

# A Singular Love Affair – Charles and Juliette Peirce

*Um caso de amor singular — Charles e Juliette Peirce*

**David E. Pfeifer**

Philosophy Department  
Institute for American Thought  
Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) – USA  
depfeife@iupui.edu

**Abstract:** The usual view of Juliette Peirce is that she had a negative influence on Charles Peirce. This essay takes the opposite point of view, arguing that she had a very positive influence on the life and work of Charles Peirce.

**Keywords:** Charles Peirce. Juliette Peirce. Biography.

**Resumo:** *A visão comum de Juliette Peirce é que ela teve uma influência negativa sobre Charles Peirce. Este ensaio assume o ponto de vista oposto, argumentando que ela tinha uma influência muito positiva sobre a vida e obra de Charles Peirce.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Charles Peirce. Juliette Peirce. Biografia.*

## Introduction

“I can see no hope for Charley as long as he has this woman on his hands.”<sup>1</sup> So wrote Charles’ brother Bertie in 1885, two and a half years after Charles’ marriage to Juliette. The Peirce family did not appreciate Juliette Peirce and her influence on Charles. Bertie, of all the family members, was the most forceful in his negative judgment of Juliette. In 1907, Bertie repeated his feelings to their sister, Helen Peirce Ellis, stating that “thanks to the charming Juliette he has lost all his great opportunities.”<sup>2</sup> And later in the same letter, he remarked on “Juliette’s malign interference with his affairs.” Charles’ aunt, Charlotte Elizabeth Peirce, who lived in the Benjamin Peirce (father) household did not care for Juliette. “It seems to me that she [Juliette] is a spoilt child—& I should be wretched if I had to pass any length of time with her; it would be so impossible to satisfy her or make her happy.”<sup>3</sup> Even William James commented negatively on Juliette. “I return you Juliette’s letter which is horrible enough. Hard to help a person of that kind! I begin to congratulate myself on not being in the

---

1 Letter, Herbert Henry Davis Peirce (younger brother “Bertie”) to James Mills Peirce (older brother), 24 November 1885.

2 Letter, Herbert Henry Davis Peirce to Helen Peirce Ellis (Charles’ sister), 22 January 1907.

3 Letter, Charlotte Elizabeth Peirce to Helen Peirce Ellis, 18 December 1883.

family!”<sup>4</sup> Yes, Charles lost many opportunities. Yes, Juliette could be annoying, even to Charles. But, the influence of Juliette on Charles was far more positive than most persons recognize. The complete narrative is not available, yet many pieces can be put together. This article is an attempt to put pieces together to obtain a fuller account of the Charles/Juliette relation.

## 1 The Juliette questions

Juliette Peirce is considered by researchers in the Peirce world to be an important part of Charles’ life. She cared for his physical needs—food, clothing, a pleasant home environment, nursed him through illnesses, became his primary emotional support, used her own dwindling funds to keep their lifestyle when Charles could not, and stayed with him even when he was cruel and abusive. Max Fisch, when working on his biography of Charles Peirce (never completed), stated, “The chief single difficulty about Peirce’s biography is the identity of his second wife”<sup>5</sup> The two pressing questions are (1) Juliette’s identity and (2) how Juliette may have influenced Charles’ life and work. Did her presence make a difference in what Charles achieved in his scientific and philosophic pursuits? They were married for almost thirty-one years and were together for a time prior to the marriage. I will discuss information relevant to these questions separately, beginning with the issue of identity.

## 2 Juliette’s identity

Besides Max Fisch and Maurice Auger (a retired United Nations official living in France who assisted Max Fisch) those who sought to learn the identity of Juliette Froissy Pourtalai include Peirce biography researchers Henry Leonard, Victor Lenzen, Arthur Burks, Joseph Brent, Kenneth Ketner, and Nathan Houser. These inquirers felt dissatisfied with their results and possible conclusions. Though no definite conclusions may be reached, broad hints as to Juliette’s identity can be gathered from their research materials, from a judicious sifting of their speculations and conclusions, from a careful examination of Charles’ manuscripts, and from the letters of Charles, Juliette,<sup>6</sup> and the Peirce family.

Charles and Juliette married on 26 April 1883 in New York City, just after Charles’ final divorce decree from his first wife, Zina, on 24 April 1883. The marriage for each was listed as the second. (Given that Charles and Juliette consciously hid Juliette’s identity, no evidence exists that Juliette was previously married.) Juliette lists her name as Juliette Annette Pourtalai (née Froissy). Charles listed his residence as Baltimore, Maryland, and his place of birth as Cambridge, Massachusetts. Juliette

---

4 Letter, William James to Herbert Henry Davis Peirce, 11 November 1908.

5 Letter, Max H. Fisch to Maurice Auger, 15 August 1983.

6 Juliette’s correspondence (L485-L579) is now available online at the Harvard archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Am 1632: (<http://hollis.harvard.edu/?q=material-id:matManuscript+Peirce,%20Charles%20Sanders+%28branches-id:HOU+OR+branches-id:NET%29>).

listed her residence as Washington, D.C.,<sup>7</sup> and her place of birth as France. Her age was given as twenty-six, which would make her birth date 1857.

