
Review article

Peirce the melancholy prestidigitator*

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For several decades the Peirce community has awaited a definitive biographical study of the founder of pragmatism and of all that is compelling in semiotics. Rumors about Peirce's personal life have long circulated underground, exacerbated by the reluctance of the Harvard authorities to release the relevant material for publication. Joseph Brent at long last brings this material to light in a forceful and beautifully written account of the life and work of Peirce, and places the demonic aspects of Peirce's personality in their proper social and psychological contexts. Brent's dissertation at UCLA, 'A study of the life of Charles Sanders Peirce' (Brent 1960), has been privately copied and circulated among the cognoscenti as if it were a ticking time bomb waiting to go off. The published version, written some thirty years later, after Harvard finally gave Brent permission to publish the damaging material from the Peirce archives, goes beyond the dissertation, even if it often softens the much more negative tone of the earlier version. In addition, the book balances the tragic qualities of Peirce's life with a sensitive and accurate analysis of his conceptual achievements, and brings out his marred heroic stature.

What, then, is the nature of this ticking time bomb that has now had its public explosion? And, more to the point, will Peirce's achievements be undermined because of the material Brent brings to light? One is reminded of what happened to Paul Tillich, the noted liberal theologian, when his wife Hannah published two scathing books after his death in 1965 (Tillich 1973, 1976), in which his many sexual escapades were laid bare to an astonished theological world. It took some time before Tillich's reputation returned to its previous high status, and all graduate seminars on Tillich must now address the correlation between his life and his work. It will be interesting to see how Peirce fares, and whether or not philosophers and semioticians are judged by different standards than are theologians.

Brent begins his tale by tracing the Peirce family history from its roots

*Joseph Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

in dissenting religious factions in England. The Peirce family considered itself to be firmly entrenched in the New England gentry, and Peirce retained his aristocratic bearing throughout his darkest years, when he had no material support. The Peirce family home was the center of much of the most important thinking in the country. Several important intellectual clubs met there, and the young Charles was able to listen in on the conversations of such people as Emerson, Longfellow, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, not to mention the many mathematicians and astronomers who met in the Cambridge Scientific Club and the Cambridge Astronomical Club.

It is clear that Peirce was thoroughly indulged by both of his parents, especially his father Benjamin, who singled Charles out from among the five children for special treatment. It is well known that Peirce's precocious intellectual appetite was supported by his father, who tutored him in a variety of subjects. What is not as well known is that Benjamin and his son shared a common affliction, a debilitating disease known as facial neuralgia (now known as trigeminal neuralgia). This disease, now treatable through surgery, causes extreme pain in the nerves of the face. Both father and son were driven to a heavy reliance on drugs and alcohol to dull the pain. By the time Charles had reached college, he had already developed his life-long addiction to alcohol — an addiction that led to his reputation as an unreliable and violent person. Brent describes the pain-induced swings in Peirce's personality:

When free of pain he was often pleasant, considerate, cheerful, loving, charming, and good company, but when the pain was on him he was, at first, almost stupefied and then aloof, cold, depressed, extremely suspicious, impatient of the slightest crossing, and subject to violent outbursts of temper. (p. 33)

He later came to use cocaine, opium, and morphine to dull the pain. It must be remembered that these drugs were legal at the time and that self-prescription was not uncommon.

The young Charles was an indifferent student, with the exception of his excellent work in chemistry. He usually ended up near the bottom of his high school and college classes, spending much of his time as an autodidact, and he frequently found himself in trouble with school authorities for his public drinking. He was even feared as an immoral influence on other students, because he would often lead them astray with alcohol. It was at this point early in his life that his troubled relations with women began to take shape. As his powerful sexual energies emerged, he found that he could not practice monogamy, and his use of drugs and alcohol lent a violent aspect to his relations with women. As Brent discovered in his

research, Peirce physically abused both of his wives, and he appeared in court on more than one occasion for beating one of his house servants. Under the influence of chemical stimulants, he could fly into a blind rage, throwing furniture and breaking things. Brent refuses to gloss over this behavior, although he does locate it within the larger context of Peirce's personal and social failures, and makes it clear that his inherited neurological problems were the source for much of his destructive behavior. The fact of wife-beating is, however, deeply sobering, and sheds new light on the reasons for his divorce.

