Chapter 9
The Whistler Decade
1969–1977

Realizing that work in the GBS archives in London would create additional opportunities beyond the ongoing Journey to Heartbreak, I proposed to Victor Weybright that I stitch together the autobiography that Shaw produced only piecemeal and in odd corners of other writings. Always eager for earnings, the Public Trustee for the Shaw Estate agreed. My working premise, as stated earlier, was to incorporate only writings which, even when unsigned, Shaw intended for print or did publish, and to exclude from his public persona personal letters, however evocative, as falling outside autobiography. When he was a young man he observed from the safety of an anonymous book review that autobiography was “usually begun with interest by reader and writer alike, and seldom finished by either. Few men care enough about their past to take the trouble of writing its history.” Yet he cared and wrote voluminously about himself, but he never assembled a real memoir.

I found that he had saved scrapbooks of his anonymous reviews and other ephemeral writings, often scissored out of newspapers and magazines. Prefaces to his plays and reprints of his early novels also were replete with amusing and even moving personal history. In a pre-photocopy era I laid out substantial sums for photostats, and with scissors and paste conjured up a volume that took Shaw from his beginnings to the launch of his career as polemicist and playwright. Except for explanatory annotations in square brackets for linkage, every word was authentic GBS.
Shaw. An Autobiography 1856–1898 emerged in 1969 and was front-paged in the New York Times Book Review. A successor volume, Shaw. An Autobiography 1898–1950. The Playwright Years appeared in 1970 and took GBS to the close of his long life. As I worked on his last years, I wondered how to close. Completing an autobiography from the hereafter was, of course, impossible. Shaw had collected what he called “scraps and shavings” as Sixteen Self Sketches in 1949, a slender book of pieces from the 1890s to the 1940s, including several letters which he covertly rewrote. I excluded them. “Of these reminiscences and memoranda,” he concluded,

I must now make an end, as there must be an end to everything.... I cannot be sure that my sayings and writings are not the senile drivellings of a garrulous and too old man. However, enough of it was written years ago to embolden me to let it take its chance, such as it is. I will not even say Hail and Farewell....

As that seemed inadequate as finality, I also exploited, for black humor, his own words written in 1898, more than a half-century before his death. When he signed off as a drama critic, the most brilliant in his time, as serious foot surgery had foreclosed his ability to tramp the aisles of theaters, he wrote a witty valedictory column which exploited his vegetarianism, to which he would remain faithful to the end: “I know now that I am mortal,” he wrote, “which ... I had come to doubt. My will contains directions for my funeral, which will be followed, not by mourning coaches”—he was referring to elaborate Dickensian obsequies—

but by herds of oxen, sheep, swine, flocks of poultry and a small travelling aquarium of live fish, all wearing white scarves in honour of the man who perished rather than eat his fellow creatures. It will be, with the exception of Noah’s Ark, the most remarkable thing of its kind yet seen.

That mockery seemed to require, following it, an authentic will. I appended Shaw’s Last Will and Testament, signed on June 12, 1950. Shaw died at ninety-four that November 2.

Journey to Heartbreak was published in the summer of 1971. I thought that not only was it effective biography, but in taking Shaw through a war he thought senseless, and about which he was excoriated by the public and the press for lacking patriotic ardor, it had achieved a second implicit dimension. Journey to Heartbreak appeared at a time of anxiety and protest as the waste of a purposeless war in Vietnam proceeded. The most distinguished playwright in Britain, Shaw was even
expelled from the Society of Authors as an outspoken pacifist. Too late for publication, I thought of the obvious rejoinder in *Hamlet*:

**Hamlet:** Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

**Clown:** Because 'a was mad. 'A shall recover his wits there, or, if 'a do not, 'tis no great matter there.

**Hamlet:** Why?

**Clown:** 'Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he.

Earlier, I had reviewed a book about Shaw, *Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment*, for the *New York Times* by Colin Wilson, then a polymath prodigy who had become famous with his *The Outsider*, and although prolific would soon flame out. I judged his new book as intending to be controversial but lacking in substance. Meanly, as rejoinder, I thought, the *Book Review* editor assigned *Journey to Heartbreak* to Wilson. It was unreasonable, even unethical, to do so. As Wilson only faint-praised the book, my hopes for it deflated. However significant it remains, its momentum was aborted. A line in *Die Fledermaus*, “Glücklich ist, wer vergisst, was doch nicht zu ändern ist” (“Happy is he who forgets what cannot be changed”), has not reconciled me to the tit-for-tat.

Although *Journey to Heartbreak* would not sell enough to be reprinted, I was invited onto the leading television review, Robert Cromie’s *Book Beat*, out of Chicago, and to Studs Terkel’s Chicago-based radio interview show, which penetrated deep into the Midwest heartland. My hotel doorman hailed a taxi and I offered the cabbie a slip with the address of Cromie’s TV studio. “OK,” he said. We drove aimlessly about Chicago as the meter spun well above fifty dollars, big money then, and I was beginning to worry about making the show, which was telecast live. Finally, the cabbie pulled over and shut down the meter. In halting English he explained that he had recently arrived from Mexico, and it was his first day on the job.
Although I am an incompetent navigator, we looked over his Chicago city map and street directory together and figured out how to get there. At the correct building—he hadn’t put his meter on again—he appealed: “Whatever you want.” I gave him fifty dollars, got a receipt, and dashed inside to the elevator. Bob Cromie waited for me to catch my breath by extending his introduction, and we had a great conversation.

I had an even livelier exchange with Studs Terkel, who proved in his oral histories like The Good War to be a brilliant interviewer. He had the blank back-matter leaves of my book closely written over with questions, noting also the page numbers on which the answers could be found. He had really read Journey to Heartbreak, and his notes were in effect a compliment.

A minor personal deflation occurred after the book was published in England. A letter arrived in a crabbed hand, obviously the handwriting of an old man. I had noted that Robert Loraine, a prominent actor in GBS’s plays, had joined the Royal Flying Corps as a pilot and aerial photographer. To the childless Shaws, he had become a surrogate son, to whom they posted delicacies from Fortnum and Mason in Piccadilly, and also something especially valued at his airbase in Flanders—“Bromo Paper.” I footnoted without checking: “A fast-printing photographic paper, also called bromide paper.” My correspondent in England observed that I must be a very young man, as bromo paper was then a quality toilet paper. Although no one else called attention to the bottom-of-the-page blunder, it was a lesson in not committing guesswork to print. Thanks to the Shaws, Robert Loraine did not have to resort to old pages of The Times.

A few further corrections have been offered to me since then, the most memorable about a line in a book about the Pacific war in 1945. A typographical error, missed in proofs, added an unnoticed zero to a 30-foot Japanese torpedo. “Sir,” wrote a reader, “You must not have served in the Navy.” A 300-foot missile would be the length of a football gridiron. Thereafter, when I visited bookshops to sign copies, I carried a small bottle of “white-out” and turned to page 74 to eliminate the superfluous zero. Paperback reprints eliminated the error. Since I couldn’t haunt libraries to deface their books, or replace them, the 300-foot torpedo maintains that length on library shelves.
My days in the British Museum renewed my acquaintance with Stanley Rypins, a diminutive retired professor at Brooklyn College, who not only worked on Shaw but was also a distinguished scholar in Anglo-Saxon studies. Rypins, then in his late seventies, was hunting down annotations for an edition of Shaw’s shorthand diaries of the 1880s and 1890s. Each time I encountered him he appeared increasingly feeble, leaning heavily on a cane and on his wife’s arm. Soon he was on two crutches. His sight was failing and he resorted to a large magnifying glass. “Why doesn’t he put the research aside?” I asked Evelyn Rypins. “He doesn’t need this. His reputation is assured. And certainly there is no income likely from, at best, an academic press edition of the diaries.”