Juliette died on Thursday, 4 October 1934,<sup>8</sup> in Milford, Pennsylvania. The funeral was held at her home, Arisbe, on Sunday, 7 October 1934. Her death certificate, completed by a neighbor, listed her birth date as 2 July 1865 and her birth place as France. If the 1865 date from the death certificate is correct, at their marriage Juliette was about eighteen and Charles was forty-four.

Juliette spoke French fluently. William James, who traveled extensively in Europe and spoke French himself, claimed that Juliette was Alsatian. When Charles was in Cambridge, William James stated he had with him “his pathetic little old alsatian wife.”<sup>9</sup> This Alsatian claim fits with the information that Juliette could speak German acceptably, but could not write correspondence in German.<sup>10</sup> Neighbors heard Juliette and Charles speaking in French. Juliette spoke to others about being from France;<sup>11</sup> Charles advised Juliette about her property in France;<sup>12</sup> and Juliette was consistent in recording France as her birth place in the census reports of 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930.<sup>13</sup> Note should be made that while Juliette reported her birth place as France in these census reports, she gave different dates for her immigration to the United States (1877, 1880, and 1881) and gave different birth dates, based on the age she gave the census-taker (1851, 1857, 1862, and 1865). In the 1910 census report, Juliette stated she was 59 years old; in the 1920 census report, she stated she was 58 years old.

These dates for Juliette’s birth are significant, because the date of Juliette’s and Charles’ first meeting is clear—1877, the earliest date given in the various census reports. Confirmation of the year that Juliette and Charles first met was given by Charles when he wrote to Juliette in 1907, “Carus has written wanting some of my old articles[,] that I wrote about the time I first knew you[,] to be reprinted...”<sup>14</sup> This reference is to *The Popular Science Monthly* articles of 1877-1878. Given the range of dates for her birth, when Juliette and Charles met, her age could have been 26, 20, 15, or maybe 12. While the ages of 15 and 12 seem unlikely, no evidence exists to rule them out.

---

7 The Boyd City Directory for Washington, D.C., 1883, lists Mad. Juliette Pourtalar (sic) living at 1324 Riggs Street. (The building, a small row house, still existed in the 1980s.) Photocopies of the pages from the Boyd Directory were included by Maurice Auger in a letter to Max H. Fisch, 19 November 1984. Auger also included a photograph of the building. Charles also mentions this address (Verso of a sheet in MS 278).

8 Juliette’s headstone in the Milford cemetery lists only her death date, 1934. No birth date is given.

9 Letter William James to Henry James (son), 3 May 1903, in the letter ‘French’ is crossed out and replaced with ‘alsatian.’ Alsatian refers to the Alsace region near Germany.

10 Undated, memories by Mrs. Quick (Edna May Gassmann) in an interview by Victor Lenzen.

11 See for example the Edna Green interview by Preston Tuttle of 17 September 1977.

12 Letter, Charles to Juliette, 4 March 1897.

13 Copies of the marriage certificate and the relevant census sheets are available in the Fisch Archives, Institute for American Thought, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.

14 Letter, Charles to Juliette, 21 February 1907.

Here is the narrative of how Juliette and Charles met. Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), the son of wealthy Milford, PA, neighbors James and Mary Pinchot, and Henry James (1879-1947),<sup>15</sup> son of William James, both reported the same event; the reports seem to have come from Juliette, with whom they both had substantive and repeated contact, especially on legal and financial matters. Pinchot reported: "She met Peirce at a party at the Hotel Brevoort in New York after landing here."<sup>16</sup> Henry James reported: "She came to New York with a woman companion who was engaged for her, presumably by her brother, and a supply of money, and lived alone in the Hotel Brevoort not knowing what to do or what step to take next."<sup>17</sup>

[...] after coming to this country and while living at the old Hotel Brevoort, knowing nobody and keeping to her room most of the time, the manager of the Hotel came to her and told her that there was to be a party or ball or evening reception in the Hotel that evening, that he knew the hosts and would arrange to have her properly introduced as a guest, and that she ought to begin to make some acquaintances, etc.; and she let him go ahead. At this party, which was a respectable New York social affair, she met Peirce.<sup>18</sup>

Charles seems to be remembering this event in the opening of this statement of affection for Juliette.

Now I will write to you about a dear friend I once had and whom I think about every night when I put my head upon my pillow. When I first saw this dear young lady, she had on a very thin brown veil. It hid her face from me, but it did not hide the delicacy, the nobility, the truth, and the strength of her heart. That shone out; not with all the clearness and radiance that it did later, but still enough for me to feel the charm of it. Afterwards, I used often to see this young lady. I have even taken walks in the park with her. Sometimes there was moonlight, and sometimes

---

15 Henry James obviously knew a great deal about Juliette. He handled numerous legal issues for Juliette. Juliette wrote to his mother, Alice James, regularly. A set of letters from Juliette to Alice James were given to Max Fisch in 1963 with this handwritten note from Charles Hartshorne: "Some more letters [Ralph Barton] Perry [William James' biographer] told me to burn." The correspondence between the Peirce family and the James family raises questions. After William's death, the family began to collect the correspondence of William. In a letter from Juliette to Alice James, of c.1 November 1910, Juliette reports sending William's letters to Charles to Alice. In a letter from Alice James to Juliette, of 25 September 1911, Alice reports having received the letters. The Ralph Barton Perry biography of William James, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935, contains 22 letters from Charles to William. However, the Harvard James archival collection (William James Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, MS Am 1092.9) contains no letters from Charles, only 58 letters from William to Charles and one letter from William to Juliette. One can only conjecture what happened.