During his years at Harvard, Peirce began his association with the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. A summer outing with the Survey (in 1858), quite common for college students at the time, gave him entrée into this independent and somewhat eccentric professional society, which was operated, in a rather loose fashion, by the federal government. One immediate benefit of his Survey affiliation was that he was able to secure an exemption from the draft during the Civil War. Brent paints a picture of a diffident and elitist young intellectual who did not want to soil himself with the national tragedy, and who felt that he would be 'ended and thrown away for nothing' (p. 49) should he be forced to fight in the Union Army. Peirce also shared his family's racist attitudes toward African-Americans, and had little patience for the Abolitionist cause.

Having avoided the draft and returned to continue his work at Harvard, now at the Lawrence Scientific School, he began courting Harriet Melusina Fay, known as Zina. As is well known, Zina was an early feminist, and was active in creating the Cooperative Housekeeping Society of Cambridge. She was also an accomplished journalist and did freelance writing, in addition to editing her own journal. While the Peirce family never fully warmed to Zina, she was welcomed into their circle. Peirce's conversion to Episcopalianism was motivated by his relationship with Zina, and he became a catechumen shortly before his marriage. He remained in the Episcopal church for the rest of his life, although he was certainly not a regular or faithful communicant.

During the early years of their marriage, Charles and Zina occupied several small homes in Cambridge. While in their Arrow Street home, Peirce founded the short-lived Metaphysical Club. Much lore has grown around this club, and it has acquired a mythical status in histories of American Philosophy, assuming an importance that seems overstated. Brent provides a more balanced view, seeing the group as but one of many such societies at the time, and arguing that it died from neglect when Peirce went off to Europe for his continuing gravity and pendulum experiments.

His marriage went reasonably well at first. Strains soon emerged, how-

ever, because of his travels to Europe on Survey research. His drinking, physical abuse, and tendency to fall into debilitating forms of psychological and physical paralysis caused Zina to abandon him in Europe in 1875–1876. Peirce's family knew that his problems stemmed from his abuse of alcohol, but Peirce went into denial and refused to see his problem for what it was. It is interesting that Peirce's family remained loyal to him, and even took his side on the issue of the separation from Zina (while harboring no illusions, of course, about Peirce's contribution to the debacle).

Brent makes a very convincing case that Peirce developed the manifestations, and mind-set, of the so-called 'Dandy'. He always wore the finest clothes and affected an aristocratic air, presenting himself as a man of the world, and he frequently gave vent to a strong Rabelaisian sense of humor. His lifestyle was beyond the means of his Survey salary, and he was frequently in trouble with the Survey superintendent for his extravagance. It must be remembered that his father was his protector in the Survey, and that later, family friends took over the Survey when Benjamin retired. Because of these strong personal ties, Peirce was able to get away with far more than was appropriate. Later, his financial extravagances would come back to haunt him in the form of an 1885 Congressional investigation of the Survey, in which Peirce was singled out in particular as the worst abuser of the system.

By the late 1870s his separation from Zina, combined with rumors of his drinking and sexual indiscretions, made it impossible for him to secure any kind of academic post at Harvard. President Eliot developed an antipathy for Peirce that never waned, despite William James's efforts over the years to soften Eliot's heart. Consequently, when President Gilman of Johns Hopkins offered Peirce an instructorship in Logic, his long-held dream of a professorship must have seemed close to fulfillment. Peirce took the position, while retaining his post with the Survey, citing salary considerations. He moved to Baltimore, and commuted to York, Pennsylvania to conduct his pendulum experiments. It is clear from Brent's account that both Gilman and Peirce had hopes that Peirce would graduate from his lectureship to a full tenured professorship with the Philosophy Department. It should be remembered Johns Hopkins created the first Ph.D. program in the country (Harvard followed in 1890), and that Gilman wanted to create a world-class institution on the German model. Consequently, a great deal of emphasis was placed on research, which played to Peirce's strong suit.

Peirce's dismissal from Johns Hopkins (in 1884) has been the subject of much scrutiny and speculation. Brent reveals far more of the details surrounding Peirce's dismissal than have previously been available, although

he admits that there remain several confusing elements. It seems that Gilman went to great lengths to bury any written evidence of the proceedings that were undertaken to remove Peirce, and that the institution tried to make Peirce's dismissal appear as merely part of a larger reconfiguration of the entire graduate program. Several things are, however, much clearer about the situation leading to Peirce's dismissal (for a good parallel account of the Hopkins case, see Houser 1986).

