A Writing Life
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Chapter 8
Beardsley and Beyond
1966–1968

Working on Reggie led almost inevitably to Beardsley. The doomed young artist, icon of the 1890s, was omnipresent in the archives I consulted, public and private. He was also a founder of The Yellow Book, the quintessential quarterly of the decade, to which Reggie Turner contributed a short story, the first of his fictions. Aubrey Beardsley, who died at twenty-five in 1898, did not seem to have survived long enough for a biography; yet he died at the age of John Keats, and had lived intensely in full awareness of his unforgiving tuberculosis, the medical scourge of the times. Biographies of him were brief and none had appeared for decades. Much new documentation had surfaced about his art and his writings.

George Braziller was eager to sign me to another contract, and the small advance on my signature helped eke out my university income. In the days before electronic aids to research and writing, I traveled to archives and to collectors; one-finger-typed on a manual typewriter, with multiple carbon-paper copies; laboriously penciled notes; and re-sorted when necessary to expensive black-and-white photostats which often took weeks or even months to arrive. Moving paragraphs about, I cut-and-pasted parts of pages into new wholes, turning revised and retyped sheets into near-cardboard. One side benefit of my labors was that for years I could count on receiving two practical birthday gifts. Fig. 23 Stan with editor and wife Rodelle, 1968
from the children: a new jar of rubber cement and a fresh typewriter ribbon. Meanwhile, Rodelle and I took turns at producing cleaner versions from restitched copy.

In early 1966, Beardsley. Imp of the Perverse was hand-delivered in New York to Edwin Seaver, Braziller’s old-school editor, who was shocked by the subtitle. “We can’t use that,” he said. “Lady librarians won’t buy the book.”

“I’m not writing for lady librarians,” I explained. “I’m writing for adult readers. It’s accurate.”

“It’s unacceptable,” Seaver insisted. “I won’t publish a book with that.” I settled for Beardsley. A Biography. Ironically, later Italian, German and Japanese translations would capitalize on the box-office attraction of the rejected subtitle. Il prezioso perverso was the Italian title, with Beardsley relegated below. I would have decades of disputes with editors about titles, as almost always they preferred fudging to reality.

It was still the age of awkward 30-inch-long galley proofs, which book review editors received in advance of publication. On the Monday before the Sunday release of the New York Times Book Review in early April 1967, Edwin Seaver telephoned me excitedly. “You’re on the front page!” John Russell, the art editor of The Times of London, had praised Beardsley in terms one doesn’t even dream about. “Mr. Weintraub’s book,” he wrote, “needs no successor.” The Wall Street Journal would call it “A first-rate biography, amusing, thorough, knowledgeable and most important of all, compassionate.” When, in early summer, we took a rare family vacation to Maine, where it proved too gusty and cold to swim, our disappointed kids tiptoed in anyway to try it out. The seafront motel in Ogunquit displayed in the foyer, expecting us, a copy of TIME open to a review of Beardsley. Illustrating the page was a drawing from the book which strikingly anticipated the widowed Jackie Kennedy.

Beardsley drew a phone call from someone in Los Angeles explaining that he represented one of the Beatles, who was interested in playing the doomed yet brash
young artist on film. Aubrey Beardsley’s style was one of the inspirations for their forthcoming *Yellow Submarine*. “Great!” I said, instantly picturing John Lennon, who looked strikingly like Beardsley. “No,” said the agent. “George Harrison is my guy. If we can raise the production money, can we get back to you?” “You can,” I said, with the optimism draining from my voice. “But only Lennon could possibly play Beardsley. You won’t raise the money.” And he didn’t.

*Yellow Submarine* was playing in London in 1968, my Guggenheim year (I had secured a Guggenheim fellowship in my second try, having included, this time around, seven former recipients as my recommenders). The family was with me, and we enjoyed the funky film. Dreams of a Beardsley on screen had already faded. Still, my renewed visibility led to my book reviewing about 1890s figures. Francis Brown, then editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, would telegraph me (as was the practice in pre-electronic days.) On one occasion the assignment was a biography by ’Nineties biographer Rupert Croft-Cooke. *Feasting with Panthers*, the title drawn from a boast by Wilde, was about Oscar’s open homosexual indulgences, then a crime, with friends, acquaintances, and squalid young “renters” off the London streets. The book was more coy than graphic, as this was still the 1960s. I judged it a failure. The imposed title, not my own, as review editors love their own snappy inventions, was “Queer Fish.” A phone call came the same Sunday from a colleague who shared Wilde’s style. “I loved the review,” he said, “and I immediately went out and bought the book.”

*Beardsley* sold well enough to warrant paperback reprints. Once they faded from the marketplace an invitation came to update the text for an edition including the illustrations that might have led to charges of obscenity against earlier publishers. Beardsley was a satirist in the tradition of Juvenal and had illustrated the pacifist *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, in which women deny their sexual favors to their warring mates, with graphic eroticism. Other drawings also challenged prudish norms. Chris Kentera of Penn State Press offered to include all the contentious art, and to produce, in oversize format in hardcover and paperback, an edition with 197 illustrations. An academic press has more scholarly leeway than a commercial press, and the times had been changing. No objections arose, and the edition, taken over later by yet another publisher, would have decades more life.
W. H. Allen in London, which had published the U.K. edition, featured advertising for its edition of Beardsley on the back of the jackets of other W. H. Allen releases. The notoriously litigious Feasting With Panthers author, Rupert Croft-Cooke, remembered largely for his earlier Bosie, a life of Lord Alfred Douglas, whose affair with Oscar resulted in three trials for Wilde and his imprisonment in Reading Gaol, threatened a suit unless Beardsley was stricken from the jacket of Panthers. The publisher cringed and reprinted, asking bookshops to replace the offending jacket with an innocuous one. I have one of the original wrappers on my copy—now a rarity.

Jacket blurbs remain the bane of the profession. Publishers seek them; authors are solicited for them; reviewers loathe them. Years later, after publishing Whistler (1974) and Four Rossettis (1977), I was posted a proof copy of Neighboring Lives, a novel about Whistler, Rossetti, Carlyle, Swinburne, and other denizens of the Chelsea district along the Thames, requesting a blurb. The endpapers displayed a striking map of the area, but the narrative did not live up to it. I wrote back to Scribner’s regretting my inability to contribute. The concept, I said, was ingenious but not the result. Some months later I was sent the finished book. On the back of the jacket were six blurbs in “Advance Praise,” each writer identified. One blurb—a single misleading word, with my name attached—was “ingenious.”

