

“A Convenient Ventriloquist’s Dummy”

The “Christopher Isherwood” Character in Christopher Isherwood

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Abstract

The “Christopher Isherwood” character first appears in *Lions and Shadows* (1938), Christopher Isherwood’s lightly fictionalised autobiography. Its foreword claims that “Isherwood” is merely a “guinea-pig” and asks us to read *Lions and Shadows* “as a novel” (xv). In the foreword to *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), the author distances himself from his namesake once again: “‘Christopher Isherwood’ is a convenient ventriloquist’s dummy, nothing more” (np). This thesis examines Christopher Isherwood’s relationship with the “Christopher Isherwood” character in five texts: *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet* (1945), *Down There on a Visit* (1962), and *Christopher and His Kind* (1976). In doing so, I attempt to answer the question, ‘what happens when Christopher Isherwood gives his name to the narrator of his fiction?’

The second paragraph of *Goodbye to Berlin* begins, “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking” (1). The critical consensus is that this paragraph is indicative of a namesake narrator who acts as a detached observer, withholding judgment, existing only as a vessel through which the story can be told. I maintain, however, that as Isherwood and “Isherwood” have the same name, we are compelled to compare and contrast the two. Isherwood’s biographer, Peter Parker, claims that “Isherwood liked to imagine himself his own creation” (np). Through his construction of “Isherwood,” Isherwood creates a self – one that does not pre-exist his texts.

Isherwood’s novels anticipate a new kind of autobiographical writing, transparent and aware in their fictionality, four decades before it is formally recognised as a genre; while contemporary writers all over the world are now publishing autofiction more than ever before, there was a writer, alone in Britain in the 1930s who preceded them all. His name, and his character, is Christopher Isherwood.

All literary critics are corrupt and in the pay of the enemy . . . And why, anyhow, put your trust in treacherous hopes of this kind, when the world of the epic myth offers unfailing comfort and safety?

– “Christopher Isherwood,” *Down There on a Visit*, 1962

Introduction

In the foreword to *Lions and Shadows* (1938), a lightly fictionalised autobiography, Christopher Isherwood claims that his narrator, “Christopher Isherwood,” is merely a “guinea-pig,” instructing readers: “I have had to dramatize it, or you would not get past the first page. Read it as a novel” (xv). Also lending his name to his narrator in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), Isherwood again tries to distance himself from his namesake: ““Christopher Isherwood” is a convenient ventriloquist’s dummy, nothing more” (np). According to Isherwood, just because he has given his “own name to the ‘I’ of this narrative, readers are certainly not entitled to assume that its pages are purely autobiographical” (np). Critics assume that Isherwood, the author, shares a similar objectivity to his namesake narrator,¹ often citing the second paragraph of *Goodbye to Berlin*:

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed. (1)

Isherwood’s most quoted passage is symbolic of “Christopher,” one who is not there to be a character in the story, but a lens through which the story can be told.² The narrator’s life, albeit uncannily similar, is not to be confused with the author’s. Or is it?

This thesis will examine the “Christopher Isherwood” narrator in five of Isherwood’s texts, spanning nearly four decades of a literary career: *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet* (1945), *Down There on a Visit* (1962) and *Christopher and His Kind* (1976). This thesis will attempt to answer the question, ‘what happens when Christopher Isherwood gives his name to his

¹ The term “namesake narrator” comes from Lisa M. Schwerdt’s book, *Isherwood’s Fiction: The Self and Technique* (1989).

² This point will be examined further in chapter three of this thesis, “A Figurative Filmmaker: “Christopher Isherwood”’s Camera Lens in *Prater Violet*.

narrator?’ I will argue that “Christopher Isherwood” is not merely a bystander, but rather a figure through which the author constructs his own identity. According to Peter Parker, the author of Isherwood’s comprehensive biography, “Isherwood liked to imagine himself his own creation, and he was quite prepared to rewrite history in order to improve on the facts for aesthetic or personal reasons” (np). This history, though, the one that he had rewritten, “lay hiding, as it always had, ready to leap out and reclaim him” (3). Through a concerted and consistent effort over the course of his life, Isherwood attempted to stave off his real history, inserting the one he created in its place.

Each of the five chapters in this thesis will examine a different Isherwood text in the chronology in which they were written. The first chapter, then, will examine *Lions and Shadows*, the first work in which the “Christopher Isherwood” character appears. The way I approach *Lions and Shadows* will differ from the way I do *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet*, and *Down There on a Visit* respectively. This is because *Lions and Shadows* is an autobiography containing fiction, whereas his novels – *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet*, and *Down There on a Visit* – are all works of fiction that use autobiography. The first chapter will introduce *Lions and Shadows* as a work that exists in the space between autobiography and fiction – what Serge Doubrovsky defines as “autofiction” (*Fils* Back Cover). In a 1972 interview, Isherwood explains how the narrative focus in *Lions and Shadows* makes it a different kind of work to his novels:

in *Lions and Shadows* he at least holds the center of the stage, more or less, and therefore is seen in much greater depth. The whole endeavour of the Christopher Isherwood persona in the novels is to be in the background as much as he can because what he is trying to do is tell a story. He’s not telling his story really at all, or only incidentally, and only just to explain why he was there with those people and what he was up to. But in all cases, fundamentally, Christopher Isherwood is in the background. Whereas *Lions and Shadows* is about Christopher Isherwood. (76)

In what follows, I will be referring to the narrators of *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet*, and *Down There on a Visit* as “Christopher Isherwood”³ in quotation marks. “Christopher” is distinct from the inferred author.⁴ When I refer to Christopher Isherwood without quotation marks I will mean the inferred author. However, sometimes when I refer to Christopher Isherwood without quotation marks it can also mean the flesh-and-blood person. *Christopher and His Kind* is somewhat of an exception to this rule as it is not narrated by the fictional “Isherwood.” *Christopher and His Kind* is memoir, written in the third person; it reads as Isherwood looking back on his past self. Thus, when I refer to the narrator of *Christopher and His Kind*, I mean the Isherwood who wrote this text about his previous self: Christopher Isherwood.

To some extent, this goes against New Critical strictures about the intentional fallacy.⁵ However, an argument could be made that even a New Critic, in my position, would be forced to do the same; because Isherwood and “Isherwood” have the same name, the text itself compels us to compare and contrast the two.

By giving his own name to his narrator, Isherwood not only brings himself into the texts, but also implicates the real-life people on which he bases his fictional characters. An example of this is the character Paul in *Down There on a Visit*. The real-life basis for Paul is addressed by novelist and literary critic Phillip Hensher in his introduction to *Down There on a Visit*:

This Paul was Denny Fouts, variously described (by Lincoln Kirstein) as ‘pure, unadulterated poison. Poison!’ and by the novelist and socialite Glenway

³ I will also refer to the narrator of *Mr Norris Changes Trains* as “William Bradshaw” in quotation marks.

⁴ The term “inferred author,” coined by H. Porter Abbott, is defined as the “sensibility behind the narrative that accounts for how it is constructed – a sensibility on which to base our interpretations” (84). I have adopted Porter Abbott’s term of the “inferred author” over Wayne C. Booth’s term, the “implied author” as readers infer this implied sensibility behind the narrative.

⁵ In William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s 1946 essay, “The Intentional Fallacy,” they claim that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (468).

Westcott as 'foible-minded and fable-bodied' [...] Fouts died in exactly the same way as Paul. (xii)

Truman Capote writes about Fouts's life in the "Unspoiled Monsters" section from *Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel* (1986). Gore Vidal's "Pages From an Abandoned Journal," a short story published in his 1956 work, *A Thirsty Evil: Seven Short Stories* is also based on Fouts's life. Gavin Lambert, a screenwriter and novelist, wrote *Norman's Letter* (1966) about Fouts. This phenomenon, then, goes far beyond the texts themselves. In discussing Isherwood and the real people his fictional characters are based on, I am not just doing so for the purpose of exploring their personal lives; I am examining the relationship between Isherwood and "Isherwood" – a relationship that, for all intents and purposes, allows Isherwood to construct his own historical identity through the texts he writes.

By lending his name to the narrator, Isherwood engages in what the radical constructivist Jerome Bruner defines as "self-making" (4). Bruner claims that it is misguided to think that one can accurately portray the self, arguing that "there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there ready to be portrayed in words" (4). The act of telling a story about oneself, in any form, is the construction of a self that does not exist beforehand:

Surely, if our selves were just there, we'd have no need to tell ourselves about them. Yet we spend a good deal of time doing just that, either alone, or with friends, or vicariously at the psychiatrist's, or at confession if we are Catholics. (3)

Arguing that human beings naturally portray themselves through story, Bruner points out that selfhood is a product of story making, rather than something which pre-exists the story; the construction of the self, then, begins and ends with storytelling.

While it may appear that Isherwood is just doing what we all do when telling stories about ourselves, he exhibits an acute awareness of the fictionality one employs when telling such stories. In discussing the "William Bradshaw" narrator of *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935), the narrator of *Christopher and His Kind* says:

He could, however, permit himself to invent as much dialogue, as many situations and additional characters as he needed. One does that even when one is telling a story to one's friends which is allegedly true. (190)

Even though Isherwood is discussing a narrator⁶ with whom he does not share his name, he is indirectly admitting that he, as we all do, invents “as much dialogue, as many situations and additional characters as he [needs]” even when he “is telling a story [to] friends which is allegedly true.” By giving his own name to his narrator, these fictitious representations assume the position of autobiographical fact, allowing Isherwood to construct an historical identity. Additionally, by setting his works in a specific time and place that he existed within, Isherwood is able to pass off the experiences of his narrator as his own, constructing an autobiography, albeit openly fictional.

⁶ See chapter two of this thesis, “Goodbye to “William Bradshaw”: The Namesake Narrator in *Goodbye to Berlin*,” for a comparative analysis of the “Bradshaw” and “Isherwood” narrators and their relationship to Christopher Isherwood, the author.

1. The Education of a Fictional Novelist: “Christopher Isherwood” in *Lions and Shadows*

The foreword to *Lions and Shadows* claims that the purpose of this text is “to describe the first stages in a lifelong education – the education of a novelist” (xv). Contradicting himself in the very next paragraph, he writes, “I have had to dramatize it, or you would not get farther than the first page. Read it as a novel” (xv). According to Rose Kamel, *Lions and Shadows* is not quite a novel, nor is it entirely a series of memoirs, but “a curious amalgam of both” (162).

Referencing his 1977 novel, *Fils*, French theorist and writer Serge Doubrovsky coined the term “autofiction,” defining it as “Fiction, made up of events and facts that are strictly real” (Vilain 5). Philippe Vilain later adds to Doubrovsky’s definition, arguing that for a work to be one of autofiction it “requires homonymy among its author, narrator, and character” (5). Vilain’s definition distinguishes autofiction from the autobiographical novel, in which the “author bestows a borrowed name upon a character” (5). Vilain also argues that a work of autofiction must play on a “contradictory pact,” presenting

itself as both absolutely referential, since it is subject to a principle of factual exactitude, and nonreferential, since by claiming to be a novel it attests to its entrance into fiction. (5)

While *Lions and Shadows* has been used as an autobiographical reference point for an entire generation of writers, the foreword still claims that “it is not, in the ordinary journalistic sense of the word, an autobiography; it contains no ‘revelations’; it is never ‘indiscreet’; it is not even entirely ‘true’” (xv). Zuzana Foniokova argues that it is important to distinguish between construction in autofiction, a necessary process involved in the creation of any narrative, and the intentional use of fictionality. Foniokova also argues that an open use of fictionality is very different from an attempt to deceive readers with an autobiographical hoax. Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan, and Richard Walsh point out that the use of fictionality does not diminish a work’s autobiographical reliability, nor does it make

it a work of fiction, rather, it allows the work to perform in a different mode altogether:

The crucial point is that fictionality attaches to the communicative act, not the object of representation: in uses of fictionality outside of generic fictions, a sender does not transform nonfictional subject matter into something fictional but rather adopts a distinct communicative stance, inviting the audience to recognize that she has temporarily stopped conforming to the constraints of referentiality and actuality in order to accomplish some rhetorical end. (65)

While Doubrovsky's *Fils* is widely considered as the first work of autofiction, *Lions and Shadows* was published nearly forty years earlier, and fulfils all Vilain's requirements for the form: Isherwood shares his name with his narrator and the work is presented as a referential account of his experience in the 1920s. Moreover, Isherwood asks his audience to read the work as a novel while openly admitting to dramatising and using fictionality for the purpose of readability. *Lions and Shadows*, then, might very well be the first work of autofiction, four decades before Doubrovsky's *Fils*. This is significant as autofiction, in recent years, has become a popular genre of writing. Recent works of autofiction include Édouard Louis's *History of Violence* which was published in French in 2016 and in English in 2018, Joanna Walsh's *Break.up* (2018), and *Based on a True Story* (2015) by Delphine de Vigan. All three of these works are narrated by characters who share their name with the author. *Lions and Shadows*, it appears, is years ahead of its time. Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* (1997) was originally met with a cold reception, until 2012 when it was published in the United Kingdom for the first time and became widely popular. Of its initial lack of success, Emily Gould writes that

Reviewers seemed to think that it was gossip; beneath contempt: the nasty indictment of a real person, the art critic Dick Hebdige, who'd spurned the advances of its heroine, a woman who, like its author, is named Chris Kraus. (Gould, "I Love Dick: the Book about Relationships Everyone Should Read")

Unlike "Kraus," "Isherwood"'s fellow characters in *Lions and Shadows* are all given fictional names. W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Edward Upward are among the notable characters in the text who are disguised. Auden is "Hugh Weston," Spender

is “Stephen Savage,” and Edward Upward is “Allen Chalmers.”⁷ These pseudonyms, though, are rather transparent; “Hugh Weston” is hardly a sophisticated disguise for Wystan Hugh Auden. It is peculiar that Auden, Spender, and Upward, then, are all donned with light disguises, yet the narrator is still called “Isherwood.” Isherwood’s admission that he has “had to dramatize” the events and characters represented in *Lions and Shadows* does not explain his implementation of fictional names. By themselves, these names are not a fictionalisation of events or people; they only serve, at best, to disguise the identity of each person represented. This point is also addressed in the foreword:

‘Chalmers,’ ‘Linsley,’ ‘Cheuret’ and ‘Weston’ are all caricatures: that is why – quite apart from the fear of hurt feelings – I have given them, and nearly everybody else, fictitious names. (xv)

The use of fictitious names is contradicted before the work even begins; the admission that they are based on real people directly links these “caricatures” to their real-life counterparts, making their disguises somewhat redundant before they are even used. This passage also implies that Isherwood has not painted the “I” of this narrative with the same brush of caricature that he has the others, otherwise his name would not be “Christopher Isherwood.” If the representation of “Christopher Isherwood” is not a caricature, then the implication is that this narrator is an accurate portrayal of Christopher Isherwood himself.

The question of whether or not this work should be considered as an autobiography is a difficult one. If the admission of fictionality in *Lions and Shadows* merely indicates an awareness of the limitations of the autobiographical form, then it follows that all works of autobiography contain fictional elements, even if only as communicative tool. Even if the purpose of a work is to communicate essential truths about events experienced in one’s life, these events must be transformed into the mode through which they are being told. Isherwood, in this case, is aware of this process, affording him the ability to consciously, and openly, employ autofictional strategies to create his own history.

⁷ The name “Allen Chalmers” is also used in Stephen Spender’s autobiography, *World Within World* (1966).

Despite the admission that what lies beyond the foreword has been dramatised and is not necessarily true, literary critics such as Geoffrey Grigson consider the work to be the “key book of the Auden Age and the Auden Circle” (19). Patterning itself in the autofictional genre, *Lions and Shadows* constructs Isherwood’s past and eventually becomes an autobiographical record for the Auden Group. The construction of “Christopher Isherwood” is not a self-aggrandising myth that Isherwood is perpetrating, but a culmination of a self that has been constructed over time. Or, as Bruner explains:

It is not that we have to make up these stories from scratch each time. Our self-making stories accumulate over time, even pattern themselves on conventional genres. They get out-of-date, and not just because we grow older or wiser but also because our self-making stories need to fit new circumstances, new friends, new enterprises. (4)

Lions and Shadows is not a story that Isherwood has made up from scratch. Like all self-making stories, it is an accumulation of stories which has patterned itself in the autofictional genre; when writing a work of this nature, fictionality cannot be escaped.

Isherwood constructs two different versions of his historical self for two very different types of readers. Hugh Brogan touches on this in his personal essay, “Lions and Shadows”:

the omission of parents, childhood and sex (though any tolerably sophisticated reader – which I confess I was not, first time around – will be able to read between the lines with fair accuracy) make it difficult to place the author, and therefore doubly difficult to assess his views. (309)

Although “Isherwood”’s homosexuality⁸ is never directly addressed, the narrator constructs two different images of selfhood for two different groups of people – those in the know, and those out of it.

⁸ This thesis uses the term ‘homosexual’ to define both Christopher Isherwood and “Christopher Isherwood”’s sexuality throughout, rather than relying on other, more contemporary definitions such

These two “Isherwoods” can best be explained by Bruner, who argues that self-making and desired images of selfhood are a direct result of the cultures we find ourselves within:

much of self-making is from outside in—based on the apparent esteem of others and on the myriad of expectations that we early, even mindlessly, pick up from the culture in which we are immersed [...] narrative acts of self-making are usually guided by unspoken, implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, might be—and, of course, shouldn't be. (3)

Through subtle omissions – to which some readers are party – “Isherwood” presents a kind of dual-selfhood, particularly in regard to his own homosexuality. Some readers can see through these omissions, while some read the text at face value. One such occasion occurs toward the end of the novel when “Isherwood” finds himself on a beach looking on as many young men and women get ready to swim:

Also, of course, the majority of the men were secretly embarrassed at finding themselves practically naked in the presence of a lot of semi-naked and (presumably to them) attractive girls. (185)

The phrase, “presumably to them,” distinguishes “Isherwood” from the men who find these women attractive, separating the narrator from the desires of heterosexual men. On another occasion, “Isherwood” goes on a trip to France with his public school teacher, Mr Holmes:

girls waved their handkerchiefs to us and screamed. Mr Holmes waved back, encouraging us to do likewise. Throughout the trip he lost no opportunity for facetiousness, even skittishness, where the opposite sex was concerned. This naughtiness seemed rather forced, it didn't suit him. No doubt he was trying to continue our education in yet another direction. If so, his problem was certainly a difficult one; he couldn't, as a respectable master in an English public school, have taken us to a brothel. Yet how I wish he had! His introduction to sexual

as queer, gay, or a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. This is because Isherwood refers to himself as “homosexual” and reserves the right to define his own sexuality.

experience would, I feel sure, have been a masterpiece of tact; it might well have speeded up our development by a good five years. (20)

The phrases, “Yet how I wish he had!” and “speeded up our development by a good five years” convey two meanings: at face value they indicate “Isherwood”’s desire for heterosexual sex, yet for those party to Christopher Isherwood’s personal life, they are ironic remarks directed at heterosexuals.

“Isherwood”’s aversion to heterosexuality in *Lions and Shadows* also implies his homosexuality. On attending the wedding of his friend, Polly, “Isherwood” narrates:

The registrar’s clerk surveyed us with a disapproving eye: ‘You two come over here, please,’ he said, addressing Polly and myself: ‘We’re late, as it is. We’d better start at once; there’s another couple waiting.’ We explained and got ourselves sorted out, only just in time. (164)

While the phrase, “Only just in time,” is not necessarily indicative of “Isherwood”’s homosexuality, it does make it clear that “Isherwood” and Polly are not a couple; the narrator is not, nor has he ever been, in a heterosexual relationship.

“Isherwood”’s reluctance to engage in heterosexuality can also be seen in his friendship with a local fisherman, Tim:

Together, we visited the local cinema, picked up a couple of girls and cuddled them throughout the performance. I found that I was particularly good at cuddling; especially after three or four ‘dog’s noses’ (gin and beer) at the pub. Indeed, my very inhibitions made me extremely daring – up to a point. Tim, who really meant business, was often curiously shy in the opening stages. Once or twice, having pushed things farther than I had intended, I was scared to find myself committed to a midnight walk over the downs. But, on these occasions, I always discovered an excuse for passing my girl on to Tim. (189)

Clearly reluctant to have a heterosexual experience, “Isherwood” is “scared” of being alone with a girl at night and always finds an “excuse” to get out of it. Again, while this does not directly imply that the narrator is homosexual, it does imply that he is not heterosexual. So, although “Isherwood”’s homosexuality is never directly addressed, it is heavily implied.

In a 1972 interview, Isherwood expressed regret regarding the omission of homosexuality in *Lions and Shadows*:

there are certain reticences which to my mind, now anyway, rather constrict the whole thing. The principal one is that I didn't come out and say I was homosexual, which really colors a tremendous lot of one's value judgments and of attitudes to other people. (145)

According to Isherwood, the purpose of *Lions and Shadows* is to represent the narrator's education from Repton, through his bouts at Cambridge and Medical School, to the writing of his first novel, *All the Conspirators* (1928), until finally, he departs England for Berlin indefinitely in 1929. For Isherwood, the omission of "Isherwood"'s homosexuality, a characteristic so central to this narrator's development and one that "colors a tremendous lot" of his "value judgments and of attitudes to other people," restricts his ability to accurately portray his own life.

This restriction was forced upon Isherwood, as an overt homosexuality in "Isherwood" would have been incriminating as homosexual acts were still illegal in England in 1938. Through a careful use of language, though, Isherwood not only implies "Isherwood"'s homosexuality, but is able to explore it as a pivotal part of the narrator's development.

The plot of the manuscript of *Lions and Shadows* – which "Isherwood" tried to write while still at school – is briefly described:

I built up the daydream of an heroic school career in which the central figure, the dream I, was an austere young prefect, called upon unexpectedly to captain a 'bad' house, surrounded by sneering critics and open enemies, fighting slackness, moral rottenness, grimly repressing his own romantic feelings towards a younger boy, and finally triumphing over all his obstacles, passing the test, emerging – a Man. (54)

The "dream I" of "Isherwood"'s "heroic school career" has strong sexual feelings towards another boy at his school, a clear indication of the namesake narrator's homosexuality. "Isherwood"'s fantasy, though, involves a repression of these feelings so that he can fulfil his ultimate desire and become "a Man." Within "Isherwood" exists a conflict between wanting to become "a Man" and his homosexual desires. If

“Isherwood” is to emerge a man, then he must repress his homosexuality. The concept of the “Truly Strong Man” in *Lions and Shadows* serves as an implicit representation of the narrator’s struggles with his own masculinity and place in the world as a homosexual.

