reader's generally unfavourable reactions. "Arrangement in Black and White" is a much more effective story.

Miss Wilmarth's situation may not be as tragic as Big
Lannie's, but it is certainly more poignant. Told with classic Parker detachment, her story affects us in terms of what she can never be, and it becomes more vivid when contrasted with what Camilla Cruger is and represents: "'Those children,' Camilla's mother was wont to say, chuckling. 'Those two kids. The independence of them! Struggling along on cheese and kisses. Why, they hardly let me pay for the trained nurse. And it was all we could do, last Christmas, to make Camilla take the Packard and the chauffeur'' (p. 261).

Her visitors said that Camilla looked lovelier than ever, but they were mistaken. She was only as lovely as she had always been. They spoke in hushed voices of the new look in her eyes since her motherhood; but it was the same far brightness that had always lain there. They said how white she was and how lifted above other people; they forgot that she had always been pale as moonlight and had always worn a delicate disdain, as light as the lace that covered her breast. Her doctor cautioned tenderly against hurry, besought her to take recovery slowly—Camilla, who had never done anything quickly in her life. . . Motherhood had not brought perfection to Camilla's loveliness. She had had that before (p. 265).

And like Daisy Buchanan, of whom Nick had "heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her," Camilla's "light figure turned always a little away from those about her, so that she must move her head and speak her slow words over her shoulder to them" (p. 266).

The story gets its title from Gerald and Camilla's nickname for Miss Wilmarth. It is cruelly apt: her long face looks uncannily equine, in expression as well as in
Miss Wilmarth's oddity increases in proportion to her rejection by others. The sight of the concern and attention lavished upon Camilla throws her own drab isolation into relief, and has the effect of intensifying her ugliness. The moral design is confirmed at the end of the story, when she is off-handedly given a box of flowers by Gerald Cruger, who is greatly relieved to be finally getting rid of her.

Gerald has noted the various fluctuations in Miss Wilmarth's appearance, although he is unable to account for them, and he is sensitive enough to instinctively buy her flowers. He is, however, quick to deny any such awareness: "'I was so crazed at the idea that she was really going,' he said, 'that I must have lost my head. No one was more surprised than I, buying gardenias for Horsie'" (p. 274). The subtle implication seems to be that Establishment men are for some reason not as bad as their women, not as deliberately hardened or role-bound. Gerald appears quite naïve and impetuous throughout the story, treating Camilla as a fragile creation rather than as a flesh and blood creature like himself, although she seems to be in fact the stronger of the pair.

The two-fold irony of "Horsie" comes in the last paragraph. When Miss Wilmarth looks back at the house, Gerald has already disappeared: "He must have run across the sidewalk--run, to get back to the fragrant room and the little yellow roses and Camilla . . . They would be alone together; they would dine alone together by candlelight; they would be alone together in the night . . .
It was perhaps fortunate that no one looked in the limousine. A beholder must have been startled to learn that a human face could look as much like that of a weary mare as did Miss Wilmarth's" (p. 275). But when the flowers slide over on the seat as the car turns, Miss Wilmarth is reminded of them, and when she opens the box, her expression changes:

The florist's box slipped against Miss Wilmarth's knee. She looked down at it. Then she took it on her lap, raised the lid a little and peeped at the waxy bouquet. It would have been all fair then for a chance spectator; Miss Wilmarth's strange resemblance was not apparent, as she looked at her flowers. They were her flowers. A man had given them to her. She had been given flowers. They might not fade maybe for days. And she could keep the box (ibid.).

Thus Miss Wilmarth becomes best-looking when there is no one to see her, and she does it over flowers given to her for all the wrong reasons.

"Horsie" succeeds because it is so delicately balanced. Dorothy Parker painstakingly permits us to feel quite sorry for Miss Wilmarth without allowing us to become too involved with her. The author achieves this effect by first making us very aware of Miss Wilmarth's appearance, and then constantly reminding us of it. Once she has made certain we realize that Miss Wilmarth is condemned to be an eternal victim, Parker can easily and ironically grant her one brief, useless reprieve.

In "Little Curtis," "The Wonderful Old Gentleman" and "Mr. Durant" we find further variations on the manipulator-victim theme. In "Little Curtis" the victim is an adopted
child who is punished for attempting to be a normal little boy; in "The Wonderful Old Gentleman" the nominal aggressor lies upstairs dying throughout the story, ever-present although never seen; in "Mr. Durant" the matron-figure is a man with a curious set of double standards. The stories are all written in a very low-key, extremely objective style, and progress in a deliberate, almost fatal fashion. There are no surprise endings here--in fact, the stories do not end so much as close gently. We feel as though we are witnessing scenes which have been played before and which will be played again, rather than isolated incidents in the character's lives.

Mrs. Albert Matson adopted Curtis "'at the best place in New York.' No one was surprised at that. Mrs. Matson always went to the best places when she shopped in New York. You thought of her selecting a child as she selected all her other belongings: a good one, one that would last" (p. 342f). We are told that "Curtis really comes of a very nice family, for an orphan" (p. 349), and that although both his parents are dead, his father did go to college. These are important qualifications, since Curtis is being groomed to take over the Matson and the Whitmore fortunes, which Mrs. Matson would have people believe to be quite substantial. After all, "she had been Miss Laura Whitmore, of the Drop Forge and Tool Works Whitmores" (p. 341), and Mr. Matson "is the Matson Adding Machines" (p. 348).

Training Curtis properly is a difficult task. Discovering
him playing with the furnaceman's son, Mrs. Matson is forced to spank him before she can even take off her hat, and she finds this behaviour especially inconsiderate since Curtis knows she will be having company that afternoon. Mrs. Matson is the type of woman who must have everything just right.

The party is a satisfactory affair. The leftover chicken sandwiches and the one-egg cake are properly complimented, and thankfully neither Mrs. Swan, Mrs. Kerley nor deaf old Mrs. Cook regards the candy baskets as favours to be taken home. Curtis has been introduced to the ladies, who find him charming, although he finds Mrs. Swan a bit too effusive, and Mrs. Cook's large, intestine-shaped speaking tube fascinates him. The story reaches its climax when Mr. Matson accidentally brushes against Mrs. Cook's speaking tube and knocks it to the ground:

Curtis' control went. Peal upon peal of high, helpless laughter came from him. He laughed on, against Mrs. Matson's cry of "Curtis!" against Mr. Matson's frown. He doubled over with his hands on his little brown knees, and laughed mad laughter.

"Curtis!" bellowed Mr. Matson. The laughter died. Curtis straightened himself, and one last little moan of enjoyment escaped him.

Mr. Matson pointed with a magnificent gesture. "Upstairs!" he boomed.

Curtis turned and climbed the stairs. He looked small beside the banister (p. 352).

Curtis is really not to blame. He is only five years old, and his reaction is perfectly normal. Many adults might be tempted to laugh under similar circumstances.
Although it could not be considered acceptable behaviour, it is explicable and pardonable in a youngster. Curtis, however, is a commodity rather than a child. His function is to be properly and overtly grateful for all that the Matsons, especially Mrs. Matson, are doing for him, in spite of the fact that they are, of course, doing everything for themselves. Their main reason for adopting Curtis was not because they loved him, or because they wanted a child, but because they would do anything to keep their estate from falling into the hands of Henry Matson's children, whom they had long pictured as eventually "going through their money like Sherman to the sea" (p. 342).

As suggested above, these were not the first times that Curtis has been punished, nor are they likely to be the last. Curtis will be properly brought up if it kills him, and it well might:

"Oh, children," Mrs. Kerley assured her, "they're funny sometimes--especially a little boy like that. You can't expect so much. My goodness, you'll fix all that! I always say I don't know any child that's getting any better bringing up than that young one--just as if he was your own."

Peace returned to the breast of Mrs. Matson. "Oh--goodness!" she said. There was almost a coyness in her smile as she closed the door on the departing (p. 353).

Once more, it is to the manipulative Mrs. Matson we must relate, rather than to the innocent victim, Curtis. His youth and his stereotyped situation insulate him too well from any deep emotions we might otherwise be tempted
to transfer, but Parker carefully bares his stepmother's soul in order that we may see clearly through her despicable pretensions.

"The Wonderful Old Gentleman" has what must be one of the most effective beginnings of any Parker short story:

If the Bains had striven for years, they could have been no more successful in making their living-room into a small but admirably complete museum of objects suggesting strain, discomfort, or the tomb. Yet they had never even tried for the effect . . . It was curious how perfectly [the articles] all fitted into the general scheme. It was as if they had all been selected by a single enthusiast to whom time was but little object, so long as he could achieve the eventual result of transforming the Bain living-room into a home chamber of horrors, modified a bit for family use (p. 52).

Mr. and Mrs. Bain and Mrs. Whittaker, Mrs. Bain's sister, are seated in this living room, waiting for the women's father to die. He has been living with the Bains for five years, causing them endless amounts of trouble and grief, but they steadfastly refuse to admit this, or even to acknowledge it to themselves. He might have lived with Mrs. Whittaker and her husband, who, in addition to having a large amount of money, had no children. But Mrs. Whittaker found herself unable to deprive her less fortunate relatives of the opportunity to enjoy the Wonderful Old Gentleman's company.

As the story progresses, the reader realises that the "Old Gentleman," as he is referred to, was not quite as wonderful as the family pretends. The Bains' son left home
because of him; he almost ruined the life of his own son Matt, with whom the family is no longer in touch. He has left all his money to Mrs. Whittaker, leaving the Bains the furniture he had brought with him, his set of Thackeray, and the rest of a sum of money he had once given Mr. Bain. The latter had regarded it as a loan, however, and had almost finished paying his father-in-law back.

In "The Wonderful Old Gentleman" we find the clearest representation of a manipulator-victim relationship. In fact, there are two separate relationships being carried on. The first manipulator is the title character. Any thought that he might have acted unfairly would never have crossed the old man's mind, or, if it had, it would have been rejected out of hand. The second, whose actions are not quite as overt, is Mrs. Whittaker. Not at all altruistic, she refused to become involved when she might have done some good, and any hopes the idealistic reader may have had about her helping her sister and her brother-in-law now are quickly dashed. And throughout the story the Bains remain pathetically and frustratingly unaware of the ways in which they have been taken advantage of.

Firmly controlled understatement and irony are again the techniques which Parker employs to keep the story from becoming tiresome and cloying. She informs us that Mrs. Whittaker "was dressed, in compliment to the occasion, in her black crepe de Chine, and she had left her lapis-lazuli
pin, her olivine bracelet, and her topaz and amethyst rings at home in her bureau drawer, retaining only her lorgnette on its gold chain, in case there should be any reading to be done" (p. 55). Mrs. Bain serves cookies on the plate painted by hand with clusters of cherries. --the plate she had used for sandwiches when, several years ago, her card club had met at her house.

She had thought it over a little tonight, before she lifted out the cherry plate, then quickly decided and resolutely heaped it with cookies. After all, it was an occasion--informal, perhaps, but still an occasion (p. 54f).

