

TAILPIECE

THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY

Ambrose Bierce

A sardonic sample ...

- A. Adamant, *n.* A mineral frequently found beneath a corset. Soluble in solicitate of gold.
- B. Beard, *n.* The hair that is commonly cut off by those who justly execrate the absurd Chinese custom of shaving the head.
- C. Contempt, *n.* The feeling of a prudent man for an enemy who is too formidable safely to be opposed.
- D. Debauchee, *n.* One who has so earnestly pursued pleasure that he has had the misfortune to overtake it.
- E. Exhort, *v.t.* In religious affairs, to put the conscience of another upon the spit and roast it to a nut-brown discomfort.
- F. Fiddle, *n.* An instrument to tickle human ears by friction of a horse's tail on the entrails of a cat.
- G. Grammar, *n.* A system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet of the self-made man, along the path by which he advances to distinction.

H.	Harbor, <i>n.</i>	A place where ships taking shelter from storms are exposed to the fury of the customs.
I.	Imposter, <i>n.</i>	A rival aspirant to public honours.
J.	Jealous, <i>adj.</i>	Unduly concerned about the preservation of that which can be lost only if not worth keeping.
K.	Kilt, <i>n.</i>	A costume sometimes worn by Scotsmen in America and Americans in Scotland.
L.	Loquacity, <i>n.</i>	A disorder which renders the sufferer unable to curb his tongue when you wish to talk.
M.	Malefactor, <i>n.</i>	The chief factor in the progress of the human race.
N.	Neighbour, <i>n.</i>	One whom we are commanded to love as ourselves, and who does all he knows how to make us disobedient.
O.	Observatory, <i>n.</i>	A place where astronomers conjecture away the guesses of their predecessors.
P.	Pantaloons, <i>n.</i>	A nether habiliment of the adult civilized male. The garment is tubular and unprovided with hinges at the points of flexion. Supposed to have been invented by a humorist. Called 'trousers' by the enlightened and 'pants' by the unworthy.
Q.	Quiver, <i>n.</i>	A portable sheath in which the ancient statesman and the aboriginal lawyer carried their lighter arguments.
R.	Ribaldry, <i>n.</i>	Censorious language' by another concerning oneself.
S.	Satiety, <i>n.</i>	The feeling that one has for the plate after one has eaten its contents.
T.	Turkey, <i>n.</i>	A large bird whose flesh when eaten on certain religious anniversaries has the peculiar property of attesting piety and gratitude.

- U. Ultimatum, *n.* In diplomacy, a last demand before resorting to concession.
- V. Virtues, *n. pl.* Certain abstentions.
- W. Weather, *n.* The climate of an hour. A permanent topic of conversation among persons whom it does not interest, but who have inherited the tendency to chatter about it from naked arboreal ancestors whom it keenly concerned.
- X. Words beginning with X are Grecian and will not be defined in this standard English dictionary.
- Y. Yesterday, *n.* The infancy of youth, the youth of manhood, the entire past of age.
- Z. Zeal, *n.* A certain nervous disorder afflicting the young and inexperienced. A passion that goeth before a sprawl.

(Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*. New York: Dover, 1958)

K.R.