

42 QUOTATIONS



Robert Benchley

(1889-1945)

Robert Benchley was a comic performer in many Hollywood movies, a humor columnist and a theater critic. He got his start at Harvard by doing comic impersonations of professors and classmates. His graduation was delayed when he turned in a senior thesis on an international fishing dispute from the point of view of a codfish. Benchley is likely to pop up in any sophisticated comedy of the 1930s as a genteel little man in a business suit with slicked hair, a thin mustache and an impish manner. He got so popular he starred in his own short movies as a lecturer who explained with muddled placidity such topics as “How to Sleep” and “How to Watch Football.” His style of sedate satire, appealing to a rational sense of absurdity and using puns and wordplay is in the Neoclassical tradition of Oliver Wendell Holmes. James Thurber said that Benchley’s columns were the only reason people read the *New Yorker* and he described his fellow humorist as “presenting the commonplace as remarkable.” Benchley belonged to the celebrated Algonquin Round Table of wits with the legendary Dorothy Parker, with whom he had an affair. Peter Benchley, the author of *Jaws*, is his grandson.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, autobiographical, arguing, working, drinking, literature, humor, women, human nature, America, dogs, old age, death:

YOUTH

When I was a child I was of an affectionate disposition, but not enough to get arrested.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

I'm no good in the morning even after I've had my coffee.

The only real cure for a hangover is death.

Go jogging? And get hit by a meteor?

Anything can happen, but it usually doesn't.

I didn't ought to have went.

ARGUING

Behind every argument is someone's ignorance.

Most of the arguments to which I am party fall somewhat short of being impressive, owing to the fact that neither I nor my opponent knows what we are talking about.

WORKING

I do most of my work sitting down; that's where I shine.

The freelance writer is a man who is paid per piece, per word or perhaps.

Anyone can do any amount of work provided it isn't the work he is supposed to be doing at the moment.

I am more the inspirational type of speller. I work on hunches rather than mere facts, and the result is sometimes open to criticism by purists.

I find that, while working, a pipe is a great source of inspiration. A pipe can be placed diagonally across the keys of a typewriter so that they will not function, or it can be made to give out such a cloud of smoke that I cannot see the paper.

It took me fifteen years to discover that I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous.

DRINKING

Why don't you get out of that wet coat and into a dry martini?

I know I'm drinking myself to a slow death, but then I'm in no hurry.

Drinking makes such fools of people, and people are such fools to begin with, that it's compounding a felony.

A great many people have come up to me and asked how I manage to get so much work done and still keep looking so dissipated.

Drawing on my fine command of the English language, I said nothing.

LITERATURE

After an author has been dead for some time, it becomes increasingly difficult for his publishers to get a new book out of him each year.

The naturalistic literature of this country has reached such a state that no family of characters is considered true to life which does not include at least two hypochondriacs, one sadist, and one old man who spills food down the front of his vest.

Review of the New York City telephone directory: The weakness of plot is due to the great number of characters which clutter up the pages. The Russian school is responsible for this.

Great literature must spring from an upheaval in the author's soul. If that upheaval is not present then it must come from the works of any other author which happens to be handy and easily adapted.

It was only one of those plays in which the actors, unfortunately, enunciated very clearly.

HUMOR

Defining and analyzing humor is a pastime of humorless people.

The old dictum that seeing is believing has been shown to be just another flash in the pan.

WOMEN

Sand is also a good place on which to write, "I love you," as it would be difficult to get into court after several years have passed.

Even nowadays a man can't step up and kill a woman without feeling just a bit unchivalrous.

HUMAN NATURE

We are constantly being surprised that people did things well before we were born.

Nothing is more responsible for the good old days than a bad memory.

They represent the worst element in our civilization--the Brother's Keeper.

Every man owes it to himself (and to his friends) to get away entirely alone in an isolated shack every so often, if only to find out just what bad company he can be.

There are two kinds of people in this world, those who believe there are two kinds of people in this world and those who don't.

AMERICA

In America, there are two classes of travel--first class, and with children.

We call ourselves a free nation, and yet we let ourselves be told what cabs we can and can't take by a man at a hotel door, simply because he has a drum major's uniform on.

An ardent supporter of the hometown team should go to a game prepared to take offense, no matter what happens.

DOGS

Dachshunds are ideal dogs for small children, as they are already stretched and pulled to such a length that the child cannot do much harm one way or the other.

A boy can learn a lot from a dog: obedience, loyalty, and the importance of turning around three times before lying down.

OLD AGE

As for me, except for an occasional heart attack, I feel as young as I ever did.

Nothing makes a man feel older than to hear a band coming up the street and not to have the impulse to rush downstairs and out on to the sidewalk.

DEATH

The surest way to make a monkey of a man is to quote him.

Death ends a life, not a relationship.