Tight stylistic control is unfortunately not as evident in "Mr. Durant." That Parker herself was not satisfied with the story is evident from a comparison of the various texts available, and even in the definitive Viking edition there is a sense of something missing. The author maintains her distance and her objectivity, but perhaps not as surely or as consistently as in some of the other stories. "Mr. Durant"'s weaknesses might be explained in part by the story's date: it was first printed in 1924, which makes it the earliest of any of the stories we have so far discussed, and one of the earliest of the "serious" works. In spite of these weaknesses, however, it is still a fairly good piece, and it may be found to suffer more in comparison than it would if considered on its own.

Mr. Durant is the assistant manager of the credit department of a rubber company, a deliberately ironic touch when we discover that the story concerns his predicament when he finds he has got the secretary with whom he has been having an affair "into trouble" (p. 39). The girl, Rose,
manages to obtain an abortion through the help of her girlfriend Ruby: in spite of Mr. Durant's boast that "he knew 'a thing or two'" (ibid.), he finds himself unable to seek out the required information. Later Rose goes home to her sister vowing never to return, even though Mr. Durant volunteers "to put in a good word for her whenever she wanted her job back" (p. 41). He is unable to understand her reaction. He has also paid for the operation, although not ungrudgingly: "Not that I wouldn't have used the twenty-five very nicely myself just then, with Junior's teeth, and all!" (ibid.).

But the unpleasant episode is now over, and Mr. Durant spends his evening bus ride ogling the pretty young working girls, hoping to see "their narrow skirts sliding up over their legs" (p. 42). When he arrives home he finds his children excited over a puppy which they have found, and which he expansively says they may keep--until his wife mentions that it is a female. He motions her out of the room to his den, and dresses her down abruptly:

"Now you know perfectly well, Fan, we can't have that dog around," he told her. He used the low voice reserved for underwear and bathroom articles and kindred shady topics. There was all the kindness in his tones that one has for a backward child, but a Gibraltar-like firmness was behind it. "You must be crazy to even think we could for a minute. Why, I wouldn't give a she-dog house room, not for any amount of money. It's disgusting, that's what it is." . . .

"Disgusting," he repeated. "You have a female around, and you know what happens. All the males in the neighborhood will be running after her. First thing you know, she'd be
having puppies—and the way they look after they've had them, and all! That would be nice for the children to see, wouldn't it? I should think you'd think of the children, Fan. No, sir; there'll be nothing like that around here, not while I know it. 'Disgusting!'" (p. 46).

Rather than break his promise to the children in a concrete fashion, Mr. Durant proposes to put the dog out after they have gone to sleep, and to have his wife tell them the next morning that it had run away. She agrees, and they consider the problem solved. "His peace with the world was once more intact, restored by this simple solution of the little difficulty. Again his mind wrapped itself in the knowledge that everything was all fixed, all ready for a nice, fresh start. His arm was still around his wife's shoulder as they went on in to dinner" (ibid.).

Mr. Durant's hypocrisy is staggering, but, like Mrs. Lanier and Mrs. Martindale, he is incapable of recognizing it. With his "rich-bitch," bulldozer-type mentality he finds it perfectly natural that he could have seduced Rose, perfectly understandable that she should have been seduced (pp. 37-39). However, when it becomes necessary for her to have an abortion, when he finds himself having to confront and to accept the responsibility for his actions, he withdraws, upset and angry "that he should be drawn into conniving to find a way to break the law of his country--probably the law of every country in the world. Certainly of every decent Christian place" (p. 40). His attitude throughout the story is that young women have been created for his enjoyment,
that "there would always be others" (p. 36)—but were he to observe that behaviour in other men, or to find that the young women, or even young dogs, took pleasure in their own sexuality, his scorn and wrath would be uncontainable.

This hypocrisy is carefully underlined in Parker's description of "Father's den." Its books give us the key to his personality:

He had directed the decoration of his den, had seen that it had been made a truly masculine room. Red paper covered its walls, up to the wooden rack on which were displayed ornamental steins, of domestic manufacture. Empty pipe-racks—Mr. Durant smoked cigars—were nailed against the red paper at frequent intervals. On one wall was an indifferent reproduction of a drawing of a young woman with wings like a vampire bat, and on another, a water-colored photograph of "September Morn," the tints running a bit beyond the edges of the figure as if the artist's emotions had rendered his hand unsteady... Mr. Durant's books were lined up behind the glass of the bookcase. They were all tall, thick books, brightly bound, and they justified his pride in their showing. They were mostly accounts of favorites of the French court, with a few volumes on odd personal habits of various monarchs; and the adventures of former Russian monks. Mrs. Durant, who never had time to get around to reading, regarded them with awe, and thought of her husband as one of the country's leading bibliophiles... Mr. Durant thought of himself as an indefatigable collector and an insatiable reader. But he was always disappointed in his books, after he had sent for them. They were never so good as the advertisements had led him to believe (pp. 45-46).

The main thrust of the passage is one of irony, irony created by the alternated use of understatement, exaggeration, and asides. Parker signals to her readers in the first sentence that she will be going mercilessly after Mr. Durant when she states that he had indeed made his den "a truly
masculine room" (lines two through three), and then continues to describe what must surely be the epitome of bourgeois preconceptions and bad taste. The exhibit of beer mugs is more than an affectation, pretentiously suggesting European travel; the mugs themselves must also be insipid, and the absurd uselessness of the pipe racks is underlined by their plurality and by the fact that they occur "at frequent intervals" (line seven, italics mine) against the repeated red of the wallpaper.

Mr. Durant's taste in art is called into question by the qualification that his first reproduction is "indifferent" (line eight), and its subject matter is the first clue the reader is given which suggests that Mr. Durant's sexual philosophies, fantasies and predilections take a concrete form. The point is emphasized by his possessing a print of "September Morn," one in which "the tints [run] a bit beyond the edges of the figure" (lines eleven through twelve). By noting this, the author implies not only the poor quality of the print, but also that the picture has been expurgated for mass consumption, and the possibility that children might see it. She immediately undercuts this, however, by suggesting that Mr. Durant finds the blurriness even more titillating than the original when she scathingly describes the picture through his eyes as looking "as if the artist's emotions had rendered his hand unsteady" (line thirteen).

Mr. Durant's books are his favourites, though. His
wide range of interests and the extent of his collection are noted by the adverbial "mostly" (line seventeen) and "a few" (line eighteen); "accounts" (line seventeen), "odd personal habits" (line nineteen) and "adventures" (line twenty) are innocuously euphemistic understatements to use to describe the books' subject matter. The author would lament that Mrs. Durant "never had time to get around to reading" (line twenty-one), but as this might destroy her conception that her spouse is "one of the country's leading bibliophiles" (line twenty-three), it is probably just as well. "Bibliophile" itself is a felicitous find: although the word is perfectly innocent and correct, it sounds smutty, and therefore helps remind us that Mr. Durant is the hypocritical closet Dirty Old Man par excellence.

Mr. Durant's discriminating taste in literature is also noted. In the last paragraph, which is made even more effective by its brevity and by the use of the coordinating conjunction at the beginning of the second sentence, Parker tells us that the books never seemed to meet Mr. Durant's jaded expectations. We wonder momentarily about the books, but then we are expertly returned to the subject, and wonder even more about the man.

We also wonder what the children will be like when they grow up, but we are afraid to think about it for too long in the fear that we already know. Like Curtis, they have experienced this sort of behaviour before, and they will in all probability keep experiencing it until they either
escape or succumb.

"The Bolt behind the Blue" is a late story, the third and last in the section of "Later Stories" in the new Viking Portable. In it we see a fairly clear, albeit indirect, manipulator-victim relationship, and so the story may be said to form a link between the specific manipulator-victim-relationship series and the second victimless portrait group. Although the two characters in the story are closely juxtaposed, each is distinctly drawn, and they are developed in parallels, rather than shown one from the perspective of the other, as in the first four stories discussed above:

Miss Mary Nicholl was poor and plain, which afflictions compelled her, when she was in the presence of a more blessed lady, to vacillate between squirming humility and spitting envy. The more blessed lady, her friend Mrs. Hazelton, enjoyed Miss Nicholl's visits occasionally; humility is a seemly tribute to a favorite of fate, and to be the cause of envy is cozy to the ego. The visits had to be kept only occasional, though. With the years, Miss Nicholl grew no less flat in the purse and no more delightful to the eye, and it is a boresome business to go on and on feeling tenderness for one whose luck never changes (p. 394).

Mrs. Hazelton is "not wealthy or well-to-do or comfortably off; in the popular phrase, Mrs. Hazelton was loaded" (p. 395). Miss Nicholl is at the other extreme: having almost nothing, her idea of a big evening is going to dinner at the Candlewick (or the Candie, as she and her friend Miss Christie describe it to themselves), where one can get a meal for only two dollars, tip included.
The structure of the story is contrapuntal. One woman will praise the other, who then modestly disclaims all virtues; then she returns the compliment on a slightly higher plane, only to have it graciously denied, and so on. The climax is reached when Mrs. Hazelton offers to show Miss Nicholl some of her new dresses, "the cost of the least of which would have been two year's rent to Miss Nicholl" (p. 410). But then Mrs. Hazelton must find something for her guest, and she settles upon a sequined evening bag.

The thought of Miss Nicholl always brought with it a nasty little guilt. She supposed she really ought to do more for the poor thing. But what more could she do? It was unthinkable that you could tuck a folded twenty-dollar bill into her dry palm; such people were so impossibly sensitive about being objects of charity. You could have her come to see you, feed her a drink, let her look at your pretty flowers, maybe give her some little thing you were through with--such a donation, unlike cash, wounded no feelings (p. 397).

Nor does it create good ones, however. The bag is of course useless to Miss Nicholl, as are the big jar of bath salts and the after-shave lotion she received the previous Christmas (p. 411). She accepts it gratefully, though, and departs, promising Mrs. Hazelton that "I'll think of you every time I use it" (p. 412).

The story ends with a counterpoint coda. On her way to the bus stop Miss Nicholl recounts to herself the details of her afternoon visit, disparaging everything Mrs. Hazelton has, has done, or represents. She concludes her monologue by insisting she would not change places with Mrs. Hazelton...
for "anything on earth" (p. 413). Parker interpolates:

"It is a strange thing, but it is a fact. Though it had every justification, a bolt did not sweep down from the sky and strike Miss Nicholl down, then and there" (p. 413f). Mrs. Hazelton, on the other hand, is complacent, content that she had managed to maintain her graciousness at enough personal discomfort to make her feel noble about the afternoon. When her daughter Ewie remarks that she feels sorry for "Miss Nicker"'s plain looks and poor clothing, Mrs. Hazelton scolds her, saying that Miss Nicholl is "a wonderful woman" who has "more than a good many people" (p. 414), and that she, Mrs. Hazelton, would be "more than glad to change places with Mary Nicholl" (p. 415). "And again that bolt, though surely sufficiently provoked, stayed where it was, up in the back of the blue" (ibid.).

