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Abstract: Semiotics, in the guise of the limited Saussurean semiology, has been widely used in the humanities and in cultural studies for the past 20 to 30 years at least. With the advent, nearly 20 years ago, of the environmental humanities, including the new field of humanities animal studies, the weaknesses of this mode of analysis became increasingly clear. This essay forms part of a larger attempt to develop a Peirce-informed biosemiotic theory capable of affording conceptual tools for the broad-based study of human and nonhuman natural and cultural developmental ecologies. It is particularly concerned to develop a biosemiotic, and hence non-reductive, account of aesthetic experience in which function consists in the growth of knowledge. Based on the role of chance, and thus creativity, in natural and cultural evolutionary systems, this essay uses poetry and poetic theory in order to argue that chance is a habit-upsetting happenstance whereby something which has the potential to become a sign (in Peirce's triadic account), or to become a bearer of meaning, actually does become a sign to some living thing.
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