

# Chapter B

**Chapter B** continues Ambrose Bierce's piercing examination of language, where words are stripped of their expected dignity to reveal underlying human contradictions. Beginning with **Caaba**, Bierce reframes the sacred stone revered in Mecca not as a symbol of divine power, but as a mere stone presented to Abraham, who humorously prefers practical bread over religious relics. This irreverent portrayal challenges traditional spirituality by contrasting sacredness with mundane human desire. Similarly, **Cabbage** introduces a fictitious ruler, Cabagius, who mixes ministers with cabbages, both beheaded to quell unrest—highlighting how political power can be maintained through spectacle rather than substance. These witty definitions reveal how historical and cultural symbolism often hides selfish or absurd realities beneath layers of ceremony and tradition.

Bierce's sharp wit also targets human nature and social behavior. He defines **Calamity** not simply as disaster but as a stark reminder of life's fragility, especially when misfortune strikes others, underscoring our limited empathy. **Callus** moves beyond the physical to describe emotional numbness, criticizing society's tendency to become indifferent to suffering. Even the **Camel** is not spared; instead of a steadfast beast of burden, it is recast as a performer in show business, mocking how spectacle can distort value. Through these redefinitions, Bierce urges readers to look beyond surface appearances and question the shallow meanings that have been normalized in everyday language and behavior.

Religious satire cuts through with precise cynicism. **Christian** is redefined as someone who applies the New Testament to everyone but themselves, pointing to widespread hypocrisy still relevant today. The figure of **Christ** is imagined as puzzled by those who claim to follow him, emphasizing the gap between religious ideals and actual practice. This critique does not attack faith itself but exposes how belief can be twisted

or misused. Political institutions fare no better, with **Congress** portrayed as a body that repeals laws more than it enacts them, and **Conservative** described not as cautious, but as enamored with existing evils. These entries reveal the contradictions and failures masked by titles and traditions, inviting readers to question the true nature of authority and morality.

Cultural roles and social criticism are vividly explored. The **Critic** is painted as hard to satisfy, not due to refined taste but because no one bothers to please them, highlighting how criticism often serves ego more than improvement. The **Court Fool**, historically permitted to mock rulers, symbolizes controlled dissent tolerated only when it doesn't threaten power. **Coward**, rather than merely lacking courage, is seen as a strategist who survives by avoiding unnecessary risks, challenging traditional notions of bravery. These definitions turn conventional virtues and vices on their head, suggesting that survival often requires pragmatism over valor.

Finally, the **Cross** is examined as a symbol with layered and shifting meanings. Bierce notes that its use predates Christianity and that it now appears in various forms—from the White Cross symbolizing chastity to the Red Cross representing humanitarian aid. This evolution shows how powerful symbols are continually reshaped by cultural context and purpose. Rather than attacking faith or charity, Bierce highlights the flexibility and contradictions inherent in cultural icons. A symbol's meaning depends on who uses it and why, illustrating a broader theme of the chapter: language and ideas are fluid, molded by human needs and agendas.

What makes this chapter particularly compelling is Bierce's ability to blend dark humor with profound insight. His satire is biting but never empty; beneath the jokes lies a serious call for honesty and reflection. Definitions carry hidden assumptions that influence how reality is perceived and interpreted. Through parody, Bierce encourages sharper thinking about social systems, beliefs, and human behavior. This chapter challenges readers to see beyond polished appearances and reconsider language as a mirror reflecting the complexities and contradictions of life.