The hypocrisy of both women is as obvious and as deep as their entire relationship is symbiotic. Miss Nicholl visits Mrs. Hazelton in order to complain about how unfair fate has been to her; she then comforts herself with the notion that she, at least, is doing something with her life. Mrs. Hazelton entertains her in order to be able to play Lady Bountiful to some poor creature, at any low level. The pointedly non-evaluative authorial intrusions in the coda are what give the story its sardonic freshness. Without them, the story is an exercise in morality which we have all read before. With them, however, the characters take on new life, and revitalize the fable into something to which
a reader might pay attention.

In "The Custard Heart," "Song of the Shirt, 1941," "Clothe the Naked," "Horsie," "Little Curtis," "The Wonderful Old Gentleman," "Mr. Durant" and "The Bolt: behind the Blue," then, we have concerned ourselves with the manipulating Establishment characters who are associated with specific victims. These stories have all been more or less serious and low-key, subtly satirical rather than blatantly comical, and concerned with various relationships between the haves and the have-nots. In the next group of stories, which includes "Arrangement in Black and White," "From the Diary of a New York Lady" and "Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Crane," the connection between characters and comedy will be reversed. The victimless manipulators will simper, romp and stagger through their various episodes, affecting us quite differently from their apparently higher-class, more respectable sisters. Here the satire is more pointed and more obvious; these stories are more brilliant artistically than those of the first group. But this does not mean that Dorothy Parker is less serious about her messages. In the second group of stories she deals with the same themes she has dealt with above. If these stories seem more effective, it is because the satirical sugar coating has made the pill easier to swallow, not because the medicine is any less potent than the blander concoctions.

"Soldiers of the Republic" will also be discussed in this section, in spite of the fact that it is not a comical
story. Here Parker examines the relationship between an Establishment figure and an entire victimized society, unjustly blaming the Establishment a priori for creating and perpetuating the ills of that society, and equally unjustly permitting the woman to berate herself for not being able to immediately and completely alleviate the situation with one stroke of her magic typewriter. The woman is Parker herself, and the society is Spain during the Civil War.

-Section 2-

As mentioned above, many of the themes stated in Section 1 will be transposed and played as more sprightly variations in Section 2. "Arrangement in Black and White," for example, deals with the same subject as "Clothe the Naked": racial prejudice. In "Clothe the Naked" it is openly admitted and taken for granted by the characters involved, \(^{14}\) recognized by the readers, and mortar-shelled by the author, but in "Arrangement in Black and White" it appears in an insidious and in a much more dangerous form. Although the leading character pretends to be unbiased, she is in fact more of a bigot than her absent Virginian husband Burton, who has the integrity to be honest about his feelings.

This statement is not meant to suggest that the woman is hypocritical—she is too stupid. She is unable to realize that there are many forms of prejudice, or that hers, one of the more subtle, is also perhaps the most treacherous:

"I haven't the slightest feeling about colored people. Why, I'm just crazy about some of them."
They're just like children--just as easygoing, and always singing and laughing and everything. Aren't they the happiest things you ever saw in your life? Honestly, it makes me laugh just to hear them. Oh, I like them. I really do. Well, now, listen, I have this colored laundress, I've had her for years, and I'm devoted to her. She's a real character. And I want to tell you, I think of her as my friend. That's the way I think of her. As I say to Burton, 'Well, for heaven's sakes, we're all human beings!' Aren't we?" (p. 20).

The story takes place at a party given in honour of a black singer whom the woman is very eager to meet. Most of the dialogue centres around her supposedly broad-minded attitudes, especially as they are opposed to the rigid, narrow sentiments held by her husband (Her host, a truly liberal man, remains carefully non-committal throughout). Upon meeting the singer, the woman "extended her hand at the length of her arm and held it so for all the world to see, until the Negro took it, shook it, and gave it back to her" (p. 21). She speaks to him "with great distinctness, moving her lips meticulously, as if in parlance with the deaf" (p. 22), and when he leaves to talk to someone else she exclaims to her host, "I liked him... I haven't any feeling at all because he's a colored man. I felt just as natural as I would with anybody. Talked to him just as naturally, and everything. But honestly, I could hardly keep a straight face. I kept thinking of Burton. Oh, wait till I tell Burton I called him 'Mister'!" (p. 23).

The description of the woman given in the first
paragraph of the story gives us a fairly good idea of what we may expect from her: "The woman with the pink velvet poppies twined around the assisted gold of her hair traversed the crowded room at an interesting gait combining a skip with a sidle, and clutched the lean arm of her host" (p. 19). A sense of falseness, brittleness and shallowness is immediately conveyed. When the woman informs her host that she feels "finely . . . Just simply finely" (ibid.), we shudder at the affectation, painfully aware that there will be more to come. Like Mrs. Martindale of "Song of the Shirt, 1941," she is unable to see the trees for the forest, incapable of recognising in herself the precise lack of empathy and of real human emotions for which they both disparage their peers. And like Mrs. Martindale's soldiers, the Negroes might be better off without her.

On March 11, 1938, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote to his daughter Scottie, "I am glad you have finally gotten around to liking Dorothy Parker and that you had the good taste to pick out her 'Diary of a New York Lady.' It is one of her best pieces." Most critics seem to agree: it is one of her best-known and most widely-anthologized stories, second perhaps only to "Big Blonde." Strictly speaking, it is a monologue rather than a story, as dramatic in its own way as Browning's "My Last Duchess."

In the Viking Portable Dorothy Parker, "From the Diary of a New York Lady" is subtitled "During Days of Horror, Despair, and World Change." In After Such Pleasures,
however, it is described as having been written "During Days of Panic, Frenzy, and World Change." As mentioned above, the Viking edition is considered to contain the definitive texts, but it is interesting to speculate upon Parker's reasons for changing the first two nouns. True, "panic" and "frenzy" are closer to each other in meaning than "horror" and "despair," and the author may simply have wished to express a wider range of feelings. On the other hand, "horror" and "despair" are quieter than "panic" and "frenzy"; perhaps she felt that the latter pair went too far, and wanted to tone them down. A third suggestion might be that "horror" and "despair" are more intense, more personal emotions, which would evoke more precisely what the character believes herself to be going through.

The Depression, the background for this 1933 story, never seems to enter into it. The world which is changing is the lady's rather than the socio-geo-political one, but when the story was retitled for the 1939 collection of stories Here Lies, a more pointed reference to the continually dismal economic scene, as well as to the European situation, may also have been intended. In any case, what follows the subtitle is one of the most entertaining pieces in Parker's cannon, possibly in the body of short literature of the 1930's as well.

Like the woman in "Arrangement in Black and White" and the three female manipulators of Chapter II, the lady keeping the "Diary" is unnamed. In "Diary," as in "The Lady with
the Lamp" and "Cousin Larry," the technique is used to help create the monologue effect, but it also serves to make us realise that these women could be any women—or, more likely, to some extent. Everyman. The story is a Monday-through-Friday chronicle of what Parker wants us to take to be a typical week in the typical life of a typical New York socialite, and, typically, everything that might possibly go wrong does. The lady's plight centres symbolically around her finger nails: the story's all-pervading refrain is "Damn Miss Rose" (pp. 328, 329, 331, 332), the manicurist.

The woman's social standing, if not her entire social life, is rapidly disintegrating, although she would adamantly refuse to acknowledge this even if she could recognise it. She is estranged from her husband: although they seem to cohabit, they do not communicate. She goes out every night, but she is always escorted by the same man—although she believes him to be homosexual (p. 328)—because he is the only man she can get. She always buys their theatre tickets, and they always end up at the same parties with the same people and the same Hungarian musicians in the same green coats, and they always have the same hangovers the next morning. She is preoccupied with a "new number," a man whom she is forever pestering in spite of his efforts to ignore her: "I told him sometimes I get so nauseated that I could yip, and I felt I absolutely had to do something like write or paint. He said why didn't I write or paint" (p. 329). We know her end is near when she decides to ask
him to a tea she has read about in the paper—"they must have meant to invite me" (p. 331).

Parker makes it impossible for the reader to sympathise with her protagonist. He may muster up a very slight feeling of contempt between laughs, but that would be all. The story is meant to be hilarious satire, and it is; any emotional commitment between the reader and the character would disturb the precarious balance by which "From the Diary of a New York Lady" instructs as it amuses.

The importance of this equilibrium shows up especially well when the story is contrasted with "Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Crane," which was also published in The New Yorker. Because its theme is the by-now familiar emptiness of the lives of rich Establishment women, and because it is not an especially well-written story, it is not included in any of Parker's collected works.

"Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Crane" has a very simple plot. One of the women will reproach an aspect of the behaviour of one of their friends; the other will enthusiastically concur, and then both will proceed to act in this very manner. The story is liberally spiced with "simply" this and "literally" that, making us quite aware of the empty heads of the pseudo-sophisticates with whom we are dealing. Mrs. Carrington wants to take "some sort of course or other at Columbia" for "stimulation"; when she hears that Mrs. Crane is considering learning to tap dance, however, she decides that that might do, but only if they can go together.
The difference between these two stories lies in the level of satire as well as in the form. "From the Diary of a New York Lady" is acerbic and biting, written with great craft and with the author in control of the reader at every turn. "Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Crane" is structurally and stylistically looser. At times it almost rambles, with the disappointing result that it ends up being a teasing cartoon rather than an indicting caricature.

In "Soldiers of the Republic," a non-fiction account of one of her experiences in Spain during the Civil War, Dorothy Parker gives herself the role of Establishment matron-manipulator—or, as she more succinctly puts it, the "prize sow" (p. 167). Like "Clothe the Naked," "Soldiers of the Republic" sometimes comes perilously close to the sloppily sentimental because the author is incapable of keeping herself sufficiently detached from the cause in which she is so desperately trying to involve her audience. By playing too much upon our emotions she triggers our self-defense mechanisms rather than any sympathetic feelings we might harbour, and in so doing, neatly sabotages her own mission:

"Oh, for God's sake, stop that!" I said to myself. "All right, so it's got a bit of blue ribbon on its hair. All right, so its mother went without eating so it could look pretty when its father came home on leave. All right, so it's her business, and none of yours. All right, so what have you got to cry about?" (p. 165).

Parker's difficulty here, both as an artist and as a
human being, was that while she felt and reacted, she was unable to consider anything she might accomplish as concrete or worthwhile (see "The Siege of Madrid"). By grouping herself with the Mrs. Martindales and the Mrs. Hazeltons, the self-styled "Little Lady Bountiful" (p. 167) did herself a grave injustice. She did not realise, or perhaps because of her insecurity was incapable of accepting, that she could not possibly do more for her cause than report the truth about what she saw. Instead, she went too far. If Parker had been able to control these over-involved, self-deprecating tendencies in her work, much of it would have been better. If she had been able to control them in her personal life, however, she might never have written at all.