The most peculiar fall-out from Beardsley came a year after publication, when a colleague put into my departmental mailbox several photocopied pages from a just-published novel with an academic setting by Gerald Warner Brace, The Department (1968). “One of my students,” the narrator recalls, was “Stanley Weintraub of Newark, New Jersey.” He was brilliant but arrogant:

He may be erratic in some of his grades because he is opinionated and he can be difficult, but we recognize him as one of us: he will go on through graduate school and be[come] a formidable critic and scholar—not necessarily in literature. His kind of mind takes to the social sciences: he’ll probably end up as an authority on the psychology of the artist.

Brace had visited his daughter at Penn State during the weekend that the New York Times Book Review had front-paged my Beardsley. Somehow, although we never met, I had lodged in Brace’s mind. Although I never read any more of his novel to find out what had happened to my namesake, I wrote to him in Belmont, Massachusetts, to explain
that I was real, although not from New Jersey, and that he would have no worries about legal action, nor would his publisher. Only that December did he reply: “As an authority on the psychology of the artist you very likely could explain what got into me when I made free with your name in my novel. I do apologize, and I thank you for your magnanimous letter…. I had no [malicious] intentions of any sort—no doppelgäänger, no nothing....”

Since then I have turned up, in thin disguise, in three other novels, one placing me back in Korea. Bob Elegant, a correspondent I had encountered there, had turned successfully to novel writing, and in Cry, Peace wrote me, transparently, into the POW hospital camp as Lieutenant Sidney Weinberg. He sent me the proofs, and I responded: “Since this is fiction, can’t you promote me to captain?” He didn’t. Another, A Spanish Season, by Bernard Oldsey, put me in Spain to research my book on the Spanish Civil War, The Last Great Cause. A Spanish Season was complete fiction, as the Generalissimo Franco regime would not permit me a visa to visit Spain and conduct research that might undermine him in print. In The Indian Lawyer, James Welch used my actual name in inventing a pony-tailed radical lawyer in Idaho who defended Native Americans in legal trouble. Possibly the author had come across my son Mark, who was a legal defense attorney in adjoining Oregon. He was never pony-tailed, but that appendage suggested the far Left. Perhaps there are further fictional emanations out there.

My writing was always two-handed in nature, even with one-finger typing. Beginning in my dissertation days, I worked on aspects of Bernard Shaw and edited the Shaw Review, which decades later became SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies. GBS referred to himself as “an old Victorian,” and the Shaw perspective would inspire biographies of Victorians—of 1890s vintage, like Aubrey Beardsley and Reggie Turner, and earlier notables like Whistler, Victoria and Disraeli. On the other hand, dating back to Korean War days, and including such military (and literary) figures as T. E. Lawrence, who also had a Shavian dimension, I continued writing about military matters. Even Journey to Heartbreak (1971), which dealt with Shaw from Pygmalion to Heartbreak House, was also about World War I; and the book that preceded it, The Last Great Cause, evoked the Spanish Civil War.
While writing my first two biographies for the boutique Braziller firm, I was solicited by a much larger publisher, Doubleday. The upshot was a two-book contract, with the second subject open. For the first I had offered *War in the Wards*. My editor, Sam Vaughan, later Doubleday’s publisher and then a senior editor at Random House, suggested that I flesh it out by turning it into a novel. For price reasons, he wanted more pages—a bigger book. I declined. I had no experience writing fiction, and what had happened was real. To fatten it up, Vaughan assigned a new assistant editor now out of the army, John Eisenhower, to research appropriate illustrations. He had been hired as a lure to publish his father. (Young Eisenhower had been with the 15th Regiment in Korea after the fighting ended.) He located some press cartoons and other images. Apparently disappointed with the thin final package, Doubleday released the book with little effort at promotion. William Buckley, a Vaughan crony, noted it in one of his Rightist newspaper columns as a useful anti-Communist read. Although there was a second, augmented, edition in the 1970s by another publisher, it remains almost forgotten.

An anti-Communist writer about whom I knew nothing almost doomed the second book on my Doubleday contract. *The Last Great Cause* evoked the artists, writers and other public intellectuals, British and American, who involved themselves in the Spanish Civil War, which I had first learned about early on from my bubble-gum cards. The participants with gun and pen were often boldface names like George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway. Others who appeared in *Last Great Cause* were idealists doomed by their radical politics to have foreshortened careers and abbreviated lives.

Before submitting the book, I asked Malcolm Cowley to read my pages. Now a friend, with a powerfully revived reputation, he had been a volunteer ambulance driver in France in World War I, as Hemingway had been in Italy, and an editor and writer on the Left. Although no longer a 1930s “pink,” he explained from his farm in Connecticut, he had long been “outside the pale” and could make some suggestions about people I had missed. “Chasing down his leads,” I rewrote. Sam Vaughan sent the typescript, I believe on Buckley’s advice, to Eugene Lyons, once a Communist fellow traveler who had become disillusioned with Stalinism and in his converted ultra-Right guise wrote an

My title came from a plaint by the memorable “angry young man” in John Osborne’s breakthrough play *Look Back in Anger* (1956). “I suppose people of my generation,” Jimmy Porter had declared, “aren’t able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and forties, when we were still kids. There aren’t any good, brave causes left.”

“A splendid opportunity bungled here,” Lyons began his condemnation. His verdict was that my book was “unbalanced,” and should be rejected unless I gave equal space to the Generalissimo Franco side. It was impossible, I replied. There was no way to fudge the facts, even if many on the Republican–Loyalist side had been misled by Stalinists. The pro–Falangist public intellectuals like W. B. Yeats and Roy Campbell were few, and already covered in a chapter, “The Other Side of the Cause,” and another chapter on the uncommitted “Olympians” like Shaw and Eliot dealt with the ambivalent middle. I was charged to recast the book to make it more “Right” or return the contractual advance.

