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Review of *His Glassy Essence: An Autobiography of Charles Sanders Peirce.*

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Charles Peirce died in the spring of 1914. The first full-length biography, my own, did not appear until almost eighty years later in the spring of 1993.1   The first volume of the second-projected for three volumes—by Kenneth Laine Ketner and under review here, appeared five years after that. It is, I think, important to be able to place in their historical context the reasons why one of the great and original thinkers of the 19th Century waited so long for well-researched biographical studies, especially in light of the fact that there exists in many depositories a varied and very large number of primary sources on Peirce's life, of which the largest and most complete collection is at Harvard University's Houghton Library. For a detailed account, see my "The Singular Experience of the Peirce Biographer."2Let it suffice here to point to the suspicions of the Harvard University department of philosophy concerning both Peirce's authenticity as a philosopher and his character. Their doubts about his character resulted in the department's withholding from research, with the exception of their designated biographer, all of Peirce's biographical papers until 1956 and of four "restricted" boxes until 1991.

When in 1958, I began research into Peirce's life, I asked a number of respected Harvard scholars about Peirce in an effort to find out why no biography had been written. At best, they said, Peirce was a brilliant and undisciplined thinker who created the kernel of great ideas that were fulfilled by others, such as William James a

Josiah Royce. He was, they said, a classic example of extraordinary talents gone tragically astray. His publications were minor and his philosophical ideas, such as they were, were already collected in six volumes of largely incomprehensible text, or else lost in the immense and impenetrable labyrinth of his manuscripts.

Peirce was, they reported, an eccentric and debauched genius—a miscegenator, a homosexual, a bigamist, a drug addict and boozer, and a libertine who tried to seduce his first wife into sexual perversion, who married a French whore, and died of syphilis.  My informants believed that these accusations, which they assumed to be true, were the principal factors, along with its aversion to Peirce's philosophy, in the decision of the department not to proceed with his biography. My research in Peirce's papers has shown that some of these characterizations have a basis in evidence, others do not. There is nothing whatever to support the idea that the racist Peirce had a black mistress and mulatto children by her. But one of Peirce's Century Club cronies, the scientifically respected, but personally notorious geologist, Clarence King, did have and the two men may have been confused.3   Neither is there evidence to support the idea that Peirce was homosexual, but his brother, James Mills Peirce, dean of the graduate faculty, was (as were a fair number of their classmates) and, again, the two men may have been confused.4    The charge of bigamy has no serious basis.  It is true, that at twenty, Peirce had seduced a young woman with the pretense of marriage, but that act was not bigamous. Melusina, his first wife, though she had many complaints about his behavior, never accused him of sexual perversion (or bigamy). No evidence exists supporting the claim that Juliette, his second wife, was a prostitute. To the contrary, what evidence there is supports the idea that she was a woman of independent means. Peirce's ability to think clearly until a very short time before his death belies the belief that he suffered from syphilis. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that Peirce abused drugs and alcohol beginning in his early twenties. I believe he used them to ameliorate the lifelong effects of two neurological pathologies, the exquisite pain of trigeminal neuralgia and the uncontrollable mood swings of manic depressive illness; the symptoms of both he described in himself.6 That Peirce was a philanderer was believed by both his wives and by others. Hypersexuality, along with the other kinds of manic behavior exhibited by Peirce, is symptomatic of manic-depressives. The department had, it seems, some basis for its attitude towards Peirce, but not for what Murphey accurately calls "the Harvard vendetta against Peirce from Eliot's ascension to the presidency of Harvard in 1869 until the advent of Putnam, Sheffler, and a new breed of Harvard professors." Nor is there justification for the sad state into which Peirce's manuscripts were allowed to decline.7

