



## CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD: A "LIFE STORY" DEDICATED TO THE ACT OF WRITING IN SEARCH OF AN ARTISTIC AND SEXUAL IDENTITY\*

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### Abstract

Starting from the very beginning of his literary career, Christopher Isherwood nurtures his fiction from real life experiences. However his idiosyncrasy does not only come out of producing an ordinary autobiographical writing. He forms a direct relationship between art and experience and claims that, "I [he] write in order to find out what my life means and who I am" The act of writing itself is an attempt to make sense and meaning out of his life. By recording personal experience and transforming them into stories, he finds unity and purpose in life. The theoretical framework that I've benefited while exploring Isherwood's fiction thoroughly belongs to personality psychologist Dan P. Mc Adams and his Life Story Model of Identity Theory. Dan P. McAdams argues that personal stories are our identities. Like a novelist, we work on our lives to make sense and meaning out of them. Our experiences, values, beliefs and objectives in life affect the formation of our identities. According to McAdams, identity is a story which has a beginning, a middle and an ending, with a plot, theme and characters in it. Drawing upon the framework of Dan P. McAdams' life story model of identity, the aim of this paper is to portray the relationship between personal story telling and identity construction in Isherwood's early novels and the ones he produced in Berlin. By analyzing Christopher Isherwood's fiction within the performance of his life story, my intention in this research is to unravel the formation of the artistic and sexual identities that he constructed in different periods of his life.

**Keywords:** Christopher Isherwood, Life Story Model of Identity, Dan P. McAdams Artistic and Sexual Identity.

All my life I have had an instinct to record experience as it is going by and somehow to save something out of it and keep it. ... For me, art really begins with the question of my own experience, and what am I going to turn it into? What does it mean and what is it all about? I suppose that I write in order to find out what my life means and who I am. ... There are many other motives for writing, but as I promised to speak always out of my own experience, this has been my motive (Isherwood, 1960, 53-54).

Apart from the ability to portray idiosyncratic characters with his humorous and eloquent style, Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood presents a personal life story that he constructed out of his very own life experiences. For Isherwood writing had always been personal. The experiences and the events he had gone through were gathered to be presented to the readers, sometimes in form of fiction and sometimes in form of autobiography or memoir. Although he famously claims to act like a camera in *Goodbye to Berlin*, readers of Isherwood know that Isherwood's "life story" is inseparable from any kind of work he produced. The word "life story" will have connotative meaning throughout this paper. It has psychological associations mainly within the framework of identity formation. By benefiting from personality psychologist Dan P. McAdams' *Life Story Model of Identity Theory*, the main objective of this study is to explore how Christopher Isherwood, whom Somerset Maugham once described as the man holding "the future of the English novel in his hands", constructed an identity out of his personal experiences and how he placed a self-defining narrative into his fiction.

### 1. Introduction

"We are all storytellers, and we are the stories we tell."

William James

A lot of people perceive their lives as a story. In our everyday life we go through many different incidents, we get our share of every single aspect of life, family, education, career, health, work, marriage and so on. We try to survive, we try to find who we are in order to make sense of our lives. In other words we all have a different stories to tell about ourselves. From the day we born until death, we write and

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perform our life stories. This is the reason why when we read novels, plays, poems, it is the power of stories that we are attracted to; especially stories that have individual at the center, stories that tell about human experience, feelings, and emotions that we all have in our real lives.

When Odysseus meets Achilles in the underworld, he pays his respects and praises Achilles' glories, but Achilles protests by saying "No winning words about death to me, shining Odysseus! / By god, I'd rather slave on earth for another man – "(Homer, 1996, 11.556-58, Fagles trans Book). Achilles would gladly exchange his position with Odysseus in order to go back to life even as a slave. The agony of Achilles is a perfectly understandable humane feeling. No matter how successful Beckett is at alienating his audience, haven't we secretly waited for Godot and thought about the things we desired to happen in vain? How many of us can claim that Conrad's Marlowe in Heart of Darkness and Twain's Huc Fin in Huckleberry Finn are the same person after their famous journeys? When Lady Macbeth cries, "What is done cannot be undone" haven't we all nodded the regrets of our lives? Beginning with Robinson Crusoe, many novels in English and American literature focus on individual stories and their relations with life; from Moll Flanders to Pamela, Tom Jones to Jane Eyre, Frankenstein to Dorian Grey, Tom Sawyer to Huckleberry Finn, there are numerous stories in which a human being is at the center. Why do these stories attract us? Why are they still popular? The common denominator among these novels is their depiction of human experience and what they do with it. Doris Lessing once said that "A story is how we construct our experiences." What we live through in life, pain, happiness, love, success, disappointments, failures pleasures, death are the cement of our identity. As the years pass by, these experiences transform us, mature us, and most importantly help us to know who we are.

What if we treat our own lives as the chapters of a novel? In other words what if we see ourselves as the storyteller of our own lives? Every single individual has some personal story to tell. It is either a happy incident or a painful memory, stories tell us who we are. Personality psychologist Dan McAdams argues that

Much like playwrights or novelists, people work on their stories in an effort to construct an integrative and meaningful product. As psycholiterary achievements, life stories function to make lives make sense by helping to organize the many different roles and features of the individual life into a synthetic whole and by offering causal explanations for how people believe they have come to be who they are (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, 243).

Like the characters in a play or a novel we play our part in real life. The question of where our lives are going, where we have been, the things that we want to achieve, our desires, our expectations in life contribute to our own formation of identity. Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood is one of those individuals who worked on his personal life story through writing. For Isherwood, the act of writing is closely related with his personal experiences and life story. Every piece of writing is a step toward learning about himself. This is exactly what differentiates him from many other writers. As he narrates his experiences via fiction, the identity that he discovers becomes more visible to his readers. Beginning with his early novels, it is possible to recognize the gradual transformation of this naïve and inexperienced young author into a mature, grown-up man who takes every chance to face life and what it brings. Each new experiences at different stages of his life contributes something in the formation of his identity. This quest to know himself is always apparent in his narrative and as for readers it is also possible to gain insights of how he creates the persona of "Christopher Isherwood." Within the framework of Dan P. McAdams' Life Story Model of Identity, this paper focuses on artistic and sexual identity formation of Christopher Isherwood in two different episodes of his life.

In *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, Dan P. McAdams claims that, starting from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the modern novel is interested in knowing how "self-conscious human beings make sense of themselves from one moment to the next" and how people "make meaning out of their social performances." (McAdams, 2015, 239). He observes that certain factors such as the industrial revolution, developments in science and technology, "the proliferation of capitalism and free markets, increasing urbanization and globalization" contributed the birth of "modern sense of selfhood." (McAdams, 2015, .239). Modern people begin to work on their lives because modern life expects them to embrace different roles regarding their social and private lives. In this whirlwind, one question arises: "Who am I?"

McAdams' answer to this question is that "you are a novel. You are an extended prose narrative featuring a main character." (McAdams, 2015, 240). This is the foundation of McAdams' *Life Story Model of Identity*. McAdams claims that identity is a story with its "setting, scenes, character, plot and theme." (McAdams, 2001, 101). It is in the period of late adolescence and young adulthood that we begin to participate in social life, take active roles, and develop certain beliefs and values. According to McAdams, at this point of life, people begin "to put their lives into self-defining stories." (McAdams, 2001, 102) and it is through those stories that people "provide their lives with unity and purpose." In the field of psychology,



researchers use the concept of “Narrative Identity” to describe how individual life stories contribute to who we were in the past and who we are today. Narrative identity is described as “the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life.” (Schwartz et al. 2011, 99). In 1985, McAdams contributed to narrative identity studies by proposing his own model, called “Life Story Model of Identity.”

Dan P. McAdams is currently working at Northwestern University in Chicago. Among his research interests, there are various topics such as narrative psychology, the development of a life-story model of human identity, generativity, adult development and the redemptive self. Throughout this study, McAdams’ theory will provide guidance to understand the relationship between personal story telling and identity construction in Isherwood’s novels. The contribution of the field of psychology to literature and literary criticism is indisputable. Many years researchers have benefitted from Freud and psychoanalysis. In this paper, I’d like to present a new angle in understanding an author and his works. I strongly believe that Dan McAdams’ theory could also be used for interpreting other authors who narrate life while living it.

McAdams believes that stories define the identities of individuals. He regards life story as “ a person’s whole life, it is the whole person, everything that has happened to the person, all-encompassing the full frame work that makes that whole life make sense.” (McAdams, 2010,). Isherwood embraced a similar motto in his fiction. “Everything that you are must affect your writing.” (Schwerdt, 1989, 1). says Isherwood. He reflected what he experienced in life into his fiction. All his fears, weaknesses, insecurities, hopes and plans are in his art. That’s why his work tells us about who Christopher Isherwood is.

## 2. Life Story Model of Identity

In the summer of 1982, while McAdams was teaching a graduate seminar on self and identity, the question that he asked to his students was the starting point of his claim: “What is identity? What would identity look like if you could see it?” (Yancy & Hadley, 2005, 120). A few months later McAdams established the foundations of his theory: “If you could see identity, I surmised, it would look like a story. A story incorporates a beginning, middle, and ending, working to organize a life into a reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future.” (Yancy & Hadley, 2005, 121). If identity is a story, we need a storyteller to tell these stories. In that case, an individual’s life itself is the raw material of this story. Just as in novels and plays, a person’s life has a beginning, a middle and an end. While writing or performing a life story, an individual experiences all the facets of life. During this period, he or she grows physically and mentally, determines goals, believes in certain values (religious and spiritual beliefs), makes decisions (right or wrong) and reaches a certain point of maturity.

In many of his articles, McAdams emphasizes that creating a personal narrative begins in a period called “emerging adulthood.” Emerging adulthood covers the period between the ages of 18 and 30. In his article “*Identity and the Life Story*” he claims that it is the time that our personal growth comes into being and we attempt to “reconstruct the personal past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future in terms of an internalized and evolving self-story.” (Fivush & Haden 2003, 187). Dan McAdams perceives identity, as a life story “complete with setting, scenes, characters, plot and themes.” (Fivush & Haden, 2003, 187). Autobiographical facts of an individual nourish life stories. He claims that “A person’s evolving and dynamic life story is a key component of what constitutes the individuality of that particular person, situated in a particular family and among particular friends and acquaintances, and living in a particular society at a particular historical moment.” (Fivush & Haden, 2003, 187). In other words, all these above mentioned factors play an important role in our life stories. From our family members to the society to which we belong, everything moulds us into our current personalities.

