

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Christopher Isherwood's Concept of Isolation from *Goodbye to Berlin* to *A Single Man*

Koncept izolace v díle Christophera Isherwooda a jeho vývoj od *Goodbye to Berlin* k
A Single Man

Diplomová práce

Bc. Petra Skálová

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Libor Práger, Ph.D.

Olomouc 2015

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou na téma „Christopher Isherwood's Concept of Isolation from *Goodbye to Berlin* to *A Single Man*“ vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V dne.....

Podpis

I would like to thank my supervisor, PhDr. Libor Práger, Ph.D. for his assistance during the elaboration of my Master thesis, especially for his advice and patience.

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1. Introduction

"Girls are what the state and the church and the law and the press and the medical profession endorse, and command me to desire. My mother endorses them, too. She is silently brutishly willing me to get married and breed grandchildren for her. Her will is the will of Nearly Everybody, and in their will is my death. My will is to live according to my nature, and to find a place where I can be what I am... But I'll admit this – even if my nature were like theirs, I should still have to fight them, in one way or another. If boys didn't exist, I should have to invent them."

(Christopher William Bradshaw-Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind*)

This Master diploma thesis is going to focus on one of the great literary figures of Anglo-American literature – Christopher Isherwood. Gore Vidal said about Isherwood that he was "[...] the best professional writer in English"¹. However overstated this declaration might seem, during Isherwood's long life he became of the leading figure of his generation.

The name of Christopher Isherwood evokes: gay, gay liberation movement, Berlin, a film with Colin Firth. The thesis is going to explore the topic of isolation as it is depicted in a selection of his works. In order to do this I have chosen several of Isherwood's novels. The research is going to cover Isherwood's stories from his Berlin era (*Goodbye to Berlin* and *Christopher and His Kind*) together with his probably most distinct novel *A Single Man* published in 1964. These particular titles have been chosen for their striking difference in topic,

¹Reed Woodhouse. *Unlimited Embrace, A Canon of Gay Fiction, 1945-1995*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998. 155

atmosphere and technique of writing. Also the works mentioned above can be considered a cross-section of Isherwood's work in general.

Nevertheless, the above mentioned novels are also surprisingly similar at the same time. What almost all Isherwood's works have in common is a certain degree of autobiography. Isherwood said in one of his interviews: "My work is all part of an autobiography"² All Isherwood's novels are interconnected and based on real life events. The majority of his writings draw from his own experiences. One could certainly argue: which author is not inspired by his own life experiences? However, in the case of Isherwood, it is not only mere inspiration. In his Berlin stories Isherwood wrote about people he encountered, made them main characters of his stories and managed to capture the unique atmosphere of pre-war Berlin. This method is most visible in his Berlin stories – *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. By Isherwood himself it was called a "dynamic portrait [...], a portrait that grows, a little bit like the portrait of Dorian Gray grew or changed."³

Christopher Isherwood is also well-known for his novella written in the sixties *A Single Man*. This work of his is often mentioned by scholars who engage in literary criticism of gay fiction. This is the reason why a chapter on the development of gay literature is included in the thesis.

The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that Isherwood's art reached its height with the novel *A Single Man*. This is going to be done by comparing various aspects of his major works mentioned above. While the main characters of his previous novels are observed and commented on from the outside, in *A Single Man* the narrator finally becomes the hero. In his later life Isherwood did something he had not dared to do before – he opened up and wrote what in his own words is his masterpiece – *A Single Man*. On October 31 1963 Isherwood

² James J. Berg., Chris Freeman. *Conversations with Christopher Isherwood*. Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2001. 7

³ Berg, Freeman. *Conversations* 6

wrote: "I am almost certain that it is my masterpiece; by which I mean my most effective, coherent statement, artwork, whatever you want to call it."⁴

2. The Two Isherwoods

Christopher Isherwood's relationship with the past was not an easy one. As Peter Parker declared "[...], for Christopher Isherwood the past was a treacherous bog into which you would be sucked down and suffocated."⁵ Since his early twenties he was travelling in order to find his place in the world for he knew that his maternal county was not where he wanted to live in. A short overview of his family background and his own life experiences is thus incorporated.

