



The Devil's Dictionary

Ambrose Bierce (1842 – circa 1914)

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The Devil's Dictionary by Ambrose Bierce is a satirical dictionary that contains witty and ironic definitions of common English words. Published in 1906, it was originally titled *The Cynic's Word Book*. The book evolved over thirty years and was inspired in part by *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, which Bierce thought had comic opportunities. It had its origins in a submission Bierce made in 1875 to the *San Francisco News Letter* which contained comic definitions of 48 words, which were, ironically, left out of the original book. He continued the practice in columns for *The Argonaut* in 1877-78 and then contributed 88 installments of 15-20 words to *The Wasp* during 1881-86, using "The Devil's Dictionary" as its title. The series continued only sporadically during his term as editor of the *San Francisco Examiner* from 1887-

1906. The initial edition published in 1906 by Doubleday, Page and Company contained 500 words (A-L). A second edition appeared as "The Devil's Dictionary" in Volume 7 of his collected works and contained an additional 500 words (M-Z). This is the version used in these recordings. An expanded edition was released in 1967 that contained an additional 851 words that were thought lost after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake destroyed the archives of most publications.

Conservative (n.) A statesman who is enamoured of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.

Faith (n.) Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.

Lawyer (n.) One skilled in circumvention of the law.

Marriage (n.) A household consisting of a master, a mistress, and two slaves, making in all, two.

Ambrose Bierce (June 24, 1842 – circa 1914) was an American writer known for his fierce criticism and sardonic view of human nature. His motto was "nothing matters". His work ranged from journalism to fiction and satire. He is best known for the short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and "The Devil's Dictionary", a satirical lexicon. He was born the tenth of thirteen children to a poor but well educated couple in Ohio and raised in Indiana. He left home at age 15 to work for a newspaper and joined the Union Army at the outset of the Civil War. He was cited for bravery, saw action in numerous battles, and was wounded at the battle of Kennesaw Mountain. His experience at the Battle of Shiloh was the basis for several short stories and a memoir. After the war he traveled west with the army to San Francisco, where he eventually became famous for his contributions to a number of newspapers and periodicals, most notably the *San Francisco Examiner* of William Randolph Hearst. Thanks to his sarcasm and biting criticism, his journalism was often controversial. His fiction was largely overlooked during his lifetime, and dwelt on themes of war, death and cruelty. Today his war stories, which realistically depicted the horrors of war, are seen as important contributions to American literature. Bierce journeyed to Mexico in 1914 to cover the Mexican Revolution and disappeared while rumored to be traveling with rebel troops.