

= Robert Benchley =

Robert Charles Benchley (September 15 , 1889 ? November 21 , 1945) was an American humorist best known for his work as a newspaper columnist and film actor . From his beginnings at the Harvard Lampoon while attending Harvard University , through his many years writing essays and articles for Vanity Fair and The New Yorker and his acclaimed short films , Benchley 's style of humor brought him respect and success during his life , from New York City and his peers at the Algonquin Round Table to contemporaries in the burgeoning film industry .

Benchley is best remembered for his contributions to The New Yorker , where his essays , whether topical or absurdist , influenced many modern humorists . He also made a name for himself in Hollywood , when his short film How to Sleep was a popular success and won Best Short Subject at the 1935 Academy Awards , and through his many memorable appearances in films such as Alfred Hitchcock 's Foreign Correspondent (1940) and (in a dramatic turn) Nice Girl ? (1941) . His legacy includes written work and numerous short film appearances .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early life = = =

Although Benchley was known for misleading and fictional autobiographical statements about himself (at one point asserting that he wrote A Tale of Two Cities before being buried at Westminster Abbey) , he actually was the great @-@ grandchild of the founder of Benchley , Texas , Henry Wetherby Benchley , who was jailed for his help with the Underground Railroad . Robert Benchley was born on September 15 , 1889 in Worcester , Massachusetts , the son of Maria Jane (Moran) and Charles Henry Benchley .

Robert 's older brother , Edmund , was rushed to the Spanish ? American War days after graduation from West Point (1898) , and was a casualty almost immediately . The Benchley family were attending a public Fourth of July picnic when a bicycle messenger brought the notification telegram . In unthinking , stunned reaction , Maria Benchley cried out " Why couldn 't it have been Robert ? ! " , while the latter , who was nine years old , was standing by her side . Mrs. Benchley apologized profusely and tried hard to atone for the remark . Edmund 's death had considerable effects on and unintended consequences for Robert 's life , particularly in the form of Edmund 's fiancée Lillian Duryea , a wealthy heiress . It is believed that Edmund 's death in battle seeded pacifist leanings in Robert Benchley 's writings . The period , however , was full of strong literary reactions to the Great War , and Benchley was aware of , for instance , the anti @-@ war writings of A.A. Milne .

Robert Benchley met Gertrude Darling in high school in Worcester . They became engaged during his senior year at Harvard , and they married in June 1914 . Their first child , Nathaniel Benchley , was born a year later . A second son , Robert Benchley , Jr . , was born in 1919 . Nathaniel became a writer himself , and penned a biography of his father in 1955 . He was a well @-@ respected fiction and children 's book author . Nathaniel had talented sons as well : Peter Benchley was best known for the book Jaws (which inspired the film of the same name) , and Nat Benchley wrote and performed in an acclaimed one @-@ man production based on Robert 's life .

= = = Education = = =

Robert grew up and attended school in Worcester and was involved in academic and traveling theatrical productions during high school . Thanks to financial aid from his late brother 's fiancée , Lillian Duryea , he could attend Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter , New Hampshire for his final year of high school . Benchley reveled in the atmosphere at the Academy , and he remained active in creative extracurricular activities , thereby damaging his academic credentials toward the end of his term .

Benchley enrolled at Harvard University in 1908 , again with Duryea 's financial help . He joined the Delta Upsilon fraternity in his first year , and continued to partake in the camaraderie that he had enjoyed at Phillips Exeter while still doing well in school . He did especially well in his English and government classes . His humor and style began to reveal themselves during this time : Benchley was often called upon to entertain his fraternity brothers , and his impressions of classmates and professors became very popular . His performances gave him some local fame , and most entertainment programs on campus and many off @-@ campus meetings recruited Benchley 's talents .

During his first two years at Harvard , Benchley worked with the Harvard Advocate and the Harvard Lampoon . He was elected to the Lampoon 's board of directors in his third year . The election of Benchley was unusual , as he was the publication 's art editor and the board positions typically fell to the foremost writers on the staff . The Lampoon position opened a number of other doors for Benchley , and he was quickly nominated to the Signet Society meeting club as well as becoming the only undergraduate member of the Boston Papyrus Club at the time .

