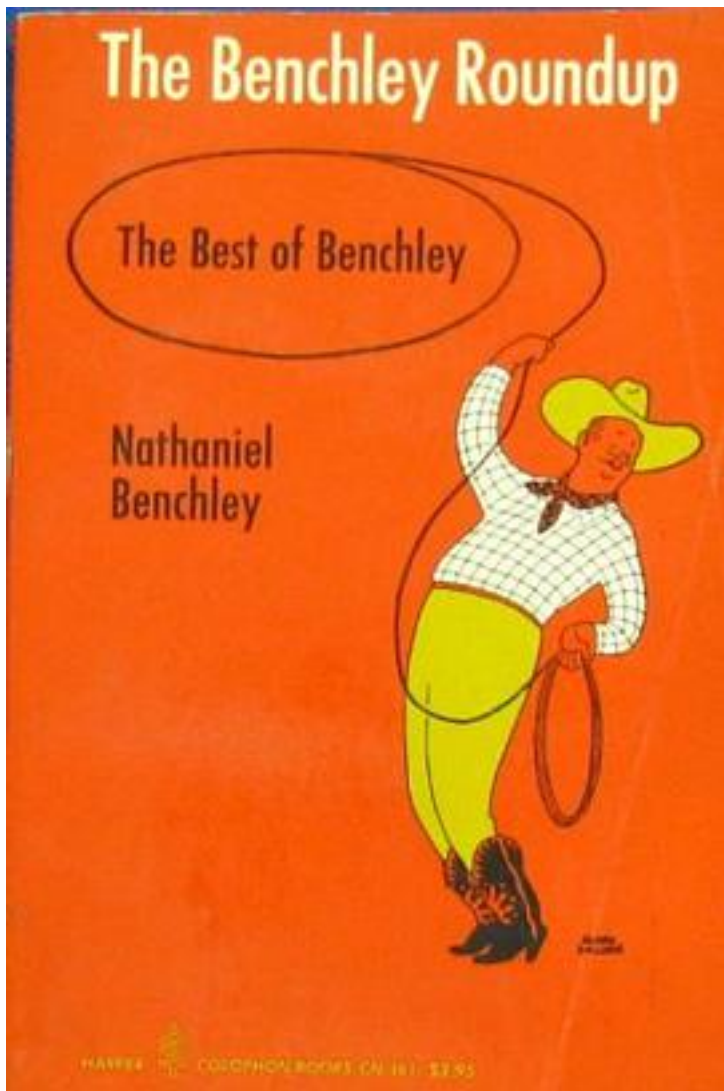


The Benchley Roundup Harper Colophon CN 461



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著者:Unknown

出版者:

出版时间:1976-1

装帧:

isbn:9780060904616

Foreword
ONE time during the recent war an Air Force sergeant accosted Robert Benchley in a bar and with little or no preamble said "I might as well tell you that I don't like your work." Benchley replied that he had moments of doubt himself and the sergeant then explained that he had hitched a ride from Africa to Italy on a cargo plane and that the only available sleeping space had been on bags that were full of overseas editions of Benchley's books. By the time they passed Sicily the man said he was so stiff and sore that he hoped never to hear the name Benchley again. "Try it yourself sometime" he concluded. "That stuff isn't funny when you have to sleep on it." In somewhat the same way I would suggest that The Benchley Roundup be read piecemeal rather than in one lump---picked up and put down as though you were waiting for a telephone call or for guests to arrive because after all the pieces had their original appeal as separate entities. In making my selection from about a thousand previously published pieces I read in fits and starts over a long period of time. Many people have tried to analyze Robert Benchley's particular form of humor and I would be the last one to add my tiny voice to that of the throng because I don't think it can be analyzed. It is sometimes mad, sometimes penetrating and sometimes based on nothing more than word associations and the only generalization that can be made with any degree of certainty is that it is different--or, if you will, unique. So let's just leave it that the humorous pieces collected here--written between 1915 and 1945--are those which seem to stand up best over the years. There were some that were much admired

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