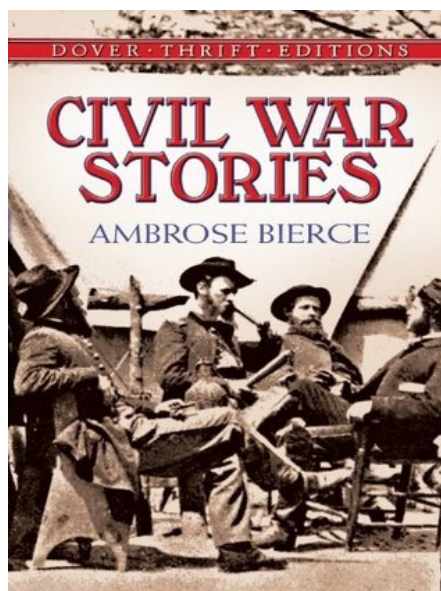




Civil War Stories

Ambrose Bierce

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Newspaperman, short-story writer, poet, and satirist, Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914) is one of the most striking and unusual literary figures America has produced. Dubbed "Bitter Bierce" for his vitriolic wit and biting satire, his fame rests largely on a celebrated compilation of barbed epigrams, *The Devil's Dictionary*, and a book of short stories (*Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, 1891). Most of the 16 selections in this volume have been taken from the latter collection.

The stories in this edition include: "What I Saw at Shiloh," "A Son of the Gods," "Four Days in Dixie," "One of the Missing," "A Horseman in the Sky," "The Coup de Grace," "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," "The Story of Conscience," "One Kind of Officer," "Chickamauga," and five more.

Bierce's stories employ a buildup of suggestive realistic detail to produce grim and vivid tales often disturbing in their mood of fatalism and impending calamity. Hauntingly suggestive, they offer excellent examples of the author's dark pessimism and storytelling power.

Civil War Stories Details

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From Reader Review Civil War Stories for online ebook

globulon says

Some books really give you a feel for a specific time and place. "The Tale of Two Cities" does that for me with the French Revolution. It's not so much that it gives a sophisticated intellectual understanding as that it gives a vivid impression of what it may have been like to live there at that time. Perhaps all really great books do this, but it seems to me some do it more than others. This collection of short stories by Bierce is one of them. In it I get a feel for what the actual people who fought the Civil War are like, how they are different from other people who fought other wars. It may not all be accurate although it is informed by personal experience, but none the less it throws a striking image on the mind of the times and personalities involved.

The stories themselves are for the most part driven by twist endings. Whether or not this is the highest form of the short story, the stories are readable and pungent. One comes away with a strong sense of how Bierce saw the war without him for the most part resorting to direct commentary. Very satisfying.

Steve Wang says

As bitter and nihilistic as it is elegantly written.

Ridgewalker says

This book was very well written and provides a wonderful view into the human aspect of the men on the side of the North that were in the battle. The formula surprise ending used in many of the stories can easily be forgiven because of the language and wit of the author. This is not a history book and does nothing to cover the battles, movement of troops or anything that you might have studied in school. It puts you in the shoes of an officer and tells you a story. This was a pleasure to read.

Caroline says

Well, I'm so glad I finally finished. In all of the stories, Ambrose Bierce obsesses over the morbid aspects of the Civil War (particularly the devastation of divided families) and spatters his descriptions with dark humor and twisted irony. Bierce's own service in the Civil War obviously inspired the morose and bitter themes that strung this book together. Many of the stories (especially "Chickamauga") were pretty disturbing, and I think I would have suffered from PTSD myself if the book had been any longer.

Ellis Knox says

With every review, someone had to mention he was known as "bitter Bierce" but I found him more ironic than bitter. He loved to have a character be unknowingly killed by a former benefactor, or for a villain to perform a good deed, and so on. I think today he'd be called realistic.

Short story writers do not benefit, I think, from being collected. Their stories do better when we encounter them at intervals, in various magazines--in other words, in the context for which they were written. Reading these stories in quick succession does tend to make one notice repetition (that boy was fond of the word "acclivity"), and this lessens the impact of each story. If you get this book, try reading no more than one story a month, with other reading in between.

All that said, the writing is a marvel, particularly in two respects. One is that realism. Some of his descriptions of dead bodies are horrifying, even at this long remove. He doesn't linger; the effect is more that of a jump scare in a movie, a sudden close-up that leaves you shaken.

Balancing these moments are wonderfully funny lines. Most are sardonic, and it helps to know the temper of the times, but boy howdy he gets off some zingers. His writing is the sort where you lean forward into the text, eager for the next vivid image or memorable vignette. Bierce does not keep the reader waiting.