Along with his duties at the Lampoon , Benchley acted in a number of theatrical productions , including Hasty Pudding productions of The Crystal Gazer and Below Zero . He also held the position of ?????????? for the Pudding in 1912 . Benchley kept these achievements in mind as he began to contemplate a career for himself after college . Charles Townsend Copeland , an English professor , recommended that Benchley go into writing , and Benchley and future Benchley illustrator Gluyas Williams from the Lampoon considered going into freelance work writing and illustrating theatrical reviews . Another English professor recommended that Benchley speak with the Curtis Publishing Company ; but Benchley was initially against the idea , and ultimately took a position at a civil service office in Philadelphia . Owing to an academic failure in his senior year due to an illness , Benchley would not receive his Bachelor of Arts from Harvard until the completion of his credits in 1913 . His shortcoming was the submission of a " scholarly paper " ? which Benchley eventually rectified by a treatise on the U.S. ? Canadian Fisheries Dispute , written from the point of view of a cod . He took a position with Curtis shortly after he received his diploma .

= = = Early professional career = = =

Benchley did copy work for the Curtis Company during the summer following graduation , while doing other odd service jobs , such as translating French catalogs for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts . In September , he was hired by Curtis as a full @-@ time staff member , preparing copy for its new house publication , Obiter Dicta . The first issue was roundly criticized by management , who felt it was " too technical , too scattering , and wholly lacking in punch " Things did not improve for Benchley and Obiter Dicta , and a failed practical joke at a company banquet further strained the relationship between Benchley and his superiors . He continued his attempts to develop his own voice within the publication , but Benchley and Curtis were not a good match , and he eventually left , as Curtis was considering eliminating Benchley 's role and he had been offered a position in Boston with a better salary

Benchley held a number of similar jobs in the following years . His re @-@ entry into public speaking followed the annual Harvard ? Yale football game in 1914 , where he presented a practical joke involving " Professor Soong " giving a question @-@ and @-@ answer session on football in Chinese . In what the local press dubbed " the Chinese professor caper , " Soong was played by a Chinese @-@ American who had lived in the United States for over thirty years , and pretended to answer questions in Chinese while Benchley " translated . " While his public profile rose , Benchley continued with freelance work , which included his first paid piece for Vanity Fair in 1914 , titled " Hints on Writing a Book , " a parody of the non @-@ fiction pieces then popular . While Benchley 's pieces were bought by Vanity Fair from time to time , his consistent work dried up , and he took a position with the New York Tribune .

Benchley started at the Tribune as a reporter . He was a very poor one , unable to get statements from people quoted in other papers , and eventually had greater success covering lectures around the city . He was promised a position at the Tribune 's Sunday magazine when it launched , and he

was moved to the magazine 's staff soon after he was hired , eventually becoming chief writer . He wrote two articles a week : the first a review of non @-@ literary books , the other a feature @-@ style article about whatever he wanted . The liberty gave his work new life , and the success of his pieces in the magazine convinced his editors to give him a signed byline column in the Tribune proper .

Benchley filled in for P. G. Wodehouse at Vanity Fair at the beginning of 1916 , reviewing theatre in New York . This inspired staff at the Tribune magazine to creativity for articles (such as arranging for the producers of The Thirteenth Chair to cast Benchley as a corpse) , but the situation at the magazine deteriorated as the pacifist Benchley became unhappy with the Tribune 's position on World War I , and the Tribune editors were unhappy with the evolving tone and irreverence of the magazine . In 1917 , the Tribune shut down the magazine , and Benchley was out of work again . When a rumored opening for an editorial position at Vanity Fair fell through , Benchley decided he would continue freelancing , having made a name for himself at the magazine .

This freelancing attempt did not start out well , with Benchley selling just one piece to Vanity Fair and accumulating countless rejections in two months . When a position as press agent for Broadway producer William A. Brady was offered , Benchley accepted it , against the advice of many of his peers . This experience was a poor one , as Brady was extremely difficult to work for . Benchley resigned to become a publicity director for the federal government 's Aircraft Board at the beginning of 1918 . His experience there was not much better , and when an opportunity was offered to return to the Tribune under new editorial management , Benchley took it .

At the Tribune , Benchley , along with new editor Ernest Gruening , was in charge of a twelve @-@ page pictorial supplement titled the Tribune Graphic . The two were given a good deal of freedom , but Benchley 's coverage of the war and focus on African @-@ American regiments as well as provocative pictorials about lynching in the southern United States earned him and Gruening scrutiny from management . Amid accusations that both were pro @-@ German (the United States was fighting Germany at the time) , Benchley tendered his resignation in a terse letter , citing the lack of " rational proof that Dr. Gruening was guilty of ... charges made against him ... " and management 's attempts to " smirch the character and the newspaper career of the first man in three years who has been able to make the Tribune look like a newspaper . "

Benchley was forced to take a publicity position with the Liberty Loan program , and he continued to freelance until Collier 's contacted him with an associate editor position . Benchley took this offer to Vanity Fair to see if they would match it , as he felt Vanity Fair was the better magazine , and Vanity Fair offered him the position of managing editor . He accepted and began work there in 1919 .

