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Zobrazení homosexuality v díle Christophera Isherwooda

The Depiction of Homosexuality in the Fiction of Christopher Isherwood

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce prozkoumává zobrazení homosexuality v románech *Goodbye to Berlin* a *A Single Man* Christophera Isherwooda. Tyto romány reprezentují dvě odlišná období Isherwoodova života a jeho fikce, evropské a americké, a tedy ho pevně zasazují do kánonu fikce vydané před hnutím za rovnoprávnost pro homosexuály na obou kontinentech. Text sestává ze dvou hlavních částí, teoretické a praktické. Teoretická část práce nabízí ucelený pohled na britskou a americkou tzv. queer fikci v období mezi koncem 19. století a rokem 1969. To odpovídá literárním obdobím a hnutím, jež měly na Isherwoodovu prózu největší vliv. K tomu je v této části také prezentován autorův životopis, kde jsou vypsány nejzásadnější události autorova života s odkazy na jeho dva literární hlasy. Praktická část bakalářské práce pak sestává z komparativní analýzy románů napříč pěti vybranými tématy. Postavy jsou analyzovány především ohledně své osobní identity, interpersonálních vztahů a společenských rolí. Navíc je zkoumán přínos autorova vlastního vlivu a jeho narativních technik. Tato bakalářská práce tedy má za cíl identifikovat hlavní rozdíly v prezentaci homosexuálních postav, a důvody těchto rozdílů ve vztahu k autorovu osobnímu životu a kulturnímu prostředí.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

identita, homosexualita, mezilidské vztahy, společnost

ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the depiction of homosexuality in the novels *Goodbye to Berlin* and *A Single Man* by Christopher Isherwood. The novels represent two distinctive periods in Isherwood's life and fiction, European and American, and as such firmly ground him in the canon of pre-gay liberation movement fiction on both continents. The text consists of two main parts, the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical part of the thesis provides a comprehensive overview of British and American queer fiction in the period between the end of the 19th century and the year 1969, corresponding to literary periods and movements which had the greatest impact on Isherwood's prose. In addition, a structured biography of the author is presented, outlining the most significant events in the author's life with reference to his two literary voices. The practical part of the thesis consists of a comparative analysis of the novels across five selected topics. The characters are analysed chiefly in terms of their personal identity, interpersonal relationships and societal roles. Moreover, the contribution of the author's own influence and the narrative techniques he employed is scrutinised. The thesis, therefore, aims to identify the main differences between how homosexual characters are portrayed and determine the causes of this distinctness in relation to the author's personal life and cultural environment.

KEY WORDS

identity, homosexuality, interpersonal relationships, society

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	6
2 Theoretical Part	8
2.1 Gay History, Fiction, and Identity	8
2.1.1 The Wilde Scandal	9
2.1.2 The Bloomsbury Group and E. M. Forster	11
2.1.3 The Interwar Period	12
2.1.4 The Second Wave of Gay Fiction	13
2.1.5 Gay Rights in the Post-War United Kingdom	16
2.2 Isherwood's Biography.....	17
2.2.1 The Early Years	17
2.2.2 The Berlin Years	19
2.2.3 The American Years	21
2.2.4 Isherwood's Legacy	24
3 Practical Part	26
3.1 Personal Identity and Relationship to Oneself	26
3.2 Interpersonal Relationships	29
3.3 Relationship to Society	34
3.4 Relationship to the Author.....	37
3.5 The Contribution of Narrative Techniques and Stylistic Devices	39
4 Conclusion.....	42
5 Works Cited.....	44

1 Introduction

Queer fiction has always played an important role in giving voice to minority authors aiming to establish their own literary tradition. Even though today it is a staple of many university courses, literary studies, and common core programs, it had not always been; this relatively recent development sprang to life as a result of the pioneering work of many dedicated individuals, chiefly among them the critically acclaimed Christopher Isherwood. Born in England and traversing through several European and Asian countries before finally settling in the USA, Isherwood was a true global citizen, well-suited for the advocacy of gay rights in many different parts of the world with their respective political and social circumstances. As he continued broadening his horizons and becoming acquainted with prominent thinkers and activists, so did his fiction grow bolder and more daring, until it became an outlet for many who could not speak up for themselves.

The aim of the theoretical part of this thesis, therefore, is to introduce Christopher Isherwood as an Anglo-American gay writer, provide relevant biographical data corresponding to the milestones in the development of his prose, and clarify his position in the canon of the early 20th century anglophone gay fiction. In order to understand how and why Isherwood proved to be a such an influential figure and a forerunner of the gay liberation movement, a brief definition of gay fiction is provided, with selected examples illustrating the development of the gay movement and fiction in the United Kingdom and the USA between the years 1885 and 1969. The historical scope of the analysis was chosen to correspond to the period when Isherwood was most active and prolific as an author, and to reflect on the significant change occurring in his fiction after he had emigrated to the USA in 1939. The historical outline is going to be followed by Isherwood's biography, mapping the two distinctive periods in his life - the British Isherwood and the American Isherwood. The last section of the theoretical part is

going to focus on Isherwood's prominence as a renowned openly gay writer, his influence on the gay liberation movement, and his legacy.

The practical part is comprised of an in-depth comparative analysis of how homosexuality is portrayed in two of the most representative novels in Isherwood's fiction, *Goodbye to Berlin* and *A Single Man*. The novels are analysed by the means of five cross-cutting themes and topics, namely: personal identity and relationship to oneself, interpersonal relationships, relationship to society, relationship to the author, and finally the contribution of narrative techniques and devices. Each section of the practical part looks at both novels and draws parallels and differences where applicable, with the goal of presenting the development in Isherwood's depiction of homosexuality at different stages of his career.

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 Gay History, Fiction, and Identity

It is nearly impossible to discuss the fiction of Christopher Isherwood without addressing the underlying theme present, in one way or another, in most of his works - homosexuality. While unabashedly open about his sexual orientation throughout most of his life, Isherwood preferred to avoid labelling his pre-1939 characters as gay, leaving it up to the reader's discerning eye to read between the lines. This writing habit, however, raises the question of how exactly gay fiction is to be defined - by what the author says, what the author does, what the character says or what the character does?

There is a lack of wide consensus as to what exactly gay literature entails. Claude J. Summers defines gay fiction as the “fictional representation of male homosexuals by gay male and lesbian writers; the evolution of concepts about homosexual identity; and the construction, perpetuation, revision, and deconstruction of fictions (including stereotypes and defamations) about homosexuality and homosexuals” (*Gay Fictions* 11). Reed Woodhouse presents a corroborating view, describing gay male fiction as “literature by, for, and about gay men” (1).

However, as Summers comments, the issue of establishing clear borderlines of homosexual fiction is more intricate. He points out that homosexual identity defines not merely who one is, but what one does (*Gay Fictions* 14). As a result, gay fiction and history as well as gay struggle for representation and identity are so closely interwoven that they are practically inseparable. Therefore, the following passages are going to examine the development of gay fiction in the first half of the 20th century in synchrony with paramount historical milestones and scientific discoveries, rather than keeping them apart. This approach allows for a more complete picture of important events that shaped gay identity and, by extension, Christopher Isherwood's fiction.

2.1.1 The Wilde Scandal

In *Foucault and Queer Theory*, Tamsin Spargo presents the breakthrough that occurred in the perception of homosexuality in the 19th century. She relates the concept of the prominent French philosopher and historian Michael Foucault, who maintains that even though homosexuality was a common phenomenon before the 19th century, the “category of the homosexual grew out of a particular context in the 1870s” (19). However, it was in the 19th century when, according to Foucault, homosexuals began to be defined as an “aberrant type of human being defined by perverse sexuality”. The rapidly developing capitalist system called for a workforce supported by strong family values, and same-sex desires were considered a perversion, an aberration from the norm.

Summers presents an opposing view, arguing that the categorisation of individuals on basis of their sexual behaviour occurred well before the 19th century (*Gay Fictions* 18). Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the end of the 19th century saw an increase in the limitations placed upon the homosexual community. The “social purity movement” in England in the 1880s eventually succeeded in putting forward a revision of the Criminal Law Amendment Act regulating sexual behaviour. Although same-sex relationships were not the primary focus of the law, M.P. Henry Labouchere suggested an amendment that classified acts of “gross indecency” as misdemeanour. It was under this act that Oscar Wilde was convicted and incarcerated for “committing acts of gross indecency with male persons” in 1895 (Linder).