16 Interview of Gifford Pinchot by Henry Leonard c.1933, p. 9.

17 Henry James, "Memorandum – re: Mrs. Peirce," 27 December 1921, p. 3.

18 Letter, Henry James to Henry Leonard, 2 October 1936.

there was only the beautiful splendour of that wonderful heart of hers. It makes me weep this minute to think of those times; and how the little thing was afraid of a toad so that I had the blessed privilege of clasping her. Then I used to see her more intimately. My life became bound up with hers. I used to regard her with deep love and still deeper adoration as being very pure & very noble. And when I look back upon it all, it is that that is the strongest impression. She was a very true and noble heart, that nothing ever could corrupt. And then I knew her in Washington when she showed capacities which surprised me. Then there was a dreadful period when everything in life was terribly terribly embittered. I wish now I had been drowned, before I had to pass through such things. Very gradually, the curse seems to pass away, & there was a time in Milford when there seemed to be happiness, shaded by some doubts only. All this time, I was getting to know and to adore this dear lady more and more and to love her more deeply. In the future I don't know how it will be. The present is dreadful. Life is just a *supplice* [French for torture] without that lady's loving heart. I can only set my teeth & try to do my duty as well as I can.<sup>19</sup>

Note is to be made of the passage's adoring, loving, affectionate content. This emotional side of Charles' personality is one that is not often noted, but is stronger than imagined. Charles obviously loved and felt deeply about Juliette.

Juliette told of being associated with the Hapsburg family and the Austrian royal family. Charles hinted at this association, but neither one of them made a definite statement that could be confirmed. Information exists to establish that Juliette had some connection with royals in Europe.<sup>20</sup> Here are bits of information that support the royal connection inference.

[Juliette was ill.] And over her was this perfectly beautiful robe. It was royal purple velvet. And it was created with the czar's crest. And as I took it off [...] it was lined with chinchilla fur [...] and she was quite delirious and she was completely going back to her days as a young girl, mentioned the same governess and how she and Willy used to play together. (Preston: She and Willy?) Well, the Kaiser [...] She spoke about his withered arm [...] every single thing was for Papa [Charles].<sup>21</sup>

But Mom did talk about the wonderfully rich clothes that Madame Peirce had. She told about going over there, and she opened up a kind of a secret panel in the wall, and she said in there was beautiful fur coats and evening dresses and all

---

19 Letter, Charles to Juliette, 22 April 1890.

20 The statement by neighbors that Juliette was an illegitimate child of a Hapsburg cannot be verified. See for example Ralph Gassman, Preston Tuttle taped interview of friends and neighbors of Peirces, 17 September 1977, p. 14, who said that "she was born on the wrong side of the blanket."

21 Caroline Depuy, Preston Tuttle taped interview of friends and neighbors of Peirces, 17 September 1977, p. 53-54.

of it. And she said she had a big box of costume jewelry, the most expensive kind [...] Mrs. Peirce had shown Mom some beautiful rosepoint homemade lace, a lot of it. And she said to Mom, she said, "You know, I make an income off this." Said this belonged to royalty, the Austrian Royal Family. They use it in christenings and [...] You know how they use to replace it on wedding dresses? [...] They would take it off and sew it on, you know? She said, "I rent that out, and I make money off it."<sup>22</sup>

[...] she [Juliette] used to go to Europe, and after she'd come back from Europe, why, they'd seem to have some money. Now, I think she was in some way actually connected with the royal court of Austria. I think she was. And she used to go over there occasionally to Europe and come back, and of course when they come back they'd seem to have some money.<sup>23</sup>

[Gifford] Pinchot said that he was convinced that Juliette had lived in a royal court [...] he had checked Juliette's stories, and she just knew too much that was reliable for her to be fabricating the whole thing.<sup>24</sup>

Another important incident confirming some royal connection happened when Juliette was traveling in Egypt for her health (tuberculosis). Charles' brother, James Mills Peirce, was traveling in Egypt at the same time and met Juliette and her traveling companions. In response to a disparaging comment by James, Charles wrote: "You saw her in Egypt traveling about with the Duc and Duchesse D'Harcourt. Do you fancy people like that pick up unknown females? If you do, you don't know much about the French."<sup>25</sup>

Juliette's and Charles' statements about royalty along with the numerous reports from neighbors can be discounted, but the presence of jewelry and fine clothing, especially a fur with a royal crest, is a different matter. The testimony of Gifford Pinchot is creditable, since his mother was a close friend of Juliette, and knew more about her than most people. Also he studied in Nancy, France, a city from which Juliette sometimes indicated she came.