Christopher William Bradshaw-Isherwood was born on August 26, 1904 in Cheshire, England into a well-off family. His father was a professional soldier but he came from a family of landed gentry which was able to trace its origins back into the sixteenth century.⁶ Frank Isherwood was an artistic and sensitive young man who obtained a good education. Nevertheless it was not the father who had the biggest impact on the young writer since he died in 1915 in the First World War. He became only a "shadowy figure"⁷ in Isherwood's life.

It was his mother, Kathleen, a conventional, emotional woman having a very complicated relationship with her original family, most of all with her own mother, Emily. Emily Machell-Smith called herself "Baby Mama" and her relationship with Kathleen was very demanding and time consuming.⁸ Even though Kathleen had a first-hand experience with a possessive mother, she became the same.

⁴ Christopher Isherwood. *The Sixties*. Ed. Katherine Bucknell. New York: Harper Perennial, 2011. 291

⁵ Peter Parker. *Isherwood: A Life Revealed*. New York: Random House, 2004. 3

⁶ See Parker 5

⁷ Parker 19

⁸ See Parker 19

After Isherwood's birth she started a book called *Baby's Progress* where every little detail about her elder son was recorded.⁹ Richard, Isherwood's brother born seven years later than him, did not have any record of this kind. On what grounds Kathleen used to call her eldest "the favourite child"¹⁰ is not clear, one of the reasons (apart from Isherwood being the firstborn) may be the fact that she gave birth to Isherwood at the age of thirty-three, relatively late for the beginning of the 20th century.

On the other hand, Kathleen Isherwood was caught in the happy past, in the times of her youth and "nothing he [Isherwood] or Richard could ever do would compensate her its [the past] loss."¹¹ Isherwood was a young boy and did not wish to live in the past but in the present. Thus in the course of time Isherwood started to feel suffocated by the excess of motherly affection and her constant reminding of the happy days with by then long deceased Frank.

One more member of the family should be commented on – Frank Isherwood's elder brother, Henry. It was no secret that Henry was gay and the presence of somebody who did not hide his sexual orientation had a big influence on the young writer. When Isherwood was adult Henry regularly paid him an allowance which helped him immensely during the years he spent travelling around Europe. In exchange for the money he was supposed to tell his uncle about his every future sexual encounter.¹² Uncle Henry also loved literature and allowed Isherwood to borrow whatever book he wanted.

While at school at Repton, Derbyshire, Isherwood met Edward Upward, who became his best friend for many years. Nonetheless, they were not mere friends for Isherwood and Upward started writing stories together. Very few pieces have been published since then but the influence Upward had on the young writer was immense. It was Upward who told Isherwood that:

⁹ See Parker 17

¹⁰ Parker 36

¹¹ Parker 84

¹² See Parker 16

"Forster's the only one who understands what the modern novel ought to be... Our frightful mistake was that we believed in tragedy: the point is, tragedy's quite impossible nowadays... We ought to aim at being essentially comic writers."[...] In fact, there's actually less emphasis laid on the big scenes than on the unimportant ones: that's what so utterly terrific."¹³

At the time Isherwood had no idea that E.M.Forster would become his pen-friend for many years and to a certain extent his mentor. Isherwood started to employ the comic throughout his writing career. Not only in his early novels and short stories, but also in the later ones. Even *A Single Man* contains comical (or rather tragicomical) elements to tone down the graveness. The collaboration with Upward in their early years of producing first pieces of writing had an impact on Isherwood for the rest of his life. Isherwood himself proclaimed "Upward educated me,"¹⁴ and Upward continued being his first reader and critic.

