



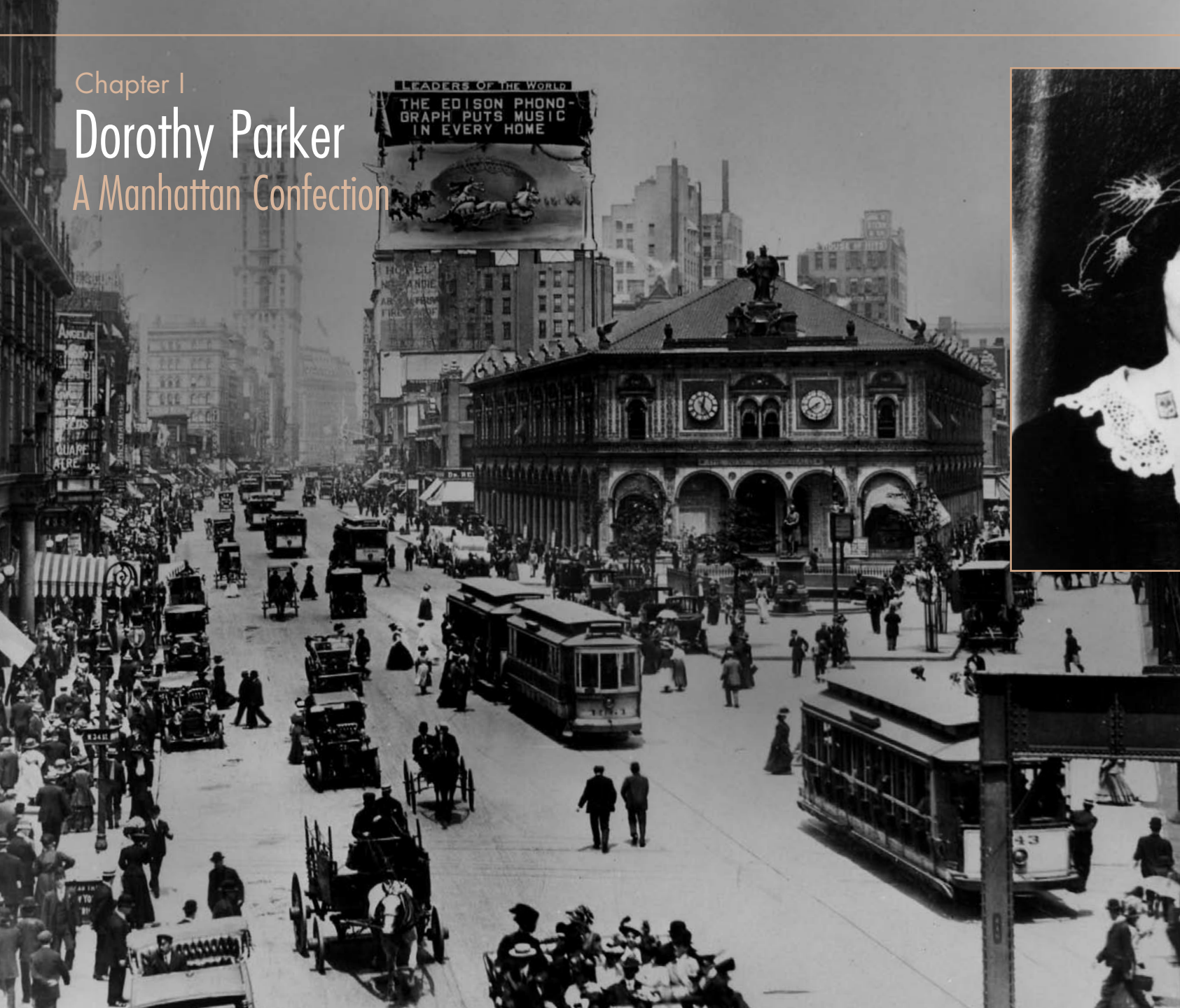
A ROARING FORTIES PRESS PUBLICATION

A Journey into  
**Dorothy Parker's  
New York**

Kevin C. Fitzpatrick

ARTPLACE SERIES

## Chapter I

Dorothy Parker  
A Manhattan Confection

Dorothy circa 1924

It is the fall of 1988 and Dorothy Parker is back at the Algonquin Hotel, surrounded by reporters. A small crowd has gathered in the Round Table Room. Some have cocktails in hand; others are telling jokes; a few jot down quips and quotes in narrow notebooks. Television news cameras are rolling. Somewhere in the room, Mrs. Parker is waiting. She's in a can.