Claude Summers is convinced that modern gay fiction in English begins with Oscar Wilde (*Gay Fictions* 29). Wilde’s homosexuality, which at times he attempted to hide (fearing both social ostracism and legal ramifications), and at times tried to garner more respect for, made him a pioneer of gay fiction, and his writings essential for his successors. The love that dare not speak its name made Wilde a martyr of a specific kind, and Michael Morris of the

ArtAngel art group remarks that while Wilde never wrote about his sexuality openly, in the context of the sensibility of this period, it was not to be expected anyway (Gosling).

Summers points out that as late as 1835 sodomy was still punishable by death, and to say that the Victorian society frowned upon homosexuality would be an understatement. The persecution of homosexuals helps explain why Wilde never portrays his characters as openly gay, but merely alludes and hints in works such as *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). In *De Profundis* (1897), Wilde finally confirms his separation from the major heterosexual society and revels in his isolation (*Gay Fictions* 32). On the other hand, it is also important to note that certain authors, for example Adam Goodheart of Washington College, believe that Wilde's crime "was not his orientation [...] so much as his insistence on parading it before the judge and jury." This interpretation remains open to questioning.

As a reaction to the major repercussions for homosexuality, Uranians, an early gay rights activist group, was formed in England (Summers, *Gay Fictions* 19). In Germany, the works of Karl Ulrichs and Karl-Maria Kertbeny paved the way towards looser laws and regulations, with Kertbeny's booklet Paragraph 143 of the Prussian Penal Code published in 1869. Kertbeny asserted that the government should not police private affairs unless they infringed upon the rights of others. He believed that the state did not have the right to intervene in acts between consenting adults. Kertbeny is also credited with coining the terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual" (Peron). Concurrently, in the year 1897 Magnus Hirschfeld founded the world's first homosexual organisation, Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee, and in 1919 he founded the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin (Putna 16, as translated by Barbora Imrišková¹). Isherwood describes Hirschfeld as the "world's leading expert on homosexuality" and a "champion of the Third Sex" (Ulrich's umbrella term for homosexuality and a variation of other

¹ All subsequent translations from Czech are made by Barbora Imrišková.

sexual and gender types). He continues to add that Hirschfeld campaigned for the revision of Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, a German analogue to the English Criminal Law Amendment Act. (*Christopher and His Kind* 17). Putna presents two goals that Hirschfeld was trying to accomplish: the abolishment of Paragraph 175, and acceptance of homosexuals by the German society (17).

In the United States homosexuals did not have to face such hostility in this period. Among the pioneers of gay awareness and understanding Summers mentions the poetry of Walt Whitman, and the short story *Paul's Case* by Willa Cather (*Gay Fictions* 19), which features a probably homosexual protagonist serving as a metaphor for more universal concerns.

2.1.2 The Bloomsbury Group and E. M. Forster

Inspired by the activities of the stirring gay rights movement in Germany, writers in England responded to the new trend as well. Another important figure of gay fiction, E. M. Forster, emerged as a member of the Bloomsbury Group. Formed in 1904 in London, the group consisted of well-educated upper-class intellectuals, set apart from the rest of their contemporaries by their open support of gay rights, women in the arts, open marriages, and uninhibited sexuality. They rejected the Victorian ideals of their childhoods and instead adopted liberal and progressive attitudes (Brooks). In addition to Forster, three of the ten initial members of the group were gay or lesbian, namely John Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, and Lytton Strachey (Lyon).

Forster, born in 1879, grew up in the aftermath of the Wilde trial, and never dared to publicly reveal his sexuality. As a writer he dedicated his novels and short stories to heterosexual love, steadily suppressing his own sexuality throughout the first decades of his life (Moore). The homosexual short stories and later a full novel, *Maurice*, were not intended for publication. Even though Forster completed the first draft of *Maurice* in 1914, he only showed

it to a selected group of friends. Among them was Isherwood, who repeatedly tried to get Forster to publish the book. However, Forster did not relent, and the novel's manuscript, bequeathed to Isherwood, was published only posthumously in 1971 (Symondson).

In addition to *Maurice*, Forster's gay fiction also includes short stories such as "The Life to Come" and "The Other Boat". Nonetheless, it is thanks to *Maurice* that Forster continues to be hailed as the pioneer of the Bildungsroman where the main protagonist finally comes to terms with his homosexuality as the predominant novelistic form of gay fiction (Summers, *Gay Fictions* 23).

2.1.3 The Interwar Period

Although gay fiction did not flourish in the interwar period in England, some of the period's most celebrated writers Wylan Hugh Auden, Stephen Spender, and Isherwood himself, captured the openness and tolerance of the Weimar Republic in their works. Auden, a close friend of Isherwood's, deliberately chose to forego individual and personal matters in his poetry, concentrating on political and social causes instead. Auden's homosexuality, while a public secret, never became the focal point of his works, and Auden himself fretted about the impact of his sexuality on his public image and persona too much to ever reveal it directly. Instead, similarly to Wilde, he opted for allusions, analogies and private jokes (Frontain). Auden's sexually explicit poem "The Platonic Blow" is not included in the authorized edition of his works. Moreover, his poems proclaiming his love for Chester Kallman, an American poet who went on to become the love of his life, do not specify the gender of the object of his affections (Norton). It is also important to note that Auden and Isherwood enjoyed a friendship and companionship that lasted a lifetime. They spent not only the thirties in Berlin together, but in 1938 also sailed to China to document the Sino-Japanese conflict, and eventually agreed to emigrate to the United States in January 1939 (Bucknell, "Biography").

Stephen Spender, who also belonged to Isherwood's inner circle of friends and confidantes, took a different stance than Auden. Despite his marriage to Natasha Spender, he engaged in numerous, quite public affairs with men throughout his life. However, his sexuality never became the topic of his works, and some authors argue that "he fell into the reigning Oxford cult of homosexuality, and just as easily fell out of it" (Metcalf).

To sum up, in the Victorian and Edwardian period, homosexuality was neither accepted nor encouraged in England, as evidenced by the infamous trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895. The trial verdict and the general atmosphere around England negatively affected the successive generations of gay writers. E. M. Forster witnessed this discouraged attitude alongside with Isherwood, who describes how he felt about his life in England in precise terms: "Christopher was quite willing to admit that his life in England was basically untruthful, since it conformed outwardly to standards of respectability which he inwardly rejected and despised" (*Christopher and His Kind* 7). Contrary to the rather discriminatory public opinion in England, Germany was becoming more and more gay-friendly, with Magnus Hirschfeld spearheading gay rights activism in Berlin. It comes as no surprise, then, that Isherwood chose Berlin as the city to escape the constrictions of his motherland to in 1928.

2.1.4 The Second Wave of Gay Fiction

The post-World War II literary boom affected the authors of gay fiction as well, even though Summers notices that the second wave is an American, rather than British, phenomenon. He identifies two reasons for the emergence of a visible gay subculture in the United States in the late 1940s: increasing urbanisation, which clusters people together, and the turmoil commenced by war mobilisation, which allowed same-sex action to be expressed more easily (*Gay Fictions* 23).

Martin C. Putna put forward the idea that the development of gay identity in the United States came in three phases. In the first phase, known as the “homophilic phase” and spanning the fifties and sixties, tolerance by the majority was of utmost importance (19). Even as late as April 1952, homosexuality was still listed as a “sociopathic personality disturbance” in The American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual. To combat this attitude, several gay rights organisations such as The Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis were founded (“LGBT Rights Milestones”). These societies were aided by the findings published in “The Kinsey Reports”, particularly “Sexual Behavior in the Human Male” (1948). Kinsey’s research discovered not only a greater variation in sexual behaviour than expected, but also surprisingly high rates of homosexual behaviour (Times Higher Education). Consequently, gay men and lesbians felt a greater sense of belonging and community than ever before (Summers, *Gay Fictions* 24).