The manipulators are curious figures. Some, like Mrs. Lanier, Mrs. Martindale, the "Arrangement" woman and, presumably, Parker herself, spend their time going through other people's lives in search of some miraculous "fulfillment" which will somehow fall on their heads one day and give "meaning" to their existence. Others, like the Crugers, Mr. Durant, and Mrs. Matson, believe themselves happy and secure in their best of all possible worlds, and live with no regard for other people whatsoever. And who is to say they are not happy? All Dorothy Parker would have us do is examine these ways of life and consider them very carefully. If we find them acceptable, that is our prerogative.
She has achieved her goal as a realistic painter of life. If we do not accept them, however, she has also achieved her goal as a satirical artist: to make us more aware of who we are, how we act, and why we are the ways we are.

When specific characters are related to each other, this creation of awareness is a comparatively simple one. When she introduces us to her solitary victims, we see more of what Dorothy Parker is really about.
Notes: Chapter I


3 Ross Labrie, "Dorothy Parker Revisited," p. 20 of a twenty-two page manuscript to be published in The Canadian Review of American Studies in either the spring or the fall of 1976.

4 Fitzgerald, p. 9.

5 See NVP, p. 260.

6 Labrie, p. 13.

7 As Mrs. Matson herself says on p. 347, "Yes ... I went right to the best place for him. Miss Codman's nursery--it's absolutely reliable. You can get awfully nice children there."

8 When Parker and Robert Benchley shared an office on the third floor of the Metropolitan Opera House studios, one story they told about it was that the name lettered on the door was "Utica Drop Forge and Tool Co., Robert Benchley, President; Dorothy Parker, President." Another was that after Benchley left, Parker had the sign changed to read simply "Men." See Keats, p. 57.

9 See American Mercury, 3 (September 1924), 81-7; 64 (June 1947), 694-703; Laments for the Living; Here Lies. Specific changes have not been noted here, but the development of the story is an interesting one, and a study of the manuscripts could prove useful.

10 "She was 'in trouble.' Neither then nor in the succeeding days did she and Mr. Durant ever use any less delicate phrase to describe her condition. Even in their thoughts, they referred to it that way" (ibid.).

11 See also p. 35f:
Rather shabby, she was, in her rough coat
with its shagginess rubbed off here and there. But there was something in the way her cheaply smart turban was jammed over her eyes, in the way her thin young figure moved under the loose coat. Mr. Durant pointed his tongue, and moved it delicately along his cool, smooth upper lip.

The car approached, clanged to a stop before them. Mr. Durant stepped gallantly aside to let the girl get in first. He did not help her to enter, but the solicitous way in which he superintended the process gave all the effect of his having actually assisted her.

Her tight little skirt slipped up over her thin, pretty legs as she took the high step. There was a run in one of her flimsy silk stockings. She was doubtless unconscious of it; it was well back toward the seam, extending, probably from her garter, halfway down the calf. Mr. Durant had an odd desire to catch his thumb-nail in the present end of the run, and to draw it on down until the slim line of the dropped stitches reached to the top of her low shoe. An indulgent smile at his whimsy played about his mouth, broadening to a grin of affable evening greeting for the conductor, as he entered the car and paid his fare.

12 The deleted passage at the end of paragraph one continues: "Over the table was carefully flung a tanned and fringed hide with the profile of an unknown Indian maiden painted on it, and the rocking-chair held a leather pillow, done by pyrography, of a girl in a fencing costume which set off her distressingly dated figure." (p. 45).

13 For indications of this, see pages 43-45.

14 Big Lannie went to each of the ladies who employed her and explained that she could not work for some while; she must take care of her grandson. The ladies were sharply discommoded, after her steady years, but they dressed their outrage in shrugs and cool tones. Each arrived, separately, at the conclusion that she had been too good to Big Lannie, and had been imposed upon, therefore. "Honestly, those niggers!" each said to her friends. "They're all alike" (p. 361). . . "She went back to the ladies for whom she had worked, to ask if they might not want her back again; but there was little hope in her, after she had visited the first one. Well, now, really, said the ladies; well, now, really" (p. 362). See also pages 365 and 367 for Mrs. Ewing's
feelings about Big Lannie's actions.

15 Fitzgerald's letter of March 11, 1938, to Frances Scott Fitzgerald, from the Garden of Allah Hotel, Hollywood, California, as quoted in F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald, ed. Andrew Turnbull (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 25. The letter continues: "As to knowing her, you do know her, but that was in the days when you were a little weary of my literary friends."

16 Dorothy Parker, After Such Pleasures (New York: The Sundial Press, 1940), p. 85. The only other textual change is the omission of the circumflex on "yellow pebble crêpe" on p. 330 of the Viking edition (p. 89 in Pleasures).

17 Dorothy Parker, "Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Crane," The New Yorker, 9 (July 15, 1933), 12.
Chapter II: The Victims

The stories which comprise Chapter II may also be divided into two parts. The first section includes "You Were Perfectly Fine," "Cousin Larry" and "Lady with a Lamp"; like Section 1 of Chapter I, it deals with specific victim-manipulator relationships. Unlike the stories which make up that section, however, the three discussed here are told in a highly comical fashion.

The characters who appear in the second section of this chapter are victims of chance or of themselves, and are therefore portrayed in non-specific relationships. In some of these stories this distinction may seem blurred, because the so-called antagonist or manipulator is personified and usually present, but he or she is a shadowy figure representative of a condition or a state of mind rather than an actual oppressor. The victims in "A Telephone Call," "Such a Pretty Little Picture," "Too Bad," "The Banquet of Crow" and "Big Blonde" are all character types who display discouragingly predictable behaviour patterns. Having been trapped for so long in their own stifling situations, the most they can hope for is a change in the
secondary characters with whom they interact.

The various techniques of repetition Parker uses in the second set of stories should be noted, as they contribute much to the reader's sense of inevitability. Cool seriousness is no longer representative of any kind of intimate relationship, as it was in Chapter I, Section 1; instead, it has become a sign of alienation or estrangement between fictional individuals, and from our own highly-vaunted but perhaps equally theoretical sense of reality.

-Section 1-

In "Robert Benchley and Dorothy Parker: Punch and Judy in Formal Dress," William Shanahan comments:

The most basic difference between Benchley and Parker was the fact that one wrote almost exclusively about sex while the other practically never mentioned it. Like Henry James, Dorothy Parker felt that the relationship between the sexes was the most important human relationship. Unlike James, she did not mask her message with mandarin politeness and verbal duplicity--the two tricks of which James was master. Instead, Mrs. Parker's young people, like those of William Dean Howells, are pictured in the mean and real surroundings native to them.

The girl in "You Were Perfectly Fine" is also very "mean and real," a staunch supporter of the idea that "All's fair in love and war." When she realises that her boyfriend recalls nothing of his actions the heavily-liquored night before, the young woman creates a midnight taxi ride through the park, during which he supposedly proposed to her:

"Round and round and round the park," she said. "Oh, and the trees were shining so in the moonlight. And you said you never knew before
that you really had a soul."
"Yes," he said. "I said that. That was me."
"You said such lovely, lovely things," she said. "And I'd never known, all this time, how you had been feeling about me, and I'd never dared to let you see how I felt about you. And then last night--oh, Peter dear, I think that taxi ride was the most important thing that ever happened to us in our lives."
"Yes," he said. "I guess it must have been."
"And we're going to be so happy," she said. "Oh, I just want to tell everybody! But I don't know--I think maybe it would be sweeter to keep it all to ourselves."
"I think it would be," he said (p. 153).

The title of the story comes from the girl's repeated assurances that the young man's behaviour had been acceptable, if not exemplary. Although he would prefer not to believe what she tells him, he accepts the idea that he might have been capable of acting in the manner she has described, and he does not question anything she says. That she could be making it all up never seems to enter his mind. His lack of self-confidence makes him an unwitting accomplice as well as a victim, but as we can see from the portrait of the ruthless female manipulator which Parker has so sparingly sketched, his fate was inescapable, and he will become a true victim in and of the marriage which will undoubtedly follow quickly.

In this story, as in the next two, the plight of the victim is underscored by Parker's close focus on the manipulator. She makes the reader work hard to develop and to sort out his sympathies and reactions, knowing that whatever victim he projects will be more immediate than any she might be able to describe—a sort of reverse Coleridge
"sight to dream of, not to tell."

"Cousin Larry" is a masterpiece of this sort of understatement, with both its first and last paragraphs wonderfully invidious descriptions of the female manipulator who narrates the story as a dramatic monologue. The girl does pose a genuine threat to Lila's marriage, but the author implies that this has come about only because Lila, and we, have permitted her to do so. In reality she is an ineffective mechanical contrivance, one which might easily be taken apart once we find the right tools:

The young woman in the crepe de Chine dress printed all over with little pagodas set amid giant cornflowers flung one knee atop the other and surveyed, with an enviable contentment, the tip of her scrolled green sandal. Then, in a like happy calm, she inspected her fingernails of so thick and glistening a red that it seemed as if she but recently had completed tearing an ox apart with her naked hands. Then she dropped her chin abruptly to her chest and busied herself among the man-made curls, sharp and dry as shavings, along the back of her neck; and again she appeared to be wrapped in cozy satisfaction. Then she lighted a fresh cigarette and seemed to find it, like all about her, good. Then she went right on with all she had been saying before (p. 333) ... The young woman in the printed crepe de Chine dress removed her dead cigarette from its pasteboard holder and seemed, as she did so, to find increased enjoyment in the familiar sight of her rich-hued finger nails. Then she took from her lap a case of gold or some substance near it, and in a minute mirror scanned her face as carefully as if it were verse. She knit her brows, she drew her upper eyelids nearly to those below them, she turned her head as one expressing regretful negation, she moved her mouth laterally in the manner of a semi-tropical fish; and when all that was done, she seemed even cooler in confidence of well-being. Then she lighted a fresh cigarette and appeared to find that, too, impeccable. Then she went right on over all she had been saying before (p. 338).
In these paragraphs, as in the passage from "Song of the Shirt, 1941," repetition and seemingly non-evaluative understatement are two important stylistic techniques Parker employs, but we are also struck by her masterful use of powerful verbs and modifiers. The first phrase of the first sentence catches our attention immediately: the "little pagodas" seem very incongruous among all those "giant cornflowers" (lines two and three). The girl's shoe is described in exaggerated detail, which belittles her very nicely. The shoe is not only "green," but "scrolled" as well (line five), and she admires only its toe. The image of this "sweet young thing" rending an ox from end to end is intensified by the uncommon word order "as if she but recently had" (lines eight through nine), instead of the more conventional "as if she had but recently." In the next sentence she is likened to a little animal, perhaps a hamster or a guinea pig, when the author has her "[busy] herself" among the "shavings" of her curls, and the fact that these curls are false sustains the sense of contrivance and artificiality which runs throughout the passage.

