



Poetry and Commentary of
Ambrose Bierce, Duncan McPherson,
Dr. Charles William Doyle, and Other
Critics of Santa Cruz, California:
Chronology of Newspaper Articles and
Documentary Evidence of Their Relationship

“Things Made Immortal by the Kiss of Rhyme”

*Compiled by
Stanley D. Stevens*

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Compiled by

Stanley D. Stevens
Santa Cruz, California

July 1, 1988; Revised May 9, 2019

Notes:

A correction needs to be made before going further; it's not a major point, but worthy of noting: Dr. Charles William Doyle died on May 2, 1903, *not the 6th* as I had earlier noted. This error came to light after reading his obituaries. The Cemetery records book that has been compiled by local genealogists was done from various sources, apparently wrong in this case. Nevertheless, May 2, 1903, is the correct date.

R. M. BELL, whose contributions appear herein, was Robert M. Bell, physician, of San Francisco.

Josephine Clifford McCrackin, who wrote for *Overland Monthly*, inter alia, and also contributed to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* newspaper, as an occasional and later as a hired reporter, was one of the writers whom Bierce visited at her place in the Santa Cruz Mountains on occasion. Her place was called *Monte Paraiso*. See Stephen Payne's book *A Howling Wilderness: the Summit Road of the Santa Cruz Mountains 1850-1906* [Santa Cruz : Loma Prieta Publishing Company, 1978.] That biography of Mrs. McCrackin provides the context for the material that appears in the following:

In 1913, George Wharton James published *The Woman Who Lost Him and Tales of the Army Frontier* by Josephine Clifford McCrackin, with Introduction by Ambrose Bierce [Pasadena, Cal. : George Wharton James, 1913].

Take notice of the photos which include Bierce, and the photo of McCrackin leaning on the fireplace in the middle of the rubble of her burned-out Monte Paraiso; she is draped by Ambrose Bierce's cape.

A November 1973, article which appeared in *American West* (10:6 34-39, 63), by Dale L Walker, was brought to my attention by a colleague (Donald T. Clark) and I thought it is most

useful. It provided me with additional context for understanding the Bierce mistique. It also has useful bibliographic information.

Chronology of Newspaper Articles and Documentary Evidence of their relationship.

ITEM #1

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

March 2, 1894, p. 2, c. 4

IN COURT

Bierce in Examiner.

In another department of the paper I mentioned last week the litigation of Col. R. H. Savage [Dick Savage of Santa Cruz], author, against Mr. F. Tennyson Neeley, publisher. Since then I have received some “documents in the case” showing it to be the most important and notable of its kind that ever came before an American court. In one feature it is, indeed, believed to be unique, being the only instance in which an author has gone into court and compelled a publisher to make an accounting for royalties withheld, or pay the sum claimed as due. It is not likely to be the last case of the kind—not by many. Several authors—among them Charles Warren Stoddard—have signified an intention to go up against this same pirate of the Spanish Main and bear a hand at the job of degorging him of his plunder. For four years he has been publishing Stoddard’s “Lazy Letters from Low Latitudes,” and has paid him in royalties the gorgeous sum of fifty-one dollars and ten cents! As one of the robber barons of the book-writing industry, I extend to Mr. Stoddard the itching palm of fellowship, and declare him a worthy member of our millionaire combine.

[NOTE: I believe the bracketed information in the above article was supplied by the Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel, Duncan McPherson, Editor/Publisher.]

[The same article appeared in the *Santa Cruz Evening Sentinel* (same publisher) on March 3, 1897, p. 2, c.4]

[A poem by Richard Henry Savage, “The Little Lady of Lagunitas,” appears in the *Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel* for November 16, 1895, p.2, c.3.]

ITEM # 2

Santa Cruz Sentinel

"ED. SENTINEL: — When Mr. Bierce, in criticising Dr. Doyle's sonnet, objects to the use of "doth observe," a "bastard indicative" made use of by Byron, Shakespeare, Keats, Tenyson, Milton (for example), there is borne in upon us with the burst of a revelation the severely exclusive character of Mr. Bierce's critical faculty. How hard it must be for a man of his sensitive nature to get any enjoyment out of this poor little world of ours, to whom even "most of the great sonnets of our tongue are illegitimate," and "the king of them all being quite irritating in that way." Sonnet writers like Keats, Wordsworth and Shakespeare, capable of giving pleasure to the rest of us ignorant mortals, apparently only irritate poor Mr. Bierce, since in some of their sonnets "the octet comprises three rhymes," or even four occasionally. These latter Mr. Bierce presumably never reads. To him there is, it seems, but one correct form for the sonnet.

As to Orpheus, there are those who would differ from Mr. Bierce even on that point. Orpheus did not, as a matter of fact, succeed in finally winning Eurydice from the shades, and it is easily supposable, with just a trifle more of imagination than Mr. Bierce is able to throw into the subject, that the hard condition, through the non-fulfilment of which she was obliged to return, may have been imposed on account of a lack of complete sympathy with Orpheus' music, on the part of those who had the matter in charge. This may quite possibly, as Dr. Doyle suggests, have been due to the imperfect character of the instruments of Orpheus' day.

When Mr. Bierce says that "in our tongue 'er' and 'ur' have not the same sound," to what tongue does he refer? Does he mean that spoken by the inmates of the Examiner sanctum, or is he modestly making use of the editorial "our" in referring to his own personal pronunciation? He can hardly be thinking of American speech. Webster, it is true, while considering that "the most approved style of pronunciation" of the e in such words as term, mercy, is something between the e in met and u in urge, admits that "many cultivated speakers both in England and America give the e in such words the full sound of u in urge." Without consulting further authorities it may be said that under these circumstances it will be a difficult task for Mr. Bierce to try to disseminate the Examiner sanctum speech among the common people, especially when among the poets examples like the following can be easily found:

Returned rhyming with *discerned*, (Coleridge); *hers* with *stirs*, (J. R. Lowell); *her* with *myrrh*, (Edwin Arnold); *perverse* with *curse*, (Browning); *universe* with *curse*, (Shelley); and so on *ad libitum*.