Now, the question to be asked is what is the starting point of the development of life stories? In “*Personality and Life Story*” Dan McAdams and Erika Manczak observe that telling personal stories begins at the age of 3 or 4. The stories told at this age are simple. In particular, parents encourage their children to tell stories. When they reach kindergarten, children are at least aware of the fact that their stories should include an event and a character. But still, it is impossible to claim they have developed an identity. (McAdams & Manczak, 2015) At this point, McAdams benefits from Tilmann Habermas and Susan Bluck’s article called “*Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence*” in order to underline the importance of cognitive tools in constructing life stories. For Habermas and Bluck, there are four types of coherence in life stories: These are temporal, biographical, casual, and thematic coherence. Habermas and Bluck claim that during their elementary school years, children know what to include in life stories. This is called temporal coherence. Mc Adams emphasizes that temporal coherence comprises “single autobiographical events” before adolescence. On the other hand, children also learn that their personal stories should include



biographical facts regarding their birth or families. This is called biographical coherence. When they reach adolescence, children begin to connect events that have an effect upon them. In other words they can explain "how one event caused, led to, transformed, or in some way is meaningfully related to other events in one's life." (Fivush & Haden, 2003, 192). Linking different events in order to form casual narratives is called casual coherence. Finally recognizing certain themes or values in different periods of life and identifying "the gist of" who someone is, or what is his/her autobiography about, is called "thematic coherence"

Now the individual is ready to author his or her story about the past. Mc Adams argues that "By the time individuals have reached the emerging adulthood years, therefore, they are typically able and eager to construct stories about the past and about the self that exhibit temporal, biographical, causal and thematic coherence." (Fivush & Haden, 2003, 193). Thus it wouldn't be wrong to say that starting from infancy, we gather materials for our personal stories. Memories are crucial at this point. McAdams argues that it is through "autobiographical reasoning" that we deduce meaning from our "lived experiences." He defines autobiographical reasoning as a "wide set of interpretive operations through which people draw upon autobiographical memories to make inferences about who they are." (McAdams, 2013, 153). A lesson learned, a turning point event or a "specific life episode" can be included in autobiographical reasoning because it is through autobiographical reasoning that you make meaning out of an event or experience. McAdams uses college admissions essays as an example. In college admission essays students write about their personal experiences, plans and targets in life. So while they are portraying their goals and purposes in life, the autobiographical data that they propose in order to support their argument, reveals how students make sense of their lives up to that point.

### 3. Christopher Isherwood's "Life Story"

McAdams states that the starting point of constructing a life story goes back to infancy and childhood. It is in this period that an individual "gathers materials" for his or her personal story to be formed in the future. To understand Isherwood's early novels and his persona behind them, it is necessary to focus on certain childhood episodes which had a direct effect on the formation of who Isherwood was and how he later became a particular person. Born on August 26 1904, Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood was raised as a typical child of an upper middle class British family, with a house full of servants and a nanny, in Wysberlegh and Marple Hall. His father, Frank Bradshaw Isherwood, was a Captain in the British army who had a taste for music, theatre, books and eastern religions. His mother, Kathleen was the daughter of a wine merchant and was raised "more conventionally bourgeois than Frank," according to Isherwood's biographer Jonathan Fryer (Fryer, 1993, 7).

Forming narrative identity is to become "an author" of your life, and McAdams argues that simple narration of personal life stories is not enough to become an author. You need to "articulate what personal memories mean." (McAdams, 2013, 153). Personal memories are important in life stories. The act of deducting meaning from personal experiences is called "autobiographical reasoning." In "*The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author*" McAdams describes it as "a wide set of interpretive operations through which people draw on autobiographical memories to make inferences about who they are and what their lives mean." (McAdams, 2013, 279). In other words, some memories have permanent effects in our lives. They can either be good or bad, but they contribute to our personality. An event in the past can be considered a turning point in life and can indicate much about who we are. The month of May was the month of a similar turning point in Isherwood's life. Because on May 1, 1914 he was sent to St. Edmunds preparatory school and on May 8, 1915 his father was killed in the battle of Ypres.

St. Edmunds Preparatory school was a typical British public school, with harsh and brutal conditions. Many students who studied in this kind of school had no pleasant memories about it. It plays an important role in the formation of Isherwood's identity. The foundations of his protest and reaction against British tradition and authority were laid in St Edmunds. Isherwood describes St Edmunds as "an aggressive gabled building in the early Edwardian style, about the size of a private hotel... in the foreground is a plantation of dwarf conifers, such as are almost always to be seen in the grounds of better-class lunatic asylum." (Isherwood, 1966, 194). In St. Edmunds, Divinity was an important part of the curriculum. Going to chapel twice a day was compulsory; Latin and Greek were central to the curriculum. Apart from being in such a strict school, Isherwood had also an important disadvantage. St. Edmunds was run by cousins of the Isherwoods, Cyril Morgan Brown and his sister Monica. Christopher's relationship with the headmaster and his daughter was a disaster. This mutual dislike led to stressful days for Isherwood. In his book *Kathleen and Frank*, he says that he "found the staff much harder to cope with than the boys." (Isherwood, 1971, 398). Biographer Jonathan Fryer describes the education goal of St Edmunds as "to produce disciplined, upright, God-fearing youths." which of course Christopher Isherwood rejected all his life. In *Kathleen and Frank*



Isherwood observes that being at a school run by a relative was not something that one can be proud of. He observes that "The relationship made them expect more of him than the other boys, it also made them afraid of seeming to show him any favor." (Isherwood, 1971, 398).

A year after the declaration of the First World War, Isherwood's father was killed in a battle at Ypres. Meanwhile at St. Edmunds, the head master, Cyril, was making speeches extolling British heroism and courage. Students whose fathers were killed in the war were supposed to wear a black armband, which was an object of respect from the other students. After his father's death, Isherwood also joined the group wearing black armbands. Now, St Edmunds became more unbearable for him. In the Afterword of *Kathleen and Frank*, Isherwood he states that "being a sacred Orphan" and the effort to be a son worth of his father cause a feeling of inferiority which never left him during his adolescence.

While he was surrounded by sympathy and condolences, he had to cope with "reprimands" of the teachers "as they reduced the boy to tears by accusing him of not living up to Frank's example." (Fryer, 1993, 26). This was the beginning of Isherwood's gradual hatred for the school authorities and "disrespect for the British Establishment." (Fryer, 1993, 26). The only benefit of St. Edmunds for Isherwood was his meeting with Wystan Auden. Their friendship began in 1917 and became stronger as the years passed by. In 1919, when Isherwood was accepted at Repton, (another important public school of the time) he was 14 years old. However the effect of St. Edmunds on Isherwood was crucial. In his half autobiographical novel *Lions and Shadows*, he expresses his feelings with these words: "I had arrived at my school thoroughly sick of masters and mistresses, having been emotionally messed about by them at my preparatory school, where the war years had given full license to every sort of dishonest cant about loyalty, selfishness, patriotism, playing the game and dishonoring the dead. Now I wanted to be left alone." (Isherwood, 1974, 9).

These lines signify the starting point of Isherwood's weariness and disgust with any form of authority associated with British tradition and the Establishment. In 1922 when he won a scholarship at Corpus Christi, Cambridge, he faced new challenges. He had to deal with the pressures of his mother, Kathleen, who wanted her son to be a Cambridge don. As she transformed into a more controlling figure in his life, Isherwood felt as if there was no way out. The rigid and inflexible nature of the British education system showed its effect once more when Isherwood wanted to switch his department from History to English. The final straw came when he learned that he was not allowed to do so. From that moment on, Isherwood turned his attention to the social life of Cambridge rather than his classes.

#### **4. Formation of Artistic Identity & Early Novels: All The Conspirators & The Memorial**

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. I must come to see in all its particulars the narrative of the self – the personal myth – that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the course of my years. It is a story I continue to revise, and to tell to myself (and sometimes to others) as I go on living (McAdams, 1993, 11).

At the age of 21, Christopher Isherwood took the first step in telling his own story in the way that he knew best. When his writing career began in 1926, England was still trying to deal with political, economic and social after effects of World War I. England's power in exporting goods to Europe had already decreased because European countries were busily recovering from the destruction of the war. America was producing its own goods and was no longer in need of Britain. Since soldiers returning from the war were unable to find jobs, the level of unemployment had also increased. In 1926, the General Strike, which involved 2 million British workers, put a further strain on the British economy. On the other hand modernism was already on the literary agenda with various works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. (1925)

In such a literary atmosphere, Isherwood naturally came under the influence of these novels. As a matter of fact, in the foreword to *All The Conspirators* which was written in 1958, Isherwood accepts the fact that his first novel can be read as "a period piece- smiling at its naïve attempts at James Joyce thought-stream, its aping of the mannerisms of Stephen Dedalus, its quaint echoes of Virginia Woolf, its jerky flashback narration crudely imitated from E.M. Forster." (Isherwood 1966, p. 93) Yet, it would be unfair if we regard Isherwood's early novels as nothing but a cheap imitation of these writers. Isherwood was about to form a different credo that he embraced until the end of his writing career. He came to believe that "Everything that you are must affect your writing." (Schwerdt 1989, p.1) With his first two novels, *All The Conspirators* (1928) and *The Memorial* (1932) Isherwood begins to integrate personal experiences into his fiction. The heroes of both novels rely mostly on the autobiographical accounts of Isherwood's life. In his



early fiction, one can follow the traces of how Isherwood interpreted the key incidents that shaped Isherwood's identity in the late 1920s and early 30s. The story that Isherwood constructed at the beginning of his literary career contributed to the formation of his artistic identity.

*All The Conspirators* and *The Memorial* are novels that reflect all the uneasiness and discomfort that he had in his youth. The common issues that dominate these novels originate directly from Isherwood's own life. A young man's attempt to be an independent individual and follow his own path away from a controlling mother and her pressures, a rebellious attitude against any form of authority and society's expectations, a constant desire to leave the country and finally the concept of the "Test", "Truly Strong Men" and "Truly Weak Man" are not the only topics he deals with in his novels but they are also parts of his self-defining life story.

*All The Conspirators* tells the story of young Philip Lindsay, who quits his job at a post office in order to devote his time to write and paint as his wishes. He avoids telling the news to his controlling and oppressive mother, and leaves home to spend a couple of days at a hotel, leaving a letter behind. On his return home, he finally faces his mother who does not approve of her son's decision and emotionally pressures him into changing his mind. The rest of the story reflects Philip's effort to resist the family expectations and pressures in order to assert his own will. At the end of the novel, unable to deal with his mother's pressure and an unhappy job, he attempts to run away again. He faints in the middle of the street because of a rheumatic fever. He awakes into a different world where he is finally allowed to paint and write. Philip fails every test that Isherwood creates for him. His fainting at the end of the novel can be interpreted as an odd quirk of fate to show that he does not have the courage to stand on his own feet and control his life.

His second novel, *The Memorial*, focuses on the period after WWI. He portrays the after-effects of the war on the Vernon family and each family members' struggle with life. Isherwood got the idea for writing his second novel while he was on holiday in 1928. He met an ex-soldier, Lester, who joined the army after his 16th birthday in 1915. In *Lions and Shadows* Isherwood notes that "As I listened, I asked myself the same question; always I tried to picture myself in his place ... No, no, I told myself, terrified: this could never happen to me. It could never happen to any of my friends... Lester had shaken my faith in the invulnerability of my generation:" (Isherwood, 1974, 157). In fact *The Memorial*, shows that everybody is vulnerable when it comes to war. Isherwood works on each character separately and presents how these individuals from different generations perceive the war and deal with life.

McAdams observes that in the construction of narrative identity "the storyteller can work only with the material in hand." (Schwartz et al. 2011, 107) In other words, narrative identity can only be formed out of the facts in life. As an author of the life story, the narrator has to transform these facts into a self-defining narrative. The First World War was one of those facts of Isherwood's life because Frank Isherwood's death not only widened the gap between his mother and Isherwood but also caused a large emotional and psychological gap in his life. What did Isherwood make out of these facts? By writing a novel like *The Memorial* and by depicting a problematic relationship between a son and his mother, who fails to get over her husband's death in the WWI, Isherwood integrated personal experience into the story.