Juliette seemed to have her own money, but the flow of funds ended just about the same time that Charles lost his position with the Coast Survey. "When we settled here [Milford, Pennsylvania, in 1887] I had an income of about \$6000 and my wife three or four thousand [about \$222,250 in 2015 US dollars]."<sup>26</sup> "Formerly Juliette used to receive an allowance from a lady on the other side [of the Atlantic] now

---

22 Hazel Gassmann, Preston Tuttle taped interview of friends and neighbors of Peirces, 17 September 1977, p. 32, 33.

23 Henry James, "Memorandum – re: Mrs. Peirce," 27 December 1921, p. 3.

24 Arthur Burk's notes, p. 3, of a 23 March 1956 interview with Henry Leonard, who was sent in 1934 after Juliette's death by the Harvard Philosophy Department to collect biographical information on the Peirces.

25 Letter, Charles to brother, James Mills Peirce, 31 July 1894.

26 Letter, Charles to Cornelius Conway Felton, 13 November 1909.

dead; and she died neglecting to provide for its continuance.”<sup>27</sup>

Charles and Juliette seemed to purposively hide Juliette origins, giving vague responses to questions. Answers on the identity question are simply not available. A plausible hypothesis—stated by Henry James,<sup>28</sup> son of William; a neighbor, Edna Green;<sup>29</sup> and hinted at by Charles<sup>30</sup>—is that to reveal Juliette’s identity would have been an embarrassment to her family in France and would injure some nieces and nephews who knew nothing of her. Possibly an element of pride and family loyalty inspired a desire for secrecy. Possibly the real truth might have harmed the social status of Juliette’s family and impugned her social standing. Juliette was very capable of displaying pride, loyalty, and a concern for social status; she displayed them strongly in her relation to Charles and his family.

Thus, Juliette’s age when she met Charles is uncertain. Was it 12, 15, 20 or 26? All that may be said is that “She was a young woman.” A safe conclusion is that Juliette was French. She came from France, with the specific city being unknown, maybe it was Nancy. She had some unknown relation to the Hapsburg royals, most likely she was from some outer circle. Juliette’s French royal background—of whatever kind—would have been attractive to Charles. He came from the upper class of the Cambridge/Boston area; he loved elegant clothes, French wines, and was a bit of a snob. Socially, Charles and Juliette complemented each other.

### 3 The Charles/Juliette relationship and Juliette’s influence

How Juliette may have impacted Charles’ life and work is difficult to answer, but possibly more important. Their relation went through several phases. The short summary, which I will elaborate, is: The first phase, 1877-1884, was from their first meeting through the end of Charles’ appointment at Johns Hopkins University; it was a time that was generally positive and delightful. The second phase, 1885-1891 had two parts. The first part was the years 1885-1887—when they lived primarily in New York City, and the second part was the years 1887-1891—their early time in Milford, Pennsylvania. During this second phase they both had money and associated with the society they deemed their peers. The third and last phase, 1891-1914, began when they both lost their sources of income and their financial situation went from bad to worse. One can see that the first and second phases were likely happy; the third phase consistently became more difficult. Here are some details.

#### ***First phase, 1877-1884***

Charles’ reflection on this early period of their relationship is captured in an 1893 letter to Juliette that revisits their early times together.

It is with deep emotion that I find myself in this hotel which I

---

27 Letter, Charles to William James, 25 July 1907.

28 Henry James, “Memorandum – re: Mrs. Peirce,” 27 December 1921, p. 3-4.

29 Edna Green, Preston Tuttle taped interview of friends and neighbors of Peirce’s, 17 September 1977, p. 51.

30 Letter, Charles to sister, Helen Peirce Ellis, 21 July 1907.

have not been in since we were here together in the old days when you were, oh, so sacred to me, before the City Hall rowdy had put things on a different footing [married us]. Oh my dear love, it makes me want to fall on my knees & worship you to remember all that, my pure devoted friend. Alas, I fear that of late years I have sometimes most dreadfully forgotten the deep deep worship and honour that I owe you. But this brings it all back to me; and I pray I never may forget it any more.<sup>31</sup>

Note again that Charles expresses great love and affection for Juliette. Their relation, though often tempestuous, was grounded in Charles' genuine adoration for Juliette.

Charles' diary from the early months of 1882 (prior to the marriage) clearly indicates they were living together. (Whether Charles and Juliette were together consistently from 1877 through to the marriage in 1883 is not clear.) Of course, Charles rejected claims that they were inappropriate. "Madame Pourtalai and I have not been indulging in wantonness."<sup>32</sup> Charles spoke openly of their impending marriage, even though he was not yet divorced from his first wife, Zina.

I am very anxious, & indeed alarmed at Juliette's health and dare not leave her till warmer weather comes. She is seriously threatened with consumption [tuberculous] & the doctor urges me to get her abroad as soon as possible. The present plan is that we should be married by a man of the law the day she sails & afterward again in France in church [...]<sup>33</sup>

A civil ceremony marriage took place in New York City on April 26, 1883, and soon after that the couple went to Europe."<sup>34</sup>

During this time period, Charles was employed full-time by the Coast Survey and from 1879 through 1883 was a Lecturer in Logic at Johns Hopkins University. Charles was dismissed from Johns Hopkins University primarily because of his traveling and living with Juliette prior to their marriage,<sup>35</sup> a very great offense in the nineteenth century in the social strata within which Charles and Juliette circulated.