“If he stopped working,” Evelyn said, “He’d die.” Still at it, he died at eighty in 1971. Ten years later, Mrs. Rypins wrote to me, asking whether I would be willing to acquire his papers and finish editing the diaries. She had one stipulation: title-page credit for him. We drove to her flat in Manhattan and picked up boxes of papers, including a very useful non-Shavian tool—the Extended Tape Indicator Map of London, published in 1902, which identified seven thousand streets and even public buildings. I could walk, in effect, with GBS and other Victorian worthies throughout the metropolis in their time.

It took me years of commuting to the London School of Economics, which housed the diaries, and the British Museum, to complete and correct annotations. The formidable result, two volumes and nearly two thousand pages, was published in 1986. As the Shaw Estate by contract took its share of royalties ahead of my receiving anything, I not only earned utterly nothing, but probably lost working and travel funds in six figures. Yet I thoroughly enjoyed the look in depth at late-Victorian England, which proved useful background for later books.

One of my scholarly resources for the diary was my mother. In high school she had learned the Pitman shorthand that Shaw had used, and when a secretary again as a widow had employed it, and so each time I needed assistance on obscure Shavian annotations, I called on her expertise. To short-cut, for example, Rypins had ignored all of Shaw’s meticulous accountings of expenses, and I wished to fill in these missing pieces of Shaw’s story. Mom would gather her elderly friends with similar experience in Pitman at her apartment in Philadelphia for cof-
fee and pass around enlarged photocopies I had posted to her from the diaries. One proved to be simply “Lost penny under train.” She and the ladies wondered what that could mean beyond the bald fact. I explained in a letter that newsboys would gather at train platforms and hawk papers, which often were paid for by tossed coins from passenger windows as the boys reached out. Shaw’s penny had apparently missed its target.

Another entry noted thirty-six shillings—a great sum then, nearly two pounds—for “French letters.” The ladies could not imagine such exorbitant cross-Channel postage in 1885. Shaw at nearly twenty-nine had been seduced, in stages, by the buxom, forty-four year-old Jenny Patterson, who came to his home in London for music lessons from GBS’s mother, a voice teacher. Shaw often escorted Jenny back to Brompton Square. Only marginally employed, but attractive to women, he remained a virgin, cautious about intimacies that might lead to a shotgun wedding. Jenny claimed to be a widow and had no children, but Shaw took no chances. He purchased a supply of then-illegal condoms—“French letters” in English euphemism. Under the date of July 25, 1885, he wrote laconically in his diary about an event that obviously occurred early on the 26th: “I returned to the Square with JP, and stayed there until 3 o’clock on my 29th birthday which I celebrated by a new experience. Was watched by an old woman next door, whose evil interpretation of the lateness of my departure greatly alarmed us.” I chose to ignore the query from the ladies about “French letters,” by-passing the question by posting another and unrelated query.

Working on the diaries was often detective work, and I felt like a reincarnation of one of my earliest literary heroes, Sherlock Holmes. On November 8, 1894, toward the close of the daily accounts, Shaw noted that he had visited “FE”—his abbreviation for Florence Farr Emery, then his mistress. Not long before, she had been the feisty maid Louka in Arms and the Man, his first hit comedy. Only one word followed the date: “Trennung.” Strikingly, it was his only use of German in the diaries—other than for works he reviewed. Trennung means parting.

Dramatically set alone, the word meant more than that, I found through my colleague Robert Trehy, an operatic baritone and, beginning in 1969, a music professor at Penn State. “Trennung,” I would note, “was probably a reference to a Lied of that title by Brahms …
which seems to summarize Shaw’s feelings about Florence.” Their affection lasted her lifetime, but she was drifting toward a liaison with W. B. Yeats. The last of the four poignant stanzas of Brahms’s *Trennung*, each illuminating a passion Shaw still felt, was

For the time when you loved me,  
I thank you from the heart,  
And I hope it will  
Go better for you elsewhere.

Shaw and Florence did part, which she regretted all her life. I found a fragment of diary that was all he wrote in January 1917, to describe what life was like during the war years. I used some lines in *Journey to Heartbreak*, and the entire ten days of text in the later diaries. In Shaw’s mail on January 3, 1917 was a letter from Florence, posted from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) which had taken four weeks to reach him at his country home at Ayot St. Lawrence. She was in the Colombo general hospital awaiting surgery for breast cancer. She had gone there before the war, perhaps an outcome of her attraction to Eastern religions, which she had shared with Yeats, becoming principal of Ramanathan College, a school for Hindu girls. When she had learned of the death of Aubrey Beardsley’s sister Mabel from cancer in 1916, Florence had written: “I am always glad to hear of someone making a good end. I came here to make mine brave.” To Shaw she now wrote that she was not going to inform her family but she wanted to confide in him. “I would like to get a letter from you someday…. Goodbye. Remember me to your people.”

In the foyer of “Shaw’s Corner,” where he had a piano, his first reaction in his sorrow was to play a transcription for keyboard of Richard Strauss’s *Tod und Verklärung—Death and Transfiguration*. The next morning he rode thirteen miles on his motor bicycle to a post office from which he could send a telegram, reply paid, to Ceylon. Apparently, Florence was beyond any response. None came. She died that April. Shaw was then back from the front in Flanders, where he had gone as a war correspondent at the invitation of the British commander, General Haig.

Also among my band of diary researchers were English friends we had first met in 1968, Alan and Eileen Hanley-Browne, of Walton-on-Thames. While Rodelle and I were home, they became our legs in London. When I sought to elucidate a reference in the diaries to
“Seven Dials”—this was pre-Google—they queried a teenage librarian at Weybridge, close to their children’s school. “Why,” said the girl at the reference desk, “it’s right out there”—and she pointed to a pillar on the lawn. The stone sundial once atop it lay apart. The column in the Covent Garden area where seven streets converge had six sundials rather than seven. (The additional street came after the pillar was constructed.) Built in the 1690s, it failed to survive the deterioration of the area into a notorious slum, its squalor described graphically by Charles Dickens in his *Sketches by Boz*.

Dismantled as a traffic hazard in 1773, its remains were salvaged and brought to Weybridge in 1820. Until Alan and Eileen called attention to it, no one in the now-prosperous commercial and theater district thought of a restoration. Then the Seven Dials Council asked for its return, and the Weybridge authorities declined. In 1988–1989, three years after the Shaw diaries were published, a replica column was constructed to the original design and unveiled by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands to mark the tercentenary of the reign in England of William and Mary. It was an unforeseen conclusion to research on the diaries, validating once again the unwritten law of unexpected consequences.