Her overwhelming sense of self-satisfaction is repeated and emphasized by the always-modified expressions of her quiet delight: "enviable contentment" (line four), "like happy calm" (line six), "cozy satisfaction" (line thirteen), the fact that her new cigarette is Biblically, "like all about her, good" (line fifteen; all italics mine). This over-inflation strengthens the sense of affectation so
important to the author's point.

In both paragraphs, all the sentences except the first begin with "then," whose sound is sustained through the first paragraph by the rhymed "again" (line twelve), and in the second by "when" (line twenty-eight). The only exception is the third sentence in paragraph two; but even there, the "she" ties us in with the introductory "The"s. The first five words of both first sentences are identical, as are the entire last sentences of both paragraphs, with a slight deviation in the sixth word: in the first paragraph it is "with" (line sixteen), while in the last paragraph it is "over" (line thirty-two). Thus the structural repetition and internal rhyme support the evocation of the girl's single-mindedness as effectively as the words themselves, and the continuation of the idea suggested by the end of the first paragraph is borne out at the end of the story: "Then she went right on [with/over] all she had been saying before." In the single exception, which begins on line twenty-four, "she" is repeated five times in fifty words, always as the subject of a noun-verb-etc. clause construction, thereby serving the same function.

Through the course of the story, however, a sort of decomposition has set in. The second paragraph is not as positive as the first. The young woman's dress is now simply "printed" (line seventeen); her cigarette is "dead" (line eighteen). Parker carefully calls our attention to the fact that its filter is "pasteboard" (line eighteen),
pointing out its cheapness even more than the affectation and the artificiality of its use, and she underscores the concept again by remarking ironically that the girl's compact is "gold or some substance near it" (line twenty-two). The girl punningly "[scans] her face as carefully as if it were verse" (lines twenty-three through twenty-four): that it is not becomes immediately apparent to the reader when her method of scansion is detailed at the beginning of the next sentence (Calling her a "semi-tropical fish" [lines twenty-seven through twenty-eight; italics mine] is a most effective descent into bathos).

The poetry metaphor is cleverly carried out in the text. In the second paragraph, Parker makes much use of alliteration and assonance--"some substance" (line twenty-two), "minute mirror" (lines twenty-two through twenty-three), "moved her mouth" (line twenty-seven), "she seemed even cooler in confidence" (line twenty-eight through twenty-nine), "those below" (line twenty-five) and "expressing regretful negation" (line twenty-six)--techniques she did not use at all in the first paragraph. They call our attention to the contrivance and artificiality of formal poesie, permitting the author to again relate these traits to the girl (and at the same time, perhaps, to gently poke fun at her own facility in juggling them).

The young woman has almost finished breaking up Lila and Larry's already-shaky marriage. It was probably not very steady to start with, since Lila is an older woman
whom Larry had married for money (p. 337), but the couple might have got along if they had been left alone. The girl is always there, however, always ready to "rescue" Cousin Larry from a dragon of a wife who goes to bed at ten o'clock and who forever wants to know why everyone else is laughing. She and Larry go out together (pp. 334, 337), he calls her "Little Sweetheart" "just the way he always did" (p. 335), and jokingly sends her pink chiffon underwear "with 'Mais l'amour viendra' embroidered on them in black" (p. 337), but she sees nothing wrong in their relationship, and is unsympathetic toward Lila for being upset. In all likelihood this behaviour will continue until Lila and Larry separate. We can hypothesise that Lila would be left with nothing, and we feel certain that Larry would never realize how the breakup had been engineered.

The victim of the "Lady with a Lamp" is a woman named Mona, and the woman manipulating her is ostensibly her best friend. Visiting Mona as she convalesces from what she says is a nervous breakdown, the woman is interested only in forcing Mona to admit that she has in reality had an abortion, and she tries every strategy she can possibly think of to bring about the confession.²

"Lady with a Lamp" is a dramatic monologue. Although there is no description apart from the woman's comments on Mona's reactions, we feel immediately that we are in the room with the two women, watching Mona cringe under her "friend"'s relentless attacks, and our hearts go out to her:
Well, Mona! Well, you poor sick thing, you! Ah, you look so little and white and little, you do, lying there in that great big bed. That's what you do--go and look so childlike and pitiful nobody'd have the heart to scold you. And I ought to scold you, Mona. Oh, yes, I should so, too. Never letting me know you were ill. Never a word to your oldest friend. Darling, you might have known I'd understand, no matter what you did. What do I mean? Well, what do you mean what do I mean, Mona? Of course, if you'd rather not talk about--Not even to your oldest friend. All I wanted to say was you might have known that I'm always for you, no matter what happens. I do admit, sometimes it's a little hard for me to understand how on earth you ever got into such--well. Goodness knows I don't want to nag you now, when you're so sick (p. 246).

The woman manages to work Mona into hysterics (p. 253) without getting a concrete admission of guilt, but we can be fairly sure that Mona's "confession" will be all over town by nightfall.

In the three stories we have discussed so far, all the victims have been named, but all the manipulators have done their dirty work anonymously, continuing the tradition started with "Arrangement in Black and White" and "From the Diary of a New York Lady." Once more the technique has been used to make these women Everyman, one of the author's main statements. Two of the victims are women; the men involved are ineffectual and of no real consequence to the action. They are prize tokens which the women shuffle around in their little games, to be sacrificed without qualms or carried off in triumphant glory. They seem to have no intrinsic value: Mona is casually told that her inamorato of three years should be immediately forgotten, and that the best thing for her to do now would be to get
married--to whom seems immaterial.

The paradox becomes more complicated when we note that all the victims we have met (with the exception of Peter) seem to be cognizant of the relative worthlessness of any involvement with the male sex, but still let it rule their lives all the same. As is the case with irony, what is said is not necessarily what is meant to be understood.

-Section 2-

The relationship between men and women was Parker's hobby-horse: the main criticism of her poetry is that there she beat it to death. In these stories, however, she handles her theme adeptly, changing leads as smoothly and coolly as a champion dressage rider. Here chance becomes the manipulator, along with misplaced love, the general purposelessness of life, and a God who must prove to be either disinterested or malevolent--should one be foolish enough to require cor request any gods at all. With the exception of one relating to the agonies of courtship, all the stories deal with unhappy marriages in various stages of disillusion and dissolution. All the main characters are losers.

The stories have been arranged to form a proto-relationship. The first, "A Telephone Call," concerns a young woman waiting desperately to hear from her lover; the second, "Such a Pretty Little Picture," is a short description of an unhappy marriage. "Too Bad" and "The
Banquet of Crow" deal with men who have taken action to amend their situations, and what this action does to their wives, while "I Live on Your Visits" shows the effect of divorce on a bitter woman who had centred her life on a marriage, and who still refuses to let go of it years later. The last story, "Big Blonde," gives us the capsule history of a woman who did everything for companionship and popularity, only to find out when it was too late that these mean less than nothing when related to the larger realities of existence. Again Parker's working premise is that true happiness is unreal and therefore unattainable. People must struggle, either because they feel existentially honour-bound to do so, or because they are too stubbornly, stupidly human to do otherwise, but they must also realise from the outset that they can never win.

This view of life is clearly expressed in the monologue "A Telephone Call," a futile prayer to an inexorable God for a telephone call which will never come. The story is also a fine example of the tragi-comic "double vision" mentioned in the Introduction:

Ah, don't let my prayer seem too little to You, God. You sit up there, so white and old, with all the angels about You and the stars slipping by. And I come to You with a prayer about a telephone call. Ah, don't laugh, God. You see, You don't know how it feels. You're so safe, there on Your throne, with the blue swirling under You. Nothing can touch You; no one can twist Your heart in his hands. This is suffering, God, this is bad, bad suffering. Won't You help me? For Your Son's sake, help me. You said You would do whatever was asked of You in His name. Oh, God, in the name of Thine only
beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, let him telephone me now. I must stop this. I mustn't be this way. Look. Suppose a young man says he'll call a girl up, and then something happens, and he doesn't. That isn't so terrible, is it? Why, it's going on all over the world, right this minute. Oh, what do I care what's going on all over the world? Why can't that telephone ring? (p. 120).

We want to laugh at the girl's ridiculous behaviour, but we are prevented from doing so by the knowledge that we have all acted in the same manner. That the girl perceives the absurdity of her situation does little to make it more bearable for her; however, it does make it more poignant, and allows us to indulge our emotions with less defensive guilt than we might otherwise feel. Although we feel sorry for her, our involvement is abstracted enough so that we can enjoy the humour of the story while still realising the author's underlying frustrations.

Parker's anger runs throughout the story. Her observations on the apparently incomprehensible code of male behaviour are given with only one comment, a bewailing of the inescapable game: "I know you shouldn't keep telephoning them--I know they don't like that. When you do that, they know you are thinking about them and wanting them, and that makes them hate you" (p. 119). She continues, "I wonder why they hate you, as soon as they are sure of you. I should think it would be so sweet to be sure" (p. 123):

. . . I don't think he even knows how he makes me feel. I wish he could know, without my telling him. They don't like you to tell them they've made you cry. They don't like you to tell them
you're unhappy because of them. If you do, they think you're possessive and exacting. And then they hate you. They hate you whenever you say anything you really think. You always have to keep playing little games. Oh, I thought we didn't have to; I thought this was so big I could say whatever I meant. I guess you can't, ever. I guess there isn't ever anything big enough for that (pp. 121-122).

The tone of the story changes two paragraphs later. Now, instead of pleading that her lover call her, the girl prays that she will be able to keep from telephoning him. She goes back to her original request only in the last two paragraphs:

God, aren't You really going to let him call me? Are You sure, God? Couldn't You please relent? Couldn't You? I don't even ask You to let him telephone me this minute, God: only let him do it in a little while. I'll count five hundred by fives. I'll do it so slowly and so fairly. If he hasn't telephoned then, I'll call him. I will. Oh, please, dear God, dear kind God, my blessed Father in Heaven, let him call before then. Please, God. Please.

Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five. . . . (p. 124).

Will she break down and telephone him now, or will she try to hold out, only to give in at some indefinite future point? We know the man will not call, even if the girl cannot admit it. The outcome of the relationship is no longer in doubt. The only unanswered question is one of time.

