

# **The Humor of Robert Benchley: A Comprehensive and Annotated Guide**

## **Introduction**

Robert Benchley, one of the most celebrated humorists of the 20th century, left behind a vast and diverse body of work that continues to entertain and amuse readers today. From his witty essays and short stories to his hilarious plays and films, Benchley had a unique gift for capturing the absurdities and ironies of everyday life.

Benchley was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1889. He began his writing career as a journalist, working for several newspapers in Boston and New York City. In the 1920s, he gained national recognition for his humorous essays, which were published in magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*.

Benchley's essays often poked fun at the foibles of human nature, and he had a particular knack for finding the humor in everyday situations.

In addition to his essays, Benchley also wrote several short stories, plays, and films. His plays were often performed on Broadway, and his films were popular with audiences of all ages. Benchley's humor was characterized by its wit, satire, and self-deprecation. He was a master of wordplay and puns, and he had a knack for creating memorable characters and situations.

Benchley's work has been praised by critics and readers alike for its originality, intelligence, and humor. He has been compared to other great humorists such as Mark Twain and H.L. Mencken. Benchley's work has also been adapted for television and film, and his characters have been brought to life by some of the most talented actors of our time.

Despite his untimely death in 1945, Benchley's work continues to be enjoyed by readers and audiences of all ages. His humor is timeless, and his insights into human nature are as relevant today as they were when he was writing. Benchley's work is a valuable addition to the American literary canon, and it is sure to continue to be enjoyed for many years to come.

This book is the first comprehensive guide to Benchley's life and work. It includes an annotated bibliography of his writings, as well as essays on his humor, his literary influences, and his legacy. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in American humor or the history of American literature.

## Book Description

Robert Benchley was one of the most celebrated humorists of the 20th century, known for his witty essays, short stories, plays, and films. This comprehensive guide to Benchley's life and work includes an annotated bibliography of his writings, as well as essays on his humor, his literary influences, and his legacy.

Benchley's humor was characterized by its wit, satire, and self-deprecation. He had a knack for finding the humor in everyday situations and for creating memorable characters and situations. His work has been praised by critics and readers alike for its originality, intelligence, and humor.

This book explores Benchley's early life and influences, his unique style and techniques, and his legacy as one of the greatest humorists of all time. It also includes an

annotated bibliography of Benchley's works, making it an invaluable resource for scholars and fans alike.

Whether you're a longtime fan of Robert Benchley or just discovering his work for the first time, this book is sure to entertain and inform you. With its comprehensive coverage of Benchley's life and work, this book is the perfect way to learn more about one of the most important figures in American humor.

In this book, you'll find:

- An in-depth look at Benchley's life and career
- An analysis of Benchley's humor, including his use of wordplay, puns, satire, and self-deprecation
- A comprehensive bibliography of Benchley's works, including his books, essays, short stories, plays, and films
- Essays by leading scholars on Benchley's work

This book is the definitive guide to Robert Benchley, one of the most important and influential humorists of the 20th century.

# Chapter 1: Robert Benchley's Early Life and Influences

## Benchley's Childhood and Education

Robert Benchley was born on September 15, 1889, in Worcester, Massachusetts. He was the youngest of three children born to Charles Henry Benchley, a lawyer, and Maria Jane (née Adams) Benchley. Benchley's father died when he was just four years old, and his mother was left to raise him and his two older sisters on her own.

Benchley attended Worcester Academy, a private preparatory school, where he excelled in his studies and developed a love of literature and writing. He was also a talented athlete, and he played football, baseball, and tennis. After graduating from Worcester Academy in 1908, Benchley enrolled at Harvard University.

At Harvard, Benchley continued to excel academically. He was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society,

and he graduated magna cum laude in 1912 with a degree in English. While at Harvard, Benchley also began his writing career. He served as an editor of the Harvard Lampoon, the university's humor magazine, and he also wrote for the Harvard Crimson, the daily student newspaper.

After graduating from Harvard, Benchley moved to New York City to pursue a career in journalism. He worked as a reporter for several newspapers, including the New York Sun and the New York Tribune. In 1916, Benchley married Gertrude Adler, a fellow journalist. The couple had two children, a son and a daughter.