Returning home from London on one occasion, Alan, a senior British Airways pilot, suggested—it was long before post-9/11 strict security—that we fly with him, as he had been asked to ferry a huge Boeing 747 replacement Rolls-Royce engine to New York. As machinery of that bulk would not fit in aircraft holds, some 747s had wing brackets to attach a spare engine, making the flight a delicate balance-and-maneuvering challenge for which only a few pilots were qualified. We had a lengthy delay until the fitting was accomplished, and were served drinks once we were airborne. Asked if he wanted another whisky, a passenger behind us declined, telling the flight attendant that the first drink must have been powerful, as he was seeing three engines on the wing at his window. As the plane closed in on New York, Alan invited us into the cockpit to watch the landing, something that could have only happened in an earlier world.

When *Bernard Shaw, The Diaries 1885–1897* was published (1986), I fulfilled my promise to Evelyn Rypins. The title pages of both volumes include the prominent attribution “transliterated by Stanley Rypkin.”
They also credit “additional transcriptions and transliterations” to Ray Weintraub. And I dedicated these works to “my London sleuths Eileen and Alan Hanley-Browne.”

In those less hectic days, publishing was also an unhurried experience. Editors cultivated their authors, or dropped them. Publicity and promotion were not restricted to predictable best-sellers, and production was not yet accomplished by computer typesetting and external work-for-hire copy editors. The process did not take any longer in months than computerized typesetting in years later. Many books now likely to vanish quietly and sacrificially were advertised and even sold in shops which happily existed before the advent of electronic sales and electronic books.

With the Shaw autobiographies and Journey to Heartbreak released, I received a call from Sterling Lord: “Mac Talley wants to know what you want to do next. He prefers that you take a holiday from Shaw, or you’ll become known as the Shaw man.” (Phones made publishing more personal in pre-email days. Truman Talley was Victor Weybright’s stepson and partner.) In working on Aubrey Beardsley, I explained, I had found that the upstart young artist had mocked Jimmy Whistler’s wife, Trixie, for the quarterly The Yellow Book as “The Fat Woman.” Whistler, who had snubbed Beardsley earlier, for which this was payback, was offended, and Aubrey was glad. In illustrating Wilde’s Salome, he caricatured Whistler himself as a faun (and Wilde as a fetus). Sardonic, outré wit was Beardsley’s forte.

Privately, Whistler, the only artist in London known as a “Master,” as was Henry James in writing, dismissed Beardsley as a truant boy, but after he saw the remarkable illustrations for an edition of Alexander Pope’s The Rape of the Lock, Whistler could not keep up the pose. He had encountered Beardsley at the home of Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell, with a portfolio of pictures to show under his arm. Whistler examined them too, at first with an air of indifference, then with unconcealed admiration. “Aubrey,” he said, “I have made a very great mistake—you are a very great artist.” In relief Beardsley wept unashamedly, and all Whistler could respond was, “I mean it—I mean it—I mean it.”

After that, I told Sterling Lord, I was determined to write, someday, a biography of Whistler. None had appeared in decades. “I’ll get back to you,” Sterling said. And the next day he telephoned again:
“Mac Talley says go ahead.”

“How long should the proposal be?”

“He said write a page and sign your name.”


Once I determined upon Whistler, I confronted the obstacle of the fenced-off scholarly schoolyard. I had encountered it before. Requesting permission from Harvard to quote in *Beardsley* from an unpublished letter by Henry James, I was informed that all James’s letters were embargoed until Leon Edel, who was endlessly writing the authorized life of James and editing James’s letters, had signed off on them. I wrote to Edel, who then asked me whether a particular someone who was friendly with both James and Beardsley was homosexual. Protecting James’s closeted sexual identity as he wrote, Edel hoped not. After I replied, I was authorized to quote the lines about which I had asked.

Similarly, when I wanted to publish extracts from Bernard Shaw’s unpublished letters, Elizabeth Barber, the Cerberus for the Society of Authors, informed me that all letters not yet in print were embargoed for Dan H. Laurence’s volumes in progress of the *Collected Letters*, the first published in 1965 and the fourth and last not until 1988.

The most flagrant example of the Shaw prohibition would occur when Sidney Albert, a California philosophy professor and collector of Shaviana, purchased at a large fee a letter to Shaw’s friend Gilbert Murray, the basis for Shaw’s character Adolphus Cusins of *Major Barbara* and a distinguished classicist and adapter for the stage of early Greek plays. In the long letter, dated March 14, 1911, Shaw suggests that Murray adapt his translation of *Oedipus Rex* for the stage, and offers pages of proposed dialogue. “Let us get a little nearer home,” Shaw suggests. “I very seldom dream of my mother; but when I do, she is my wife as well as mother.”

Sid Albert, so he told me, unhappily, had sent a photocopy to Laurence with a request for permission to publish. Laurence’s response was that he was delighted to see the letter, which would now become the gem of his volume 3. But Albert was not to publish the letter himself, as he owned only the paper on which it was written. Through the
Estate, Laurence controlled the copyright. Decades later, in 1985, the letter appeared in his volume 3.

When Miss Barber appointed Michael Holroyd, then acclaimed as the biographer of Lytton Strachey, to write an authorized life of Shaw, the first of three volumes published in 1988, a hold was placed on other biographies using Shaw copyrights. That closed off any possibility for the autobiography volumes to have a longer life in paperback or in translation, as they might compete with the unwritten biography she had authorized. *My Journey to Heartbreak* was exempted because it only covered the World War I years—and presumably because I had acceded to her request to brief Holroyd about GBS. When Rodelle and I visited London in 1970, we had met Holroyd in a hotel coffee shop off Russell Square. He was working on a life of the colorful Augustus John, which would not appear until 1975. Then he would begin on Shaw. I invited him to Penn State to teach a seminar on Strachey and the Bloomsbury group, as an opportunity to visit GBS archives in the U.S.

I could invite Holroyd—as I also would Leon Edel—because that year, 1970, I became the director of the three-year-old Institute for the Arts and Humanistic Studies, then a few rooms in a dark corridor of Willard Building on the Penn State campus. Its goal was to stir the faculty into accomplishment in creativity, research and performance, but thus far it was rather listless and hardly known. Elburt Osborn, the vice president for research, had called me in to ask that I take it over. I had external visibility and apparent energy. As it seemed to be a bleak, no-win operation, I proposed a number of avenues to make it work. First, an accessible location. Faculty had to realize that it existed. Second, I would commission creative initiatives and bring to the campus role models in arts and humanities to interact with faculty. Also, I wanted some freedom to continue my writing—which meant naming an assistant director. And whatever my actual working schedule, I insisted upon a year-round contract, as Penn State faculty were salaried for only ten months.

Osborn proposed raising my rank to Research Professor, affording me the opportunity to teach as much or as little as I wanted, have the summers free for research, and hire an associate director of my choice. Also, in addition to the secretary I would inherit, I could employ a part-time research assistant to support my own work. (Shirley Drew Rader
would become my research assistant, then full-time secretary—and our lifelong friend.) Further, since the Department of Classics was about to move to new space, Osborn would have its temporary home, Ihlseng Cottage, across from Pattee Library, renovated and refurnished for the Institute. I accepted, and Bill Allison, head of Theater and Film, agreed to second me. While I officially took over in the summer of 1970, I kept to my research travel, and Bill, a theater architect in background, oversaw the internal modernization of a ramshackle frame structure built in the 1890s that had once been the home of long-ago Professor Magnus Ihlseng and then, during World War I, the college infirmary.