On the most basic level, Peirce often failed to fulfill his contractual obligations as a teacher. He was often away on Survey research or business, and also missed classes because of his recurrent nervous collapses (which Brent diagnoses as cases of conversion hysteria perhaps brought about by his guilt over his personal failings). He was a gifted teacher when he did manage to show up for class, and many of his students remained devoted to him for the rest of his life. After all, he did manage to edit and publish an important book of essays on logic (*Studies in Logic*) written by his students, to whom he was always ready to give full credit for ideas and innovations. Yet Gilman thought that he was not a good moral leader of the nation's youth, and that his influence outside the classroom might be more negative.

This sense of Peirce's immorality was deepened by the appearance of a mysterious woman in Baltimore who went by the name of Juliette Pourtalai. Strenuous efforts have thus far failed to shed light on her French origins. She claimed to be related to royalty, and wove a complex myth about herself that later took hold when the Peirces moved to Milford. From Gilman's perspective, Peirce was openly living in sin with another woman when he was technically still married to Zina, although Charles and Zina had been separated for years. Six days after his final divorce decree came through, Peirce married Juliette. While none of this would be an issue today, of course, in the 1880s such behavior could cause a scandal.

In addition to his irregular appearance in class and his 'immoral' behavior with Juliette, Peirce's violent behavior resurfaced around this time. During his Baltimore years he was charged by one of his female domestic servants with physical abuse. The case appeared in the newspapers, and Gilman, for some strange reason, carried a clipping about the trial in his wallet. Unfortunately, this pattern of violence would return again and again, and Peirce found himself in similar straits during his final years in Milford. Peirce was thus no stranger to the law courts, and found himself on the receiving end of several lawsuits.

By 1884 (age 44), Peirce had endured the death of his beloved father, the highly public breakup of his marriage, the loss of his hopes at Harvard, and the humiliating dismissal from Johns Hopkins. As if all of this were not enough, his fortunes began to wane at the Survey. As noted, the Survey

as a whole, and Peirce in particular, came under intense public scrutiny in 1885 when the Allison Commission, appointed by the U.S. Congress, began its investigation of possible financial abuses by Survey Superintendents and their subordinates. Peirce, the perpetually failing Dandy, was pounced on by the popular press as the worst abuser of the public trust. The Survey as a whole was portrayed as a private and privileged society of prima donna scientists who had no accountability to the Congress. Brent's exhaustive research of the published accounts of the period point to a growing change in public sentiment. The Survey, once a proud and independent organization devoted to pure research, was now being asked to contribute more immediate and practical results to a nation grown weary with public scandal. This argument could take on greater force because several universities were assuming the role of supporting advanced research which the Survey had previously filled.

While Peirce was not immediately dismissed, his position with the Survey was damaged beyond repair. Within a few short years he was asked to resign. The reason given was that he repeatedly failed to turn in the results of his innumerable pendulum experiments, and that he was thus failing to fulfill his contractual obligations. Peirce argued that his procrastination stemmed from his perfectionism, while the Superintendent felt, not without some warrant, that Peirce was simply unreliable. At the end of 1891 his more than 30-year involvement with the Survey came to an abrupt close, and he lost his most reliable source of income.

A number of myths have grown up around Peirce's second marriage, chief among them being that it was basically a happy one. Brent paints a very different portrait. It seems that Peirce's fascination with women plagued the relationship right from the start. Before he and Juliette were married, Peirce carried on open affairs with at least two women. Needless to say, Juliette was reluctant to marry Peirce, but claimed that he threatened her with a gun if she didn't agree to become his wife. He abused her both verbally and physically, not to mention the emotional abuse caused by his infidelity. Throughout their marriage, Juliette remained stoically devoted to Peirce, and comes across as by far the nobler of the two. In addition to her travail with Charles, she suffered from tuberculosis, and had to have surgery to alleviate her chronic condition.

In 1888 the Peirces moved to Milford, Pennsylvania, where Charles eked out a living by doing book reviews for *The Nation* and other publications. Brent points out the little-known fact that the Peirces also maintained an expensive brownstone in New York City, and that they frequently spent long months in the city, living, as always, beyond their means. A two-hour train and ferry ride made it easy to go from Port Jervis, just north of Milford, to the heart of Manhattan. In the city, the Peirces tried to stay

within 'refined' society. Peirce belonged to the prestigious Century Club, where he met many entrepreneurs who were to con him into several get-rich-quick schemes. Brent is at his best when he contrasts Peirce's published diatribes against the 'Gospel of Greed' with his own social darwinism, in which he tries to manipulate the capitalist system for personal gain. As his personal and professional aspirations waned, his financial schemes, in a form of compensation, took up more and more of his energy.