In the late 1950s and 60s, Isherwood delivered some lectures at certain universities in California and in his notes for "A Last Lecture," he says that "... the function of a writer is to be, first and foremost, an individual. He writes, ultimately, out of his experience. And he should think of himself as addressing a number of other individuals – not a mass." (Berg, 2007, 5) With this motto in mind, every character is uniquely and equally portrayed in *The Memorial*. War had been a part of his experience since childhood, so for Isherwood there was no need to fictionalize the main concept. In his semi-autobiographical novel, *Lions and Shadows* (1938) Isherwood summarizes the reason for writing *The Memorial* with these words:

It was to be about a war; not the war itself, but the effect of the idea of war on my generation. It was to give expression at last to my own "War" complex... I would tell the story of a family; its births and deaths, ups and downs, marriage, feuds and love affairs. (Isherwood, 1974, 182).

In terms of technique and style, he aimed to present an epic with modernist elements. He notes that "I was out to write an epic; a potted epic; an epic disguised as a drawing-room comedy. The worst of all epics, except the very greatest, is that their beginnings are so dull.... Therefore epics, I reasoned, should start, in the middle and go backwards then forwards again- so that the reader comes upon the dullness halfway through, when he is more interested in the characters; the fish holds its tail in its mouth, and time is circular, which sounds Einstein-ish and brilliantly modern." (Isherwood, 1974, 182). Hence, *The Memorial* begins with a scene in 1928; then in the next chapter, events go back to 1920 where you learn more about the characters



and their background; in chapter three, we find ourselves in 1925 and finally the novel ends with a fourth chapter opening in 1929. According to Dan McAdams,

... the stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class and culture writ large. The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity. (John et al. 2008, 242- 243).

*All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* reflects the period when young Isherwood first attempts to realize who he was and how he made meaning out of his life. Coming from an upper middle class British family and going through his education after a painful and depressing process as the son of a "Hero-Father" caused an inner conflict. The identity that he imagined for himself was totally different with the expectations of his family and the society that he was a part of. For that matter, *All the Conspirators* presents a writer's effort to stand up to the values and pressures that are imposed upon him. On the other hand, *The Memorial* reveals how much Isherwood had grown after the publication of his first novel. In terms of the subject matter and technique, the novels were the starting point of a young writer's step into maturity. In my opinion, both novels are Isherwood's way of coming to terms with the society that he was living in. But his first novel, naturally, carries lots of personal elements in terms of the issues that he focused on.

McAdams claims that the personal experiences and "remembered episodes" from the past that we collect during our childhood and adolescence carry "personal meaning" for the individual. (John et al. 2008: 244) Thus, autobiographical memories affect the way we construct our narratives in the past and our goals for the future. "Life stories, therefore, are always about both the reconstructed past and the imagined future." (John et al. 2008, 244). says McAdams. One of the common concepts that signified personal meaning in Isherwood's adolescence was "war" and "the test." In his semi-autobiographical novel *Lions and Shadows* he explains this with these words: "Like most of my generation, I was obsessed by a complex of terrors and longings connected with the idea "War." "War," in this purely neurotic sense, meant The Test. The Test of your courage, of your maturity, of your sexual prowess: 'Are you really a Man?' Subconsciously, I believe, I longed to be subjected to this test; but I also dreaded failure." (Isherwood, 1974, 46).

The source of the war/test concept was already a part of Isherwood's experience. He was the son of a hero-father who died for his country. Moreover, as the son of a hero-father he was expected to live up to his father's legacy and overcome any kind of difficulties or pass various tests in life. Isherwood perceived every failure in life as also being a failure in the test. The test at this point symbolizes everything he despised at that period of life. It represents his family's expectations, pressures, his incompetence at fitting into British society and its traditions, rules and boundaries, which he described as hypocritical, snobbish, and complacent. In reality, he related some of the critical events of his personal life with the concept of Test. For instance, when he had a serious motorbike accident he admitted that he felt humiliated: "War for the moment was at a discount. I had failed the Test, and knew it, and was, for the time being, comfortably and ignobly resigned." (Isherwood, 1974, 59). Yet, he sometimes remained indifferent to the Test. For instance, after he got himself dismissed from Cambridge, he knew that he failed the Test. But as he says in *Lions and Shadows*, he called a taxi and all he felt was freedom. Maybe the constant fear of failure was exactly what intensified the desire to leave which he always had in his personality. He accepts the fact that he has an "escapist temperament." He states that "I could never see a train leave a platform for any destination without wishing myself on board." (Isherwood, 1974, 163). While his life story is full of attempts to escape from tests, the characters that he created in his early novels get their own share as well.

The two other concepts that he deals with in *All The Conspirators* and *The Memorial* are Truly Strong Man and Truly Weak Man. He sees the two concepts as anti-thesis of each other. While the Truly Strong Man is "calm, balanced, aware of his strength" (Isherwood, 1974, 128) Truly Weak Man is a "neurotic hero" and "the Test exists only for Truly Weak Man: no matter whether he passes or he fails it, he cannot alter his essential nature." (Isherwood, 1974, 128) In these novels, Isherwood intentionally prepares personal tests for Philip in *All The Conspirators* and Eric in *The Memorial* and reflects their struggle to pass them.

In *All The Conspirators*, Philip Lindsay is portrayed as a young man who rejects the future that his mother has planned for him. After quitting his job at the post office, he leaves home and goes to a hotel at seaside with his friend Allen Chalmers. As biographer Jonathan Fryer points out in his book, Isherwood modelled Philip and Allen on his friends Edward Upward and Hector Wintle "both of whom also have elements of Christopher in them." (Fryer, 1993, 63). At the beginning of the novel, Isherwood presents Philip as a young man who is ready to go after his dream. As the novel progresses, the reader realize that the test that Isherwood sets for Philip is a difficult one to pass. Philip has to win this fight against his mother in the



name of being a writer and painter. If Philip succeeds, it would not only be a victory against his controlling mother but it would also be a rebellion against the rules of the system that gnaw at him.

As a reader, one expects Philip to stand firm against the efforts of Mrs. Lindsay and Mr. Langbridge (a friend of Philip's dead father who helped Philip to find a job at the post office) to breakdown Philip's resistance. Particularly, after the scene where Philip confronts his mother after quitting his job at the post office, it is obvious that Philip is going to lose this battle soon. Seeing her "scornful, ugly face," makes Philip feel as if he is "hypnotized," Mrs. Lindsay's sharp tongue also makes him feel weak and insecure. When Philip tries to defend his decision by saying that he can stand on his own feet, Mrs. Lindsay directly targets her son's self-confidence with the response: "Since when have you ever done that?"

Philip is doomed to lose this war from the start because he doesn't know how to fight. After a nervous mother-son confrontation, Mrs. Lindsay, who knows her son's weaknesses so well, slowly pulls the rug out from him. Her last weapon of destruction is to remind Philip to remember his dead father. "Your father always hoped that you would make a position for yourself in the world." (Isherwood, 1990, p.50) In a way, Mrs. Lindsay warns Philip not to bring any shame on the family name by quitting his job in the name of writing and painting. In the end, Philip gives up and returns to his old job because he is a desperate and powerless Truly Weak Man, who is doomed to fail.

For Isherwood, writing such a scene is intentional. This was a big challenge that he was forced to face in his personal life and played an important role in his self-defining life story. After Frank's death, honouring his father was something that Isherwood was expected to do. In the Afterword of his book *Kathleen and Frank*, he states that after his father's death, he felt he was cursed for the rest of his life. "...he was under an obligation to be worthy of Frank, his Hero-Father, at all times, and in all ways.... Later there were many more who tried to do so; people he actually met, and disembodied voices from pulpits, newspapers, books. He began to think of them collectively as The Others." (Isherwood, 1971, 501). Isherwood's self-analysis proves that his father's death added a great burden on his shoulders. Trying to be worthy of a "Hero-Father" was something that Isherwood could not deal with at this young age. He began to regard everything that his mother expected him to do as a part of a Test which he fails every time.

In his twenties and thirties, Isherwood was always in conflict with Kathleen. Especially after Frank's death, the relationship between Kathleen and Christopher was tense and contentious. This fact reflected his portrayal of the two mother figures, Mrs. Lindsay and Lilly, in his early novels. He thinks that "A Hero-Father leaves behind him a Holy Widow- Mother, who shames her children by her sacred grief." (Isherwood, 1971, 505). He blamed his mother for not being able to be there for him when he needed her since Kathleen was buried so deep in her grief, she was unable to communicate with her son anymore. In the Afterword of *Kathleen and Frank*, Isherwood recalls a nerve-racking memory of Kathleen's disrespect for Thomas Hardy, although she knew very well how much Isherwood admired the author. He summarized the opposition between him and Kathleen with these sentences. "... if Kathleen and he [Christopher] had landed on an alien planet where there were two political parties about which they knew nothing, the Uggs and the Oggs, she would have instantly chosen one of them and he the other, simply reacting to the sound of their names." (Isherwood, 1971, 507).

There is a similar mother figure portrayal in *The Memorial*. Although she wasn't presented as harsh and brutal like Mrs. Lindsay in *All the Conspirators*, Lilly Vernon shows a resemblance to his mother, Kathleen. In the story, she has also lost her husband, Richard, in the war and she is still unable to cope with his death. She lives in the past and keeps thinking "Is this all my share of life, ... twelve years of happiness; paid for more than twelve times over in agonies of waiting during those awful months, expecting always the War Office telegram which came at last. Killed in Action." (Isherwood, 2013, 71). For Lilly, her son is always described as "poor Eric. Poor darling. He was always so plain. He didn't in the least remind one of Richard." (Isherwood, 2013, 67). This kind of comparison with the heroic father was something that Isherwood had always felt during his adolescence. In the novel, Eric is having the same dilemma in his relationship with his mother.

Throughout the novel, as we learn about each character's past, we see that Lilly makes Eric to feel inferior because of his stammer. She warns Eric every time he tries to speak: "Darling you must remember to count every time you speak. You're getting worse than ever... you could cure yourself if you'd only fight against it. You must not lose heart. Everything can be cured." (Isherwood, 2013, 74). She doesn't care to know the fact that the more she warns him the more she pushes Eric back. Because of his stammer, Eric already has insecurities. Like Isherwood's mother Kathleen, Lilly, also wants her son to be a don. "Everyone





told her that he was so clever. His history master felt sure that he would get an entrance scholarship to Cambridge.... How happy it would make Richard." (Isherwood, 2013, 91).

Eric's future success in life is evaluated in terms of Richard's wishes. In book II of *The Memorial*, Isherwood portrays Eric as a 17 year old insecure boy who thinks that he will never be a don if he can't cure his stammer. Eric sees himself as "ugly, clumsy" and "inept" (Isherwood, 2013, 147). Unable to be successful at various fields like playing tennis, "conjuring-tricks, juggling with oranges, doing stunts on a push bike, ping pong, card games..." (Isherwood, 2013, 147). Even these little, unimportant things are enough to make him feel inferior. Eric keeps comparing himself with his Truly Strong Man cousin, Maurice, who is popular and successful at anything he puts his hand to. One day Maurice comes and suggests "Suppose we join up Eric?" This sentence is also crucial in understanding the mood of Isherwood and his generation. Their generation felt despised because they were too young to take part in WWI. In a way, alongside his personal insecurities, Isherwood wanted to emphasize his generation's dilemma. They were made to feel useless because they couldn't join the war. As he opines in *Lions and Shadows*, manhood, courage, maturity are all tested in War. In the preface of *All the Conspirators*, he depicts his generation as the Angry Young Men, because they are angry with British society, "their dullness, snobbery, complacency, apathy." (Isherwood, 1966, 92).