Later in *Lions and Shadows*, “Isherwood” defines what “a Man” is, or, more specifically, what he should be: “Truly strong” (156). “Isherwood” paints the picture of the “Truly strong man” as one who is

calm, balanced, aware of his strength, [who] sits drinking quietly in the bar; it is not necessary for him to try and prove to himself that he is not afraid, by joining the Foreign Legion, seeking out the most dangerous wild animals in the remotest tropical jungles, leaving his comfortable home in a snowstorm to climb the impossible glacier. (156)

“Isherwood” spends much of the text attempting to reconcile his homosexuality with his desire to be a “truly strong man.” Kamel argues that Isherwood never actually explains what a “truly strong man is,” instead choosing to define him purely in relation to his antithesis – a man who is truly weak: himself. By presenting the truly strong man as one who is “calm, balanced, aware of his strength [who] sits drinking quietly in the bar,” “Isherwood” describes the very kind of man that he, initially, is not.

“Isherwood” eventually reconciles the dichotomy between his desire to be a “truly strong man” and his homosexuality by adopting the philosophy of Homer Lane⁹:

Every disease, Lane had taught, is in itself a cure – if we know how to take it. There is only one sin: disobedience to the inner law of our own nature. The results of this disobedience show themselves in crime or in disease; but the disobedience is never, in the first place, our own fault – it is the fault of those who teach us, as children, to control God (our desires) instead of giving Him

⁹ Homer Lane was an American psychologist. His teachings were relayed to Auden and subsequently Isherwood by his pupil, anthropologist John Layard. John Layard is represented as Barnard in *Lions and Shadows*.

room to grow. The whole problem, when dealing with a patient, is to find out which of all the conflicting things inside him is God, and which is the Devil. And the one sure guide is that God appears always unreasonable, while the Devil appears always to be noble and right. God appears unreasonable because He has been put in prison and driven wild. The Devil is conscious control, and is, therefore, reasonable and sane. (227)

Taken alone, this passage reads as an antithesis to the neurotic, cagey, hyper-aware nature of the “Christopher Isherwood” character. It is only when it is read with both “Isherwood”’s homosexuality and the ending of *Lions and Shadows* in mind that its place in the text becomes clear. “Isherwood” is so moved by Homer Lane’s philosophy that he moves to Berlin at the end of the text to meet him. But, as he explains in *Christopher and His Kind*, this was not the reason that Christopher Isherwood moved to Berlin in real life:

when *Lions and Shadows* suggests that Christopher’s chief motive for going to Berlin was that he wanted to meet Layard, it is avoiding the truth. He did look forward to meeting Layard, but that wasn’t why he was in such a hurry to make this journey. It was Berlin itself he was hungry to meet; the Berlin Wystan had promised him. To Christopher, Berlin meant Boys. (2-3)

“Isherwood”’s attraction to Lane’s obscure philosophy in *Lions and Shadows*, though, somewhat contradicts this claim; if “Isherwood” continues to disobey “the inner law of [his] own nature” then he will be committing a sin which will, according to Lane, result in “crime or disease.” “Isherwood,” then, has no choice but to obey his inner nature (his homosexuality) and move to Berlin. By providing Lane’s philosophy as the reason for “Isherwood” moving to Berlin, Isherwood implies that “Christopher Isherwood” is going to Berlin to follow his inner nature, or, as he puts it in *Christopher and His Kind*: “To Christopher, Berlin meant Boys.”

Before Berlin, there was for “Isherwood” another fantasy. Kamel argues that “Isherwood”’s fictional world, “Mortmere,” was “the prototype for the Weimar Berlin he will later discover” (164). Mortmere is a make-believe world that “Isherwood” uses as a setting for his fiction in *Lions and Shadows* – a fictional world within a fictional world. It offers for “Isherwood” a surreal alternative to the dullness of university life, a make-believe Cambridge where he controls his own creation. Mortmere, then, is

similar to the real-life Christopher Isherwood's relationship to the world "Christopher Isherwood" inhabits.

Edward Upward and Christopher Isherwood's *The Mortmere Stories* was eventually published in 1994; "Christopher Isherwood"'s representation of Mortmere, then, further verifies the narrator's experiences as those of Christopher Isherwood, as both wrote stories set in Mortmere. In the section of *The Mortmere Stories* titled 'Introductory Dialogue,' Isherwood and Upward write:

Mortmere was to be published as a volume containing oil paintings, brasses, intaglios, pressed flowers, mirrors and harmless bombs to emphasize points in the story. The dialogue was actually spoken by a concealed gramophone. A musical box played emotional airs. The pages would smell, according to their subject matter, of grave-clothes, manure or expensive scent. Within a pocket of the cover there could be a valuable gold present for each reader. (45)

Mortmere offers for "Isherwood" in *Lions and Shadows*, as it does Isherwood in real-life, an opportunity to create his own surreal world through his fiction. Just as it does for Isherwood, "Isherwood"'s fictional world eventually spills out into his real one. "Isherwood" explains that Mortmere

could best be visited by night. So every evening, after supper, we wandered the cold foggy streets, away from the lights and the shops, down back alleys to the water's edge. We leant over clammy stone parapets, in a state of trance-like fascination, auto-hypnotised by the tones of our own voices and the ink-black movement of the stream. Sometimes, we dropped pennies into the water. One evening, I happened to read aloud the name under a fluttering gas-lamp: 'Garret Hostel Bridge.' 'The Rats' Hostel!' Chalmers suddenly exclaimed. We often conversed in surrealist phrases of this kind. Now we both became abnormally excited: it seemed to us that an all-important statement had been made. At last, by pure accident, we had stumbled upon the key-words which expressed the inmost nature of the Other Town. 'The Rats' Hostel,' we kept repeating to each other, as we hurried back to our rooms to discuss this astonishing revelation. (*Lions and Shadows* 47)

“Isherwood”’s fictional world becomes indiscernible from his reality, just as it did for Isherwood; both respective fantasies become realities.

Of “Isherwood”’s relationship to Mortmere and his own reality at Cambridge, Kamel states:

To unravel the system that spawned him, he projects his narrator as a picaro consorted with like-minded anti-bourgeois outcasts. To reconstruct himself out of new cloth, “Christopher” transforms his anarchic impulse into allegorical landscapes. (164)

Mortmere allows “Isherwood” to create himself and, in turn, allows Isherwood to construct his own historical identity – an identity that is validated by the publication of *The Mortmere Stories*. Kamel argues that *Lions and Shadows* serves as proof that Isherwood

must use the weapon of language to articulate the personal myth of Christopher, apprentice, in the process of becoming Isherwood, the god-like creator of written artifact—his autobiography. (163)

As Kamel insightfully argues, *Lions and Shadows* verifies the narrator’s representation of an autobiographical journey by serving as its own proof. The mere existence of the book proves that the main character was successful in his quest in becoming an author.

I am reluctant, however, to refer to the construction of Isherwood through “Isherwood” as myth-building. Describing “Christopher Isherwood” as a myth fails to address the self-critique and hyper-awareness with which Isherwood constructs his own character. “Isherwood” certainly constructs the personal history of Isherwood, but the result is not a grandiose, god-like mythical figure, but rather, an acutely aware, and at times petulant, weary man.

“Isherwood” eventually leaves Mortmere for Berlin, a city in which his fantasy becomes a reality. In Berlin, “Isherwood” constructs the history of Isherwood, one that readers may perceive as autobiographical.

2. Goodbye to “Bradshaw”: The Namesake Narrator in *Goodbye to Berlin*

Goodbye to Berlin (1939) and *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935), often published together as *The Berlin Stories*, are both fictional accounts of Christopher Isherwood's time in Berlin. As the narrator of *Christopher and His Kind* points out: “The Berlin novels leave out a great deal which I now want to remember; they also falsify events and alter dates for dramatic purposes” (41). Both novels offer sympathetic views of peculiar characters as Germany rapidly descends into fascism. By casting attention on those who exist in the margins of a Berlin society threatened by encroaching Nazism, both plots function primarily to aid “Isherwood” as he paints portraits of characters around him. In a 1963 lecture at Berkeley, Isherwood explains that

the action of the story was seen to be nothing else but a kind of exercise rack to show off the paces of your horse. If the character has to be shown in certain circumstances that is only because he has certain characteristics that you want to bring out, and you can only bring them out by putting him under all kinds of stress and strain, showing him in this kind of situation or that [...] I should present it, as far as I'm concerned, in the form of a portrait. (*Isherwood on Writing* 166)

In *Goodbye to Berlin*, “Isherwood”'s portraits range from the uninhibited Sally Bowles, an English singer working in an underground Berlin bar, to Otto Nowak, a young German working-class sex worker. *Goodbye to Berlin* also paints pictures of Jewish store owners facing anti-Semitic persecution, “Isherwood”'s German English language students, and a professional musician.

Mr Norris Changes Trains, however, provides an in-depth portrait of just one character, Arthur Norris. Running an illegal import-export business, Norris describes himself as a man of “independent means,” and it later becomes apparent that he has ties to the Communist Party, and is a masochist. Like many that “Isherwood” paints, this portrait is sordid yet complex: when Norris is about to be questioned by Berlin police amidst suspicion that he is a communist, he and the narrator have the following conversation:

‘Be brave, Comrade Norris. Think of Lenin.’

‘I’m afraid, ha, ha, I find more inspiration in the Marquis de Sade.’ (72)

These comically dark exchanges are common in these novels and are presumably drawn from Isherwood’s own experience of the Weimar Republic, the centre for sexual liberation in Europe before the rise of fascism. Lured to Berlin by sex, Stephen Spender likened the flocking to Germany of Isherwood’s contemporaries to young American writers in the early twenties, such as Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald, fleeing prohibition to the alcohol in France and Spain: “For them, drink: for us, sex” (*The Temple* x). One such man was Gerald Hamilton, an English journalist boasting friends such as Winston Churchill. Hamilton would later become the basis for Isherwood’s Arthur Norris character. It was Isherwood’s hope that the fragmented writings of his time in Berlin might join together to form a “huge episodic novel of pre-Hitler Berlin” (*Goodbye to Berlin* np). He was unable to achieve this goal, however, and these fragments were refined and published as *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, and eventually contributed to *Down There on a Visit*.

Despite both novels being fictionalised accounts of Isherwood’s time in Berlin between 1930 and 1933, only the narrator of *Goodbye to Berlin* is called “Christopher Isherwood.” The space between these novels, then, offers a chance to examine a watershed moment in Isherwood’s development as he rids himself of “William Bradshaw,” the narrator of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*. This narrator is also a namesake, in a way, as “William” and “Bradshaw” are Christopher Isherwood’s two middle names. Interestingly, Isherwood’s apparent nervousness at giving his own name to his narrator had an ironic consequence: according to Isherwood’s uncle,

Isherwood was a mere tradesman’s name while Bradshaw epitomized the family’s claim to aristocratic status and historical importance. Therefore, Christopher had committed sacrilege by dragging William Bradshaw down into the company of criminals and proletarians. (*Christopher and His Kind* 206)

“William Bradshaw,” though, is the first narrator of Isherwood’s who assumes the position of the observer. The process by which Isherwood arrived at using “Bradshaw” is described in *Christopher and His Kind*:

While Christopher was struggling to write his huge novel about the prototypes of the Lost, he had decided that it must be narrated in the third person, objectively, camera-wise. The camera would record only outward appearances, actions, and spoken words—no thoughts, no feelings, nothing subjective. In this kind of storytelling, the author is playing a game with the reader. The author gives him all the necessary objective data, challenging him to interpret it and guess what will happen next [...]

But now Christopher was attempting an altogether different kind of novel, in which Mr. Norris wasn't a prototype, wasn't designed to demonstrate a concept. Here, he was a character in the simplest sense. Meeting him must be its own reward.

Christopher wanted to make the reader experience Arthur Norris just as he himself had experienced Gerald Hamilton. He could only do this by writing subjectively, in the first person, otherwise, his portrait of Mr. Norris wouldn't be lifelike. (189-90)

Isherwood started writing about Berlin in the “third person, objectively, camera-wise” (189). When he changes his mind and decides to use a first-person narrator, then, “William Bradshaw” maintains many of these characteristics, ones usually associated with a third-person narrator.

According to Isherwood, he could not successfully write about Berlin in the third person. He further explained his decision to use “William Bradshaw” in a lecture at Berkeley in April 1963:

I thought to myself, I only know Germany from the point of view of myself. I cannot pretend to be a German, and I can't identify myself with any of the other characters, particularly as they're presented as such freaks. So the only thing I can possibly do is to write in the first person. But I was nervous and had never heard of anybody writing in the first person and using their own name. So I took my two middle names and called myself William Bradshaw. (165)

“William Bradshaw,” it would seem, is merely symptomatic of a young Isherwood's nervousness – a thin disguise for a self-conscious novelist. Even though Isherwood does not share his first and last name with “Bradshaw,” he uses the personal pronouns “I” and “myself” when referring to him. This shows a closer kinship

between Christopher Isherwood and “Bradshaw” than is seen with Arthur Vernon, a narrator used in Isherwood’s second novel, *The Memorial* (1932). Like “Bradshaw,” Vernon’s life is very similar to Isherwood’s. *The Memorial* follows Vernon’s family in the days after the First World War. Vernon, a student at Cambridge, is in conflict with himself, pulled by two separate desires. On the one hand, he wants to follow in the footsteps of his heroic father, who sacrificed for his family his whole life and ultimately died in the war, and on the other hand he wants to be like his uncle, who, after surviving the war, maintained no serious relationships and moved to Berlin in pursuit of a homosexual life.

The tension between these two desires is similar to that which exists in the “Isherwood” narrator of *Lions and Shadows*, who wants to conform to the expectations of “the truly strong man,” but who also wants to live life freely as a homosexual – two opposing ways of life that “Isherwood” cannot resolve. Despite this, however, Isherwood never refers to Vernon using the personal pronoun as he does with “Bradshaw.” As *Christopher and His Kind* makes clear, there is a reason the narrators of both *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* are so similar:

During his years in Germany, Christopher kept a diary. As he became aware that he would one day write stories about the people he knew there, his diary entries got longer. They later supplied him with most of the material which is used to create period atmosphere in *Mr. Norris* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. (40-1)

The similarity between the two extends beyond period atmosphere as “Bradshaw” seems to speak with the same voice as “Isherwood.” Colin Wilson identifies “William Bradshaw” as “Christopher Isherwood”:

From the first words of *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935), you can see that Isherwood has achieved his freedom. He has still not quite achieved the confidence to speak of himself as Christopher Isherwood, but in all the essentials, William Bradshaw is ‘Chris’. (318)

Before Wilson makes the claim that “Bradshaw is ‘Chris,’” he prefaces it: “but in all the essentials.” He explains away the use of the name “William Bradshaw” as merely

a result of a lack of confidence, implying that the only difference between “Bradshaw” and “Isherwood” exists in inessentials.

Across the critical literature, “William Bradshaw” and “Christopher Isherwood” are both treated as Isherwood’s fictional stand-ins. Although qualifications such as “but in all the essentials” are used often, the issue of identity in the narration of these stories is considered to be a given, with caveats taking the place of further discussion on the issue. Lisa M. Schwerdt offers the most in-depth discussion on the ‘namesake narrators’ in *Isherwood’s Fiction: The Self and Technique* (1989). Despite the complexity of her argument, however, she states that

[*Mr Norris Changes Trains*] is not about Arthur Norris but about William Bradshaw, a thinly disguised Isherwood, a character whose name is a portion of Isherwood’s own – Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood. (57)

Schwerdt is correct in her assertion that, even though Isherwood himself argues that “William Bradshaw” is only there to act as an observer of those around him, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* is in fact a novel about its narrator. Much like Wilson, though, Schwerdt describes “William Bradshaw” as nothing but “a thinly disguised Isherwood.” The identity of the narrator is assumed, rather than examined. Similarly, Rose Kamel asserts:

Isherwood’s “plots” roughly correspond to events he tells us he has experienced. His narrator-personae bear his name or its variations: Christopher, Chris, William Bradshaw, Herr Issyvoo. They express his avowed needs and predilections. (162)

Kamel offers a nuanced discussion of Isherwood’s narrators – discussing them as personae rather than a single persona. Despite this, both “Isherwood” and “Bradshaw” are still referred to as Isherwood’s namesakes.

In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood answers to the nature of “William Bradshaw”’s narration: “Was Christopher claiming that the Narrator of this novel was, in every respect, himself? No” (190). If “William Bradshaw” is not Isherwood’s fictional stand-in in every respect, then there must be characteristics that he displays that are neither essential nor belong to Christopher Isherwood. In *Christopher and His Kind*, the narrator explains that he does not entirely identify with “Bradshaw”

because “he wasn’t prepared to admit that the Narrator was homosexual” (190). He goes on to say:

Christopher wanted to keep the reader’s attention concentrated on Norris; therefore the Narrator had to be as unobtrusive as possible. The reader had to be encouraged to put himself in the Narrator’s shoes [...] For example, the Narrator is at a Beethoven concert, he sees and smells a juicy steak in a restaurant, he wakes up in the night to feel his cheek being licked by the tongue of a non-venomous snake. The ordinary reader, being convinced of the Narrator’s ordinariness, will take it for granted that he is feeling pleasure in the first instance, appetite in the second, and terror and disgust in the third. (190)

Had he made “Bradshaw” an “avowed homosexual,” Isherwood claims that an “ordinary” reader would always remain aware that the Narrator was a figure vastly different to themselves. Interestingly, though, “Isherwood” is not an “avowed homosexual” either. In fact, “Isherwood”’s perception of Otto is specifically constructed to make sure that the reader does not suspect the narrator of being homosexual:

Otto certainly has a superb pair of shoulders and chest for a boy of his age – but his body is nevertheless somehow slightly ridiculous. The beautiful ripe lines of the torso taper away too suddenly to his rather absurd little buttocks and spindly, immature legs. (*Goodbye to Berlin* 68)

In *Christopher and His Kind*, this initial description of Otto is addressed:

He nearly gives himself away when he speaks of ‘the beautiful ripe lines of the torso.’ So, lest the reader should suspect him of finding Otto physically attractive, he adds that Otto’s legs are ‘spindly.’ Otto’s original in life had an entirely adequate, sturdy pair of legs [...] (72)

Isherwood, then, not only omits his narrator’s homosexuality, he purposefully fictionalises his own real-life perceptions through “Isherwood” so that he does not “give himself away.” If this claim is true – that he did not want readers to be aware of “Isherwood”’s homosexuality – then it is peculiar that *Goodbye to Berlin* is littered with scenes that imply the namesake narrator’s homosexuality.

On one occasion, “Isherwood” sits down to eat with a Jewish family he has befriended. The father then asks

‘Was your English Law justified in punishing Oscar Wilde, or was it not justified? Please tell me what you think?’

Herr Landauer regarded me delightedly, a forkful of meat poised half-way up to his mouth. In the background, I was aware of Bernhard, discreetly smiling.

‘Well . . .’ I began, feeling my ears burning red. This time, however, Frau Landauer unexpectedly saved me, by making a remark to Natalia in German, about the vegetables. (150)

When asked about Oscar Wilde’s punishment, who was arrested and imprisoned on charges of sodomy and gross indecency, “Isherwood”’s ears begin “burning red.” Presumably, “Isherwood” is uncomfortable because he too is homosexual, and it takes an interruption from Frau Landauer to save him from having to provide Herr Landauer with an answer – an answer which might have given “himself away.”

Bernhard Landauer, who is based on Wilfrid Israel, is represented differently from most of the other men in the novel. In his initial description of Bernhard, when he visits his room for the first time, “Isherwood” describes him with a delicateness that is unique to this passage of the novel:

This evening he was wearing a beautifully embroidered kimono over his town clothes. He was not quite as I remembered him from our first meeting [...] His over-civilized, prim, finely drawn, beaky profile gave him something out of the air of a bird in a piece of Chinese embroidery. He was soft, negative, I thought, yet curiously potent, with the static potency of a carved ivory figure in a shrine. I noticed again his beautiful English, and the deprecatory gestures of his hands, as he showed me a twelfth-century sandstone head of Buddha from Khmer which stood at the foot of his bed – ‘keeping watch over my slumbers.’ On the low white bookcase [...] I saw Vachell’s *The Hill*. (188)

Bernhard is “prim, finely drawn,” “soft” and “curiously potent.” The precision with which Bernhard is described is then added to by “Isherwood”’s mention of Vachell’s *The Hill* (1905). *The Hill: A Romance of Friendship* idealises the friendship of two boys at Harrow, the boarding school that Horace Vachell went to. Guy Cuthbertson

argues that “when the book is mentioned in Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* it is a hint at the homosexuality of its owner” (254). At multiple points of the novel, it is implied that “Isherwood” and Bernhard might have some romantic connection and this culminates in “Isherwood” making his way up to the bedroom with him:

Half an hour later, Bernhard took me up to my bedroom door, his hand upon my shoulder, still smiling. Next morning, at breakfast, he looked tired, but was gay and amusing. (172)

These novels are methodically written and read like diaries detailing each important event in the life of a young writer in Germany. There are gaps between sentences – in this case between “his hand upon my shoulder, stilling smiling” and “Next morning” – in which large amounts of time are omitted, noticeably, implying there are events that “Isherwood” does not want to share. According to OED, the word “gay” has been used since 1922 to relate to homosexuality. Across Isherwood’s work, though, he consistently uses the term “homosexual.” In this case, one cannot be sure if Isherwood is using it to mean happy, or if it has a double meaning here, one for readers in the know and one for those out of it.

Bernhard later proposes a shared trip to China but only if “Isherwood” chooses to “leave Berlin this evening” (180). Isherwood again describes this in *Christopher and His Kind*:

In the novel, it seems to be implied that what Bernhard is hiding is a romantic attachment to ‘Isherwood.’ The shared trip to China which Bernhard proposes is made to sound like an elopement. (73)

Bernhard’s proposed elopement, though, is entirely fictional. Isherwood later revealed that he was certain that Bernhard “wasn’t in love with Christopher” (*Christopher and His Kind* 73). Despite his claim that he did not want readers to be aware of “Isherwood”’s homosexuality, Isherwood consistently fictionalises his narrator’s relationships so that they imply he is.

The same can be said of the “Bradshaw” narrator; even though he is never directly represented as homosexual, there are scenes in *Mr Norris Changes Trains* that imply this to be the case. “Bradshaw”’s aristocratic acquaintance, Baron Pregnitz

(referred to as Kuno) is explicitly represented in the text as homosexual. At one point, Pregnitz asks “Bradshaw” up to his flat after the two have had dinner together:

Kuno gave my hand a limp squeeze.

‘May I ask you something?’

‘Ask away.’

‘You see, I don’t wish to be personal. Do you believe in Platonic friendship?’

‘I expect so,’ I said, guardedly.

The answer seemed to satisfy him. His tone became more confidential: ‘You’re sure you won’t come up to see my flat? Not for five minutes?’

‘Not tonight.’

‘Quite sure?’ He squeezed.

‘Quite, quite sure.’

‘Some other evening?’ Another squeeze.

I laughed: ‘I think I should see it better in the daytime, shouldn’t I?’ (136)

“Bradshaw” finds himself in these situations often, and while he is never actually represented in an explicit homosexual act, there are constant reminders such as this.