Back at Milford, the Peirces took up with the prominent Pinchot family, who lived nearby in an estate known as Grey Towers. The Pinchot family proved to be invaluable to the Peirces, providing them with financial aid during their darkest years. They also gave the Peirces an important social outlet where Charles could hold forth for hours before the gentry of the area. Peirce was also able to indulge in his life-long fascination with theater through his amateur dramatic productions (in which he performed plays written by himself).

Peirce had grand dreams for Arisbe (the name he gave to his Milford home), hoping to turn it into a kind of summer spa for wealthy city-dwellers. His vision compelled him to undertake numerous additions to the house that he could not pay for. He was often hauled into court by disgruntled workmen and contractors who failed to receive timely payment for their labors. It is from these episodes that the famous, perhaps apocryphal story emerged that Peirce fled into his attic (pulling up the trap door behind him) when the sheriff pounded on his front door (see Pencak 1986). In fact, the dunning became so bad that the Peirces had to flee to New York to avoid the Pennsylvania authorities.

During the period after 1888, Peirce devoted heroic energies to his writing, probing into the foundations of semiotics, cosmology, logic, mathematics, and general philosophy. As noted, he wrote many reviews for *The Nation*, for which he was well paid. He also spent a great deal of energy on his various speculative schemes, one involving the harnessing of power for commercial use. Each of these schemes fell flat, even those that had some intrinsic merit. Brent makes it clear that Peirce was not always a fool in these ventures, but that he often fell victim to national economic problems (in particular the general depression of 1893–1894) and less than honest partners.

During his time in New York, his standard of living declined dramatically. The Peirces were forced to give up their upscale brownstone and move into a series of smaller apartments. At one point, Peirce was forced to wander the streets in search of food and housing. Conditions got so bad that he was forced to steal food from the Century Club. Juliette was suffering terribly from her lung problems, and Peirce was not in a position to get her proper medical treatment. Brent gives a lively sketch of life in

New York in the 1890s, thus locating Peirce's travail within and against a much larger and more basic social dislocation of the underclasses. Brent speculates, perhaps too hopefully, that Peirce developed some sympathy for the downtrodden during this tragic period of his life.

The image of the melancholy prestidigitator is the one Brent uses for the tragic decade of the 1890s (p. 162). The melancholy quality stems from Peirce's repeated failure to attain his primary goal in life — a proper outlet for his ideas. The quality of the prestidigitator comes from the endless schemes and bizarre plans he generated to bring himself wealth and fame. Brent sees Peirce as a manipulative charlatan who used friends whenever he could, rarely paying them back or thanking them for their generosity. Again, Peirce's inability to govern his own appetites and expenses haunted him. Brent puts it forcefully:

The ruinous but characteristic thing about Peirce's handling of money was that he had always refused to adjust his style of living to his income. The loss of his Survey salary seemed to change nothing. The Peirces were both extravagant. He and Juliette proceeded with the work on Arisbe. To go with it they bought two fine horses and an elegant carriage When in new York, Peirce frequently stayed at the Century Club and Brevoort House, both expensive. He traveled often to Boston and down the East Coast. (p. 175)

Peirce thus overextended himself and ended up in extreme poverty. He seemed to have no sense of the absurdity of his lifestyle, and fell into paranoid conspiracy theories to explain the decline in his fortunes. Of course, after a Congressional investigation, and after falling out with Presidents Eliot and Gilman, it is small wonder that his fortunes never recovered.

However, Brent explodes another myth about Peirce's last years. Contrary to the common conception, Peirce was actually quite famous in scientific and mathematical circles for his many published papers. He was considered one of the most prominent men of science of the nineteenth century, and many people tried to help him find some place in the world. Yet his personality alienated so many people that his brilliant achievements were not enough to secure him employment. One case in particular where his brilliance collided with his personality is in his oft-cited application to the Carnegie Institution. The Fund was created to give creative persons a chance to undertake major works which they might not otherwise have the time or means to complete. Peirce sent the Institution a detailed proposal for a 36-volume work covering such issues as the nature of space and time, the nature of metaphysics, and the nature of method.

