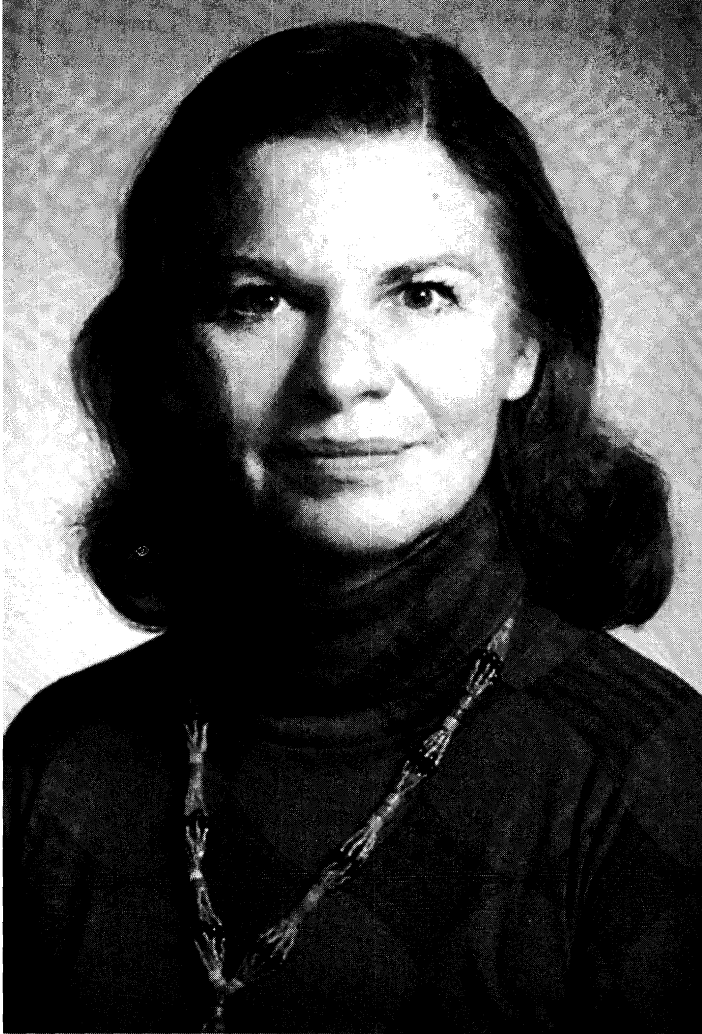


**ROBERTA KEVELSON**



**Born November 4, 1931; Died November 28, 1998**

## A REMEMBRANCE FOR ROBERTA KEVELSON

*William Pencak*  
*Pennsylvania State University*

Roberta Kevelson died on November 28, 1998. She seemed to be recovering well from a heart attack she had suffered eight days before. We had talked three times in the intervening week. She did not appear to be, or would not let on, that she was worrying about her health. All she seemed interested in was the improving health of the Semiotic Society of America, the publication of the Round Table volume, the visit of her son Ken for Thanksgiving. When I visited her at the hospital, she was most concerned that I had something to eat, and that I didn't stay too long as I was meeting friends later and she didn't want them to feel stood up. I told her to take it easy, which was like Canute telling the waves to stand still. Ken was with her at the end, which came suddenly. She did not suffer more than an hour.

But as Bobbie—which she insisted everyone, including her students, call her, although they seldom did—would tell us, there is no “last moment.” Her memory, her ideas, her sparkling personality, and her zeal on behalf of philosopher Charles S. Peirce's semiotic “method of methods” will live on in the lives and work of many who knew and loved her.

Charles Peirce, we are told, died with his pen in his hand, still writing. Bobbie did him one better: she continued her teaching at the simple but moving memorial service at Cedar Grove Cemetery in Williamsburg on December 1. Her rabbi termed the event a “celebration” of Roberta

Kevelson as members of her family and friends spoke briefly. Bobbie's mother was there, letting us know that had Bobbie lived another thirty years, she would have retained her sharp mind and not aged very much in appearance. People of all sorts attended: members of her garden club, adult students she instructed through the Christopher Wren Institute of the College of William and Mary, students and faculty at that college who took a seminar in semiotics she had informally taught while technically "retired and an astounding number of friends from the beautiful wooded neighborhood where she had lived for two years, and which she had come to love deeply. Bobbie had created in her life not one, but many of the sort of communities of inquirers about the which the reclusive Peirce only theorized. At the service, which the rabbi began and ended by reading from Proverbs 31 which describes a strong, good woman as an incomparable treasure, representatives of these communities came together, met, and became acquainted for the first time. We left feeling sad, but also feeling blessed that Bobbie had so enriched our lives, and brought us together to continue her work, even under such tragic circumstances.

A list of Bobbie's accomplishments and publications fills a chapter in a book, specifically the *festschrift* I edited for her with Ralph Lindgren, *New Approaches to Semiotics and the Human Sciences: Essays in Honor of Roberta Kevelson* (Peter Lang, 1997). But a few distinctions must be mentioned: Distinguished Professor Emerita of Philosophy at Penn State, Director of the Penn State Center for Semiotic Research, Founder and Director of the Round Table for Law and Semiotics, President (1995-96) and active member of the Semiotic Society of America, Director of External Relations and one of five founders of the International Association for the Semiotics of Law, and—as she insisted I include in the interview published in the *festschrift*—author of more books on Charles Peirce than anyone else. What will unfortunately be the last of these volumes—*Peirce and the Sign of the Gryphon*—will appear later in 1999 as the first book in a new series, "Signs and Semaphores" she was beginning with St. Martin's Press.

Much is planned to keep Bobbie's work alive. I have agreed to edit the series Semiotics and the Human Sciences (with John Brigham handling the Round Table Proceedings, which will continue) and Critic of Institutions for Peter Lang. These 1998 Proceedings of the Semiotic Society of America are dedicated to Bobbie. We are hoping to keep her library and

archive—including photocopies of the entire 31-volume microfilm reels of the Peirce papers—in tact as a living memorial room and research facility which will also include some of the plants and artwork she collected and cherished. Memorial sessions will pay tribute to her wide-ranging interests at the Round Table and Semiotic Society of America meetings for 1999. A special issue of *The American Journal of Semiotics* will be devoted to her ideas and influence. An article in *Semiotica* will attempt to encapsulate the essence of hundreds of books, articles, and personal encounters. And the Kevelson Memorial Award will be given annually to the best student paper presented at the annual meeting of the Semiotic Society of America. This was a prize Bobbie had frequently suggested. Chris Myers of Peter Lang, a friend as well as a publisher, has generously initiated a fund to which friends may contribute: address checks to the Semiotic Society of America, marked for the Kevelson Memorial Fund, to Linda Rogers, Executive Director, 405 White Hall, Department of Educational Foundations, Kent State University, Kent, OH 44242.

In my favorite essay by Peirce, “Evolutionary Love is a passage that beautifully expresses what it meant to be a philosopher for Peirce and Kevelson. “Suppose, for example, I have an idea that interests me. It is my creation. It is my creature;... it is a little person. I love it; and I will sink myself in perfecting it. It is not by dealing out cold justice to the circle of my ideas that I can make them grow, but by cherishing and tending them as I would the flowers in my garden.” Following the memorial service, Ken Kevelson invited each of us to take one of the plants Bobbie cared for as much as she did her ideas and cherish it in remembrance. Let us equally cherish Bobbie’s and Peirce’s insistence that we are indeed free to create a world filled with love, and flowers, and perhaps even justice.