Another ground-breaking study called “The Homosexual in America” by Donald Webster Cory was published in 1951. Cory depicted homosexuals as a detested minority, suffering from a denial of civil rights not unlike the ordeals which other religious and ethnic groups were experiencing throughout the same period (Goldberg). This greater visibility of gay subculture gave rise to a new wave of gay fiction. In *The City and the Pillar* (1948), Gore Vidal decided to challenge the stereotype of gay characters as either effeminate, transvestite or suffering in an unhappy marriage, and depicted the novel’s main character Jim Willard as a masculine athlete. Vidal’s open portrayal of a love affair between homosexual men became a bestseller despite the refusal of several major newspapers, including *The New York Times*, to review the publication (Masello).

While Vidal resolved to present a same-sex relationship as mundane and in no aspect extraordinary, his contemporaries Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams employed a different approach. Williams published seven gay stories in the forties and fifties, including

“Desire and the Black Masseur”, “Hard Candy”, and “The Mysteries of Joy Rio” (Woodhouse 36). The characters in his short stories are too eccentric to conform to the norms of everyday homosexuals, and show a vivid portrayal of the oppression faced by the gay subculture in the United States (Summers, *Gay Fictions* 25). Capote’s semi-autobiographical first novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948) juxtaposes male gay identity with effeminacy, with the main protagonist falling in love with his gay uncle in the gothic ambiance of a destitute Southern plantation (Richards). Both Williams and Capote aim their attention at extreme character types, including “mannish women, transvestites, dirty old men and flamboyant queens” and see homosexuality as a “manifestation of the irrationality of love” (Summers, *Gay Fictions* 130).

On the contrary, the novel *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) by James Baldwin, leaves ample room for interpretation with Baldwin making his characters “bisexually confused” and injecting certain ambiguity into his depiction of homosexuality (Summers, *Gay Fictions* 173). This sentiment is quite understandable in the historical context. Police raids, threats of violence, and discrimination in bars and clubs were an everyday occurrence for the gay community, and three years prior to the publication of *Giovanni’s Room*, President Eisenhower banned homosexuals from working for the federal government (“LGBT Rights Milestones”).

The scales tipped on the night of 27th June 1969, when a police raid of the Stonewall Inn in New York City resulted in five nights of violent protests. A gay liberation movement formed following the Stonewall riots and managed to achieve the removal of homosexuality from The American Psychiatric Association’s list of mental disorders in 1973 (Lauerman). Not content with the goal of mere acceptance anymore, the second phase of gay rights movement (also known as the “gay liberation phase”) desired a revolution and reshaping of the entire society.

In the third phase, following the right-wing backlash, the gay movement had to adapt a defence position and according to Putna still occupies this side of the spectrum today. In this

current phase, homosexuals consider themselves not only a minority, but a nation, with their own neighbourhoods, flag, national holiday and memorial days (Putna 19).

2.1.5 Gay Rights in the Post-War United Kingdom

Even though the second wave of gay fiction was predominantly an American phenomenon, one of the classics of the genre was published in 1953 in the UK. Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* depicts same-sex relationships between soldiers and male nurses in a military hospital. The novel was published in a period when homosexuality was illegal, with "gross indecency" still reported in newspapers recounting trials of homosexuals. The rising intolerance towards homosexuals was led by Home Secretary Sir David Maxwell Fyfe. In the post-war period, homosexuals were perceived as traitorous and depraved, and Fyfe wanted to "rid England of this plague" (Bedell). Between the years 1945 and 1955, the number of custodial sentences in England and Wales skyrocketed to 1,000 per year (Milmo) and only a year before the publication of *The Charioteer*, Alan Turing, the Enigma codebreaker, was convicted of homosexuality. Turing was forced to undergo hormone therapy and committed suicide in 1954 (Bedell). Three years later, Fyfe ordered a report by Lord Wolfenden of the House of Lords to consider whether the law should be amended. The Wolfenden Committee eventually recommended that homosexual acts between consenting adults in private should no longer be illegal, and homosexuality was decriminalised in the UK in 1967 (Milmo).

In conclusion, after World War II, tensions were rising between homosexuals and both American and British authorities. Even though major scientific studies, such as "The Kinsey Report", showed that homosexuality was far more prevalent than previously believed, the public opinion remained unswayed, and the police continuously cracked down on gays and lesbians. Ultimately, the severe persecution was halted by the Stonewall Riots and the birth of the gay rights movement in 1969 in the US, and the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the

UK in 1967. The gay writers of the period followed two radically different approaches, either portraying homosexual characters as everyday and mundane, or unconventional and peculiar. Isherwood belongs to the former group, with his novel *A Single Man* representing not so much a homosexual man, as an “universal aspect of the human condition” (Garnes). This aspect will be later analysed in the practical part of the thesis.

2.2 Isherwood’s Biography

Every author is influenced by their background and experiences to a certain degree, and in case of Christopher Isherwood the autobiographical factors gain extreme importance. As Stephen Wade notes in his biography, *Christopher Isherwood* (1992), the boundaries between Isherwood’s autobiography and fiction are quite blurred. The aim of the following biographical section is to describe major events in Isherwood’s life and depict how they relate to characteristic features of his novels, predominantly *Goodbye to Berlin* and *A Single Man*.

2.2.1 The Early Years

The Anglo-American novelist, playwright, screen-writer and diarist Christopher Isherwood was born as Christopher William Bradshaw-Isherwood on 26th August, 1904 in Cheshire, England. As a grandson of a wealthy country squire, his childhood was quite privileged, although marked by a distant relationship with his parents and eventually the loss of his father in World War I (Bucknell, “Biography”). His mother Kathleen was just as strong-willed as the young Christopher, and he grew to see her as a representative of the old generation he rebelled against (Wade 2). Isherwood later explored his family background in the novel *Kathleen and Frank* (1971), where he also publicly came out as a homosexual.

From an early age Isherwood had a proclivity for theatre and, encouraged by his mother, would often write and stage plays. He was keen on dressing up and acting in his own plays.

This affinity for the theatrical continued throughout Isherwood's life. In 1914 he began attending St. Edmund's Preparatory School, where he established a pivotal friendship with a man who would be instrumental throughout his life, W. H. Auden. They continued to cultivate their relationship at the Repton public school, where Auden, Isherwood and their friend Edward Upward became acutely aware of the privilege of the affluent and rejected it (Wade 2). Later, at Corpus Cristi College, Isherwood began another of his long-lasting habits; diary-keeping. His diaries served as a basis of the material for his semi-autobiographical fiction.

After attending Corpus Cristi Isherwood continued his studies at Cambridge. However, he had to leave the school in spring 1925 after failing a test on purpose, a decision stemming from his increased focus on his literary endeavours rather than the academic career his mother had envisioned. His first novel, *All the Conspirators*, was published three years later. Isherwood briefly attempted to return to school in 1928 to study medicine but abandoned his studies within six months. Allured not only by his career as a novelist, but by the stories Wystan Auden had brought from his travels to Berlin, he left for the Weimar capital for the first time in March 1929. Isherwood explains his motivation for exploring Berlin in what is now an iconic passage in his stylised autobiography *Christopher and His Kind*: "However, when *Lions and Shadows* suggests that Christopher's chief motive for going to Berlin was that he wanted to meet Laynard, it is avoiding the truth [...] It was Berlin himself he was hungry to meet; the Berlin Wystan had promised him. To Christopher, Berlin meant Boys" (3). In the same telling Isherwood then gives an account of his first romantic and sexual experiences, and highlights how his love life was stifled in his home country by his own preferences. Christopher, he explains unscrupulously, "needed a work-class foreigner" to be able to relax sexually (*Christopher and His Kind* 3).

2.2.2 The Berlin Years

Even though Isherwood's first visit to Berlin was relatively short, during the trip he came to know a young man called Bubi, his first German infatuation. Partly because of Bubi and partly because of the appeal Berlin held as a stronghold of liberalism, freedom and artistic individuality, Isherwood decided to emigrate there in November 1929 (Wade 8). The Berlin Isherwood fell in love with was a mecca of artistic, Bohemian culture, with a reputation for its open-mindedness and sexual tolerance. It was in Berlin where Magnus Hirschfeld opened his Institute for Sexual Research, and it was at the Institute where Isherwood first came face to face with the reality of being a member of a homosexual minority, which he describes as his "tribe" (*Christopher and His Kind* 16). Isherwood soon established intimate relationships with several German boys, chief among them the young Heinz Neddermeyer. Many of these boys became inspirations for the characters in Isherwood's novels which capture life in pre-war Berlin.