All eyes turn to the tall, white-haired Paul O'Dwyer as he moves to the front of the room with Dorothy Parker. The 81-year-old lawyer from Ireland had, with his late partner, Oscar Bernstein, built a law firm known throughout the city for representing underdogs, defending civil rights, fighting to end the Vietnam War, and serving those in need. It was Bernstein who had drawn up Dorothy Parker's last will and testament. According to that will, her estate went to Dr. Martin Luther King, a man she greatly admired but had never met. Ten months later, he was assassinated, and his estate was turned over to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. After being cremated in Westchester County, Mrs. Parker's remains were unclaimed by Parker's executrix, the playwright Lillian Hellman, and the ashes had been in O'Dwyer's filing cabinet for almost twenty years.

Now, the final chapter of Parker's life was literally being written by Marion Meade, who had discovered that the ashes had never been properly interred while researching her biography *Dorothy Parker: What Fresh Hell Is This?* O'Dwyer called this press conference at the Algonquin to officially hand over Parker's ashes to Dr. Benjamin Hooks, the executive director of the NAACP. After a short speech by O'Dwyer, Hooks graciously accepts the ashes, promising to create a proper memorial for this



Mrs. Parker's iconic status was officially recognized in 1992, when the U.S. Postal Service issued this commemorative stamp.



Dottie and second husband Alan Campbell

to Palm Beach, and Charles MacArthur, a newspaperman, raconteur, and budding playwright who was Robert Benchley's drinking buddy. Dottie was madly in love with Charlie. Unfortunately, Charlie had several other lovers, not to mention a wife back home in Chicago, and the affair ended miserably with an abortion and Dorothy's first attempt at suicide.

Dorothy's choice of boyfriends did not improve with time. In 1931, for instance, she met John McClain, a clerk in a brokerage house on Wall Street. He was 27, a good-looking rake who had played football for Brown University. Mrs. Parker, 38, liked the attention he gave her. They soon became an item. Both

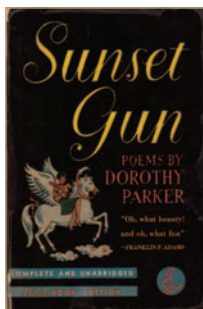
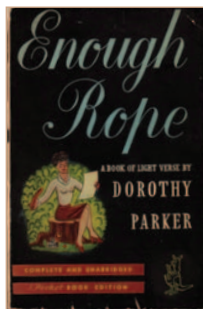
After her marriage to Eddie fell apart in the early 1920s, Parker was not at a loss for lovers. Although often lonely, even in the company of friends, she—much like Hazel Morse in what is probably Parker's best and certainly her longest story, "The Big Blonde"—managed to find willing male companions in an extended circle of friends and acquaintances. She counted among her many boyfriends Seward Collins, her editor at *Smart Set*, who ditched her when he tired of her by taking extended trips

got what they wanted: she, fearful that her youth and popularity were declining precipitously, acquired a handsome boyfriend; he acquired attention from the press by virtue of being the man on her arm. He also acquired a better career. Mrs. Parker spoke to a friend at the *New York Sun* who found a reporter's job for McClain. He was assigned to write the shipping news, and eventually wrote a column about the comings and goings of steamship travelers called "The Sun Deck."

Dorothy craved McClain's attention. When he wasn't visiting her room at the Algonquin, she would telephone him throughout the day and night. He was less enamored, and—by most accounts—after using her to get in the society pages, he tossed her aside. Dorothy responded with another suicide attempt.

Death was a preoccupation of Dorothy's: the titles of her books hint at death (*Enough Rope*, *Sunset Gun*, *Death and Taxes*, *Laments for the Living*); images of death and burial make repeated appearances in her work; while at *Vanity Fair*, she subscribed to undertakers' trade journals; and in her thirties, she even wore a perfume favored for dressing corpses. This fascination with death should come as no surprise; after all, she lost a mother, a stepmother, a father, and a favorite uncle all before she turned 20.