An often overlooked influence upon Benchley 's early professional career was the admiration and friendship of the Canadian economist , academic , and humorist Dr. Stephen Leacock . From Toronto Leacock closely followed the increasing body of Benchley 's published humor and wit , and opened correspondence between them . He admitted to occasional borrowing of a Benchley topic for his own reflection and writings . Eventually , he began lobbying gently for Benchley to compile his columns into book form , and in 1922 was delighted with the result of his nagging . For his part ? in a tribute to Leacock ? Benchley later said he wrote everything Leacock ever wrote . They had a marvelous friendship .

= = = Vanity Fair and its aftermath = = =

Benchley began at Vanity Fair with fellow Harvard Lampoon and Hasty Pudding Theatricals alumnus Robert Emmet Sherwood and future friend and collaborator Dorothy Parker , who had taken over theatre criticism from P. G. Wodehouse years earlier . The format of Vanity Fair fit Benchley 's style very well , allowing his columns to have a humorous tone , often as straight parodies . Benchley 's work was typically published twice a month . Some of Benchley 's columns , featuring a character he created , were attributed to his pseudonym Brighton Perry , but he took credit for most of them himself . Sherwood , Parker , and Benchley became close , often having long lunches at the Algonquin Hotel . When the editorial managers went on a European trip , the three took advantage of the situation , writing articles mocking the local theatre establishment and offering

parodic commentary on a variety of topics , such as the effect of Canadian hockey on United States fashion . This worried Sherwood , as he felt it could jeopardize his forthcoming raise .

The situation at Vanity Fair deteriorated upon management 's return . They sent out a memo forbidding the discussion of salaries in an attempt to rein in the staff . Benchley , Parker , and Sherwood responded with a memo of their own , followed by placards around their necks detailing their exact salaries for all to see . Management attempted to issue " tardy slips " for staff who were late . On one of these , Benchley wrote out , in very small handwriting , an elaborate excuse involving a herd of elephants on 44th Street . These issues contributed to a general deterioration of morale in the offices , culminating in Parker 's termination , allegedly due to complaints by the producers of the plays she skewered in her theatrical reviews . Upon learning of her termination , Benchley tendered his own resignation . Word of it was published in Time by Alexander Woollcott , who was at a lunch with Benchley , Parker , and others . Given that Benchley had two children at the time of his resignation , Parker referred to it as " the greatest act of friendship I 'd ever seen . "

Following word of Benchley 's resignation , freelance offers began piling up . He worked constantly while claiming he was intensely lazy . (According to legend , he submitted a magazine piece titled " I Like to Loaf " two weeks after deadline . His explanatory note : ? I was loafing . ?) He was offered \$ 200 per basic subject article for The Home Sector , and a weekly freelance salary from New York World to write a book review column three times per week for the same salary he received at Vanity Fair . The column , titled " Books and Other Things , " ran for one year and roved beyond literature to mundane topics such as Bricklaying in Modern Practice . Unfortunately for Benchley , however , his writing a syndicated column for David Lawrence drew the ire of his World bosses , and " Books and Other Things " was dropped .

Benchley continued to freelance , submitting humor columns to a variety of publications , including Life (where fellow humorist James Thurber stated that Benchley 's columns were the only reason the magazine was read) . He continued meeting with his friends at the Algonquin , and the group became popularly known as the Algonquin Round Table . In April 1920 , Benchley landed a position with Life writing theatre reviews , which he would continue doing regularly through 1929 , eventually taking complete control of the drama section . His reviews were known for their flair , and he often used them as a soapbox for issues of concern to him , whether petty (people who cough during plays) or more important (such as racial intolerance) .

Things changed again for Benchley a number of years into the arrangement . A theatrical production by the members of the Round Table was put together in response to a challenge from actor J. M. Kerrigan , who was tired of the Table 's complaints about the ongoing theatre season . The result , which played for one night April 30 , 1922 at the 49th Street Theatre , was No Sirree ! (the name being a pun of the European revue La Chauve @-@ Souris) , " An Anonymous Entertainment by the Vicious Circle of the Hotel Algonquin . " Benchley 's contribution to the program , " The Treasurer 's Report , " featured Benchley as a nervous , disorganized man attempting to summarize an organization 's yearly expenses . The revue was applauded by both spectators and fellow actors , with Benchley 's performance receiving the biggest laughs . A reprise of " The Treasurer 's Report " was often requested for future events , and Irving Berlin hired Benchley for \$ 500 a week to perform it nightly during Berlin 's Music Box Revue which opened in September 1921 and ran until September 1922 .