The members of the Board were inclined to accept Peirce's proposal, and he even had the support of Theodore Roosevelt. However, his reputa-

tion for procrastination, stemming from his days with the Survey, caused the Institution to block the grant. Peirce spent several years writing letters and campaigning to secure a grant he felt sure he deserved. Brent quotes from a 1902 letter Peirce wrote to the Board:

I have a reputation of not finishing things. I suppose there is some basis of truth beneath it; but it has been like every evil reputation, exaggerated out of all semblance of truth by calumny the most bare faced calumny invented by the intriguers of the Coast Survey. I have three voluminous memoirs completed. They refused to print them, and the consequence was that I lost interest in the work very largely and became absorbed in my logic. I have several times offered to see those memoirs through the press, but the offers have always been refused, probably on the utterly mistaken notion that I wished to interfere with the Survey. . . . and then I was accused, vaguely and in intangible forms, of not getting my work ready for publication. For the truth of this (except that the accusations were made) I stand responsible. (p. 227)

There is certainly something tragic about Peirce's failure to get the Carnegie grant, especially because he was forced to earn a living by writing book reviews and translating articles. What is truly astonishing is that he wrote as much technical philosophy, semiotics, and science as he did during this period. There is a very clear sense in which Peirce had the deepest compulsive need to write, no matter what the external circumstances. Juliette recounts how Peirce was writing right up to the end of his life, and that she had to pry pen and paper away from him (see L485-L579 from the Peirce microfilm collection).

Peirce's last years were marked by extreme sadness. The Milford house began to deteriorate around him, and the Peirces were barely able to provide adequate heating for the rambling and incomplete structure. Peirce lectured in Cambridge (in a private home), and in 1903 gave his famous lecture series on pragmatism at Harvard. Few people understood what he was about, but his reputation was secured by the efforts of William James, who credited him with the creation of pragmatism. Royce, a logician of great gifts, used Peirce's early (1860s) semiotic theory in his own hermeneutic theory of the community of interpreters. The connection between Peirce and Royce was an important one, and Brent recognizes how much these two men meant to each other.

In 1907 Peirce discovered that he had cancer. He treated himself with pain-killing drugs, and was able to hold on for seven years in his debilitated state. Peirce was never a whiner, and took his illness in stride. He continued with his technical work and nursed Juliette through her innumerable bouts with illness. His last years have a kind of quiet quality that marks them off from the previous hectic decades. His grand schemes were less on his

mind as he struggled to pull his categorial structures together. The end came quietly on Sunday evening, April 19, 1914. He was cremated and his ashes remained in Juliette's possession until her death in 1934. They were buried together in the cemetery at Milford, in a small plot given to Juliette by the Pinchot family.

In his concluding chapter, 'The wasp in the bottle', Brent assesses the complex nature of his protagonist and makes some psychological observations about the forces that drove him to create one of the most impressive categorial arrays in the history of thought. The image of the furious wasp banging against the transparent walls of its prison is a haunting one. Certainly Peirce had the ferocity of temperament that made him appear wasp-like to his friends and many enemies. There is also the sense that he was driven to heroic forms of productivity in order to validate a sense of self that was never fully complete. Ironically, the indulgences allowed him in his youth may have undermined a proper sense of Secondness and social contrast, a sense that is necessary for the person who needs to become shaped through self-control. Peirce knew that he had no moral center, and bemoaned the lack of self-control in his dealings with others. Is there a deeper sense of loss behind Peirce's frenzied productivity?

For Brent, Peirce's fascination with Firstness, the realm of feeling, potentiality, spontaneity, and qualitative immediacy, was correlated with his role as a Dandy. The Dandy is the perfect narcissist, living without regard for the forms of Secondness and Thirdness in the 'outer' world. The Dandy acts out of an overflow of purely internal and self-referential energy, and is not connected to an actual and concrete community of selves. Peirce probed into the elusive heart of Firstness because of an ill-defined sense that his world lacked proper metaphysical props. As Brent also points out, the death of his father in 1880 caused Peirce to turn more and more of his energies toward speculative cosmology in an effort to find some center and meaning for his fragmented and out-of-control life. His efforts at creating a philosophical theology, in which God seems to be both evolutionary and non-evolutionary, although in different respects, point to his sense that the higher powers of the world are not what they seem. The sheer energy behind Peirce's manic creativity must have had very deep psychic roots.

There is an obvious sense in which Peirce 'spent his life trying to surpass his father at his own subtle and demanding calling, the exploration of the abstract' (p. 270). This drive was exacerbated by the fact that his father was a worldly success, while he was a dismal failure. Freud was well aware of the tragic dilemma facing the male child of the gifted father (although he was insensitive to gender differences and the nature of female psychology). Peirce was condemned to fall short of an ideal that his temperament

and overwhelming drives blocked. In Jung's terms, the failure of his public self (the persona) produced a state of psychic inflation in which he had to make the grandest possible claims about his stature in the history of thought. The irony of the situation is that his self-description as the equal of Leibniz is one that most serious scholars would readily accept. Yet the mind-set that compelled him to make these claims betrayed a deeply split consciousness — split between a recognition of his personal and professional failures and his equally strong sense that he had produced the most important intellectual synthesis since the Century of Genius. The concept of 'genius' is one that fascinated Peirce throughout his life, but his recognition that he belonged in this category seems to have brought him little relief or comfort.