I asked my agent to find an alternative publisher whose contract would repay Doubleday and include enough for a further agency fee. Beyond politics, the success of *Beardsley* had made that possible. Victor Weybright had sold his paperback line New American Library, a spinoff from Penguin, and was beginning a hardback venture. He had long been critical of McCarthyism, which although dying (McCarthy himself had died in disrepute in 1957) would never totally expire. I was a finalist for the National Book Award, and although *Beardsley* was not his book, Weybright offered to pay my way to the award ceremonies, as George Braziller, peeved that I had deserted his imprint, would not. Victor Weybright was a publisher unlike many then, and certainly unlike most successors in the later climate of conglomerates and computers. *The Last Great Cause* had a future with Weybright and Talley (Truman Talley was Victor’s stepson), and a promise of continuity in publishing for me after that.

My book returned to life committed British and American intellectuals in Spain. After my difficulties getting it into print, it would receive surprising coverage in 1968. The war in Spain had been eclipsed by
World War II, for which it had been an overture. Published on both sides of the pond, the book attracted media interviews as well as wide coverage in the press. The Toronto Globe & Mail gave it a full broadsheet page. The usually acerbic Malcolm Muggeridge reviewed it enthusiastically in The Observer in London and for Esquire in the U.S. I was posted the Esquire issue, which my sons, twelve and ten, had already seen on their school bus, where a friend had brought a parental copy to show off the racy cartoons. When, during their page-turning, the review of my book turned up, I was suddenly famous in the school bus circle. Soon Esquire, fresh from our mailbox, appeared on a low table in our foyer. One of my boys warned: “Dad, you don’t want to leave that lying around where a visitor might see it.”

Some critics questioned my choice of subject, as Beardsley, about the dying and unforgettable 1890s “decadent” artist, had been a National Book Award nominee. Why was I shifting gears? In reality, I hadn’t abandoned the late Victorians—I was writing, again, about war. I had been in one. And in 1963 I had published a book about the postwar Lawrence of Arabia, and after that a portion of a diary I had kept in wartime Korea. I would return afterwards both to the Victorians—and to war.

In April 1968, Cleveland Amory, who hosted a popular weekly panel of writers and assorted celebrities on CBS television, recruited me for a taping of his Wednesday evening show on Thursday, April 4. The panelists, promoting their books, or themselves, had no logical connection with each other. It was up to the genial Amory to move the conversation along for an hour between commercials. When prompted, I chatted about Hemingway and Orwell and others who chose to risk their lives and reputations for a controversial cause that they felt was larger than themselves. In someone’s mid-sentence the lights in the studio suddenly darkened; the cameras stopped; and red emergency lights began blinking. Entering, a technician warned: “We’re on indefinite pause. Martin Luther King has been shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee.”

Fig. 25 Sitting in front of retaining wall at home
The television monitors in the studio blinked on again as CBS began covering Memphis, then switched, filling in vacant air time, to film clips about King’s stormy civil rights career. We were ushered out into the adjacent green room, offered soft drinks and snacks in lieu of lost dinner, and watched another TV monitor. Amory vanished, promising to return and continue. We sat in the equivalent of a hospital waiting room while the hands on the wall clock moved slowly. King’s assailant had escaped; witnesses were recalling what they had seen on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel where King had been standing. Speculation began replacing hard news. Finally, Amory looked in and beckoned us back into the studio. We took our places, on which the books we had been promoting had sat in for us. The lights and cameras went on, and Amory, perched once more on his swivel chair, said: “We’re going to start again from the beginning. What you saw on screen didn’t happen from the standpoint of our show. Ignore it when we go on. It will be stale news by the time your segment will be aired. And remember, this is Wednesday.”

Soon, in Los Angeles, as a stormy presidential campaign was unfolding, Robert Kennedy would be shot and killed. Insurgent politics, both Left and Right, exacerbated by Vietnam, would dominate the summer and fall, but my priorities had to be professional. I went off to England to research the impact of the 1914–1918 war on Bernard Shaw, and his impact, as an embattled critic of the war, on the fracturing British scene. (As Vietnam war protests were widespread, the parallel seemed timely.)

Victor Weybright gave me an advance on my next book following The Last Great Cause, which I used to purchase a Volvo station wagon for delivery in London, as my family was traveling with me. Since the vehicle was ordered American style, so that I could ship it home, it had left-side steering, which made “overtaking” (passing) cars on English roads a bit hairy, as it also did traversing “roundabouts” (traffic circles). On one trip to Oxford, as we circled a roundabout, we chanced upon a motel and restaurant which had a sign conspicuously posted: NO FOOTBALL COACHES PERMITTED. Rodelle shouted, “Stop!”—and when I did she reached for her camera and snapped a picture. Although we knew that the warning referred to rowdy soccer fans and the buses that carried such yobs, she intended the photo for the amusement of our
friend Joe Paterno, the Penn State football coach. (His reputation was sullied decades later after the institutional cover-up of a retired assistant coach’s pedophilia, but in 1968 “JoePa” was ascending a brilliant career.) We had been at parties he had thrown for football fat cats, unlike us, who lavishly supported the team.

On one occasion he introduced us to Lou Lasch, a wealthy auto dealer who would finance the Penn State football team’s training facility. Lasch, said Joe, had a proposition for me. Learning from Paterno that I was a biographer, Lou wanted to persuade me to write a life of Bert (De Benneville) Bell, former owner of the Philadelphia Eagles and, from 1946 until his death in 1959, the commissioner of the National Football League. Bell had rescued professional football from the bribing of players, the fixing of games and the betting on arranged outcomes, employing former FBI men to ensure that the league became respectable. When television came along under Bell’s watch, its advertisers also made pro football a magnet for big money.

Lou outlined his offer. He would support my research and writing expenses on his own or with football associates. Further, the owners of the pro teams in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Baltimore would each guarantee to buy five thousand giveaway copies of the Bell biography at retail price. No publisher, he claimed, could resist that inducement—and the royalties would be mine. Yet I hesitated. As a Philadelphian who, with my father, had gone excitedly to football games as a kid, including those of the local Frankford Yellow Jackets, a failed precursor of the Eagles which Bell had owned, I knew of him, but my biographies had nothing to do with football. “Listen!” Lasch cajoled. “Once you meet Bert’s widow and talk to her, you’ll be convinced. Let me send a limo to take you to meet Mrs. Bell, and bring you back. I guarantee it will be a sure thing.”