Originally, the Harvard department intended the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*8 to appear in ten volumes, with those beyond the first six devoted to philosophical writings expected to contain "writings on physics and psychology, as well as his reviews, letters and biography," but that project languished for almost twenty years.9 Slowly, Peirce's reputation  as a philosopher  grew.  In  1939, the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Society devoted most of a meeting to his thought, the first such event. The Charles S. Peirce Society was founded in 1946, but owing to lack of funds did not begin publication of its *Transactions* until1965. In 1952, at the suggestion of Arthur 0. Lovejoy, the distinguished historian of ideas, the Peirce Society sponsored the first *Studies in the Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce,* with an essay by him and twenty-three others on various aspects of Peirce's thought.10 Two years later, partly in response to these events, the department invited Arthur Burks, with the aid of a Rockefeller Grant, to prepare the seventh and eighth volumes of the *Collected Papers,* which appeared in 1958. The department also asked him to undertake Peirce's biography, but he refused for reasons of professional choice.  That Quine asked Burks at the time if he had uncovered any evidence of Peirce's bigamy (he had not) shows that the department still had reservations about the desirability of a biography. In 1959, forty-five years after Peirce's death, the department appointed Max Harold Fisch, a long‑time Peirce scholar and established historian of philosophy, as its designated Peirce biographer and provided  him with a Rockefeller  Grant.   Fisch spent thenext thirty years engaged in collecting a wide variety of Peirce materials, but he never wrote the biography and effectively discouraged anyone else from doing so. In this painstaking and exacting search, he was assisted by many scholars, friends, and correspondents both in the United States and in Europe. Harvard's refusal to provide a permanent office or funding for Fisch's biographical work led, in 1974, to the circumstances whereby Fisch and his efforts, by this time including plans for a new chronological edition of Peirce's work as well as the biography, became associated with the Texas Tech University's Institute for Studies in Pragmaticism, whose director is Ketner, about as distant geographically and culturally from Harvard University as it is possible to imagine within the continental limits of the United States. The next year Fisch and his work moved again to begin the Peirce Project at Indiana University-Purdue University in lndianapolis, where it remains today. The Project contains two general categories of material those that support the chronological edition of Peirce's writings and those that support the biography Fisch intended to write. The first includes electroprints of all the Harvard microfilms, copies of appropriate documents and manuscripts from the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, the libraries at Harvard University, Southern Illinois University, Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University, Princeton University, and at least fifty other depositories. It also includes bibliographical studies and the research of contributing editors.

The second, the Fisch material, includes an extensive chronological file of at least 40,000 notecards (the beginning of which consisted in the more than 3000 notecards of my own research), containing a virtual narrative of most aspects of Peirce's life, beginning about 1820 and continuing to about 1940; an extensive subject file (of about the same length) cross‑indexed to hundreds of file boxes (which includes, for example, under A: abduction, ambidexterity, AAAS, analogy, analytic, anthropomorphic, architectonic, argument, Arisbe, Aristotle, art, association of ideas, Astor, atheism, Athenaeum (London), Atlantic Monthly, atom, and autobiographical); at least l00 files from correspondents on matters of interest; and bodies of research by those who assisted him in the United States and in Europe. In addition, there is a large, select library of books appropriate to a Peirce biography.

Except for Fisch, Ketner, a well-established Peirce scholar, is the first and only Peirce biographer to have the unfettered use of this magnificent assemblage. Because of the censorship of Peirce's biographical papers, Ketner's biography, therefore, carries an unfair burden; it is a pioneering work, as well as the carrier of the mean and tragic history of Peirce's papers and reputation. When I eagerly picked up the handsomely produced volume to read (which covers Peirce's life from 1839 until about 1870), it was with the highest expectations and the keenest anticipation, despite its odd pretension as Peirce's autobiography. By the bottom of the first page of text, I was brought up short. The book begins:

DEAR READER: my identity is significant, but ultimately of no importance. You need to understand a bit about me. I'm known as a mystery writer by trade, but I'm an amateur by inclination and instinct....But my dilettante ways, now that I reflect, are more important to me than my writing.... From my father I received the name Louis Elisha Eisenstaat, but everyone has always called me Ike. I'm proud of my Harvard education, but I 'm still an Okie at bottom .... This book... has been an exorcism, my way as an amateur psychologist to avoid becoming a professional—which is to say, continuing to be neurotically obsessed and mildly maniacal—about the topic of this volume. [I will place the page numbers from the book in parentheses. 3, 4]