From the Johns Hopkins days, not much information on Charles' and Juliette's relationship is available, since they were together and not writing letters to each other. Note must be made, however, that tension was sometimes present in the marriage. A typical example from a bit later: "Uncle Sam [the Coast Survey] and Juliette are enough to drive me out of my wits. I have not learned to calculate

---

31 Letter, Charles to Juliette, March 9, 1893 from Delavan House, Albany, New York.

32 Letter, Charles, apparently, to his brother-in-law, W. R. Ellis, 20 June 1882.

33 Letter, Charles to his mother, Sarah Mills Peirce, c.31March 1883.

34 A puzzling statement is: "Mr. [Benjamin] Ellis, Peirce's nephew, told [Charles] Hartshorne that when Peirce returned from France with Juliette he was asked if he had married her and said – not yet. Ellis remembers learning of a wedding soon afterwards. Undated notes by Arthur Burks on conversations with Charles Hartshorne from the 1960s.

35 A fine summary is found in Nathan Houser, "Introduction," *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition, Volume 4*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, especially lxii-lxiv.

in any measure what the former will do; but from the latter I can expect with confidence 30 different lines of conduct per month, of which 25 will be in one way or another impedimentary to my success.”<sup>36</sup> This remark is commonly cited to illustrate Juliette’s character. However, the remark can be viewed as Charles’ frustration with Juliette wishing to live the elegant, upper-class life she supposedly had in France, while he was laboring away at two full-time jobs. Charles worked on some of his most significant endeavors: in astronomy, *Photometric Researches* (Leipzig, 1878); in logic, *Studies in Logic* (Boston, 1883); and in geodesy, his ongoing pendulum work which was recognized with great praise by Europeans—all while teaching at Johns Hopkins University. Charles enjoyed the upper-class life style, but he focused his energies and attention on his two jobs in an effort to become the success his family expected.

### ***Second phase (1885-1891)***

Charles was still employed by the Coast Survey. He continued work on gravity using pendulums, dealt with weights and measures, and contributed to assay questions. He wrote substantive essays, such as “The Algebra of Logic” (1885) and “Logical Machines” (1887). He wrote *The Monist* series on metaphysics (1891), and he wrote over 12,000 entries for *The Century Dictionary and Encyclopedia*. Charles was connected with the scientific community and the literary community, writing for *The Nation* and *The North American Review*. Juliette took acting lessons with Steele MacKaye.<sup>37</sup> For most of this period, they were together. The times seemed to be good to and for them.

Juliette had tuberculosis for which she traveled—a common suggestion for illnesses in the nineteenth century. While she was gone, Charles wrote, often complaining about money, but also to express his affection. “I have been and still am sick with the grippe [influenza], and this is the reason for my delay in sending you the enclosed cheque [...] I don’t pass many hours at a time without thinking of my little girl with passionate love and longing; and you may be sure I am as far from the slightest infidelity as possible.”<sup>38</sup> Note is to be made of the term ‘infidelity.’ Charles was sexually active from his teenage years,<sup>39</sup> and rumors of infidelities were common.<sup>40</sup> Note also that Charles always called Juliette “Little Girl” and Juliette called Charles “Papa.”<sup>41</sup> Remember that Charles was at least eighteen years older than Juliette. How young was Juliette when the met? Was it 12 or 15? Did her young

---

36 Letter, Charles to brother, James Mills Peirce, January 1887.

37 See letters to Juliette from the MacKayses in L542.

38 Letter, Charles to Juliette, 24 December 1889.

39 A good example is Charles’ affair with Carrie Badger. A complete account with correspondence can be found KETNER, 1998, 213-222.

40 An example is the comments Charles’ mother makes on his relations to Mrs. Bradford, when he was living in Washington, DC. Letter, Sarah Mills Peirce to her sister-in-law, Charlotte Elizabeth Peirce, 4 April 1884 and 25 April 1884.

41 From a 1962 Victor Lenzen interview with Charles Gassman, a next door neighbor who was present at Charles’ death, age twenty-two in 1914. Walter Gassman in a letter of 1 February 1974 states that Juliette called Charles “Bopper.” The difference between “Papa” and “Bopper” may just be different ways of interpreting Juliette’s accent.

age impact how Charles thought of her and how she thought of him? In the early years, was Charles Juliette's protector? We do not know the nature of these early years, but Charles repeatedly recalled them with very warm feelings. The fact is that the marriage was solid, even though outbursts were evident on both sides.

As stated earlier, they had money:

When we settled here [Milford, Pennsylvania, in 1887] I had an income of about \$6000 and my wife three or four thousand. But we both lost every cent within a fortnight of one another & without the slightest—without two days warning. I for my part had a good many bills to pay & nothing at all to pay with,—no business habits, experience, or natural faculty. I am still a perfect 3-year old in such matters.<sup>42</sup>

With the loss of their respective incomes in 1891, their situation became progressively worse. Charles was always full of hope and expectation, but their situation did not improve. Yet through it all Juliette was a devoted wife and caregiver.

### ***Third phase (1891-1914)***

Life became difficult. Yet Charles continued to work, even when ill with cancer. He made major revisions to his Pragmaticism, created semiotics and restructured his philosophy in semiotic terms, and pushed his logic into new and bolder directions.