Romantic misadventures and the serious flirtation with suicide that they inspired accentuated her sense of death's omnipresence. When she wrote "The Big Blonde" in 1928, she had already attempted suicide twice, which may explain why Hazel Morse, the heroine of that novella, reflects, "The thought of death came and stayed with her and lent her a sort of drowsy cheer. It would be nice, nice and restful, to be dead."



Dorothy was not all gloom and doom, however; her reputation was built by using humor to defuse heartache and loneliness as much as to skewer social pretensions and emotional shallowness. She was a freelance writer dependent

on publishing in magazines. Many readers were women, and she got a lot of mileage out of the boyfriends who cast her aside and the men to whom she was attracted. "Autumn Valentine," which appeared in 1935, is a case in point:

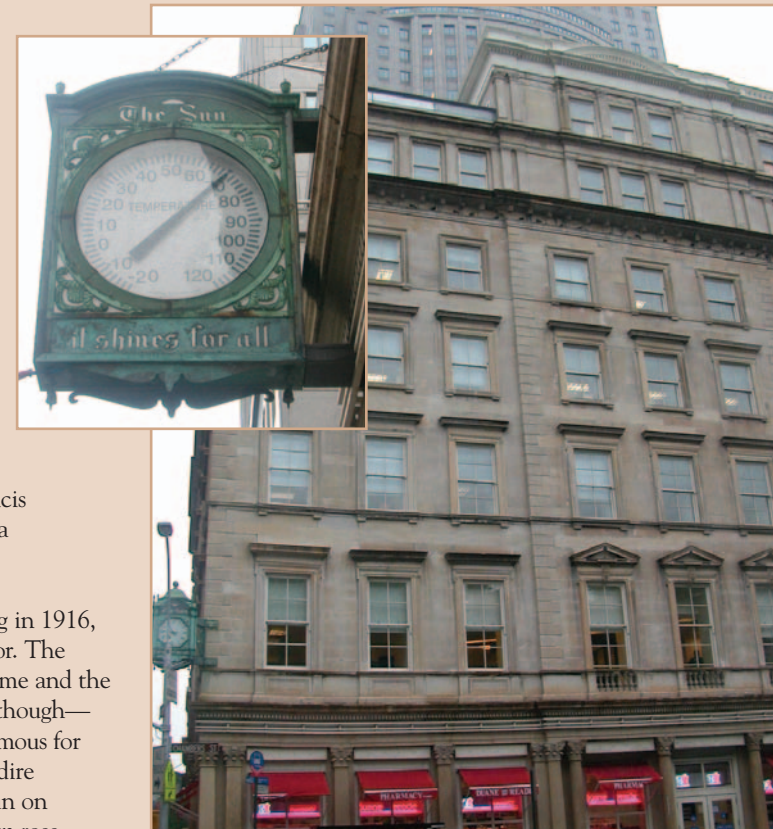
### Parker and the Reporter

The *Sun*, the newspaper where Parker pulled some strings to land a job for her boyfriend John McClain, gave its name to the building at **280 Broadway** where it took up residence in 1916. Founded in 1833 by printer Benjamin H. Day, the *Sun* became famous for its legendary editor, Charles A. Dana, an early proponent of journalistic integrity and balanced news.

A famous exchange took place in the pages of the *New York Sun* in September 1897. Virginia O'Hanlon, of 115 West 95th Street—just around the corner from where Dorothy was living—wrote to the paper: "Dear Editor, I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, If you see it in The Sun, it's so. Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?" Editor Francis P. Church replied, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus."

When the *Sun* moved to the Sun Building in 1916, it installed two giant clocks on the exterior. The clocks are still there, one displaying the time and the other the temperature. Don't trust them, though—according to New York lore, they are infamous for never being right. The newspaper, facing dire financial difficulties, ended its 116-year run on January 4, 1950. Happily, however, the *Sun* rose again on April 16, 2002, and has since been

published as a weekdays-only broadsheet. The newspaper offices are no longer at the Sun Building, however, but at the Carey Building at 105 Chambers Street.