A long black Lasch limo with built-in bar duly took me two hundred miles from Centre County to Frances Upton Bell’s estate on the Philadelphia Main Line. While Lou’s chauffeur, accustomed to the waiting routine, sat in the Cadillac listening to the radio, I chatted with Mrs. Bell over coffee and snacks. Now sixty-four, she had starred as “Sally Morgan” with Eddie Cantor in the 1928 Broadway production of Whoopee! and in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1928. It was easy to see why Bell had fallen for her, as she retained, years later, her good looks. While
they courted, Bert had taken advantage of her attraction to him to borrow money she had made in show business—he needed only a few thousands then—to buy an NFL franchise for Philadelphia. After the Eagles’ inaugural season in 1933, which lost money, as would happen the following two seasons, he talked to Frances earnestly about marriage.

“Let me tell you,” she began, “about Bert’s proposal to me. I said that I liked him and thought he’d be a good husband, but he had two drawbacks. He would have to agree to marry in church and that any children we had would be raised as Catholics. And he would have to stop drinking—completely.” Although the second stipulation would be tough to take, Bell quickly agreed, saying that he would have to explain to the boys at the Philadelphia Athletic Club that he was going on the wagon for good. At his usual time he went to the club, then at Rittenhouse Square, strode directly to the bar, and announced, Mrs. Bell recalled: “Boys, this is my last drink.” He ordered an eight-ounce tumbler of Scotch, neat. To their stares, he slowly drained it, then rather unsteadily walked out with a brisk wave. Bell married Frances Upton at St. Madeleine’s in Philadelphia.

“Professor,” she urged, “if you do the book about Bert, I’ll be glad to tell you a lot more.” I promised to consider it, and was chauffeured back home.

Consulting my agent Sterling Lord in New York, I was shocked that he disapproved. It was a milk cow, I explained, using a term Anton Chekhov had given one of his lightweight early plays.

“It would be bad for your career,” said Sterling. “Strictly commercial. And I don’t need the agent’s commission for another sports book. For big money I placed a biography of Sandy Koufax a couple of years ago. Go back to what you do best and build a reputation at it.”

Since agents were hard to get, and to keep (and he was known in the trade as “Sterling God”), I went back to my alleged strengths, but still regret kicking away the opportunity. It was, financially, my worst professional decision.1

Once I was settled in London on my Guggenheim Fellowship, the BBC invited me to appear on its popular late-night talk show, “Late Night Line-Up,” and asked me to suggest a live participant—writer or fighter—from the Spanish Civil War to join me for discussion. I pro-
posed Stephen Spender or W. H. Auden, but both turned us down. Then I suggested the acerbic Claud Cockburn, who had edited the radical *The Week* and covered the war for the London *Daily Worker*, reporting anything he thought useful to Moscow. “Cockburn is too controversial,” a BBC authority told me; “besides, he lives in Cork so he doesn’t have to pay English taxes.” Still, the BBC could find no useful alternative, and offered Cockburn air fare from Ireland and an upscale hotel room. Well off, he had written (under a protective pseudonym) *Beat the Devil*, a novel made into a Humphrey Bogart film, yet he wanted something more than money—a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label for his use in the studio. It was soon a deal, and we met at the BBC television building at Shepherd’s Bush.

That Monday was going to be a crowded day. Before meeting Fred McDowell, a Shaw scholar and friend from Iowa whom we were going to take to Ayot St. Lawrence, Shaw’s country home, Rodelle wanted to visit Oxford Street to buy a sheepskin coat. At Selfridge’s, the giant department store, the double-decker bus halted in traffic. The sheepskin shop was across the street. Assuming a legitimate stop, Rodelle began exiting the bus just as it began moving again, and discovered that the leap was not as simple as she had seen others do it. She was pitched into the roadway, and I jumped out after her. The bus stopped and the driver ran out. Picking herself up, Rodelle said too hurriedly that she was OK, and the bus went on.

Then the shock hit Rodelle. A passerby announced that he was a nurse, helped her to curbside, and told her to rest her head on her knees. While a crowd gathered, he went into Selfridge’s to badger for first-aid assistance from their clinic and then vanished. Rodelle was examined; the assumed ankle bruise was taped up; and she doggedly crossed the street and bought her sheepskin for the Pennsylvania winters. That afternoon we went on with Fred to “Shaw’s Corner”—only to find that it was closed on Mondays.

Back at our house, gulping aspirin to dull the pain, Rodelle, limping, prepared dinner and then played host to the BBC personnel who had come to escort us to the studios at Shepherd’s Bush. Her reward for having injured her right leg was that she never had to drive our new Volvo on the wrong side of the road.
At the BBC, we were introduced to lean, spry Claud Cockburn, who already had his bottle in hand and offered the hobbling Rodelle a drink, which she clearly needed and accepted. As the introductory segment began, we watched on monitors in the studio. The background film, to bring the audience at home into the subject we were covering, was graphic file footage of the war, emphasizing its bloodiness. Cockburn watched in increasing horror. He had witnessed such scenes personally. He reopened his Johnnie Walker and began swigging from it. Weeping, he began shaking violently. Seeing Cockburn losing control, the film operator looped the film again and again, while attendants off camera tried unsuccessfully to wrest the whisky from him. Finally, they turned the cameras on us and seeing himself on the monitor the old pro straightened up. Gripping his bottle firmly as our air time ebbed away, he spoke with cocky, alcoholic vitality about what he had seen in Spain, and the writers he encountered there. We had a sparkling hour—or what was left of it. Audiences never knew what they hadn’t seen. We were congratulated at sign-off for bringing the forgotten war to life, and Cockburn shook my hand while with the other he offered the empty bottle to a studio flunky.