How extraordinary, I mused, that Ketner should use his alter ego Okie Ike, self-confessed amateur and dilettante, as the narrator of a major biography of a great philosopher! In some confusion, I turned to the Preface, where I learned that "History is an abductivc science" and "a  story-telling art," that there are three fictional characters, Ike, the narrator, Betsey, and LeRoy, and that the Epiloguewill explain what Ketner is doing (xiii). Fearing that abduction and fiction were about to become irremediably entangled, I turned to the Epilogue, subtitled, "On Method...." There, Ketner admits that Peirce never wrote an autobiography, "of this length." (351). He then describes how his format creates a fictional world, within which he strings together Peirce's autobiographical and philosophical writings, while filling in the gaps where needed. Ketner justifies this unusual and daring structure by saying that he learned from the writer Walker Percy "about the way in which truths can be expressed within proper fictional settings, in some cases better than in scientific prose," that he wants the book to read "as a good historical novel should be read," and that the "fact that the present work is fundamentally and ontologically fictional does not remove it from the category of scholarship...(352-353). For the reader, like me, who wishes actually to distinguish abduction from fiction, he provides a rule:

The conversations of Ike Eisenstaat, Betsey Darbey, and LeRoy Wyttynys about Peirce are also based upon historical and philosophical  research: mine and that of many other persons as indicated. However, the adventures of those three characters are fictional creations. (352)

The rule, which seems simple, is remarkably difficult to apply. I will illustrate this difficulty by presenting the story of the identity of Peirce's second wife, the mysterious Juliette, (an obsession with Fisch, Ketner, and others), which is engagingly and forcefully told by LeRoy Wyttynys (whose portrait on page 341 is in fact that of Walker Percy). The story is a good one, and is a cleverly detailed embroidery of the research originally done for Fisch by Victor Lenzen, in 1972, into the possibility (one of several such possibilities) that Juliette was the illegitimate daughter, named Fabiola, of a French aristocrat and diplomat, Adolphe de Bacourt and a Spanish Gypsy woman, Agustina de Lopez, celebrated *flamenco* dancer and singer of *cantejondo,* both of whom had died before their daughter was six; that, in 1876, at age twelve, orphan Fabiola came to New York with a chaperone, the Marquise de Chambrun, where she took the name Juliette Annette Froissy Pourtalai, lived in luxury and became the informal ward of a group that included the historian and diplomat George Bancroft and Peirce's father Benjamin; and that Peirce met her then, fell in love and married her seven years later, in 1883, when she was nineteen.  Such are the bare bones of the romantic tale (279-292).  Does it also count as an abduction, as Ketner  intends? Bacourt, Lopez, and her daughter Fabiola are historical figures who are contemporary with Juliette, but the dates are problematic. Fabiola was born in 1864, but according to three outline sketches of Julicttc's life written by Peirce in about 1890,Juliette was born in 1857.11 The 1883 wedding certificate gives her age as 26, which is consistent with the outlines. Ketner does not cite these sources, although he is aware of them, only Peirce's diary entry for January 6, 1914, noting Juliette's 50th birthday and a neighbor's letter, both of which fit Fabiola's birthdate.  The evidence provided for Juliette's gypsy background is forced far beyond its value.  There is no evidence for Chambrun's chaperonage, for the group that cared for Fabiola, for her coming to New York, or for the other clever inventions of the story. This is poor science and poor scholarship.   I count the tale merely fiction. Lenzen, the creator of the Fabiola hypothesis, gave it up as highly unlikely, though perhaps reluctantly, as it is an appealing romance.