Isherwood's first act of rebellion against Kathleen was his choice of university. She expected her elder son to go to Oxford as was the family tradition.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Isherwood chose University of Cambridge. The study only strengthened Isherwood's opinion about everything English. As Isherwood points out in *Christopher and His Kind* many years later, "Christopher was quite willing to admit that his life in England was basically untruthful, since it conformed outwardly to standards of respectability which he inwardly rejected and despised."¹⁶ While reading Isherwood's biography, one finds that there is one expression that could never be used to describe Isherwood after his emigration – a conformist.

¹³ Parker 113

¹⁴ Parker 12

¹⁵ See Parker 59

¹⁶ Christopher Isherwood. *Christopher and His Kind*. Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1976.

The need of liberty of making his own choices is an element pervading all Isherwood's life. He finally dropped out of university at the Tripos examination. And he did so "in style."¹⁷ Isherwood was certain that he would not get a good mark while not being able to settle for anything else. Yet, he meant to show his intellectual capacity so he gave academically suicidal answers. A few examples illustrate Isherwood's sense of humour. "Some essays he wrote in concealed verse (including a sonnet on the Restoration), others in the facetious style of *Punch*. Rather than answer one 'rather unfortunately worded' question, he subjected it to lethal textual analysis."¹⁸ Never was Isherwood one of the personalities highly esteemed for their conventionalism since tradition meant nothing to him, just as he desired his mother to comprehend.

Even though Isherwood never got his degree, the university certainly changed his life – one of his junior friends from university was W. H. Auden, a poet who became maybe more famous than Isherwood himself. Yet, since Auden was three years younger, he somehow looked up to Isherwood who became his mentor.¹⁹ Even though the roles swapped in the later years, they became life-long friends and intermittent lovers. However, Auden's opinion about Isherwood is of some interest as well, since he once told Isherwood that he was "the cruellest and most unscrupulous person he had ever met."²⁰ Yet, their friendship continued until Auden's death in 1973.

Just before and during the Second World War the two collaborated on several plays (*The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), *The Ascent of F6* (1936), *On the Frontier* (1939)) and after a expedition to China *Journey to a War* was also published. At the time Isherwood had already previously published *All the Conspirators* (1928), *The Memorial* (1932) and *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935). When considering which country would be best to Isherwood to settle in, it was Auden who suggested the United States.

¹⁷ Parker 97

¹⁸ Parker 97

¹⁹ See Parker 45

²⁰ Christopher Isherwood. *Diaries*. Ed. Katherine Bucknell. London: Methuen, 1996.

In the late twenties Isherwood moved to Berlin. In the capital of Germany Isherwood could finally behave without restrictions, and soon he started a relationship with a young boy nicknamed Bubi. This involvement did not last very long but Isherwood seemed to be genuinely in love. Bubi gave him a bracelet, de facto a trinket, which Isherwood valued very much. As he says in *Christopher and His Kind*, he wore it ostentatiously before Kathleen, his mother, in expectation of a disapproving reaction.²¹ The nature of Isherwood's relationship with his mother led him to anticipation that she did not approve of his affairs and homosexuality as a whole. Nevertheless, throughout his life, Kathleen did not anyhow express any contempt for his actions, at least not considering his sexual life.

As it was mentioned, Isherwood's early works contrast with his later ones. The most important aspect in which they differ is the depth of characters' depiction.

It seems that there are in fact two Isherwoods. The one who wrote *A Single Man* and the other who is the author of *Berlin Stories*. Most of Isherwood's literary works from the early thirties share a note of optimism, even though they take place just before WWII. The reason might be that Isherwood himself was so exhilarated that he finally left England. As it will be demonstrated in the next chapter, Isherwood was not happy in his homeland and soon after he became more or less self-sufficient, he left England never to live there again.

His ability to see behind the curtain of people's souls is similar throughout his whole career, yet, it is *A Single Man* which finally shows the most honest picture of the human condition.

At this point I would like to insert a short reflection on the novel itself. The words I use now are words of E.M. Forster who was Isherwood's mentor with whom Isherwood kept up correspondence for many years. What Forster stresses in his *Aspects of a Novel* is that a "historian records, whereas the novelist must

²¹ Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind*. 12

create."²² Isherwood is a blend of both in this matter since all his books contain a high degree of *a record* and also of *creation*.