At times, both Charles and Juliette became depressed. Here are examples of letters from Juliette to her friend, Alice James, wife of William James:

[...] how he could endure to have me worked far beyond my strength into a cripple and deprive me of the most vital necessities to enable him to indulge in the drugs and drinks. His crueltys at times are such that my heart would fail me to care for him. If I was not sure he cannot be himself. For believe me dear Ms. James he has never while under my care suffered from want of the best food, which I thought it was not enough to go around, under some pretext I did not sit at the table with him, for a good many days at the time.<sup>43</sup>

[...] my husband's letters have been so discouraging [...] Dear Mrs. James never mind about me I have been for the last 12 years accustomed to suffering of endless privations & humiliations & miseries, that what is hardest of hard to bear to think I have married a man that must depend more or less on charity. For in other countrys a man of his ability would be eagerly sought out, instead of being called too old at 66 years to a well deserved post in his own country. I better write no more for I am too depressed [...]<sup>44</sup>

---

42 Letter, Charles to Cornelius Felton, 13 November 1909.

43 Letter, Juliette to Alice James, 3 June 1907.

44 Letter, Juliette to Alice James, 10 March 1907.

An example of Charles' depression is seen in this letter to William James:

No man can be logical who reckons his personal well-being as a matter of overwhelming moment. I do not think suicide springs from a pessimistic philosophy [...] But men commit suicide because they are personally discouraged, and there seems to be no good reason to anybody in their living [...]<sup>45</sup>

How bad was the situation? "I may mention that in order to send the people & the animals food Juliette pawned not only everything left of her jewelry and sold part, but also pawned every dress."<sup>46</sup> Both had health concerns. Charles particularly began to slowly lose his health. Evidence exists that Charles may have suspected he had cancer or at least serious intestinal concerns as early as 1901.<sup>47</sup> Charles was concerned greatly about Juliette's health. She had a prolapsed uterus; her successful hysterectomy in 1897 also involved the removal of a seven pound benign tumor.<sup>48</sup> Yet, throughout these events, Juliette and Charles stayed together. We do not have Juliette's letters to Charles, but the neighbors reported affection between them. Arthur Burks reported that in an interview Mrs. Alexander Rose, when remembering Charles and Juliette in Milford in 1910, had in thought "the picture of two neurotic people, showing extreme devotion to each other at times, extreme cruelty at other times [...]"<sup>49</sup> Here are some comments from 1977 when neighbors, elderly at the time of the interview, gathered to talk about Charles and Juliette.

[...] if ever a woman adored her husband, Madame Peirce adored him.<sup>50</sup>  
[...] every single thing was for Papa. She just simply adored him. I mean she was the most selfless person that I think I've ever known. She never thought of Juliette; it was always Papa.<sup>51</sup>

That Charles loved Juliette is easily seen in his numerous letters to her. Here are two examples of his affection for Juliette.

---

45 Letter, Charles to William James, 13 March 1897.

46 Letter, Charles to brother, James Mills Peirce, 3 March 1895.

47 August, 1901. A reprint inscribed: Professor Peirce/ with respect of / H. O. Sommer. Title: "The Abdomino-Sacral and Other New Methods for the Extirpation of Rectal Cancer," by H. Otto Sommer, M.D. (Freiburg), Washington D. C. (reprinted from the *Medical Times*, July and August 1901).

48 See letter to sister, Helen Peirce Ellis, May 1897. In 1897, a hysterectomy was a very rare and dangerous operation.

49 Arthur Burks interview of Mrs. Alexander Rose in 1957.

50 Caroline Depuy, Preston Tuttle taped interview of friends and neighbors of Peirces, 17 September 1977, p. 46.

51 Caroline Depuy, Preston Tuttle taped interview of friends and neighbors of Peirces, 17 September 1977, p. 54.

Dearest love, I seem to feel you about me more than ever. I love & worship my precious wife, my heart's heart.<sup>52</sup>

I love my own sweet and divine little wife, and I am faithful to her. I love her more than tongue can tell [...] Dearest Love! I long for you! I love you. I worship you.<sup>53</sup>

Even for a nineteenth century romantic, these are intense words. Charles was ardent. 'Impassioned' is not too bold of a word.

Juliette and Charles both had a taste for fine clothing. Both enjoyed fine food. Both enjoyed the theater and performances. They had much in common on the social level, but not in intellectual matters.<sup>54</sup> Juliette seems not to have participated at any level in Charles' intellectual life. She was the adoring supporter. She revered his work and desired it be preserved after his death, but she seems not to have understood any of it herself. Juliette accepted at face-value what Charles stated about the significance of his writings.

Juliette continued to care for and nurse Charles through his last days when dying of cancer of the colon. (Charles died 19 April 1914.) She was adamant in proclaiming Charles' greatness. She wanted Harvard to publish Charles' works. She wished to turn their home, Arisbe, into a monument or memorial to Charles. She kept his cremation ashes on the fireplace mantle until her death at which time they were buried with her.<sup>55</sup> She loved and adored Charles and his work.