Perhaps the key acquisitions in the refurbishing were the still rather new IBM Selectric typewriters. The fingers on my right hand were already becoming gnarled and painful from arthritis, and as a one-finger typist I had been reduced to striking the keys of a manual typewriter with the eraser end of a pencil. The Selectric keys required only a light touch. I was set free to type the first draft of *Whistler* when I had something to say.

Bill Allison and I had a start-up budget which we had to augment any lawful way we could. Our goal was to revitalize an often somnolent faculty in arts and humanities, employing matching funds and external grants from any useful sources. I got off to a bad start. I rented a furnished flat for Visiting Fellow Arthur Nethercot, a drama scholar, to offer a seminar on Eugene O'Neill which proved dull. As the mailbox for the rental had my name, some locals assumed that Rodelle and I had separated. Nethercot’s difficult wife, Margot, liked nothing in the flat and so we had to supply furnishings from our home. Although they were told that the building did not accept pets, Margot, a haughty German “von,” brought her poodle, the perfectly named Putz, which was seen as she sneaked down the fire escape with it. To forestall their eviction and departure we had to rescue the beast, which soon killed our daughter’s beloved half-moon parrot, Sydney. We should have sent the couple packing.

Another catastrophe occurred when critic William Empson, an alcoholic chain smoker, nearly burned up the flat when he fell asleep drunk. Urgently, we sent to London for his wife, who had been happy to be rid of him. One never knows, Bill and I quickly learned, when asking the theoretically knowledgeable about a prospective visitor’s lecturing
skills or personal habits, how to separate diplomatic falsehoods from reality.

On one occasion I was able to reverse a minor, past, catastrophe. The distinguished sculptor George Grey Barnard (1863–1938), born in nearby Bellefonte and remembered now for his rough-hewn bronze *Lincoln* and for his creating the nucleus of the Metropolitan Museum’s medieval *Cloisters*, had given Penn State two Rodin-inspired Greco-Roman nudes. As turn-of-the-century Centre County was a buckle on the Bible Belt, some viewers were so dismayed by the genitals of the male figure that timid college authorities had the offending anatomy cloaked in concrete—a solution so grotesque that the statues were removed from exhibition to a basement purgatory. John Cook, a fine sculptor and medalist on the faculty, visited me, explained the history of the cover-up and applied for a grant to restore the hidden original for exhibition. It wasn’t Michelangelo’s *David*, he said, but we were now remote from turn-of-the-century prudery and he would guarantee not to perform a circumcision. Soon the Barnards were back on display.

To furnish the resident Alard String Quartet with a significant new work it could both premiere on campus and then tour, I commissioned Pulitzer laureate Vincent Persichetti to write a string quartet. For a faculty pianist, I commissioned the French composer Antoine Tisné, a disciple of Darius Milhaud, to create new works for piano, and to fly over for their premiere. The French Culture Ministry participated, and Air France paid his travel costs. We invited Brazil’s leading living novelist, Jorge Amado, to spend a semester lecturing from and reading his colorful novels, and the Brazilian government and his American publisher helped sponsor his long visit, with elderly Alfred Knopf arriving, himself, to listen. We invited American playwright Barrie Stavis, known for his dramas on radical themes, like *The Man Who Never Died* (on labor leader and songwriter Joe Hill), and *Lamp at Midnight* (on the trial of astronomer Galileo Galilei), to be in residence to research and write a new play, which he began on campus, on demystifying nearly mythic George Washington, and which grew into *The Raw Edge of Victory*. We became close friends with Barrie and his wife, Beesie, and sailed from their Long Island cottage at Bay Shore where Barrie kept a boat. On our first long outing at Bay Shore, I grew a beard which I trimmed...
afterwards to a goatee. It would appear for decades-to-come on dust jacket flaps of my books.

We invited proposals from composers to create an opera for the bicentennial of American independence in 1976, showcasing the brilliant University Choirs—the most elaborate undertaking of our Institute tenure. John La Montaine, a Pulitzer laureate, traveled back and forth from Hollywood, creating the libretto from documents of the period, and echoing passages from the choral music of William Billings, a Bostonian who was thirty in 1776 and the first self-taught American composer. The director of the Boston opera, Sarah Caldwell, was to lead the Pittsburgh Symphony, which caused problems new to us—rehearsals that ran overtime and musicians’ union rules. La Montaine wrote a magnificent solo for a folk singer playing a slave, “Freedom Hath a Thousand Charms,” and recommended Odetta (Holmes), then in her mid-forties and known as the voice of the Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King had called her “the queen of American folk music,” and Maya Angelou claimed that “If one could be sure that every 50 years a voice and a soul like Odetta’s would come along, the centuries would pass so quickly and painlessly we would hardly recognize time.” Her lustrous voice as resonant as an orchestra, Odetta would accompany herself on the guitar.

We secured from the Metropolitan opera Donald Gramm, David Lloyd and Richard Lewis. Be Glad Then America. A Decent Entertainment from the Thirteen Colonies, with scenery designed by Bill Allison, premiered, despite a snowfall, to sellout audiences on February 6, 1976. It was repeated twice, then shown in rehearsal and, in part, live,1 on Public Television, and broadcast every July 4 for decades, worldwide, by the Voice of America. Following the final performance, the University Choirs director, Raymond Brown, brought the two hundred singers, mostly students, to Ihlseng Cottage, where John La Montaine signed their programs. It had been a thrilling experience for performers and listeners alike, especially in the staging inspiration of Bill Allison, David Lloyd and Sarah Caldwell to secrete, for effect, in some scenes, much of the chorus of Lexington townspeople within the sound baffles on both sides of the theater. Onstage the full chorus in the “Mourn, Mourn” elegy for the Yankee dead was immensely moving. A number of students queued up for the signing told me that they did not expect
anything so memorable to happen to them again. I understood. I treasure the Voice of America CD.

We invited artists to showcase their work, like author and sculptor Michael Ayrton, a creator of labyrinths in words and in stone; composer and conductor Elgar Howarth, who came with a brass quintet and would write a quintet for brass for our musicians. Portraitist Alice Neel (whose graphic images reminded one of those of Lucian Freud), painter Elaine de Kooning and the almost legendary director Ellen Stewart, founder of the avant garde theater La MaMa, who swept in like a goddess, were guests in the pioneering course Women in the Arts, organized by Rodelle, who for eleven years was an untenured faculty member. Hidebound regulars, including the Arts dean, despised the success of the experimental course, which, although heavily attended, even by men, was reauthorized only once, yet it was miles ahead of future feminist offerings nationwide.