In *All The Conspirators* and *The Memorial* the mother figures are the symbol of "the Others." For Isherwood, Philip's desire to be a painter and writer is a cover story for being able to do whatever you want to achieve in life without any interruption from "the Others." When we compare the two mothers in *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* Isherwood's anger and hatred can be felt more heavily in the portrayal of Mrs. Lindsay. Mrs. Lindsay's excessive mothering of Philip affects her son's ability to make his own decisions and transforms him into an insecure man who is unable to choose a job that he wants. Towards the end of the novel, Isherwood gives Philip a last chance to break free from the pressures of his mother and the job that he hates. He is offered a job at a coffee plantation in Kenya. Philip accepts the position immediately. Mrs. Lindsay's reaction to Philip's decision is unexpected. She wishes her son happiness and she declares that if it is for Philip's own good, she can endure this separation. As a mother who controls his son's life in every possible way, even by plotting against him, this response proves that she doesn't believe that Philip will eventually leave. Her quick surrender can be interpreted as bluffing as opposed to Philip's own way of punishing her.

Isherwood's decision to depict Mrs. Lindsay as a cunning and insidious woman is the result of his anger and prejudice against his mother. He takes every chance to present her as an evil mother figure and wants his readers to see her from this perspective. In one scene, Mrs. Lindsay makes it clear that she doesn't believe that her son is able to leave home and begin a new life. "I fancy you'll find Philip is very fond of his comforts. He wouldn't give them up as easily as you imagine." (Isherwood, 1990, 110). says Mrs. Lindsay to her daughter, Joan. She knows that Philip does not know how to stand on his own feet. Quitting his job is surely a rebellion but he doesn't know how to carry on. His whole life he has been dependent on his family and Mrs. Lindsay is there to remind him of this fact constantly.

In the Foreword to *All the Conspirators*, written in 1957, Isherwood describes the story as "of a trivial but furious battle which the combatants fight out passionately and dirtily to a finish, using whatever weapons come to their hands." (Isherwood, 1990, 9). The plot in that matter was designed to reflect a battle, "a great war between the old and young!" (Isherwood, 1990, p. 8) But Philip is not fully equipped to fight in this war. Isherwood was at the beginning of his twenties when he wrote the novel, and the reason why he created a storyline like this is because of his desire to spill out all the hatred and hostility against the conformist, rule-driven British establishment and its representatives.

Although Isherwood owes his reputation to novels like *Goodbye to Berlin*, and *A Single Man*, his second novel, *The Memorial*, deserves credit as well. The tone and style of the novel, the detailed and meticulously developed character analysis, give the novel a different perspective when compared with *All the Conspirators*. *The Memorial* is distinct from his first novel in many ways. First of all, his hatred and anger towards, and the lack of understanding of his mother diminishes. In his depiction of Lilly Vernon, Isherwood is now more sympathetic and less harsh. The issue regarding the gap between mother and son still continues but Isherwood takes a step to empathize with Lilly Vernon. Isherwood is now mature enough to perceive Lilly Vernon from a different perspective.

After losing her husband in the war, everyone expects Lily to be brave but she rebels against such an idea. "Be brave, she repeated to herself. But now that word had no meaning. It sounded rather idiotic. Why should I be brave? ... Who cares whether I'm brave or not? I'm all alone." (Isherwood, 2013, 66). Here,



Isherwood successfully reflects two sides of the coin. On the one side, he portrays Lily as a woman who refuses to be strong and hide her pain, in contrast to society's expectations. She has lost someone she cared about and she doesn't want to ignore the feeling in the name of being brave. Moreover, since she is so deeply buried in her grief, she doesn't keep up with the new world. People no longer remember the war. There is no solidarity and understanding anymore. She admits that "There is another generation already... She was living on in a new, changed world, unwanted among enemies." (Isherwood, 2013, 66). Isherwood understands this kind of feeling because he also feels that he was living in a world surrounded by the others.

The other side of the coin reflects a degree of criticism by Isherwood of his mother. When Lily says "I'm all alone," she forgets the fact that she has a son. Instead of looking for consolation in Eric's love, she thinks that "how on earth am I to live for Eric, when he's away at school eight months of the year?" (Isherwood, 2013, 67). She does not perceive Eric as a companion in her pain. As she immerses herself in her inner feelings, she directly contributes to the emotional gap between Eric and herself. "That's not life, Lily cried out to herself. That's not life; people being kind to you and talking in gentle voices, trying to think of things which will amuse you. That's not life" (Isherwood, 2013, 68). Isherwood does not try to justify Lily's action and her lack of interest to her son Eric, but by portraying such direct and pure feelings, he shows that he is not insensitive and blind to the feeling of emptiness after losing someone you love.

Secondly, the circumstances that caused Truly Weak Man's failure gives away to a more optimistic environment. There is now a room for development for the Truly Weak Man. In Book III, Eric is presented as a young man who questions and stands against the institutions of the British Establishment. Book III, part II opens with a scene of Eric, looking at his dorm room and expressing his hatred toward the dons. He even thinks about bombing Cambridge's Round Church, Hall of Trinity, King's Chapel and Corpus Library so "Cambridge would have returned to its proper status as a small market-town, inhabited by commercial travelers, auctioneers, cattle-dealers, out of work jockeys..." (Isherwood, 2013, 201). He also finds the courage to tell his mother that he hates religion. "All Religion is vile. And religious people are all either hypocrites or idiots." (Isherwood, 2013, 207) says Eric. He is not the "ugly, clumsy" and "inept" boy anymore. This kind of self-reliance and protest is the result of Isherwood's Berlin years. After leaving for Berlin in 1929, Isherwood encountered a whole new world. Finally, he had a chance to break free of his mother's pressures and the British Establishment. Some parts of *The Memorial*, were edited and rewritten in Berlin. On his return to London, Isherwood was no longer the same person. He was confident, he wasn't a Truly Weak Man anymore. So Eric most probably benefitted from Isherwood's Berlin life. The novel ends with Eric's complete transformation. Eric decides to dedicate his life to Catholicism and he declares that he has "the most extraordinary feeling of peace." (Isherwood, 2013, 291) The reason why Isherwood wrote such an ending for Eric is unknown, but it can be interpreted as signifying Eric's adult conscious choice to decide on the path that he wants to follow.

Thirdly as Isherwood approached adulthood, he became more preoccupied with sex and sexuality. Although the novel does not offer an analysis of the issue, by including a homosexual character, he at least raised awareness through creating a war veteran, Edward Blake, who happens to be gay. Another representative of the previous generation is Edward Blake. The portrayal of Edward Blake is important in two ways. First of all, for the first time in his life, he dared to create a homosexual character in his fiction. Secondly, he portrayed him as a combination of Truly Strong Man and Truly Weak Man.

There are four phases in sexual identity development: These are: 'awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/ synthesis.' "Within the awareness phase, at the individual level, one recognizes being different, and at the group level, one acknowledges that there are different possible sexual orientations." (Schwartz et al. 2011, 593). After this phase, there comes the exploration of same-sex attractions" which "occurs at the individual level and exploration of one's position in the lesbian and gay community begins at the group level." (Schwartz et al. 2011: 593-94). When one looks closely at Isherwood's narrative, it can be said that Isherwood's awareness phase goes back to the time while he was in public school. In *Lions and Shadows* Isherwood confesses that he "was grimly repressing his own romantic feelings towards a younger boy" because he was so anxious to pass the test in order to emerge as a "Man." (Isherwood, 1974, 48). His biographer, Jonathan Fryer, argues that in the years between 1925-1928 "sex was the ultimate topic for unsettling Christopher. Despite his romantic yearnings for younger boys and the one rather unsatisfactory sexual experience at university, Christopher was still in a state of considerable confusion about his sexual needs." (Fryer, 1993, 57). He observes that it was in 1926 that Isherwood and Auden were lovers. "Isherwood later said that they made love unromantically but with great pleasure." (Fryer, 1993, 61).



Isherwood's exploration and deepening/commitment phases probably formed in the spring of 1928, when Kathleen's distant relative, Basil Fry, came to visit them in London and invited Isherwood to Bremen. In his letter to Edward Upward, Isherwood described the town as a place "full of boys." Fryer points out that "Christopher felt an instantaneous sexual attraction to Germany as the home of so many desirable boys." (Fryer, 1993, 66). As mentioned earlier, 1929 was a year that can be considered one of the turning points in his life. As Fryer observes, it was the year when "his great journey of liberation" began. His decision to go to Berlin facilitated the formation of his sexual identity. Although this period will be examined in detail in the following pages of this thesis, it would not be wrong to observe that the time Isherwood spent in Germany resulted in the creation of Edward Blake.

Readers first meet Edward Blake in Book I which describes events in 1928. Isherwood creates an impressive and intense scene showing Edward Blake's unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide by shooting himself in the mouth. The next scene depicts him leaving his home with blood all over his body, taking a taxi to someone's home. Isherwood took the inspiration for writing such a scene in real life. Edward Blake was modelled on a man called John Layard, who had slept with the latest boyfriend of Auden. Fryer states that it was because of Auden's rejection of his love, the man tried to shoot himself in the mouth but the bullet missed the brain. He got into a taxi, went to see Auden and "begged him to finish him off." (Fryer, 1993, 72).

Fifty pages later, when the book goes back to the year 1920, readers learn that Edward Blake is a friend of Richard and a war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He depicts Edward as a Truly Weak Man from the start. In his childhood, he was a total outsider, facing "injustice and tyranny." He was bullied by the senior students and attacked in the corridors, changing rooms and dormitory of the school. As the time passes, Edward transforms into a Truly Strong Man and begins to "take life by storm" and "He admitted no final obstacle, no barriers. He could do anything. He would do everything." (Fryer, 1993, 131). Although the suicide scene at the beginning of the novel can be interpreted as an act of Truly Weak Man, in my opinion, Isherwood includes it in order to show that Edward is still a Truly Strong Man because he has the courage to pull the trigger. The last inter chapters of the book reflect Edward's relationship with Eric, Maurice and Margaret. Isherwood does not put undue emphasis on Edward's homosexuality, but he also does not avoid mentioning his lovers, Mimi, Gaston and Franz. As a writer of only his second novel, the inclusion of a homosexual character into his fiction was a bold move. He touched upon an issue which in those times was regarded as a taboo and "perversity" by society. But on the other hand he presented a life of a man, a war veteran, who only happens to be gay. He doesn't want his readers to treat Edward Blake differently. Hence, in his portrayal, he doesn't separate him from the other characters. He is just like the others who are trying to survive life after war.

In terms of subject matter, the young Christopher Isherwood addresses highly personal issues; however, as a writer who is just beginning to form an artistic identity, the word choice, sentence construction, description of characters and his clear narrative reflect his talent and enthusiasm as a writer. In these early novels there are, of course, modernist influences. Both *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* have scenes of stream of consciousness, characters are occupied with their inner selves, in which each, in his or her own way, is lonely or alienated from society. Although he was at the very beginning of his artistic career, Isherwood successfully combines these modernist echoes in his fiction with his personal life narrative.