One could make the argument that if Isherwood really wanted to make sure that his narrator was not perceived by readers as homosexual, then he could have made “Bradshaw” heterosexual. On “Bradshaw”’s sexuality, Isherwood writes:

Christopher dared not make the Narrator homosexual. But he scorned to make him heterosexual. That, to Christopher, would have been as shameful as pretending to be heterosexual himself. Therefore, the narrator could have no explicit sex experiences in the story. (‘This sexless nitwit,’ one reviewer was to call him.) The unlucky creature is, indeed, no more than a demi-character.

(*Christopher and His Kind* 191-2)

According to Isherwood, “William Bradshaw” is only loosely based on himself, “a demi-character,” one through which Isherwood’s relationship with Gerald Hamilton (Arthur Norris) is represented, but ultimately not one whose experiences shape themselves as his own.

While homosexuality is loosely implied in both novels, the implications in *Mr Norris Changes Trains* are not as overt. In "Sexuality in Isherwood," Jonathan H. Fryer states:

Despite the fact that the homosexual content of the Berlin stories must penetrate even the most blinkered reader's mind, Isherwood does not commit himself one way or the other [...] He disguises his own sexual stance by the very inclusion of a Christopher dummy character in the novels, a narrator who observes everything going on around him with a positively asexual detachment. (np)

As neither text declares their narrator to be openly homosexual, it is a contradiction for Isherwood to give this reason to explain his later loss of kinship with "Bradshaw." In his introduction to Gerald Hamilton's memoir, *Mr Norris and I* (1956), Isherwood explains that what bothers him most about *Mr Norris Changes Trains* is that it appears to be

a heartless fairy-story about a real city in which human beings were suffering the miseries of political violence and near-starvation [...] As for the "monsters", they were quite ordinary human beings prosaically engaged in getting their living through illegal methods. The only genuine monster was the young foreigner who passed gaily through these scenes of desolation, misinterpreting them to suit his childish fantasy. (11)

In the last pages of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, "Bradshaw" leaves Berlin. At the same time, many of his German friends are disappearing. "Bradshaw" eventually learns of Kuno's death. After unknowingly helping Norris in a criminal dealing, "Bradshaw" implicates both himself and Kuno in a crime. Needing money to pay off a blackmail, Kuno is eventually caught sharing political secrets by German police. Norris's secretary, Schimdt, blackmails Kuno, threatening to make his homosexuality public by publishing explicit letters Kuno has sent to another man. When the police come to arrest Kuno, he escapes, running into a lavatory. Just as the police are about to break down the door, Kuno shoots himself. "William Bradshaw," on the other hand, is now safe in England, while everyone both he and Arthur Norris knew are either dead, or in grave danger of dying.

The difference between “Christopher Isherwood”’s departure from Berlin in *Goodbye to Berlin* is the self-critical honesty of the “Isherwood” narrator:

Today the sun is brilliantly shining; it is quite mild and warm. I go out for my last morning walk, without an overcoat or hat. The sun shines, and Hitler is master of this city. The sun shines, and dozens of my friends – my pupils at the Workers’ School, the men and women I met at the I.A.H. – are in prison, possibly dead. But it isn’t of them I am thinking – the clear-headed ones, the purposeful, the heroic; they recognised and accepted the risks. I am thinking of poor Rudi, in his absurd Russian blouse. Rudi’s make-believe, story-book games have become earnest; the Nazis will play it with him. The Nazis won’t laugh at him; they’ll take him on trust for what he pretended to be. Perhaps at this very moment Rudi is being tortured to death.

I catch sight of my face in the mirror of the ship, and am horrified to see that I am smiling. You can’t help smiling, in such beautiful weather. (251-2)

The last pages of *Goodbye to Berlin* are sombre, told by a narrator aware of his own indifference and selfishness. As Nazism becomes a stronger presence over the course of the novel, it becomes apparent that none of the characters have truly taken the Nazis seriously, until it is too late. As “Isherwood” remarks:

‘The Nazis may write like schoolboys, but they’re capable of anything. That’s just why they’re so dangerous. People laugh at them, right up to the last moment.’ (*Goodbye to Berlin* 217)

At the last moment, though, “Isherwood” leaves Berlin freely, smiling. Whereas his friends face prison, torture, and death. Such critical introspection is not present in “Bradshaw”’s narration.

At the very beginning of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, “Bradshaw” and Norris have their passports inspected by German officials. Watching Norris, “Bradshaw” misobserves:

I was amazed to see what a state he was in; his fingers twitched and his voice was scarcely under control. There were actually beads of sweat on his alabaster forehead. If this was what he called ‘being fussed,’ if these were the agonies he

suffered when he broke a by-law, it was no wonder that his nerves had turned him prematurely bald. (9)

Determined to believe that Norris is merely smuggling a silk scarf into the country, “Bradshaw” remains unaware, wilfully looking at his new acquaintance through a naive lens. Conversely, the awareness of the “Christopher Isherwood” character blurs the line between the narrator and Isherwood. On the other hand, there is a noticeable separation between narrator and Isherwood in *Mr Norris Changes Trains*. The difference between the two can be seen in the way Isherwood describes the narrator of *Mr Norris Changes Trains* in a 1963 lecture:

In order that I should assist at certain criminal proceedings which were going on in the story, I was made a great deal dumber than I have ever been, because I would have seen right through these people and had nothing to do with them. (165)

In *Goodbye to Berlin*, “Christopher Isherwood” narrates with the same authority as the author; he omits events from the text and appears to be privy to the same information. “Bradshaw,” however, is not as aware as the reader, and is oblivious from the outset as to what seems obvious: Arthur Norris’s criminal behaviour. The lack of awareness and wilful ignorance of “William Bradshaw” is a kind of betrayal, Isherwood felt, to the type of novel he was trying to write:

I find myself in great difficulties because I was lying about the very nature of my own experience, a thing that I have never done since then. I mean, I was making myself participate in the story of Mr. Norris in a way in which I in fact didn’t participate. (*Isherwood on Writing* 165)

“William Bradshaw” is an intelligent yet altogether naïve and unaware character. Isherwood, however, is aware of how naïve “Bradshaw” is. The narrator of *Goodbye to Berlin* is all-knowing and hides events and thoughts from the reader. This does not stop Isherwood, though, conflating the two narrators in the foreword to *Goodbye to Berlin*:

Readers of *Mr Norris Changes Trains* may notice that certain characters and situations in that novel overlap and contradict what I have written here [...]

Christopher Isherwood would certainly have come home one evening to find William Bradshaw asleep in his bed [...]

Because I have given my own name to the 'I' of this narrative, readers are certainly not entitled to assume that its pages are purely autobiographical, or that its characters are libellously exact portraits of living persons. 'Christopher Isherwood' is a convenient ventriloquist's dummy, nothing more. (np)

By instructing the reader that this novel is not "purely autobiographical," Isherwood grants himself a novelist's license to fictionalise, simultaneously presenting *Goodbye to Berlin* as both a referential and nonreferential text. The "Christopher Isherwood" namesake, then, demands to be read more autobiographically, as the narrative is littered with autobiographical facts – dates, people, places – making it almost impossible to discern the fictional "Isherwood" from the real one.

Further complicating things, "Isherwood" can be found not only in the narrator's sensibilities, but in those of his characters. As Kamel points out, while Sally Bowles, Arthur Norris, and Otto

may charm us with their childlike vulnerability, [they] are childishly narcissistic, incapable of moving beyond their immediate need for self-gratification to recognize authority [...] Perhaps they symbolize fragments of a repressed childhood Isherwood has explored only obliquely. (166)

Sally, Arthur and Otto exhibit a desperate need for sexual gratification while being highly contemptuous towards any figure of authority. These characters, then, mirror an "Isherwood" narrator who exhibits these very same qualities, even if only implicitly. "Isherwood" represses these qualities in himself, instead choosing to see them in the characters he focuses on.

Alan Wilde observes of Isherwood's personae that they are "what he might be, what he revolts against or what he is" (20). This observation can also be applied to the characters in his work; "Isherwood" paints them with a sharp but heavy brush, producing caricatures more closely resembling the real-life Isherwood than the people these characters are based on. When "Isherwood" meets Sally Bowles in *Goodbye to Berlin*, he notices

that her finger-nails were painted emerald green, a colour unfortunately chosen, for it called attention to her hands, which were much stained by cigarette smoking and as dirty as a little girl's. She was dark [...] Her face was long and thin, powdered dead white. She had very large brown eyes which should have been darker, to match her hair and the pencil she used for her eyebrows. (34)

The real-life basis for Sally Bowles, Jean Ross, disliked the fact that she was often identified as the inspiration for this character. Ross believed Bowles was vacuous, more representative of one of Isherwood's unnamed homosexual friends than of herself (Firchow 120). Isherwood too later stated that Ross was very different to Bowles. According to Isherwood, Ross had "a long, thin handsome face, aristocratic nose, glossy dark hair, large brown eyes," and was "more essentially British than Sally; she grumbled like a true Englishwoman, with her grin-and-bear-it grin. And she was tougher" (*Christopher and His Kind* 62). Ross was a lifelong communist who eventually wrote the political manifesto for the Worker's Film and Photo League. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, though, Sally Bowles is "divinely decadent" and promiscuous, more like Christopher Isherwood than Ross.¹⁰

Despite his unflattering portrayal of Ross as Sally Bowles, "Isherwood" ends the 'Sally Bowles' chapter by writing, "When you read this, Sally – if you ever do – please accept it as a tribute, the sincerest I can pay, to yourself and to our friendship" (92). This sentence shows "Isherwood," a fictional character who shares his name with the author, addressing another character directly, as if she exists outside of the text. If Sally Bowles exists outside of the text, as this sentence suggests, then so too does this narrator – "Christopher Isherwood" becomes Christopher Isherwood.

Unlike the other characters in *Goodbye to Berlin*, Peter is not based on anyone that Isherwood actually knew. Peter, a nervous, thin, ungraceful Englishman, is roughly the same age as "Christopher Isherwood." Peter appears as Otto Nowak's lover in the third chapter of the text, 'On Ruegen Island (Summer 1931).' Living with Peter and Otto, "Isherwood" observes their tumultuous relationship. Norman Page argues that, in comparison to the rest of *Goodbye to Berlin*, the "manipulation of the

¹⁰ Sally Bowles is also a character in *Cabaret* (1966), the musical based on *I Am a Camera* (1951), the John Van Druten play based on *Goodbye to Berlin*.

autobiographical basis is more palpable” in this chapter (196). Examining Peter, Page states:

[Peter] has much in common with Isherwood, so that [Isherwood's] actual characteristics may be seen as being divided between the innocuous Christopher (more readily identified, of course, with the author) and the weaker more problematic Peter. (196)

Isherwood went to Cambridge and lost his father at a young age; Peter attended Oxford after losing his mother when he was young (Page 166). Christopher Isherwood was in a tumultuous relationship with a man named Walter Wolff from 1930 to 1932 who eventually served as the basis for the Otto Nowak character. Peter, then,

comes from a social background resembling Isherwood's own and whose feelings for the youth are similarly compounded of lust, sentimental affection, and anger and jealousy at his cupidity, disloyalty and heterosexual philandering. (Page 196)

Peter is a thinly disguised reflection of “Isherwood,” allowing the narrator to construct Christopher Isherwood's personal history – that is, his relationship with Walter Wolff/Otto Nowak – from a safe, removed distance. Page claims:

There is something a little perfunctory about the disguise bestowed on Peter [...] who is unconvincing as a character, and the expository section that summarises his early life is clumsily done, reading like a synopsis for a *Bildungsroman*, but he enables ‘Christopher’ to be presented as coolly in control of the situation and fully detached from Peter's humiliating entanglement. (196)

Although Page claims that Peter's disguise is both “perfunctory” and clumsy, it is more likely that this heavy-handedness is actually deliberate. If “Isherwood” makes it clear that he is Peter, then he can create Christopher Isherwood's personal history from a position of a narrator that is coolly distant, maintaining emotional control and clarity, only observing and passing no judgment. If, instead, “Isherwood” was to assume Peter's position – which would be a more accurate portrayal of what really

happened – then his narration would not be that of an unbiased observer, but rather a character experiencing the depths of jealousy and loneliness, unable to see his life from the outside. Peter, then, is indicative of the type of criticism Isherwood's work receives the most; although Isherwood gives his own name to the narrator he still hides behind the objectivity his camera-like lens offers him.

Much of the events that make up *Goodbye to Berlin* were originally supposed to be a part of Isherwood's epic novel, *The Lost*. In *Christopher and His Kind*, the original plot overview for the unwritten novel is provided:

Peter Wilkinson, newly arrived in Germany, has been invited to a party at the Wannsee villa of the Landauers, whom he has never met. He arrives early and has to kill time by wandering along the beach of the lake. Here he is picked up by Otto Nowak, who takes him into the woods and seduces him. He then goes to the party and meets the Landauers, Sally Bowles, her boy friend Klaus, and Baron von Pregnitz, a homosexual official in the German government [...] The Baron is snobbishly drawn to Peter because he is a young Englishman of good family. (181)

“Peter Wilkinson” was to be the narrator of the original Berlin story. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, though, Peter's experiences are represented by an objective observer who is “very much taken up” with the novel he is writing, spending most of his time alone. “Isherwood”'s observation of Peter's emotional turmoil is delivered with a detached and uncaring curiosity. The last line of the chapter, however, shows “Isherwood” expressing a feeling of loss:

I miss Peter and Otto, and their daily quarrels, far more than I should have expected. And not even Otto's dancing partners have stopped lingering sadly in the twilight, under my window. (101)

For “Isherwood” to express deep feelings, such as loss and sadness, he must do so from an external perspective, creating Christopher Isherwood's personal history through another character.

In addition to these complexities, it is worth noting that the experience of the “Christopher Isherwood” narrator in this chapter is more similar to Stephen

Spender's when he was on Ruegen Island. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, "Isherwood" describes the following scene:

Suddenly Peter slapped Otto hard on both cheeks. They closed immediately and staggered grappling about the room, knocking over the chairs. I looked on, getting out of their way as well as I could. It was funny, and, at the same time, unpleasant, because rage made their faces strange and ugly. Presently Otto got Peter down on the ground and began twisting his arm: 'Have you had enough?' he kept asking. He grinned: at that moment he was really hideous, positively deformed with malice. I knew that Otto was glad to have me there, because my presence was an extra humiliation for Peter. (106)

In *Christopher and His Kind*, this paragraph is simply quoted in its entirety, the only difference being that "Peter" is replaced with "Christopher" and "I" is replaced with "Stephen" (45-6). "Isherwood," then, not only creates Peter to take Isherwood's place, but also assumes the place of his friend, Stephen Spender. Conveniently, Spender observes of Isherwood's writing:

Christopher, so far from being the self-effacing spectator he depicts in his novels, was really the centre of his characters and neither could they exist without him nor he without them. (*World Within World* 124)

"Isherwood" creates his characters so that they can, in turn, create him. "Isherwood" is positioned behind the camera at all times because he is only comfortable when he is in complete control of his own story. Drawing on Susan Sontag's observation of how one acts as a subject in photography, Kamel claims, "one's exposure on film instigates a primitive fear of being drained or robbed of one's selfhood" (169).

Isherwood's construction of "Christopher Isherwood" is threatened by the objectivity of Spender's camera lens. "Isherwood," the camera, purports to wield the objectivity of physical lens, but Spender's photos of the real-life Christopher Isherwood project a different image, one that he has no control over. Donald Windham assesses the real-life photos that American novelist George Platt Lynes took of Isherwood:

the camera remains "in front of" Isherwood's Britishness. He appears safe guarded behind the English schoolboy quality he still has, its formality as well

as its mischievousness, in the way he safeguarded himself behind the fictional William Bradshaw in *The Last of Mr. Norris* [the American edition's title] and the "convenient ventriloquist dummy" of Herr Issyvoo in *Goodbye to Berlin*. (28-9)

Isherwood is briefly depicted in Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* (1942), alongside Auden. Waugh, irritated that both Auden and Isherwood had left England for the United States before the Second World War started, created two characters, Parsnip and Pimpernell. Depicted as characters that "ganged up and captured the decade of the 30s," Waugh ridicules Isherwood and Auden through a young communist woman in conversation:

What I don't see is how these two can claim to be *Contemporary* if they run away from the biggest event in contemporary history. They were contemporary enough about Spain when no one threatened to come and bomb them. (48)

However, it is not Waugh's lens that poses the biggest threat to Isherwood's personal history, but Spender's. *The Temple* (1988) is a fictionalised account of a trip Spender made to Berlin at the behest of Auden and Isherwood. Spender's fictional stand-in is "Paul Schoner"; Auden is depicted as "Simon Wilmot" and Isherwood, unsurprisingly, is again afforded the identity of "William Bradshaw." The view that Spender provides of "Bradshaw" is one that is not seen in any of Isherwood's fiction:

William had assumed a look of infinite weariness. To Paul's eyes everything in the little study seemed to weigh on William: the tidily arranged row of English Classics on the bookshelves, the two armchairs in which they were seated by the fireplace, the table with William's typewriter on it, and, over the chimney-piece, the watercolour of *Bluebells in a Forest* painted by his father, Colonel Bradshaw who, on 15 February 1916, had been 'reported missing' on the Western Front, never to be heard of again.

'What is your novel about?'

Paul asked this question for the simple reason that he passionately wanted to know.

William looked at Paul resentfully, as though determined not to be drawn out.

(17)

“Isherwood” never explicitly deals with the death of his father.¹¹ Spender, on the other hand, discusses this freely, using it to help create a portrait of his “Bradshaw.”

Amidst the portraits of *Goodbye to Berlin*, the narrator never paints himself explicitly. “Isherwood” is only ever glimpsed tangentially from behind the camera, rather than ever taking centre stage. In reading *The Temple*, one can gain a sense of how others might have seen Isherwood; Spender’s “Bradshaw” is an entirely different character to Isherwood’s “Isherwood.” The “Isherwood” of *Goodbye to Berlin*, though, is still relied upon as the autobiographical documentation of Christopher Isherwood’s life, a testament to the strength of his self-making. “Isherwood” constructs for readers Christopher Isherwood’s history, winking at you the whole way.

¹¹ His second novel, *The Memorial*, however, is dedicated to his father. And later, he writes *Kathleen and Frank* (1971), an autobiographical work covering the relationship of Isherwood’s parents.

3. A Figurative Filmmaker: “Christopher Isherwood”’s Camera Lens in *Prater Violet*

The second paragraph of *Goodbye to Berlin*, where the narrator refers to himself as “a camera,” has been frequently used by critics to indicate how one should read Christopher Isherwood’s namesake narrator. Richard Mayne argues that this passage

very closely describes the role which Isherwood plays as the narrator of his novels. Here, he is a self-effacing onlooker, making no judgments, forming no attachments, withholding imaginative sympathy, ultimately not involved. (564-5)

G. H. Bantock further develops this point, claiming that, like other works in which “Christopher Isherwood” is the narrator, this paragraph shows a “lack of a sense of personal reaction except insofar as the mere angle at which the camera is held” (51). The “I am a camera” style of Isherwood’s writing is heavily influenced by Katherine Mansfield. In a 1924 interview, though, she says

I should not have made such observations as I have made of people, however cruel they may seem. After all, I did observe those things, and I had to set them down. I’ve been a camera. But that’s the point. I’ve been a selective camera, and it has been my attitude that has determined the selection; with the result that my slices of life [...] have been partial, misleading, and a little malicious. (53)

Unlike Mansfield, Isherwood never appeared to have such reservations. While some, such as Mayne and Bantock, criticise the impersonality of “Christopher Isherwood,” the author himself maintains that it is this very kind of self-effacement that is this narrator’s purpose. In a lecture delivered in Los Angeles on May 4, 1965, Isherwood stated that *Prater Violet* is the most successful example of this technique because of the narrative distance that it achieves:

Prater Violet was probably the most successful use of the “Christopher Isherwood” method [...] because Viertel (Bergmann) talked so much that really nobody else got a word in edgewise. Therefore it didn’t matter very much about

who was telling the story; I was nothing but a kind of straight man for all the anecdotes, jokes, carryings-on of Viertel himself. (192)

Set in the mid-1930s, *Prater Violet* sees “Christopher Isherwood” narrate his first ever experience writing and creating a film. As outlined in the previous chapter on *Goodbye to Berlin*, “Isherwood”’s narration often takes the form of portraiture, with the narrator acting as a camera – though the camera is not always figurative in the case of *Prater Violet* – through which the reader is shown a particular character or set of characters in many situations that show off the paces of his “horse” (*Isherwood on Writing* 166).

In *Prater Violet*, “Isherwood” paints the portrait of Friedrich Bergmann, a character based on Berthold Viertel, with whom Isherwood worked on his first ever film script. Taking its name from the title of the film they are working on, *Prater Violet* uses the backdrop of film making to paint an in-depth portrait of Bergmann, an Austrian Jew directing a film in England as Europe descends into Nazism. As is the case with *Goodbye to Berlin*, then, the characters in *Prater Violet* are based on real people with fictionalised names. *Prater Violet* is clearly written in the same mode as *Goodbye to Berlin*: a fictional novel narrated by “Christopher Isherwood” constructed from Isherwood’s experiences. His characters, while based on real people, are openly fictionalised in name and in disposition.¹²

As *Prater Violet* is a novel in which its narrator learns to write effective dialogue, the heavy presence of stripped back conversations between characters – much of which is delivered with little to no description in between – serves to verify the narrator’s representation of events. This can be likened to *Lions and Shadows*, a published book about wanting to publish a book, as it too serves as its own verification. In effect, this verification does not make the narrator appear invisible, but rather an active participant in the proceedings of the text – a character whose self is being transformed by the events which are being represented.

As “Isherwood” works on the film, then, his figurative camera is therefore describing a real one:

¹² Even the name of the film, ‘Prater Violet,’ is fictionalised, as the name of the actual film Christopher Isherwood worked with Berthold Viertel on is called *Little Friend* (1934).

After the close-up, there is a tracking-shot, which will take time to prepare. The dolly, on which the camera will retreat before Toni's advance to the bedroom window, is apt to emit loud squeaks, audible to the microphone. It has to be oiled and tested. (*Prater Violet* 86)

Filmmaking tools are often described by "Isherwood" with the same impersonal, clinical precision as human beings. This highlights how "Isherwood" is just as detached from the cameras, dollies, and microphones as he is from the people with whom he spends his time. This can also be seen in his description of other characters during the filming process:

A long buzz from the sound-camera room. Roger puts on the headphones and reports, 'Sound-camera reloading, sir.' Bergmann gives a grunt and goes off into a corner to dictate a poem to Dorothy. Amidst all this turmoil, he still finds time to compose one, nearly every day. Fred Murray is shouting directions for the readjustment of various lamps on the spot-rail and gantry; the tweets, the snooks and the baby spots. Joyce is typing the continuity report, which contains the exact text of each scene, as acted, with details of footage, screen-time, hours of work and so forth. (76)

These descriptive passages are altogether impersonal; "Isherwood" operates as a self-effacing onlooker, achieving the same level of distance between observer and subject that a camera does. "Isherwood"'s fingerprints, it seems, cannot be found in these clinical and removed passages.