Rodelle and I returned “home” to 75 Royal Hospital Road in Chelsea, close to the venerable Albert Bridge across the Thames, which always looked magical after dark. In English illogic, Royal Hospital Road was christened Cheyne Walk across the street from us, which cabbies knew but visitors didn’t. Dante Gabriel Rossetti had lived on Cheyne Walk, and James McNeill Whistler and Oscar Wilde nearby on intersecting Tite Street. I would eventually write about all three neighboring figures. When we first drove up to the narrow three-story row house we had rented yet never seen, we were surprised by the bland postwar exterior that didn’t resemble traditional London. The rebuilt block had been blitzed in 1940—perhaps the Albert Bridge had been targeted—and across Tite Street to the east the site was still only cleared rubble. When Rodelle first saw the grimy interior of our house, she wept. The walls on the ground floor were black with kitchen soot. It took a day to scrub them reasonably clean.

The house came with other unforeseen problems. Once we accepted the Volvo’s license tags (QH 7076), we had driven to the realtor’s office to sign our lease and receive the keys. In the fine print we learned that
we didn’t possess the entire small house—three levels with two rooms on each, including three bedrooms designed for Lilliputians. The front bedroom on the top floor was rented separately, for Edward De Bono of Cambridge, who was likely to use it only once a week. The larger of the two remaining bedrooms would be shared by the three children. Rodelle and I were left to occupy a room with a single, twin-sized bed. That summer would become the most physically intimate one of our marriage.

De Bono, thirty-three, and already famous, as we did not know at the time, for a book published the year before on “lateral thinking,” was a native of Malta and a Rhodes Scholar with an M.A. from Oxford in psychology and physiology and a Ph.D. from Cambridge in medicine. He would go on to publish shelves of pop titles on techniques of thinking. De Bono would turn up from Cambridge at odd hours, once a week, and immediately peer out of his window for what would be the inevitable miniskirted bird in an open convertible to wheel him away. It was not always the same bird. Once he came to Rodelle in tears. “I have clean sheets!” he said in some awe. Rodelle assured him that he would continue to have them while we were there. Mrs. Watson, the once-a-week char who was also locked into our curious rental agreement, had never entered “Dr. Edward’s” room. Rodelle insisted to her, to no avail, that the house was the entire house. Although De Bono would become a peripatetic lecturer, his four words to Rodelle were the only conversation either of us ever had with him.

A small fridge dominated the tiny kitchen. Milk came in pint bottles. Every other morning we would have a battalion of bottles at the front door. Most wouldn’t fit in the fridge and were lodged outside on a window sill. Our landlord, who lived in Scotland, arrived only once—not to inspect the premises but to squeeze a large fresh salmon into the fridge overnight. Everything else had to be removed, and for days afterwards the kitchen smelled like a fishery.

Our summer in London included other surprises. The afternoon following our arrival the family had split up to go to different West End matinees, so that London would not be all work. I went to a J. B. Priestley play. Rodelle and Erica (who was seven) went to a ballet. Mark and David, twelve and ten, went to the movies to see Stanley Kubrick’s recently released *2001: A Space Odyssey*. We planned to meet the
boys afterwards in the movie theatre lobby. But when we returned, the
lobby and the theater were empty. No boys in sight. Rodelle sought out
the manager. “Oh, it’s all right,” he assured us. “Since they were not
accompanied by an adult, we escorted them out but gave them their
money back.” We wondered whether to summon a policeman, or just
rush home and then call the police. We hurried home.

As we turned into Royal Hospital Road, we saw the boys leaning out
of the second-floor window, waving to us. They explained, as our hearts
stopped pounding, that since they had a slip of paper with our address,
they hailed a taxi—it took many tries, and a helpful bobby, before one
would stop for two kids—and adventured back home, letting them-
selves in. They paid the cabbie for two fares, as he failed to explain that
only one was required. But they were home.

Just across the Albert Bridge in Battersea was a park and amusement
area. The boys could take Erica with them on days when Rodelle ac-
companied me on research. On one occasion, an elderly man (as de-
scribed to us by the children) approached Erica and invited her home
to see his pictures. No dummies, although nothing like it had entered
their small-town experience, they took Erica by the hand to play into
the fenced “tot lot” which was placarded prominently, “NO ADULTS
PERMITTED.” The man fidgeted, then left.

The children often walked from our house to nearby King’s Road,
then in the heyday of Beatlemania. The whimsical Beatles fantasy *The
Yellow Submarine* was the hit film down the street. American tourists
flocked to the hippy scene. Erica’s hair had seldom been cut and was
quite long. To confound tourists, the boys once parted her hair, braided
it under her chin, and stuck a pigeon feather atop her head. Onlookers
madly snapped pictures of the “English hippy.”

I had some research meetings scheduled. One was with Sir Basil
Liddell Hart, who in 1961 had advised me on my biography of Law-
rence of Arabia. He had been a confidant of the reclusive postwar hero
who hid dramatically in the limelight. Now I wanted to pick Sir Basil’s
brains about the war in which both had fought. Then a captain, Hart
had been invalided out of action after a shell-burst at Ypres in 1915
and gassing at the bloody Somme in 1916. Following his retirement
from active service in 1927 he had become, for a generation, one of
the leading British military strategists in civilian life. Tall and slender
in a brocade vest, he was now seventy-two and gracious host to innumerable supplicants. His library at States House, Medmenham, southwest of Marlow-on-Thames, was hung with signed portraits of men to whom he had taught military tactics—among them Yigal Allon, Moshe Dayan, Charles de Gaulle, George Patton and Heinz Guderian. “I have here,” he had said on my earlier visit, handing me a large bundle tied with much-knotted string, “some dozens of letters and hundreds of photos sent to me by Lawrence when I worked on a book about him. Do you think some American would give me a Rolls-Royce for them?”

“Definitely,” I said without a gulp, having recently come from research in Austin. “Let me write to Harry Ransom.” Ransom was president of the University of Texas and had founded there the immensely endowed, and expanding, Humanities Research Center. When back in Pennsylvania, I found a letter waiting for me from the Oxford don F. W. Bateson, with whom I had become friendly. Liddell Hart, he wrote, had asked him (their wives had been schoolmates) how much his Lawrence collection was worth on the manuscript market, as he had received an inquiry from the HRC’s agent in London, Bertram Rota. As a gentleman, Sir Basil personally eschewed such mercantile matters. The Rota firm, of course, knew its value, but Liddell Hart wanted a second opinion from his own side. I did some homework on recent sales prices of TEL letters and wrote back to Freddie Bateson.