However, as the author himself indicates, his Berlin novels cannot be taken at face value. First of all, he burned the diary he had kept in Berlin after finishing his two period novels *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. The real reason why he decided to burn the diary was that he preferred the "simplified, more creditable, more exciting fictitious past" which he wanted to remember instead of the real events. Isherwood freely admits that "the Berlin novels leave out a great deal and [...] they also falsify events and alter dates for dramatic purposes" (*Christopher and His Kind* 41). Some of the traceable real-life inspirations for Isherwood's Berlin stories are his relationships with the actress Jean Ross, the original of Sally Bowles, and Gerald Hamilton, the original Mr. Norris (Bucknell, "Biography"). Isherwood's landlord Francis also appears as a character called Ambrose in his later American novel *Down There on a Visit* (1962).

Isherwood's Berlin stories follow the release of his second novel *The Memorial* (1932), with *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* published in 1935 and *Goodbye to Berlin* in 1939. These

novels are often classified as documentary fiction, predominantly due to Isherwood's notorious opening passage 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" (*The Berlin Stories* 207). However, the narrator's feigned objectivity is debunked later.

Although the theatre play *I Am a Camera* and the subsequent musical *Cabaret* brought Isherwood worldwide recognition, he came to regret the metaphor of the camera as being misleading (Bucknell, "Who is Christopher Isherwood?" 14). The novelist Armistead Maupin clarifies why in his introduction to *The Berlin Stories*: "Isherwood was not, as the camera metaphor suggested, a detached or a clinical observer; he was as fully engaged as a writer could be, both with his work and his readers". Maupin reveals that Isherwood made his hero a neutered observer due to the ethical conundrum he was facing: neither revealing his sexual identity nor making him a heterosexual (ix). Despite his novels capturing peaceful life in pre-war Berlin, Isherwood himself had to flee the city together with his lover Heinz to escape the Nazis in 1933. They moved around Europe until 1937, when Heinz was arrested by the Gestapo and sentenced to six months in prison, a year of labour service and two years in the army (*Christopher and His Kind* 297).

Following his lover's arrest Isherwood briefly returned to England before setting off to China with Auden in 1938 to document the Sino-Japanese war. The two writers returned to England via the United States, where they both fell under the spell of New York City. Isherwood recalls what effect the city had on him: "If he did decide to settle in America - and by America, he meant New York - he would be able to make himself at home there. This, he said to himself, was a setting in which his public personality would function more freely, more successfully than it could ever have functioned in London" (*Christopher and His Kind* 349). In the end,

Auden and Isherwood emigrated to the United States for good in January 1939 (Bucknell, “Biography”).

2.2.3 The American Years

In spite of New York’s tantalising appeal, Isherwood eventually settled in Hollywood, where he began to write movie scripts. The move to the United States helped Isherwood to reinvent himself in terms of his writing career and personal and political beliefs. He became a pacifist, a Hinduist, and a disciple of the Ramakrishna monk Swami Prabhavananda, head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California (Harker 1, Bucknell, “Biography”). Isherwood struggled with his new identity as an expatriate, as his move did not go unnoticed in England and even became a scandal, with several British writers considering his emigration a “betrayal” (Faraone 247). Likewise, navigating the Cold War politics and literary culture proved to be quite troublesome (Harker 2). In this identity crisis he reached out to the Vedanta religion. The years 1939-1945 were his period of spiritual learning and he did not publish any literary works, save for the English translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, an Indian religious text. Isherwood briefly considered becoming a monk, and even though he rejected the idea, he remained a devout Hinduist for the rest of his life.

In addition to exploring his newfound spiritual path, Isherwood also immersed himself in the social life of his new home. He made acquaintances with numerous prominent figures of the period, such as Aldous Huxley and Truman Capote, and his screenwriting job introduced him to stars such as Greta Garbo and Charlie Chaplin (Bucknell, “Who is Christopher Isherwood?” 19). Isherwood’s movie work inspired his novels as well, with his first American novel *Prater Violet* (1945) giving a semi-autobiographical account of his first film writing job in London in the thirties. Although Mario Faraone of the University of Rome considers *Prater Violet* “a turning point in Isherwood’s personal mythology and the road to self-understanding”

(249), the real breakthrough came with the novel *The World in the Evening* (1954). As the writer John McFarland explains, it is in *The World in the Evening* where Isherwood presents a gay couple in a loving relationship for the first time. McFarland adds that Isherwood lets himself go in the novel, writing about two gay male lovers with humour and ease (242). Given the fact that the predominant tendency in gay writing of the period was a tragic ending (as witnessed e.g. in Gore Vidal's *The City and The Pillar*), Isherwood is ahead of his time. The kind, open portrayal of homosexuality can perhaps be traced to the influence of Isherwood's guru Swami Prabhavananda. In a moment of paramount importance, the swami declared another of his gay disciples Chris Wood pure and good in front of Isherwood. This paradigm shift, as McFarland calls it, might have paved the way to Isherwood's newly found sincerity even with himself (239).

In 1953, after completing the first draft of *The World in the Evening*, Isherwood met the eighteen-year-old college student Don Bachardy. Despite the age difference of thirty years they soon fell in love, and their relationship became one of the most enduring in Hollywood, parted only by Isherwood's death. The art curator Dan Luckenbill, who knew Bachardy and Isherwood personally, describes the pair as a "model couple" for gays in Los Angeles in the sixties and mentions how they hosted dinner parties in their Santa Monica home for young people of all backgrounds (37-39). Isherwood also supported Bachardy in his artistic endeavours, and in 1961 the young artist left for London to study at the Slade School of Fine Art (Bucknell, "Biography"). As Bachardy struggled to find his own identity and artistic expression, his relationship with Isherwood became strained and nearly ended in 1963. The darker period of Isherwood's life is reflected in his masterpiece *A Single Man*.

A Single Man presents a familiar blend of autobiography and fiction. Modelled on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, it depicts one day in the life of a literature professor George. Much like Isherwood, who himself became a university lecturer in 1959, George is a middle-

aged Englishman and a homosexual (Bucknell, “Who is Christopher Isherwood?” 26). He mourns the death of his lover Jim, who died in a car crash, preferring to tell the neighbours that Jim moved away to conceal the true nature of their relationship. In pre-Stonewall America, George cannot publicly reveal his homosexuality, even though he accepts and loves himself the way he is. Isherwood no longer tries to muddy the waters, and presents George as a homosexual straight from the beginning of the novel, but never quite exactly makes his orientation central to the plot. Instead he focuses on universal aspects of life experienced by everyone: love, loss, fear of death, acceptance, tolerance and alienation from society. In fact, Claude Summers points out that Isherwood uses his main character as a metaphor for the “alienation endemic to the general human condition” (*Christopher Isherwood* 114). The novel was adapted to the big screen in 2009 by Tom Ford.

Although Isherwood grounded himself firmly as an American writer, and even became an American citizen in 1946, the greatest fame was brought to him by three adaptations of *Goodbye to Berlin*. The theatre play by John van Druten opened in 1951, followed by the 1955 film *I Am a Camera* and the musical *Cabaret* (1966) by Hal Prince. Spurred by the adaptations and by the release of his new book, *A Meeting by the River* (1967), Isherwood’s star was rising. After the Stonewall riots he finally publicly came out in *Kathleen and Frank* (1971) and his 1976 memoir *Christopher and His Kind*, which revisits his time in Berlin, made him a seventies cultural icon (Harker 171). Isherwood introduces *Christopher and his Kind* as an effort to write a biography “as frank and factual” as he can make it (1). However, given the fact that he burned his diaries from the period, it is uncertain to what extent the readers can believe him. Nonetheless, the book made him a hero of gay liberation and a national celebrity, now in his own identity. Isherwood’s last book, *My Guru and His Disciple* (1980), is a culmination of his devotion to the Vedanta religion (Bucknell, “Biography”).

