



An Occurrence at Owl-Creek Bridge

Ambrose Bierce

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Perhaps best known as a journalist and the author of the sardonic "The Devil's Dictionary", Bierce ranks alongside Poe as one of the fathers of American supernatural fiction.

As a young man he served in the Federal army during the American Civil War, participating in some of the most horrific battles, and this closeness to the horrors and excitement of war informed both his famed cynicism and his fiction. As S.T. Joshi says in his new Introduction to these, the complete supernatural stories, 'The element that fuses Bierce's tales . . . is the focus on what might be called the psychology and physiology of fear. . . . Bierce is relentless in dissecting the precise succession of emotions that transforms a sane, normal man . . . into a gibbering lunatic.' And Bierce's precise, pared down writing style provides a perfect foil to the Gothic content of his tales.

In his journalism, Bierce habitually ridiculed belief in ghosts, apparitions, and revenants; but he nonetheless continued to find death a powerful and troubling concept. It is significant that he does not provide an entry for 'Death' in The Devil's Dictionary: it was, perhaps, the one phenomenon he could not poke fun at. His own death remains an enduring mystery: the septuagenarian Bierce went missing during a trip to Revolutionary Mexico late in 1913, and no trace of him has ever been found.

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