Wayne Walker says

I was born and raised in Ohio, where we studied Ohio History in eighth grade at that time. Because of my interest in the subject, the teacher gave a used copy of an older edition of our textbook, which I still have. In the chapter on "Literature and the Arts," there was a section on "Later Ohio fiction writers" which said, "Ohio has continued to produce its full share of famous authors," one of whom was Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914). The following was written about Bierce. "Ambrose Bierce is the author of a limited number of short stories, among which are some of the best ever written by an American. After fighting in the Union Army, Bierce went to San Francisco and became a newspaper editor. He was noted for his biting comments on anything that seemed to him insincere. His column, which won for him the title of 'Bitter Bierce,' has had many imitators in modern newspapers."

Thus, when I saw this book of Civil War Stories by Bierce at the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Park gift shop in Missouri, I picked it up. It contains sixteen short stories about the Civil War taken from The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce, Volumes I and II, published in 1909, most of which come from his book Tales of Soldiers and Civilians of 1891. Some of the titles include "A Horseman in the Sky," "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," "Chickamauga," "A Son of the Gods," "What I Saw of Shiloh," "Four Days in Dixie," and "One of the Missing," plus nine more. It does not have one of his most famous Civil War stories, "A Bivouac for the Dead." All of them are filled with the vitriolic wit and biting satire that earned Bierce his nickname. Most of them involve some kind of irony, often with a surprise ending, and a few of them might fall into the category of the macabre, ala Alfred Hitchcock.

Many of the descriptions of the battles are rather graphic, and one story involves a suicide. The "d" and "h" words are used occasionally, along with some taking the Lord's name in vain (e.g., "my God," "by God," "good God"). There is one reference to drinking wine. These dark and vivid tales are not for young children, but teens and adults who are Civil War buffs might appreciate them. A lot of the stories I found interesting, but a few just did not make a great deal of sense to me. In 1913, Bierce, who had become increasingly disenchanted with his own life due to the divorce from his wife and the deaths of his two sons, went to Mexico to meet the revolutionary leader Pancho Villa and to observe firsthand the Civil War there. After a "farewell letter," nothing more was heard from or about Bierce, and the circumstances of his death remain a mystery. It is generally assumed that he died at the siege of Ojinaga in January of 1914.

Matthew says

God he's good!!!!Glad this is pared down to a few of his best - An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge is as good as they say! His ideas on death are complex and almost contradictory. Crazy coincidences crop up often and are a definite motif .And the horror in his stories still stands up today- the description of the retreating wounded soldiers at Chicamauga was insane. I'm still thinking about the extraordinary circumstances his characters are placed. Loved the story Parker Addison, Philosopher as well. I'll reread this someday...

Ashkan Ansari says

To me, Ambrose Bierce is not only a writer. He is trying to propose a thought. A thought that pioneers like Jean Paul Sartre developed it; a magnificent balance between humanity and brutality. He is adopting a short story form for that which I do believe each one of them is more than a novel. I am speechless!

Ellen says

If you want to read vivid descriptions of the front line of the Civil War, read these stories. If you want to read dark, biting satire, read these stories. If you want to read something that makes you say, "That's effed up!" read these stories. If you're looking for happy-go-lucky stories about rabbits searching for rainbows to tell your children before they go to bed, look elsewhere.

Sharon Barrow Wilfong says

Ambrose Bierce was an enigmatic man. He wrote for newspapers, short stories, and poetry. His writing was colored by acerbic wit and more than a touch of bitterness. He traveled to Mexico in 1913. In a farewell letter he wrote, "If you hear of my being stood up against a Mexican stone wall and shot to rags, please know that I think it a pretty good way to depart this life..."

That was the last heard of Bierce. It is assumed that he died in the siege of Ojinaga in January 1914.

This collection of stories are considered some of the best of Bierce's fiction. They are inspired largely from his own experiences in the war. However, Bierce's writing isn't worth reading because he is an authority on the Civil War but rather because of his ability to cause the reader to dive into each scene and experience along with the characters the events that take place.

Perhaps he is a little verbose on detail but that seems to be a characteristic of writers of that day. Another common story technique that Bierce uses is to create a story line that appears to have no arc. It simply builds

until the final paragraph, sometimes the last sentence, where the full force of the story arrives home to astound the reader.

My one criticism is that in some of the stories the difficulty for the protagonist could have been avoided if he had only employed common sense. In one such story a man does amazingly foolish things because, as it turns out, some idjit of a woman back home "hoped he wouldn't turn out to be a coward as Captain so and so claimed." Really? We counter that with risking our life to the point of finally losing it for nothing? How about just finding a new girlfriend?

Another story has a Captain so blindly following orders that he knowingly engages in friendly fire because ordered to "shoot ahead no matter what" by a superior who had also told him to never question an order.