2.2.4 Isherwood's Legacy

Isherwood's biographers James J. Berg and Chris Freeman preface their introduction to *The Isherwood Century* (2000) by claiming that the writer remains "one of the most celebrated writers of his time and ours". They attribute Isherwood with documenting the twentieth century, contributing to the development of memoir and autobiographical fiction, and pioneering gay writing in America and abroad (4). The biographers continue to add that Isherwood became a gay writer in the 50s, when his fiction started to feature gay characters and issues (6). Unfortunately, in the period prior to his move to the United States, Isherwood could not write about homosexuality as he would have liked (Bucknell, "Who is Christopher Isherwood?" 22) due to the possible legal hazards. However, even then he felt aware of the need to speak out openly for the community (Luckenbill 39).

Meeting Don Bachardy and experiencing first-hand the hope that rippled through society after the Stonewall riots, Isherwood started to handle his gay characters with more freedom. The success of *A Single Man* encouraged him to lecture in front of college gay groups, trying to present a positive role model (Peters 67). Even though he normally charged a thousand dollars to give a public speech in 1974, he spoke for gay causes free of charge (White 81). David Bergman, professor of English at Towson University, notes that "more than any other writer, Isherwood gave direction to the gay literary movement", and in the lecture "Gay Literature Today" the novelist Robert Ferro placed Isherwood on the list of "eight or ten great homosexual writers" who were "literary forebears" (205). Robert Peters summarises Isherwood's legacy by quoting a part of their exchange in a Santa Monica restaurant in 1966:

'I envy you, Chris. You convince me that a gay life can be something to celebrate rather than feel guilt-driven about. I'll always be grateful.'

'I'm touched,' he said, with a caution that I alone must make decisions (68).

Christopher Isherwood remains one of the most acclaimed writers of the twentieth century, and as attested by numerous personal testimonies, an inspiration for the gay liberation movement and a generation of gay writers to come. As the gay culture in the United States helped him find a voice and a place in a community after his move, the publication of *A Single Man* helped many aspiring authors to find theirs.

3 Practical Part

3.1 Personal Identity and Relationship to Oneself

Unfolding against the backdrop of the diminishing glitz and glamour of the pre-World War II capital of the Weimar Republic, Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* paints a bleak picture of a city in a rapid decline. Once renowned for its open-mindedness and regarded a hub of European artistic, bohemian culture, it lured young Isherwood to explore its nooks and crannies and find the elusive working-class foreigner to satisfy his need for intimacy (Wade 8). After his permanent relocation Isherwood commenced work on another novel, and enjoyed numerous relationships with men who would later become the basis for *Berlin's* key characters. In his semi-autobiographical style of writing, all the episodic stories in the collection are told from a first-person perspective. Moreover, the narrator of the story is eerily similar to Isherwood himself; an Englishman who has moved to Berlin to work on his novel, and earns his living by teaching English. Even though he would like the readers to consider him a mere unbiased observer and keeps most of his thoughts to himself, gradually he undergoes a slight change in his self-perception and sense of personal and sexual identity. At the end of the novel, he is finally capable of identifying himself as who he is.

In the first episode of the novel, *A Berlin Diary (Autumn 1930)*, the subject of (sexual) identity is broached by his student Fr. Hipp. In what Isherwood describes as a "cross-examination" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 222) the young lady relentlessly, and quite flirtatiously, insists on her tutor disclosing the details of his relationships with other girls. The narrator dodges the question several times, and the reader is left to wonder why Christopher would withhold a response to such an innocuous enquiry. At this point in the story, it is unclear whether he is in denial of his own sexuality, or if he wishes to avoid being publicly recognised as a homosexual. Both options clearly indicate a certain reluctance to address the narrator's self-perception and relationship with himself - either he is not at ease with who he is, or he is not at ease with other

people knowing who he is. Referring back to the infamous “I am a camera” statement, it could be argued that he simply wishes to function as a mirror reflecting others rather than to be in the limelight himself, and to this end he does not consider it imperative to reveal too much about his inner thoughts and motivations. Similarly, a point could be made that he is genuinely not ready to come out as gay, or that he simply wishes to refrain from discussing his personal affairs with a student. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the narrator is not quite comfortable in his own skin, and appears to need to keep himself to himself for the most part.

Another prime example of the narrator’s tendency to deflect any question aimed at his sexual identity and relationship history is revealed in the second episode of the novel. After the narrator’s landlady, Frl. Schroeder, meets the memorable titular character Sally, she marvels that the narrator would have such a lady friend. She clearly infers from the nature of the visit and from Sally’s demeanour that they are romantically involved, and yet again he chooses to leave the query without any explanation or commentary, seemingly content in having Frl. Schroeder believe that he is in a relationship with Sally. It seems simpler to lie by omission than to go through the arduous task of clarifying the true nature of his sexual identity.

The following episodes in the novel present a series of relationships which will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. Nonetheless, his friendship with an openly homosexual couple appears to change the narrator’s perspective. He comes back to Berlin one final time before departing in 1933 and embarks on a farewell tour of gay bars and clubs. The first and last honest depiction of his sexuality comes veiled as a joke, when his friend Fritz and he encounter a party of hesitant Americans at the entrance to a travesty show bar. One of the Americans musters his courage and enquires after the nature of the place. “Do you mean they’re queer?” he asks, to which Fritz replies, “Eventually we’re all queer.” When the American turns to Christopher, the narrator gives a surprisingly candid answer and confirms that he’s “very

queer indeed” (*Goodbye to Berlin* 396). Even though the reply is teasing in nature, it could be interpreted as the first step on the narrator’s journey to the confidence in his own identity.

If the narrator of *Goodbye to Berlin* leaves the city at the beginning of the road to self-acceptance of his sexual identity, the protagonist of *A Single Man*, George, is noticeably more comfortable with who he is. This middle-aged university professor of English literature in California once again parallels Isherwood’s own life to an extent. As an Englishman in the United States Isherwood had to struggle to find his new literary voice and place among the established writers of the period, while dealing with the homophobic atmosphere of the 1950s. On the contrary, George and his partner Jim seem to have adapted to post-war United States rather well, buying a property in a Los Angeles suburb and leading a quiet, content life - until Jim dies in a car crash. Subverting the prevalent tradition of framing gay literature as a coming-out Bildungsroman, Isherwood presents a well-adjusted character at ease with his homosexuality. His sexual orientation is presented as an integral part of his personality, open neither to question nor interpretation (Summers 203). At the same time, it remains the focal point of the novel, as George keeps bitterly addressing the point that his neighbours would not welcome the truth about his relationship with Jim. He even imagines that one of his neighbours would find perverse joy in the news, believing that a gay relationship “can sometimes be beautiful - particularly if one of the parties is already dead; or, better yet, both” (*A Single Man* 16).

That being said, George is not at odds with himself, and does not need to justify his choices or behaviour to anyone. The deeper crisis that he is facing comes from not from a personal identity struggle, but from feeling detested and pitied by his neighbours, misunderstood by his best friend, and lonely even when surrounded by students, colleagues, and friends. However, throughout the course of the day which the novel spans, George gradually realises that his experience, while heartbreaking, cannot define him. He tells his best

friend Charley that “the Past is over” (*A Single Man*, 113) and he decides to build a new identity, unfortunately thwarted by a heart attack that presumably kills him. What makes *A Single Man* so remarkable is that George’s plight is independent of the fact that he is mourning the death of a gay lover, which it is presented and perceived as nothing out of the ordinary even and especially by George himself. In comparison with the narrator of *Goodbye to Berlin*, he faces challenges innate to the entire human race, such as death, loss, and building your life anew after a tragedy strikes. This makes him a perfect representative of each and every one of us, even though he is only a single man.