While it may be well occasionally to consult metrical chiropodists if the feet in one's lines need attending to, yet there is one thing that other poets may learn from Dr. Doyle's experience. That is, not to submit their literary efforts to those who can see in the great masters of poetry only metrical defects and faults of phrasing; in other words, not to cast their pearls before — those who will submit them to a nitric acid test, which never was a fair test for a pearl.

One question I should like to ask in closing. Who is this Mr. Ambrose Bierce? Is he known outside of his Examiner writings, or is he merely one of those writers for the press to whom everything is gall that comes to their pen; who willingly sacrifice friendship, truth, anything for the sake of a witty paragraph — a class of writers from which American journalism is suffering at present. Or is he, on the other hand, a writer of ability led into evil ways by the terrible demands made on the paid contributors of a great daily? I ask to enlighten my own ignorance, being a new comer in these parts.

ITEM # 3

Santa Cruz Surf

November 13, 1894, p. 2, c. 2 & 3 "THE SONNET.'

It seems an impertinence for any one so late in the day to try and say anything new about the sonnet. Books and exhaustive articles by scholars and poets and critics have been written about it by the score, and therefore nothing new need be expected here.

A lamentable lack of knowledge seems to prevail amongst sonneteers and their readers about the form of the sonnet. The great English critic, Mr. Theodore Watts, who was assigned to write the articles on Poetry and the Sonnet for the Encyclopedia Britannica, and may therefore be considered an authority, says that there are four classes of sonnets in English literature.

First, the sonnet of Shakespeare consisting of three quatrains of alternate rhymes and a concluding couplet.

Secondly, the sonnet of Milton in which he blends the octave and the sestet with the daring of a genius that scorns all laws.

Thirdly, the sonnet of Petrarch, which consists of an octave of two rhymes and a sestet of two or three rhymes. The law regulating the arrangement of the rhymes in the octave is *never* to be infringed; it requires the first, fourth, fifth and eighth lines to rhyme and the second, third, sixth and seventh. The rhymes of the sestet can be arranged as the writer pleases.

Fourthly, the sonnets of irregular form. It is in this class that some of the greatest sonnets in the English language have been written, but it is true also that the mere sonneteer as distinguished from the sonnet writer almost invariably uses this form. Mr. Theodore Watts was evidently led to admit the claims of this last class of poems to be called sonnets from his personal affection for Rossetti, whose troubles and discomforts in his last years Mr. Watts greatly ameliorated, at whose death bed he was present, and whose memoirs he was assigned to write.

Rossetti was particularly sensitive to hostile criticism. An article that appeared in 1871 in the Contemporary Review, which was written by Mr. Robert Buchanan, against the school of "fleshly poets" led by Swinburne and Rossetti sank into the very soul of the latter and embittered the last eleven years of his life; he fell into a condition of melancholia, and Rossetti's friends always claimed that Buchanan's article was the primary cause of the depression of his spirits that ended so disastrously.

Rossetti published altogether one hundred and sixty sonnets, of which fifty-four were irregular in form, having three rhymes instead of two in the octave, and as Mr. Watts' article on the Sonnet appeared during Rossetti's life time, and, as nobody could have known better than Watts how morbidly sensitive Rossetti was to criticism, it is fair to presume he created a fourth class of sonnets to include his friend's poems and thereby save him any pang that might have

and blames,
Deserve a roasting in the fires of hell.
You know the moods of love and mirth and
grief,
And o'er emotion's realms hold ample sway?
What, *you* a singer with that piping voice?
O, cease your shrillings, give us some relief!
I'll have you *criticised* ! yes that's the way —
It's worse than hell, and will my friends
rejoice.

C. W. DOYLE

ITEM # 4

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

November 28, 1894, p. 2, c. 2

Ambrose Bierce in the Examiner.

R. M. Bell, of Santa Cruz, has struck a streak of hard luck. Dr. C. W. Doyle, of his town, a clever man with a neatish knack at rhyming, sent me a manuscript sonnet, asking me to print it if it seemed good enough, and point out it[s] faults. The sonnet was printed and what I conceived to be its faults duly pointed out. Thereupon ensued the Bell, stirring his long clapper in the SENTINEL in championship of the injured poet and fierce denunciation of the presumptuous critic. Straightway appears the smiling Dr. Doyle, in the *Surf*, gracefully acknowledging the justice of my criticism, saying pleasant things about me and tranquilly repudiating the brazen slambanging of the Bell. After this amusing incident who shall say that the rough and thorny path of the luckless satirist has not, here and again, short reaches ordered with meadowsweet and gallingale. Occasionally, too, it proffers something soft and warm to sit upon and rest when wayweary—Mr. Bell, for example.

Among other objections to Dr. Doyle's sonnet, I based one upon the "illegitimacy of its form." That roused the sleeping swine in Mr. Bell's upper entrail and evoked from the heart of Dr. Doyle the following ingenious lines in proof that he can write a legitimate sonnet if he choose:

A SONNETEER TO AN ILLEGITIMATE
SONNET.

Hence, bastard bantling, to your sulphur-
ous cell !

Your mincing phrases scarce support
your claims
To be admitted to the tempered flames
Where soaring Shelley's, Wordsworth's,
sonnets dwell;
That you should jostle them were far from
well.
Your rawness, and your "doths," and
other shames,
Which every school boy sees, and scorns,
and blames,
Deserve a roasting in the fires of hell.
You know the moods of love and mirth
and grief,
And o'er emotion's realms hold ample
sway?
What, *you* a singer with that piping
voice?
O, cease your shrillings — give us some re-
lief!
I'll have you *criticised* ! — yes that's the
way —
It's worse than hell and will my
friends rejoice.