#### 4 Juliette after Charles

Not much is known of Juliette's life after Charles' death. We do not have many records except correspondence on legal and financial matters plus her extended correspondence with the Harvard Philosophy Department. The local newspaper reported that she participated in village fairs, telling fortunes by reading tarot cards which she brought with her from France. Receipts indicate she gave small amounts to various charities, like the Red Cross. She tried to rent out Arisbe, without real success. She became somewhat of a recluse. In her Harvard Archives correspondence file are copies of bank deposits from the 1920s,<sup>56</sup> each for \$25 (about \$290 in 2015 US dollars), an amount at that time upon which one could pretty much live in a simple manner. An effort to trace this money led to the inference—without strong confirmation—that the funds came from somewhere in Europe. The house slowly fell into disrepair. The most interesting correspondence is with Harvard, Henry James, and Gifford Pinchot.

---

52 Letter, Charles to Juliette, 6 December 1889.

53 Letter, Charles to Juliette, 15 November 1891.

54 Zina, Charles' first wife, shared an intellectual life with Charles. They discussed and debated ideas. Zina published articles and, after the divorce, a book.

55 Edna Green, Preston Tuttle taped interview of friends and neighbors of Peirce's, 17 September 1977, p. 51.

56 Harvard University – Houghton Library / Peirce, Charles S. (Charles Sanders), 1839-1914. Charles Sanders Peirce papers, 1787-1951. Juliette Peirce Correspondence. MS Am 1632 (L517 - L528). Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, screens 3-57.

After Charles' death, Juliette made arrangements with Harvard University for its receipt of his papers. She worked through Josiah Royce, of whom Peirce stated, "Royce is about the only person who ever paid me a compliment in print."<sup>57</sup> The full narrative of conveying the Peirce papers to Harvard is ably presented by Nathan Houser in "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Peirce Papers."<sup>58</sup> Once the papers were at Harvard, Juliette pushed to have them published. Indeed, she pestered the Harvard Philosophy Department for years, up to and including the publication in 1931 of the first volume of *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*.<sup>59</sup> She further demanded payment for the papers and royalties on the published volumes. While the Philosophy Department sent her several checks, mostly out of charity, Juliette never understood that the volumes would never yield a profit. Yet, the fact that Juliette pushed hard for the publication of Charles' work indicated her fierce loyalty to Charles. She wished his work to receive its due recognition.

Juliette Peirce died 4 October 1934.

Juliette's funeral gives us further insight into her and her relation to Charles. What some people might find surprising is that the Governor of the State of Pennsylvania, Gifford Pinchot, attended Juliette's funeral.<sup>60</sup> To some of the neighbors who only knew Juliette as a somewhat eccentric old woman living in a house that was in poor repair, the governor's appearance must have been startling.

James Pinchot (1831-1908), Gifford's father, made a large fortune through importing elaborate Victorian wallpapers and then in manufacturing Victorian wallpapers. In 1818, he built a summer home in Milford, Pennsylvania. In 1886, Grey Towers, the palatial home of James and Mary Pinchot, was completed.<sup>61</sup> Charles and Juliette Peirce moved to Milford in 1887, and became friends with the Pinchots. In 1887 and 1888, while attending Yale University and wondering about his career, Gifford Pinchot had discussions with Charles Peirce. Gifford himself stated that the consequence of these chats was that he studied at L'Ecole Nationale Forestiere in Nancy, France.<sup>62</sup> He established the first school of forestry at Yale University, became the first U.S. Chief Forester. Under presidents Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt, he made great progress for forestry and conservation in the United States. He was governor of Pennsylvania from 1923-1926 and 1931-1934. Gifford knew the Peirces quite well. "Peirce was a thoroughly charming gentleman with an old-world manner. The presence of the Peirces in Milford added much

---

57 Letter, Charles Peirce to William James, 17 November 1891.

58 *Signs of Humanity*, vol. 3. Eds. Michel Balat and Janice Deledalle-Rhodes; Gen. Ed. Gérard Deledalle. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992, p. 1259-1268.

59 This extensive correspondence is available on microfilm at the Institute for American Thought, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Nathan Houser made arrangements for copying this material onto microfilm. (The microfilm also contains some correspondence between the Harvard Philosophy Department and Max H. Fisch.).

60 Mme. Juliette Peirce Obituary, *Milford Dispatch and Pike County Press*, 11 October 1934.

61 See the Grey Towers National Historic Landmark website [<http://www.fs.fed.us/na.gt>] for brief information on James and Mary Pinchot and Grey Towers.

62 Interview of Gifford Pinchot by Henry Leonard c.1933, p. 3.

to the pleasure of life there. There was no other intellectual society.”<sup>63</sup> Gifford’s remembrances of the Peirces are not sugar-coated, but realistic and insightful; he knew of Charles’ failings, including a violent temper.<sup>64</sup>

Governor Pinchot’s appearance at Juliette’s funeral indicates the kind of people the Peirces were. Juliette and Charles socialized with the highest level of society in Milford, with the wealthiest people. Juliette and Charles were peers. Gifford admired Charles. Also, Gifford likely appeared at the funeral, because his mother, Mary, was Juliette’s closest friend in Milford. Mary knew more about Juliette than we ever will. We will not know what Mary knew, because all references to Juliette’s identity were cut out of the Mary Eno Pinchot papers at the Library of Congress.<sup>65</sup> Juliette’s identity must have been significant. Juliette and Charles were part of the upper-class; they socialized with the intellectual elite and the wealthy. For a time, they were wealthy, but even when they lost their money, they socially remained part of the upper-class. Juliette obviously was not some street urchin; she had a bearing, style, and attitude that bespoke upper-class, maybe royalty.