Before long the Liddell Hart collection was ensconced in Texas. A T. E. Lawrence exhibition to feature them was being planned—and somehow I was not invited to the opening, nor was I credited in the exhibition catalog for making it possible. Now, six years after, Rodelle and I drove to the Liddell Hart estate bringing a crate of South African melons. Sir Basil had asked us to pick them up for him at his club and remain for lunch. There was a gleaming black Mercedes in the driveway. “Where,” I asked, when he emerged to greet us, “is the Rolls?”

It was tedious story, he said. Before he had gone off to a college in California for a semester as visiting professor of military history, he had received a letter from a young faculty member at that campus offering to exchange homes and vehicles. It seemed an opportune convenience, and Sir Basil had accepted. He and Lady Kathleen crossed the Atlantic, and then the continent, to a small but comfortable house and a 1951 Chevrolet. The American professor settled into States House and
began negotiating, unsteadily, the narrow, winding, unfamiliar Bucking-hamshire roads in the big Rolls with its steering wheel on the wrong side. Soon it was wrecked. The insurance money would only cover a less expensive car. But the Lawrence of Arabia cache had a grand new home in America.

Our children were disappointed when we returned to London to report our adventure.

“Was he a real Indian?” one of them asked.

“Who?”

“Chief Little Heart.”

We had been invited as a family for dinner with Freddie and Jan Bateson at their historic home near Oxford, built in 1593 and unfortunately now hugging a narrow road noisy with traffic. Even so, overseas mail arrived regularly from future visitors to Oxford eager to know when the Batesons would next be away and the property available for rental. The first Queen Elizabeth hadn’t slept there, but she might have passed by. En route, anticipating a chilly country evening, we stopped at the local Marks & Spencer for me to buy a turtleneck sweater.

Entering the Bateson residence wasn’t easy. The vestibule was piled high on both sides with copies of Essays in Criticism. Freddie founded and edited it; Jan posted the journal. The house had back issues stacked in every open space. Freddie was proud of his long back garden, quiet and distant from the roadway and the lorries. The lush garden stretched back to some crumbling ruins and the remains of a moat alleged to date from the reign of Edward the Confessor, the last Saxon king, who died in 1066. While Freddie, with a woolen vest and work shoes, spaded out potatoes to roast for dinner, the children went off exploring.

“Don’t get too close to the moat,” Freddie warned. “It’s full of old green slime.”

“If you fall in,” I threatened, “don’t come back.”

Before long, the boys came running. Erica had tumbled into the moat. A passing village teenager had pulled her out. What were they to do? She wasn’t allowed to come back. Rodelle and Jan rushed out with towels, and Erica, swaddled in them, was taken up to a tub. Her sopping clothes were fetid and unwearable. Scrubbed up but without them, but for underpants, she dined in my new turtleneck sweater, its sleeves rolled up as far as possible. Since we returned home late
that night, only next morning was I able to take everything redolent with Edward the Confessor’s 900 year-old residue to the launderette on Pimlico Road.

Other book interviews after the BBC adventure were useful publicity for W. H. Allen, my London publisher. I was even invited to Bush House in Aldwych to broadcast on the BBC radio’s Spanish Service, on which, during the Franco regime, I was a sort of subversive. There were reviews in The Sunday Times, The Observer, The Scotsman of Edinburgh, The Glasgow Herald, and even The Irish Times. Yet no experience for an aspiring writer in England could have been more memorable than my visit to Leonard Woolf at Monk’s House in Rodmell, near Lewes, where he had once summered with Virginia. Woolf was in his later eighties, and although no longer up to his morning walks, still intellectually vigorous. He had recently published several volumes of memoirs and regularly reviewed books.

Monk’s House was sheltered from the road by an old stone wall and wooden gate. The garden was lush with flowers. One prewar summer day in 1939 as he was out working in the garden, Virginia called from a window that Hitler was making a speech which she had picked up on their radio. Leonard shouted backed: “I shan’t come. I’m planting iris and they will be flowering long after he’s dead.” The irises were in bloom.

Before I reached the door, I was announced by loud barking—Woolf’s two shaggy, elderly dogs. He followed behind. “The dogs are friendly,” he assured me. “Come upstairs; I’ve been expecting you.” In the sitting room were several aged chairs, their tattered upholstery shredded and full of holes. The floor was covered by newspapers and magazines and books, among them my The Last Great Cause. “I’m too old to worry about how long these chairs will last,” he said. “They’re safe.”

Seated on the floor were two young women with notebook, tape recorder and microphone. “They’re running a bit late,” Woolf said. “I’m recording a book review for the BBC—not your book, at least not yet.” He settled himself back in his armchair to continue, and the dogs settled themselves on either side and went back to sleep. The book in question was about customs surrounding death and funerals. Such ceremonies, he told the women, were for the living, and useless for the dead. He didn’t want any fuss for himself. The tape whirred on to his
conclusion. He nodded his head in finality; the young women gathered their equipment and turned toward the stairs with a “Thank you, Sir. No need to see us down.”

He picked up my book and began reminiscing about the Spanish Civil War:

Virginia’s nephew, Julian Bell, you know, was killed in Spain. A great loss, like many others, but the losses in 1914–1918 were incomparably worse. Some were not even war casualties in the strict sense, because they were losses resulting from minds gone astray. Virginia was like this—insane during much of the war. Tom Eliot and I became close at the time, and do you think we talked about books? We were both caring for addled wives.

The war, he said,

changed everything. It altered art and literature because a sense of stability went out of life. It made Tom Eliot more religious, and it made me less so, if that were possible. I was appalled by the militaristic churchmen throughout the war. Many of us who supported the war for idealistic reasons at the start soon began to see that Shaw’s cynicism had been right. Perhaps it was the privations, the privileges the wealthy never seemed to lose, the vast loss of relatives and friends. There was a widespread feeling of misery after a while that was never articulated into anything substantial because the government propaganda kept most of it out of the newspapers, especially that the war was being fought over nothing. It was difficult to sense this from the newspapers. When a “Peace Now!” pacifist meeting would be broken up by a mob, the press would call it a patriotic act. We needed more attrition. So did the other side.

