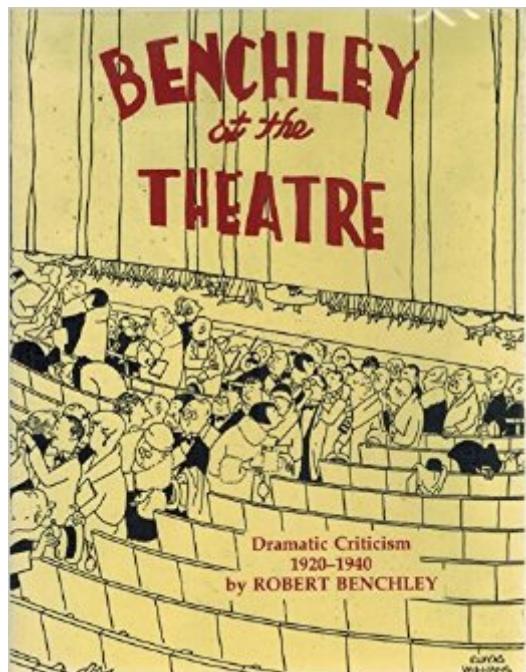


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# Benchley At The Theatre: Dramatic Criticism, 1920-1940



## Synopsis

Book by Benchley, Robert

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

BENCHLEY AT THE THEATRE It was the Golden Age of Broadway. Sandwiched between the two wars that would end all war, the American theater briefly blossomed into a thousand different colors, giving the world such immortals as Eugene O'Neill, the Barrymores, Lillian Hellman, George S. Kaufman, Fred Astaire, Helen Hayes, George M. Cohan, the Gershwins, Orson Welles, the Marx Brothers, and many more. Amid all this hubbub was Robert Benchley, famed humorist, actor, and boulevardier. Known mostly for his urbane and often puckish essays, Benchley was also an ardent observer of the stage, first for the old *Life* magazine and then for the *New Yorker*. He wrote nearly a thousand reviews during his 20-year tenure as one of Broadway's leading theater critics. Those culled by Ipswich Press for *Benchley at the Theatre* represent Benchley at his wittiest and most revealing. This garland of hitherto uncollected pieces touches on the great, the near-great, and some deservedly forgotten (but nonetheless intriguing) plays and actors of the twenties and thirties. For Benchley aficionados the book is a rare treat--the first new collection of the master's work in nearly 40 years. For both amateur and professional students of the theater, it's a chance to share an aisle seat with one of Broadway's most discerning critics. And if you are none of the above, no matter. If you love informed, literate, brisk writing, Benchley at the Theatre will be a welcome respite from the Siskel and Ebert school of criticism. A night at the theater with Benchley is never dull, chock-full as it is with pithy asides, New England common sense, and occasional eruptions of pure

Dada.

[...] It's a collection of theater reviews by Robert Benchley--that much is obvious. Most of the reviews (oh, let's say ALL of the reviews) are from the Golden Age of American Theater. With our current historical amnesia that could be an epoch situated anywhere from between 1066 AD (the year of the founding of our nation by President Paul Bunyon and General "Johnny" Appleseed) to the present time. What isn't obvious is that Benchley is a very rare bird: a first-class writer with a first-class sense of humor. Since his writing is from a few years back and he makes frequent mention of steam trains (A jacuzzi service once provided by Amtrak), Al Smith (The Smith brother on the left side of the cough drop box), and bootleggers (Thigh-highs favored by Twiggy), he is too easily dismissed as a "horse and buggy" writer with little relevance to our modern sophisticated culture. In fact, he's about as timeless as Mark Twain--a currently fading great--and he writes about as well. He's also funnier and has better judgement than that American Icon. Robert Benchley would never have written "Innocents Abroad." The point of all this is if you've come here looking for MORE Benchley you don't need me or any other reviews. This is "more Benchley" and you're fully aware of what that means. Have fun. If you're here for other reasons or you just stumbled across this page while doing an Internet search for something else--"Theater Benches" perhaps--then here's your big chance to recover lost gold. If you're 21 years old, ended up here because you passed out on the keyboard, and lack the attention span to get through an Ogdon Nash poem without medication, then just move on and be cheered by the fact that the future is yours.

14 Robert Benchley titles, as of 01/25/16: Eleven Benchley clip books; his son's biography (12); "Wayward Press" (13) & "Benchley At The Theatre" (14) were added on 12/16/15 to this revision of "A Composite Review of Books By & About Robert Benchley [1889-1945]," originally sent / accepted 12/10-11/15; revised 01/25/16) "You may think that you are not superstitious, but would you walk under a burning building?" --- from "Good Luck, And Try & Get It" ("Chips Off The Old Benchley") I was staggered when I read, in Nat Benchley's "The Benchley Roundup," that his father had written at least "a thousand" published pieces of humorous satire. In so doing, Robert became America's most popular / famous wit of writ since Mark Twain. When he formally announced his retirement as a humorist in 1944, the doleful news was presented on the front page of The New York Times. During wartime. (He had already ceased writing humor columns years prior to 1944. Overall, I found out that trying to identify the dates of original publication of his columns was a fool's errand. Short of weeding through each biography & related publications & setting up a chronological study, for which

I will reluctantly accept the payment of \$1,000 an hour as a consultant, what follows suffices.) For many years, I've owned & re-read from time to time, "Benchley - Or Else!" & "Inside Benchley," collections of his columns. Recently, the compulsion to acquire what turned out to be almost all of his books took precedence over common sense, as it is now realized without regret. I had had no idea that there had been that many.

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