Nor can they be found at the beginning of the novel, as the first two and a half pages consist almost entirely of dialogue. The novel begins:

'Mr. Isherwood?'

'Speaking.'

'Mr. Christopher Isherwood?'

'That's me.'

'You know, we've been trying to contact you ever since yesterday afternoon.'

The voice at the other end of the wire was a bit reproachful.

'I was out.'

'You were out?' (Not altogether convinced.)

‘Yes.’

‘Oh . . . I see . . .’ (1)

The first pages of *Prater Violet* mark a stark difference from the way in which “Isherwood” begins his narration in *Lions and Shadows* and *Goodbye to Berlin*, as both of these texts begin with long descriptions of characters and setting. The reason for this stylistic difference is expressed in *Prater Violet* when “Isherwood” begins the script writing process alongside Bergmann:

I had always had a pretty good opinion of myself as a writer. But, during those first days with Bergmann, it was lowered considerably. I had flattered myself that I had imagination, that I could invent dialogue, that I could develop a character. I had believed that I could describe almost anything, just as a competent artist can draw you an old man’s face, or a table, or a tree. Well, it seemed that I was wrong. (30)

“Isherwood” details his struggles in coming up with effective (or believable) dialogue, painting Bergmann as the master from which he must learn. “Isherwood” alludes to this fact when he claims that Bergmann “talked so much that really nobody else got a word in edgewise” (*Isherwood on Writing* 192).

In effect, then, much of this novel consists of conversations between the narrator and Bergmann, in which “Isherwood”’s responses are very limited and reserved and Bergmann’s are lengthy, causing Bergmann to take up more of the narrative than the narrator himself. An example of such a conversation between Bergmann and “Isherwood” occurs when they are discussing whether or not the film is political:

‘It is political,’ Bergmann swept into the attack. ‘And the reason you refuse to see this, the reason you pretend it is uninteresting, is that it directly concerns yourself.’

‘I must say, I . . .’

‘Listen!’ Bergmann interrupted, imperiously. ‘The dilemma of Rudolf is the dilemma of the would-be revolutionary writer or artist, all over Europe. This writer is not to be confused with the true proletarian writer, such as we find in Russia. His economic background is bourgeois. He is accustomed to comfort, a

nice home, the care of a devoted slave who is his mother and also his jailer. From the safety and comfort of his home, he permits himself the luxury of romantic interest in the proletariat. He comes among the workers under false pretences, as in disguise. He flirts with Toni, the girl of the working class. But it is only a damn lousy act, a heartless masquerade . . .’

‘Well, if you like to put it in that way . . . But what about . . .?’

‘Listen! Suddenly Rudolf’s home collapses, security collapses. The investments which built comfortable life are made worthless by inflation. His mother has to scrub doorsteps. The young artist prince, with all his fine ideas, has to face grim reality. The play becomes bitter earnest. His relation to the proletariat is romantic no longer. He now has to make a choice. He is declassed, and he must find a new class. Does he really love Toni? Did his beautiful words mean anything? If so, he must prove that they did. Otherwise . . .’ (45-6)

Continuing this way for a few pages, “Isherwood” only replies to Bergmann with limited responses, withholding opinion, while Bergmann goes on long existential monologues. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, “Isherwood”’s portraits are generally more descriptive, and while often delivered with a manufactured objectivity, the narrator still has to process the setting and relay it back for the reader. But here, the narrator, for long sequences, merely acts as a recorder of Bergmann.

When asked about the narrator in *Prater Violet* in an interview in 1972, Isherwood shows an awareness of a cleaner separation that exists between this “Christopher Isherwood” and the setting he finds himself in:

As long as he was listening he was a perfectly efficient pick-up machine and scanning device, and nothing more. Therefore, it was all right because he wasn't pushed out into the middle of the stage, wasn't compelled to act, to behave as a character, so this problem didn't arise. (146)

While it is certainly true that “Christopher Isherwood” narrates with a detached, almost clinical precision for large portions of *Prater Violet*, this is intertwined with the deeply personal. This can be seen when “Isherwood” describes Bergmann as he directs a scene:

I watch him, throughout the take. It isn't necessary to look at the set; the whole scene is reflected in his face. He never shifts his eyes from the actors for an instant. He seems to control every gesture, every intonation, by a sheer effort of hypnotic power. His lips move, his face relaxes and contracts, his body is thrust forward or drawn back in its seat, his hands rise and fall to mark the phases of the action. Now he is coaxing Toni from the window, now warning against too much haste, now encouraging her father, now calling for more expression, now afraid the pause will be missed, now delighted with the tempo, now anxious again, now really alarmed, now reassured, now touched, now pleased, now very pleased, now cautious, now disturbed, now amused. Bergmann's concentration is marvellous in its singleness of purpose. It is the act of creation. (74-5)

"Isherwood"'s observation of Bergmann is voyeuristic, as this passage appears to implicitly compare his directing style to love-making. As a result, a tenderness comes across on the part of "Isherwood" towards Bergmann. The last sentence of the passage positions Bergmann as "Isherwood"'s mirror; like "Isherwood" in this moment, Bergmann is engaged in "the act of creation." While many of "Isherwood"'s other descriptions of Bergmann are narrated with a kind of mechanical precision, there are passages such as these, that use words like "hypnotic," "coaxing," "haste," "expression," "delighted," "anxious," "reassured," "touched," "cautious," "disturbed," "amused," "marvellous," "creation." Bergmann's animation deeply touches "Isherwood," and, by pointing to those attributes of Bergmann's that he finds so touching, the text more clearly displays for readers the nature of the "Isherwood" narrator.

As Bergmann's character is so heavily grounded in his real-life inspiration, Berthold Viertel, "Isherwood"'s affection for Bergmann directly constructs Isherwood's relationship with Viertel himself. In addition to describing his affection for Bergmann, "Isherwood" also provides a detailed explanation of his deepest fears through the relaying of his own dreams:

I dreamed that I was in a courtroom. This, I knew, was a political trial. Some communists were being sentenced to death. The State Prosecutor was a hard-faced, middle aged, blonde woman, with her hair twisted into a knot on the back of her head. She stood up, gripping one of the accused men by his coat collar, and marched him down the room towards the judge's desk. As they

advanced, she drew a revolver and shot the communist in the back. His knees sagged and his chin fell forward; but she dragged him on, until they faced the judge, and she cried, in a loud voice, 'Look! Here is the traitor!' (51)

“Isherwood”’s thoughts are indicative of the impending Nazism that shrouds the novel; like *Goodbye to Berlin*, the threat of fascism to Europe becomes greater as *Prater Violet* progresses. Interestingly, in this case, fascism is personified as a woman. This might represent an ingrained misogyny in “Isherwood,” as well as a revulsion towards heterosexuality.

It must be noted that there are very few occasions that “Isherwood” represents female characters in depth; aside from Polly in *Lions and Shadows*, Sally Bowles and Natalia Landauer in *Goodbye to Berlin*, and a brief representation of “Isherwood”’s mother at the beginning of *Prater Violet*, this dream passage marks the most impact a female character has on “Isherwood.” As female representation in these works is rare, it becomes all the more relevant for “Isherwood” that an unnamed woman is used as a metaphor for fascism in *Prater Violet*; “Isherwood”’s aversion to heterosexuality, at times, manifests itself as misogyny.

After this passage, “Isherwood” spends the next few pages detailing the rest of his peculiar and elaborate dream. The prominent representation of this dream, then, shows “Isherwood” thrusting himself onto centre stage – the antithesis of a self-effacing narrator. By associating “Isherwood”’s subconscious fears with the tangible threat of fascism¹³, the text firmly sets this narrator within a very real and traumatic historical experience – the same history that he experienced. “Christopher Isherwood,” then, very quickly becomes for readers the real Christopher Isherwood, his fictional experiences documenting a real personal history.

As is the case with *Lions and Shadows* and *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet* omits any direct reference to its narrator’s homosexuality. This “Isherwood”’s homosexuality, though, is more palpable. Upon meeting Bergmann for the first time, “Isherwood” immediately meets Chatsworth, the boss of the film company for which they both will work, who, in turn, introduces him to a man by the name of Sandy Ashmeade. “Isherwood,” however, already knows Ashmeade:

¹³ *Prater Violet* was published in 1945 and is set in the mid-1930s. For English readers at the time, then, their immediate past is World War Two.

Ashmeade smiled his smooth, pussycat smile. ‘Hullo, Isherwood,’ he said softly, in an amused voice.

Our eyes met. ‘What the hell are you doing here?’ I wanted to ask him. I was really quite shocked. Ashmeade, the poet. Ashmeade, the star of the Marlowe Society. Obviously, he was aware of what I was thinking. His light golden eyes smilingly refused to admit anything, to exchange any conspiratorial signal. (19)

While Ashmeade and his “light golden eyes” refuse to give anything away, this passage shows “Isherwood” exchanging a conspiratorial signal, implying his own homosexuality to those aware of it at the time. “Isherwood”’s reference to the Marlowe Society, a theatre club at Cambridge, is also an allusion to the narrator’s homosexuality. It is frequently claimed of the society’s namesake, Christopher Marlowe, that he was homosexual.¹⁴

Although unnamed in the text, there is a waiter who takes a “fancy” to “Isherwood”:

But there was a little waiter who, for some reason, had taken a fancy to me. We always exchanged a few words when I came in. One day, when I was sitting in a large group and had ordered, as usual, the cheapest item on the menu, he came up behind my chair and whispered, ‘Why not take the Lobster Newburg, sir? The other gentlemen have ordered it. There’ll be enough for one extra. I won’t charge you anything.’ (79)

As is often the case in Christopher Isherwood’s works, these small passages are often followed by a line break, which both emphasises the last sentence in the paragraph as well as provides a temporal space in which an implied event can occur. In this instance, the reader is left with a waiter whispering into “Isherwood”’s ear from behind, followed by a line break, which one can use to construct their own version of events based on their personal knowledge of Isherwood.

¹⁴ Although these claims are somewhat contentious, with literary critics disagreeing on the issue, homosexuality shrouds the name of Christopher Marlowe, thus mentioning the Marlowe Society at all serves as a subtle implication by “Isherwood.”

Even when “Isherwood” has been around sex, he has, up until this point, remained uninvolved, observing rather than acting. Sex, like other events, is something that this narrator has often represented in others and commented on, but, up until the last five pages of *Prater Violet*, he has never alluded to his own personal experiences in such situations. In the final pages of *Prater Violet*, though, this all changes as “Christopher Isherwood” delivers a soliloquy which is one of the most deeply personal passages in all of Isherwood’s writing. In it, “Isherwood” explores the concept of Love in relation to himself for the first time:

Love. At the very word, the taste, the smell of it, something inside me began to throb. Ah yes, Love . . . Love, at the moment, was J.

Love had been J. for the last month – ever since we met at that party. (118)

As unassuming as these few sentences may be, they mark the first time “Isherwood” ever directly places himself in a romantic relationship for the reader, a watershed moment for the character. By only giving the initial of his lover, “Isherwood” directly addresses his sexual relationship without explicitly expressing his homosexuality. “Isherwood” adds to this ambiguity by using first-person pronouns which don’t indicate gender:

Next week, or as soon as my work for Bulldog [film studio] was finished, we should go away together. To the South of France, perhaps. And it would be wonderful. We would swim. We would lie in the sun. We would take photographs. We would sit in the café. We would hold hands, at night, looking out over the sea from the balcony of our room. I would be so grateful, so flattered, and I would be damned careful not to show it. I would be anxious. I would be jealous. I would unpack my box of tricks, and exhibit them, once again. And, in the end (the end you never thought about), I would get sick of the tricks, or J. and very politely, tenderly, nostalgically, flatteringly, we would part. We would part, agreeing to be the greatest friends always. We would part, immune, in future, from that particular toxin, that special twinge of jealous desire, when one of us met the other, with somebody else, at another party. (118)

Not only does “Isherwood” place himself in a romantic, sexual relationship, he also explores his own inadequacies and faults within it. In this passage, “Isherwood” is neurotic, hyper-aware of his own caginess, anxious. Passages such as these make the narrator of *Prater Violet*, at times, the antithesis to the objective observer.

As the soliloquy continues, “Isherwood” provides readers with a thorough self-critique:

After J., there would be K. and L. and M. right down the alphabet. It’s no use being sentimentally cynical about this, or cynically sentimental. Because J. isn’t really what I want. J. has only the value of being now. J. will pass, the need will remain. The need to get back into the dark, into the bed, into the warm naked embrace, where J. is no more J. than K., L., or M. (119)

If one looks back at the foreword to *Lions and Shadows*, Isherwood explains that the reason he uses fictitious names for his characters is because he has used a novelist’s licence in drawing their portraits, thus these characters become caricatures rather than accurate or fair portrayals. If one applies this explanation to the characters in *Prater Violet*, then “J.,” “K.,” “L.,” and “M.” represent his fictional versions of real-life counterparts. “Isherwood” is obviously using a rhetoric device, as all of these initials appear in alphabetical order, but by not creating a fictitious name for his lover, instead referring to him with a simple abbreviation, “J.,” “Isherwood” implies that the brief portrait painted of this figure is of a different nature to the other, more fictitious, characters represented in this text. Presumably, “J.” is a man, but “Isherwood”’s use of an abbreviation conceals that fact from the unknowing reader, while revealing it to those in the know.

The observer, the “straight man for all the anecdotes,” is now choosing to explore his own inadequacies, pangs of jealousy, and fickle nature. This exploration, though, is a cagey one; while “Isherwood” shares deeply personal romantic and sexual feelings with readers, he is still reluctant to be completely honest, partially concealing his revelations behind ambiguity.

Despite this, “Isherwood” is now an explicitly sexual being, even going as far as talking about his own orgasm:

Where there is nothing but the nearness, and the painful hopelessness of clasping the naked body in your arms. The pain of hunger beneath everything.

And the end of all love-making, the dreamless sleep after the orgasm, which is like death. (119)

Not only is “Isherwood” a sexual being in this instance, but he is a narrator who compares the moments after sex to that of dying. For “Isherwood,” sex is life, quickly followed by the death of no one to touch.

“Isherwood”’s soliloquising does not just explore deeply personal views and feelings on love and sex, but also his bond with Bergmann. The soliloquy begins as he and Bergmann walk home after drinking to celebrate the end of filming:

What was he thinking about? *Prater Violet*, his wife, his daughter, myself, Hitler, a poem he would write, his boyhood, or tomorrow morning? How did it feel to be inside that stocky body, to look out of those dark, ancient eyes? How did it feel to be Friedrich Bergmann? (117)

In “Isherwood”’s portraiture, there is usually a significant distance maintained between narrator and subject, as he assesses the characteristics of each character, both physically and personally, piece by piece. In this case, though, “Isherwood” minimises this distance, instead questioning what lies inside the mind of his friend. Furthermore, these questions are left unanswered, showing how limited “Isherwood”’s powers of observation really are. Bergmann is not only a figure who shows “Isherwood”’s yearning for closeness, but one through which the narrator is able to provide an honest and harsh self-critique.

At one point of the novel, there is civil unrest in Bergmann’s home country of Austria. “Isherwood” describes the widely felt ambivalence to this event by those that surround Bergmann, with the director the only one who seems at all concerned for the wellbeing of his family. “Isherwood” uses the uncaring indifference shown by other characters towards Bergmann as a backdrop for his own self-critique:

I knew what I was supposed to feel, what it was fashionable for my generation to feel. We cared about everything: fascism in Germany and Italy, the seizure of Manchuria, Indian nationalism, the Irish question, the workers, the Negroes, the Jews. We had spread our feelings over the whole world; and I knew that mine were spread very thin. I cared – oh, yes, I certainly cared – about the

Austrian socialists. But did I care as much as I said I did, tried to imagine I did?
No, not nearly as much. (99)

This analytical self-criticism offers up another version of “Isherwood”’s self – one that would not be available unless divulged in this way to the reader. “Isherwood,” in this instance, then, is not at all an observer, rather, the central narrator to a story based around himself, using a close friend’s deepest troubles to analyse his own shortcomings and his apparent ambivalence to the plight of others.

“Isherwood”’s self-examination only intensifies as the novel draws to a close. Towards the start of the soliloquy, “Isherwood” narrates:

There is one question we seldom ask each other directly: it is too brutal. And yet it is the only question worth asking our fellow-travellers. What makes you go on living? Why don’t you kill yourself? Why is all this bearable? What makes you bear it? (117)

“Isherwood,” whose characters often commit suicide, echoes Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942): “There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide” (3)¹⁵.

At times, “Isherwood” is impersonal, observing events with detached precision. For most of *Prater Violet*, the narrator appears only to operate as a recorder of people, places and events, the one that observes a fictional world – one that is based on Christopher Isherwood’s real one – and relays it back to you, the reader. What one really receives by the end of this novel, though, is a deeply moving, personal account of a young man confronting himself with the hardest questions of all: “What makes you go on living? Why don’t you kill yourself?”

Could I answer that question about myself? No. Yes. Perhaps . . . I supposed, vaguely, that it was kind of a balance, a complex of tensions. You did whatever was next on the list. A meal to be eaten. Chapter eleven to be written. The telephone rings. You go somewhere in a taxi. There is one’s job. There are amusements. There are people. There are books. There are things to be bought

¹⁵ Despite this, Isherwood wrote in his diary on 13 May 1962, “Have just finished Camus’ *The Stranger*, which irritates me merely; Camus is such a dreary mind” (188).

in shops. There is always something new. There has to be. Otherwise, the balance would be upset, the tension would break. (117)

“Isherwood,” supposedly a faceless observer, shares with readers that which keeps him from ending his life; he must, as he puts it, do “whatever is next on the list.” This revelation also provides a greater context for how the “Isherwood” narrator operates more broadly. Criticised for the position he assumes as a camera, “Isherwood”’s meticulous observational style – what is “next on the list. A meal to be eaten. Chapter eleven to be written. The telephone rings. You go somewhere in a taxi” – is symptomatic of that which keeps him from killing himself. For “Isherwood,” his step-by-step recording of the world he inhabits is indicative of how the narrator must operate in order to keep on living. “Isherwood” does not choose to be a camera; if he is going to exist, he must be one.

In this soliloquy, “Isherwood” examines the deep personal connections, in this case with Bergmann, that keep him going:

For, beneath our disguises, and despite all the kind-unkind things we might ever say or think about each other, we knew. Beneath outer consciousness, two other beings, anonymous, impersonal, without labels, had met and recognised each other, and had clasped hands. He was my father. I was his son. And I loved him very much.

Bergman held out his hand.

‘Good night, my child,’ he said.

He went into the house. (121)

Isherwood’s father died on the Western Front in World War One. Setting aside *Kathleen and Frank* (1971), Isherwood’s father is never represented, nor is he the basis for any fictional representation, in all of Isherwood’s texts. As “Isherwood” never addresses the loss of his father, his acceptance of Bergmann as a father figure assumes a higher importance than it otherwise would. “Isherwood”’s relationship with Bergmann, then, creates for Isherwood an alternate personal history, one in which he gains, rather than loses, a father.

It is worth thinking of “Isherwood” in relation to W. B. Yeats’s “Mask.” In *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), Yeats describes Oscar Wilde as one who, through his art, wears a mask that makes him appear to be the opposite of his natural self. Even

in real life, Yeats claims, Wilde's "charm was acquired and systematized, a mask which he wore only when it pleased him" (22). Yeats later explains that what he has "called "the Mask" is an emotional antithesis to all that comes out of [our] internal nature. We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy" (75). The artist, according to Yeats, does not create their "emotional antithesis" to lie to readers, but to present readers or an audience with a new character entirely. As Isherwood positions "Isherwood" as his other, "anti-self," then, he can "begin to live"; Isherwood's historical self is conceived through "Isherwood," a life that begins and ends with the fictional stories he tells about his own life through his namesake narrator.

In *Prater Violet*, "Isherwood"'s apparent objectivity works to present a narrator who, at face value, is an unbiased observer, narrating a story that he is altogether not involved in. Upon further reflection, though, one sees a narrator who constructs a deep and introspective personal history of Christopher Isherwood. This narrator finds a father in Bergmann, and, in the process, details his daily struggle of living. His meticulous objectivity is merely a symptom of him clinging to life – the life of Christopher Isherwood. This "Isherwood" shares his deepest fears, dreams, loves, and that which makes him able to keep on living; if "Isherwood" is a camera, he is a living, feeling, subjective one, forever capturing a close-up shot of Isherwood's mind.

4. Painting a Self-Portrait: Reflections of the Narrator in *Down There on a Visit*

I seldom thought of Ambrose as a person. Most of the time he was simply a consciousness that was aware of me, a mirror in which I saw my reflection – but dimly, and only if I made big, easily recognisable gestures.

– “Christopher Isherwood,” *Down There on a Visit*, 1962

I have assumed, over the course of this thesis, that each “Christopher Isherwood” narrator is merely a continuation of the same character. I have done this to clearly separate Christopher Isherwood and “Christopher Isherwood” from one another. The purpose of this separation has been to show how Isherwood uses “Christopher Isherwood” to construct his own historical identity through these texts. Discussing the “Christopher Isherwood” narrator as one that maintains a continuity of character is also a direct result of the way he is represented in the texts examined thus far; the nature of the “Christopher Isherwood” character is consistent across *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, and *Prater Violet*. The only discernible differences between each of these “Christopher Isherwoods” are the number of their omissions and the extent to which they have been revealed to the reader. The same, however, cannot be said for each of the “Christopher Isherwoods” that appear in the four chapters in *Down There on a Visit* respectively.

English novelist and literary critic Phillip Hensher remarks of *Down There on a Visit* that “the novel seems like four novellas, and its narrator seems to have four different faces” (xiv). As Hensher points out, the back cover of the original US edition of the book expresses a similar sentiment: “here four episodes are connected by four narrators, all of whom are called “Christopher Isherwood”” (xv).

