

“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” / Ambrose Bierce

Ambrose Bierce may very well have been a man out of time. He was a cynical journalist writing at a time when social thought was dominated by optimism. He was the writer who introduced psychological studies in fiction into the American literary scene and was uncompromising in his refusal to bend to the requests of his publishers.

Bierce’s nickname was “Bitter Bierce.” Examine these items to see why:

Here’s a parody Bierce wrote of the National Anthem (“My Country Tis of Thee” was the anthem until 1931, when “The Star Spangled Banner” was officially made the national anthem.). He called his version the “Rational Anthem.”

My country, ‘tis of thee,
Sweet land of felony,
Of thee I sing--
Land where my fathers fried
Young witches and applied
Whips to the Quaker’s hide
And made him spring.

My knavish country, thee,
Land where the thief is free,
Thy laws I love;
I love thy thieving bills

That tap the people’s tills;
I love thy mob whose will’s
All laws above.

Let Federal employees
And rings rob all they please,
The whole year long.
Let office-holders make
Their piles and judges rake
Our coin. For Jesus’ sake,
Let’s all go wrong!

His book *The Devil’s Dictionary* reveals his pessimism as he redefines familiar words. Here are several examples:

Absurdity:

A statement or belief manifestly inconsistent with one’s own opinion.

Congratulation:

The civility of envy.

Conservative:

A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.

Discussion:

A method of confirming others in their errors.

Happiness:

An agreeable sensation arising from contemplating the misery of another.

History:

An account, mostly false, of events unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.

Philosophy:

A route of many roads leading from nowhere to nothing.

Saint:

A dead sinner revised and edited.

Zeal:

A certain nervous disorder afflicting the young and inexperienced.

Now create your own devilish definitions for these familiar terms. Select five of the fifteen and type your definitions for homework. Make sure to use a proper header. Then, select one of your definitions to put on an 8.5"x 11" piece of paper to share with the class. Please decorate it! **This will be due on Monday, February 3.**

Classroom

Boyfriend

Desk

Curfew

Examinations

Date

Grades

Engagement Ring

Report Card

Girlfriend

Research Paper

Good Time

Student

Love

Prom

Teacher