ITEM # 5

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

November 28, 1894, p. 2, c. 4

[Written for the Sentinel.]

"SONNET."

When the gods gave us, pitying man's sad
plight.
The gift of wit, they said, "O man, behold
An influence mightier than fear or gold.
See that thou use this weapon for the
right!"
Since then, what wrongs have fallen by
its might?

Foul superstition flees the conqueror
bold;
Corruption's walls are leveled, false-
hoods old
Are slain; long prisoned worth is brought
to light.
Yet 'gainst things high and holy when it
is turned,
Their pure light, glinting on the blade
of wit,
Smites him who wields; each time by
eyes thus burned
Less clearly the heights of truth can be
discerned,
Buft poisoned with coarse vulgarity, 'tis
fit
That he's most injured who has struck
with it.

R. M. BELL.

ITEM # 6

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

November 12, 1895, p. 2, c.2

“Ambrose Bierce, the hired critic of the Examiner, was at his post in that sheet last Sunday. This fact proves the falsity of the statement that he had been discharged. It may be that his name got mixed up with some discharged Bierce. Possibly, the absence of the Bierce stuff from the columns of the Examiner for a number of Sundays led some one to conclude that the Monarh of metropolitan dailies had given him the grand bounce. Not so, no so. Hearst has money, and the men who write for him and want to get it will not criticise in the direction he wants to throw taffy.”

ITEM # 7

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

November 14, 1895, p. 2, c. 1 [no head] “It is said that the intellectual powers of Ambrose Bierce, the hired critic of the Examiner, are waning. This is unfortunate. The country needs a dyspeptic scold, and he is a good one, Shakespear [sic, no "e" printed in original. sds], Byron, Burns, Longfellow, all had their critics, and smaller writers must have theirs, some one to bite 'em, “fleas ad infinitum.””

ITEM # 8

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

November 27, 1895, p. 2, c. 1: [no head] “Mr. Bierce has run afoul of a victim who will not stay crushed. The victim’s name is William Greer Harrison, who criticizes the writings of the satirist with much acumen, if not with the bitterness that Bierce criticizes his. The fact seems to be that Bierce is no longer a Bogie Man to people who write, act, think, do business and mind their own. He has played that role for years, but he has lost his power to scare. — Alameda Argus.

And yet Bierce has apes and admirers among a class of men who think the power to abuse the best evidence of genius. If this is genius, genius he has.”

[The latter comment is typical of McPherson’s style. He frequently ran clips from other newspapers and then added his own comment. sds]

[PREFACE TO ITEM # 9:]

[It seems that R. M. Bell was not the only critic of Bierce in Santa Cruz.]

Mark Tapley wrote for the *Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel* from his location in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Highland. He wrote a regular column called: “Sense & Nonsense”, as well as poetry and criticism. For an example, on November 28, 1895 (p. 3, c.4) he published a poem directed against Phil Francis, author/editor of a book about Santa Cruz County, [*Beautiful*] *Santa Cruz County* (San Francisco : H. S. Crocker Co., 1896). Again, on December 21, 1895 (p.2,c.3 SCDS) he followed a poem written about “Bonita May” with this: “And now mark tapley has a few words to say to Phil Francis (the cheerful idiot)”, — a poem for Francis. I do not know the chronological span of his association with SCDS. On November 13, 1895 (p.3, c.4) he wrote “A Farewell Social...” in which he said that “This will be the last letter I can write from this place [Highland, in the Santa Cruz Mountains, about 15 miles from Santa Cruz, and very near the home of Josephine Clifford McCrackin and the Hotel Bohemia where Bierce stayed when he visited the latter.], as my vacation is at an end and I must now travel, but I shall continue to write for the Sentinel from the places I visit on my tour around the world...” And, on November 19th (p. 2, c.3) he wrote “Good-Bye to Highland” and a poem “Santa Cruz, the Beautiful City by the Sea.”

ITEM # 9

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

December 5, 1895, p. 1, c. 5 & 6

“Sense and Nonsense by Mark Tapley.”

Editor Bowman of the Los Gatos Mail has a temper of such sweetness that comb honey is used in Los Gatos for pickling cucumbers. Two weeks ago I referred to his paper inadvertently as The Times, and that heavenly man did not resent it! Small wonder that he is imposed on by the mountain love-poets. However, he has taken action for his relief by appointing me to guard his peace; and I if I do not clean the whole Santa Cruz range of the sighers and dreamers that infact its jungles I’m Dunc. Macpherson, the Upward Oswump of the Mount of Song!

So writes the once brilliant wit and famous journalist, Ambrose Bierce, in last Sunday's Examiner.

What a task for a man whose articles need to be a household word, but who for the last few years has substituted blasphemy for logic, personal abuse for criticism, and vulgar and unmeaning words for the beautiful sentences that used to flow from his masterly pen.

The man who in days gone by dared to expose wrong, ridicule folly and champion the right is now going to bring some of the remaining force of his critical abilities to bear upon the simple utterances of love-sick swains or ambitious school boys, who write their little rhymes or unpretentious essays to their county paper for the pleasure of seeing their names in print, or to gain an approving smile from their mother or sweetheart.

Verily whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. But simple as this task may appear to the Goliath of journalism, I hope that I shall live to see him succeed in awakening a fearless young David who, trusting for guidance in the all-wise and omnipotent Creator whom his boasting opponent defies and blasphemes, will boldly stand out and give him battle, and perhaps even find a pebble of truth that will enter the supposed invulnerable armor of his haughty antagonist.