Like *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Prater Violet*, *Down There on a Visit* sees “Isherwood” attempt to paint the portrait of his fellow characters. “Isherwood” uses each chapter to paint the portrait of just one character, instead of trying to intertwine and connect them like he does in *Goodbye to Berlin*. This is, in part, explained in *Christopher and His Kind*, as the narrator examines why Isherwood failed to publish

what was intended to be his epic novel, *The Lost*: “there [were] far too many [characters] and the packing was too tight. They couldn’t move without getting in each other’s way” (182). *Down There on a Visit* – fragments of which were written in Isherwood’s attempt to write *The Lost* – separates these main characters, making sure they have no chance of “getting in each other’s way” (182).¹⁶ While there are other interesting characters that exist on the periphery of the true focus of each chapter, no other character ever overshadows each “Isherwoods” main subject. The opening paragraph of *Down There on a Visit*, though, insists that there is a different, simpler reason for the separation of these characters:

I always used to think of [Mr Lancaster] as an isolated character. Taken alone, he is less than himself. To present him entirely, I realize I must show how our meeting was the start of a new chapter in my life, indeed a whole series of chapters. And I must go on to describe some of the characters in those chapters. They are all, with one exception, strangers to Mr Lancaster [...] If he could ever have met Ambrose, or Geoffrey, or Maria, or Paul—but no, my imagination fails! And yet, through me, all these people are involved with each other, however much they might have hated to think so. And so they are all going to have to share the insult of each other’s presence in this book. (3)

Unlike *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, or *Prater Violet*, this novel does not open with “Isherwood”’s narration. Instead, one is met with narration from the voice of the implied sensibility behind the text’s construction – Isherwood’s own. The phrase, “To present him entirely, I realize I must show how our meeting was the start of a new chapter of my life,” separates the narrative voice from the events represented in the text; this voice belongs to the one who has written the following pages, not the “Christopher Isherwood” character narrating them. By then referring to the events represented as “the start of a new chapter in my life,” the narrator makes it clear that “Christopher Isherwood”’s experiences, which are to follow, are strictly autobiographical. In just the opening paragraph, then, this narrator has both

¹⁶ The same could be said of *Prater Violet*, a work that only focuses on one character, Friedrich Bergmann.

separated himself from “Christopher Isherwood” and implied that his experiences are representative of his own.

According to Isherwood, the reason these characters are separated between chapters is because they are “strangers” to one another – this is how they existed in Isherwood’s life: “through me, all these people are involved with each other [...]” (3). Isherwood constructs his representation of his relationship with these characters as an accurate portrayal of real-life interactions. This creates for Isherwood a personal history grounded in his own autobiography. The phrase, “my imagination fails,” further verifies the representation of these characters as true reflections of their respective real-life autobiographical bases.

Hensher points out that “Isherwood took great care to give each episode, separated in time, a sharply different style and approach” (xv). One could certainly make the case that the discrepancies in tone between these four novellas and their narrators are no different from that which exists between *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, and *Prater Violet*. The difference in this case, though, is that the respective “Isherwoods” and their characters share a front and back cover, making the stark difference in style and tone between them all the more apparent for readers.

The first chapter paints the portrait of Mr Lancaster, an old friend of the “Isherwood” family, kindly referred to by Kathleen, “Isherwood”’s mother, as “cousin Alexander” (4).¹⁷ Set in 1928 Berlin, this “Christopher Isherwood” is the youngest namesake narrator that appears in this text– a fact that is clear in his first physical description of Mr Lancaster:

His head was so small that it seemed feminine. He had very large ears, a broad, wet mustache, and a peevish mouth. He looked sulky, frigid, dyspeptic. His nose was long and red, with a suggestion of moisture at the end of it. And he wore a high, hard collar and awkward black boots. No – I could find no beauty in him. All my earlier impressions were confirmed. I remind myself with approval of one of my friend Hugh Weston’s dicta: ‘All ugly people are wicked.’
(14)

¹⁷ Interestingly, both Christopher Isherwood and “Christopher Isherwood” both have a mother called Kathleen.

Even though this “Christopher Isherwood” narrates with the same eloquence and command of language that the other namesakes do, by introducing Lancaster’s “small” head, “large ears,” “wet mustache,” and “peevisish mouth,” his youthful contempt for the older Lancaster becomes at once apparent. By assessing Lancaster as “sulky, frigid, dyspeptic” and remarking that his clothes are “hard” and “awkward,” “Isherwood” moves from the material to the personal, exhibiting an aversion to those older than him that the other “Isherwoods” do not. Announcing that he can “find no beauty” in Lancaster, “Isherwood” then directs readers to his real motive, the source of his hatred for Lancaster: “All ugly people are wicked.” For this “Isherwood,” signs of age are ugly, and such ugliness can only be found in the wicked. It is not just the case that this narrator believes “All ugly people are wicked,” but that all old people are ugly, and this ugliness is indicative of a deeper, more sinister wickedness.

“Isherwood”’s hatred of Lancaster is unrelenting, with the narrator eventually taking pleasure in humiliating him by sabotaging the motor of his boat, forcing Lancaster to sail back to land:

The sail lasted all the rest of the day. There was very little wind, and Mr Lancaster seemed to be making the worst possible use of it, for nearly every boat on the river passed us. He steered, glumly [...] Finally we were taken in tow by a pleasure steamer. Mr Lancaster had to accept this courtesy because it was beginning to get dark, but I could see how it humiliated him. A man and a woman, neither of them slender or young, were sitting in the stern of the steamer, invisible to the other passengers but right in front of us. Throughout the trip they made love with abandon. And this, too, was a sort of humiliation for Mr Lancaster, because the lovers evidently felt that his reactions weren’t worth worrying about. I felt that I was on the side of the lovers, and smiled at them approvingly; but they weren’t bothering about my reactions, either. As for myself, I was in a wonderful mood. The semi-deliberate ditching of the outboard engine had discharged all my aggression, like a great orgasm. (48-9)

This inexperienced “Isherwood” is yet to move to Berlin, yet to live freely as a homosexual. Thus, the humiliation of Lancaster, “Isherwood”’s experienced acquaintance, is as close as he is going to get, at this point in his life, to a “great orgasm” (49).

While “Isherwood” never directly addresses where his sexual frustration and subsequent release through Lancaster’s humiliation comes from, the narrator of *Christopher and His Kind* does comment on Christopher Isherwood’s trip to Bremen in 1928, the autobiographical basis for the ‘Mr Lancaster’ chapter:

Christopher was suffering from an inhibition, then not unusual among upper-class homosexuals; he couldn’t relax sexually with a member of his own class or nation. He needed a working-class foreigner. He had become clearly aware of this when he went to Germany in May 1928, to stay with an elderly cousin who was the British consul at Bremen. He had no love adventures while there, but he looked around him and saw what he was missing. (3)

This “Isherwood” knows “what he [is] missing,” conscious of his desire for sexual freedom but yet to obtain it. In addition to his sexual frustration, the inexperienced “Isherwood” exhibits less awareness than other “Isherwoods”. Treating those older than him with a cold, unflinching meanness, “Mr Lancaster”’s “Isherwood” is shocked when this treatment is returned. This can be seen in his last interaction with Lancaster:

He just didn’t seem particularly interested in my existence. ‘Give my regards to your mother’ was all he said when we parted. I felt hurt by his coldness. However little *I* might care, I was still sincerely surprised when my indifference was returned. (52)

After treating Lancaster with indifference throughout the whole chapter, “Isherwood” appears hurt when this indifference is returned, culminating in the petulant qualification, “However little *I* might care.” Here “Isherwood” displays a lack of tact and social awareness.

The last few pages of ‘Mr Lancaster’ culminate in an “Isherwood” looking towards Berlin, set for the next ‘chapter’ of his life:

Sooner or later, I should get there. I was sure of that. Already I had begun to teach myself German, by one of those learn-it-in-three-months methods. While riding on buses, I recited irregular verbs. To me they were like those incantations in *The Arabian Nights* which will make you master of a paradise of pleasures. (53)

Like the “Isherwood” of *Lions and Shadows*, this narrator is determined to get to Berlin, already constructing it as an elaborate fantasy.

Hensher describes the narrator of the ‘Mr Lancaster’ chapter as “inexperienced in life, but in love with his own newly-exercised powers of expression” (xv). It would seem, then, that Mr Lancaster – an old, out of touch and, at times, grumpy man – is the antithesis of this young narrator, rather than one who reflects this “Isherwood”’s personality. At the beginning of the chapter, before the two characters even meet one another, “Isherwood” says

As far as I was concerned, everyone over forty belonged, with a mere handful of honorable exceptions, to an alien tribe, hostile by definition but in practice ridiculous rather than formidable. (4)

This is the first time in the chapter we see “Isherwood”’s own hostility to those older than him, as the narrator goes on to claim that only those of his “own age” appear to be “better than half-alive” (4). Just as Lancaster belongs “to an alien tribe,” “Isherwood” too belongs to his. Through Lancaster, “Isherwood” constructs an opposition, consistently positioning himself as the other.

“Isherwood”’s desire to humiliate Lancaster is also a reflection, stemming from his own humiliation. During their first meeting, when they are in England before “Isherwood” heads to Germany to stay with Lancaster, “Isherwood” finds that

Mr Lancaster proved to be every bit as grotesque as I had expected. Nevertheless, hard as I tried, I couldn’t be indifferent to him; for, from the moment he arrived, he managed to enrage and humiliate me. (4)

“Isherwood” becomes every bit as insufferable to Lancaster as Lancaster is, at first, to “Isherwood.”

While the humiliation of Lancaster is the climax of the chapter, its conclusion is far more sinister; months after “Isherwood”’s departure from Germany he learns that Mr Lancaster has committed suicide:

I suppose I should gradually have forgotten all about Mr Lancaster if he hadn’t regained my interest in the most dramatic way possible. Toward the end of November that same year he shot himself. (54)

The desolate scene of Lancaster shooting himself is as an act that regains the narrator's "interest in the most dramatic way possible." An act that should presumably traumatise or bring devastation to a narrator is met by "Isherwood" with renewed interest and excitement; with this, Isherwood delivers a harsh and honest critique of the young namesake. "Isherwood," though, does not stop there, going on to commend Lancaster's final act of defiance:

Mr Lancaster's act impressed me a great deal. I strongly approved of suicide on principle, because I thought of it as an act of protest against society. I wanted to make a saga around Mr Lancaster's protest. I wanted to turn him into a romantic figure. But I couldn't. I didn't know how. (54)

Approving of Lancaster's suicide, "Isherwood" reveals that he "wanted to turn him into a romantic figure." By directly linking his characters to their autobiographical inspiration – in this case his cousin¹⁸ – Isherwood is able to use these romanticised, largely fictitious figures to create his own past.

"Isherwood" is a character with a complete history, constructing for readers the historical identity of Christopher Isherwood. Looking back on his relationship with Lancaster, "Isherwood" observes:

I think I see now that Mr Lancaster's invitation to me was his last attempt to re-establish relations with the outside world. But of course it was already much too late. If my visit had any decisive effect on him, it can only have been to show him what it was that prevented him from having any close contact with anybody. He had lived too long inside his sounding box, listening to his own reverberations, his epic song of himself. He didn't need me. He didn't need any kind of human being; only an imaginary nephew-disciple to play a supporting part in his epic. After my visit he created one. (55)

Beginning this passage with, "I think I see now," the narrator distances himself from his past, yet, at the same time, assumes ownership of his experiences. With *Down There on a Visit* being published in 1962, "Isherwood" is presented to readers as a

¹⁸ While "Isherwood"'s mother insisted on referring to Lancaster as a cousin, he was actually "the stepson of ["Isherwood"'s] maternal grandmother's brother-in-law" (4).

character with a layered identity. As he expresses differences between his present and past self, “Isherwood” assumes the position of Isherwood – looking back on his life, removed, able to reflect objectively on the situation. It is apparent, in this instance, that the namesake narrator, like all of us, and like Isherwood, changes over time. Isherwood can thus construct his past self from the safe distance of the present through a fictional narrator with whom he shares his name.

The above description of Lancaster can also be used to describe “Isherwood”; he too “lives inside his sounding box, listening to his own reverberations, his epic song of himself.” Lancaster, who “didn’t need any kind of human being; only an imaginary nephew-disciple to play a supporting part in his epic,” creates his own “Isherwood” just as “Isherwood” creates his own “Lancaster” in *Down There on a Visit*. “Isherwood,” the “nephew disciple,” constructs Lancaster, an uncle-oppressor figure, one who he must defy.

In a conversation with another character, Waldemar, it becomes clear that “Isherwood”’s construction of Lancaster as an opposition is quite far from the truth:

Waldemar, naturally, knew very little about Mr Lancaster’s death. But he told me something which amazed me. He told me that Mr Lancaster had often spoken of me, after I had left, to people in the office. Waldemar had heard him say that I had written a book, that it had been a failure in England because the critics were all fools, but that I should certainly be recognised one day as one of the greatest writers of my time. Also he had always referred to me as his nephew.

‘I believe he was really fond of you,’ said Waldemar, sentimentally. ‘He never had any son of his own, did he? Who knows, Christoph, if you’d been there to look after him, he might have been alive today!’ (55)

Just as Isherwood creates a duality of selfhood for his narrator, Lancaster has two opposing selves – the one “Isherwood” perceives, and the one Waldemar perceives. Not only do these two selves reflect the duality of the narrator, but they allude to the possibility of another Lancaster, one that “Isherwood” did not perceive. This forces “Isherwood” to consider the possibility that if he had “been there to look after [Lancaster], he might have been alive today!”

Doubting his initial perception of Lancaster, the narrator considers the possibility that Lancaster's abrasiveness may have stemmed from his love life, or lack thereof:

I also touched on the subject of Mr Lancaster's love life in talking to my mother. She smiled vaguely and murmured, 'Oh, I hardly think *that* was the trouble.' I then learned from her what she hadn't thought even worth telling me before—that Mr Lancaster had actually been married for a few months, after the war, but that his wife had left him and they had separated legally. 'Because,' said my mother dryly, 'Cousin Alexander wasn't—so one was given to understand—at all adequate as a husband.' This revelation of Mr Lancaster's impotence quite shocked me. (53)

"Isherwood" then implies that Lancaster's failure to consummate his marriage was the very reason he was alone "inside his sounding box" for such a long period of time. Here, then, Isherwood's namesake draws an obvious link between Lancaster's impotence and his eventual suicide; for "Isherwood," it seems, impotence is death. For an "Isherwood" who is yet to move to Berlin and freely experience life sexually, he has had impotence somewhat forced upon him. Mirrors of one another, Lancaster dies, "Isherwood" prepares to move to Berlin; for either character, to live without sex is not an option.

The next chapter is set, for the most part, on a Greek Island in 1932. The "Isherwood" narrator of the second chapter, 'Ambrose,' is four years older, fresh from the devastating experience of living through Germany's fall to fascism. As a result, the narrator of the second chapter is more cynical, choosing to paint the portrait of Ambrose in a removed and matter-of-fact tone. In the process, "Isherwood" also paints himself in a more cynical light.

The "Isherwood" narrator of the first chapter is frustrated at those around him, yearning to express himself, not thinking of how he could be wrong in any given circumstance. In contrast, the "Isherwood" narrator of the second chapter is awash with guilt, having just left Germany and all those he knew in it:

But now the Nazis are in power. And now I have to admit to myself that I have never been seriously involved, never been a real partisan; only an excited spectator. When I first came to Berlin, I came quite irresponsibly, for a thrill. I

was the naughty boy who had enjoyed himself that afternoon at the flat of Waldemar's *Braut*, and wanted more. However, having thoroughly explored the Berlin night life and begun to get tired of it, I grew puritanical. I severely criticized those depraved foreigners who visited Berlin in search of pleasure. They were exploiting the starving German working class, I said, and turning them into prostitutes. My indignation was perfectly sincere, and even justified; Berlin night life, when you saw it from behind the scenes, was pitiful enough. But have I really changed underneath? Aren't I as irresponsible as ever, running away from the situation like this? Isn't it somehow a betrayal? I don't know. I don't know. I don't want to think about all that, just now. I'm bored with feeling guilty. And why should I feel guilty if I don't choose to? Who decides my guilt except myself? Who tells me to be responsible for Germany? Who has the right to? No—I can't discuss this matter. I'm too confused. I feel like a cupboard in which all the clothes are mixed up; everything has got to be thrown out on the floor and sorted. (68-9)

The "Isherwood" readers are met with at the beginning of the second chapter, then, is not an inexperienced narrator full of excitement for Berlin, but one jaded by his experience there. Having gone to Berlin in search of pleasure, "Isherwood" is now deeply critical of those attempting to do the same, thus showing a contempt for his past self. This "Isherwood" does not like who he was and is therefore deeply suspicious of the person he is now, unlike how he was in the previous chapter. This "Isherwood" does not despise the older generations, but rather despises himself.

As the chapter progresses, "Isherwood" becomes more insular, closing himself off from the very world he sought to experience in Berlin – if he does not experience the world, then he cannot feel guilty in relation to it:

The news was terrible; and, by this time, it's probably worse. There may easily be war with Hitler this year, or next. I say this and believe it, but somehow I can no longer quite care. When we go into Chalkis, I no longer worry about the wireless or ask Ambrose to translate the newspaper headlines. We never take a newspaper in this island. Ambrose goes on talking about anarchism, fascism, communism, etc., but he uses the words only in reference to his world, not to the one outside. And now I am beginning to live, more and more, in Ambrose's

world. When I admit this to myself, I feel I ought to feel guilty. But I don't. (99-100)

Like Ambrose, "Isherwood" also talks "about anarchism, fascism, communism"; like Ambrose, "Isherwood" uses these words only "in reference to his world, not to the one outside." As this "Isherwood" becomes more insular – symbolic of the remote island he is on – he looks inward, expressing that however much one may care about an issue, any issue at all, one can only care insofar as it concerns oneself. Despite living in Berlin, Hitler did not have an impact on "Isherwood" as he did on the German working-class boys he went to Berlin to have sex with; unlike his lovers "Isherwood" could leave at a moment's notice. The "Isherwood" narrator of 'Mr Lancaster' is unaware of this dichotomy, believing in earnest that he truly cares and feels all things that concern him. The "Isherwood" of the 'Ambrose' chapter, though, is concerned with his own "guilt" much as he is in *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Prater Violet*; living in Berlin, then, bestows upon "Isherwood" a sense of heightened awareness.

As is the case with his initial description of Lancaster, each of "Isherwood"'s introductory paragraphs of his main characters directly reflect the type of narrator this iteration of the namesake is. Ambrose, the subject character of the second chapter, is no exception:

Ambrose was about my age, I supposed; he looked both older and younger. His figure was slim and erect and there was a boyishness in his quick movements. But his dark-skinned face was quite shockingly lined, as though life had mauled him with its claws. His hair fell picturesquely about his face in wavy black locks which were already streaked with grey. There was a gentle surprise in the expression of his dark brown eyes. He could become frantically nervous at an instant's notice—I saw that; with his sensitive nostrils and fine-drawn cheekbones, he had the look of a horse which may bolt without warning. And yet there was a kind of inner contemplative repose in the midst of him. It made him touchingly beautiful. He could have posed for a portrait of a saint. (70-1)

Although he is the same age as the narrator, Ambrose appears both old and young, boyish in his movements. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Christopher Isherwood is

classified by Magnus Hirschfeld¹⁹ as “infantile” – a classification that Isherwood is far from offended by: “Christopher didn’t object to this epithet; he interpreted it as ‘boyish’” (27). Ambrose’s “boyishness” reflects the narrator’s. “Isherwood” then describes Ambrose’s face as one that looks “as though life had mauled him with its claws.” Having just left Hitler’s Berlin, “Isherwood” further paints Ambrose in his own image. Ambrose, who looks like “a horse which may bolt without warning” mirrors this “Isherwood” narrator, who, ironically, is the one who eventually leaves Ambrose on a Greek island all alone at the end of the chapter.

Ambrose is based on Isherwood’s real-life friend, Francis Turville-Petre. Reflecting on the above description of Ambrose in *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood writes, “This is true to life, more or less, except for the last three sentences, which relate only to the fictitious part of Ambrose” (24). When Isherwood writes, “the fictitious part of Ambrose,” he implies that there are essential parts to Ambrose that are fictional. Furthermore, this “fictitious part of Ambrose” – his “inner contemplative repose,” that he “could have posed for a portrait of a saint” – reflect the disposition of this “Christopher Isherwood,” one who, over the course of the chapter, retreats inwardly.

The way Ambrose speaks, and what he speaks about, reflect the narrator’s tone also. On one occasion, Ambrose begins discussing what he would do if he were to become king:

‘Of course, when we do get into power, we shall have to begin by reassuring everybody. We must make it clear that there’ll be absolutely no reprisals. Actually, they’ll be amazed to find how tolerant we are . . . I’m afraid we shan’t be able to make heterosexuality actually legal, at first—there’d be too much of an outcry. One’ll have to let at least twenty years go by, until resentment has died down. But meanwhile it’ll be winked at, of course, as long as it’s practiced in decent privacy. I think we shall even allow a few bars to be opened for people with those unfortunate tendencies, in certain quarters of the larger cities. They’ll have to be clearly marked, with police at the doors to warn foreigners

¹⁹ The head of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (the Institute of Sex Research but called by Isherwood the ‘Hirschfeld Institute’).

what kind of places these are—just so that no one shall find himself there by mistake and see something which might upset him. Naturally, from time to time, some tourist with weak nerves may have to be rushed to hospital, suffering from shock. We'll have a psychologist on hand to explain to him that people like that do exist, through no fault of their own, and that we must feel sympathy for them and try to find scientific ways of reconditioning them . . .'
(103)

“Isherwood”'s newfound home of Berlin was the Weimar Republic which offered him homosexual liberation – the kind of life that he could not have in England. Now, though, this very same Berlin is controlled by Hitler, and many homosexuals and other marginalised groups are being placed in prison or concentration camps. Through Ambrose, then, Isherwood constructs a mirror of “Isherwood” while still allowing him to play the part of the camera-observer, listening, rather than expressing. This “Isherwood” is choosing to snap a shot of Ambrose's words, and in doing so constructs his narrator, the one sitting behind the camera, in the image of his main character.

Finally, Ambrose has within him the same sense of loneliness and pessimism that “Isherwood” does; just as Lancaster is indifferent to “Isherwood”'s departure in the previous chapter, Ambrose too reacts with ambivalence when the narrator announces he is leaving the island:

‘Actually,’ I said, speaking slowly and deliberately, ‘I suppose there's really nothing to stop me leaving tomorrow.’

I had felt sure that this would rouse Ambrose to make at least some kind of protest. But he merely shrugged his shoulders slightly. ‘Just as you like, lovey.’ His indifference shocked me out of my self-control for a moment. ‘But Ambrose,’ I began in my dismay, ‘don't you—?’ I stopped myself in time. I'd been about to say, ‘Don't you care if I stay or not?’ Now I changed it to, ‘Don't you mind being alone here—with nobody but the boys?’

Ambrose looked at me gently as if reproaching me for the stupidity of the question. ‘But one's always alone, ducky. Surely you know that.’ (140-1)

Ambrose's appearance, views, and disposition mirror the narrator's. While “Isherwood” surrounds himself with eccentric characters, he, like Ambrose, is always

completely alone, projecting himself onto all of those around him – the only character in his own story.

