

WESTON COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS

presents

Laurel Ollstein

in her one-woman play

**“Laughter, Hope and
a Sock in the Eye”**

Based on the life of American literary icon
DOROTHY PARKER



*“This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly.
It should be thrown with great force.”*

FRIDAY, JUNE 29, 7:30pm

Weston Public Library

Weston, Connecticut

PROGRAM NOTES

By Christine Lomuscio

Dorothy Parker is the author of seven volumes of short stories and poetry incorporating pieces she had written for *The New Yorker* in which her biting book reviews were published. She is as well known for her witty, satirical and edgy one-liners as she is for her literary works. Among her memorable lines are "This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly. It should be thrown with great force" and the frequently quoted quip "Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses." It was said that she had asked that engraved on her headstone one day would be the epitaph "Excuse my dust."

Born Dorothy Rothchild in 1893 in New Jersey, she grew up on New York's Upper West Side and had her first poem published in *Vanity Fair* in 1917. She was later hired as an editorial assistant for *Vogue* and then a drama critic and staff writer for *Vanity Fair* despite her limited formal education that ended at age 13.

Ms. Parker was known nationally for her participation in the well known Round Table consortium at the Algonquin Hotel in New York. She lunched with *Life* and *Vanity Fair* movie critic and playwright Robert E. Sherwood, and later with newspaper columnists Robert Benchley, Franklin Pierce Adams and Alexander Woolcott who published her witticisms as well. In later years she would join their ranks as a writer for *The New Yorker*.

Ms. Parker had a history of love affairs and on and off marriage to Alan Campbell with whom she wrote fifteen film scripts. Among them was the 1937 film *A Star is Born* with Robert Carlson, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Writing - Screenplay. There can be no denying that her reoccurring theme of suicide in her writings and in real life played a role in defining her as troubling both for herself and her public.

A left-wing advocate and self-proclaimed Communist, though never a party member, Dorothy Parker took part in the Anti-Nazi League in 1936. She was consequently blacklisted by the FBI.

Parker, though succumbing to alcoholism, continued to contribute to *Esquire* and write film scripts. She died in 1967 at seventy-three of natural causes. Even in death her tumultuous spirit loomed for another seventeen years as her ashes were as yet unclaimed.

But, as she had bequeathed her estate to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. foundation, eventually the NAACP was given her remains for burial on their headquarter grounds.

The plaque reads: "Here lie the ashes of Dorothy Parker (1893-1967) humorist, writer, critic. Defender of human and civil rights. For her epitaph she suggested, 'Excuse my dust.' This memorial garden is dedicated to her noble spirit which celebrated the oneness of humankind and to the bonds of everlasting friendship between black and Jewish people. Dedicated by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. October 28, 1988.

This event is sponsored by the **WESTON COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS**, whose members are appointed by the Board of Selectmen and whose mission it is to provide arts and cultural events for the Town of Weston (and its friends and neighbors). Thank you for coming!



California actress and playwright **Laurel Ollstein's** award-winning one-woman play "*Laughter, Hope and a Sock in the Eye*" the story of Dorothy Parker, was first performed at the unveiling of the Dorothy Parker Memorial Garden in Baltimore on the National Grounds of the NAACP where her ashes were laid to rest. It has also played at The Old Log Theatre in Minneapolis, Foot of the Mountain Theatre in Minnesota, The Arena Theatre in Baltimore, and at the Seattle Fringe Festival. In Los Angeles "*Laughter, Hope and a Sock in the Eye*" played for nearly a year to full houses at the Burbage Theatre where it was nominated for Best One Person show by the LA Weekly. Most recently it was produced by the Theatre/Drama Committee of the National Arts Club, in New York City in September 2006.

As a member of the award winning Actors' Gang for over ten years, Ms. Ollstein worked as an actress in many collaborative pieces such as *Hysteria*, *Blood Love Madness*, and *MMC* as a playwright producing her plays *POTROAST*, *CHEESE* and *Insomniac*. She is a member of ABOUT PRODUCTIONS and has collaborated as writer and actor in *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*. Her newest collaborative work *Showing Our Age*, directed by Ms. Ollstein, is a multi-media theatrical event which combines over forty interviews conducted with senior citizens from Los Angeles with original music by Robert Anderson and choreographed by Lori DuPeron which debuted in March at the Inside the Ford in Los Angeles.

Her other stage plays include *Insomniac*, *Storage Room*, *Pot Roast*, *Cheese*, *Blackwell's Corner*, *Ester's Moustache* and *The Dark Ages*. Her essays and memoir pieces have been published by The Middle English Literary Group and the Sea Oats review.

Ms. Ollstein is currently adjunct faculty at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, teaching classes in playwriting, acting, directing, screenwriting, writing oral histories and solo performance.

NOTES by Dorothy Curran, Friend of WCA:

Franklin Pierce Adams (1881-1960), famed 20th century journalist, radio personality, *Information, Please* panelist and charter member of the celebrated Algonquin Round Table, kept a country home on Kellogg Hill in Weston. "FPA," as he was known, introduced Dorothy Parker's wit to the world when he quoted her verse in "The Conning Tower", his column in *New York Tribune* and *New York World* newspapers. She became a regular contributor, Algonquin table mate, weekend guest in Weston (along with other members of the Algonquin's "Vicious Circle") and lifelong friend.

Of her, he wrote: "More certain than either death or taxes is the high and shining art of Dorothy Parker...Bitterness, humor, wit, yearning for beauty and love, and a foreknowledge of their futility--with rue her heart is laden, but her lads are gold-plated--these, you might say, are the elements of the Parkerian formula; these, and the divine talent to find the right word and reject the wrong one. The result is a simplicity that almost startles."

Of him, she wrote: "He raised me from a couplet."