

# *54 Years Late, Dorothy Parker Finally Gets a Tombstone*

The beloved author wrote many witty epitaphs but never suggested where her remains



A nip of gin in honor of Dorothy Parker, whose ashes finally have a marker in Woodlawn Cemetery, in the Bronx.Credit...David Dee Delgado for The New York Times

**By Robert Simonson**

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Dorothy Parker was born during a hurricane. So the poet, known for her mordant wit, might have gotten a dark chuckle that Hurricane Henri derailed plans for the long-incoming unveiling of her headstone at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx last Sunday.

The ceremony was instead conducted under uncertain skies on Monday morning, beginning with music and recitations of Parker’s work at the cemetery’s Woolworth Chapel and ending with sips from gin-filled flasks and roses cascading around a granite monument carved from a quarry in Vermont.

The stone itself asked for the roses. Below Parker’s name and dates was the final stanza of her 1925 poem [“Epitaph for a Darling Lady”](#):

*Leave for her a red young rose,*

*Go your way, and save your pity;*

*She is happy, for she knows*

*That her dust is very pretty.*

“Parker wrote about five epitaphs,” observed Kevin C. Fitzpatrick, the founder of the [Dorothy Parker Society](#), who arranged the ceremony. More than anyone, Mr. Fitzpatrick had made it possible for Parker — whose ashes have bounced around the Eastern Seaboard since she died in 1967 — to finally come to rest in the family plot at Woodlawn. “That was one of her things. She also wrote a bunch of poems about death and cemeteries.”

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Parker’s three grandnieces, who all live in upstate New York — and who all missed the event owing to Henri and some unexchangeable train tickets — all agreed on the passage. Others weren’t so sure.

“I’m kind of missing the ‘Excuse my dust’ part,” said Margot Avery, an actress, mentioning a famous quip Parker once suggested as her epitaph. Ms. Avery has appeared as the writer in numerous productions of a one-woman play by Annie Lux called [“The Portable Dorothy Parker.”](#) Ms. Lux was also in attendance. She, too, wondered about the choice of epitaph.

“One of her favorites was ‘If you can read this, you’ve come too close,’” Ms. Lux added. (Mr. Fitzpatrick later noted that this quote may be apocryphal. Time has had a habit of attributing witticisms to Parker.)



Image

A new photo opportunity at Woodlawn for fans of Parker's caustic wit. Beth Woolley, whose company made her headstone, has long been a Parker aficionado. Credit...David Dee Delgado for The New York Times

"I'm here against my better judgment," said Ms. Avery, keeping the bon mot volley going. (The actual quote was "Wherever she went, including here, it was against her better judgment," but the meaning remains.)

Ms. Avery wasn't the only Parker impersonator on hand. Natalie Wilder, who has starred in a different one-woman play ("Fresh Hell: The Life and Loves of Dorothy Parker," by Eric Peterson), recited two Parker poems at the chapel: the aforementioned "Epitaph for a Darling Lady" and "The Evening Primrose," from 1929. Dressed in her flapper best and wearing a cloche hat, she bore a passing resemblance to the poet. "I try," Ms. Wilder said.

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The unveiling of the gravestone was the final chapter in a 15-year odyssey, instigated by Mr. Fitzpatrick with the support of Parker's family. The goal was to bring Parker's cremated remains from the N.A.A.C.P. headquarters in Baltimore to the Rothschild (Parker's birth name) plot at Woodlawn, where the writer's parents and grandparents are buried.



Parker, a lifelong civil rights activist, bequeathed her estate to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. but failed to stipulate where her remains should rest. As a result, Parker's ashes spent long periods in a crematory in Westchester County, a lawyer's office in Manhattan and a [memorial garden outside the N.A.A.C.P. offices](#). When the organization [decided to move to Washington, D.C.](#), last year, it agreed to deliver the urn with Parker's remains into the hands of Mr. Fitzpatrick, who brought them by train to New York. The ashes [were buried last year at Woodlawn](#) on Parker's birthday, Aug. 22.

Erecting a headstone proved an additional project. They are expensive. The Parker relatives agreed to accept donations from the poet's fans. Further money was raised through the sale of a [T-shirt bearing a caricature of Parker](#) by the illustrator Al Hirschfeld and a [limited-edition gin](#) produced by the New York Distilling Company in Brooklyn. The gin run went on sale June 7 and sold out in one day.

The distillery's devotion to Parker was not new. Allen Katz, a co-founder, is such a fan of the [Algonquin Round Table](#) wit that he named the company's gin after her in 2011.

Image



Kevin Fitzpatrick of the Dorothy Parker Society at the unveiling. Credit...David Dee Delgado for The New York Times

Image



Memorabilia at the ceremony honoring the author, who died in 1967. Credit...David Dee Delgado for The New York Times

But no one, perhaps, is a bigger Parker devotee than Mr. Fitzpatrick, who attended the ceremony in a seersucker suit. He admits that his dedication sometimes goes too far. “There’s an empty plot next to Dorothy Parker, and my wife wants to push me into that hole,” he said.

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Jesse Gelber & the Rounders, a five-piece ensemble, played songs of Parker’s era both at the chapel and graveside, including compositions from Irving Berlin and Duke Ellington (both buried at Woodlawn). Kate Manning joined them at the chapel to sing “I Wished on the Moon,” a surprisingly tender 1935 song for which Parker wrote the lyrics.

Susan Olsen, the director of historical services at Woodlawn, expects many more people to make the pilgrimage to Parker’s grave. “She will make it on our map,” she said.

The stalwarts who visit in the coming years will perhaps appreciate the fact that [Jerry Thomas](#), who published the first book of mixology in 1862, was laid to rest around the corner from Parker, who was known to enjoy a drink.