We could not invite all the writers we would have liked to lure, and a few even refused. Edmund Wilson postcarded that he didn’t like to talk standing up, and Joseph Heller, who once taught at Penn State but was denied promotion, did not respond. The great, blind, Argentine master, Jorge Luis Borges visited, as did Robert Graves and W. H. Auden. As with Dylan Thomas some years before him, Auden, his face enseamed with age, performed while obviously inebriated, but never missed a syllable. His “On the Circuit” evokes the celebrity poetizing I brought to campus:

Another morning comes, I see,
Dwindling below me on the plane,
The roofs of one more audience.
I shall not see again.

J. M. Coetzee and Isaac Bashevis Singer each came just before their Nobel Prize awards, with Singer so greeted at each appearance that I had to listen to his luncheon talk from the hallway outside. As he would
not fly, I sent a car and driver to Manhattan, and back. So many were eager to have five hours to exchange with him en route that it was a delicate matter to choose volunteers—two each trip. I used the same system to bring J. M. Coetzee, whom I had met at the University of Cape Town, from Baltimore, where he had a visiting appointment at Johns Hopkins. Later I found that Coetzee had put Penn State into his novel *Elizabeth Costello*, about a novelist who travels to “Altona College” (Altoona is the nearest substantial city to State College) in “Williamstown, Pennsylvania,” and stays at a hotel like the Nittany Lion Inn on the Penn State campus, but taller, overlooking, like the Inn, a golf course.

As the Bicentennial opera *Be Glad Then America* began taking shape, so was *Whistler*. One of the key resources for a new life of Whistler had been the University of Glasgow, which had been bequeathed all that he left in 1904 to his wife Trixie’s sister, Rosalind Birnie Philip, along with his copyrights. When his friends Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell worked on the first substantial biography of Whistler, published in 1908, the Pennells carped that Miss Birnie Philip “not only withheld such assistance as she might have given us, but put serious hindrances in our way.” The hindrances continued. She died only in 1958 after a long, jealous guardianship of Whistler’s memory as well as his copyrights, claiming absurdly that the indefatigable self-publicist did not want a biography.

After her, Professor Andrew McLaren Young, a professor of fine arts at Glasgow and the curator of the Whistler archive, embargoed it once more to afford him exclusivity to prepare a critical catalog of the images. I applied for access to Whistler’s writings. He refused me, but I went ahead without him, evading his ban because our close friends Ralph and Norma Condee spent summers at Glasgow, where Ralph had professorial privileges at the university library for his work on John Milton. I would send Ralph queries, and he would slip in and take notes. Concealing nothing, I credited Glasgow—and Ralph—in my Acknowledgments pages. When McLaren Young died in 1975, his catalog unfinished, my *Whistler* was in print. In 1980 his assistants inheriting the project published the catalog.

Undaunted by Glasgow, I worked with the considerable Whistler resources available to me. The Pennells, Philadelphians who had lived
an expatriate life in artistic circles in London, had returned to the U.S. early in World War I. On commission by the government, Joseph Pennell, a distinguished architectural artist, traveled the country documenting wartime industry, from factories to shipyards. Pennell, who died in 1926, left all his papers and drawings, including a vast collection of Whistleriana, to the Library of Congress. Like a musty attic, much of his art and papers remained uncatalogued. The Great Depression beginning in 1929 deprived the library of staff to continue the task, and it remained neglected thereafter.

The dusty chaos of the collection was a challenge for us in identifying what was useful, but Rodelle and I went at it. Nearby, too, along the Capitol Mall, was the Freer Gallery, under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, long guardian of the national memory. Charles Freer, a Detroit streetcar mogul and enthusiastic purchaser of Whistler’s art, had willed his collection to a Smithsonian gallery to be erected on the Mall. The Freer even housed Whistler’s famous Peacock Room, an ornate dining room which he had designed and decorated for shipowner Frederick Leyland at Prince’s Gate, London. Freer had bought it, wall to wall, and packaged it piece by piece to America.

There was much to see and examine at the Freer, but a surprise confronted us when I first came to the documents desk with my request slips. “Why, you’re the third person this week to ask for Whistler material!” It appeared that two other biographical projects on Whistler were underway. I had much to assimilate and apparently a writing marathon to run. I would have no idea for many months as to who my competitors were.

In addition to public archives, there were private ones. One collector I visited was Lessing J. Rosenwald, in his overflowing Abington Art Center at Alverthorpe Manor in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, in the northern Philadelphia suburbs. Balding, bespectacled Rosenwald, chairman of Sears, Roebuck until 1939, had retired early to cultivate his interests in rare books and prints, and was then in his eighties. Like many collectors he wanted to ply me, genially, with snacks and drinks when picking my brains, while I wanted to pick through his Whistleriana. We managed to do both, as he knew what I was after and where he could locate everything. “Don’t credit me in your source notes,” he said as we shared goodbyes, “credit the Alverthorpe Gallery.” I credited both. He
died at 88 in 1979, leaving his collections to the Library of Congress and the National Gallery.

I had no idea until I read his obituary that he had been, like his Sears colleague, retired general Robert Wood, a prewar isolationist. Although Rosenwald resigned from the anti-FDR America First Committee because of its openly anti-Semitic turn, he remained an anti-Zionist. We talked only about Whistler.

My editors for the biography, Mac Talley in the U.S. and Philip Ziegler in London (for Collins), were concerned that my narrative was too long to be marketable, and Ziegler flew to New York to consult with Mac and me about “judicious” cuts. We three gathered at a round table set up in the Weybright & Talley offices and went through the typescript page by page, both editors slashing away diagonally at “unnecessary detail” with red pencils. I was appalled but silently took away the amputated text to retype and furnish connectives for what remained. At home, where I had kept a clean copy, I cut some minor stuff from early chapters, where the proposed excisions were likely to be noticed, and ignored almost all the proposed later surgery. With my alleged revisions, the book went to press.

In the summer of 1973, before I began a new project, or even read Whistler proofs, we went as a family, almost—as Mark didn’t join us until later—to Hawaii. (He had a girlfriend at home.) Leon Edel had arranged to have me replace him for the summer at the University of Hawaii, where he possessed the first endowed chair. He would be on research leave in England. I did not know, and Edel did not tell me, that he was on the verge of retiring and that his department was beginning a search for a successor. We flew over to a house we had rented unseen in Kailua, across the mountainous Pali range from Honolulu. My directorship of the Institute for the Arts and Humanistic Studies was left to my second-in-command, Bill Allison.

On my last morning at Ihlseng Cottage, a telephone call came for me. It was Ralph Rackley, the new university provost. “I have some bad and good news for you,” he began. “Your building is being condemned, in order for a walking bridge to be built on the site to cross over the street to the other side of campus. The good news is that we will find you a central location somewhere else for your offices.”
I have little self-restraint. I told Rackley that I was about to fly off for a visiting professorship at the University of Hawaii. Although I had not been offered Edel’s job but knew that I was being considered for it, I boldly declared that if “my building” were demolished I would not be back. Six weeks later, Bill Allison telephoned me: “You can come home. The people bridge is canceled. It was decided that students would evade it.”