3.2 Interpersonal Relationships

In addition to the exploration of the inner self, Isherwood also offers the readers insight into various relationships of the main protagonist of *Goodbye to Berlin* throughout the course of the novel. The wide array of Berlin’s inhabitants spans different nationalities, social classes and spheres of life, but a few of them stand out as representatives of the narrator’s romantic and sexual interests. In *On Ruegen Island* we are introduced to a young homosexual couple, Peter Wilkinson and Otto Nowak. In the novel, the narrator is once again only a bystander, staying in the rented holiday house with Otto and Peter by pure chance. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood credits the real-life inspiration for Otto, and makes it abundantly clear that Peter is, in fact, an avatar of himself. The narrator almost reveals his hand in a lengthy, two-page physical description of Otto, praising his “face like a ripe peach”, “superb pair of shoulders and chest” and “beautiful ripe lines of the torso” (*The Berlin Stories* 282, 283). However, he is careful to taper off his praise, and deftly reverts back to being an amused onlooker and recorder of events that transpire between Otto and Peter.

We learn somewhat of Peter’s background and education, and also discover that he is an insecure, neurotic, and quite jealous partner. When Otto goes to a dance, Peter stays at home and sulks, gloomily predicting that Otto will leave him. Even though the events play out

differently that night, Otto's capricious behaviour and frequent mood swings and teasing do nothing to put Peter at ease. The relationship presented to the reader is strained from the very beginning, even resulting in physical violence from Peter's side. It is quite evident that these two are a horrible mismatch, and the narrator frequently comments on how they wish to "humiliate each other" and find each other's company tedious. As the summer progresses, Peter and Otto continue to throw barbs at each other and become more and more uneasy in each other's company, until their relationship is reduced to trading Otto's favour for Peter's money. When Otto invariably departs for Berlin and ends their affair, the reader is left to feel that the relationship was doomed from the very beginning.

Nonetheless, it is worth noticing that the issues that drove a wedge between the lovers, such as possessiveness and jealousy, were rather commonplace. The couple faces no repercussions for being homosexual (or bisexual, in Otto's case), and there is no mention of judgement or negativity on the part of the narrator or the villagers, save for another holidaymaker, a Nazi doctor. This matter-of-fact presentation is common for Isherwood, who strictly adheres to the principle of not making the characters' sexual orientation a cause for inner turmoil. Much like George, Otto and Peter rarely brood or dwell on who they are, and their relationship is not, insofar as the narrator can perceive, impacted by anything else than their personal differences.

The narrator continues his friendship with Otto even after the breakup. In *The Nowaks*, they pay a visit to Otto's mother in a sanatorium and find themselves dallying with two of the female patients. Otto seems to have enjoyed himself, confiding in Christopher that he "could have done anything he liked with that girl" (*The Berlin Stories* 341) and asking in turn if he had a good time with his girl, Erna. The narrator does not answer and the reader is once again left to fill in the blanks. No further details are provided, save for a brief description of how Erna and Christopher kissed: "My mouth pressed against Erna's hot, dry lips. I had no particular

sensation of contact: all this was part of the long, rather sinister symbolic dream which I seem to have been dreaming throughout the day” (*The Berlin Stories* 341). This piece of evidence is inconclusive on its own, since it is perfectly possible that the narrator simply did not find the consumption patient Erna sexually attractive. However, it is worth noting that this is yet another rejection in a string starting from Sally Bowles, who presses the narrator to find out if he loves her, but does not seem terribly disappointed when he turns her down. Later in the novel we are introduced to Natalia Landauer, another potential love interest with whom Christopher develops a platonic relationship. Nonetheless, he swiftly proceeds to self-sabotage the budding romance when he introduces Natalia to Sally, and leaves the girl under the impression that Sally and he are sexually involved. Christopher refuses to clarify the misunderstanding, claiming that “at the end of all the explanations, Natalia would probably have found herself quite as much shocked as she was at present, and a good deal more jealous” (*The Berlin Stories* 368). The reader must draw their own conclusion about the revelation that would have stunned Natalia, although it is likely that Christopher alludes to his homosexuality.

In addition to Natalia, the narrator also forms a bond with another member of the Landauer family, her cousin Bernhard. Although a strange undercurrent seems to permeate the entire duration of their relationship, the denouement does not come until their last meeting before Christopher’s departure from Berlin. Seemingly in jest, Bernhard offers Christopher to leave for China with him the next day. They both share a laugh over the proposal, and the narrator admits that it took him nearly eighteen months to realise that the offer to elope to Peking was sincere.

The myriad of relationships depicted in *Goodbye to Berlin* show different facets of human interaction, but they all mirror the pattern of carefully feigned, but only skin-deep detachment of the narrator. The most telling description comes in the form of Otto and Peter, presented as an unsuccessful model of a homosexual relationship failed on the account of

irreconcilable differences unrelated to their sexual orientation, foreshadowing the portrayal of George and Jim in *A Single Man*.

When introducing the reader to the protagonists of *A Single Man*, Isherwood paints a picture of domestic idyll and cosiness at first. Even seemingly inconsequential details, such as the way Jim and George used to cook or shave together, contribute to the idea of an ordinary couple leading an ordinary life. Yet certain careful hints prove the opposite, such as when the reader learns that Jim and George kept the true nature of their relationship from Jim's family. George does not even come to the funeral and leaves Jim's uncle under the illusion that "this much talked-of room-mate hadn't been such a close friend, after all" (*A Single Man*, 101). Geo's closest friend Charley might have been aware of their romantic involvement, but that was where the boundary was drawn. While outwardly it might seem like not much has changed since the times of *On Ruegen Island*, the most significant change has happened in the protagonists' perception of who they are, and its natural projection on their attitudes towards each other. George's world, shaken to the core by Jim's death, is nonetheless functional and able to find small joys again, and reclaim pastimes such as going to the gym, enjoying idle lunch breaks chatting with colleagues, or interacting with students.

We are first introduced to George's students in the context of his literature lecture at the university. He gives a lengthy description of several intriguing personalities, but only one of them is singled out and developed later in the novel. Kenny Potter is described as a "tall skinny boy with very broad stooped shoulders, gold-red hair, a small head, small bright blue eyes" (*A Single Man* 43). In his portrayal, George hastens to add that "he would be conventionally handsome if he didn't have a beaky nose", in a fashion similar to Otto's description a few decades before. The real appeal of Kenny is revealed after the lecture, when he catches up with George to discuss altered consciousness, religion, and literature, in a playful banter that establishes a special kind of intimacy between them. Even if George notices the visually

pleasing students around him, he is brought out of his stupor by an unconventional, openly challenging Kenny. The same motif is repeated later that night, when George meets Kenny at a bar he used to frequent with Jim. At first he is full of nostalgia, reminiscing about their first meeting and brief courtship, when he notices Kenny at the bar writing a letter. George is irresistibly drawn to his student and engages him in conversation, suddenly invigorated and ready to pit his wits against the youngster. While George is certainly keenly aware of the memories of Jim, he does not hold himself to an impossible standard even Jim could not keep (as it has been revealed earlier, Jim was cheating on George with a woman called Doris). Once again, Isherwood takes away the tentative first-steps nature of a stereotypical gay relationship portrayal and demonstrates that George is a fully fledged representative of his minority, with his own complex and sometimes conflicting desires and traumas. The uninhibited alcohol consumption and skinny dipping that ensue serve to confirm this view of both George and Kenny, even though the game ceases being a game to George midway. When they end up in George's house, positively flirting with each other, no pretences are left until George appears to have repelled Kenny by his outpour of emotions. However, George does not seem to mind, as evident in his inner dialogue:

What if Kenny has been scared off? What if he doesn't come back?

Let him stay away. George doesn't need him, or any of these kids. He isn't looking for a son.

[...] Then why will George stay here?

This is where he found Jim. He believes he will find another Jim here. He doesn't know it, but he has started looking already. (*A Single Man* 148-149)

The catharsis and reconciliation of interpersonal relationships, found in Berlin in the violent split of Peter and Otto and the narrator's cautious acceptance of himself, are taken even further in *A Single Man*. Not only does George prove to the reader and to himself that he is capable of

perseverance and gaiety in the wake of a tragedy, he also embodies the spirit of healing and moving on and attempting to find happiness independent of the nature of one's desires.