##### **5. Isherwood in the 1930's: Mr. Norris Changes Trains & Goodbye to Berlin**

The previous chapter of this study states that it is through autobiographical reasoning that people deduce meaning from personal experiences and attempt to understand who they are and what life means for them. A turning point event in one's life facilitates this process. For Isherwood, his childhood, his father's death and the years that he spent at St. Edmunds carry similar effect. They directly contributed to the Christopher Isherwood persona behind his early novels. We witness young Christopher Isherwood's struggle to discover who he really was and what path he should follow as a person who was at the very beginning of a literary career. It is obvious that in his early fiction, *All the Conspirators* (1928) and *The Memorial* (1932), Isherwood turned inward. He was very much absorbed in his personal problems. His discomfort with the British education system, his inability to fit in society, the constant disagreements with his mother, his never ending desire to leave and his attempt to be an independent individual, away from the expectations and pressures of his family, were not only the issues he portrayed in his novels but were also the realities of his personal life.

In his essay "Life Authorship: A Psychological Challenge for Emerging Adulthood as Illustrated in Two Notable Case Studies" Dan McAdams states that autobiographical reasoning:



... continues to grow into the emerging adulthood years. Older adolescents and young adults show more facility than their younger counterparts in (1) deriving organizing themes in their lives, (2) sequencing personal episodes into causal chains in order to explain their development, (3) illustrating personal growth over time, (4) identifying clear beginnings and endings in their life narrative accounts ... (McAdams, 2013, 153).

The years between 1929 and 1933 witnessed Isherwood's attempt and desire to fulfil all of the above. He came to Berlin during his emerging adulthood and the city of Berlin was undoubtedly an important episode of Isherwood's life. Personal themes which can clearly be seen in his early fiction, such as the Test, Truly strong men and Truly weak men gradually diminished in their effect on him, as well as his fiction. The camera which once focused on his inner world began to turn outside to shoot others. While the city of Berlin was provided ample material for Isherwood to record, it also helped him to make sense and meaning out of his life.

The questions that I am going to seek for answers in this part of the study are: In this particular time and place, what kind of artistic and sexual identity was Isherwood constructing? What did Isherwood's story say about himself? How was this story reflected in his Berlin fiction? Isherwood wrote four novels pertaining to his Berlin years. These are *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) a chapter in *Down There On a Visit* (1959) and *Christopher and His Kind* (1976). However, since my aim is to focus on the formation of Isherwood's identity he constructed during 1929-1933, the main emphasis will be on *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) The two other novels, which were written during his mid-life years, will be referred to briefly in order to clarify points related to the subject matter. Before focusing on Isherwood's artistic and sexual identity, it is necessary to touch upon the political and social atmosphere waiting for the young William Bradshaw Christopher Isherwood in the 1930s.

During the 1920s Germany was in struggle to overcome the after effects of the World War I. Thanks to the politician and statesman Gustav Stresemann's efforts to bring German's political parties together in the Reichstag, and to the Dawes Plan (1923) which rescheduled the payment of war debts of Germany to various countries affected in WWI, Germany achieved economic stability and industrial growth. But this stability was destroyed when Wall Street crashed in 1929, ushering in the Great Depression. Germany, as a country, which depended on foreign investments, confronted a serious economic crisis and massive unemployment. Moreover, the tension between the communists and the fascists was rising. In the elections held in 1930, the two factions confronted each other. While the communists increased their percentage of the vote by fifty percent, Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party increased its seats in the Reichstag from 12 to 107.

As Karl Leydecker states in *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic Intersections of Literature and Politics* this new kind of nationalism became popular among a new generation "who felt that they had gained nothing from the experiment in democracy." (Leydecker, ed. 2013, 8). As for the Jews, Leydecker thinks that

The rising nationalism also fostered a mood of anti-Semitism that had never been far below the surface of the Weimar Republic. The nationalists had stigmatized the Jews as representing an alien and "un-German" liberal-democratic spirit upon which the disastrous republic had been founded. Now they sought scapegoats for the economic misery that the country was suffering (Leydecker, ed. 2013, 8).

It was exactly in this political and social turmoil that Isherwood began to live in Berlin. As a writer who embraced the motto that "For me, art really begins with the question of my own experience, and what am I going to turn it into." (Berg ed. 2007, 53-54) it was impossible for Isherwood to remain indifferent to these incidents.

In *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935), he portrays himself as a character who takes a political stance and supports the communists against the Nazis. He attends political gatherings organized by the communists. He even translates a communist manuscript into English. On the other hand, in *Goodbye to Berlin*, while he offers vivid and memorable portraits from German culture, he simultaneously shares the effects of these social and political events on the citizens of the city. Isherwood was a perfect observer. During the years he spent in Berlin, he sensed the dynamics of the culture clearly and in his own humorous way, he touches upon sensitive subjects like the tension between the Jewish and German citizens. *Goodbye to Berlin* reflects this conflict. For instance, a thought-provoking scene between two characters, a 'Galician Jewess' Frau Gllanterncek and Fr. Mayr, who is an "ardent Nazi," shows the fractures in the society when Fr. Mayr defames Frau Gllanterncek by sending a letter to Frau Gllanterncek's suitor claiming that she has bugs in her flat and also has been arrested for "fraud and released on the ground that she is insane." Fr.



Mayr also accuses Frau Gllanterneck of using her own bedroom for “immoral purposes and slept in the beds afterwards without changing the sheets.” (Isherwood, 2003, 21). Next morning, Isherwood writes, “we hear that ... Frau Glanterneck is to be seen with a black eye. The marriage is off.” (Isherwood 2003, p.21) Although it is a humorous scene to read, it reveals the fact that the two woman hate each other because of their race.

Another character, Frau Nowak, thinks that “When Hitler comes, he’ll show these Jews a thing or two. They won’t be so cheeky then” (Isherwood, 2003, 148). Isherwood also refers to some real-life incidents of the time, especially the ones which deepen the gap between the Germans and the Jews. He refers to the Nazi riots and their attack on Jewish shops. One of the most strikingly hateful speeches comes from Frl. Mayr, who learns that the Nazis smashed the windows of the shops belonging to the Jews in the city. She thinks that it “Serves them right... This town is sick with Jews. Turn over any stone, and a couple of them will crawl out. They’re poisoning the very water we drink! They’re strangling us, they’re sobbing us, they’re sucking our life-blood. Look at all the big department stores: ‘Wertheim, K.D.W., Landauers’ Who owns them? Filthy thieving Jews” (Isherwood, 2003, 175). As a writer who nurtured his fiction from his own first hand experiences, Isherwood successfully documents the hatred and the increasing fractures among the Germans against the Jews.

In the Foreword to their book, *The Study of Sexual Identity Narrative Perspectives on The Gay and Lesbian Life Course*, Philip L Hammack and Bertam J. Cohler argue that

The stories we tell of our lives, being richly bound up with our experiences and habits, always speak of lives lived at particular moments in history at particular points in the life cycle. Stories have very specific timings and generations, which should never be overlooked. The stories we tell at any time are also bound up with the historical moment and place. They are always tales about a time and a space. (Hammack & Cohler eds.2009, x)

This quote above brings a crucial question to mind: How did the city of Berlin in the 1930s contribute to the artistic and sexual identity that Isherwood constructed and reflected to his fiction? The story of his life in this specific period provides us clues regarding this formation. The most significant and distinctive feature of his artistic identity embraced in his Berlin fiction is the attempt to put himself at the heart of the story. In his first Berlin novel, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, Christopher Isherwood is the first person narrator using his ancestral name William Bradshaw. He is also a character in the story who gets involved in the events, supporting Communists against the Nazis, and being on Mr. Norris’ side when help is needed. While readers meet other characters through Bradshaw’s eyes, he, at the same time successfully places himself in a mysterious and adventurous spy story.

Yet, I believe that presenting himself as the narrator-character causes a contradiction. He wants his readers to focus on the central character, Mr. Norris, but he cannot keep himself away from the action. He wants to be a part of the adventure as well. He tries to be a secondary character in the novel. He avoids sharing information about himself. In various scenes he portrays the sexual underworld of Berlin and Mr. Norris’ sexual fantasies. He joins Baron von Pregnitz’s parties full of young, athletic and handsome boys, but he doesn’t give a single clue about William Bradshaw’s sexual orientation. In *Christopher and His Kind*, (1976) when he revisited the Berlin years more than thirty years later, he reveals that the reason why he didn’t mention anything about William Bradshaw’s sexuality is that he wanted to keep the attention only on Mr. Norris. He fears that if he made the narrator homosexual, Mr. Norris would lose his importance as a character. The callow and inexperienced author of *All The Conspirators* and *The Memorial* is now telling his readers that the incidents we read in Mr. Norris are told by a narrator who happens to be a character in the novel but he doesn’t want readers to focus on himself, although he is in the middle of the plot alongside Mr. Norris.

*Mr. Norris Changes Trains* can be regarded as a humorous spy story portraying an “old crook” Arthur Norris who is a double agent going back and forth between communists and fascists in the 1930s. This secret is revealed towards the end of the book because like the narrator-character William Bradshaw, readers are also deceived by the lovely but manipulative Arthur Norris. He is Isherwood’s one of the most idiosyncratic characters in this first Berlin novel. Isherwood got the inspiration for writing *Mr. Norris* from his friendship with Gerald Hamilton. Hamilton was working for the Times in the 1930s. He was an interesting character and because of his “aristocratic and political” connections he had himself gotten into various difficult positions. He was even put into jail because of “act of gross indecency with a male.” (Finney, 1979, 85). At the time that Isherwood met him, he had been involved in a jewellery theft and imprisoned by the Italians for fraud.” (Finney, 1979, 85). As a writer who nurtures himself on real life incidents and characters,



Isherwood was highly fascinated by Hamilton's stories. In *Christopher and His Kind*, he explains that Mr. Norris wasn't a prototype:

he was a character in the simplest sense... Christopher wanted to make the reader experience Arthur Norris just as he himself has experienced Gerald Hamilton. He could only do this by writing subjectively, in the first person, describing his own reactions to and feelings about Hamilton; otherwise his portrait of Mr. Norris wouldn't be lifelike (Isherwood, 1976, 184).

As he himself reveals in the quote above, Mr. Norris is one of the liveliest and most idiosyncratic characters in his Berlin stories. He is as important and carefully woven as Sally Bowles in *Goodbye To Berlin*. First of all, he is not young enough to be a spy. With the ugliest teeth the narrator had ever seen, his "white, small, and beautifully manicured" hands, his silk underwear, and most importantly with his cleverly made wig perfectly suiting the color of his hair, Arthur Norris does not have any of the qualities of a spy. Even the narrator thinks that he can only be an "innocent private smuggler". His tastes are highly expensive for a spy. His choice of clothes, his first class seat on a train, and even the food that he prefers indicate that he is a rich person and loves luxury. He explains his extravagant life style to Bradshaw as a characteristic of his generation. "My generation was brought up to regard luxury from an aesthetic standpoint. Since the war, people don't seem to feel that anymore." (Isherwood, 1955, 15).

The way the narrator William Bradshaw portrays and approaches Mr. Norris is so sympathetic and intimate that readers also fall under the spell of Mr. Norris. He loves and respects Arthur like a father. He wants to become a part of Mr. Norris' life, which is full of ups and downs, covert affairs and disappearances: I was fond of Arthur with an affection strengthened by obstinacy. If my friends didn't like him because of his mouth and or his past, the loss was theirs; I was, I flattered myself, more profound, more humane, an altogether subtler connoisseur of human nature than they (Isherwood, 1955, 35).