The book contains several such confusions of fiction and hypothesis, but I will mention very briefly only one, the section headed, "A Secret Marriage," which begins, "Charley's first wife was Caroline Louise Badger..." (213-222). The claim is mistaken. What the evidence (in the form of letters from Badger to Peirce) supports is the hypothesis that Peirce, at age twenty, arrogantly planned and successfully carried out the seduction of Badger (whose family was down the social scale from the Peirces) by convincing her that they were married. For Peirce, it was in the nature of an experiment; as he put it, "You may do anything with a person who is in love with you." When she realized how credulous she had been, Badger wrote him that "you are such an experienced male-coquette you can give me a few lessons in flirting... "(221). If Ketner thinks that the evidence supports the existence of a genuine marriage contract, he is as gullible as poor Badger.

While we may excuse these confusions as the result of Ketncr's story-telling purpose, the confusions arising from the style and structure of the book are more serious; they make it sometimes almost unreadable. Almost half of the book is made up of long selections of Peirce's words in italics, often without commentary.  Some of these sequences are biographical, some philosophical and some have elements of both.  They are very well chosen and most of them are in print for the first time. By this means, Ketner intends to make Peirce's voice a unique and prominent element in the book and to reduce as much as possible his own intrusion into Peirce's life story. The strategy sadly fails for a number of reasons. The use of italics, rather than emphasizing and giving weight to Peirce's words, docs the reverse. In contrast with ordinary type, which appears weighty and straight forward, the lengthy sections of italics are difficult to read, appear washed out—almost disembodied—and the reader's eyes tend to skip. Because so many of the Peirce  quotations are long, they create the effect of a separate book. Many of them are too long and create tedium. For example, there are twenty pages of letters in 1859-60 from Peirce to his family from various Coast Survey stations (178-198). Two or three pages would have been sufficient. In fact, this tendency to quote without analysis affects much of the book and often leaves the reader at a loss. There are some fifty pages, with occasional helpful analysis, covering Peirce's high school and college years, which include both biographical and philosophical matters (128-178). There are fifty-five pages of philosophical writing which present the development of Peirce's philosophy from 1865 to 1910 with two sections of analysis in LeRoy's Wyttynys's clear, but overbearing style (293-348). (There are even twenty pages of letters (107-127) from Benjamin Peirce to Josephine LcContc, a Georgia belle, whom he called "Queen of the Sciences," apparently included only to suggest that the two had an affair, since Ketner's introductory paragraphs establish the importance to Benjamin's professional life of her and her husband, the physicist John LeConte.)

Without intense study (which is certainly worth the effort), very little of the quality of Peirce's character or thought comes through in these long sequences, except in the commentaries of Ketner's livelyfictional characters, Ike, Betsey, and LeRoy. Half way through the book, their intrusive personalities and coarse sensibilities have taken over and Peirce has become a phantom, utterly dependent on them for definition of both character and thought, especially for the general reader. Ketner's strategy of giving Peirce his own voice, by means of long selected quotations in italics interspersed with commentary, has produced the reverse of what he intended, and we know considerably more about the biographer and his fictional characters than we do about Peirce. Fortunately, the historical content underlying the narrative style is solid and filled with information that is new for Peirce scholars and interesting to the general reader. As an example, I point to the excellent brief biography of Benjamin Peirce and his place in the social, educational, scientific, and political worlds of his time (75-96). In summary, the structure of the book jumps back and forth chronologically and in content and style between its various elements and leaves the reader confused by the labyrinth of multiple narrations and unanalyzed text.

There is much wasted space in the book in addition to Peirce's early letters to his family and the letters from Benjamin to Josephine LeConte. The story of Juliette's origins, placed as it is almost twenty years out of chronological sequence, takes space and attention away from a discussion of the genuine importance of Peirce's first marriage (which Ketner calls the second marriage) to Melusina Fay. Unlike the relationship with Juliette which was empty of any exchange of philosophic ideas, that with Zina was filled with important discussions concerning the Categories, the status of women, and so forth. Some of Peirce's early work was written for her. In all, these fifty-five pages (and half that number again from other sources) might have been used to better advantage, perhaps to provide a fuller picture of science at the time, especially the impact of the Coast Survey as its preeminent scientific institution, perhaps to give more specific information on the sources of Peirce's thought, as exemplified, for example, in the dominating influence of his father and in the 1865-66 lcctures and the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* series.

