

## The Portable Dorothy Parker

Posted By Stanford Friedman on Aug 27, 2015

By Stanford Friedman

In 1944, Viking Press published *The Portable Dorothy Parker*, a collection of poems, short stories and scathing witticisms from this grand mistress of the cutting remark (“Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses,” and “You can lead a whore to culture, but you can’t make her think,” to quote but two.) Playwright **Annie Lux** has borrowed the book’s title for her one-woman biographical play, and the work has proven itself to be quite portable indeed. Having premiered at the Hollywood Fringe Festival in 2011, this production has been staged in Los Angeles, Richmond, Va and Charleston, SC. It is now finishing up a short run at the New York International Fringe Festival, but let’s hope that it finds a way to stick around for a while. This is the type of tightly written, keenly directed, subtly performed piece that is a pleasure to breathe in. And it is a cinch to produce. A table and a chair is all that is needed. Oh, and a liquor bottle.

The play is set in 1943, in the New York residential hotel where Parker (**Margot Avery**), at age 50, was then living. The audience follows along as she weeds through her manuscripts and her memories, gathering material for the upcoming book while working her way through a bottle of Scotch. An unseen editorial assistant from Viking is there with her, an obvious but welcome artifice that allows Parker to speak toward the audience without having to speak to the audience. What she has to say is continually hilarious, often surprisingly poignant, and even historically significant. Who knew that she not only reviewed theater for *Vanity Fair*, but that she was also the very first female Broadway critic? Or that she was a founding member of the Screen Writers Guild?

We are treated to a cavalcade of irresistible Parkerisms as Avery inhabits her character with full authority and sharp comic timing. But perhaps more importantly, under Lee Costello’s skillful direction, she captures the nuanced sadness behind Parker’s great humor. With every sip of whisky she gets a wee bit more desperate. Yes, she loved the **Algonquin round table**, or the Gonk, as they called it. But how terrible to be “famous for having lunch.” Yes, she ran with Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Maugham, but death and depression were always in the wings. Without explicitly dwelling on her suicide attempts, she holds her arms skyward and tells of wearing blue ribbons around her wrists in the hospital, And without explicitly reliving her abortion, she bemoans having put “all of her eggs in one bastard.”

The play gets in and then gets out; no tagged on ending for emphasis as is the custom of too many new plays this decade. Parker simply tells the unseen assistant she that she has had enough for today, having grown tired before the audience has had a chance to. Avery’s weary, drunken expression as the lights come down reinforce what we learn that Parker’s good friend Robert Benchley had said of her, that she did not earn a living, but rather, she “yearned a living.”

**The Portable Dorothy Parker** – By Annie Lux; Directed by Lee Costello.



Margot Avery. Photo by Fredda Tone.



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With an MLS in Library Science from Rutgers and an MFA in Creative Writing from Columbia, Stan's published works range from the technical to the abstract. He has written cover stories and reportage for Library Journal, obituaries for The Times of London, over 200 cookbook reviews for Publishers Weekly, and dozens of TV and theater reviews for New York Press. Prior to his current career, he worked a variety of theatrical odd jobs ranging from clerk at the Drama Book Shop to a roving Renaissance festival bloodletter to Special Effects Technician for the original Off-Broadway production of Little Shop of Horrors. Follow him on Twitter: [@StanfordF](#) and [Show-Score](#).

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