= = = Hollywood and The New Yorker call = = =

Benchley had continued to receive positive responses from his performing , and in 1925 he accepted a standing invitation from film producer Jesse L. Lasky for a six @-@ week term writing screenplays at \$ 500 . While the session did not yield significant results , Benchley did get writing credit for producing the title cards on the Raymond Griffith silent film You 'd Be Surprised (released September 1926) , and was invited to do some titling for two other films .

Benchley was also hired to help with the book for a Broadway musical , Smarty , starring Fred Astaire . This experience was not as positive , and most of Benchley 's contributions were excised and the final product , Funny Face , did not have Benchley 's name attached . Worn down ,

Benchley moved to his next commitment , an attempt at a talkie version of " The Treasurer 's Report " . The filming went by quickly , and though he was convinced he was not good , The Treasurer 's Report was a financial and critical success upon its release in 1928 . Benchley participated in two more films that year : a second talking film he wrote , The Sex Life of the Polyp , and a third starring but not written by him , The Spellbinder , all made in the Fox Movietone sound @-@ on @-@ film system and released by Fox Films . The films enjoyed similar success and were critically acclaimed , and Benchley was signed to a deal to produce more films before heading back to New York to continue writing . As Life would say following his eventual resignation in 1929 , " Mr. Benchley has left Dramatic Criticism for the Talking Movies " .

During the time that Benchley was filming various short films , he also began working at The New Yorker , which had started in February 1925 under the control of Benchley 's friend Harold Ross . While Benchley , along with many of his Algonquin acquaintances , was wary of getting involved with another publication for various reasons , he completed some freelance work for The New Yorker over the first few years , and was later invited to be newspaper critic . Benchley initially wrote the column under the pseudonym Guy Fawkes (the lead conspirator in the English Gunpowder Plot) , and the column was well received . Benchley tackled issues ranging from careless reporting to European fascism , and the publication flourished . He was invited to be theatre critic for The New Yorker in 1929 , leaving Life , and contributions from Woolcott and Parker became regular features in the magazine . The New Yorker published an average of forty @-@ eight Benchley columns per year during the early 1930s .

With the emergence of The New Yorker , Benchley was able to stay away from Hollywood work for a number of years . In 1931 , he was persuaded to do voice work for RKO Radio Pictures for a film that would eventually be titled Sky Devils , and he acted in his first feature film , The Sport Parade (1932) with Joel McCrea . The work on The Sport Parade caused Benchley to miss the fall theatre openings , which embarrassed him (even if the relative success of The Sport Parade was often credited to Benchley 's role) , but the lure of filmmaking did not disappear , since RKO offered him a writing and acting contract for the following year for more money than he was making writing for The New Yorker .

= = = Benchley on film and " How to Sleep " = = =

Benchley re @-@ entered Hollywood at the height of the Great Depression and the large @-@ scale introduction of the talkie films he had begun working with years before . His arrival put him on the scene of a number of productions almost instantly . While Benchley was more interested in writing than acting , one of his more important roles as an actor was as a salesman in Rafter Romance , and his work attracted the interest of MGM , who offered Benchley a lot of money to complete a series of short films . Benchley , who had also been offered a syndicated column by Hearst , was able to film the shorts in New York and keep up with his new column . Before heading back to New York , Benchley took a role in the feature film Dancing Lady (1933) , which also featured Joan Crawford , Clark Gable , Fred Astaire , Nelson Eddy , and the Three Stooges .

In 1933 , Benchley returned to Hollywood , completing the short films Your Technocracy and Mine for Universal Pictures , How to Break 90 at Croquet for RKO , and the lavish feature @-@ length production China Seas for Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer , starring Clark Gable , Jean Harlow , Wallace Beery , and Rosalind Russell ; Benchley 's character was slurring drunk throughout the movie . Upon completion , MGM invited Benchley to write and perform in a short production inspired by a Mellon Institute study on sleep commissioned by the Simmons Mattress Company . The resulting film , How to Sleep , was filmed in two days , and featured Benchley as both the narrator and sleeper , the latter a role Benchley claimed was " not much of a strain , as [he] was in bed most of the time . " The film was well received in preview screenings , and promotions took over , with a still from the film being used in Simmons advertisements . The only group not pleased was the Mellon Institute , who did not approve of the studio mocking their study .