### Some conclusions

What can we make of Juliette’s influence on Charles life and work? Some conclusions are obvious. Juliette made sure that their house or apartment was neat, clean, and decorated well. She provided Charles with excellent food. She nursed him through serious illnesses. Juliette made sure, as best she could, that Charles had a comfortable place to live and work. This effort gave Charles an environment within which he could work with maximum support and minimal disturbances.

As mentioned earlier, Juliette could speak, read and write French, and could speak and maybe read German. (Charles could speak, read and write both French and German; Charles enjoyed things that were French.) Juliette read French novels, sang well, played the piano, and participated in theatrical performances. As a French woman, possibly connected with royalty, she added an elevated sense to their social status. Her demeanor could be called commanding. She seemed to have those skills expected of a woman in a nineteenth century setting surrounded by royalty. Charles seems to have appreciated her upper-class, elegant style. Charles was comfortable with Juliette, since he considered himself upper-class from a preeminent family. In Charles’ family, social status was very important, as can be seen in the correspondence of his mother, Sarah Mills Peirce, and his aunt, Charlotte Elizabeth Peirce. Charles may have felt that having a French wife was more refined and sophisticated than having an American wife.

---

63 *Ibid.*

64 In the interest of full disclosure, here is a statement on Juliette by Gifford’s wife, Cornelia: “Dr. Peirce was a very close and warm friend of the Pinchots but I myself never met him. I did know his wife a little bit. She was interesting, but very definitely a mental case, for some years before she died. She apparently did not share in his (Charles Peirce’s) intellectual life.” (Letter, Mrs. Gifford [Cornelia Bryce] Pinchot to Max H. Fisch, 15 October 1949).

65 Joseph Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life*, p. 143. Brent is referring to the Pinchot family papers in the manuscript collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Despite arguments and disagreements with Charles, Juliette was fiercely loyal to him. In her own way, she adored him and what he stood for. What Charles may have done for Juliette in their early years together that led to this loyalty remains unknown, but even with Charles' cruelties toward her, she remained. Indeed, in Charles' last years, dying of colon cancer, she literally took physical care of him and became his sole emotional support, namely, she stood with him when others were abandoning him.

The conclusion is that Juliette provided for Charles what a nineteenth century professional man needed, namely, companionship, physical and emotional care, and unstinting support and loyalty. Later in his life Charles saw that this was true.

I have made up my mind that I have been utterly wrong-headed about the most important point of all. I blame myself bitterly for harboring the idea the Juliette did not love me. The human heart is an intricate thing and I ought have seen things in another light.<sup>66</sup>

Had Juliette not been present, Charles' life likely would have crumbled; he was too much of a social misfit and too naïve with regard to the ways of the world to cope successfully with his situation without Juliette. “[...] without my wife's companionship & aid in an hundred ways they [Charles' ideas] never would be written.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, Juliette kept Charles' life together so he could work. Juliette did not contribute directly to Charles' work, but she created the environment within which he could work productively. Charles saw this toward the end of his life, and became extremely appreciative of and more loving toward Juliette. To state the conclusion in a negative manner, had Juliette (or someone like her) not been present, Charles likely would not have accomplished as much as he did in the last thirty years of his life. Juliette is the unsung, in the background, heroine of Charles' life.

Charles' love for Juliette was passionate; Juliette's love for Charles' was unstinting. Their love for each other was clearly a singular love affair.

## References

BRENT, Joseph. *Charles Sanders Peirce: A life*. Revised edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998.

HOUSER, Nathan. Introduction. *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A chronological edition*, Vol. 4. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. The fortunes and misfortunes of the Peirce papers. *Signs of humanity*, vol. 3. Michel Balat and Janice Deledalle-Rhodes (ed.); Gérard Deledalle (gen. ed.). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992, p. 1259-1268.

KETNER, Kenneth. *His glassy essence*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998.

---

66 Letter to brother, James Mills Peirce, 31 July 1894.

67 Letter, Charles to Lady Victoria Welby, 29 September 1909. L463, p. 204.

MAX FISCH ARCHIVES, Institute for American Thought, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, which includes copies of all the Charles Peirce manuscripts, the Peirce family correspondence, files with correspondence and collected material from Maurice Augier, Arthur Burkes, Max Fisch, Victor Lenzen, Henry Leonard, Preston Tuttle, and the Harvard University Philosophy Department.

PEIRCE, Charles. *Semiotic and signifcics*: The correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby. Charles S. Harwick (ed). Elshah, IL: The Press of Arisbe Associates, 2nd ed., 2001.

PERRY, Ralph Barton. *The thought and character of William James*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935.

SOMMER, H. O. The abdomino-sacral and other new methods for the extirpation of rectal cancer. *The Medical Times*, July and August 1901.

WILLIAM JAMES PAPERS, Houghton Library, Harvard University Archives.

### **Endereço/ Address**

David E. Pfeifer, Ph.D.  
Indiana University School of Liberal Arts – IUPUI  
425 University Boulevard  
Indianapolis, IN 46202 – USA

Data de envio: 12-04-15

Data de aprovação: 14-05-15