This brings us to the second feature of his artistic identity. While he places himself at the heart of his stories as the narrator-character, he makes his readers experience incidents as he experienced them in his real life. The same thing also happens in his character portrayals. Auden once described Isherwood as a man who "was wholly and simply interested in people. He did not like or dislike them, judge them favourably or unfavourably. He simply regarded them as material for his work." (Spender, 1966, 101).

Isherwood portrays the characters in his fiction in the way he viewed them in real life. A keen reader of Isherwood knows that the author would make readers feel exactly as he felt in his real life. This is the reason why Arthur Norris or Sally Bowles creates such a big smile on our faces. One cannot loathe them or criticize them when we read of their reckless and selfish behaviour because we know that they have their own idiosyncrasies. We know that they are real and Isherwood portrayed them because he found them interesting. They are memorable and distinct. Again in *Christopher and His Kind*, he reveals that the reason why he chose Mr. Norris as his subject is to present

the bizarre as though it were humdrum and to show events which are generally regarded as extraordinary forming the daily routine of somebody's life. He had chosen Norris for his first subject because, of all his Berlin characters, Norris was the most bizarre (Isherwood, 1976, 187).

The quote above shows that he fears to create dull and uninteresting characters with no excitement at all. But neither *Mr. Norris* nor *Goodbye to Berlin* has such characters. He was aware of the fact that he was a part of extraordinary times. Being in Berlin in the 1930s, witnessing the sexual freedom as opposed to political chaos, observing the rise of the Nazis, and the transformation of the city through the beginning of the war were all a privilege. In an atmosphere like this, his main concern in his fiction is to be able to reflect them without being monotonous. That's why he emphasizes in *Christopher and His Kind* that:

In his two novels about Berlin, Christopher tried to make not only the bizarre seen humdrum, but the humdrum seem bizarre- that is, exciting. He wanted his readers to find excitement in Berlin's drab streets and shabby crowds, in the poverty and dullness of the overgrown Prussian provincial town which had become Germany's pseudo-capital (Isherwood, 1976, 188).

With a belief in reflecting his first-hand experience and sharing it with people in the form of fiction, today we can absolutely say that he succeeded in awakening that kind of excitement. When one reads *Mr. Norris* or *Goodbye to Berlin*, we all aspire to be part of those days, to wander around the streets of Berlin. Today in Berlin people organize "Walking Tours" starting from the street Nollendorfplatz, (Isherwood's neighborhood in the 1930s) visiting the streets and cafes which featured in his Berlin stories. People read excerpts from his novels, talking about Isherwood and 1930s Berlin. All this suggests that there are still people looking for similar excitement. In *Christopher and His Kind* he shares a quotation from the Russian author Ilya Ehrenburg's poem, "The Sons of Our Sons," which was also a quotation embraced by Auden:



“Read about us and marvel! You did not live in our time- be sorry!” (1976, p.188) Isherwood already knew the value of those times. The reason why he kept turning back to those years even thirty years later was to revisit the excitement and to awaken the old feelings. He wanted his readers to read his Berlin stories and marvel at the extraordinary times. He took pleasure when people wished to be a part of 1930s Berlin; indeed, his desire to write about the motive for writing about “bizarre” characters or incidents was one of the hallmarks of his Berlin fiction. Although this was a tough task to do, he successfully managed to reflect what he felt, experienced and observed into his stories.

*Goodbye To Berlin* brought Isherwood a worldwide reputation as a writer when the novel was later adapted as a musical, *Cabaret*, turning Liza Minelli into an icon with her role as the famous Sally Bowles. As in *Mr. Norris*, he presents vivid and memorable portraits such as Sally Bowles, Fr. Schroeder, Otto Nowak and the Lauenders. The habit of integrating the atmosphere of the 1930s into the novel continues in *Goodbye to Berlin*. The novel consists of six stories between the autumn of 1930 and the winter of 1933. Isherwood completed three episodes, entitled 'On Reugen Island (Summer 1931)', 'The Landauers', and 'A Berlin Diary (Winter 1932-3)' in 1937, just before his visit to China with Auden as war correspondents. When the novel was published in 1939, the stories had been chronologically organized. The most important distinction between *Mr. Norris* and *Goodbye to Berlin* in terms of Isherwood's artistic identity is his attempt to make the characters' voice more distinct than those in *Mr. Norris*. Isherwood focuses on human nature. *Goodbye to Berlin* is not a spy story in which you get lost in an adventurous plot. It is a historical presentation of people's struggle to survive in a socially, economic and politically chaotic environment.

The narrator-character is Christopher Isherwood now, but unlike William Bradshaw of *Mr. Norris*, Christopher in *Goodbye to Berlin* is less involved with the characters. At the very beginning of the story, Isherwood promises his readers, in his most quoted and discussed sentences:

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. Someday, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed (Isherwood, 2003, 9).

This quotation above gives us insights about his artistic identity and life story. The incidents he had lived through, the people he had met and the feelings he had felt had been important throughout his life. The man who is shaving at the window is as important as the woman in the kimono. He had never missed a scene in his life. This is the way he records experience and reflects it into his novels. It is through this experience that he realizes who he really is and what the meaning of his life is. In “*A Psychologist Without A Country or Living Two Lives in the Same Story*” Mc Adams observes that people:

... construct, internalize, and revise stories of the self. Like novelists, they work with the material they have been (implicitly) gathering for many years - key experiences that may stand out as critical scenes in the story, important interpersonal relationships, the values and the norms of their society, and just about anything else that presents itself as something that could possibly work its way into a narrative to portray who I am (Yancy & Hadley, eds. 2005, 122).

Isherwood's attempt to act like a camera does not only mean that he's collecting material for his fiction. This kind of thinking would be superficial. All the people and incidents that Isherwood's camera recorded would actually be a contribution to his identity. As an artist he reflects them into his fiction the way he saw it. In *Goodbye to Berlin* one can observe the outcomes of his experience in terms of the description of people and incidents. As he focuses more on human nature, he comes to know himself. He nurtures his identity with the characters he created. He learns from them. The things that he learned found their way into his narrative identity. The dialogues he wrote for the characters are deep and thoughtful, understanding and satisfactory. As opposed to *Mr. Norris*, this time he detaches himself from the events. The plot is no longer important now. Isherwood leaves the stage to the characters. With *Goodbye to Berlin*, he learns to observe and understand the people around him. Berlin in the 1930s not only affected the formation of his artistic identity, but it also affected his life story. In *Goodbye to Berlin* one can observe his gradual transformation into a mature and sensitive person who learns to empathize with other people. This might be is the reason why he presents character portrayals from such diverse backgrounds.

For instance, Fr. Schroeder, Isherwood's landlady who calls Isherwood “Herr Issyvoo” is struggling in her loneliness and looking for a sound in her empty flat while trying to survive economically struggling Berlin. She is so desperate that she is holding on the marks and stains left on the carpets and wallpapers by her lodgers. She remembers each of them by name:



... and that's where the Herr Rittmeister always upset his coffee over the wall-paper. He used to sit there on the couch with his fiancée.... You see the ink-stains on the carpet? That's where Herr Professor Koch used to shake his fountain-pen (Isherwood, 2003, 13-14)

Unlike the Christopher Isherwood in *All the Conspirators and The Memorial*, this Christopher has learned to respect the feeling of loneliness and appreciate how desperate a person can be.

In another episode, called "On Reugen Island," he portrays an upper middle class Englishman, Peter Wilkinson's relationship with a German working-class boy, Otto Nowak. It is definitely an important episode in the formation of Isherwood's sexual identity, which will be discussed soon, but it is also important in understanding one of the basic fears in human nature. Isherwood writes this episode to emphasize the fear of loneliness and the need to hold on to somebody even though that person is no good for him. From the very first scene it is obvious that Otto is after Peter's money and the luxurious life that Peter is offering for him. He is one of the boys who pretends to be gay. As Fryer points out, "Otto is a good example of those lads who drifted into what is essentially male prostitution as the economically sensible thing to do in times of great unemployment." (Fryer, 1993, 348). Otto intentionally exploits Peter. But the other side of the coin reveals a simple fact about Peter: he depends on Otto. Isherwood depicts Otto as a young man who has healing powers for Peter. He says that

Like many animal people, he has considerable instinctive powers of healing- when he chooses to use them. At such times, his treatment of Peter is unerringly correct. Peter will be sitting at the table, hunched up, his downward-curving mouth lined with childhood fears: a perfect case picture of his twisted expensive upbringing. Then in comes Otto, grins, dimples, knocks over a chair, slaps Peter on the back, rubs his hands and exclaims fatuously 'Ja, Ja... so ist die Sache!' And, in a moment, Peter is transformed. He relaxes, begins to hold himself naturally, the tightness disappears from his mouth, his eyes lose their hunted look. As long as the spell lasts, he is just like an ordinary person (Isherwood, 2003, 107).

This paragraph does not reflect a simple relationship between two men. It shows the need to depend on another person as a motivation to live. Peter needs Otto. Otto, with his youth and energy, is like a life source for Peter. Peter is a man who has his own insecurities and psychological problems, but Otto keeps him busy and prevents him remembering them with his childish, naughty and selfish manner.

When we view the situation from Otto's perspective, one cannot loathe Otto. Isherwood writes a whole chapter on Otto and his family; "The Nowaks." When we read the facts about Otto's life struggle, it is impossible not to empathize with Otto. The Nowaks are a typical working class family, barely surviving, with little money. Frau Nowak is the main figure keeping the family together. She has tuberculosis because of the insanitary and uninhabitable atmosphere of the flat. Herr Nowak has a job at a furniture-removers. Brian Finney observes that "poverty and unemployment" have turned Otto into a "... life long actor who can believe in nothing beyond the scene in which he is participating at any one moment." (Finney, 1979, 150). Whether you like it or not, Otto is a survivor and Isherwood's camera reflects Otto's way of fighting with and for life.

The most famous and unforgettable character in the novel is undoubtedly Sally Bowles. Isherwood moved to a neighbourhood called Nollendorfstrasse where he met his landlady Fraulein Meta Thureau, who was to be the basis for Fraulein Schroder in the novel. It was in Fraulein Thureau's flat that he met Jean Ross - aka Sally Bowles- in *Goodbye to Berlin*. With her aristocratic British background and promiscuity, she was clearly an interesting and colourful character portrait for Isherwood to draw upon. Sally Bowles leaves her upper middle class life in England, where she is financially comfortable. In Berlin, she is singing at a club called Lady Windermere, with the hope of becoming famous one day. In the meantime, she sleeps with rich men and goes after every financial opportunity to survive in Berlin as a 19 year old foreign girl. She believes that a woman cannot be a great actress without a number of love affairs. Throughout the chapter, she puts herself in inconvenient situations many times but somehow Isherwood manages to prevent his readers hating her.

In one scene, Sally gets swindled by a man who introduced himself as an agent from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He tells Sally that they are looking for an English actress who can speak German to act in a comedy film which is to be shot in Italy. He offers her a contract. In return, of course, Sally sleeps with him, pays an enormous restaurant and hotel bill and lends him three hundred marks and the man suddenly disappears, in two days. The scene where Sally and Christopher go to the police is perhaps one of the most memorable scenes in the whole book. It once more reveals Isherwood's humour and wit, alongside his depiction of how naïve and quick-witted can people be. As a reader, you can't stop yourself from laughing but at the same time you take pity on Sally Bowles.