The struggle against the larger-than-life father, and the psychic tensions that produced many episodes of paralysis (conversion hysteria), actually made Peirce what he was. This is not to romanticize his struggles, or to ignore his moral failures and his physical and mental abuse of his two wives, but to show the tragic link between his manic productivity and his broken sense of self. Much effort has been spent in trying to decide what Peirce's semiotic anthropology actually boils down to (see Corrington 1993). On the one side is the sense that he saw the self as a sign system held together through self-control and the purposes emergent from the larger reality of developmental teleology. On the other side is his quasi-Buddhistic sense that the self is at best a 'glassy essence' that only comes into its own when it becomes a cipher of a universe 'perfused with signs'. These two views, never fully reconciled by Peirce, manifest the nature of his psychic split.

The purposive self is the self that prevails within and against the world of the persona, while the glassy essence version of the self is the one that leaves the struggles of life behind to become a transfigured and redeemed self on the edges of time and history. Brent does not probe into the religious heart of Peirce's vision, where the tensions in his semiotic anthropology are most acute.

In conclusion, I wish to say a few things about the unsaid lying at the heart of Peirce's melancholy life, and to shed further light on his tragic compulsions.

In spite of his innumerable character defects, Brent concludes that Peirce was 'an authentic tragic hero, not the hypocrite, degenerate, or clown he was accused of being by many of his powerful peers' (p. 269). This heroic quality is manifest above all in his lonely and oft-frustrated efforts to develop and express his unique conceptual system. He watched others get credit for his innovations, and saw mediocrities land the choice academic appointments that always went to 'safe men'. Yet with no academic institu-

tional support, he probed into the structures of semiosis and their correlation with the three primal categories (Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness). At the same time, I would argue, he sought a religious redemption in which an evolving God would accept him in spite of his demonic splits. Lest this interpretation sound contrived or a form of special pleading, it must be remembered that he never let go of an eschatological sense that the world and all that is in it is moving toward a kind of cosmic resurrection in which the fissures of Secondness would be healed by the triumph of Thirdness, a Thirdness that is what it is because of the deeper powers of agape. Was agape the answer to his own unbridled eros?

The presence of agape in Peirce's strange transmutation of the Lamarck/Darwin debate points to a future reconciliation in which the breaks in the cosmos (read as anthropomorphic projections of his own psychic splits) would be overcome. His 'would be', never reducible to a simplistic 'will be', is not only a counter-factual conditional, but, on a much deeper level, an eschatological hope. Some have seen his post-1880 cosmology as an aberration, brought about by a slackening of his powers. Yet the deeper truth seems to be that he could only approach his personal melancholy by rethinking the cosmos along healing lines. There is a clear sense in which Thirdness, as the category of mediation, is also the category of healing.

Alice Miller sheds light on the connection between what she calls a 'narcissistic wound' and the drive to achieve structures of great power and force (Miller 1990). Her categories shed some light on Peirce's religious quest and on his profound psychic splits. Transforming her argument slightly in the present context, we can see how Peirce failed to overcome the narcissistic demands of his father, who in this case seems to act in the role of the mother as the primary source of support and nurture. Benjamin's sheer presence and force of will compelled Charles to become the mirror image of his famous father. His own intrinsic needs became bent to serve the self-image of the dominant parent, who could only validate his son in terms of his son's achievements, rather than in terms of his intrinsic worth as a self. Put in strong terms, Peirce was forced to become his works, rather than a center of healthy narcissism.

Brent fully understands the paternal role in shaping Peirce's mature dilemma, although he shies away from psychoanalytic formulations. He presents the relationship in dramatic terms:

When Charles was still a boy, his father draped on his shoulders the crushing mantle of genius and engaged him from that age well into the manhood in an intense and extremely demanding training in the rigorous efforts needed to make fine distinctions. ... The effects of this training were to aggravate his neuralgia, to nourish his arrogance, and to set his ambition on fire. (p. 14)

Hence the younger Peirce inherited the painful facial neuralgia and the narcissistic wound that drove him beyond anyone in his generation in terms of sheer conceptual power and productivity. How to satisfy the omnivorous needs of the father when the external patterns of success and reinforcement are not there? The older Peirce got, the deeper his psychic split became.