The “Christopher Isherwood” narrator of the third chapter, titled ‘Waldemar,’ is six years older than the previous one. Set in England in 1938, this “Isherwood” has grown bitter towards the world, and particularly England. He is colder, more cynical, meaner. Back in England and surrounded by the very institutions he despised, and subsequently fled, this “Isherwood” is one that is frustrated with his own class and nation. On the first page of the chapter, “Isherwood” arrives in England by ship. As he describes the White Cliffs of Dover, his resentment of the English, and particularly his own class, becomes clear:

How tiny it all seems! No more than a cranny in the old cheese cliffs; a drab doll town with the stubborn little castle standing guard above it, in a light summer drizzle. Oh, the staring, unblinking, uncompromising familiarity of it all! The loud, rude squawking of the gulls! How compactly the English sit, confronting their visitors: here we are, take us or leave us – this is where you’ll do things our way, not yours. Byron saw the last of them here. So did Wilde. You say goodbye to them forever and go away to fame and death among the dagoes, and they couldn’t care less. Oh, yes, when your name has been a household word everywhere else for the past two generations, they’ll concede that they used to know you – slightly. But they’ll never admit that they were wrong about you or about anything. They are indomitable, incorrigible, and so utterly self-satisfied that they no longer have to raise their voices or wave their arms when they address the lesser breeds. If you have any criticisms, they have one unanswerable answer: you can stay off our island. (145)

The “indomitable,” “incorrigible,” and “utterly self-satisfied” English embody all that “Isherwood” has grown to hate. Despite all that has happened, our narrator finds himself back there, living in his mother’s home. The term, “lesser breeds,” is an allusion to Rudyard Kipling’s *Recessional* (1897). Despite what some have asserted, Kipling’s line, “lesser breeds without the Law” is not a reference to indigenous peoples living under imperial rule, but “European imperialists (probably German) less responsible than the British” (Park 547). “Isherwood,” having lived in Germany, and in other parts of Europe, is addressing the attitude the English have of the very people with which he has spent much of his time; the inclusion of “lesser breeds,”

then, is a sardonic shot at what “Isherwood” perceives as the condescending middle-class attitude that symbolises England. To this “Isherwood” – one who has lived in Berlin, taken male lovers, travelled around Europe, made films, published novels, lived on a Greek island – England seems “tiny.” A country that was once home, once too overwhelming to contend with, is now made up of “old cheese cliffs,” a “stubborn little castle,” “summer drizzle,” and the “loud, rude squawking of the gulls.” Worse for this “Isherwood,” though, is that “they’ll never admit that they were wrong about you or about anything.”

This “Isherwood”’s unrelenting frustration escalates over the course of the chapter. First directing his attention at the landscape and the people, “Isherwood” then moves to more directly address his aversion to the social attitudes of middle-class England:

Ever since I’ve been able to talk and read they have been telling me the rules of their game. And they’ve been insinuating, until lately, with sneering smiles, ‘But, of course you could never play it.’ And, until lately, I’ve been mentally answering them, ‘I could if I wanted to, but I don’t; I wouldn’t be caught dead playing it.’ That wasn’t quite convincing, even to me. But now I’ve changed my defense into attack. I’ve accepted their challenge, I’ve played their game and I’ve won, even according to their own rules. I’m a success – which is all they really long to be, and mostly aren’t. (148)

Turning “defense into attack,” this “Isherwood” uses his success as a weapon against the very people who told him that he had failed: the English. While younger “Isherwoods”²⁰ resist the “family, the church, and especially the school, which like other members of the Auden group [Isherwood] perceives in Orwellian terms as a paradigm for totalitarianism,” this “Isherwood” accepts “their challenge, [plays] their game and [wins], even according to their own rules” (Kamel 163). The narrator’s deep-seated cynicism and anger cross over into his personal life as well, colouring his judgments of friends and their relationships. On one such occasion, his friend, Dorothy, tells him about a German boy she has fallen in love with:

²⁰ This includes the namesake narrators of *Lions and Shadows* and of the ‘Mr Lancaster’ chapter in *Down There on a Visit*.

‘He’s a proletarian boy. A German. I met him in Paris.’

‘So he’s a refugee?’

‘Well—in a way. He isn’t Jewish.’

‘A Communist?’

‘No. Not a party member. But he sympathizes . . . Christopher—I’m in love. It’s the first time I ever was. I’ve never met anyone like him before. He’s so absolutely honest. He makes other people seem—not quite real, somehow—’

‘What does he do for a living?’ I asked, beginning to suspect this absolutely honest proletarian. Long before meeting Dorothy in Berlin, I had myself gone through a short attack of worker worship; and I had been acutely impatient of it ever since my cure. (152)

In this instance, not only is “Isherwood” critical of his English friend, but of his own past, citing his brief “attack of worker worship” as the cause for his suspicion. This “Isherwood,” then, not only resents his own class – which he tried to distance himself from – but also those rebelling against it, such as Dorothy, an avowed communist and opponent of conservative English aristocracy. This “Isherwood,” one who, ironically, seems to despise the British for their condescending attitudes, condescends towards almost every character or group of people he encounters in this chapter. By his own standards, then, this “Isherwood” could not be more completely British, as he even seems to view Waldemar as a less responsible, unrefined, working-class German boy.

Waldemar, the only character who appears in each of the four chapters of *Down There on a Visit*, is the “proletarian boy” with whom Dorothy falls in love – a happy coincidence, but one that is entirely fictitious. Waldemar stays with “Isherwood” on the Greek island in the previous chapter and, while it is never explicitly represented, it is implied that they are lovers. The “Isherwood” narrator of this chapter is older, nastier, more cynical and, above all else, condescending; Waldemar, the young German working-class boy, allows Isherwood to position “Isherwood” as the older, more knowledgeable narrator.

This chapter begins with Dorothy waiting for Waldemar to arrive by ship to England. As alluded to earlier, this situation is a fictionalised version of what

happened when Isherwood tried to bring his real-life lover, Heinz, to England.²¹ In *Down There on a Visit*, “Isherwood” stumbles upon Dorothy as she waits at the rail for her German boyfriend to arrive. When he does, “Isherwood” realises that it is Waldemar, and that, among other things, he has changed his name to Eugen. “Isherwood,” though, still insists on referring to him as Waldemar. Once Waldemar has arrived, “Isherwood” narrates:

Dorothy was talking to Waldemar urgently in German; she still spoke it very fluently, I noticed, with a strong Berlin accent. ‘Now listen, you go through that entrance where it says “Aliens.” We’ll be waiting for you to exit.’

‘You mean, I have to go alone?’

‘Eugen—I’ve explained to you a hundred times already—it’s much better this way. It’ll save you so many explanations. Besides, they’ll insist on interviewing you by yourself.’

‘But what’ll I tell them?’

‘Just answer all their questions quite truthfully. The readier you are to answer, the less they’ll ask you.’

‘But I may not understand what they say.’

‘Don’t be an idiot!’ Dorothy’s voice trembled—she was obviously making a frantic effort to get him through this ordeal by the sheer force of her will. ‘They speak German.’

‘They do?’ This only seemed to dismay Waldemar all the more. He looked with resentful appeal at both of us. Then, forlornly, he turned and went toward the aliens’ door and entered. (155-6)

Waldemar’s stubbornness comes across as childlike, with Dorothy having to repeat, again and again, exactly what he must do to get into England. Unfortunately for Waldemar, he is not allowed into the country. After pointing out that “there seems to be some discrepancy between [Waldemar and Dorothy] with regard to class,” the immigration officer asks:

²¹ Isherwood tried to bring Heinz to England, attempting to find refuge for him from Hitler’s Germany where he would have been forced to fight in the army or be put in prison as a homosexual.

‘And you’re quite sure that this young man isn’t coming to England as a domestic servant, and not as a friend on a social visit? You refuse to admit that he’s coming to work for your family, without a labor permit, in defiance of immigration laws?’

‘That’s ridiculous.’

‘Then perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling us what he is going to do?’ The official leaned right back in his chair, as though he had checkmated us and could now relax. ‘You see, this young man has already admitted to us that he is not a domestic servant, that his passport in fact contains a misstatement and is therefore an attempt to deceive His Majesty’s Immigration Service . . .’ (160)

This altercation is based on one the real Christopher Isherwood had with customs officials when he tried to get Heinz into England. In this instance, then, Dorothy takes Isherwood’s place, and “Isherwood” takes the place, as he so often does, of the innocent bystander, observing without actively taking part. In real life, this bystander was W. H. Auden.

The portion of *Christopher and His Kind* that represents Heinz’s rejection from England reads remarkably similarly to Waldemar’s interaction with “His Majesty’s Immigration Service”:

On their table lay Kathleen’s letter of invitation, side by side with Heinz’s passport containing that damning word *Hausdiener*. Why, they wanted to know, should a lady like Mrs. Isherwood, the mother of a gentleman like himself, invite a young working-class foreigner to her home? Could it be that she herself planned to employ Heinz—without a work permit and perhaps on substandard wages? (165)

Like Dorothy in *Down There on a Visit*, Christopher Isherwood is accused of bringing Heinz to England to work illegally; like Dorothy and Waldemar, the discrepancy of class between Christopher and Heinz is also a point of contention. While the ‘Waldemar’ chapter makes it appear that Waldemar is Heinz Neddymeyer’s fictional stand-in, the narrator of *Christopher and His Kind* claims otherwise:

Waldemar, the boy who arrives from Germany with 'Isherwood,' isn't in the least a portrait of Heinz; he is a mere second edition of the character of Otto Nowak. "Isherwood" treats Waldemar very much as he treats Otto in *Goodbye to Berlin*, with condescending amusement and without any suggestion that they are seriously involved. (142-3)

According to *Christopher and His Kind*, Waldemar "isn't in the least a portrait of Heinz," rather "he is a mere second edition of the character of Otto Nowak" (142-3). But, as Heinz did actually accompany Isherwood to the Greek island in real life, Isherwood has projected Waldemar, who is based on Walter Wolff, onto Heinz's autobiographical position in his own life. Waldemar, then, is a fictional stand-in for Heinz, but based on someone entirely different – Walter Wolff. By doing this, "Isherwood"'s fictitious interaction is mistaken for Christopher Isherwood's real personal history. Even Hensher asserts:

The original of 'Waldemar' was Heinz Neddermeyer, who later married and was terrified of Isherwood's continuing tendency to explore their early relationship [...] it seems more than likely that Neddermeyer indeed tried to extract a promise from Isherwood to take him and his family over to America. (xii)

The confusion surrounding the relationship between Heinz and the Waldemar and Otto characters exists across literary criticism. Paul Piazza initially claims that the Otto character in *Goodbye to Berlin* is "Heinz in *Christopher and His Kind*" (93). Later, Piazza also claims that through "Isherwood"'s and Waldemar's relationship in the 'Waldemar' chapter, "Isherwood tells the story of these two would-be lovers – himself and Heinz in disguise" (106). While Piazza offers two contradictory claims – in one instance that Otto is Heinz and in another that Waldemar is – he is not necessarily wrong; after all, Waldemar is "a mere second edition of the character of Otto Nowak." If Waldemar is Heinz, then Otto must also be a kind of representation of Heinz. Isherwood firmly grounds both Waldemar and Otto in the autobiography of Heinz Neddermeyer and Walter Wolff, yet interchanges this grounding between both characters.

Waldemar's eventual fate mirrors Heinz's; his running from the Nazis, his serving in the army, and finally ending up in Soviet Berlin. But his character, his

juvenility, his meanness – these characteristics do not resemble Heinz as he is represented in *Christopher and His Kind*:

Christopher found himself keeping house with Heinz. This was a kind of happiness which he had never experienced before; he now realized that he had always desired it. Unlike Otto, or any of the boys he had known from the bars, Heinz actually enjoyed work for work's sake. No lover, however literary, could have shared Christopher's work with him. But Heinz did the next best thing: while Christopher wrote, Heinz collaborated with him indirectly by sweeping the floors, tidying the garden, cooking the meals. Whenever Christopher had written while Otto was nearby, he had been conscious of Otto's restlessness and boredom and had felt responsible for it. His effort to go on writing became an assertion of his will against Otto's, although Otto was probably unaware that he was interfering with Christopher's work; he merely wanted attention. As for Heinz, he was certainly quite unaware how much he was helping Christopher. This odd pair, enjoying these few days of privacy and occupation with pauses for eating and making love, were absurdly like the most ordinary happily married heterosexual couple. (94-5)

The representation of Waldemar in *Down There on a Visit* echoes Francis Hart's observation that "the truism that in autobiography history and fiction are intentionally distinct proves too slippery to hold" (487). Indistinguishable from both his fictional and autobiographical inspirations, Waldemar is based on both Heinz and Walter – as well as the fictional Otto Nowak. In Waldemar, then, "Isherwood" creates an entirely new fictional character, which, in turn, creates for Isherwood an entirely new personal history.

Eventually, Waldemar goes back to Germany – an act which, as he well knows beforehand, will force him to join the German army. In discussing how he feels about the war in the 'Paul' chapter, "Isherwood" narrates:

Suppose I have in my power an army of five million men. I can destroy it instantly by pressing an electric button. The five-millionth man is Waldemar. Will I press that button? No, of course not—even if the four million, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine others are

world-destroying fiends. This, beneath all my acquired convictions [...] is my own private bedrock for being a pacifist [...]

And what if Waldemar is lying dead already, in Hitler's uniform, killed invading France? My reason is still my reason. It still stands. Once I have refused to press the button because of Waldemar, I can never press it. Because Waldemar could be absolutely anybody. (213-4)

Every person, and every character, could be his Waldemar, his love, and so he cannot bring himself to kill Waldemar even if it causes the death of "four million, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine [...] world-destroying fiends." Through "Isherwood," then, Isherwood justifies his pacifism, and his eventual move from England to America as war breaks out; just like "Isherwood," Isherwood was not running away from conflict because he was afraid, he was doing so because of his conscience.

The final chapter of *Down There on a Visit* is set in 1940 in "Isherwood"'s new home of California. "Isherwood" is writing screenplays for Hollywood and is at the height of his fame. This "Isherwood" is a well-established author and scriptwriter, wealthy in his own right. Despite his apparent success, though, "Isherwood"'s never ending cynicism has, by this point, consumed him. Not just cynical about certain ways of life, but about everyone and everything in it, this "Isherwood" is jaded, seemingly sick of life altogether. This can be seen right from the beginning of the chapter as "Isherwood" describes the other characters that sit around the table at a restaurant in the opening scene:

I watch my guests sourly as they face the tremendous, the nearly but never quite insoluble daily problem of deciding what to eat. They purse their lips in distaste, they scowl over the menu as though it were a personal insult; and the waiter stands watching them, smiling. He is in no more of a hurry than they are. The place isn't full today, and he expects a big tip. (204)

Describing the task of choosing what to eat as "tremendous," and one that is "nearly but never quite insoluble," this "Isherwood" appears to be deeply sarcastic, meaner and more jaded than the rest. By describing the other characters as scowling "over the menu as though it were a personal insult," "Isherwood" mocks them.

Immediately after the sarcastic passage above, “Isherwood” turns his attention to a character who is sitting across from him:

Ruthie’s face is chalky white, with huge vermilion lips daubed upon it. She is a big girl altogether; big hips, big bottom, big legs. I’ve seldom seen anyone look so placid, so wide open to visitors, so sleepy-slow. Her great, beautiful gentle cow eyes have sculptured lids which make me think of an Asian bas-relief – the carving of some giant goddess. She wears a black silk dress with black lace which would do just as well for the evening; maybe she hasn’t taken it off since last night. It is cut low—very low; it could almost be a nightgown. My God, I believe it is! Anyhow, she has a fur coat to go over it if necessary. It is somewhat smeared with cigarette ash. (204)

After describing Ruthie as “chalky white,” “big,” and “placid,” “Isherwood” then likens her eyes to that of a “great beautiful cow,” before finally pointing out that she is still wearing her nightgown from the night before. As briefly discussed in the *Prater Violet* chapter, “Isherwood” has a tendency to write about women in this way.²² This “Isherwood,” though, is more overtly misogynistic than his counterparts: “She is an animal person; she has that cozy quality of a subhuman and therefore guiltless creature; she might just have emerged from a warm burrow under a hill” (207).

Hensher describes the narrator of the ‘Paul’ chapter as one who gives “a slightly less intimate, more worldly performance which only gradually cracks” (xv). This narrator’s grandiosity, initial condescension and callousness slowly fades over the course of the chapter. “Isherwood” reveals a newfound belief in God, or, at least, reveals that he is open to the possibility. In his first private conversation with Paul, “Isherwood” abandons his usual pessimistic tone as he describes the beliefs of his friend and spiritual mentor, Augustus Parr:

²² Sally Bowles, whose fingers were “as dirty as a little girl’s” and whose “powdered dead white face” contains “very large brown eyes which should have been darker, to match her hair and the pencil she used for her eyebrows” is one example of this (28). Maria, another character in *Down There on a Visit*, is another example; she is described as “very easily amused” and “the sort of monster who is often miscalled a good sport” (125).

‘He believes in—’ I suddenly found I couldn’t say ‘God,’ not to Paul—so I changed it to, ‘this thing that’s inside us and yet isn’t us—isn’t our individual personality. He believes it’s there and that we can get in touch with it.’

‘If you *want* to get in touch with it.’ I was surprised at the quickness of Paul’s response. He’s been thinking about all this a lot, I said to myself.

‘Everybody wants to.’

‘They most certainly don’t.’

‘They do really—even when they won’t admit it.’ (I knew I sounded superior-benevolent here.)

‘That’s just crap.’ Paul spoke quite curtly and angrily.

‘You mean, you won’t admit that you want to?’

‘I wasn’t talking about myself. It doesn’t matter what *I* want. The point is, why should any ordinary, sensible person want to get in touch with this thing—as you call it?’

‘Because it’s—that’s what life’s for.’ (223-4)

“Isherwood”’s explanation of Augustus and his somewhat tentative belief in God stands out in a chapter that has been narrated, up until this point, with cynicism. Still reluctant to use the word ‘God,’ “Isherwood,” in this same conversation, likens using the word in Paul’s presence to “using a new dirty word at [his] first school” (225). While a religious belief might at first appear to be out of character for the older “Isherwood,” it embodies his constant construction of himself as the other; a belief in God for an older “Isherwood” is similar to the atheism of his younger self – both are acts of rebellion, both are “dirty.”

The narrator of *Christopher and His Kind* touches on Christopher Isherwood’s newfound belief:

when Christopher was in California, he would have long talks on this subject with Gerald Heard [...] As the result of his talks with Gerald and with Gerald’s friend and teacher, the Hindu monk Prabhavananda, Christopher would find himself able to believe—as a possibility, at least—that an eternal impersonal presence (call it ‘the soul’ if you like) exists within all creatures and is other than the mutable non-eternal ‘person.’ He would then feel that all his earlier difficulties had been merely semantic; that he could have been converted to this belief at any time of his life, if only someone had used the right words to explain

to him. Now, I doubt this. I doubt if one ever accepts a belief until one urgently needs it.

But, although Christopher wasn't yet aware that he needed such a belief, he may have been feeling the need subconsciously. This would explain his recently increased hostility toward what he thought of as 'religion'—the version of Christianity he had been taught in his childhood. Perhaps he was afraid that he would be forced to accept it, at last, after nearly fifteen years of atheism. (316)

Augustus Parr – a fictional blend of Christopher Isherwood's real-life friend, Gerald Heard, and his real-life guru, Prabhavananda – convinces "Isherwood" that God, or in the very least the existence of the soul, is a possibility. By admitting that his atheism is not a result of a higher sense of awareness, but a reaction to his experience at school, "Isherwood"'s movement towards a belief in God is constructed as a rational one.

Passages such as these, though, still strike an odd tone in the narrative, standing out much like Homer Lane's philosophy does in *Lions and Shadows*; a spiritual optimism is not characteristic of the "Isherwood" narrator. Hensher touches on this point:

It is an account, I think, of the wavering and unreliable presence of grace in a bad man's life, suggesting how the possibility of redemption can be held out to the worst of us, not by God, but by the universe, and the human race. (xv)

This "Isherwood" character certainly does focus on the "wavering and unreliable presence of grace" in Paul. But Paul, a notorious sex worker, is not the only "bad man" in this chapter. He is, however, a caricature who represents all of "Isherwood"'s darkest vices:

Paul, who has been described to me, more than once, as 'the last of the professional tapettes' and 'the most expensive male prostitute in the world'; the notorious companion of the Peruvian millionairess celebrating her seventieth birthday on Cap Ferrat, of the Hungarian baron with a yacht on the Baltic, of the Princess somebody or other who actually tried to bring Paul with her to stay at the home of one of the stuffiest English dukes and got spectacularly snubbed. This is the Paul who was expelled from Switzerland for ostentatiously sniffing,

or pretending to sniff, cocaine in the lounge of a hotel at St Moritz; who was arrested in Portugal – but at once released by the intervention of a cabinet minister – for some flagrantly public sexual act. (206-7)

Paul is selfish, narcissistic, and impulsive. Of all “Isherwood”’s characters, from Arthur Norris to Mr Lancaster, Paul’s actions are by far the most irredeemable. The worst of Paul, and perhaps the worst of “Isherwood,” can be seen when Paul tells “Isherwood” the following story:

Sometimes he made me laugh a lot—as when, for instance, he described how an American woman in Switzerland with a nine-year-old daughter had told him she was nervous about leaving the child alone with him. (I could just imagine how Paul must have cross-examined and bullied her to make her confess this!) Whereupon he had given her a scathing lecture on the hypocrisy of self-styled broad-minded mothers who think sexual freedom is fine for everyone except their own children. He had gone on like this until the woman was in tears and had, as he put it, ‘practically begged me to help myself to her loathsome moppet. And would you believe it, Chris, the very next day, that kid came up on the roof while I was sunbathing and seduced me!’ (281)

Paul, a character who lies to almost every person he meets, describes for “Isherwood” an act of paedophilia carried out by himself. Worse still, is that Paul’s description of the event is both told as if it is a funny story, or simply a joke, and received by “Isherwood” as such; not only does “Isherwood” fail to condemn Paul’s apparent paedophilia, he finds it hilarious: “I could just imagine how Paul must have cross-examined and bullied her to make her confess this!” This irredeemable aspect of Paul has sinister implications for this “Isherwood” character, as, in a way, it reflects the nature of the narrator. Firstly, the above story shows a normalisation of Paul’s disturbing abuse and misogyny directed at a girl of only nine years old, mirroring “Isherwood”’s own problematic attitudes towards women. Secondly, Paul’s actions are a caricature of “Isherwood”’s sexual conduct with young teenage boys – Otto (Walter Wolff), for instance, was only “sixteen or seventeen years old” when “Isherwood” began having sex with him. Paul’s worst actions, and indeed the worst parts of his personality, are exaggerations of the negative parts of this “Isherwood.”

Isherwood, then, uses Paul as a mirror for an “Isherwood” that is disgusted by himself, painting for Isherwood a far from savoury personal history.

