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The Fall of the Republic and Other Political Satires

Ambrose Bierce

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The Fall of the Republic and Other Political Satires Ambrose Bierce
A prolific journalist and author well known for his tales of horror and stories about the Civil War, Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?) was also a mordant commentator on the political, social, legal, and intellectual failings of his countrymen. Throughout his career, he remained an unapologetic curmudgeon who took a dim view of everything from trade unions and the temperance movement to Americans' insatiable thirst for money. Even the very principles of democracy did not escape his skeptical pen.

This volume brings together a generous sampling of Bierce's scathing fictional satires, many of which have not been reprinted since their first appearance a century ago. In writing these works, Bierce often employed fanciful devices, such as assuming the perspective of a future historian looking back on the follies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among such selections, "Ashes of the Beacon" is perhaps the finest, with its trenchant comments on socialism, anarchy, and the problems of republican government. In another fictional piece, "The Land Beyond the Blow," Bierce recounts voyages to an imaginary world in the style of Gulliver's Travels, commenting on bizarre political and social customs that, not coincidentally, mirror America's own.

The volume also includes a rich array of still-relevant nonfiction essays on such topics as capital punishment, the evils of insurance, and the unpleasant disposition of the canines that roam the nation's capital. These pieces reflect many of the same concerns Bierce addresses in his fictional satires, albeit in a more direct way.

The selections are drawn from contributions to newspapers and magazines and from Bierce's Collected Works, and include many unsigned editorials that Bierce wrote for the San Francisco Examiner. Editors S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz have thoroughly annotated the pieces and have written a substantial introduction outlining the aspects of Bierce's political thought. The resulting volume is essential reading for anyone who appreciates lively commentary desgined to puncture the hypocrisies and sentimentality of Bierce's contemporaries, whatever their beliefs. It fills a major gap in Bierce scholarship and allows us to see the world as the notorious cynic did.

The Editors: S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz have collaborated extensively on books devoted to Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft, and other literary figures. The edited Bierce's A Sole Survivor: Bits of Autobiography, also published by the University of Tennessee Press, and an annotated edition of Bierce's Devil's Dictionary.

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