The results of this split — one that divided Peirce between the self-as-works and a self as intrinsic person — can be seen, as noted, in his semiotic anthropology. Who or what is the self? The self is in some respects little more than its external sign series. Peirce argued against introspection and insisted that so-called internal signs were actually introjected external signs. The true core of the self remains hidden from view as the false self (Jung's *persona*) becomes the norm for semiotic life. The false and external self is the self that must seek confirmation from an indifferent world. The shift to the empty self of the 'glassy essence' works in a dialectical tension with the self of the 'bottomless lake'. Peirce clearly had some sense of what could be called the 'collective unconscious' when he analyzed the sub-surface forms of semiotic association that assemble to form *gestalts* of great power. The conscious self (the self of healthy narcissism) is effaced before the empty self that becomes a mere cipher of nature and of its own impenetrable unconscious. Again, we are compelled to ask: where or what is the self?

I am persuaded that Peirce could not find the true self precisely because of his deep narcissistic wound. In struggling to overcome the father/mother, he had to split his self into the attainable false self of public semiosis and the hidden self that could not be integrated with his *persona*. Where does religion come in? Peirce's quest for a transfiguring center, manifest above all in his mature cosmological speculations, represents his attempt to find a true self on the other side of the psychic split produced by his narcissistic wound. The God of *agape*, deeply tied to the growth of concrete reasonableness in the domain of *Thirdness*, is the lost self writ large on the semiotic universe. Peirce's religious quest was part and parcel of his quest for self. Is this to say that his God is nothing more than a narcissistic anthropomorphic projection? No; for the divine nature represents a genuine presence that can actually heal the narcissistic wound by transfiguring the self within the context of a healing universe 'perfused with signs'.

Augmenting Alice Miller's evocative portrayal of the narcissistic wound, and the psychic doubling (between a true and false self), are parallel insights from Julia Kristeva. Her brilliant analysis of the semiotic structures of melancholy have opened up a new chapter in psychoanalytic theory, and so aid the psycho-biographer in moving toward a renewed understanding of the role of melancholy in the productions of genius. Her formulations

are too complex to be adumbrated here, but several pertinent conceptions can help us round out our understanding of Peirce's frenzied melancholy. Of primary importance is the split she envisions between the public realm of manifest signs (the 'signs of the Father' in patriarchal codes) and the deeper and presymbolic realm of bodily rhythms. She distinguishes between the symbolic and the semiotic, with the latter term referring to the bodily rhythms prior to signification. A more judicious formulation would redefine this in terms of the tensions between the presemiotic and the semiotic proper, with the semiotic realm being equivalent to what she calls the symbolic.

In the context of this reformulation, Peirce was caught between the obvious power of the semiotic realm (hence his commitment to pansemioticism) and the realm of Firstness that is presemiotic. In addition to his repeated analyses of Firstness is his fascination with nothingness, which he divides into two types. There is a kind of 'greater nothingness' that lies outside the realms of the world, and is certainly prior to Firstness. And there is a kind of 'lesser nothingness' that is roughly equivalent to the cosmic soup of possibilities that obtains at the origin of all Firsts, Seconds, and Thirds. What is Peirce moving toward when he speaks of this greater nothingness? In psychological terms, he is struggling toward a domain in which his own reality can emerge prior to the forced codes of the 'name of the Father', from which he has been compelled to derive his own validity and contour. His choice of semiosis, and the robust realm of speech, marks him as an alienated self who must flee from the more primal realm of the presemiotic. In siding with the father (who, curiously, is also the mother of the semiotic self), Peirce turns away from the presemiotic enabling conditions that link him to the larger world.

Kristeva puts the matter in perspective when she argues that literary productivity — and here we can include philosophical productivity — attempts to write the self into being, even though it always fails to do so:

the work of art that insures the rebirth of its author and its reader or viewer is one that succeeds in integrating the artificial language it puts forward (new style, new composition, surprising imagination) and the unnamed agitations of an omnipotent self that ordinary social and linguistic usage always leave somewhat orphaned or plunged into mourning. Hence such a fiction, if it isn't an antidepressant, is at least a survival, a resurrection. ... (Kristeva 1989: 51)

Peirce's manic productivity is in search of a resurrected self that can overcome the narcissistic wound left by the self-absorbed father/mother who failed to allow Peirce his own intrinsic needs. Depression and writing are deeply entwined. The depressive, suffering from a profound sense of the loss of true self, must write him- or herself into being through the

power of signs. Yet the sheer semiotic plenitude that emerges cannot fill in the sense of lack that animates it, thus calling for another doomed cycle of frenzied productivity.