After Paul nearly dies in a car accident, and it becomes clear that he is suicidal, “Isherwood” tries to help him get back on his feet. For a large portion of the chapter, Paul and “Isherwood” live together in “Isherwood”’s home and regularly visit Augustus:

This was certainly one of the happiest periods of my life. The longer I lived with Paul, the more I became aware of a kind of geisha quality in him; he really understood how to give pleasure [...] Our friendship was the sort which naturally evolves its own private jargon; ours was made up chiefly of misapplications of Augustus’s favorite phrases. If we were late for a date with Augustus – who was particular about punctuality – Paul might exclaim, ‘Boy, we’d better get over there with appalling instantaneity!’ (275)

The “I” of “Isherwood” turns into the “we” of his and Paul’s friendship. He does not speak of himself as separate to Paul, but rather as if they are one, moving through life. In this sense, Paul is not so much a mirror of “Isherwood” as he is a part of him:

Paul and I had met because we needed each other. Yes, now I suddenly saw that; I needed Paul every bit as much as he needed me. Our strength and our weakness were complementary. It would be much easier for us to go forward together than separately. Only it was up to me to take the first step. (268)

Paul, representative of the dark parts of “Isherwood,” is not just a character to whom the narrator is drawn, he is one that he needs. ‘Paul’ is a chapter that follows an “Isherwood” character attempting to find for himself redemption by giving up sex, “smoking and drinking and—all those things” (226). But, just as the conclusion of the chapter shows, “Isherwood” is unable to live without these things – he is unable to exist without Paul: “we needed each other” (268).

Christopher and His Kind documents Christopher Isherwood’s initial struggles with writing the original Paul character in a work that was to be titled *Paul is Alone*. The plot of *Paul is Alone* originally began:

Part one: Ambrose [Francis] is living on the island of St. Nicholas. One night, Paul makes a dramatic appearance there by swimming across from the

mainland. He is in a state of near-collapse from hunger. Ambrose has him fed and given a place to sleep.

Paul proves to be an efficient cook. He takes charge of the kitchen, bosses the Greek boys around, and serves excellent meals. He tries to impress Ambrose by playing the mystery man. He admits that he has no money but won't say how he got to Greece. He calls himself Paul von Hartmann and claims to be a German baron. He mentions several Englishmen of titled families as being his friends. From his descriptions of them, Ambrose realizes that he must indeed know them. But Ambrose is more puzzled than impressed, because Paul speaks English like a native and with a slight Cockney accent. Ambrose later finds that Paul's German is also that of a native, but educated, upper-class.

Within a few days, a charming, good-natured, unaffected young German turns up. His name is Fritz. He tells Ambrose that he has been wandering around Greece, after escaping from Germany, where he was arrested by the Nazis as a Communist. At first, Paul tries to become Fritz's special friend. But soon Fritz is so popular with Ambrose and the Greeks that Paul gets jealous of him. Paul steals a ring belonging to Ambrose and makes it appear that Fritz stole it. So Ambrose sends Fritz away.

Then an English friend of Ambrose arrives to stay. He at once recognizes Paul as a waiter from a club to which he belongs in London. Paul was dismissed from the club for theft. The Englishmen he has claimed as his friends were, in fact, members of the club; Paul only knew them by waiting on them. He has come to Greece as a steward on a tourist-liner and jumped ship. Paul is utterly humiliated when the Englishmen tells this to Ambrose. He leaves the island at once. (215-6)

The next paragraph explains, "Like *The Lost, Paul Is Alone* was an attempt by Christopher to pack a section of his past life into a plot structure—in this instance, his experiences since leaving Berlin (219). The intended purpose of the original Paul character was not to portray Denny Fouts accurately; rather, it was to construct Isherwood's past by using Paul as a character with which "Isherwood" could interact.

Christopher and His Kind implies that in writing the character of Paul, Isherwood was focused on the construction of his narrator as a means through which

he could represent his past, and not at all concerned with representing Fouts with any sort of historical accuracy:

(Paul wasn't a portrait of any particular individual. The general idea of the character was based on an Englishman whom Christopher had known briefly during his early days in Berlin. This young man was a kleptomaniac—or perhaps he posed as one to make himself seem more interesting. Christopher preached Homer Lane to him and proposed a cure in the classic Lane tradition—the young man was to go on stealing but he was also to keep a ledger in which he entered the estimated value of everything he stole, as though he were running a business. This was to make theft unromantic. The cure didn't work. But Christopher later pretended, to Stephen and others, that it did.) (219)

“Isherwood” is able to find in Paul, a somewhat sinister character who is constantly lying and attempting to manipulate others, a sympathetic quality. At the end of the novel, Paul is sick, struggling with an opiate addiction and eventually dies on a toilet in a bar, alone. This character, who we know to be the worst of all of “Isherwood”'s portraits, comes across as a desperate and helplessly tragic figure by the end of the chapter.

The ambiguous nature of identity in the ‘Paul’ chapter is also a point of focus for Hensher:

Who is Paul? What are we to think of him, his reversals, his betrayals, and his occasional – perhaps even sincere – reversals into sincerity? It is a chapter which often disconcerts readers, but which is in the end one of the most convincing portraits of an uncertain and posturing human reality Isherwood, or anyone, ever wrote. (xv)

Like Paul, this “Isherwood” is a portrait of “an uncertain and posturing human reality.” Through Paul, then, Isherwood constructs an “Isherwood” who is jaded, untrusting, not as intimate, and, ultimately, one who is worldlier. The juxtaposition of the crudeness of Paul with a worldly narrator reflects the older “Isherwood,” eloquent and experienced, but also the most cynical of all of Isherwood's namesake narrators. This “Isherwood” finds the bad in everyone and everything, except God, his guru, and Paul – the most wicked of all of “Isherwood”'s characters.

This novel is also the first narrated by “Isherwood” in which Isherwood directly addresses the ‘I’ narrator as separate from himself. After the opening paragraph, “Isherwood” narrates the story from his perspective, just as other “Isherwood”s have before him, until:

And now before I slip back into the convention of calling this young man ‘I,’ let me consider him as a separate being, a stranger almost, setting out on this adventure in a taxi to the docks. For, of course, he is almost a stranger to me. I have unlearned or exaggerated his prejudices and his habits. We still share the same skeleton, but its outer covering has altered so much that I doubt if he would recognize me on the street. We have in common the label of our name, and a continuity of consciousness; there has been no break in the sequence of daily statements that I am I. But *what* I am has refashioned itself throughout the days and years, until now almost all that remains constant is the mere awareness of being conscious. And that awareness belongs to everybody; it isn’t a particular person. (6)

Down There on a Visit marks the first time a narrative voice addresses himself as separate from the “Isherwood” character within one of his novels²³, creating a very clear gap between his voice and that of the narrator’s. By slipping “back into the convention of calling this young man ‘I,’” Isherwood positions himself directly as the implied sensibility that sits behind the text. Here, readers are met with the voice of the person writing the text we are reading. “Christopher Isherwood,” on the other hand, is “a separate being, a stranger almost.” In “Isherwood,” then, Isherwood constructs both a narrator who is a reliable representation of his own past (“We still share the same skeleton [...] We have in common the label of our name, and a continuity of consciousness”) and one that is unreliable in this respect (“I have unlearned or exaggerated his prejudices and his habits [...] But *what* I am has refashioned itself throughout the days and years”).

Isherwood then uses the next few pages to precisely define his relationship to his narrator, and the way he goes about his construction:

²³ In both *Lions and Shadows* and *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood also addresses the “Christopher Isherwood” narrator, but he does so in a foreword on both occasions.

The Christopher who sat in that taxi is, practically speaking, dead; he only remains reflected in the fading memories of us who knew him. I can't revitalize him now. I can only reconstruct him from his remembered acts and words and from the writings he has left us. He embarrasses me often, and so I'm tempted to sneer at him; but I will try not to. I'll try not to apologize for him, either. After all, I owe him some respect. In a sense he is my father, and in another sense my son. (6)

"Christopher Isherwood" "is, practically speaking, dead." "Isherwood," then, represents Isherwood's past and is separate from his present. Exhibiting an acute awareness of how one changes over time, Isherwood positions the narrator as one who has the verification of autobiography while allowing him to narrate with fictionality: "I can't revitalize him now." "Isherwood," who has neither a father nor son, is defined by Isherwood as, "my father, and in a sense my son." "Isherwood," then, is both a creation of Isherwood (his own son), as well as the one who created him (his father). Isherwood even alludes to his own tendency to create through "Isherwood":

His life has been lived, so far, within narrow limits and he is quite naïve about most kinds of experience; he fears it and yet he is wildly eager for it. To reassure himself, he converts it into epic myth as fast as it happens. He is forever play-acting. (6-7)

Just like Isherwood, "Isherwood" converts the events in his life "into epic myth as fast as they happen" (7). Out of a fictional world, "Isherwood" creates for himself an even more refined personal history that, eventually, becomes the autobiography of Christopher Isherwood. The narrative voice then slips back into "Christopher Isherwood"'s, writing, "Now, as the taxi ride comes to an end, I shut down my own foresight and try to look out through his eyes" (8).

This is not the last time Isherwood's voice can be detected in the text; diary excerpts are spliced into the narrative between long passages of "Isherwood"'s conventional narration. The first time this occurs in the novel is in the 'Ambrose' chapter. There is a line break between the last sentence of a paragraph, and then:

[From my diary: the entries have no dates]

Christ, I have a hang-over! Not that that's new. I always have a hang-over in the mornings here. I am writing this on one of the packing cases in front of the huts and the sun is shining down with an appalling vertical intensity. (92)

The diary entries are written, as a diary often is, in the present tense, with "Isherwood" using phrases such as "I am writing." The narrator of *Christopher and His Kind* claims that the diary entries of *Down There on a Visit* contain "added details, remembered, not invented" (334). These "remembered" diary entries are scattered throughout the text, as "Isherwood" eventually goes on to give specific dates.

After visiting Waldemar and Dorothy's communist friends, "Isherwood" then moves to describe the events of the following day:

There was a craziness about their conviction which I found stimulating and infectious. As long as I was with them, I could almost see the situation through their eyes. We all drank beer, and I felt more cheerful than I had felt for weeks and as irresponsible as a character in *Alice in Wonderland*. Then I said goodbye to Dorothy and Waldemar and left them with their hosts. By the time I got home again, I was gloomier than ever.

September 8. Yesterday *The Times* published a leader suggesting that the Sudeten areas ought to be handed over to Germany. I rang up F.P. about this, because I was curious to hear the Conservative Party line [...]

Hitler, at Nuremberg, hasn't spoken yet. He probably will on Monday, unless he prefers simply to stage a *putsch* over the weekend. Meanwhile, people here seem to be suffering from anxiety-exhaustion. They're beginning to say, 'For Christ's sake, let's have war and get it over.'

Stephen Savage came to tea yesterday. His total pre-occupation with himself and his emotional affairs, far from being unsympathetic, is a tiny rock to which I cling in the midst of this raging ocean of headlines. (178-9)

The first paragraph quoted above is similar in tone to all of Isherwood's fiction, particularly those narrated by his namesake; the narrator is hyper-aware, eloquent, observant and critical of others and himself. The sentences themselves are not, at least aesthetically, the same as those following the temporal title, "*September 8.*"

Isherwood is able to create a contradiction by using Stephen Spender's fictional name – the same name that is used for his fictional stand-in in *Lions and Shadows* – Stephen Savage.

Isherwood also uses the technique of the diary entry to express, more directly than ever before, his homosexuality. On one such entry, "Isherwood" narrates the following:

August 29. Just back from a weekend in the country with G. A great mistake. Trailing all the way down to Kent just to make love in an inn gave the love-making an altogether false importance. We had to play up to it; pretend it was romantic, or at least fun. And it wasn't. It was depressing, like the cold bedroom and the lumpy bed. Right in the midst of the act, I found myself grunting and groaning extra loud, out of sheer politeness. (167-8)

Much like the narrator of *Prater Violet*, "Isherwood" uses pronouns which don't indicate gender when he addresses his lovers, representing their names only with an initial. When coupled with the rest of the text, however, it becomes more obvious that "Isherwood"'s reticence is merely semantic.

In the 'Waldemar' chapter, "Isherwood" awakes one morning to the realisation that Waldemar and Maria slept in the same tent:

Maria looked around at me—expecting no doubt to complete her triumph by detecting signs of jealousy. (For of course, being Maria, she takes it for granted that I am Waldemar's lover.) (127)

There appears to no longer be two different "Isherwoods" for two different kinds of readers; "Isherwood"'s homosexuality is not a secret. An *Oxford Times* reviewer wrote of *Down There on a Visit*, that in reading it, he was met with a "nauseating reek of homosexuality as one is led from one unhealthy circle to another" (Hensher xiii). However, even in its most sexually explicit paragraphs, *Down There on a Visit* does not put "Isherwood"'s homosexuality directly into the writing:

I had supper with B. at the flat. Since I was there last, B. had bought a big mirror and hung it in the bedroom. We drank whisky and then had sex in front of it. 'Like actors in a blue movie,' B. said, 'except that we're both much more attractive.'

But there was something cruel and tragic and desperate about the way we made love; as though we were fighting naked to the death. There was a sort of rage in both of us [...] We satisfied each other absolutely, without the smallest sentiment, like a pair of animals. (187)

Although his homosexuality is more direct than ever before, “Isherwood” never actually ‘comes out.’ This misdirection is not an omission like those in *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, or *Prater Violet*, rather, it is indicative of “Isherwood”’s neuroticism; he must have control over his own story. To exhibit this control, Isherwood refuses to directly represent “Isherwood”’s homosexuality.

The “Isherwoods” of *Down There on a Visit* are the last to ever appear in Isherwood’s works. The discrepancies between each of them directly mirror those that exist in their different focus characters, showing how “Isherwood” not only constructs Christopher Isherwood’s historical identity through himself, but through the characteristics of the characters he creates.

Of *Down There on a Visit*, Isherwood later claims that its story is told with “too much fiction and too little frankness” (*Christopher and His Kind* 3). Even though it is the most direct representation we see of “Isherwood” and his homosexuality, *Down There on a Visit* is still not completely explicit. This, however, is a revision the narrator of *Christopher and His Kind* is more than happy to make.

5. Christopher and His Character: A Revision of the Historical Self in *Christopher and His Kind*

Christopher and His Kind is seen by many as a kind of sequel to *Lions and Shadows*. *Christopher and His Kind* picks up directly where *Lions and Shadows* leaves off, with “Christopher Isherwood”²⁴ on a train to Berlin in 1929. According to the narrator of *Christopher and His Kind*, though, there is a very clear reason as to why this text should not be considered strictly as a sequel to *Lions and Shadows*:

There is a book called *Lions and Shadows*, published in 1938, which describes Christopher Isherwood’s life between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four. It is not truly autobiographical, however. The author conceals important facts about himself. He overdramatises many episodes and gives his characters fictitious names. In a foreword, he suggests that *Lions and Shadows* should be read as if it were a novel. (1)

Christopher and His Kind, according to its narrator, is more of a straight autobiography: “The book I am now going to write will be as frank and factual as I can make it, especially as far as I myself am concerned” (1). *Christopher and His Kind*, then, is a very different kind of text than those examined in this thesis so far. The narrator, the one whose voice can be identified when he writes, “The book I am now going to write,” presents readers with a memoir documenting ten years of Christopher Isherwood’s life. Unlike *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet*, and *Down There on a Visit*, “Christopher Isherwood” does not narrate this work; it is Isherwood, on this occasion, representing for readers a revised history of Christopher Isherwood.

While *Lions and Shadows* “is not truly autobiographical,” *Christopher and His Kind* is presented to readers as a strict work of autobiography – the true account, as far as the narrator can tell, of what actually happened in Christopher Isherwood’s life

²⁴ An important point to note is that, in *Lions and Shadows*, it is “Christopher Isherwood” on the train. In *Christopher and His Kind*, though, it is Christopher Isherwood.

from 1929 to 1939. As *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet*, and all but one chapter of *Down There on a Visit* are set within these ten years, Christopher Isherwood's real life is directly compared to "Christopher Isherwood"s.

According to the narrator, the main difference between *Christopher and His Kind* and previous works narrated by "Christopher Isherwood" is its lack of fictionality. Despite the narrator's claim that this text is supposedly the *real* personal history of Isherwood, though, there are still instances of fictionality that are used throughout. The account of Christopher Isherwood's relationship with "Otto" fits into this category:

It was probably in May 1930, soon after Christopher's return from London, that he met the youth who is called Otto Nowak in *Goodbye to Berlin*. He was then sixteen or seventeen years old [...] Otto—as he will be called in this book, also—was a child of the borderland. (41-2)

According to Isherwood's diaries, he met Walter Wolff – the basis for Otto Nowak – on May 11, 1930. It is interesting, then, that in this book, one that is supposedly "as frank and factual" as the narrator can make it, Walter Wolff is still disguised with a fictional name. *Christopher and His Kind* is not, in the strictest sense of the word, then, an autobiography.

Zuzana Fonioková defines *Christopher and His Kind* as a fictional meta-autobiography. Fonioková argues that, instead of trying to close the gap between life and writing, meta-autobiographies challenge this gap. In doing so, writers of fictional meta-autobiographies look for alternative means for representing their life. Fonioková maintains that these works document an author's search for this alternate means, with the main focus of these works often not on their life itself, but on the problems they have had with their autobiographical representations. *Christopher and His Kind* is as much a documentation of Isherwood's difficulties in constructing his own life as it is a revision of the personal history that he has created for Isherwood through the "Christopher Isherwood" character. *Christopher and His Kind* presents a challenge for the reader: one cannot be sure whether Isherwood is truly striving for authenticity in his revisionary representation of his own personal history, or if he is simply staging this effort. This is a problem, Fonioková argues, that challenges the readers of all fictional meta-autobiographies.

In his attempt to portray his life through alternate means, Isherwood refers to himself in the third person throughout *Christopher and His Kind*.²⁵ In most memoirs or autobiographies, the author will identify as the 'I' of the narrative, as they are writing about their own life from their perspective. "Christopher Isherwood," the narrator, is the 'I' of the narrative in all of the works that have been examined in this thesis so far. It is odd, then, that Christopher Isherwood's fictional stand-in is the 'I' of the novels, whereas in the nonfictional representation of his life, Christopher Isherwood portrays his younger self as if he is a different person.

Unlike the novels, Isherwood directly addresses his homosexuality in the opening pages of *Christopher and His Kind*:

At school, Christopher had fallen in love with many boys and been yearningly romantic about them. At college he had at last managed to get into bed with one. This was due entirely to the initiative of his partner, who, when Christopher became scared and started to raise objections, locked the door, and sat down firmly on Christopher's lap. (3)

By distancing himself from the past Christopher Isherwood, Isherwood assumes the position of a third person omniscient narrator, rather than one who has a limited view from within the story. At the same time, though, Isherwood still treats the events represented in the text as those belonging to his own past. Phrases such as "Christopher had fallen in love," or "when Christopher became scared," carry with them the authority of an unbiased, all-knowing narrator, yet because he has insight into Christopher Isherwood's thoughts and feelings, they simultaneously strengthen the implication that Isherwood is writing about his own life.

This appears to be an unbiased account of Christopher Isherwood's life told by the one who experienced it, somehow maintaining both an objective and subjective authority. In recounting his time at the Hirschfeld Institute, which housed those wanted for sex crimes (particularly those accused of sex crimes out of Paragraph

²⁵ Whenever Christopher Isherwood is addressed in *Kathleen and Frank*, it is in the third person.

175)²⁶, Isherwood both distances himself from the past Christopher Isherwood and implies that he is the same person:

I have a memory of Christopher looking down from a room in the Institute and watching two obvious plainclothes detectives lurk under the trees which grow along the edge of the park. They hope that one of their wanted victims will be tempted to venture out of Hirschfeld's sanctuary for a sniff of fresh air. Then, according to the rules of the police game, he can be grabbed and carried off to prison. (19)

Here, Isherwood brings himself to the forefront of the narrative, using the pronoun of "I" to refer to a memory. The phrase, "I have a memory of Christopher looking down," associates the memory with Christopher Isherwood's experience. Isherwood, though, still imposes a distance between himself and the Christopher Isherwood he is constructing in this text by referring to him as "Christopher," and referring to himself as "I."

Isherwood further constructs his own impartiality through his critical assessment of the past Christopher Isherwood, as can be seen when he addresses Isherwood's friendship with E. M. Forster:

Christopher made a good disciple; like most arrogant people. He loved to bow down unconditionally from time to time. No doubt he gazed at Forster with devoted eyes and set himself to entertain him with tales of Berlin and the boy world, judiciously spiced with expressions of social concern—for he must have been aware from the start that he had to deal with a moralist. (109)

By criticising his previous self, Isherwood is able to display his objectivity, further cementing his voice as one of complete impartiality. Bringing our attention to Christopher Isherwood's "arrogance," Isherwood then attempts to use this

²⁶ Paragraph 175 is described in *Christopher and His Kind*: "Thousands of members of the Third Sex, as he called it, looked up to [Hirschfeld] as their champion because, throughout his adult life, he had been campaigning for revision of Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code. This paragraph dealt with the punishment of homosexual acts between men. (By not including lesbian acts, it expressed a basic contempt for women which has been shared by lawmakers of many other nations)" (17).

impartiality to tell the ‘real’ story of what happened in his life, distinctly different from that which is represented in his fiction. The only difference in *Christopher and His Kind*, though, is the way Isherwood has presented the text to readers: *Lions and Shadows*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet* and *Down There on a Visit* are all openly fictionalised accounts. But, as we know from the nature of Isherwood’s works, just because he says something “actually” happened, does not mean it did. Furthermore, just because *Christopher and His Kind* revises works preceding it, that does not mean that it is Isherwood’s definitive and truthful revision of his own personal history. Had Isherwood not died in 1986, he might very well have revisited the thirties in his writing once again.²⁷

Like *Down There on a Visit*, *Christopher and His Kind* contains within it many letters and diary entries. The inclusion of these entries and letters as an autobiographical reference appears to strengthen the historical weight of this book: supposedly, as these letters and entries appear to be written at the time these events occurred, they can be relied upon as a more direct representation of what actually happened.

The difference in *Christopher and His Kind*, however, is that many of these letters and diary entries were not written by Isherwood himself. Instead, Isherwood provides readers with personal accounts about his historical self from those who were around him at the time:

During his stay in London, Christopher again dictated to Richard. This must have been a revised and longer version of the other manuscript. Kathleen’s diary notes that he finished the part of it a few days before he left, and showed it to Edward Upward. She mentions visits to the house by [...] Gerald Hamilton (‘He wears a wig and has an extremely adventurous life!’), and by Forster (whose name Kathleen underlines, evidently as a mark of her special respect). (130)

By relying on the accounts of people other than the past Christopher Isherwood about his own life, Isherwood presents an account of his life that appears to be more

²⁷ This information may lie in his diary entries after 1976, which, apart from Katherine Bucknell’s publication of some expurgated texts, remain sealed until January 1, 2030.

rounded. Kathleen corroborates Isherwood's version of events, and thus verifies it as his true personal history. Only parts of Kathleen's diary have been selected, allowing Isherwood to construct, out of the words of other people, the personal history that he chooses.