The New York Sun Building, 280 Broadway

*In May my heart was breaking —  
Oh, wide the wound, and deep!  
And bitter it beat at waking,  
And sore it split in sleep.*

*And when it came November,  
I sought my heart, and sighed,*

*"Poor thing, do you remember?"  
"What heart was that?" it cried.*

Dorothy found herself moving from one lover to another, seemingly unable—or, perhaps, unwilling—to build a stable relationship, constantly seeking new conquests to keep herself entertained. In a candid moment of self-realization

### Working through Writer's Block

While living at the Algonquin Hotel in February 1932, Dorothy attempted suicide by swallowing barbiturates. She was distraught over the breakup with her young playboy boyfriend, John McClain. It was the same year she published her collection of verse, *Death and Taxes*, but privately she referred to it as "this year of hell."

In an attempt to turn her life around, Dorothy left the Algonquin and took a furnished apartment at the Lowell, at **28 E. 63rd Street**. This was yet another residential hotel-apartment; she enjoyed living in these kinds of apartments because she had few if any domestic skills, possessed no furniture, and was frequently traveling. The 17-story building had a fully equipped kitchen (which Dottie didn't know the first thing about), a working wood-burning fireplace, and a terrace.

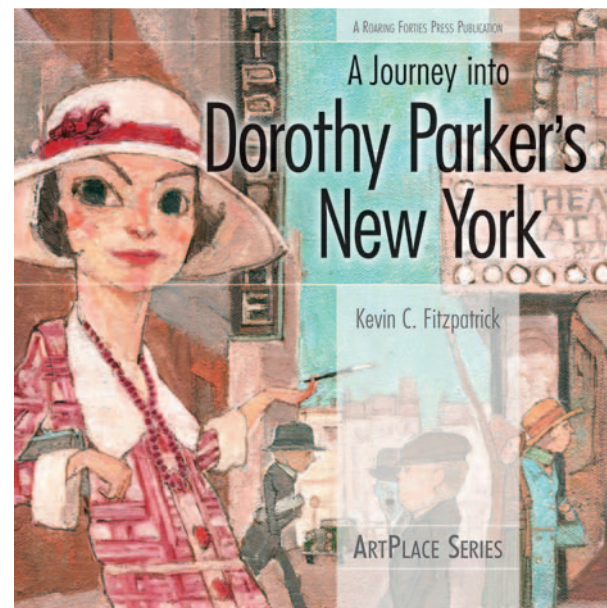
After moving into the Lowell, Dorothy's writer's block and depression broke, and she produced some of the best short stories of her career. She would ask friends to come over and sit with her for three or four hours and force her to stay focused and keep writing. While the friends occupied themselves, Dottie banged away on her typewriter. Among the classics from this time were "Lady With a Lamp," "Dusk before Fireworks," "Horsie," and "The Waltz," all of which were

published in 1932–33 in *Harper's Bazaar* or *The New Yorker*.

Dottie was forced to keep writing because she was broke. The cost of living at the Lowell, a fairly new art deco building, was beyond her means, but the managers let her stay because they liked the publicity that came with having a famous writer in residence.



The Lowell, 28 E. 63rd Street



### About the Author

Kevin C. Fitzpatrick is founder of the Dorothy Parker Society, which has been featured in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and *Time Out New York*. He was a newspaper editor before leaving to write and produce for magazines, television, and websites. In conjunction with the Algonquin Hotel, he leads monthly walking tours of the former Round Table homes and haunts in Manhattan. He lives in New York City.

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### ArtPlace Series

This book is part of the ArtPlace series published by Roaring Forties Press. Each book in the ArtPlace series explores how a renowned artist and a world-famous city helped to define and inspire each other. Forthcoming titles include *A Journey into Steinbeck's California*, *A Journey into Georgia O'Keeffe's New Mexico*, and *A Journey into Goya's Madrid*.

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A Journey into  
**Dorothy Parker's  
New York**



Take a journey into the city of theaters, bars, and hotel rooms where Dorothy Parker sharpened her wit, polished her writing, and captured the edgy mood of her times.

This eye-opening volume explores her favorite salons and saloons as well as her homes and offices (most of them still intact); charts her colorful career and intense private life; and recounts her political activism, theatrical exploits, and final years.

Richly illustrated with the art and design of the period, with revealing archival photos and contemporary photos and street maps, this book captures the New York that inspired, and was in turn inspired by, the formidable Mrs. Parker.

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