This was followed in 1936 by How to be a Detective . The early success of How to Sleep prompted MGM to rush two more short films featuring Benchley , How to Train a Dog , a spoof of dog @-@

training techniques , and How to Behave , which lampooned etiquette norms . How to Sleep was named Best Short Subject at the 1935 Academy Awards , while the latter two shorts were not as well received .

Benchley returned to the cinema in 1937 , cast in the revue Broadway Melody of 1938 , and in his largest role to that point , the critically panned Live , Love and Learn . A short that Benchley completed for MGM , A Night at the Movies , was Benchley 's greatest success since How to Sleep , and won him a contract for more short films that would be produced in New York . These films were produced more quickly than his previous efforts (while How to Sleep needed two days , the later short How to Vote needed less than twelve hours) , and took their toll on Benchley . He still completed two shoots in one day (one of which was The Courtship of the Newt) , but rested for a while following the 1937 schedule .

Benchley 's return yielded two more short films , and his high profile prompted negotiations for sponsorship of a Benchley radio program and numerous appearances on television shows , including the first television entertainment program ever broadcast , an untitled test program using an experimental antenna on the Empire State Building . The radio program , Melody and Madness , was more a showcase for Benchley 's acting , as he did not participate in writing it . It was not well received , and was removed from the schedule .

= = = Later life = = =

1939 was a bad year for Benchley 's career . Besides the cancellation of his radio show , Benchley learned that MGM did not plan to renew his contract , and The New Yorker , frustrated with Benchley 's film career taking precedence over his theatre column , appointed Wolcott Gibbs to take over in his stead . Following his final New Yorker column in 1940 , Benchley signed with Paramount Pictures for another series of one @-@ reel shorts , all filmed at Paramount 's Long Island studio in Astoria , New York . Most of them were adapted from his old essays (" Take the Witness ! , " with Benchley fantasizing about conquering a tough cross @-@ examination , was filmed as The Witness ; " The Real Public Enemies , " showing the criminal tendencies of sinister household objects , was filmed as Crime Control , etc .) . In 1940 Benchley appeared in Alfred Hitchcock 's Foreign Correspondent for which he is also credited as one of the dialogue writers . In 1941 Benchley received two more feature @-@ length roles : Walt Disney 's The Reluctant Dragon , in which Benchley tours the various departments of the Disney studio , and Nice Girl ? with Deanna Durbin , noteworthy for a rare dramatic performance by Benchley .

Benchley 's roles primarily came as a freelance actor , as his Paramount shorts contract didn 't pay as well as feature films . Benchley was cast in minor roles for various romantic comedies , some shoots going better than others . He appeared in prominent roles with Fred Astaire in You 'll Never Get Rich (1941) and The Sky 's the Limit (1943) . Paramount did not renew his contract in 1943 , and Benchley signed back with MGM with an exclusive contract . The situation was not positive for Benchley , as the studio " mishandled " him and kept Benchley too busy to complete his own work . His contract concluded with only four short films completed and no chance of signing another contract . Following the printing of two books of his old New Yorker columns , Benchley gave up writing for good in 1943 , signing one more contract with Paramount in December of that year .

While Benchley 's books and Paramount contract were giving him financial security , he was still unhappy with the turn his career had taken . By 1944 he was taking thankless roles in the studio 's least distinguished films , like the rustic musical National Barn Dance . By this time Robert Benchley 's screen image was established as a comic lecturer who tried but failed to clarify any given topic . In this capacity Paramount cast him in the 1945 Bob Hope @-@ Bing Crosby comedy Road to Utopia ; Benchley interrupts the action periodically to " explain " the nonsensical storyline . On April 22 , 1945 , he guest starred on the Blue Network 's (soon to be ABC) top @-@ rated radio series The Andrews Sisters Show , sponsored by Nash motor cars & Kelvinator home appliances .

Benchley 's drinking , already a problem , worsened and he was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver . (Ironically , when younger , he had been an adamant teetotaler .) While he completed his year 's work , his condition continued to deteriorate , and Benchley died in a New York hospital on

November 21 , 1945 . His family opted for a private funeral service , and his body was cremated and interred in a family plot on the island of Nantucket .