Furthermore, by referring to his own mother as "Kathleen," Isherwood further distances himself from his past self, as the real-life author would presumably refer to her as his mother. While Kathleen's diary entries reinforce the reliability of the events represented in *Christopher and His Kind*, there is a more direct reason why they are necessary to the text. In a discussion on the writing of both *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood writes:

After those two books had been written, Christopher burned the diary. His private reason for doing this was that it was full of details about his sex life and he feared that it might somehow fall into the hands of the police or other enemies.

Christopher's declared reason for burning his Berlin diary was unconvincing. He used to tell his friends that he had destroyed his real past because he preferred the simplified, more creditable, more exciting fictitious past which he had created to take its place. This fictitious past, he said, was the past he wanted to 'remember.' Now that I am writing about Christopher's real past, I sadly miss the help of the lost diary and have no patience with this arty talk. (41)

Isherwood admits to readers that he preferred "the simplified, more creditable, more exciting fictitious past which he had created to take" the place of what really happened. So, in writing *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, Isherwood was creating for himself "the past he wanted to 'remember.'" Here is a direct admission that Christopher Isherwood used his fiction to create his own past. In writing the above passage, though, Isherwood differentiates his fiction from *Christopher and His Kind*; now, he is "writing about Christopher's real past," whereas his fiction is mere "arty talk." The burning of these diaries means that Isherwood is forced to base this text on accounts from others, such as Kathleen (his mother), Stephen Spender, and Edward Upward.

However, while *Christopher and His Kind* appears to be based on accounts from people around Isherwood at the time, he still relies heavily upon the very

memory he admits having created through his fiction, even using it to revise accounts from his contemporaries:

Toward the end of Christopher's visit to London, his long-impending showdown with Stephen Spender took place. Stephen gives an account of this in *World Within World*. He writes that Christopher showed irritation with him so clearly, when they were together at a party, that he went to visit Christopher the next day and suggested that they should see nothing, or very little, of each other when they returned to Berlin. Christopher replied in 'accents of ironic correctitude' that he wasn't aware of any strain between them. At this point, I have a memory of my own. Stephen, annoyed by Christopher's evasiveness, exclaimed, 'If we're going to part, at least let's part like men.' To which Christopher replied, with a bitchy smile, 'But, Stephen, we *aren't* men.' (110)

Even though he is relying on a memory that is rendered unreliable by his construction of a "fictitious past," Isherwood revises his own history as it is represented by others – in this case Stephen Spender. Claiming, "I have a memory of my own," Isherwood is able to assert his version of events while still maintaining an acute awareness of the fallibility of his own memory; the phrase, "of my own" implies that both he and Spender have very different memories of the same event, and that each is as unreliable as the other. The narrator then goes on to explain:

Stephen thought that Christopher was annoyed because he had reached London before Christopher and had told their mutual friends all Christopher's favorite stories, including several which he didn't want to have broadcast indiscriminately. This is true, no doubt. But Christopher's deeper motive in quarrelling with Stephen was to get him out of Berlin altogether. I don't think he consciously knew this at the time. It is obvious to me now. Christopher regarded Berlin as his territory. He was actually afraid that Stephen would scoop him by writing Berlin stories of his own and rushing them into print. (111)

This revision reveals a selfishness that existed within Isherwood, and perhaps speaks to why he focused so much on his time in Berlin in his fiction: "Christopher regarded Berlin as his territory."

In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood even relies on his memory to revise his own diary entries:

Christopher started a diary, in the hope that it would provide him with material for this projected book.

May 13, 1933. It is a quarter past midnight and I have just finished packing. In eight hours I am going to leave Berlin, perhaps for ever [...] And now the day which seemed too good, too bad to be true, the day when I should leave Germany, has arrived, and I only know about the Future that, however often and however variously I have imagined it to myself, the reality will be quite quite different.

That last long pompously false sentence is produced by Christopher's feeling that he ought to make some statement befitting the importance of the situation. It is false because it is out of character. I don't believe he ever imagined the day on which he would leave Germany; that suggests a calm foresight of which he was incapable. He was a worrier, not a foreseer. That part of his will over which he had no conscious control—he would have called it 'circumstances'—swept him blindly into the future, often kicking, sometimes screaming. (137-8)

By providing readers with an excerpt from his diary, and then correcting it, Isherwood gives his memory more authority than his own diary from the time. He is also further constructing his own impartiality as he is being openly critical of Christopher Isherwood, while distancing himself as one who has the very foresight his younger self does not. Much of *Christopher and His Kind*, then, concerns itself with revising previously represented events in "Isherwood"'s life, offering to readers what, supposedly, actually happened.

Isherwood, on one occasion, revises the representation of the character Bernhard Landauer in *Goodbye to Berlin*. Landauer's story in the novel ends when "Isherwood" overhears two men talking of Landauer's apparent heart attack, a euphemism for being killed by the Nazis: "'There's a lot of heart failure,' said the fat man, 'in Germany these days [...] If you ask me [...] anyone's heart's liable to fail, if it gets a bullet inside it'" (224). Of this death, Isherwood comments:

The killing of Bernhard was merely a dramatic necessity. In a novel such as this one, which ends with the outbreak of political persecution, one death at least is

a must. No other major character in *Goodbye to Berlin* has been killed, and Bernhard is the most appropriate victim, being a prominent Jew. (*Christopher and His Kind* 73)

As *Christopher and His Kind* reveals, Landauer's real-life inspiration, Wilfrid Israel, did not die like this. Wilfrid Israel's death, though, was not, in the end, that different from his fictional one:

Wilfrid survived for years, despite his defiance. The Nazis did kill him in the end—but that, one can almost say, was by accident.

Having settled in England, Wilfrid devoted himself to helping his fellow refugees. After the French defeat, many of them were temporarily interned. When Wilfrid visited the internment camps he used to say, 'This is where I ought to be, too.' But, as a British subject, he was free. He enlisted in the Civil Defence.

By 1943, there were many Jews who had escaped from Germany and Austria and found their way to Spain and Portugal. In March of that year, Wilfrid flew to Portugal to arrange for some of the younger refugees to emigrate to Palestine. Within two months, he had done this. On June 1, he boarded a plane to fly back to London. Among his fellow passengers was the famous actor Leslie Howard. Over the Bay of Biscay, three hundred miles off Cape Finisterre, their plane met eight Nazi fighters. It is almost certain that the fighters came upon them by chance, while returning from an unsuccessful attempt to locate two of their own U-boats. Unarmed airliners flying between Lisbon and London were very seldom attacked, though they often carried important people. But, on this occasion, the Nazis had some reason to suspect that Churchill himself might be on board; they knew that he would be flying back from a conference in Algiers at about that time. There were no survivors. (74)

Although Bernhard's death is a fictional one, it is not an untrue representation of Wilfrid. Both Bernhard and Wilfrid died because they wanted to help fellow Jews facing persecution from the Nazis. Both were killed, unceremoniously, by the Nazis. At the time of writing *Goodbye to Berlin*, Wilfrid was still alive which means that when Bernhard's death was written it was entirely fictional. In reviewing Bernhard's death in *Christopher and His Kind*, though, this is no longer the case. The only

significant difference between each death is when they occurred; Bernhard dies far earlier than Wilfrid, allowing Wilfrid's death to still be represented within the novel itself. The fictionality used in the representation of Wilfrid's death is attached to the communicative act of writing the novel; through fiction, Wilfrid's death can be communicated where it otherwise would not have been.

The main focus of the revisions in *Christopher and His Kind*, though, as previously stated, is concerned with homosexual representation in Isherwood's namesake narrator:

In *Goodbye to Berlin*, "Isherwood" goes to live with the Nowaks in autumn of 1931, not 1930 [...] Since 'Isherwood' is not overtly homosexual, he has to be given another reason for knowing Otto and another motive for going to live with this family. In the novel, 'Isherwood' meets Otto through an Englishman named Peter Wilkinson who is Otto's lover; and the meeting takes place merely because they happen to be staying at the same boarding house in a seaside village (Sellin) on the island of Ruegen in the Baltic. Then Peter goes back to England, having broken with Otto, and Otto and 'Isherwood' return to Berlin—but not together. (51)

As discussed in the *Goodbye to Berlin* chapter, although Isherwood could not bring himself to make his narrator openly homosexual, "he scorned to make him heterosexual" (*Christopher and His Kind* 191). For Isherwood, to have done this "would have been as shameful as pretending to be heterosexual himself" (*Christopher and His Kind* 192). Isherwood, though, offers another reason for this decision:

He asked himself: Do I now want to go to bed with more women and girls? Of course not, as long as I can have boys. Why do I prefer boys? Because of their shape and their voices and their smell and the way they move. And boys can be romantic. I can put them into my myth and fall in love with them [...] Couldn't you get yourself excited by the shape of girls, too—if you worked hard at it? Perhaps. And couldn't you invent another myth—to put girls into? Why the hell should I? Well, it would be a lot more convenient for you, if you did. Then you wouldn't have all these problems. Society would accept you. You wouldn't be out of step with nearly everybody else.

It was at this point in his self-examination that Christopher would become suddenly, blindly furious. Damn Nearly Everybody. Girls are what the state and the church and the law and the press and the medical profession endorse, and command me to desire. My mother endorses them, too. She is silently brutishly willing me to get married and breed grandchildren for her. Her will is the will of Nearly Everybody, and in their will is my death. *My* will is to live according to my nature, and to find a place where I can be what I am . . . But I'll admit this—even if my nature was like theirs, I should still have to fight them, in one way or another. If boys didn't exist, I should have to invent them. (12)

In addition to Christopher Isherwood feeling that it would have been “shameful” for him to make his narrator heterosexual, it would have also jeopardised “Isherwood”'s ability to construct the historical identity of Isherwood through a fictional narrative; Christopher Isherwood can put boys into his myth – into the life of “Isherwood” – and they can, in turn, become a part of Isherwood's history. If “Isherwood” was represented as heterosexual, according to Isherwood, he would not be able to create his own myth.

In this passage, there is also an expression of Isherwood's rage towards heterosexuality: “Girls are what the state and the church and the law and the press and the medical profession endorse, and command me to desire. My mother endorses them, too.” As can be seen across Isherwood's works in which the “Isherwood” character is employed, so much of this narrator's identity is born out of his desire to rebel, as he says in this instance, against “the will of Nearly Everybody.” In *Lions and Shadows*, it is the state and school. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, “Isherwood” must rebel against the Nazis. In *Prater Violet*, it is the home, the English, and “Isherwood”'s own apathy. In *Down There on a Visit* it is the older generations in the ‘Mr Lancaster’ chapter, heterosexuality in the ‘Ambrose’ chapter, the English in ‘Waldemar,’ and, finally, against everything in ‘Paul.’ “Isherwood” cannot be heterosexual because this would be a sign of Isherwood succumbing to “the will of Nearly Everybody,” something his namesake narrator never does, and, therefore, something that his own personal history cannot reflect.

At one point, Isherwood documents an occasion when his friend, Erika, asks him to marry her so that she can escape Germany and become an English citizen:

Christopher felt honored, excited, amused—and reluctantly said no. The reason, as he vaguely phrased to Erika, was that ‘it would cause difficulties with the family.’

[...] His other motive was far less reasonable but as strong—his rooted horror of marriage. To him, it was the sacrament of the Others; the supreme affirmation of their dictatorship. Even when his heterosexual friends got married, Christopher found their action slightly distasteful. When his basically homosexual friends got married—declaring that they were really bisexual, or that they wanted children, or that their wife was ‘someone who understands’—Christopher expressed sympathy but felt disgust. Later, many of these would start having sex with men on the side, while still maintaining that marriage alone is meaningful and that homosexuality is immature—i.e., disreputable, dangerous, and illegal . . . However, I must admit that Christopher himself was behaving immaturely when he shrank from marrying Erika lest somebody, somewhere, might suspect him of trying to pass as a heterosexual. (213-4)

Marriage, the institution of the heterosexuals, is “the sacrament of the Others; the supreme affirmation of their dictatorship.” Heterosexuality, then, just like all other ideas pushed by the state and “the Others,” is an affront to Isherwood’s way of life. There would be nothing worse for Isherwood than for someone to “suspect him of trying to pass as a heterosexual” and he therefore must not make his namesake narrator even appear as such. Christopher Isherwood, the rebel, sees heterosexuality as a sign of giving up to the establishment, something “Isherwood” can never do.

Despite positioning heterosexuality, and therefore heterosexuals, as Christopher Isherwood’s opposition, Isherwood is also constructed as the other in relation to homosexuals:

Christopher giggled because he was embarrassed. He was embarrassed because, at last, he was being brought face to face with his tribe. Up to now, he had behaved as though the tribe didn’t exist and homosexuality was a private way of life discovered by himself and a few friends. He had always known, of course, that this wasn’t true. But now he was forced to admit kinship with these freakish fellow tribesmen and their distasteful customs. And he didn’t like it. His first reaction was to blame the Institute. He said to himself: How can they take this stuff so *seriously*? (16-7)

Isherwood, the one whose namesake narrator opposes all institutions, is reluctant to find kinship even with those who share his sexual preference. After “being brought face to face with his tribe,” Isherwood rushes to construct himself again as the other: “How can they take this stuff so *seriously*?” For Isherwood, and “Isherwood,” homosexuality is a secret way of life – a secret to be shared only with fellow rebels. But now that he has been brought to an institute dedicated to legitimising homosexuality, he is forced to think of himself as a part of a tribe. This attitude explains Isherwood’s real-life aversion to the homosexual liberation movement, and his wavering commitment to the Hirschfeld Institute: “he could never join the ranks of Karl’s friends and play nicey-nice third-sexism, because he refused utterly to think of himself as a queen” (28). Isherwood’s homosexuality must remain as a part of his own unique history that he constructs for himself. To join a group, to be labelled as a member of the “Third Sex,” would be for Isherwood to lose his personal identity to an institution; he would relinquish his ability to construct his own historical identity, and instead become a part of a movement.

This attitude of Isherwood’s is the reason he is so cagey in his construction of the “Christopher Isherwood” character and his own historical identity. “Isherwood” is never represented as explicitly homosexual, and even when he discusses his own homosexuality in his works, he does so from a removed third-person perspective, which is perhaps indicative of the public-school English culture in which he was educated as a novelist. For Isherwood, his identity, and indeed his homosexuality, is symbolic of a secret club to which he belongs; he is a rebel, determined not to conform. The caginess with which “Isherwood” is represented is thus indicative of the discreet, and secretive nature of homosexuality in public schools; everyone knows, but no one is going to directly address it. Therefore “Isherwood” is never presented directly in front of Isherwood’s camera lens. He must be constructed indirectly, representing “a private way of life discovered by himself and a few friends.” Or, as Auden writes in his dedication to Spender in *The Orators* (1932): “Private faces in public places / Are wiser and nicer / Than public faces in private places” (1-3). “Isherwood” belongs to Isherwood and his friends, no one else. This, though, appears to be contradicted by the title, *Christopher and His Kind*, which communicates a direct feeling of kinship with other members of his “kind.”

In his revision of the “Christopher Isherwood” character, and of his own personal history, Isherwood discusses his real-life relationships with those who

would eventually become the basis for “Isherwood”’s characters. One example of this can be seen in the representation of Christopher Isherwood’s relationship with Berthold Viertel, who later became the basis for the Fredrich Bergmann character in *Prater Violet*. The examination of Isherwood’s relationship with Viertel shows the common homophobia he endured in even his closest relationships, further strengthening his opposition to heterosexuality:

Now and again, Viertel touched on a sensitive area. Once, he told a story about a famous actor who decided to watch two boys having sex with each other. Viertel made it clear that the actor himself wasn’t homosexual, merely feeling bored and in the mood for any variety of freak show. The actor hired two homosexual youths. But, when they began to perform, one of them was unable to get an erection. Whereupon, the other advised him, in a stage whisper, to ‘pretend I’m Erich’ . . . The point and joke of this story—as far as Christopher could guess—was that these preposterous little inverts were suggesting that one sex partner might be preferable to another; they were, in fact, behaving like heterosexuals. This was amusing because, as we know, all homosexuals are hot to go to bed with any male whomsoever. Ha, ha. ‘Pretend I’m Erich,’ Viertel said, imitating the boy’s effeminate voice, and laughed heartily. Christopher laughed too, and felt ashamed of himself for doing so. Suppose Christopher had told a comparable story about the Jews—would Viertel have laughed? Either he would have found it completely pointless, or he would have flown into a rage, and rightly. (162)

There are two aspects of this passage that are worth noting. The first, is Viertel’s blatant homophobia, as he finds humour in the idea that homosexuals would behave like heterosexuals. Secondly, though, is Isherwood’s reaction to Viertel’s homophobia: “Christopher laughed too, and felt ashamed of himself for doing so.” In Gore Vidal’s 1981 essay, “Some Jews and the Gays,” he explains that he

was present when Christopher Isherwood tried to make this point to a young Jewish movie producer. “After all,” said Isherwood, “Hitler killed 600,000 homosexuals.” The young man was not impressed. “But Hitler killed six million Jews,” he said sternly. “What are you?” asked Isherwood. “In real estate?” (510)

Vidal's recollection provides context for Isherwood's feelings, specifically those that can be seen in the previous passage. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood then points out that the discrimination Viertel suffers as an Austrian Jew is comparable to that which he is espousing about homosexuals:

On another occasion, Viertel referred to Hitler's chief of staff, Ernst Roehm, and his notorious homosexuality. Viertel's comment was: 'To such swine we will never belong!' His tone as well as his words implied that Roehm's swinishness consisted just as much in being a homosexual as in being a Nazi. Christopher should have challenged him on this, but he didn't. He kept silent. Worse still, he felt himself blushing as though he were guilty. Which he was—of cowardice. Viertel also told him: 'You are a typical mother's son, I think. You are very repressed sexually. But you must not be. The right woman will change all that.' Could Viertel, with all his vaunted worldly wisdom, be so unperceptive? No, that was impossible. Then he must be deliberately provoking Christopher, to make him confess what he was. This, Christopher vowed to himself with cold fury, he would never do. (162-3)

For Isherwood, being a homosexual and being a Nazi are not at all similar and he is offended by Viertel's implication that they are. As soon as Viertel shows that he is unperceptive about Isherwood's homosexuality, he is constructed as Isherwood's opposition.

This positioning of Viertel as opposing Isherwood is represented in "Isherwood"'s relationship with Bergmann in *Prater Violet*:

He pursued me with questions, about my friends, my interests, my habits, my love life. The weekends, especially, were the object of endless, jealous curiosity. What did I do? Whom did I see? Did I live like a monk? 'Is it Mr. W. H. you seek, or the Dark Lady of the Sonnets?' But I was equally obstinate. I wouldn't tell him. I teased him with smiles and hints. (35)

Just as Isherwood "vowed to himself with cold fury" that he would never "confess what he was" to Viertel, "Isherwood" is "equally obstinate." "Isherwood" eventually reiterates this point in the last pages of *Prater Violet*:

I was glad I had never told Bergmann about J. He would have taken possession of that, as he did of everything else. But it was still mine, and it would always be. Even when J. and I were only trophies, hung up in the museums of each other's vanity. (119)

Just like his characters, readers too are forced to infer "Isherwood"'s homosexuality – he cannot tell us. To do so, would be to give readers "possession" of this part of him. "Isherwood" must maintain possession of his own self, and he must use it to create only Christopher Isherwood: "it was still mine, and it would always be." When Viertel does eventually find out that Isherwood is homosexual, their relationship changes:

Viertel showed that he knew all about Christopher's sex life and that he was prepared to treat it with respect.

Thus they began to become really friends; the tension between them on this subject had eased. It had almost ceased to exist by the time Christopher had settled in California, in 1939. Walking together on the beach at Santa Monica, they would sometimes play a game: Viertel would point out the boys he guessed Christopher might find attractive. He enjoyed doing this, though he was seldom right. (168-9)

In his revision of "Isherwood"'s relationship with Bergmann, Isherwood makes it clear that he could not truly be friends with Viertel until it was apparent that "he knew all about Christopher's sex life and that he was prepared to treat it with respect." Isherwood's homosexuality is not just central to his own identity, but to those of his friends. Just like his namesake, "Isherwood"'s fellow characters must, above all else, mirror his homosexuality – not necessarily in nature, but in attitude. They too must defy the institutions of their world; they too must exist to create the personal history of Christopher Isherwood.

After spending his writing career omitting homosexuality from his namesake narrator, it is only fitting that, in his revision of these omissions, Isherwood makes it clear for all readers that "Christopher Isherwood" is homosexual. The difference in the case of *Christopher and His Kind*, though, is that Isherwood, right from the start, asserts that this history is the one that "really" happened. In other words, Isherwood has not admitted that, in writing a work of this nature, one must employ fictionality

in their representations of their life – an autofictional strategy of which I am sure Isherwood was well aware. *Christopher and His Kind*, then, cannot be trusted as a strict autobiographical representation of Isherwood's life. It can, however, be trusted as a document that works to construct Isherwood's historical self. In his representations of "Christopher Isherwood," and indeed his past self, he has created his own self.

Isherwood's works hold a significant place in the history of the autofictional genre. As mentioned in the opening chapter, autofiction, particularly in recent years, has become widely popular and widely practised. Published in France in 2016, Édouard Louis's *History of Violence* was published in the United Kingdom in 2018. Its narrator is Édouard Louis, a novelist who, on Christmas Eve 2012 is raped and nearly killed by another man. This novel follows Édouard after this horrible event as he goes back to the village in which he grew up. It includes sequences in which Édouard overhears conversations between his family members, openly fictionalising what he hears, adding facts, changing the story. The novel even mentions his debut novel, *The End of Eddy* (2014), which is also autobiographical. Joanna Walsh's *Break.up* (2018) picks up from where she left off in her autobiographical work, *Hotel* (2015). *Break.up* follows the narrator, Joanna, and her online relationship with a man she has only met in person a few times. The novel consists of emails and messages, acutely dealing with the fact that this online world, much like the world of autobiography, is never really *real*. French writer Delphine de Vigan's *Based on a True Story* (2015) is also a notable work of autofiction. It follows the namesake narrator as she struggles with writer's block. In this work, de Vigan examines her autobiographical and fictional processes, addressing exactly where the space in which these seemingly conflicting genres intersect. De Vigan even uses a single initial to refer to another character, "L.," just as Isherwood does. These works are as much about the events they represent as they are about their authors and their respective writing processes, dealing with how they perceive reality and subsequently fictionalise it. While autofiction is certainly a genre heavily grounded in the French literary tradition, there was a writer, alone on the English island in the 1930s who preceded them.

"Isherwood," then, was not only ahead of Isherwood's own self, but shows Isherwood to be a novelist decades ahead of his time. Only in the last few decades has

the autofictional novel been widely celebrated; “Isherwood,” on the other hand, has been a living, breathing representation of his author since the 1930s.

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