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Trapped Like a Trap in a Trap: Subversive Fiction of the Twenties and Thirties - Dorothy Parker's Outrage at the Failure of Advancement Toward Gender and Social Equality

Claire Louise Englehart
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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TRAPPED LIKE A TRAP IN A TRAP:
SUBVERSIVE FICTION OF THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES –
DOROTHY PARKER’S OUTRAGE AT THE
FAILURE OF ADVANCEMENT TOWARD GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Claire Louise Englehart

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Claire Louise Englehart

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 25, 2015 Signature on file
Thomas Slater, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor

March 25, 2015 Signature on file
Chauna Craig, Ph.D.
Professor of English

March 25, 2015 Signature on file
David Downing, Ph.D.
Professor of English

March 25, 2015 Signature on file
Lynne Alvine, Ed.D.
Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Signature on file
Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Trapped Like a Trap in a Trap: Subversive Fiction of the Twenties and Thirties – Dorothy Parker’s Outrage at the Failure of Advancement Toward Gender and Social Equality

Author: Claire Louise Englehart

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Thomas Slater

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Chauna Craig
Dr. David Downing
Dr. Lynne Alvine

Despite the ratification of Nineteenth Amendment, women were still regulated by traditional sexual roles and granted few opportunities. Patriarchal ideology had not changed, and society had made little advancement toward gender and social equality. Females remained confined within institutions of marriage and motherhood while the media reported that women, at last, had everything they wanted, including self-fulfillment and personal freedom.

This dissertation examines the fiction of Dorothy Parker as it discloses her outrage against the lack of progress in a hypocritical society that refused to consider women and men as having equal worth. Parker illustrates how both men and women perpetuate gender and social constraint, giving privileges to white males while depriving women and blacks of those same privileges.

Regardless of her literary contribution as a serious women writer, Parker is often labeled as simply a witty writer of autobiographical narratives and a wisecracking member of the Algonquin Round Table. This dissertation challenges such superficial and inaccurate views of Parker and asserts that her fiction exposes the dynamics of white male dominance in the twenties and thirties.

Divided into seven chapters, this dissertation analyzes twenty-six of Parker's stories from 1921 to 1939. Chapter One describes the trap of true womanhood, misnomer of the New Woman, flapperdom, and social construction of gender. Chapter Two examines Parker's literary dexterity as a skilled satirist versus the myth of the Algonquin Round Table. Chapter Three analyzes the fallacious biographers and Parker's social, political, and personal obstacle course. Chapter Four evaluates gender roles for single women, with and without male companions. Chapter Five inspects gender roles in marriage, maternity, and motherhood. Chapter Six investigates racial inertia as white is juxtaposed against black. Chapter Seven concludes with Parker's subversion against static white patriarchy and her effort as a feminist for social progress.