

***“My independence is my wealth; it is my literature.
I have written to please myself, no matter who should be hurt.”***
-Ambrose Bierce to Walter Neale



Ambrose Bierce (1843-?) lived life on his own terms, a true non-conformist who embodied the individualism Americans idealize. His life went in many directions, from soldier to writer to editor to family man to urban legend. Ambrose Bierce was a staunch maverick whose world viewpoint was much different than many of his peers.

The tenth of thirteen children, Bierce struggled against his rigid parents and turned to his radical abolitionist uncle for guidance. Uncle Lucius sent his nephew to the Kentucky Military Institute when Bierce was fifteen. Bierce discovered a knack for military training, topography, cartoon drawing, and journalism. Instead of returning to the family farm in Indiana, he became a “printer’s devil” (a quasi-apprentice) in another town.

At the age of eighteen, Bierce enlisted in the Union in the 9th Indiana Regiment. This was at the beginning of the war, when the “rebellion” was to be crushed in a matter of months. During the first three months, Bierce rescued a fellow officer and reenlisted, becoming a sergeant of volunteers and a talented map maker and pre-battle reconnaissance scout. He would fight in the war for about four years, until a head wound “crushed {his} skull like a broken walnut.” He was home briefly (but he never went back after his recuperation), but once recovered from his injuries and served as a Treasury Agent under his one of his heroes, General William Babcock Hazen.

After the war, Ambrose moved out west and faced a decision to either remain in the military or become a journalist. After the flip of a coin, Bierce went to San Francisco and worked at the Mint, all the while working on stories for publication. He caught the eye of a newspaper editor, and soon his column, “The Town Crier,” became well known throughout San Francisco for its scathing nature. He ended up writing for *Wasp*, where he wrote his most famous work, *The Devil’s Dictionary*. Nearing the end of his career, Bierce worked for William Randolph Hearst until he was sixty-six.

However, for all of the accolades Ambrose earned, his personal life was far from satisfactory. His wife, Molly Day, and their three children, often lived apart from Ambrose while he was writing. Bierce and Molly eventually separated. Ambrose outlived both of his sons: his oldest son, Day, was killed in a fight over a woman, and his other son, Leigh, died from complications due to alcoholism.

The end of Ambrose Bierce’s life is a mystery, and one that biographers and critics still argue over. He began his last journey traveling around to the battlefields he had fought on, making his way down the country into Mexico. He went to Mexico during the height of its revolution, and he was never heard from again.

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Ambrose Bierce List

Names: _____

Please fill in the following list, making sure to cite examples from Ambrose Bierce's short stories you read in your expert groups. We are going to use these lists to make a class list to hang up on the wall. Thank you

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