Furthermore, Forster emphasizes the difference between a literary character and a real person: "[...] people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed."²³ This is exactly the moment when Isherwood chose to divert from the conventional way. This is the most visible in *Mr Norris Changes Train* since the main character, Mr Norris, is always presented only from the outside. This appears to be an excellent choice of device to reach the sought-after affect as the fourth chapter will show. The aspect of "exteriority" of Isherwood's characters can be found in several other pieces of writing, let us mention *Goodbye to Berlin*.

Another interesting aspect of Isherwood's novels is also the position of narrator. Since almost all his works make use of the author's experiences, the narrators are often called Christopher or William (Isherwood's middle name) and they always stay somehow separately from other protagonists. While in the Berlin stories Christopher is a mere observer, the main character of *A Single Man*, George, is more than that. The novel lacks a narrator from the outer world, it contains only the main character. There are a few more exceptions, for instance *Christopher And His Kind*. Isherwood wrote this novel in which he described the events of his stay in Berlin when he was sixty years old. The author himself destroyed the diaries from that time, an act which still remains a mystery. Nevertheless, he got back to those times when he was much older.

The above mentioned lack of capturing hero's mental processes together with the alienation of the narrator is what, after all, makes Isherwood's early writing so compelling. It has to be admitted that by some standards this may even be considered somehow shallow, not going in depth. Nevertheless, as the thesis is going to show, Isherwood chose not to incorporate his protagonists' perspective on a good reason.

²² E.M. Forster. *Aspects of a Novel*. London: Penguin Group, 1990. 56

²³ Forster 57

3. From Isolation to Integration

Not only was homosexuality and sex life one of Isherwood's main topics, since he himself was gay, but it allowed him to see things from a different angle. "Indeed, his greatest contribution to gay literature was to depict the homosexual as a faithful mirror of the human condition."²⁴

This chapter is going to sketch the history of modern homosexual novel. As I mentioned before, Christopher Isherwood was gay. He was not only a homosexual author, but he and his partner Don Bachardy also took part in the gay liberation movement during the seventies.

3.1. Being Gay

Being gay was never something banal, it has always been a stigma one had to deal with. "Identification as a homosexual is frequently accompanied by feelings of guilt and shame and by a sense of (often quite justified) paranoia, for to be homosexual in most modern societies is to be set apart and stigmatized."²⁵ The paranoia Summers mentions is what led many homosexual authors to hide their orientation, for instance E. M. Forster, who came out only in his *Maurice* published in 1971, after his death.

Hate is often connected with fear, be it justifiable or not. As it is going to be showed in the last chapter, Isherwood himself articulated how hate is related to fear in *A Single Man* when speaking of minorities on his lecture. Margaret Cruikshank comments on the reasons why gay men are hated. She presents following aspects: sexual anxiety in puritanical America, a need for scapegoats in times of rapid social change, fear of the unknown, new visibility and perceived

²⁴ Sharon Malinowski, Christa Brelin. *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Companion*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1995. 285

²⁵ Claude J. Summers. *Gay fictions: Wilde to Stonewall: studies in a male homosexual literary tradition*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1990. 14

power of homosexuals and AIDS.²⁶ At the times of Isherwood's growing up and his maturity the liberation movement and the imminence of AIDS were nonexistent. Nevertheless, the previously mentioned points were certainly relevant at those times. Even though *A Single Man* is not primarily a novel about homosexuality, these factors are to some degree included in it.

Christopher Isherwood was born in England in the times after the Wilde scandal. It had not been very long since Queen Victoria's death and the society was far stiffer than nowadays. That period was anything but favourable to being different from the majority, the least to homosexuals who were considered biologically defective.²⁷ Even though it was not a crime to be homosexual, to indulge in homosexual activity was.²⁸ The Criminal Law Amendment Act adopted in 1885 criminalized all homosexual activities and led to ruthless persecution.