For the Santa Cruz mountains are infested with poets and dreamers, as Mr. Bierce puts it, but they no longer live in jungles, for the hills and valleys are now dotted with Christian homes occupied by manly man and pure and devoted women, and blessed and brightened by the merry laughter and innocent prattle of loving and happy children, and the very air they breathe instills the love of all that is good and beautiful into their grateful hearts.

They are nature's true poets, peculiar to the romantic spot in which they have chosen to dwell, and the great critic might as well try to hush the countless feathered songsters that sing from the branches of the soaring redwood trees upon which they love to cluster as to drown with the discordant croaking of his ground-out rhyme and prose the happy songs that swell from the toneful souls of the poetical mountainers.

With all his bitter disdain for the poetry that other people write, Mr. Bierce ventures to attempt to warble occasionally himself, and as he has been so unmerciful to our poets and dreamers let us see what kind of a song-bird he is. Here is a sample of the melodious manner in which he sings, and which he must consider to be one of his master-pieces, as he inflicts it for the second time on his readers:

No doubt, McAllister, you can explain
How honorable 'tis to lie for gain.
Provided only that the jury's made
To understand that lying is your trade.
A hundred thousand volumnes, broad and
flat.
(The Bible not include) prove that
Have been put forth, but still the doubt
remains
If God has read them with befitting pains,
No Morrow could get justice, you'll declare,
If none who knew him foul affirmed him
fair.

Ingenious man! how easy 'tis to raise
An argument to justify the course that pays!

* * * * *

The Bible not include. Great Scott!

Surely this is a compositor's mistake; he never could have been guilty of writing such stuff. Upon my word, there is scarcely a bright school boy living on the Santa Cruz mountains but would be ashamed of fathering such silly twaddle, and though most of our boys could excel him in rhyme, and metre, I am proud to say it would be a difficult matter to find one who would be guilty of attempting to compose such a lot of muddled-up, obscure, blasphemous trash. To read it over is, figurately speaking, like riding in an empty, springless dust cart over the rough cobblestones that disfigure the streets of this city. Still he sings, and we must call him some kind of a bird, and I think I can find an appropriate one for him.

Some years ago when I was in a concert hall in New York a vocalist appeared upon the stage and commenced, out of time and tune, to sing, "Oh, would I were a bird." She got no further, for an indignant and disgusted English sailor (half seas over) arose from his seat and in a loud tone of voice cried, "Which you are mum; you are aye hold howl."

Yes, yes, he is a bird, but, poets of the mountains, he is one whose discordant croaking you should drown with the simple little songs with which your hearts are overflowing.

And dreamers, it is time for you to wake and put your thoughts into words. Too long have the Ambrose Bierce's of journalism held their pernicious sway; too long unrebuked have they defied our great Creator, ridiculed eternal truth, and sneered at religious patriotism and manhood. Up and at them, all of you, and cause them to think they struck a hornet's nest when they disturbed your peaceful slumbers.

In heaven's name, what will that class of men attempt to deprive us of next? Not satisfied with trying by their silly sneers and ridicule to turn our hearts from the love and reverence of the kind and merciful Giver of all good, that our fathers and mothers taught us to worship, they now would, if they could, prevent us from attempting to describe the beauties of nature, the love we feel for our native land or the admiration we entertain for the loss that has won our affection.

How strange it is that critics are so fond of asses. The following is from Ambrose Bierce's article:

"No man," says ex-Secretary Whitney,
"can truthfully say he would not like to
be President."

Lo! the wild rabbit, happy in the pride
Of qualities to meaner beasts denied,
Surveys the jackass with respect and fear,
Adoring his superior length of ear,
And says: "No living creature, lean or fat,
But wishes in his heart to be like That!"

If that means anything it means that the man is a jackass who gains the highest office a free people in a great and glorious land can confer, and as it is said that all men would like to attain that exalted position, all men are (in the critic's opinion) asses.

“Mr. Bierce not include” perhaps he forgot to add, but with true mountain openheartedness we will not only include him but his little Prattler also and try to do it in his own style of asinine rhyme:

A FREAK.

On reading Balaam had an ass,
And was by it instructed,
Our Ambrose gazing in a glass,
A bright idea deducted,
I'll mount, one too, and ride to fame,
With braying, noise and rattle,
And as my ass must have a name
I'll call it “Weekly Prattle.”

So on he rode and brayed aloud
In most discordant measure,
And for his master drew a crowd
(He proved indeed a treasure).
For people crowded 'round to see
One ass another straddle,
And shouted with approving glee,
Gee, woo, there. Weakly Twaddle.

ITEM # 10

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

December 13, 1895, p. 2, c.1:

“It is said that Ambrose Bierce, the Prattle editor of the Sunday issue of the Examiner, is to go to New York to work on Hearst’s Journal. Being about played out in San Francisco he should go somewhere — anywhere. His stuff, entirely Bierceonian, will undoubtedly take well in the East while its newness lasts.”

ITEM # 11

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

January 1, 1896, p. 2, c.2 & 3 & 4

Sense and Nonsense by Mark Tapley. [Written for the SENTINEL.]

Some few weeks ago, when replying to an article written by Ambrose Bierce, ridiculing the poets and dreamers of Santa Cruz, amongst other things I said:

Verily whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. But simple as this task may appear to the Goliath of journalism, I hope that I shall live to see him succeed in awakening a fearless young David who, trusting for guidance in all-wise and omnipotent Creator whom his boasting opponent defies and blasphemes, will boldly stand out and give him battle, and perhaps even find a pebble of truth that will enter the supposed invulnerable armor of his haughty antagonist.