3.3 Relationship to Society

In addition to the perspective of personal identity and relationships, a great deal of information about the status of Isherwood's gay characters can be gleaned from their interaction with society as a whole. Much of Isherwood's motivation for moving to Berlin has been explored before. Having been coaxed by Auden's vivid descriptions of a flourishing liberal haven in 1929, he left the city on the brink of virulent homophobia openly endorsed by the Nazi Party four years later. The political upheaval at the turn of the decade is evident in all six short stories of *Goodbye to Berlin*, where the narrator slowly adjusts his image from a coveted English tutor to a cautious onlooker careful not to reveal his political or personal allegiances. The gradual change is going to be examined more closely step by step in each of the six stories.

A Berlin Diary Autumn 1930 finds the narrator enjoying a privileged status among his flatmates, students and acquaintances. His landlady is thrilled at having such an esteemed tenant and frequently seeks out his attention and advice. His affluent first pupil and her family dote on Christoph as well and largely contribute to the image of a highly respected personage. On another occasion, when the narrator enjoys an evening outing, he notices the relaxed atmosphere of Berlin streets and clubs teeming with sex workers. Apart from a mild bout of homesickness he finds nothing objectionable about his present situation and establishes even more ties with the bar and club scene patrons when he is introduced to Sally Bowles. The cabaret singer frequently discusses her adventurous sex life in excruciating detail, boasts of the multitude of men under her spell, and eventually persuades Christoph to join her in a rather gold-digging relationship with a good-natured American tourist. The loose morals do not seem to affect the narrator in any way, as he whimsically partakes in Sally's shenanigans. While there

is no overt reference to Christoph's sexuality present, the general attitude of his social group and the Berlin society is still liberal and welcoming.

The first sign that the tides are turning comes when the narrator encounters a group of Nazi supporters, including a surgeon from Berlin, during his summer holiday. The doctor dutifully parrots Nazi propaganda and picks fights with Christoph over his alleged communistic views and other matters, such as Otto's lax morale and character. Eventually, he manages to corner Christoph during his walk in the forest and presents him with a solution to the problem of homosexual men, claiming they should all be put into labour-camps (The Berlin Stories 294). Even though the narrator sardonically pokes fun at the doctor's remarks, he is not altogether too sorry to put the island in his rear-view mirror at the end of the holiday. His return to Berlin finds him abandoning many of his former luxuries to live with Otto's family. With tension mounting after the election of 1930 and many of Christoph's friends now expressing openly anti-semitic views, the narrator deems it prudent to leave the city. As he tells Bernhard Landauer, he is not tired of Berlin but feels more as if Berlin had got tired of him (The Berlin Stories 383). Describing his final visit in winter 1932, Christoph briefly mentions police raids of his favourite spots and clubs and the general Berlin clean-up bound to follow, taking in the bleak atmosphere of the bar he chooses to visit for nostalgia's sake. As such, Christoph's goodbye to Berlin comes at an appropriate time and punctuates his decision to leave behind a city where he is no longer welcome, as a homosexual, foreigner and branded Jew sympathiser alike.

While set in a vastly different time and place, much of the tension present in *Goodbye to Berlin* can be traced in *A Single Man* as well. In the pre-Stonewall California of the 1960s, George finds little empathy for his neighbours, whom he derisively describes as "rearguard individualists making a last-ditch stand against the twentieth century" (*A Single Man* 8). In an echo of Christoph's exclusion from a no longer liberal society, George feels the same exclusion

from his neighbours' white picket fence idyll. He is separated by his identity as a foreigner, his sexual orientation, and perhaps most starkly by the depression caused by Jim's death. George even leads mental arguments with his neighbours where he discards their psychological theories that Jim was a substitute for a real family member. However, one cannot help but sense that George's notion of how his community views him is slightly unfair and even biased towards an imaginary enemy, perhaps seeking a scapegoat to blame for Jim's death. His neighbours are not at all as nefarious as George paints them to be, as confirmed by Mrs Strunk's genuine emotions when she sees him leaving the house: "Poor man, she thinks, living there all alone. He has a kind face." (*A Single Man* 19). Not only Geo's neighbours but also his best friend Charley gets attributed with ulterior motives when she checks up on him frequently, with Geo interpreting her concern as "more of her possessiveness" (*A Single Man* 18). His relationship to the society around him may be strained, partly in response to his lifestyle and personality, but partly also due to his stubborn refusal to take the first step to address the issues.

More of Geo's hostile attitude resurfaces when he is driving to work and ponders a recent newspaper campaign against "syphilis-carrying sex deviates" (*A Single Man* 23). Even though such opinions should by no means be endorsed, George's fantasy vendetta takes a distinctly unpleasant shape when he imagines the journalists, police officers and ministers involved in the campaign kidnapped and tortured. Eventually, he admits that his adversaries provide only a funnel for his hate and an excuse for hating itself, rather than a personal crusade to embark on. However, the sordid details of his sickening fantasy serve as a chilling reminder that George is deeply disturbed by recent events and not quite alright, despite his reassurances to Charley earlier. He also has a marked tendency to victimize himself.

Similarly to his neighbours, Geo's students are also subject to the same intense scrutiny by their professor and rarely come out on top. He is keenly aware of the power he has over his students and does not hesitate to use it when necessary. When the class discussion turns from

the literary analysis of Huxley's *After Many a Summer* to the author's alleged anti-semitism, George does not hesitate in hijacking the lesson and devoting it to the topic he had been concerned with earlier that day. Claiming that "no one ever hates without a cause" (*A Single Man* 52), he turns the attention of his students to the issue of small defenceless minorities. In what no longer seems to be an academic discussion he rejects the bland tolerance of his neighbours and friends and asserts that "it's better if we admit to disliking and hating them [minorities], than if we try to smear our feelings over with a pseudo-liberal sentimentality" (*A Single Man* 53). Moreover, he goes on to give an account of how he feels in the society: "While you're being persecuted, you hate what's happening to you, you hate the people who are making it happen; you're in a world of hate" (*A Single Man* 54). While this certainly seems to be true for George, he does little to discourage his persecutors and accomplishes little more than lashing out helplessly in front of people who cannot remedy his situation anyway. He considers himself a misunderstood victim of society, offering "a diamond for a nickel" (*A Single Man* 55), longing to be accepted and loathing the people of whom he begs acceptance at the same time. His conflicted emotions, while understandable, do little to bring him closer to the society he secretly admires.

3.4 Relationship to the Author

The last aspect of how homosexual characters are portrayed in Isherwood's two novels relates directly to the author himself. Even though, as Vladimir Nabokov famously put it, "literature is invention. Fiction is fiction. To call a story a true story is an insult to both truth and art" (Goodreads), no work of Isherwood's can be analysed completely without referring back to how the author perceived himself and how much the reader can derive about Isherwood's personality and struggle to establish himself as a queer writer in his homeland, Berlin, and finally California. The aim of this section, therefore, is to explore the impact of crucial events in the author's life on the portrayal of his gay characters.

The collection of stories published as *Goodbye to Berlin* are all told from the first-person perspective with the main character sharing a name with the author himself. Autobiography and reportage were common in the 1930s (Wade 31) and Isherwood was no stranger to the genre, having previously worked on his semi-autobiography *Lions and Shadows* (1938) using this approach. Apart from the motivation and circumstances of his arrival to Berlin, discussed already before, the most notable influence on *Berlin*'s characters comes from Isherwood's intimate relationships with several locals. His numerous lovers are all amalgamated into the character of Otto Nowak, with the character of Peter playing Isherwood's alter ego. In *Christopher and His Kind*, the writer admits to feeling obsessive jealousy and even to being cheated and scammed by one of his partners, much like Peter in *On Ruegen Island*. The bitter resolution to Peter and Otto's relationship conflicts reflects Isherwood having to break off contact with his German companion Bubi as well. Much of the author's disillusionment permeates the general tone of the story and contributes to Otto being portrayed as a promiscuous and volatile figure. On the other hand, Peter is not entirely without blame, as he fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the relationship and later even enables Otto's erratic behaviour. Isherwood himself appears to have learned from his early experiences and describes his relationship with Heinz as more grounded and mature. However, a far more significant breakthrough follows in *A Single Man*.