Ketner's scholarly apparatus creates its own difficulties. He uses a scarcely visible superscript t after a word or phrase in place of footnote numbers. In the notes, page number, line and key word identify the source. He does this "...to make it possible to read unimpeded—as a good historical novel should be read—the story of Peirce's life for its own sake as an interesting and enlightening piece of our national cultural heritage" (352). To illustrate: I became interested in a sequence of Peirce quotations (138-139) dealing with early metaphysical ideas. At first I thought there were six footnotes, but after several excursions to the notes and back, I discovered there were ten, but for some time, I could only find eight in the text. After much frustrating turning back and forth, I numbered the notes. Ketner could have used small numbers to aid the scholar without fear of impeding the general reader's enjoyment.

As serious a problem for the scholar is the fact that most citations to Fisch's notes are virtually useless, because, while they give the location in Fisch's files by year and item number, they usually fail to give Fisch's sources, which Fisch always provides. To retrieve those sources, the researcher must consult the Fisch file in person at the Peirce Edition Project, which few can do.

I have read Ketner's biography four times with care and, while the experience has been extremely frustrating for the reasons outlined, it has also been extraordinarily rewarding. Despite its flaws, it is an important and useful work, provided the reader is willing to treat it as an excellent collection of original sources interspersed with useful commentary.

As a book, *His Glassy Essence* is a valuable failure. Ketner calls it "a tentative conversation about the nature and importance of Peirce's life" and "a work about a fallibilist by a fallibilist." He suggests that recent advances in publishing technology will make a thorough revision of the entire effort possible once the third part is completed (353). I hope that Professor Ketner will accept this review in the spirit of "a tentative conversation" among fallibilists and that he will seriously consider revision before publication of the second volume in this series in the light of my critique.

NOTES

1.         Joseph Brent, *CJ1iirle1 Siimlen Peirce: A Life.* Bloomington ; Indfon;i University Press, 1993. This biography docs not ;ippear in Ketner's bibliography.

2.             Joseph Brent, "The Singular Experience of the Peirce Biogra· pher," *Sp11m 11nd Signiftc11tion1,* Roberta Kcvelson, editor, (Critic of Institu· tions: vol. 10). New York: Peter L3ng, 1996. 29-SO.

3.             Patricia O'Toole, *The FiPe of Heiirts:An Intim11te Porn-11it of Hmry Ad11ms 11nd his Friends, 1880·1918,New* York, B;ill:mtinc: Books, 1990. pp.  401-403.

4.             Hubert Kennedy," ...fierce &Quixotic ally," *H11rP11rd MR911·*

*::foe,* 85, No. 2 (November-December, 1982): 62-64

5.             Joseph Brent, "Pursuing Peirce," *Synthese* 106 No.3 March 1996   301-322

6.         Murray Murphey, Review ofJoscph Brent, *Cl1RrlesSanden Peirce: A Lift,Tr11nmctio11s ofthe CJ111rles S. Peirce Society* Vol XXIX, No. 4. 723-728.

7.         Nath:m Houser,"The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Peirce Papers." *Signs of HumRnity/l'homme et ses signes,* General Editor, Gerard Dclcd;illc, Vol. 3 *Semiotics in the World/LR Semiotigue dRns le Monde,* Edited *by*/EditJ par Michel Balat:md Janice Dcledalle: The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992.    1259-1268.

8.         Charles S. Peirce, *Collected PRptrs of ChtJrles S11nders Peirce,* edited *by* Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge: The Bclkmtp Press of Harvard  University  Press,  1931-1935.

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10.       Philip P.Wiener and Frederic H.Young, editors, *Studies inthe*

*Philosophyof CJ1iirksS1J nders Peirce.* Cambridge: H3rV3rd University Press, 1952.

11.       MS 1610.

12.       MS 891