And on reading my mail to-day I find that in part my hope has been realized. The Goliath of skeptical and personal journalism has been attacked and defeated. But it was not by one of the Santa Cruz poets, whom I had learned to love and admire so much during my short stay amongst them, but by Wm. Greer Harrison, the famous poet, dramatist and journalist, a man fully Mr. Bierce's equal in intellectual stature and a popular, generous-hearted Christian gentleman.

Glancing over the account of the battle is very much like reading the story of the engagement betwixt David and Goliath, as recorded in Holy Writ, a story with which no doubt most of our readers are familiar.

Ambrose Bierce appeared as usual in his customary place (Weekly Examiner, Dec. 5th), defying and ridiculing all that is pure and sacred; pouring forth his usual mass of blasphemous and vulgarly-worded challenge. To his surprise a champion stood up before him.

Goliath ridiculed David because he was a stripling; and the haughty critic sneeringly referred to Mr. Harrison as a "prentice hand." David made a modest yet manly reply, and Mr. Harrison answered in these words:

Let me explain myself to Mr. Bierce. He has been the Bogie Man of San Francisco for quite a number of years; he has frightened a great many people; he has destroyed some people; he has brought tears to many a woman's eyes, and he has brought the indignant oath to many an honest man's lips, and so he has been a terror. I have discovered him to be a stuffed man.

Goliath retorted with foul words and threats. Mr. Ambrose Bierce hurled the following language at his undaunted foe: "Rogue, ignoramus, amusing impostor, mutton-head, unearthly person, niggeramus, scalawag, toggle jointed, blood wump, plantigrades," etc.

A volley of abuse like this had often demoralized and disheartened a less courageous antagonist, but had no effect on this "prentice hand," who aptly replied:

He utters and mutters and sputters
The filth that belongs to the gutters.

Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator, thought it necessary to silence a notorious scold—a coarse, vulgar fish wife of Dublin—and he did so by calling her a rectangular hypotenuse. Mr. Bierce is a vulgar fraction.

Goaded to fury by the calmness and daring of our champion, the critical giant with a great flourish attempted to make an end of his tormentor by charging him with falsehood. He said:

Here are some of the things which this remarkable scholar, poet, critic and wit has uttered, for our virtues.

He says that Shakespeare frequently begins a blank verse passage with a couplet—which is, of course, false.

Then like David Mr. Harrison picked up the pebble of truth and hurled it right home. He replied:

Mr. Bierce proclaims his gross ignorance in charging me with falsehood when I said that Shakespeare frequently opened a passage of blank verse with a rhyming couplet. Apparently he has never read Shakespeare, but doubtless his readers have. The following passages will be of interest to them, and in reading them they will see how utterly false Ambrose Bierce is.

In all the quoted passages Shakespeare uses a rhyming couplet introducing his blank verse:

“Two Gentlemen of Verona,” act 2, scene 7, Julia begins a blank-verse passage with a couplet:

“Counsel, Lucetta: gentle girl, assist me.
And even in kind love I do conjure thee.”

“The Comedy of Errors,” act 4, scene 1, opens with a couplet preceding blank verse:

“You know since Pentecost the sum is due,
And since I have not much importuned
you.”

“Richard the II,” act 2, scene 1, King Richard opens blank passage with a couplet, and is immediately followed by York, who does the same thing:

“The ripest fruit first falls and so doth he;
His time is spent, our pilgrimage must be.”

“How long shall I be patient? Ah, how long,
Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong?”

In act 4, same play, scene 1, King Richard again opens a blank verse-passage with a couplet:

“Ay, no! No, ay! For I must nothing be;
Therefore, no, no, for I resign to thee.

“Henry the VI,” part 1, act 3, scene 3, La Pucelle opens a blank-verse passage with a couplet:

“Besides, all France and France exclaims on
thee,
Doubting thy birth and lawful progeny.”

“Henry the VI,” part 2, act 3, scene 2, Warwick begins a blank-verse passage with a couplet:

“But that the guilt of murder bucklers thee
And I should rob the deathsman of his fee.”

“Julius Caesar,” act 1, scene 1, Marullus opens a blank-verse passage with couplet:

“Wherefore rejoice, what conquest brings
he home?

What tributaries follow him to Rome?

“Pericles,” scene 1, act 1, opens blank-verse passage with couplet:

“See where she comes appareled like the
spring,
Graces her subjects, and her thoughts the
King.”

In the same play, act 2, scene 4, Helicanus opens blank-verse passage with couplet:

“No, Escanes, know this of me,
Antiohus from incest lived not free.”

And these are only a few of a large number of instances where Shakespeare employs this method of introducing blank verse.

Mr. Bierce may object to Shakespeare. Let him turn to Ben Jonson, and there he will find numerous instances of a similar use of the couplet.

This exposure of Bierce’s ignorance clearly indicates his illiteracy.

After this he proceeded to cut the fallen giant to pieces, and the skillful manner in which he did it was a treat to every one who read Wm. Greer Harrison’s article criticizing Ambrose Bierce in the *Sunday Call*, Dec. 8th.

I was very well pleased to see that the battle had taken place, and yet I feel almost sorry for the poor giant—he was so easily beaten, but as Mr. Harrison says that he discovered he was a stuffed man, I hope that it was only the stuffing that was destroyed, and that in future he will be what he was in the days gone by, the clean, caustic, fearless critic and gentleman—Ambrose Bierce. Mr. Bierce gave to me (unintentionally, it is true) good cause for self-congratulations, for he fell into the mistake of thinking the simple little songs and articles that were written and composed by me were the work of Duncan McPherson, the able and successful journalist and orator of Santa Cruz.

He could not have flattered me more if he had used the choicest words even his pen could inscribe.

I see my friend, the enemy, Phil Francis, is chafing under the little trick I played upon him in my last article. Poor young man. I confess that I was rather hard upon him, and do not wonder at his display of feeling, and so I intend to have mercy on him this week and let him off lightly.