But there are also some real gems. Parker Addison, Philosopher is my favorite. A Union spy engages in a witty, belligerent repartee with a Confederate General who has him in custody. The wit and belligerence is all on the side of the spy. The general merely asks formal questions. He even smiles at some of the remarks. The spy apparently has no belief in any kind of afterlife and thumbs his nose at his imminent death. Until he is unexpectedly faced with it. The ending is tense and the action lightening-speed paced culminating to a surprisingly peaceful end. Well, at least for one of them.

Bierce doesn't spare the reader the horrors of war. There is no romanticism here. Nevertheless his stories are told with rich descriptions and show the honor and respect due to both sides as they each act according to their convictions. Probably the most poignant of his stories deal with the dividing of families as each choose the side they serve, sometime with harrowing results.

Anyone interested in Civil War history and plot twist play in the style of Poe, O Henry or even Lovecraft will enjoy this small collection of short stories by a man who, sadly, lived through enough of the war to become tired of living.

Stacey says

I really enjoyed this collection of stories. I stumbled across an article on 6/24/17 'the 175th anniversary of the birth of Ambrose Bierce' and knew I had to read something he wrote. He fought in the Civil war for the Union and the stories reflect his experiences and there's NO doubt which side he was on. I think he's a great author with insight about the psyche of a soldier, humor, and writing a short story ending with a punch are his strong suit. Bravo, Mr. Bierce and thank you for your service!

Drew Martin says

Ambrose Bierce. A literary figure who seems forgotten to most modern readers. Perhaps it's the time in which he wrote and lived, or the mysterious end to his life. A fate as mysterious as many of the stories he wrote. I won't give a complete biography, but he lived an interesting life and left the world under remarkable circumstances. I'll let you, the reader, discover more if you so choose. If you like Poe, Lovecraft, and the

Twilight Zone, there's a good chance you'll enjoy Bierce. He writes with an eloquent style of prose and uses a twist ending in many of his stories. In this review of his collection titled Civil War Stories, my review will be a bit different. Bierce was a Union soldier during the Civil War, and all these stories share the setting. Instead of reviewing the collection as a whole, I'll write a short review of each individual story in the order they appear. Then I'll try to sum the collection up at the end...

To read the rest of this review go to <https://drewmartinwrites.wordpress.co...>

Jackmccullough says

Civil War Stories is a collection of short stories drawn on Ambrose Bierce's experiences as an officer in the Civil War. His writing demonstrates his true respect and admiration for the heroism he saw; contempt for cowardice; his appreciation and, yes, admiration for dedication to duty; and his outrage at the tragedies war brings about. There can be no doubt that this is a powerful antiwar document.

Today if they remember him at all, most people remember Bierce, a well-known journalist and writer in his time, only as the author of *The Devil's Dictionary*, a satirical compendium of the English language. ("Bore: A person who speaks when you wish him to listen".)

In Civil War Stories we read of Bierce's experiences in the battle of Shiloh, which are every bit as terrifying as you would expect, an unauthorized excursion behind enemy lines, and the simple heroism that seemingly ordinary men exhibit out of a sense of duty. As I said, while he admires their brave actions he never ignores the sometimes tragic consequences of those actions or the unbearable suffering of the common soldiers. For example, from "What I Saw of Shiloh":

"The dense forests wholly or partly in which were fought so many battles of the Civil War, lay upon the earth in each autumn a thick deposit of dead leaves and stems, the decay of which forms a soil of surprising depth and richness. In dry weather the upper stratum is as inflammable as tinder. A fire once kindled in it will spread with a slow, persistent advance as far as local conditions permit, leaving a bed of light ashes beneath which the less combustible accretions of previous years will smolder until extinguished by rains. In many of the engagements of the war the fallen leaves took fire and roasted the fallen men."

These events happened a hundred fifty years ago, yet the modern reader can relate to the dehumanizing experiences of Bierce's soldiers, even though they were engaged in an unquestionably justified pursuit. I suspect anyone with modern military experience will also recognize the occasional incompetence and obliviousness to reason of the chain of command and the civilian leadership who like to dabble in military affairs of which they have little understanding.

Written in the nineteenth century, the stories are written in a style that may be slightly distracting, and when read at one sitting Bierce's fondness for the surprise ending can get repetitive. These are the reasons I didn't give him five stars. Definitely worth reading.

Adelaide McGinnity says

This is an excellent anthology of a diverse assortment of tales that do a remarkable job of capturing the drama, tension, and psychology of those, like Bierce, who participated in the horror that was the Civil War. While *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* is the most famous of these stories, I found the highlight of the

collection to be Bierce's own recollection of his participation in the Battle of Shiloh, a battle that is regrettably little known today in spite of being at the time the bloodiest battle ever fought on American soil.

P.E. says

Matching soundtrack :

Galactic Funk - DJ Spooky

Rebirth of a Nation - DJ Spooky