Our rental house in Kailua came with two cars to use and a swimming pool. The location over the mountains from Honolulu required my driving daily over the steep hairpin turns of the Pali, with its breathtaking views of the Pacific, to the main campus in Manoa Valley. I would take the VW sedan, which had automatic drive, unkindly leaving the small, Triumph TR convertible, with gears to manipulate, to Rodelle. I had learned to drive in a 1937 Plymouth with gearshift, but had never shoed a clutch since. The house, on a cul de sac not far from the beaches and its roaring surf and powerful undertow, had a few unanticipated drawbacks. We had never experienced geckos. The little green lizards clambered up and down walls and across ceilings on toe pads with microscopic hooks, emitting faint barks closer to chirps, and were adept at eating insects. We got used to them quickly, except for the sudden, disconcerting loss of their long tails when frightened. The tails soon regenerated but we weren’t yet aware of that.

Sunrise came shockingly early, and with it the thud of the rolled-up morning Honolulu newspaper at the front door. I soon learned to use the house pool before my solo breakfast and my drive up and down the Pali, as by the time the sun was high the pool area was swarming with black flies. The family forsook the fly-clouded pool (we blamed dog poop at neighboring homes) and fled to the beaches with David’s surfboard, purchased for five dollars at a nearby garage sale. When we left Hawaii he sold it for fifteen.

Most evenings we returned to the beach to watch the moon rise dramatically, seemingly from the sea, like a glowing red ball. Anything after that was anti-climax.

The idyllic weather most hours had its exceptions, from torrid afternoon heat—which the radio stations seldom conceded, with tourism vital to the economy, as no more than eighty-eight degrees—to torrential rain which often followed. On our way once to meet Serrell
Hillman, who had retired from TIME and Toronto to become a professor of journalism at the University of Hawaii, our convertible was awash above the hubcaps. Reluctant to ruin my new white shoes and dinner jacket, I waited for the flooding to recede, and was embarrassed but relieved when another motorist and his companion, used to the phenomenon and seeing a lady in distress beside me, jumped out and pushed the car to safety.

Invited to suggest an eatery, Serrell had proposed one of the two restaurants in Honolulu, so he claimed—both were French—that required jackets for men rather than Aloha shirts. While Rodelle and I ordered full dinners, Serrell matched each course with a platter of escargot and an un-French martini. We drove him home and helped him unlock his door.

I taught two early morning classes, the first at 7:30. Few classes were scheduled for the torrid afternoons. My office, an object of local jealousy, was Leon Edel’s prize eyrie, the only sanctum in the building then with air conditioning. Everyone else had to depend upon louvered windows, which let in the trade winds until mid-afternoon, when the welcome gusts died away. Louvered classrooms were a new challenge. The winds pouring through required shouting rather than mere lecturing. Afterward, until I returned over the Pali, I used Leon Edel’s IBM typewriter to attempt to create a play from a central episode in Whistler, his suit against critic John Ruskin for defaming his The Falling Rocket as “a pot of paint thrown in the public’s face.” It was a real-life courtroom comedy, which I tried to replicate for the stage. When asked how long it took him to produce a picture for which he asked two hundred guineas—a guinea was one shilling more than a pound—he said: “I was two days at work on it.” The price would have salaried two London clerks for a year.

“The labour of two days, then,” prodded the judge, “is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?”

“No,” said Whistler, “I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime.”

When back in Pennsylvania, I sent the script to my agent, Sterling Lord. He was pessimistic about its possibilities, and A Pot of Paint was filed among my discards. Yet later, after my Whistler biography appeared, another writer succeeded in getting his version of the Whistler–Ruskin trial performed in San Francisco. It was not a box office success.
Aside from the beaches, lunches in exotic locales, and exploring Oahu, there was little for the family to do. A drive round the island, including Sunday brunch en route, took half a day or less. David, a high-school gymnast who was later recruited by Yale, found no opportunity to compete and only one place to practice—the Honolulu YMCA. Rodelle took him golfing at clubs which flew the Japanese “meatball” flag. The Japanese had lost the war, but were a major demographic factor in Hawaii and now owned much of the desirable property on Oahu. Rodelle also taught David to drive, legal then at fifteen in Hawaii. When we returned to Pennsylvania, he could not legally drive until his sixteen birthday and passed another examination, but Rodelle and I chose, anyway, to resign as his chauffer, and so for the ensuing nine months he drove carefully and was never caught.

To see a little more, we flew to “the Big Island,” as Hawaii is called, walked gingerly on a volcanic, black sand beach and peered into the glowing core of the Kilauea volcano. (Years later, David as an astronomer would often return to the Big Island to perch atop Mauna Kea, a major observatory site.) Although I considered the isolated island state a paradise, I was outvoted and we would not remain. To the family, the cost of living was enormous and it was thousands of miles from anywhere. I declined consideration for Edel’s professorship and we flew back to Happy Valley.

While we were away, one of the other rival Whistler biographers, having discovered, as I had not, the extent of the competition, opted for what he considered to be commercial prudence, and reworked his narrative into a novel—*I, James McNeill Whistler*. It would be stillborn. The other biography was released six weeks before mine. At the *New York Times Book Review*, the editors, apparently aware that my biography
was forthcoming, and recalling my front-paged *Beardsley*, held the ear-
lier release for joint coverage.

It was a good time and a bad time to publish a book of some heft. Nonfiction writing was in 1974 at a peak. Robert Caro’s monumental biography of Robert Moses, *The Power Broker*, emerged, as did Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein’s *All the President’s Men*. Also Studs Terkel’s *Working*, and Robert M. Pirsig’s quirky phenomenon *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. The competition was tough. Whistler rivals alone seemed enough.

My concluding paragraph, on p. 468, began with the cautious estimate that whether or not Whistler’s work

ranks him with the major creative figures of his time, he was, in Hilton Kramer’s words, “in firm posses-
sion of the advanced esthetic materials out of which the major artists of his time were producing their masterworks.” On location in Budapest, a century after the first nocturnes were scorned in London, a famous actress looked down the Danube in the dusk from her hotel suite at the chunks of dirty ice drift-
ing down the river, fascinated by what she described to a reporter as “the kind of Whistler beauty of that bridge.” Controversies about the nature of greatness notwithstanding, Whistler’s artistic vision had sur-
vived and become metaphor.

The actress quoted in *LIFE* was Elizabeth Taylor. I felt no need to identify her, except in source notes.

By no prearranged plot of mine nor that of any publicist, the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* on March 3, 1974 covered both Whistler biographies. The first, rather dismissive, paragraph dealt with the earlier release, a rather good, if far thinner, book by Roy McMullen. The rest of the two review pages continued:

The life of James Abbott McNeill Whistler is a biographer’s dream, a rare com-
pound of talent, audacity, scandal, success, and self-willed failure, heavily laced with the subject’s own self-advertising prevarications and the hero-worship of his numerous admirers....

Stanley Weintraub has met the challenge of that rich subject with a sparkling narrative that gives us a very intimate account of the artist’s life and a very illu-
minating portrait of the worlds in which he moved.... It will not be superseded for many years to come.
The reviewer, who could not have known of my concluding lines when he was assigned the books, was Hilton Kramer.

An invitation came from the Today Show. A telephone call followed from an NBC researcher who had read the book and informed me that she would coach Frank McGee, who would hold the book on his lap and ask the questions as if they were his own. As I sat in the green room in Rockefeller Center with Rodelle very early one morning waiting for my eight-minute turn, I saw that McGee was departing the studio with difficulty on the arm of an assistant, and that his chair was being removed from the set. Someone whispered to us that McGee, who was battling cancer, was unable to continue. His co-host, Barbara Walters, would manage alone.