In You Might as Well Live, John Keats summarises the plot of "Such a Pretty Little Picture" to prove that in 1922 Parker was already writing the "slice of life" narratives which would prove to be so popular in the thirties. He does it in order to show that she was actually a serious
writer, although he admits that "Dorothy Parker would have rather shortly denied it, for it was a point of honor among the Algonquin group not to take themselves seriously as creative artists."³ Keats summarises the story this way:

A man is seen clipping his suburban hedge while his wife and child watch from the porch of their house. The man is bored by his pointless city job, bored by his vapid suburb, bored by the hedge he is clipping, and more than bored by his nagging and domineering wife and their dull blob of a daughter. He would like to say, suddenly, "To hell with it," and vanish. But he has no one to whom he can say this--that is, no one who would understand him if he did say it, for he has no friends. In the kind of life he leads between office and suburb, he has only business acquaintances. There is no possibility of his forming friendships in his style of life, of sharing anything important with anyone else. Still, he footlessly dreams, as he clips his hedge, that perhaps a few years from now he might find an opportunity to say "to hell with it" to someone, and to walk away from his empty life and embark upon a new one. Two neighbors, seeing him at work, and seeing his wife and child watching him from the porch, regard the tableau to be such a pretty little picture of suburban success.⁴

The précis is relatively accurate; however, the feeling which Parker attributes to Mr. Wheelock, the main character, is more than boredom. It is the "quiet desperation" with which Thoreau suggests most of us struggle through our lives. Adelaide Wheelock is the kind of woman who sews buttons on shirts before they are worn,⁵ who buys her daughter's clothes too large so that she can grown into them "--an expectation which seemed never to be realized, for her skirts were always too long, and the shoulders of her little dresses came half-way down to her thin elbows,"⁶ and who makes jokes about her husband's lack of efficiency as a man-

about-the-house. Wheelock's emotion for his daughter also goes beyond boredom: "He had never felt any fierce thrills of father-love for the child... from the first he had nearly acknowledged to himself that he did not like Sister as a person."

Mr. Wheelock's dream of walking off into the sunset, never to return, stems from a story he had read, in which an unnamed suburbanite did precisely that. The "Oh, hell" he gave the conductor of the 5:17 out of Grand Central was the last anyone had ever heard of him. The idea appeals enormously to Mr. Wheelock, but there are large obstacles to be overcome before he can take action. People would not understand; he has responsibilities toward his family; he cannot find the proper person to say "Oh, hell" to, and he lacks the nerve to leave his wife. However...

Twenty years, he thought. The man in the story went through with it for twenty years. He must have been a man along around forty-five, most likely. Mr. Wheelock was thirty-seven. Eight years. It's a long time, eight years is. You could easily get to say that final "Oh, hell," even to Adelaide, in eight years. It probably wouldn't take more than four for you to know that you could do it. No, not more than two...

We can be fairly sure Mr. Wheelock will never be able to take that final step, but we cannot be certain. After all, both Ernest Weldon and Guy Allen dropped out of their marriages, much to the surprise and dismay of their friends, and to the especial dismay of Maida Allen.

The Weldons are the main characters of "Too Bad," whose title is the phrase which everyone except the two most
directly involved uses to characterize their marital situation. What others think is given relative importance by its enclosure of the description of the couple's life together: this technique heightens our awareness, reminding us that things are very seldom what they seem, and that marriage is a very private affair.

Lack of communication was the main reason for the failure of the Weldon's marriage. They lived in an apartment they both hated because neither had had the interest nor the energy to take a stand against it (p. 173); they engaged in meaningless rituals rather than talk to each other as individuals (ibid.; pp. 176, 178); they put up with each other's annoying habits without comment until the issues were blown out of all proportion (pp. 165, 176, 179, 180). As Mrs. Weldon says (p. 178), "she found she simply couldn't make the effort":

"Well, what have you been doing with yourself today?" he inquired.
She had been expecting the question. She had planned before he came in, how she would tell him all the little events of her day--how the woman in the grocer's shop had had an argument with the cashier, and how Delia had tried out a new salad for lunch with but moderate success, and how Alice Marshall had come to tea and it was quite true that Norma Matthews was going to have another baby. She had woven them into a lively little narrative, carefully choosing amusing phrases of description; had felt that she was going to tell it well and with spirit, and that he might laugh at the account of the occurrence at the grocer's. But now, as she considered it, it seemed to her a long, dull story. She had not the energy to begin it. And he was already smoothing out his paper.
"Oh, nothing," she said, with a gay little laugh. "Did you have a nice day?"
"Why--" he began. He had had some idea of telling her how he had finally put through that Detroit thing, and how tickled J.G. had seemed to be about it. But his interest waned, even as he started to speak. Besides, she was engrossed in breaking off a loose thread from the wool fringe of one of the pillows beside her. "Oh, pretty fair," he said (p. 174).

Neither Grace nor Ernest Weldon has this problem with other people (p. 177f); it is restricted to their relationship with each other. Both seem to accept the likelihood that their separation will be permanent. Mr. Weldon has moved out to his club, and Mrs. Weldon plans to rent a small flat when she returns from the country (p. 170). Mr. Weldon's sister will take over their apartment, which still has four years and three months on its five-year lease (p. 173). The Weldons are victims of themselves as much as of each other, but they are for the most part victims of that aspect of life which paradoxically allows for no real victim at all. There can be no categorical blame laid on either side: these things just seem to happen.

Maida Allen, in "The Banquet of. Crow," is incapable of accepting such a hypothesis. Her husband's sudden and unexplained departure has her behaving in a tediously frantic manner until she meets Dr. Marjorie Langham, a psychologist. The doctor assures her that Guy Allen's problem is "just the traditional case of temporarily souped-up nerves and the routine change in metabolism,"¹⁰ and that he should be returning to his senses, and to his wife, forthwith. But not without the proper amount of repentance, vows Maida,
encouraged by her doctor. Guy must first realise that everything was his fault, and then Maida might condescend to take him back—eventually. As Parker notes: "It was a big factor in Dr. Langham's success that she had the ability to make wet straws seem like sturdy logs to the nearly submerged." 11

Guy Allen never does come back to his wife. He stops in one evening for a suitcase he needs; he is leaving for San Francisco on business the next morning, and is not certain how long he will be gone. Maida tries to force a confrontation, but Guy refuses to take the bait:

..."I don't want to do this any more, Maida. I'm through.' Do you really feel that was a pretty thing to say to me? It seemed to me rather abrupt, after eleven years."
"No. It wasn't abrupt," he said. "I'd been saying it to you for six of those eleven years."
"I never heard you," she said.
"Yes, you did, my dear," he said. "You interpreted it as a cry of 'Wolf,' but you heard me."
"Could it be possibly that you had been planning this dramatic exit for six years?" she said.
"Not planning," he said. "Just thinking. I had no plans. Not even when I spoke those doubtless ill-chosen words of farewell."...
"Were you that unhappy?"
"Yes, I was, really," he said. "You needn't have made me say it. You knew it."
"Why were you unhappy?" she said.
"Because two people can't go on and on and on, doing the same things year after year, when only one of them likes doing them," he said, "and still be happy."
"Do you think I can be happy, like this?" she said.
"I do," he said. "I think you will. I wish there were some prettier way of doing it, but I think that after a while—and not a long while, either—you will be better than you've ever been."
"Oh, you think so?" she said. "I see, you can't believe I'm a sensitive person."
"That's not for the lack of your telling me--eleven year's worth," he said.

"The Banquet of Crow," which appeared in The New Yorker in December 1957, is the last story Dorothy Parker ever published. If we contrast it with one of the first, "Such a Pretty Little Picture," we can see that her career has come a strange full circle. She starts and ends with the story of an unhappy marriage, and Guy Allen might easily have said "Oh, hell" as he slammed the door on his way out. It took thirty-five years for Parker, but it finally happened. There are echoes of other stories here too, such as "The Last Tea," in which the woman lies about being chased and in great demand. Refusing to admit her loneliness, to explain how she really feels, she hides behind a wall of braggadocio which she hopes will stand until her man either cracks, or goes too far away to hear it crumble.

It would not be difficult to see the Maida Allen of "The Banquet of Crow" develop into the Mrs. Tennant of "I Live on Your Visits." Mrs. Allen is a victim of her society (see pages 39-40 of the text) and of her overly-simplistic doctor, but she is above all a victim of herself. She refuses to face issues squarely, preferring to live in a world of dreams and destructive self-pity instead. Like Mrs. Tennant, Maida Allen is "too sensitive" to acknowledge reality: like Mrs. Tennant, Maida Allen is
her own worst enemy.

In her "Constant Reader" column of October 22, 1927, Parker noted that "The affair between Margot Asquith and Margot Asquith will live as one of the prettiest love stories in all literature" (p. 456). To those familiar with the Mrs. Tennant of "I Live on Your Visits," it comes as no great surprise, then, to learn that Tennant was Margot Asquith's maiden name. Whether Parker's choice was accidental or a conscious decision, it does give the reader a clue to Mrs. Tennant's personality. She is a totally self-absorbed woman, given to liquor and shiny things (p. 373), and she cares about her son Christopher only in so far as she can use him as a weapon against his father, or make him feel uncomfortable for preferring the company of his father and the "new" Mrs. Tennant (although they have been married for six years) to hers. The first she does consciously and with a vengeance; the second, would probably be loudly denied, for as she stridently insists:

I would not hold you. Take with you my wishes for your joy, among your loved ones. And when you can, when they will release you for a little while--come to me again. I wait for you. I light a lamp for you. My son, my only child, there are but desert sands for me between your comings. I live on your visits--Chris, I live on your visits (p. 383).

"I Live on Your Visits" is a trio of character sketches more than a short story. Mrs. Tennant is the main character; however, she is never physically described. Instead, we
learn about her through her surroundings and from her words. Her son is tall and good-looking, caught here between his mother and her "true friend" Mme. Marah as he is caught between her and his father. Mme. Marah is an anomaly. It is difficult to see what she would find interesting about Mrs. Tennant--with the exception, perhaps, of her bar. She is preoccupied with palmistry and the zodiac, and is an amenable eccentric somewhat in the tradition of "Glory in the Daytime"'s Hally Noyes. When she is introduced to Christopher, her first words are, "Christ, he's a big bastard, isn't he?"

She was a fine one to talk about anyone's being big. Had she risen she would have stood shoulder against shoulder with him, and she must have outweighed him by sixty pounds. She was dressed in quantities of tweedlike stuff ornamented, surprisingly, with black sequins set on in patterns of little bunches of grapes. On her massive wrists were bands and chains of dull silver, from some of which hung amulets of discolored ivory, like rotted fangs. Over her head and neck was a sort of caul of crisscrossed mauve veiling, splattered with fuzzy black balls. The caul caused her no inconvenience. Puffs of smoke issued sporadically from behind it, and, though the veiling was crisp elsewhere, around the mouth it was of a marshy texture, where drink had passed through it (p. 375).

The plot is simplified almost to the point of non-existence. Christopher stops in to see his mother on the way to visit his father and step-mother. He cannot stay long because his train was late, and they are eating early in order to get a good start for the country the next morning. Mrs. Tennant is disappointed, and, not hesitating to show it, carps at him during his entire visit. She is
"like that" again:

For the past week, up at his school, he had hoped—and coming down in the train he had hoped so hard that it became prayer—that his mother would not be what he thought of only as "like that." His prayer had gone unanswered. He knew by the two voices, by the head first tilted, then held high, by the eyelids lowered in disdain then raised in outrage, by the little lisped words and then the elegant enunciation and the lofty diction. He knew . . . (p. 374).