The dogs suddenly reawakened and barked at the top of the stairs. “It’s the grocer’s daughter coming,” Woolf said. “They know her footsteps before you can hear them. She comes to help me with some of my meals, keeps me in provisions.” A teenager came up, was introduced, and offered me tea. Then she perched inconspicuously in a corner.

“You said in your letter that you wanted to know what I saw of Bernard Shaw during the war,” he continued:

Early in 1915 the Fabian Society received a gift of £100 from a benefactor whose name I’ve forgotten. He gave the money to Beatrice Webb. There was a meeting to decide on how it should be spent. She suggested it go to the Fabian Research Department to help formulate a policy on war aims, peace, and prevention of war. Sidney Webb was vice-chairman; Shaw was chairman. It was his pet preoccupation at the time, and his views had created a storm. Since the Webbs, you see, were unsympathetic with Shaw’s stark objectivity, which everyone read as pro-Germanism, Beatrice recommended that the money be used to employ me to do the basic research. I was a former civil servant with foreign
service experience and interested in legal questions. I was named the secretary, and given a salary. I needed the money, too.

In the summer of 1916, when the study, which would be titled *International Government*, was nearly complete, the Webbs invited the Woolfs and the Shaws to a house they had rented, Windham Croft in Sussex, to discuss promoting the project. The long weekend became the setting for Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*. “Shaw went into the garden every morning,” Woolf recalled, “and wrote on a writing pad on his knee.”

My World War I book would be titled *Journey to Heartbreak*, and would be about the anxieties and torments of the Great War, and Shaw’s writings about it, from protests about its uselessness, carnage and absurdity to his sardonic comedy about its beginnings. Characters in the play would be drawn from both Leonard and Virginia. And, possibly, also, Beatrice Webb.

We chatted further about the Great War, his seamed face lighting up with memories of the days when he worked on his scheme for postwar “supernational” government, which would influence Woodrow Wilson’s ideas for the failed League of Nations:

Shaw offered to write an introduction, saying that his name would help get the book noticed in the press. It was really most generous of him, for he repeatedly turned down appeals from people to do prefaces for their books. He was surprised when I turned him down, but I told him I wanted to stand on my own literary feet. He understood. Afterwards I asked him to write a preface for the American edition, which he readily agreed to do. The idea might have worked, if your country had joined the League at the outset. Perhaps nothing would have helped.

Although it was obvious that we could have gone on and on as his memories rekindled, I remembered my family on the beach in Brighton, and wanted to return before the sun went down. “You should have brought them with you,” Woolf said. He jumped up spryly, rebuttoning the hairy tweed vest that matched his trousers, and followed me down the narrow stairs, the dogs squeezing ahead of us and barking all the while. When I shook his hand at the garden gate there seemed no strength in it, a ghostly hand with no bone or sinew. He was eighty-seven. As I was about to get into my car he called out from the gate:

I nearly forgot. You said that after England you would be going to Sweden. When I was a boy my parents used to take me to visit family in Sweden, north of Gothenburg—a beautiful village called Lysekil, on a fjord. I can still remember how happy I was there. Perhaps you’ll be able to visit it.
He called out the spelling of the village’s name, waved, and was gone.

Woolf died a year later just shy of his 89th birthday—before *Journey to Heartbreak* was published in 1971—but his memories would extend into other pages of mine, then far in the future. In a book I wrote about the day the Great War ended, I described the pandemonium and revelry in London on Armistice Day, 1918. In contrast I noted on the last page that in Hogarth House, Richmond, Leonard and Virginia Woolf “celebrated the end of a civilization and the beginning of peace by sitting in the lovely, paneled [drawing] room … and eating, almost sacramentally, some small bars of chocolate cream,” saved for the occasion.

I had left my family to enjoy the beach and the surf. When I returned, I found that Erica had lost her glasses as high tide had come in. Perhaps they improved the sight of a large fish or turned up years later in Australia. Somehow, she managed without them. I took an out-of-the-way route back to London, via Lewes and up through Rodmell, so that the family could at least see Monk’s House.

Six weeks later, after nearly daily sleuthing in the grand, domed, British Museum Reading Room and the Shaw Archive in what was mislabeled the “Student’s Room,” I was loaded with pricey, photocopied data ordered for *Journey to Heartbreak*, and even more documentation for what would become the two volumes of *Shaw. An Autobiography* (1969–1970), edited, annotated and stitched together from GBS’s myriad writings about himself. Unlike “lives in letters” pseudo-biographies, my criterion was to use only what Shaw published or intended to publish—to reveal the personality he intended readers to know. To inhibit photocopying in those primitive times the British Museum permitted no xeroxing, claiming that heat in the new technology adversely affected the paper and print of books and manuscripts. Instead, microfilm processing was done on application, with many months’ delay in receipt. It meant laborious hand-copying of almost anything not reasonably lengthy, and then making photocopies from microfilm at home.

It had become my practice, when I could manage it, to work on more than one book on a research trip, as funds for travel were so hard to acquire. In this case my Gugg had been crucial. Usually, then and since, my writings were supported by past writing income or future promise.

Toward the close of our time abroad we crossed the Channel, traveling through Holland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden, depositing
the car at the Volvo factory at Trollhättan, where by arrangement it would be shipped across the Atlantic. Earlier, in Amsterdam, as we walked along the flower stalls on the Singel toward the Anne Frank home, which meant a turn toward the Prinzengracht, a young woman opened the door to her tall, narrow house fronting the canal and asked, warmly: “Would your little girl like to play with my daughter?” Rodelle was astonished, but, recovering, consulted Erica, who was delighted at the idea of a playmate after weeks without one. Unlikely as it seems, we left her with someone we did not know, only jotting down the address, and proceeded on. Later, to her disappointment, we reclaimed Erica. We were to drive to Bremen the next day, and then on to Denmark.