There is one thing in his article, however, I must notice. He doubts the truth of the story (as I told it) of the very pert young man, but if he will ask any of his German friends they will (I feel sure) tell him that such tricks are often played on would-be linguists.

I have seen it done not only in Germany, but also in New York, New Orleans and San Francisco. Mr. Francis charges me with falsehood for saying that I was in Germany. Once more

he has thrown a boomerang, for I have been not only in Germany, but also in very many different parts of the world, among the others Holland, France, Spain, Portugal, England, Ireland, Wales, the West India Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Sandwich Islands, Ceylon, Java, India, Brazil and Mexico, in addition to having visited and resided for short or long periods in very many of the principal cities in our country, both on the Atlantic and Pacific slopes.

Let me add that the sentence in German was written as it is pronounced on purpose to draw attention to it, though I confess that all the credit for this “respectable old trick” is not due to me, for the gentleman that set up the type aided me charmingly by improving on my “mistake.” A very foxy trick to play on such a verdant youth as you are, was it not, Phil? You don’t know me yet, my cheerful friend. I am not the kind of bird you think I am. You are a little too green, as you term it, for me to play with, but as you say you want to have lots of fun with me, I want to accommodate you, and perhaps occasionally have just a quiet little laugh to myself.

Just think of it, mark tapley laughing at Mr. Phil Francis, the real, live, funny man, with a circus (in his head?). “Oh fillip, fillip, it is a sight at which the heavens should drop.”

Oh, by the by, you want to know what Bonita’s doll was laying. Chestnuts, chestnuts, she was laying chestnuts. My poor innocent, you had better lay in a fresh supply as your present stock is in need of reorganizing. They are strong, fitly, very strong. Your present supply of chestnuts has long, grey whiskers on the, my poor boy.

When you can grow a crop of whiskers like that which is upon your poor dear old chestnuts, you will perhaps be able to poke fun at mark tapley, but at present you are “not in it”.

I admit that in the use of vulgar language and insulting remarks you can far outshine me, but to tell you the truth I do not desire to either acquire that habit or have anything to say to the man that has acquired it, for like every other foul disease, it is “catching,” and so I now, for the last time, refer to or notice you, unless you can write like a gentleman. If you do that I will do my best to amuse you, but I don’t want to get into the habit of calling a fellow creature out of his name. It is one that only an ignorant blackguard should be found guilty of, and is an insult to the readers of any respectable newspaper.

ITEM # 12

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

February 23, 1896, p. 2, c.2

[Here is a good example of obscurity: The *Santa Cruz Sentinel* is quoting the *Fresno Expositor*, who was quoting the *Stockton Record*]:

“Bierce , as the ambassador of the Examiner, never knew how really great he was until now. The newspapers are dissecting him in an attempt to find a vulnerable spot in his flesh, and in speaking of this the Stockton Record says: “His mantle of egotism is wrapped so tightly around him that it protects him from all the world, including himself, for the ordinary man sometimes does realize he has made an ass of himself.””

[Also in this issue (p. 2, c. 4) “Mark Tapley, Highland” [I thought he departed in 1895, maybe he returned — as so many do return to Santa Cruz after roaming the world] has a poem: “Remember You’ve Faults of Your Own.”]

ITEM # 13

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

February 6, 1897, p. 1, c. 2

“The Surf’s Appreciation.”

Advance sheets of a literary work now in press have been forwarded to the *Surf* office. The publication of this work will mark the invasion of a new force into literature, one that is destined to dim the fame for humor of Artemus Ward, Josh Billings and Bill Nye, and to prove that the weapon used so effectively by Samson may also propel the pen.

The title page of this new brochure reads:

POEMS

— **BY** —

DUNCAN M’PHERSON

—
A Choice Bibelot of verse Gleaned
from a Daily Record of Mun-
dane Things Made Immortal
by the Kiss of Rhyme.

—
Copyright Not Wanted.

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA.
February, 1897.

No description or review could do adequate justice to the contents. A few extracts will illustrate sufficiently, for many of our readers are becoming familiar with this literature as it appeared from time to time in the paper of the author. —Surf.

[NOTE: The style used by the Surf above reads: M’PHERSON. The actual publication reads: Duncan McPherson. It also has a phrase not used above: “First Edition limited to One thousand copies on handsome linen paper.”]

ITEM # 14

Note: “Corbett” was Jim Corbett, the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion who was in the news during this period.

February 13, 1897, p. 2, c.4: “And if I Can’t I’ll Cuff” by A.J.W. , in Fresno Republican

“So lend your ears—God knows that
 you’ve enough! —
I mean to teach, and if I can’t I’ll cuff,
 —Ambrose Bierce.

E’en so, my Ambrose, and ‘tis clear,
 indeed.
With such a choice you’re certain to
 succeed.
You will not teach—the reason’s plain
 enough—
But e’en my cat is able, quite, to cuff.
And shall I therefore marvel at her
 skill
And deem the feline is a wonder still?
Not so, Sir Critic, she but cuffs and
 welts
Because her brutish mind doth know
 naught else.
But you, my Ambrose, of the human
 kind,
Might once have had a more than fe-
 line mind;
Might once have dreamed of using
 power to bless,
And not alone to harrow and distress.
The day is past—the truth is sad
 enough—
You now retain alone the will to cuff.
You warred on women. Why, a man
 would scorn—
Man who is still of weaker woman
 born—
To do a deed so rank. And yet no
 shame
Withheld your pen your foulness to
 proclaim.
I beg my cat’s good pardon, valiant

sir;
To war on women still denotes the cur.
And some there wer who sung, not
 loud or clear,
A simple strain which still to them was
 dear;
A halting lay which all too vaguely
 told
That dream of music which the heart
 most hold.
You cuffed them, Ambrose. If it honor
 be,
Why, hug it closely; it belongs to thee.
Yet some there be to whom the thought
 must cling
‘Twere better far to say, “God bless
 you! Sing.”
But let it pass. You’re made of sterner
 stuff,
And he must be who joys in power to
 cuff.
And then, my Ambrose, still on ill in-
 tent,
Your cuffing mind to other deeds you
 bent.
Some names there were to humble mil-
 lions dear,
Names that the masses dared to love,
 revere.
You slimed them o’er with malice from
 your pen,
Fouled them with mire from out your
 mental fen
And trebly proved your dastardly un-
 worth
By thus attacking men of nobler birth
There is no petty deed but it shall
 claim
You as the one to do its mite of sham;
There is no power of words at grace to
 sneer
But when it summons, you shall an-
 swer, “Here.”