Yes, oh, yes. The voices, the stances, the eyelids—those were the signs. But when his mother divided the race into people and human beings—that was the certainty (p. 375).

Here, for the first time, drink becomes something else to which one might fall victim. Mrs. Tennant's inability to face herself, to accept either her responsibility for her share of the collapse of her marriage, or her responsibility for herself afterwards, is aggravated by the pseudo-solacing effects of liquor. The game she plays is a perverse one: drinking to make herself more at ease with Christopher, she does not realise that it only alienates him further.

"I Live on Your Visits," published in The New Yorker on January 5, 1955, closely resembles aspects of The Ladies of the Corridor, the unsuccessful Parker-d'Usseau play of 1953 from which its material was drawn. The play in turn closely resembled Dorothy Parker's own life at the time it was being written. Separated again from Alan Campbell, whom she had remarried in 1950, she lived at the Volney Hotel in New York, and she was sixty-two:

For the past two years, she had seemed intent on burning her bridges and sitting alone in the smoke. Friends would telephone to invite her out for a drink, or to supper, or to the theatre, and
she would say, "Oh, if you'd only called five minutes ago." I'm so sorry, but if you had only called five minutes earlier." Then she would sit alone in her bare hotel room at the Volney and drink and talk for hours to Misty [her poodle]. When friends came to call, they were often glad to leave. She was not always sober, and when she was not, she was repetitive and boring; when she was sober, she often gave her friends the impression she was not over­joyed to see them. After a time, fewer friends called, and they called less often. It was as Lillian Hellman wrote in her autobiography: "Dottie's middle age, old age, made rock of much that had been fluid, and eccentricities once charming became too strange for safety or comfort." 

She was obviously not happy, but neither did she seem very surprised at her situation. In 1922 Robert Benchley, probably the best friend she was ever to have, had warned her that "Eventually people become the thing they despise the most." Parker categorically refused to accept this; yet by 1929, when she wrote "Big Blonde," the author had come to share "twenty-eight specific attributes" with the woman she had so painstakingly portrayed.

"Big Blonde" was awarded the O. Henry Prize for the best short story published in 1929, and Parker deserved it. She describes Hazel Morse with insight and compassion, but never loses her artistic detachment. As Keats says, "In writing about Hazel Morse, Dorothy Parker had written about herself, but of course the Hazel Morse in the story was not Dorothy Parker." Instead she is a big, full-breasted blonde who had been working as a model for a wholesale dress company when she met her husband Herbie; they were married six weeks later.
Her job was not onerous, and she met numbers of men and spent numbers of evenings with them, laughing at their jokes and telling them she loved their neckties. Men liked her, and she took it for granted that the liking of men was a desirable thing. Popularity seemed to her to be worth all the work that had to be put into its achievement. Men liked you because you were fun, and when they liked you they took you out, and there you were. So, and successfully, she was fun. She was a good sport. Men liked a good sport (p. 187).

Shortly after her marriage, however, Hazel Morse stopped being a good sport. She began to cry easily and often, and to want to stay home at night. When Herbie discovered that her weeping was not oriented toward any personal tragedies, but toward newspaper stories of "strayed cats" and "heroic dogs" (p. 189), he quickly became disgusted with her, and took to coming home later and later, and then not at all. She would try to change back, to be a good sport again, but she could not. They fought. After three years of marriage she started drinking, in an attempt to get nearer to Herbie, in an attempt to dull the cutting edges of her existence. She became friends with Mrs. Martin, another big blonde who had moved in across the hall, and every day "They drank together to brace themselves after the drinks of the night before" (p. 193).

Mrs. Martin had an "admirer" who visited her nearly every night. He often brought friends with him, and Mrs. Morse was often invited too. Soon she became particularly close to a man named Ed, and when Herbie left her, she became his mistress. "She was never noticeably drunk and
seldom sober" by then, and she needed more liquor than before "to keep her misty-minded. Too little, and she was achingly melancholy" (p. 197). Ed often took her to a speakeasy named Jimmy's; there she met other women like herself, as well as more men. However, Ed also insisted she be a good sport, once walking out on her depression.

After three years Ed moved, and Charley began to take care of Mrs. Morse:

There was nearly a year of Charley; then she divided her time between him and Sydney, another frequenter of Jimmy's; then Charley slipped away altogether. . . Then Sydney married a rich and watchful bride, and then there was Billy. In her haze, she never recalled how men entered her life and left it. There were no surprises. She had no thrill at their advent, nor woe at their departure. She seemed always to be able to attract men. There was never another as rich as Ed, but they were all generous to her, in their means (p. 200).

It had been seven years since she had seen Herbie. Hazel Morse began to think about suicide:

She slept, aided by whiskey, till deep in the afternoon, then lay abed, a bottle and a glass at her hand, until it was time to dress and go out for dinner. She was beginning to feel toward alcohol a little puzzled distrust, as toward an old friend who had refused a simple favor. Whiskey could still soothe her for most of the time, but there were sudden, inexplicable moments when the cloud fell treacherously away from her, and she was sawed by the sorrow and bewilderment and nuisance of all living. She played voluptuously with the thought of cool, sleepy retreat. She had never been troubled by religious belief and no vision of an after-life intimidated her. She dreamed day after day of never again putting on tight shoes, of never having to laugh and listen and admire, of never more being a good sport. Never (p. 201).

She decided to take a overdose of sleeping pills, bought
twenty in New Jersey, where they were legal, and put them away. Then one night on her way to Jimmy's she saw a man beating a horse, and for the rest of the evening she was unable to shake her depression. Her current boyfriend Art, becoming annoyed, advised her to try and change by Thursday, and she agreed. When she got home, she took the pills.

Her maid found her the next day, called the doctor, then nursed her for the two days it took to pull her out of the stupor. Mrs. Morse cried bitterly when she realised she was still alive; the first thing she saw was a card from Art showing the Detroit Athletic Club, and reconfirming their Thursday meeting.

She dropped the card to the floor. Misery crushed her as if she were between great smooth stones. There passed before her as slow, slow pageant of days spent lying in her flat, of evenings at Jimmy's being a good sport, making herself laugh and coo at Art and other Arts; she saw a long parade of weary horses and shivering beggars and all beaten, driven, stumbling things. Her feet throbbed as if she had crammed them into the stubby champagne-colored slippers. Her heart seemed to swell and harden (p. 209).

She asked the maid for a drink:

Mrs. Morse looked into the liquor and shuddered back from its odor. Maybe it would help. Maybe, when you had been knocked cold for a few days, your very first drink would give you a lift. Maybe whiskey would be her friend again. She prayed without addressing a God, without knowing a God. Oh, please, please, let her be able to get drunk, please help keep her always drunk.

She lifted the glass.
"Thanks, Nettie," she said. "Here's mud in your eye."

The maid giggled. "That's the way, Mis' Morse," she said. "You cheer up, now."
Hazel Morse is not Dorothy Parker, nor is Dorothy Parker Hazel Morse, but together they form the two extremes of every woman who has ever thrown herself at, away from or away for a man or men. When personal integrity is set against social moeurs it generally loses: women act in ways they know they should not, and say things they know they must not, on the off-chance that this time, perhaps, things will be different. But they never are.

The men are not to blame. They are, after all, only accessories after the facts of life. Parker was perceptive and discriminating enough to realise this, writing about it as she half-heartedly struggled to overcome what she could not change, both within and without herself, but Hazel Morse could never comprehend what she was up against, and we see her slowly sinking in the quicksand of her socio-economically-conditioned background and values. Popularity and companionship were what her being was oriented toward; by the time she discovered their relative worthlessness, she was incapable of finding any kind of real, lasting love with which to replace them.

All the victims discussed in the latter half of the chapter suffer from the same fate. Their values were misplaced somewhere along the line of their lives, and the substitutes with which they have managed to replace these values have proven to be poor substitutes indeed. Once again, Parker does not suggest any specific ways of dealing with the dilemma. She finds meanings in experience, then
weaves these experiences into stories from which the reader must create his own meaning,\textsuperscript{18} applying it to his life as best he can, and only if he will. No artist can do more.
Notes: Chapter II

1 Shanahan, p. 26.

2 This story quite possibly has an autobiographical basis. In 1922-23 Parker was heavily involved with Charles MacArthur, who later married Helen Hayes. When she found she was pregnant, she had an abortion. Shortly after that, she made her first suicide attempt.

3 Keats, pp. 81-82.

4 Ibid., p. 81.


6 Ibid., p. 160.

7 Ibid., p. 158. This last point may also have an autobiographical basis. Parker used to make up stories about her husband Edward's ineptitude in order to make him more interesting to her Round Table companions, having him "fall down a manhole while reading the Wall Street Journal on his way to the office" or "[breaking] his arm while sharpening a pencil (see Keats, pp. 52-54). When she unsuccessfully tried to cut her wrists, she blamed her failure to do the job properly on the fact that "Eddie hadn't even been able to sharpen his own razors" (ibid., p. 82).


9 Ibid., p. 166.

10 Dorothy Parker, "The Banquet of Crow," The New Yorker, 33- (December 14/15/1957), 40.

11 Ibid., p. 41.

12 Ibid., p. 42f.

13 She had, of course, published before, but her "Anthologies" and the other prose pieces which appeared in The Saturday Evening Post and the Ladies' Home Journal were little more
than character sketches. Even the longer "Education of Gloria" describes a type rather than tells a story.

14 Keats, p. 267.

15 Robert Benchley, as quoted in ibid., p. 87.

16 Ibid., p. 146. Keats never does list the twenty-eight attributes.

17 Ibid.

18 See ibid., p. 145.
Conclusion

In the Saturday Review of November 4, 1933, Ogden Nash commented: "To say that Mrs. Parker writes well is as fatuous, I'm afraid, as proclaiming that Cellini was clever with his hands... The trick about her writing is the trick about Ring Lardner's writing or Ernest Hemingway's writing. It isn't a trick."\(^1\) Rather, it is an art, and it is high time that Dorothy Parker be recognised as an artist.

Her output was relatively small--three volumes of prose, four of poetry (not including collections), three co-authored plays and the collected Constant Reader columns--but as Alexander Woollcott noted, "most of it has been pure gold... [of] so potent a distillation of nectar and wormwood, of ambrosia and deadly nightshade, as might suggest to the rest of us that we all write far too much."\(^2\) She never wrote a novel, although she made several faint-hearted stabs at one; indeed, she seems almost surprised that she ever got anything down: "I, after the creative labors involved in composing a telegram to the effect that I won't be able to come to dinner Thursday on
account of a severe cold, have to go and lie down for the rest of the day" (p. 523, in "And Again, Mr. Sinclair Lewis"). Each story required an average of six months to complete, and she suffered acutely from writer's block during most of her literary life.

It was her reputation as a wit which kept people from taking her seriously as a writer: that, and the fact that her short stories faced enormous competition from those of men like Hemingway, Lardner, Fitzgerald and O'Hara. Parker's best short stories easily rivaled Hemingway's, but perhaps there were not enough of them. She admired Hemingway immensely, almost worshipped him, as her reviews of his work showed—and she was in love with him at one point. The week before she died, she asked Beatrice Ames, "Did Ernest really like me?"