= = Algonquin Round Table = =

The Algonquin Round Table was a group of New York City writers and actors who met regularly between 1919 and 1929 at the Algonquin Hotel . Initially consisting of Benchley , Dorothy Parker , and Alexander Woollcott during their time at Vanity Fair , the group eventually expanded to over a dozen regular members of the New York media and entertainment , such as playwrights George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly and journalist / critic Heywood Brown , who gained prominence due to his positions during the Sacco and Vanzetti trial . The table gained prominence due to the media attention the members drew as well as their collective contributions to their respective areas .

= = Humor style = =

Benchley 's humor was molded during his time at Harvard . While his skills as an orator were already known by classmates and friends , it was not until his work at the Lampoon that his style formed . The prominent styles of humor were then " crackerbarrel " , which relied on devices such as dialects and a disdain for formal education in the style of humorists such as Artemis Ward and Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby , and a more " genteel " style of humor , very literary and upper @-@ class in nature , a style popularized by Oliver Wendell Holmes . While the two styles were , at first glance , diametrically opposed , they coexisted in magazines such as Vanity Fair and Life . The Lampoon primarily used the latter style , which suited Benchley . While some of his pieces would not have been out of place in a crackerbarrel @-@ style presentation , Benchley 's reliance on puns and wordplay resonated more with the literary humorists , as shown by his success with The New Yorker , known for the highbrow tastes of its readers .

Benchley 's definition of humor was simplicity itself : ? Anything that makes people laugh . ? His favorite nursery rhyme was " One , two , three / Buckle my shoe . "

Benchley 's characters were typically exaggerated representations of the common man . They were designed to create a contrast between himself and the masses , who had less common sense . The character is often befuddled by many of the actions of society and is often neurotic in a " different " way ? the character in How to Watch Football , for instance , finds it sensible for a normal fan to forgo the live experience and read the recap in the local papers . This character , labeled the " Little Man " and in some ways similar to many of Mark Twain 's protagonists , was based on Benchley himself ; the character did not persist in Benchley 's writing past the early 1930s , but survived in his speaking and acting roles . This character was apparent in Benchley 's Ivy Oration during his Harvard graduation ceremonies , and would appear throughout his career , such as during " The Treasurer 's Report " in the 1920s and his work in feature films in the 1930s .

Topical , current @-@ event style pieces written for Vanity Fair during the war did not lose their levity , either . He was not afraid to poke fun at the establishment (one piece he wrote was titled " Have You a Little German Agent in Your Home ? ") , and his common man observations often veered into angry rants , such as his piece " The Average Voter , " where the namesake of the piece " [F] orgets what the paper said ... so votes straight Republicrat ticket . " His lighter fare did not hesitate to touch upon topical issues , drawing analogies between a football game and patriotism , or chewing gum and diplomacy and economic relations with Mexico .

In his films , the common man exaggerations continued . Much of his time in the films was spent spoofing himself , whether it was the affected nervousness of the treasurer in The Treasurer 's Report or the discomfort in explaining The Sex Life of the Polyp to a women 's club . The longer , plot @-@ driven shorts , such as Lesson Number One , Furnace Trouble , and Stewed , Fried and Boiled , likewise show a Benchley character overmatched by seemingly mundane tasks . Even the more stereotypical characters held these qualities , such as the incapable sportscaster Benchley played in The Sport Parade .

Benchley 's humor inspired a number of later humorists and filmmakers . Dave Barry , author ,

onetime humor writer for the Miami Herald , and judge of the 2006 and 2007 Robert Benchley Society Award for Humor , has called Benchley his " idol " and he " always wanted to write like [Benchley] . " Horace Digby claimed that , " [M] ore than anyone else , Robert Benchley influenced [his] early writing style . " Outsider filmmaker Sidney N. Laverents lists Benchley as an influence as well , and James Thurber used Benchley as a reference point , citing Benchley 's penchant for presenting " the commonplace as remarkable " in The Secret Life of Walter Mitty .

= = Works = =

Benchley produced over 600 essays , which were initially compiled in twelve volumes , during his writing career . He also appeared in a number of films , including 48 short treatments that he mostly wrote or co @-@ wrote and numerous feature films .

Posthumously , Benchley 's works continue to be released in books such as the 1983 Random House compilation The Best of Robert Benchley , and the 2005 collection of short films Robert Benchley and the Knights of the Algonquin , which compiled many of Benchley 's popular short films from his years at Paramount with other works from fellow humorists and writers Alexander Woollcott and Donald Ogden Stewart .