Isherwood's American life markedly differs from his young years in Europe, and the character of George mirrors the personal development Isherwood went through as a permanent expatriate, a Hindu disciple, and a gay writer in a hostile environment. His harmonic relationship with Don Bachardy can be traced in George and Jim's idyllic domestic lifestyle, which is devoid of the turmoil plaguing Peter and Otto relentlessly. They are no longer intent on hurting each other and focus on establishing a stronger connection instead. George reminisces about the conversations Jim and he used to have about thought-provoking topics

such as death: “It was then, while they were drinking their second and third cups of coffee, that they had their best talks. They talked about everything that came into their heads - including death, of course, and is there survival, and, if so, what exactly is it that survives” (*A Single Man* 6). In addition to more serious conversations, the couple also had to address more substantive matters, such as cohabitation. The one facet that did not change from the early years, however, is the portrayal of infidelity and Geo’s reaction to the discovery that Jim was having an affair. His profound distaste for Doris is expressed quite strongly:

What has it to do with that big arrogant animal of a girl? With that body which sprawled stark naked, gaping wide in shameless demand, underneath Jim's naked body? Gross in-sucking vulva, sly ruthless greedy flesh, in all the bloom and gloss and arrogant resilience of youth, demanding that George shall step aside, bow down and yield to the female prerogative, hide his unnatural head in shame. I am Doris. I am Woman. I am Bitch-Mother Nature. The Church and the Law and the State exist to support me. I claim my biological rights. I demand Jim. (*A Single Man* 75)

George cannot find it in himself to forgive Jim for his transgression, but eventually grows to care about Doris enough to visit her when she is dying in the hospital. Geo is eventually also able to deal with the relationship ending in a healthier way than Otto and Peter, who both refused to take responsibility for their actions and inactions.

In conclusion, Isherwood’s late characters display more compassion, wisdom, and awareness than his earlier creations. The shift could be a result of Isherwood generally maturing as a person, or the changed nature of his romantic life as well, as Don was his first potential lifelong partner and companion.

3.5 The Contribution of Narrative Techniques and Stylistic Devices

Apart from the diverse kinds of relationships portrayed in *Goodbye to Berlin* and *A Single Man*, Isherwood also employs various narrative techniques and stylistic devices to help him convey

the isolation of his homosexual characters from mainstream society. These techniques are going to be compared and contrasted closely.

Much like the rest of fiction of the interwar period, *Goodbye to Berlin* broke away from the tradition of literary modernism prevalent in England in the 1920s. Isherwood opted for a documentary style of fiction instead, in response to the burning political and social issues of the period. By virtue of his experience in screenwriting and journaling, he was able to capture his adventures in a film-like, episodic structure of the novel, similar to the picaresque genre. This episodic fragmentation serves to underscore the transience of the narrator's time in Berlin, divided between the Weimar capital, other major cities in Europe (such as once-mentioned Prague) and his homeland. The frequent moves and a changing cast of the narrator's personal story all contribute to the sense of his being uprooted and never quite finding a permanent attachment to the city. Under such conditions it comes as no surprise that the tense of the story is exclusively in the past, imparting a message of an era gone and a society no longer cordial to the foreign teacher in search of his own identity. Isherwood responds to the changed atmosphere, and at the very end of the collection, muses about the events that happened: „Een now I can't altogether believe that any of this has really happened...“ (*The Berlin Stories* 410). In addition to asserting that Berlin got tired of him, the author is careful to remove all other lasting bonds with the city and its inhabitants.

Another narrative technique worth scrutinising is Isherwood's use of first-person narration, which is at odds with the complete objectivity the author claims to adhere to at the beginning of the first story. Even though the narration lacks overt judgement or moral diatribes, the protagonist still makes his opinions known in the form of side and snide remarks alike, such as his quip to the homosexual admonishing Nazi doctor that he knows their throats and ears better than the boys themselves (*The Berlin Stories* 294). A careful reading of the story reveals

that Christoph is far less detached than he would have the readers believe with the narrative technique and fragmentation of the story into several parts.

While *Goodbye to Berlin* circumvents several modernist conventions, *A Single Man* shares many characteristic features of this movement. In an homage to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), the novel traces one day in George's life. Woolf's seminal work is a prime example of modernist narrative techniques, which reflected the uncertainty and alienation prevalent in society after World War I (Shmoop Editorial Team). She relied on stream of consciousness; an associative rather than logical sequence of events as well as heavy subjectivism and exploration of inner life and thoughts. As Ian Mugford notes, choosing the lens of a single character in a single day allowed the author to draw attention to Clarissa's inner workings, world view and sensory experiences. In addition, it forced Woolf to create "characters that are deep enough to be realistic while dealing with only one day of their lives" (Mugford). At the same time, the loss of security and shift in values led not only a refocusing on the inner self, but also to the authors and their characters experiencing abandonment, displacement, and loneliness. These feelings, while also present in *Goodbye to Berlin*, are notably heightened in Isherwood's later works. In *A Single Man*, George is an outsider, an expatriate, and a loner, with his depression following Jim's death isolating him from his community. A part of his response to these circumstances is his out-of-body experiences, where many of the events explored in earlier chapters, such as his violent fantasies and the florid lecture, happen to him as if he were in a trance. George even perceives himself as a collection of many different selves:

Staring and staring into the mirror, it sees many faces within its face—the face of a child, the boy, the young man, the not-so-young man—all present still, preserved like fossils on superimposed layers, and, like fossils, dead. Their message to this live dying creature is: Look at us—we have died—what is there to be afraid of? (*A Single Man* 2)

As Matos points out, this fragmentation of the self serves to illustrate “the sense of disconnection and the lack of wholeness that George feels towards his surroundings. The breakdown of the narration into the beginning where George and his body are not one, the middle with frequent autopilot events, and the end mirroring the structure of the beginning, further highlight Geo’s separation from mainstream society and from himself. This isolation is underscored by the third-person limited narration, which makes the reader privy into George’s thoughts, but little that is going on in the minds of his friends and colleagues.

To sum up, even though *Goodbye to Berlin* and *A Single Man* make use of different narrative points of view, the fragmented structure and narrative times contribute to heavy fragmentation and isolation of the characters from mainstream society, a feature shared by both novels alike.

4 Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with the depiction of homosexuality in selected works of Christopher Isherwood, specifically in two novels representative of each period of Isherwood’s life. In order to present a comprehensive picture of the development of these characters over time and space, five topics relating the individual characters to different facets of their lives were discussed. The conclusion is going to summarise the main findings presented in the thesis.

Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* documents a time in the author’s life when he was still establishing his own identity. Similarly, the protagonist of the collection tends to reserve his judgement and avoid direct confrontation, playing it safe whenever the topic of sexuality arises. Nonetheless, after his encounter with a homosexual couple and the time spent in a more benevolent environment, he gradually embarks on the path of self-acceptance. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the lovers he meets, as Peter and Otto’s turbulent summer leaves them both in a state of inertia. Where the narrator takes tentative steps to start identifying

himself with his community (or tribe, as Isherwood puts it), the pair's affair dissolves on the grounds of irreconcilable differences in attitudes, approach to relationship issues, and, ultimately, their own unfulfilled needs and desires. In a society where the tides were starting to turn, but still were not openly hostile, the wedge driven between the lovers originates from their own sense of insecurity.

In contrast, the two protagonists of *A Single Man*, George and Jim, are depicted as secure in their identity as a queer couple even in a harsh environment. The inner turmoil of Isherwood's younger years has been replaced with more mature concerns and a more definite set of opinions and values. This shift is further underlined by the changes in narrative voice and structure, as Isherwood abandons the unreliable first-person narrator in favour of a more objective third-person narration instead. The reduced need to create an alter ego, coupled with a strong sense of security in who his characters are in terms of their societal roles and relationship self-image, all point to a significant development in Isherwood's set of beliefs. His true value as an American queer writer stems from his strict insistence on depicting his gay characters as ordinary and facing the same issues as everyone else. Death, love, loss, jealousy and carving out a place for oneself in society are difficulties tackled by all people at certain point in their lives, and Isherwood's revolutionary and tactful depiction of these struggles helped not only generations of up-and-coming writers, but also members of the LGBTQ community, to become more secure in their own identity and realisation that we all are members of the same human tribe.

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