Beatrice, who had her own memories of Hemingway, and who had never forgiven or forgotten the poem he had written about Dorothy,3 and the way he had turned on her husband Donald Ogden Stewart, found the question momentarily difficult to answer. But she also knew that Dorothy Parker wished to be remembered for her short stories, and had always looked to Hemingway as the master in that field. It was important to her to have Hemingway's good opinion.

Yes, Beatrice told her friend, Hemingway really had always liked her very much. He truly had.

She said Dorothy thought about this, and nodded, and seemed content.4

Thus Parker herself brings us back to the theme of her paranoid insecurity, that relentless pursuer from whom she could find refuge only in her work. Her escape was at best
a partial one, as most of her poetry and some of the stories suggest, but it was all she had, and she clung to it desper­ately. This almost perceptible sense of panic leads to the uncomfortable, embarrassing feeling the reader sometimes has of the author standing ghostlike over his shoulder whispering "Understand me! Like me!"--which is also Fitzgerald's major flaw.

Both Parker and Fitzgerald were victims of chance, alcohol and tragic loves, but both were primarily victims of themselves. Parker realized this early; Fitzgerald never did. Her recognition tore her work apart, whereas his refusal to confront that possibility gave Scott's novels their almost pathetic unity. They knew each other, they respected each other's work and they were, in fact, briefly lovers, but nothing came of it. In the Paris Review interview Parker later remembered, "When he died no one went to the funeral, not a single soul came, or even sent a flower. I said, 'Poor son of a bitch,' a quote right out of The Great Gatsby, and everyone thought it was another wisecrack. But it was said in dead seriousness."5

She concluded the interview by saying, "It's not the tragedies that kill us, it's the messes. I can't stand messes. I'm not being a smartcracker. You know I'm not when you meet me--don't you, honey?"6 Again we glimpse poor little Dottie Rothschild peering out from behind the sixty-five-year-old Mrs. Dorothy Parker, and our hearts go out to her. But they need not, really. Parker did not
need our sympathy, would not have accepted it, would have thrown it back in our faces with an incisive imprecation, knowing in the back of some dark recess of her mind that she could see what we could not, and comment effectively upon it. An author should, after all, be ultimately judged according to his writing, no matter what it cost him to get it written, and Mrs. Parker deserves at least another serious look. Perhaps our time is distanced enough from hers for us to be able to examine her work relatively objectively; perhaps it is not. In this age of contact lenses, "News Item" has become an advertisement, rather than recognised as a cry of contempt for man and a comment on woman's conditions. But this will change.

Dorothy Parker is not a major American writer, but she is a good one. She exerted no small amount of influence as a critic and shaper of New York moeurs during the Twenties, and although New York might not in fact be the centre of the world, for many people it was. In "A Toast and a Tear for Dorothy Parker," Edmund Wilson reminds us that "She is not Emily Brontë or Jane Austen, but she has been at some pains to write well, and she has put into what she has written a voice, a state of mind, an era, a few moments of human experience that nobody else has conveyed." What more could we want? Presents?
Notes: Conclusion


3 See Keats, chapter 5, especially pages 112-113.

4 Ibid., p. 296.

5 Paris Review Interviews, p. 82.

6 Ibid.

7 Edmund Wilson, "A Toast and a Tear for Dorothy Parker," The New Yorker, 20 (May 20, 1944), 568.
A Checklist of Dorothy Parker's Prose,
Exclusive of Reviews

Inconsistencies in page notation are due to the various methods used by the different indices consulted, and to the nature of the journals in which much of Parker's work appeared. I have tracked the stories as far back as possible, but have not been able to find complete data on the original publication of some because of the unavailability of early issues of many of these magazines on the Lower Mainland. Some checking was done in New York, and Mr. Edwin Kennebeck of Viking Press was contacted for background on "Glory in the Daytime," "The Bolt behind the Blue," "The Custard Heart," "Good Souls" and "Too Bad," but he was unable to provide any information. A key to abbreviations follows:

- ASP - After Such Pleasures
- Col St - Collected Stories
- HL - Here Lies
- LFTL - Laments for the Living
- NVP - The Viking Portable Dorothy Parker
- NYr - The New Yorker
- SEP - The Saturday Evening Post

"Advice to the Little Peyton Girl." Harper's Bazaar, February 1934, p. 46.


"Are We Women or Are We Mice?" Mademoiselle, May 1943; condensed in The Reader's Digest, 43 (July 1943), 71-2.

"Arrangement in Black and White." NYr, 3 (October 8, 1927), 22-24; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"The Artist's Reward." NYr, 5 (November 30, 1929), 28-31; NVP.


"Big Blonde." Bookman, 68 (February 1929), 639-45; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"Bobbed Hair: A Novel by Twenty Authors." Collier's, 75 (January 27, 1925), 30-1+.

"The Bolt behind the Blue." NVP.

"But the One on My Right." NYr, 5 (October 19, 1929), 25-7;
condensed in The Reader's Digest, 30 (June 1937), 72-4.


"Clothe the Naked." Scribner's Magazine, 103 (January 1938), 31-35; Col St; HL; NVP; condensed in Scholastic, 32 (March 19, 1938), 3-5.

"Cousin Larry." NYr, 10 (June 30, 1934), 15-17; NVP.


"The Custard Heart." Col St; HL; NVP.

"Dialogue at Three in the Morning." NYr, 1 (February 13, 1926), 13; LFTL.


"Dusk before Fireworks." Harper's Bazaar, September 1932, p. 36; ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.


"Ernest Hemingway." NYr, 3 (February 18, 1928), 76-7+; 5 (November 30, 1929), 28-31.

"From the Diary of a New York Lady." NYr, 9 (March 25, 1933), 13-14; ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.


"Glory in the Daytime." ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.

"Good Souls." NVP.

"Here We Are." Cosmopolitain, March 1930, p. 32; ASP; Col St; HL; NVP. As a one-act play in 24 Favorite One-Act Plays, ed. Cerf and Cartmell, and translated into the French "Nous y voila," by Nadine Allégret and C. Guiche in Revue de Paris, May 1946, p. 51.

"Horsie." Harper's Bazaar, December 1932, p. 66; ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.

"I Live on Your Visits." NYr, 30 (January 15, 1955), 24-7; NVP.
"Just a Little One."  *NYr*, 4 (May 12, 1928), 20-1; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"Lady with a Lamp."  Harper's Bazaar, April 1932, p. 56; ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.

"The Last Tea."  *NYr*, 2 (September 11, 1926), 23-4; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"Little Curtis."  Pictorial Review, 28 (February 1927), 26-9, under the title "Lucky Little Curtis"; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"The Little Hours."  *NYr*, 9 (August 19, 1933), 13-14, ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.


"The Lovely Leave."  *Woman's Home Companion*, 70 (December 1943), 22-3+; NVP.

"The Mantle of Whistler."  *NYr*, 4 (August 18, 1928), 15-16; *Golden Book*, 22 (July 1935), 92-3; LFTL.

"Men I'm Not Married To."  *SEP*, 194 (June 17, 1922), 13+.

"The Middle or Blue Period."  *Cosmopolitain*, December 1945; NVP.

"Mr. Durant."  *American Mercury*, 3 (September 1924), 81-7; 64 (June 1947), 694-703; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Crane."  *NYr*, 9 (July 15, 1933), 11-12.

"Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street."  *NYr*, 10 (August 4, 1934), 20-6; NVP.


"New York to Detroit."  *Vanity Fair*, October 1928, p. 61, under the title "Long Distance"; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"Oh, He's Charming."  *NYr*, 2 (October 9, 1926), 22-3.

"A One-Woman Show."  *Everybody's Magazine*, 44 (March 1921), 34-5.

"Our Own Crowd."  *SEP*, 194 (April 28, 1923), 14+.


"The Road Home."  *NYr*, 9 (September 16, 1933), 19-20.
"Sentiment." Harper's Bazaar, May 1933, p. 64; ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.

"The Sexes." New Republic, 51 (July 13, 1927), 203-4; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"The Siege of Madrid." Literary Digest, 124 (December 11, 1937), 27; NVP (also known as "Madrid Martyrdom").

"Soldiers of the Republic." NYr, 13 (February 5, 1938), 13-14+; Col St; HL; NVP.

"Song of the Shirt, 1941." NYr, 17 (June 28, 1941), 13-16+; NVP.

"The Standard of Living." NYr, 17 (September 20, 1941), 24-26+; NVP.

"Such a Pretty Little Picture." The Smart Set, 1922; Smart Set Anthology.


"A Telephone Call." Bookman, 66 (January 1928), 500-2; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"Terrible Day Tomorrow." NYr, 3 (February 11, 1928), 14-16.

"Too Bad." ASP; Col St; HL; NVP.

"Travelogue." NYr, 2 (October 30, 1926), 20-1.

"The Waltz." NYr, 9 (September 2, 1933), 11-12; ASP; Col St; HL; NVP; condensed in Scholastic, 26 (March 23, 1935), 4-5, and The Reader's Digest, 55 (December 1949), 86-8.

"Welcome Home." SEP, 195 (July 22, 1922), 9+.

"Who is that Man?" Vogue, July 1944; condensed in The Reader's Digest, 45 (September 1944), 78-80.

"Why Not She-Friends?" NYr, 1 (September 19, 1925), 35+.

"The Wonderful Old Gentleman." Pictorial Review, 27 (January 1926), 24-5; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.

"You Must Come See Us Sometime." SEP, 196 (September 1, 1923), 10-11.

"You Were Perfectly Fine." NYr, 5 February 23, 1929), 17-18; Col St; HL; LFTL; NVP.
"A Young Woman in Green Lace." NYr, 8 (September 24, 1932), 15-17; ASP.

Forward to the illustrated limited edition of Lillian Hellman's Watch on the Rhine, published in 1942 by the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee.


Introduction to The Seal in the Bedroom, and other Predicaments, by James Thurber (London: Hamish Hamilton), 1951.


A Selected Bibliography of Works Relating to Dorothy Parker and to her Times


Cooper, Wyatt. "Whatever You Think Dorothy Parker was Like, She Wasn't." Esquire, 70 (July 1968), 56-7+.


Ephron, Nora. "Women." Esquire, 80, No. 4, Whole 479 (October 1973), 58+.


Gingrich, Arnold. "Entree to the World of Dorothy Parker."
Esquire, 57 (January 1962), 4.


Harriman, Margaret Case. The Vicious Circle. New York: Rinehart, 1951.


Lauterbach, Richard E. "The Legend of Dorothy Parker." Esquire, 22 (October 1944), 93+.

Lawrence, Margaret. School of Femininity. New York: Stokes, 1936.


Rascoe, Burton, and Groff Conklin, eds. The Smart Set Anthology. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934.