During the police interrogation, the elder police officer politely asks Sally "My dear young lady, ... may I inquire whether it is your usual custom to accept invitations of this kind from perfect strangers?" Sally answers "But you see Herr Komissar, he wasn't a perfect stranger. He was my fiancée." (Isherwood, 2003, 94). The police officer is in shock and naturally asks

"you mean to tell me that you become engaged to this man when you'd only known him a single afternoon?"

" 'I supposed it is.' Sally seriously agreed. 'But nowadays, you know, a girl can't afford to keep a man waiting. If he asks her once and she refuses him, he may try somebody else.' " (Isherwood, 2003, 94).

In my opinion, Sally Bowles is evidence of how far Isherwood had come as a writer. Sally Bowles is a hopeless romantic, naïve, credulous and brilliant woman who struggles to survive through life in her own way. A superficial assessment might label Sally Bowles as a simple prostitute, sleeping with men for money. However, Isherwood presents his readers with more than that. His camera makes us to see beyond the surface. Isherwood never judges Sally. He understands her. He knows that, one way or another she is trying to remain on her own two feet and looking for something to hold onto. This might be love, a singing or an acting job. Sally Bowles is no different from an ordinary woman who tries to survive despite all the disappointments, hypocrisy and deceit in life. Isherwood shows his readers that it is not Sally Bowles who ought to be blamed. It is the system, the environment that we are all being a part of.

## 6. Formation of Sexual Identity

In their essay "*Making a Gay Identity: Life Story and The Construction of a Coherent Self*," Bertam J. Cohler and Phillip L. Hammack define gay identity as "the assumption of a particular sexual story, one in which same sex desire is fully realized and integrated into the life story through social practice." (Cohler and Hammack, 2006: 152) Isherwood's first contact with Germany was in 1928, when he visited his mother Kathleen's relative, Basil Fry, in Bremen. In his letter to Edward Upward, he writes "The whole town is full of boys..." (Fryer, 1993, 66). However, it was Berlin that Isherwood promised himself that he would visit because Basil Fry had warned him about the "corruption and degeneracy" of the city. In a way, it is possible to say that his decision to go to Berlin was an attempt to integrate his sexuality into his life story.

Despite the politically chaotic atmosphere of Berlin, the promise that the city held for many artists, painters and authors since the 1920s was highly alluring. As Norman Page indicates in *Auden and Isherwood: The Berlin Years*, the city was:

the place where some of the most progressive movements in painting and theatre, architecture and cinema, and other pure and applied arts were located. Even more enticingly, it had a richly deserved reputation for sexual permissiveness and for the diversity of its sexual underworld. A joke current in Berlin at the time said that, if a lion were sitting outside the Reichstag and a virgin walked past, the lion would roar (Page, 1998, 10).

It was not wrong to say that Berlin in the 1930s was like heaven for gay people. There were bars and night clubs where one could witness scenes for all kinds of sexual tastes. These factors provided a great sense of freedom for Isherwood. As he himself confesses in *Christopher and His Kind*, for the first time in his life, he found a chance to face "his tribe." The homosexual desires he had had to suppress in England were ready to be unleashed among the dozens of gay bars in Berlin.

In an interview, dated 1973, he commented on the years he spent in Berlin with these words "I was young and full of life and tremendously happy to be away from all the restraints which England represented above all, to feel completely free sexually." (Nixon, 2007) As he became more involved with the gay subculture of Berlin, he gradually learned to come to terms with his sexuality. As the title suggests, his novel *Christopher and His Kind* provides enough data to understand what he experienced and how he felt in that specific time and place. Thus, it is an important narrative for understanding the construction of Isherwood's sexual identity. On the second page of *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood declares his main motive for going to Berlin with these words: "To Christopher, Berlin meant boys." (Isherwood, 1976, .2). He also states that he always had romantic feelings towards young boys at school but at that time he was also aware of the fact that something was missing. He explains this as follows:

Because 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 has become clearly aware of this when he went to Germany in May 1928 ... (Isherwood, 1976, 3).

Berlin provided him with a variety of sexual partners who were effectively "gay for cash." However, Isherwood took his relationships seriously, and offered his loyalty while his partners were only after his



money. His first lover, Bubi, was a blond Czech boy who is described as a wanderer, the lost boy, homeless, penniless. ..." (Isherwood, 1976, 5). Apart from his vulnerabilities, Isherwood was also attracted to him because of his physical appearance. In *Christopher and His Kind*, he writes that:

The Blond- no matter what nationality- had been a magical figure for Christopher... Christopher chose to identify himself with a black-haired British ancestor and to see the Blond as the invader who comes from another land to conquer and rape him. Thus, the Blond becomes the masculine foreign *yang* mating with Christopher's feminine native *yin* (Isherwood, 1976, 4).

However the blond's "yang" was only interested in asking money from Christopher.

In Berlin, Christopher also found a chance to observe "his kind" in the famous Magnus Hirschfeld Institute of Sexual Science. Until the day the Nazis destroyed it, the Hirschfeld Institute was the one and only center of sexology. The variety of different things he saw at the institute, from chains, whips, fetish products, to fantasy pictures painted by Dr. Hirschfeld's patients, caused him to regard sexuality from a different perspective. He writes that 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 were a private way of life discovered by himself and a few friends (Isherwood, 1976, 16).

In *Christopher and His Kind*, one can understand how much pressure he felt in England. He was sexually promiscuous in Berlin. As he himself acknowledges, he felt freedom while he was having sexual relations with young, athletic German boys. Although his German was limited, he was blunt and "he wasn't embarrassed to utter the foreign sex words, since they had no associations with his life in England." (Isherwood, 1976, 31).

These words above are enough to understand the pressures and sexual constraints of England over Isherwood's sexual identity. As the author of three novels, educated in well-known public schools and a Cambridge dropout, Isherwood was unable to utter words or sentences associated with sex or sexual desire in his mother-tongue. In *The Story of Sexual Identity* Philip L. Hammack and Bertram J. Cohler observes that

The construction of the life story is necessarily contextualized in the personal and social time in which the events take place and in which the story itself is told (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Because societies, cultures, and historical time periods inform the very meaning of sexual identity, the construction of gay identity is especially sensitive to the particular social context in which it occurs." (2009, 377).

During the years between 1929 and 1933, Isherwood's life story as a young gay man had gone through a significant transformation. Unlike England, Berlin provided him the freedom that he was looking for. Yet, he was not comfortable with reflecting his sexuality in his fiction. There is no mention of William Bradshaw or Christopher Isherwood's sexuality in *Mr. Norris and Goodbye to Berlin*. But he develops a habit of integrating a homosexual character into his fiction. Starting with Edward in *The Memorial* (which was written in Berlin), he goes on to present Baron von Pregnitz as a wealthy homosexual man in *Mr. Norris*. He portrays parties in Baron's house with "... handsome young men with superbly developed brown bodies which they smeared in oil and baked for hours in the sun." (Isherwood, 1955, .46) In *Goodbye to Berlin* in the "On Reugen Island" episode, Isherwood portrays a homosexual relationship between Peter Wilkinson and Otto Nowak in the summer of 1931. The way he describes Otto's physical qualities and how Peter is attracted to him signify that he knows a lot about the nature of homosexual relationships. He frequently emphasizes Otto's energy in swimming and wrestling and how he "moves fluidly, effortlessly; his gestures have the savage, unconscious grace of a cruel, elegant animal." (Isherwood, 2003, p.101) Isherwood presents an honest portrayal of an elderly gay man's perspective on the beauty and energy of the young. Peter is desperate in the face of Otto's youth, beauty, power and energy. Integrating these characters and stories into the plot, Isherwood attempts to insinuate the author's knowledge about such relationships.

The question to be asked at this point is why Isherwood avoided revealing the sexuality of the author? In "*Making a Gay Identity: Life Story and The Construction of a Coherent Self*," Bertam J. Cohler and Phillip L. Hammack argue that there are three "distinct generations of gay men:" "Gay men born in the 1930s and 1940s, coming of age in time following World War II, experienced a time of social conservatism and stigmatization that fostered a hidden, subversive sexual identity..." (McAdams et. al 2006, 153-54). Going to Berlin is the period when Isherwood made sense of his sexuality and constructed an identity but, since he was a person born long before the 1930s, it is perfectly natural for him to hide it in his fiction. But in his real life, he never tried to hide his sexual orientation.

Similarly, in "*Sexual Lives: The Development of Traits, Adaptations and Stories*" Dan McAdams observes that "Gay men who came of age before World War II constructed self-defining stories in a society



that refused to make narrative room for scenes of 'coming out.' (McAdams, 2005: 301) In other words, expecting Isherwood to come out in the 1930s through a newspaper or magazine article, as many celebrities do today, is impossible. In *Christopher and His Kind*, he explained the reason why he couldn't make the narrator homosexual: "... he wasn't prepared to admit that the Narrator was homosexual. Because he was afraid to? Yes, that was one reason. Although his own life as a homosexual was lived fairly openly, he feared to create a scandal." (Isherwood, 1976, 185) He continues that he was afraid of embarrassing Kathleen and losing the allowance coming from his Uncle Henry. But it is evident that he still had concerns about telling the truth to his readers. After all, he is a writer who promises his readers to speak out of his own experience. So if he's unable to tell the truth, he at least chooses not to lie in his fiction:

Christopher dared not to 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 (Isherwood, 1976, 186).

Although Isherwood dared not to make the Narrator homosexual, he dared to include a homosexual storyline and create homosexual characters in his fiction. Cohler and Hammack conclude their essay as follows:

All forms of identity, including that founded on sexual orientation, are formed through telling or writing a particular life story that injects life circumstances with meaning in a personally coherent narrative. The coherence for which we strive, and which is portrayed as an identity, is realized in and through the stories we tell about our lives. We perform our identities through what we write, say or do. Identity is made in and through performance, whether this performance is a story told to oneself or another, written for others to read or enacted in an activity involving shared expectation (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, 167).

Isherwood's coming to Berlin was his attempt to change the course of his life in England, where he felt psychologically and sexually repressed. It was a step taken to construct an identity in the name of understanding who he really was and looking for a meaning in life. He carved out his artistic identity within the stories he wrote. As for his sexual identity, it was a story to be performed. As the title of his novel suggests, Christopher Isherwood was seeking to face "his kind" in order to make an identity. He literally came face to face with "his tribe," and metaphorically he uncovered the real "Christopher Isherwood" identity. In *Christopher and His Kind*, he states "My will is to live according to my nature, and to find a place where I can be what I am..." (Isherwood, 1976, 12). Living in Berlin is Isherwood's way of writing his life story. The incidents he experienced and the people he met there helped him to form an artistic and sexual identity.

In 1932, Isherwood met his first long-time lover, Heinz Neddenmayer. The two spent the next seven years running away from Germany and the political chaos which ended with Heinz's capture by the gestapo and the couple's heart-breaking separation. Also, it was in 1932 that, at the age of 26, Isherwood began writing his first autobiography *Lions and Shadows- An Education in the Twenties*. It covers the period between his school years at St. Edmunds and Cambridge and his decision to leave England for Berlin. In 1933, things were about to fall apart politically in Berlin. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood documents the years of Hitler's gradual ascension to power and how he and his lover, Heinz, were affected by it. On January 30, 1933 when Hitler was announced as the new Chancellor of Germany by President Hindenburg, he wrote Stephen Spender a letter saying "As you will have seen, we are having a new government, with Charlie Chaplin and Father Christmas in the ministry. All words fail." (Isherwood, 1976, 119). On February 27, 1933, the Reichstag building was set on fire probably by the Nazis, though they accused communists of having done it. They put the blame on a Dutch communist, Marius van der Lubbe.

