



The Devil's Dictionary

Ambrose Bierce, Roy Morris Jr.

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History, n. an account mostly false, of events mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools. **Marriage**, n. The state or condition of a community consisting of a master, a mistress, and two slaves, making in all two. **Self-Esteem**, n. An erroneous appraisalment.

These caustic aphorisms, collected in *The Devil's Dictionary*, helped earn Ambrose Bierce the epithets Bitter Bierce, the Devil's Lexicographer, and the Wickedest Man in San Francisco. First published as *The Cynic's Word Book* (1906) and later reissued under its preferred name in 1911, Bierce's notorious collection of barbed definitions forcibly contradicts Samuel Johnson's earlier definition of a lexicographer as a harmless drudge. There was nothing harmless about Ambrose Bierce, and the words he shaped into verbal pitchforks a century ago--with or without the devil's help--can still draw blood today.

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