In this sense, Peirce's true self belongs in the 'not yet', where it can only emerge out of the transforming power of a universal community, itself rooted in an evolving God. The 'solution' to Peirce's melancholy could only come from a new cosmology in which the self could return out of the future. The many people in his life became victims of his split self. Each new relationship carried the burden of Peirce's quest for the true self. The elusive father/mother appeared again and again in different guises, always taunting Peirce and showing him his own incompleteness. His heroic productivity could only come at a price, and was only possible because of the war within his own psyche. Consequently, the community of Peirce scholars must remember that his literary achievement is deeply ambiguous, and that it is handed over to us by a person who damaged many lives through and because of his productive momentums.

We are left then with the picture of a failed Dandy who spent his life in search of an elusive lost object. The world of his youth, supported by the Boston Brahmin establishment and protected by his all-powerful father, gave way in the 1880s to a dark and frustrated reality in which Peirce's dreams became more and more unrealizable. His need for confirmation drove him into the arms of many women, and, tragically, compelled him to abuse the two women closest to him. His psychic inflation, and its concomitant delusions of grandeur, often gave way to a deeper restlessness whose most telling mark is his continual effort to rewrite his own self and the foundations of the semiotic universe. Moving beyond these psychoanalytic reflections, we can point to a split within American pragmatism itself. This split reaches right to the heart of our culture, and is most clearly manifest in the tensions between a kind of semiotic omnivorousness (a form of colonialism?) and a deeper sense of the mystery of the presemiotic world. My sense is that Peirce is a cipher of this cultural split, and that his brilliant achievement represents part of the Eurocentric matrix that haunts and fascinates us (see West 1989). If Peircean semiotics promises to become one of the dominant forces of the next century, and I believe that it will be, then we must probe more deeply into the cultural implications of his psychic split, a split that belongs to the Euro-American psyche.

The split within the American psyche can be put in terms of the divide between a pansemioticism that wishes to render all of reality in semiotic terms, and a regionalism that wishes to radically limit the reach of any semiotic claims. Peirce envisioned a general semiotic logic that would encompass all forms of awareness. Like his closest analogue, Leibniz, Peirce insisted that the fundamental principles of his system could apply

to whatever is in whatever way it is. This generic intent, shared by such later American philosophers as Dewey and Buchler, strikes many as the last vestige of an imperial sense of categorial control. In its place is offered the innumerable provincialisms that seek to move from a place on the circumference of power toward the real or alleged center. I call Peirce a cipher of the Euro-American psyche precisely because he lived within this split. His personal narcissistic wound also has a social dimension. The search for the lost object in his private life runs parallel to a search for a public lost object that may not be confined to his community of scientific inquiry. As his friend Royce knew so well, the transfigured community cannot be limited to one type of communal structure, nor can it be a kind of empty universalistic power that effaces difference. In his efforts at self-healing, Peirce also left profound traces of the larger order of national self-reconfiguration. In post-Eurocentric America, some of these traces will bear fruit.

The focus on a universal semiosis denies the mystery of origins and the equal mystery of regional configurations. Peirce's quest for the heart of nature, manifest in his category of nothingness, also spills over into a quest for the limits of semiosis. These limits can come either from the primal reality of a presemiotic nothingness (perhaps best understood as the potencies of *natura naturans*), or from the regional configurations which measure and fragment the scope of interpretants. While Peirce was not a political or social philosopher, he was an explorer of the domain that lies beyond the self-involute sign-using organism. His fragmentary understanding of the social self, or social selves, stems in the end from his deep and unreconciled narcissistic wound.

My reading of Peirce's psychic split, and the productive frenzy that emerged from it, moves considerably beyond Brent's formulations. His chosen task is that of an intellectual historian rather than a psychobiographer. However, his detailed and masterful analysis of Peirce, both in terms of his milieu and in terms of his inner demons, provides many clues that can make such a psychological analysis possible. Brent is to be thanked for bringing his brilliant achievement to the public. His balance and fairness, combined with an unrelenting honesty about his subject, make this work a model for philosophical biography. This book will forever change the way we understand Peirce, and, I hope, the way in which we correlate the struggles of the thinker with his or her public signs and world.

My suspicion is that the explosion of this ticking time bomb will absorb the energies of the community for some time to come. But I am also persuaded that the final opinion (expressed in and by the final interpretant) will be a balanced one in which Peirce's many demons will be understood

for what they were — fragmentary powers in search of a transfiguring center.

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