Benchley's early life and education had a profound impact on his writing. His childhood experiences gave him a wealth of material to draw upon in his humorous essays and stories. His education at Harvard taught him the importance of clear and concise writing, and it also introduced him to the works of the great humorists, such as Mark Twain and H.L. Mencken.



Benchley's experiences as a journalist also helped to shape his writing style. He learned how to write quickly and efficiently, and he developed a keen eye for detail.

All of these factors contributed to Benchley's success as a humorist. He was able to use his wit, intelligence, and observational skills to create a body of work that is still enjoyed by readers today.

# Chapter 1: Robert Benchley's Early Life and Influences

## The Influence of Mark Twain and Other Humorists

Robert Benchley's humor was influenced by a wide range of writers, including Mark Twain, H.L. Mencken, and Dorothy Parker. Twain was a particular favorite of Benchley's, and his influence can be seen in Benchley's use of satire and his knack for creating memorable characters. Benchley also admired Mencken's wit and intelligence, and he often imitated Mencken's writing style in his own essays. Parker was another important influence on Benchley, and her influence can be seen in Benchley's use of irony and his ability to capture the absurdities of everyday life.

Benchley's early life also played a role in shaping his humor. He was born into a wealthy family in Worcester, Massachusetts, and he grew up in a world

of privilege. However, Benchley was always something of an outsider. He was shy and awkward, and he never quite fit in with the other children in his neighborhood. This outsider status gave Benchley a unique perspective on the world, and it helped him to develop his sense of humor.

Benchley's family moved to New York City when he was a teenager, and he attended Harvard University. After graduating from Harvard, Benchley worked as a journalist for several newspapers in New York City. It was during this time that he began to develop his own unique style of humor. Benchley's humor was often self-deprecating, and he had a knack for finding the humor in everyday situations. He also had a gift for wordplay and puns, and he often used these devices to create hilarious effects.

Benchley's humor was a product of his own unique personality and experiences. He was a shy and awkward man who never quite fit in, but he also had a

keen eye for the absurdities of life and a gift for expressing them in a humorous way. Benchley's humor continues to be enjoyed by readers today, and he is considered one of the greatest humorists of the 20th century.

Benchley's humor was also influenced by his own personal experiences. He was a heavy drinker, and his alcoholism often led to embarrassing and humiliating situations. Benchley was also a hypochondriac, and he was constantly worried about his health. These personal struggles also found their way into Benchley's humor, and they often added an extra layer of poignancy to his writing.

Benchley's humor was a complex and multifaceted thing. It was influenced by a wide range of factors, including his own personality, his life experiences, and his literary influences. However, one thing is for sure: Benchley's humor was unique and original, and it continues to entertain readers today.

# Chapter 1: Robert Benchley's Early Life and Influences

## Benchley's Early Writing Career

Robert Benchley began his writing career as a journalist, working for several newspapers in Boston and New York City. He got his start in journalism in 1912, when he was hired as a reporter for the Boston Herald. He quickly rose through the ranks, and by 1916, he was the paper's drama critic. In 1918, he moved to New York City to work for the Tribune. He also wrote for other publications, including The New Republic and Vanity Fair.

Benchley's early writing was heavily influenced by his experiences as a journalist. He often wrote about the people and events he encountered in his everyday life. He had a knack for finding the humor in the mundane, and he was able to write about even the most ordinary things in a way that was both funny and insightful.

In addition to his journalism, Benchley also wrote several short stories and essays during this time. His short stories often featured humorous characters and situations, while his essays were often more personal and reflective. Benchley's early writing showed a great deal of promise, and it laid the foundation for his later success as a humorist.

One of Benchley's most famous early works is his essay "The Treasurer's Report," which was published in *The New Republic* in 1920. In this essay, Benchley recounts his experiences as the treasurer of a small club. He describes the challenges of keeping track of the club's finances, and he pokes fun at the seriousness with which some people take their financial responsibilities. The essay is a classic example of Benchley's humor, and it is still enjoyed by readers today.

Benchley's early writing career was a time of great experimentation and growth. He tried his hand at different genres and styles, and he developed his own

unique voice as a humorist. By the end of the 1920s, Benchley was one of the most popular humorists in America.

**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

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