

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

Ambrose Bierce



Ambrose Bierce

- Disillusioned with greed and conceit of times
- Reporter—broke story on railroad fraud
- Soldier—war as shattering illusions—served during Sherman's March to Sea
- Devil's Dictionary—ironic and sarcastic definitions
- Goes to Mexico—Never heard from again

Devil's Dictionary

- GUNPOWDER, *n.*
 - An agency employed by civilized nations for the settlement of disputes which might become troublesome if left unadjusted.
- PEACE, *n.*
 - In international affairs, a period of cheating between two periods of fighting.

Devil's Dictionary

CAT

- A soft indestructible automaton provided by Nature to be kicked when things go wrong in the domestic circle.

LOVE

- A temporary insanity curable by marriage.

PRAY

- To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled on behalf of a single petitioner confessedly unworthy.

Sniglets

- Blivett (blih' vit) - v. To turn one's pillow over and over, looking for the cool spot.
- Cheedle (chee-dul) n. The orange residue left on your fingers when you eat cheese puffs.
- Cubelo (kyew' beh lo) - n. The one cube left by the person too lazy to refill the ice tray.
- Dillrelict (dil rel' ikt) - n. The last pickle in the jar that avoids all attempts to be captured.

Sniglets

- Frust (frust) n. The small line of debris that refuses to be swept onto the dust pan and keeps backing a person across the room until he finally decides to give up and sweep it under the rug.
- Sark (sark) - n. The marks left on one's ankle after wearing tube socks all day.
- Sloovers (slew-vuhrz n. pl. Remnants of soap too small to use, but too big to throw away.

Realism

- Post Civil War
 - 625, 000 Dead
 - Battle of Westport = 30,000 / 3,000 Dead
- Depict life without idealizing
- Analyze social relationships
- Concentrate on contemporary life
- Uses vernacular = common and utilitarian language
- Create portrait of landscapes and people, like fashions and manners

- Give the background of Peyton Farquhar and explain why he is at the bridge. What does this reveal about the physical and temporal setting of the story?
- Give some examples of how Bierce creates a heightened sense of reality on the bridge—how does he exaggerate perception?
- How does perspective shift throughout the story (use the subheads to guide you)? How does Bierce play with your perception of the “occurrence?”
- Describe the scene that plays out in part III. Recap the story of escape.
- Define situational irony. How is the ending ironic? What clues throughout the story tip you off about the end of the story?

Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

- Define situational irony
- Who is at the bridge? Why at the bridge?
- Manipulation of perception
- Tip offs that Peyton “crossed over”
- Use of perspective and diction/syntax shifts
- Give another example of a film or book which manipulates time or plays with perception

NOTEBOOK

- NOTEBOOK
 - Create a Sniglet or a Devil's Dictionary Entry
 - Sniglet = new word to describe something for which there is no current name
 - Devil's Dictionary = sarcastic interpretation of a current word