She saw Whistler for the first time when it was handed to her in real time. Behind me as I was seated during the commercial break technicians had set two large blow-ups of Whistler paintings which I could not see, one of them a self-portrait. Since Barbara Walters knew nothing about the book, and the sheet of questions and likely responses prepared for McGee meant little to her live, and he had left with them, she concentrated fiercely on the reproductions invisible to me. I had to respond to questions about paintings I could only guess at. Desperate for an exchange she could manage, she stuck stubbornly to a conversation about the two pictures that the television audience could see but I could not as clues to Whistler. Somehow we got through the allotted time for our segment. I tottered off the set as the next commercial break began.

“Wait, Professor!” someone shouted from an anteroom as I clutched my coat. “There’s a telephone call for you.” I seized at the instant dream that it was Hollywood calling about a film offer, forgetting that dawn had not yet risen on the West Coast. The crusty, feisty, womanizing Jimmy Whistler would be a great subject for the screen. I picked up the telephone. “Is Sam Sabean a colleague of yours?” the unidentified voice asked.
“Yes,” I said. “A fine sculptor and a close friend.”

“Good,” said the voice. “When you get back to Penn State, give him my regards.”

There went the film. I never learned the name behind the voice. Rodelle and I took the elevator in the RCA Building down to the ground floor, awkwardly carrying as souvenirs the blow-ups of the images that had transfixed Barbara Walters.

Whistler led me to writing a life of his Cheyne Walk neighbor and friendly rival Dante Gabriel Rossetti. I had made a warm friend in W. E. (“Dick”) Fredeman (1928–1999), the energetic University of British Columbia scholar who was editing a new edition of Rossetti’s letters. He had persuaded UBC to purchase the papers of William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel’s brother, which William had left to his daughter Helen Rossetti Angeli. I had already arranged a visit to the Canadian West when we both turned up in Austin, Texas, to lecture. Dick had met me at the airport in his rental car, accompanied by his son, Luke, whom I took to be seven or eight. As we approached the Hotel Driskill, then notorious after dark for local ladies of the evening plying for trade, Luke, his curiosity about them apparently satisfied earlier by his father, shouted to me: “Look at all those prostates!”

The English Department head, Clarence Cline, pulled me aside at lunch while I was in Austin to ask me if I were interested in the University of Texas. “No,” I said, “I’m content to remain at Penn State.” Earlier, Harry Ransom had offered the same invitation to me. “You could be a Research Professor here,” Cline said.

“I am a Research Professor,” I said. “I got the title in 1970.”

“I guess we’re a thousand miles from nowhere,” Cline conceded, which I assumed meant the ivied East.

“Where is that?” I asked innocently.

“A thousand miles from Chapel Hill,” he said.

Visiting Vancouver on one of my Rossetti-directed research trips, another of which took me back to the Pennell collection in Washington, Rodelle and I were picked up at the airport by Dick, with Luke again in the car, and driven to Dick’s striking home, where, although an Arkansan in origin he was now an authentic Canadian, complete to a life-size portrait of Queen Elizabeth II hanging at the stairs landing. He also had an impressive book-laden library complete to balcony and
ladder leading up to it. But the most memorable space in the house was reserved for Dick’s Victoriana collection. Charles Dickens would have admired it. Fredeman had searched out and acquired nineteenth-century funereal memorabilia, and had more gloomy objects in grey and black related to Victorian mourning than I could imagine existing in any London undertaking establishment at the time of Prince Albert’s death in 1861. I could understand why in 1976 a Festschrift in Dick’s honor would be titled Haunted Texts. Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism.

My Four Rossettis. A Victorian Biography (1977) dealt with the lives of the Rossetti brothers and their sisters, the poet Christina and the diffident Maria, who had receded into obscurity as an Anglican nun. The book had been enriched in part by one of the most curious manuscripts in the Fredeman/UBC collection, a diary kept by William of seances that Dante Gabriel had solicited to recall his wife, Elizabeth Siddal, a suicide at thirty-two in 1862. Prompted by sudden regret that he had not reciprocated her devotion, Rossetti had buried a projected volume of poems in her coffin. Soon he regretted losing the manuscripts and in 1865–1866, an age when spiritualism was rife, had seances conducted by a clever washerwoman medium (who had apparently done preliminary homework) to summon Lizzy by table-rapping. He wanted her to approve from the beyond his retrieval of the poems. “He seems more anxious just now,” William wrote, “to achieve something [more] permanent in poetry than in painting.”

The Rossetti seances were not my first acquaintance with the absurd if persuasive nineteenth-century phenomenon. Even Queen Victoria had invited table-turnings at Court, and Shaw had satirized the fad in his Caesar and Cleopatra: “I am a priestess,” the increasingly arrogant Egyptian queen announces. “Now let us call on the [god of the] Nile all together. Perhaps he will rap on the table.” “What! Table rapping!” says Caesar in one of Shaw’s deliberate anachronisms. “Are such superstitions still believed in this year 707 of the Republic?”

My growing reputation as someone who knew a lot about Shaw had resulted in mail inquiries (e-mail was still in the future) that were time consuming and often exasperating. On occasion they were even interesting. One offered an audiotape purportedly of a seance in which Shaw materialized through the channeling of a famous English medium, Leslie Flint. In 1971 Flint would publish a memoir, Voices in the
Dark: My Life as a Medium, but before that emerged I had received a letter about him dated October 26, 1970, from the president of the Automatic Devices Company (“Stage and Drapery Hardware Manufacturers since 1919”). “This summer,” Abram Samuels wrote, “I had occasion to spend part of an afternoon with a London lady named Grace Rosher who is an automatist2…. During the course of our conversation she mentioned to me that she had recently come into possession of a tape made about 12 years ago ostensibly of G.B.S. Now I realize this sounds preposterous because this obviously smacks of spiritualism…. The tape in my unfettered opinion is fascinating.” Samuels wanted “the opinion of a Shavian authority.”

The cassette tape duly arrived. “I understand,” he wrote, “that Flint can produce materializations (a production of ectoplasm which is said to build up into the shape of human limbs or even complete figures).” He cautioned that “the voice which is issuing from Flint may not sound at all like Shaw, nor have the tonal characteristics, Irish idioms, etc.,” but that “is not necessarily an indication that Shaw is NOT the actual communicator.” I played the tape. Flint claimed that while visiting friends, he began

to feel a strong personality impinging on me psychically…. The curtains were drawn and the light put out. The incomplete black-out did not stop the personality whose presence I had sensed from speaking almost immediately in a strong voice with a decided Irish lilt. At first none of us knew who it was but when he mentioned his plays and said that despite their success he had no desire to return to earth again because to have been GBS was experience enough for any man…. In his lifetime Shaw had always expressed disbelief in a life beyond the grave and a lady present [at the seance] asked him what was his reaction when he died and found he had been mistaken. He answered: “I was very much surprised and very much perturbed but at the same time elated if one can have three such different emotions at once.” One of my friends tried to get him to criticise the theatre of today but he refused, saying he never now condemned because he had learned it was a sin. “I have never been terribly keen to be a sinner; when I tried I was never very successful, much to my disappointment. I wanted to sin once or twice with two charming ladies but they would not sin by correspondence.”