After this event thousands of people were arrested. Isherwood, who had already seen the other side of the coin, writes in his diary that "'Charlie Chaplin' had ceased to be funny. (Isherwood, 1976, 120). As the Nazis became more and more powerful, many homosexuals and Jews began to be arrested. Moreover, new rules were introduced, one of which stipulated that German citizens who wanted to leave the country had to get individual permits from the government. In 1932, he left Berlin with Heinz, and for seven years he did everything to protect his lover being returned to Germany and become a Nazi member. Wandering through different parts of the world - Greece, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Paris, and Portugal - he tried to buy citizenship for Heinz. McAdams observes that "Life stories contain accounts of high points, low points, turning points and other emotionally charged events" (John, Robins & Pervin, 2008, 253) and these negative and positive events contribute to individual story telling because they give us clues to understanding how that specific person process those negative or positive events in his or her life story.



January 5, 1934, was one of the turning points in Isherwood's life. He had already planned to invite Heinz to England. He sent him money so that he would be able to show the British officials that he could support himself. He also made Kathleen write a letter inviting Heinz to stay with her for an unknown period. He welcomed him without any hug or kiss with the fear that a police might be watching them. When Heinz reached the passport control, the officers in passport and customs inspections wanted to know why a lady like Mrs. Isherwood invited a German boy as a "hausdiener." Christopher was there to help him evade those questions; however, something unexpected blocked their way. Heinz had brought along Isherwood's letter with him. In that letter Isherwood was outlined his plans and give instructions regarding the money he had sent to him. When the officials asked how Heinz had got the money, Heinz showed them Isherwood's letter. Plus, one of the officers mocked Isherwood, saying that the letter was a "the sort of a letter that a man might write to his sweetheart." (1976, 162). He tried to humiliate Isherwood by looking him "straight in the eyes, smiling." (1976, 162). As a result, they denied permission for Heinz to enter England. Christopher was "incredulous and naturally furious." In *Christopher and His Kind*, he puts the blame on Kathleen and writes that "Her England- the England of Nearly Everybody- had rejected Heinz. Before long, he would be rejecting her England." (Isherwood, 1976, 164).

Isherwood hated everything that England imposed on him. He rejected all the norms, rules and pressures of the British tradition, and Heinz's rejection was the last blow. After Heinz's rejection, he wandered around different countries with Heinz, spending a great deal of money on Heinz's applications for citizenship. In 1937, when Heinz was finally arrested by Gestapo agents on his way to Belgium, Isherwood was emotionally devastated. "I felt like a house in which one room, the biggest, is locked up." (Isherwood, 1976, 282) writes Isherwood in *Christopher and His Kind*. Still keeping Heinz in mind, he went to China with Auden, both of them as war correspondents. Their experiences were reflected in the book called *Journey To A War*. On their return to England, they decided to stop by and visit New York.

The atmosphere in New York was magical for Isherwood. He writes in *Christopher and His Kind* that it was as if "everybody in this city had been yearning for their arrival." (Isherwood, 1976, 313). They gave interviews, photos were taken, they attended parties and met celebrities. One day, Isherwood made a joke that he want "to meet a beautiful blond boy, about eighteen, intelligent, with very sexy legs." (1976, 314). A boy named Vernon was found immediately. Finding an American boy, with no language barrier, he realized that he had a lot to talk about with Vernon, who is described in *Christopher and His Kind* as "good-natured, tough and independent" (Isherwood, 1976, 315). Falling under Vernon's spell, Isherwood perceives Vernon as representing the spell of the American Boys. "The American Boy is also the Walt Whitman Boy. And the Walt Whitman Boy is by definition, a wanderer." Isherwood immediately forged a relationship with Vernon who wants to leave New York as well. He dreams about establishing "a future wander-comradeship with Vernon in the Whitman tradition" (Isherwood, 1976, 315).

Vernon played a little role in Isherwood's decision to go to America for good. However, there were certain factors behind this second biggest turning point in his life. First of all he clearly declares that the "old hostility toward England" was still there. "For him, it was still the land of Others." (Isherwood, 1976, 316). Secondly he believes that he would be able to regard America as his home. "His public personality would function more freely, more successfully than it could ever have functioned in London." (Isherwood, 1976, p 337). In this case, for Isherwood everything again comes to the point of being able to live freely. In the final pages of *Christopher and His Kind*, he states that "his obligations wouldn't be the same in the States. He wouldn't be a member of a group. He could express himself freely as an individual" These sentences proves us that Isherwood, who was 35 at that time, was looking for a place where he can be away from the pressures that he carried in his baggage. Living in had Berlin showed him that such a life was possible, and at that time America was the one and only country that could provide any kind of artistic and sexual freedom.

As for his homosexuality, he confessed to a feeling that he had in the 1930s. He reveals the fact that he had been "wavering between embarrassment and defiance. He became embarrassed when he felt that he was making a selfish demand for his individual rights at a time when only group action mattered. He became defiant when he made the treatment of homosexual a text by which every political party and government must be judged. His challenge to each one of them was: 'All right, we've heard your liberty speech. Does that include us or doesn't it.'" (Isherwood, 1976, 334). These words tell us a lot about his position on homosexuality. As an admirer of communism, he always praised the attitude of the Soviet Union when the country decriminalized homosexuality and showed relative tolerance to homosexuals in 1917. However in 1934 and until 1986; homosexuality was recriminalized by the Stalin government and homosexuals were prosecuted. What Isherwood felt at that time was betrayal. With Hitler coming to power



in Germany, homosexuals began to be arrested and the heavenly atmosphere of Berlin for gay people came to an end.

All these issues undoubtedly contributed to his sexual identity. He left England for Berlin in order to gain sexual freedom. When the political atmosphere changed and he witnessed the Nazis arresting homosexuals, it was time for him to leave Berlin. He couldn't return to the confinements of England again. The sentences above also show that Isherwood was beginning to be a politically conscious homosexual when it comes to homosexual politics. His question indicates that he wanted to be politically and socially recognized as well. This the reason why he writes in *Christopher and His Kind* that "He must never again give way to embarrassment, never deny the rights of his tribe, never apologize for its existence..." (Isherwood, 1976, 335). Thus, in January 19, 1939, when he sailed to New York with Auden, he was at least sure that he would never sacrifice his sexuality.

The loss of his lover, Heinz, was definitely a turning point or as McAdams puts it "an unexpected life transition" in his life. He knew that there was a life ahead without Heinz. Secondly, as the world was coming to the brink of war, he needed to take a stand. He thought that by going to New York he could find answers to these dilemmas inside. He writes in his diary that "I must be anonymous until I discover a new self here, an American me." (Bucknell, 2011, 4). Yet forming a new self was not easy. Amid all the lunches, dinner parties and meetings that he attended with Auden, Isherwood became more depressed. "They wanted to meet Christopher Isherwood. And who I was? A sham, a mirror image, nobody" (Bucknell, 2011, 9). As McAdams puts it, Isherwood was definitely in need of a new perspective on who he was and in my opinion living in America for the rest of his life signifies that he found what he was looking for. During the years he spent in America, Isherwood went through a spiritual self-exploration and transformation. Through Gerald Heard, he embraced a Hindu philosophy called Vedanta and a Hindu monk, Swami Prabhavananda, changed Isherwood's life once and for all. Vedanta definitely changed Isherwood's life story and narrative. Until his encounter with Vedanta, Isherwood had tried many ways to find this unity and purpose in his life. His decision to leave England and his move to Berlin and then to America were results of this effort. Vedanta filled the emptiness that he had been struggling with for years. It gave him answers. It taught him to live a life of peace and spiritual fulfilment. The habit of reflecting real life incidents and experiences continues in the novels that he produced in America. *Prater Violet*, *The World in the Evening* and *A Single Man* are the works in which he presents a complete blend of his artistic, sexual and especially spiritual identities.

### Conclusion

Personally I've always been interested in life stories of authors and I most value novels and stories which are based on author's experiences. What interests me about Isherwood is his claim to write for himself. As I read his novels one by one, I've realized that he creates stories out of his personal life story and it is through these life stories that he finds meaning and sets goals in his life. The act of writing is a way to interpret life and to know who he really is. So while presenting a literary analysis of his novels and characters, I at the same time tried to reveal the real Christopher Isherwood behind the stories that he shared in his novels. With this intention in mind, I've benefited from the field of psychology as my theoretical approach.

Personality psychologist Dan Mc Adams' "Life Story Model of Identity" theory (1985, 1993, 1996) helped me to understand Christopher Isherwood's inner world and his attempts to form artistic and sexual identity. Dan McAdams claims that personal stories are our identities. The story that you create, tell, revise and retell throughout your life is your identity. Christopher Isherwood pursues the answer of "who am I?" in his writing and I've tried to reveal the stages of his identity development by focusing on his literary work and personal life story. McAdams describes life story as "an internalized an evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future." (McAdams, 1996, 307). According to McAdams, similar to the stories we read, there are characters, special settings, scenes, plots and themes in one's personal life story. By following the paths of Dan McAdams, I've analysed Isherwood's life story to discover the formation of his artistic and sexual identity.

Throughout Isherwood's life, various people (characters) had directly contributed the formation of Isherwood's identities. His father Frank Isherwood whom he felt himself under a kind of an obligation to be worthy of his "Hero-Father," his mother, Kathleen whose controlling attitude over his life drove Isherwood crazy, his closest friends Edward Upward, W. H. Auden, E. M. Forster, Gerald Heard and his guru Swami Prabhavananda touched upon his life in various periods. Apart from his native country England, Berlin and California (special settings) were the two cities that had direct effect on the formation of his sexual and spiritual identity. As for the themes in his life, "the War and the Test," "Truly Weak Man," "Truly Strong



Man," his homosexuality, and the discovery of his spiritual identity through "Vedanta" can be given as examples.

By treating human lives as personal stories, McAdams views the person as a story teller who at the same time narrates life while living it. The function of constructing these stories of our "selves" is to know who we really are, how we came to be and where our lives are going. The answers to these questions are closely related with our attempt to find unity and purpose in our lives. The tool that Dan McAdams uses in his identity studies depends upon interviews with the individuals and analysis of the story they develop regarding how they came to be the person they are now. As a person who narrates his life through writing, Christopher Isherwood's literary texts, diaries and lectures provide me enough material to reveal the gradual formation of his artistic and sexual identities. Throughout this study, I've tried to uncover the main chapters in Isherwood's life story, important life-story scenes (low points / turning points), significant characters in his story, personal plans and hopes, his beliefs and values.

Dan McAdams' "Life Story Model of Identity" provides the perfect angle to view and evaluate the critical events and transitions that played a crucial role in Christopher Isherwood's life story. My aim was to reveal the gradual development of an author who puts his life story and experience at the heart of his work. Christopher Isherwood authors a self-defining life narrative that he formed over the years and he narrates those experiences through his art. By benefiting from Dan McAdams and his studies, my intention was to break away from the dominance of Freud and psychoanalysis in literature. Since literature is about stories and human beings, Dan McAdams offers us a perfect method to understand authors like Christopher Isherwood and how they came to be the person they were before. "Every person is born into life as a blank page." says Christina Baldwin and "every person leaves life a full book." (Baldwin, 2005, ix). As Christopher Isherwood filled the pages of life, we are privileged to read the story that he carried around with him.

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