Two days later, on a crowded pedestrian mall in Copenhagen, we suddenly realized that Erica had wandered off. With Mark and David, I began backtracking in search of her. While we were gone, a grandmotherly lady came up to Rodelle clutching Erica in hand. She had pointed out her mother. But the lady would not relinquish her charge until Rodelle produced passports from her handbag for identification. The next day in Helsingør we explored Kronborg Castle, Shakespeare’s setting for Hamlet. In the dank dimness of the dungeon where aficionados of the Bard trod quietly, we heard a muffled wail: “Mommy, I lost my shoe.” With the boys, I crawled back along the much trod dungeon floor in the direction of the entrance. We found the shoe.

My next research target was the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. We flew via Scandinavian Airlines from rainy Copenhagen over the polar route to Seattle, then south to Los Angeles. Take-off weather was terrible and the plane was delayed by flooding rain, but as we waited in an airport lounge, the pilot strolled through, trundling a well-appointed golf bag. We knew all would be well.

In flight, from the clear, cold skies at 37,000 feet, the glaciers and snowmass of Greenland appeared below like a brilliant but crumpled white sheet. From her window seat Erica piped up over the throbbing of the jet engines: “I see Santa Claus’s house!” Almost everyone in listening distance seated on the left side of the 747 unbuckled their belts and rushed to look. I worried that the plane might tip over from the abrupt imbalance. As passengers realized their folly, they drifted back to their seats.
Southern California made possible, finally, after much correspondence of the mutual admiration variety, meeting the most imaginative Shavian in my experience, then and since, Ray Bradbury. Rodelle and I were briefly renting a house (with car) on Green Lane in La Cañada, in the foothills above Pasadena and close to our friends Dot and Gerry Levy. Bradbury suggested that we two meet for lunch at an eatery in Westwood, near UCLA, which featured sandwiches named for local notables, so that he could treat me to a “Ray Bradbury.” After *The Martian Chronicles* and *Fahrenheit 451*, he had, at forty-eight, earned the gustatory salute. Although Ray ordered for me, the waiter seemed unaware that the stocky guy with horn-rimmed glasses and tousled hair falling over his ears was the owner of my sandwich’s identity. In his trademark shorts, tennis shoes and sneakers, Ray had hitchhiked from Santa Monica. Many commuters on his usual routes recognized him—and knew that Bradbury did not drive and had no license.

We talked, of course, about Shaw, whom Ray would insert into at least two of his stories, one in his yet-to-be-written fictionalized *Green Shadows, White Whale* (1992), about meeting GBS in Heeber Finn’s pub when on location in Ireland as screenwriter for John Huston’s *Moby Dick* in 1953. (GBS, who had died in 1950, hadn’t frequented pubs and hadn’t been in Ireland for many years, was ostensibly marooned in the rain when his chauffeur blew a tire.) I told Ray that I loved the film and that I had read Melville’s masterpiece on a troopship in the rain two years earlier than his film gig, and then re-read it for its structural parallels to T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Years later, when he sent me *Green Shadows, White Whale* he scrawled on the flyleaf: “For Stan! See pages 184 to 201!” There was Shaw, chattering away to Finn’s awed habitués, and Ray.

Bradbury confided that he had some ideas of inserting Shaw into his fiction. He was fixated by the futuristic *Back to Methuselah* and Shaw’s concept of the “Life Force.” That concept would materialize in Bradbury’s “G.B.S.—Mark V” in *Long After Midnight* (1976), in which a robotic Shaw is discovered on a spaceship. “How I wish I had truly known you,” says young Charlie Willis, one of the crew. “*This* Shaw is best,” claims the reincarnated old man, “all of mince-meat and none of the tin.” Looking out at a star twenty-eight light-years distant, Shaw muses, “What *are* we? Why, we are the miracle of force and matter mak-
ing itself into imagination and will.... The Life Force experimenting with forms.... The Universe has shouted itself alive. We are one of the shouts.”

I mentioned the Shaw Review, the quarterly which I edited and to which Ray subscribed, and my hopes to eventually transform it into a hardcover annual. Ray offered to contribute to it. In time he offered me a verse whimsy which I placed as the opening piece in volume two of the SHAW (1982). “G.B.S. and the Loin of Pork” took off from Mrs. Patrick Campbell’s alleged warning that if Shaw ever relinquished vegetarianism, “God protect all women!” In Bradbury’s fantasy, however tempted by strong drink and roasted meat, Shaw recovers his self-discipline:

The good wine still lies there, untouched, uncorked,
The women unwomened and the pork unporked....

In California the mayhem in Chicago at the tumultuous Democratic presidential convention of 1968 appeared on our television screen in Green Lane as an implicit prophecy of the triumph of Richard Nixon and law-and-order. When I had been a visiting professor at UCLA in 1963 it was just after his humiliating defeat for governor of California the previous November. Yet he had clawed back, exploiting opposition disarray. We could only watch in futility. Our own, largely rural, county at home was perennially Republican. I went back to what I could do.

We arrived home in Pennsylvania in time for me to retrieve our Volvo, which we had picked up on arrival at a showroom in Piccadilly. A driver and auto from the local agency which had sold us the car drove me to Port Elizabeth, New Jersey. When the Volvo was offloaded from the freighter, I displayed my owner’s certificate, signed other papers, and was given the keys. We had been cautioned not to have a radio installed on purchase, as it would likely be stolen during shipment. The only object we had left in the vehicle was the boys’ black-and-white soccer ball, as it was too bulky to fit in a suitcase and we had more than enough to carry on the plane. The ball was gone.
Endnotes

1. Four decades later, *On Any Given Sunday. A Life of Bert Bell* was penned by Robert S. Lyons.

2. One fine restaurant we went to was located on Between Streets.

3. It would become the Army Museum. The sprawling Royal Hospital for veterans was further to the east.

4. Now called the Harry Ransom Center.

5. T. S. Eliot.

6. It was Joseph Rowntree of H. I. Rowntree & Co., cocoa manufacturers in York.

7. Webb was an early member of the Fabian Society, a co-founder with her husband Sidney of the London School of Economics, and the inventor of the term “collective bargaining.”

8. I wrote about that wartime weekend, and Virginia’s recollection of it to Shaw, in the closing chapter of *Who’s Afraid of Bernard Shaw?* (2011).


10. The round, domed Reading Room in the British Museum is now an exhibition space. The books and archives formerly in the museum are now in the British Library on Euston Road, across from the St. Pancras rail station.