The ladies implied were Stella (“Mrs. Pat”) Campbell and Ellen Terry, the former with whom he had an intense and fleshly flirtation, the latter only a colorful correspondence; however, he had several lovers before them and at least one after. Shaw almost never used “sin” in
his writings, and would not have characterized his amorous affairs in such fashion.

The posthumous “Shaw” went on reminiscing via Leslie Flint, confessing that

“it’s a long time since I was able to inhabit a body and speak in this way. One becomes a little unfamiliar with a body.”

“How did you find—you didn’t believe in this, did you?—when you were on earth. How do you find it over there?”

“I think,” said Flint’s wraith, “the surprise of finding that I was still alive, yet I was dead, was in itself a great disappointment to me.”

He went on to describe how erroneous his understanding was that “when the body was put into Mother Earth, that was the end of me.” Going on, about his plays and prefaces and then about those souls he had encountered in the beyond, he was “not exactly elated” about meeting his parents but he enjoyed Mrs. Pat and “dear Ellen” Terry, and even Henry [Irving], as he had found since “that the people I liked most were the people I differed most with.” And he went on to discuss Oscar Wilde and others.

Amused at the research, sometimes accurate, that Flint had put into his performance, I played the tape for a luncheon gathering of Penn State professors. Reason abandoned, chattering enthusiasts outnumbered the skeptics. The medium was carrying the day—until I noted such realities that Shaw’s body was never “put into Mother Earth” as Flint described, but cremated and scattered in the garden at Ayot St. Lawrence, which allegedly Shaw now never visited in spirit. Flint’s evocation of GBS, however dramatic, was absurdly at odds with the reality few listeners knew. Although witty and amusing, it proved what the shaken William Michael Rossetti took some time to realize decades earlier—that mediums thrive on theatrical flair, concrete detail, a tenacious memory, and intimate personal data supplied covertly by informants. I consulted Sterling Lord about publishing the entire seance with a skeptical introduction. He responded: “Who owns the copyright to a seance?”

Hostile to all forms of religious belief, William Rossetti, I found, listened intently and in bafflement to the performances of his brother’s medium and recorded in diary form the twenty seances in which the shade of Elizabeth Siddal was allegedly conjured up. Convinced of her
forgiveness, Dante Gabriel arranged with a raffish friend, Charles Augustus Howell, to exhume the body by torchlight and retrieve the manuscripts. Rossetti deftly filled in the words lost to decay and published his self-suppressed Poems to heady sales. Yet he was suffused with guilt, now redoubled, and was racked by paranoid delusions, which continued until his death in 1881.

It was no wonder that Dick Fredeman compulsively collected memorabilia of the dark side of Victorian belief and its exotic rites of passage. Yet there was more to learn, and I returned to the Pennell papers at the Library of Congress to further flesh out the lives of the four Rossettis, published in 1977.

A decade later we were in Melbourne, Australia, checking in at the Grand Hyatt on Collins, a posh hotel that made past stays elsewhere seem pallid. We asked at the reception desk about mail and messages, and found that the FBI office in Melbourne was looking for me. I knew why. Before beginning our trip, which would take us around the globe on World War II research, I was visited at my Penn State office by an FBI agent carrying a bulky portfolio. I had had many earlier visits from FBI men, checking on former students who had applied for sensitive government jobs, such as in the CIA, and who had given my name as reference. This interview was different. The agent, Daniel A. Reilly, withdrew sixty-three enlarged color photocopies of manuscripts by Whistler and Rossetti. “Do you recognize these?” he asked.

I scanned them and said that I believed I may have used them or referred to them in my lives of both artists, but I had only made handwritten notes and had ordered no photocopies.

“What about them?”

“Someone filched them, among other papers, from the Library of Congress, and tried to sell them to a dealer, Goodspeed’s, in Boston. The dealer was suspicious, asked to hold them for examination, and told the seller to come back. The purveyor of the manuscripts looked like an Edwardian gentleman out of time, with gray bowler and brass-tipped walking stick, and affected an English accent. Yet something seemed fishy.”

Reilly went on to note that Goodspeed’s saw nothing identifying the manuscripts as institutionally held. The seller, Charles Merrill Mount, was a noted biographer (in 1955) of John Singer Sargent and a talented artist, but as Goodspeed’s knew, he had been accused in the London press of a scheme to sell fake Sargent paintings. I became inadvertently
involved. A check of recent lives of period painters showed that I had cited several of the filched manuscripts in biographies of Whistler and Rossetti as lodged in the collections of the Library of Congress.

When Mount returned to Goodspeed’s the FBI was waiting. He protested his innocence. The manuscripts had allegedly been given to him, years before, by a friend now dead. The documents had no archival identification. And Mount was a recognized art scholar. Yet there was a shadowy history that suggested suspicion. He had tried earlier to sell Civil War papers, including some signed by Lincoln. There were the fake Sargents. Even his own identity was a fake. However dapper and Anglified, he turned out to have been born in Brooklyn as Sherman Merrill Suchow, and clothed himself, he claimed, from discards in Salvation Army outlets.

How, asked the FBI agent, had he managed his thievery? I explained that exit checks at the Library of Congress were cursory. Each theft must have been small—perhaps only a document, each time, buried in pages of notes. Further, “Mount” apparently took only papers that during the labor-short Depression years had not been recorded and embossed or stamped.

“You have my books with their source notes,” I said. “Obviously the letters cited had to have been stolen after I had used them.”

“We’ll get back to you,” Reilly said, tucking his raft of photocopies away. “Mount has been indicted. There will certainly be a trial. You may be called as a witness.”

“My published notes are proof enough. You’re welcome to them. You don’t need me. You have copies of my books. I am leaving shortly for New Zealand and Australia. Then Singapore, Manila and Hong Kong.”

On the telephone the FBI Melbourne representative at the American consulate declared that I would have to return as a witness in Mount’s trial in Boston. I insisted that I would not. They had my books as all the evidence they needed that the documents offered to Goodspeed’s had been in the Library of Congress before they vanished, unknown then, into Mount’s hands. “You need my books, not me.”

Without me, in the Federal District Court in Boston “Mount” was sentenced to three years in prison. Although legal costs had left him practically penniless, he was also fined $20,000. In a further hearing, the District Court in Washington, DC added five years for mail fraud and illegal possession of government property. He was released in 1994
and died the next year at sixty-seven. I found out about his trial and last years in the newspapers. The FBI never contacted me again after the conversation in Australia. Nevertheless, I had acquired some potential notoriety that might become useful in later book promotion (but unfortunately never happened): “Stanley Weintraub was once wanted by the FBI.”

**Endnotes**

1. The Pittsburgh Symphony musicians union restricted how much could be shown in live performance without additional fees.

2. Grace Rosher (d. 1981) was an English practitioner of conveying subconscious thought in writing or drawing while in a trance-like state. Her memoir was *Beyond the Horizon* (1961).