So go your way, monarch of kicks and
 cuffs,
A mental Corbett in a world of
 “toughs.”
So go your way; lay unction to your
 soul
That it is good to be a cat termed
 “pole;”
Deem, if you will, the public on its
 bench
Your might admires, the while it
 damns your stench.
But know this truth: Your strong, ma-
 licious pen
Records of you but this: “It might
 have been.”
You might have been a man—Ah, well!
 Enough!
You’ve told the tale: “And if I can’t
 I’ll cuff.”
 —A. J. W., in Fresno Republican.

ITEM # 15

On Tuesday, Feb. 16, 1897, p. 2, c. 2 *Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel* [without a head, but in McPherson’s usual column of commentary] appears the following:

“Sunday last Ambrose Bierce,
In the Examiner fierce,
Tried our pen to pierce,
 As follows:
Eh? Duncan?
O, yes, he’s a person —

A poet — they call him a bird.
But devil a linnet
With Duncan is in it
Whenever his spirit is stirred
And the blare of his larynx is heard.
If every person,
Like Dunk McPherson,
Were singing in Santa Cruz,
In such a Babel

None would be able
To hear him ripped out of his shoes
By his lungs — as now none choose.”

ITEM # 16

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

February 23, 1897 p. 2, c. 2

PROMINENCE UNSOUGHT, BUT
HIGHLY APPRECIATED.

By the Examiner Bierce.

The spectacle of two harmonious newspapers in one small town is sufficiently rare to challenge attention. This phenomenon is inferable in the instance of the “Sentinel” and The Penny Press of Santa Cruz, the editor of the latter being the local agent for a book of poems by the editor of the former, and apparently scorning delights and living laborious days in promotion of its sale. It must be confessed that the merit of the poems is such as almost to justify this reversal of traditional relations between two of a trade. “Poems by Duncan McPherson” is indeed an epoch-making book. For once we may “hail the dawn of a new era” with a reasonable assurance that it will stay hailed— wherein it has a distinct advantage of any new era that has dawned within a month.

From the preface of Mr. McPherson’s book one learns that the poems appeared in his paper “during the years 1893-4-5 and -6,” and is therefore encouraged to hope that others are now appearing. “Their elemental design,” it seems, “was the expression of opinion upon current happenings, which in the course of transmutation into words was subsequently subordinated to the requirements of rhyme.” This, I take it, means that their author, who is locally known as the Bird of the Avenue, “sang because he could not choose but sing,” as in the olden days when his who-haw-gee was heard in all the region round. For be it known that Mr McPherson was once the most distinguished bosopomp in the county of the Holy Cross.

A few of the Bird’s “wood-notes wild” are hereunto appended:

Sunday the President put in the day at Buzzard’s Bay. Any cause is sufficient Congress to get away, thereby legislation to delay.

Those who to-day partake of Jo Ball’s barbecued beef, from pinching hunger will get relief, and only by eating too much will they come to grief.

Wood and hay from forest and field on the way are sold on the street every day.

William Spencer was up from Aptos Thursday, where everything is as still as a summer dream, and a contented people are feeding on richest cream, speckled beauties jumping in the stream and the prosperous wood owner hauling with his team.

These few nameless lyrics are quoted for their brevity; when the McPherson soul soars into the breathless altitudes of epic poetry I can no more follow it than a fish can follow a cat. Nothing but continuous study, with occasional prayer, will get all the good out of such noble

works as “The Sprung Spring,” “Day’s Unclouded Lengthiness,” “The Coldness of Weight,” “Fish Mouths” and—incomparable in strength, vivacity and splendor!—“Death’s Wormy Rake.” When these shall have been generally perused, considered, gobbled up and digested a cry of delight will go up from all the land!

ITEM #17

Santa Cruz Surf

February 23, 1897, p. 2, c. 2 "COMPLIMENTS OF A CRITIC.'

The recently republished [N.B.] book of poetry entitled, *Verses of an Ox-Goad or Poems* by Duncan McPherson, is reviewed at some length by Ambrose Bierce in his Sunday Prattle in the San Francisco *Examiner*. This is an honor, the like of which has never been paid before to any local publication, and which Santa Cruzans will duly appreciate. After acknowledging receipt of a copy of the work and noted the circumstances attending its publication, Mr. Bierce says:

“Poems by Duncan McPherson” is indeed an epoch-making book. For once we may “hail the dawn of a new era” with a reasonable assurance that it will stay hailed—wherein it has a distinct advantage of any new era that has dawned within a month.

From the preface of Mr. McPherson’s book one learns that the poems appeared in his paper ‘during the years 1893 4 5 and 6,’ and is therefore encouraged to hope that others are now appearing. “Their elemental design,” it seems, “was the expression of opinion upon current happenings, which in the course of transmutation into words was subsequently subordinated to the requirements of rhyme.” This, I take it, means that their author, who is locally known as the Bird of the Avenue, “sang because he could but choose but sing,” as in the olden golden days when his whoa-haw-gee was heard in all the region round.

The Editor of the *Santa Cruz Surf* was Arthur A. Taylor. The Editor of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* was Duncan McPherson. [In fact, the McPherson family still runs the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, although it has been sold to the Dow-Jones Company.] They had a continuing battle of words in their respective newspapers, and Duncan McPherson was also battling continuously with the Editor of *The Penny Press*, another Santa Cruz paper. References to Duncan McPherson as being “a poet” should only be taken within the context of what he wrote in his *Santa Cruz Sentinel* as its Editor/Publisher, and now we have discovered, his “Poems by Duncan McPherson” I believe Taylor delighted in printing Bierce’s criticism of McPherson, and adding his own jab: i.e., “Verses of an Ox-Goad.”

{McPherson’s general attitude about these other newspaper commentators, and I am certain Bierce could be included here, is reflected in the following comment that appeared in McPherson’s *Santa Cruz Sentinel* on February 6, 1897, p. 2, c. 1: [sds]

“We are a thousand times obliged to the many people who are writing for the “Sentinel,” their homes being located in different parts of the county, and even one of them is a resident of far Los Angeles. These contributions are devoted to news and general literature, some prose, others poetry. The “Sentinel” contains more contributed articles and newsletters than all of the other papers of the county combined, some of the writers being personally unknown to us. The few communications that are appearing in other local journals are devoted largely to the abuse of men in office and citizens in private life, the writers seemingly taking their cues from the tone of the sheets in which their fulminations appear. A hog knows a mud-hole when he sees it, and a mud-hole accepts a hog when he wallows in it.”}

I believe Bierce means a book of *republished poetry*, rather than the republication of a book, as the existence of another book is doubtful; the title page indicates that it is the “First Edition”. The work itself was published in 1,000 copies, of which I have located only one copy, in the possession of the Granddaughter of Duncan McPherson (Lillian McPherson Rouse, who is now eighty). It includes a note that its content was first published in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* in 1893, 94, 95, and 96.

McPherson’s “book” is thirty-two pages, 6" high x 4 3/4" wide, tied with string in gutter. It’s title page contains the following information: “POEMS | — BY — | Duncan | McPherson | ——— | A Choice Bibelot of Verse Gleaned from | a Daily Record of Mundane Things | Made Immortal by the Kiss | of Rhyme. | ——— | First Edition limited to One thousand | copies on handsome linen paper. | ——— | Copyright Not Wanted. | SANTA CRUZ, CAL. | February, 1897.”

McPherson’s PREFACE confirms Bierce’s statement that: “The following poems appeared originally in the SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL during the years of 1893-4-5 and 6. Their elemental design was the expression of an opinion upon current happenings, which, in the course of transmutation into words, was subsequently subordinated to the requirements of rhyme. Wherever rhyme and reason might have clashed, rhyme has invariably been given the preference, as was only meet where poetry and not prose was the lofty aim to be attained. In fact, nothing whatever has been suffered to interfere with or impede the glorious progress of the muse.”

A careful reading of thirty-one pages, I failed to discover any reference to Ambrose Bierce, unless it is obscured in a reference I do not comprehend. Unfortunately for this purpose, the thirty-second page is not capable of being read; it is pasted down to an opaque leaf of Duncan McPherson’s granddaughter’s scrapbook. [i.e., Lillian McPherson Rouse]

ITEM # 18

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

March 30, 1897, p. 2 c. 5

Written for the “Sentinel.”

AT THE VAN NUYS.

There is a wondrous rise
At the new Hotel Van Nuys
 In the temperature.
The heat is something fierce,
For it radiates from Bierce
 Scorching and sure;
And it spreads all around.
It zig-zags from the ground—
 It wavers to the skies.
The whole town is enerrate
In a wilted down state,
 For Bierce is at the Van Nuys.

M. N. O.

[M. N. O. unidentified]

Los Angeles, March 24th.

ITEM # 19

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

May 3, 1903, 4:1

“Death of Dr. Doyle”

Died at 2 pm Saturday [May 2, 1903]. His death is attributed to apoplexy. This obit includes some biography of Dr. Doyle.

ITEM # 20

Santa Cruz Surf.

Monday Evening, May 4, 1903, p. 2:

a three column Editorial — “Dr. Doyle is dead” with Doyle’s signature reproduced at top of 1st column.

“Many of his best bits of verse were voluntary contributions to the *Surf*, ...”

Mentions [without citations] other publications in which Doyle's works appear: Harper's Magazine, San Francisco Examiner, Sacramento Bee.
It is noted in this Editorial that Dr. Doyle "... arrived in Santa Cruz in 1888 bringing the most valuable library that had at that date reached Santa Cruz..."

ITEM # 21

Santa Cruz Daily Sentinel

May 7, 1903, 3:3

Letter to Ed: "Mrs. M'Crackin's Tribute to Dr. Doyle" by Josephine Clifford McCrackin Monte Paraiso Ranch, Santa Cruz Mountains, May 4, 1903.

ITEM # 22

Santa Cruz Surf.

May 8, 1903, 2:2

"In Memorium — Dr. C. W. Doyle"
[a poem by] Herman Scheffauer [colleague of Bierce and McCrackin at Monte Paraiso Ranch]

References:

McCrackin, Josephine Clifford

The woman who lost him and tales of the army frontier. Pasadena : George Warton James, 1913. pp. title-page, table-of-contents, illustrations, and Introduction by Ambrose Bierce. (total 7 pages)

Payne, Stephen Michael

A howling wilderness. Santa Cruz : Loma Prieta Publishing, 1978. pp. 121-27, 136-37.

Walker, Dale L.

"A last laugh for Ambrose Bierce." *American West*. v. X, # 6 (Nov. 1973) 34-39, 63.