The understanding of homosexuality in the ending Victorian era may be summarized by citing two contemporary specialists. Richard von Kraft-Ebbing, an Austro-German psychiatrist, termed homosexuality "an absence of normal sexual feeling, with compensatory attraction to members of the same sex."²⁹ Havelock Ellis, an English sexologist, a generation younger than Kraft-Ebbing, challenged Victorian taboos and stopped calling homosexuality a disease.³⁰

Although Isherwood did not suppress his homosexuality in life, he did in his work. It was necessary to withhold the information of the narrator's orientation. However, possible punishability was not the only reason. His orientation would attract more reader's attention to the narrator, Christopher. Thus Isherwood's strength – the vivid depicting of characters who are living more or less in isolation, all of them in their own way.

²⁶ See Margaret Cruikshank. *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1992. 10

²⁷ See Roman Trušník. *Podoby Amerického Homosexuálního Románu Po Roce 1945*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2011.16

²⁸ See Stephen Jeffery-Poulter. *Peers, Queers and Commons: Struggle for Gay Law Reform from 1950 to the Present*. London: Routledge, 1991. 12

²⁹ Wayne R Dynes, Warren Johansson, William A. Percy, Stephen Donaldson. *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*. New York: Garland Pub., 1990. 668

³⁰ See Cruikshank 6

Isherwood's moving from the United Kingdom can be viewed as an escape from a rigid society. In Germany, where he spent four years, the atmosphere was more open-minded. While in his homeland Isherwood gained little sexual experience, it all changed in Berlin.³¹ As he himself asserts in *Christopher and His Kind*, for Christopher, Berlin meant boys.³² Nevertheless, even though some of his finest works were written in or about Berlin, neither there did he settle. It were the United States, possibly also because their "less organized hostility to homosexuality."³³ That is why this thesis is going to deal mainly with American gay novel.

As Annamarie Jagose in her *Queer theory* says, during the second half of the twentieth century there were five successive schools of thoughts and politics. They were homophile movement, gay liberation movement, lesbian feminism, ethnic model of gay identity and contemporary queer theory.³⁴

In the United States, the homophile organizations were for instance Chicago Society for Human Rights (the first established one) and more prominent Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis. Their goal was to organize homosexually oriented people and to improve their social status. Nevertheless, none of these societies became widely known. The Second World War became a milestone for homosexual minority, the society started changing views and homosexuals could gather since in almost every urban centre "the evolution of visible gay subculture"³⁵ was visible with a number of gay bars.

As Claude J. Summers emphasizes, our culture typically perceives sexuality as a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality.³⁶ However,

³¹ See Parker 79

³² See Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* 30

³³ Summers 19

³⁴ See Annamarie Jagose. *Queer Theory*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996.

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³⁵ Summers 23

³⁶ See Summers 13

many studies show that it is much more complicated. A key moment not only for homosexuals themselves but also for the thematic literature was the year 1948.

A zoologist Alfred Kinsey together with Wardell Pomeroy and others published a study called *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*. Since then Kinsey's results (or more precisely methodology) have been called into question, yet this work triggered discussions. Kinsey set a scale from zero to six, zero being exclusively heterosexual and six strictly homosexual. Only small percentage of men fell into the boundary values. Thirty-seven percent of American males had had significant homosexual experience, twelve percent were predominantly homosexual for at least a three-year period and four percent were exclusively homosexual.³⁷ The results of Kinsey's experiment were surprising and they caused a stir which opened discussions about diversity of sexual behaviour.

Had it not been for Kinsey, it is possible that the gay liberation movement would arise later than in the sixties. The gay liberation movement opposed the moderate means of homophile organizations.³⁸ The agitation and discontentment of gays and lesbians were slowly rising towards the sixties.

The breaking point were Stonewall Riots in June 1969. The unrest started after recurring police raids on Stonewall Inn, a homosexual bar in New York, when the occupants began to defend themselves against police harassment.

The demands of gay and lesbian liberation were³⁹: to put an end to all forms of social control of homosexuals, civil rights legislation to prevent housing and job discrimination, repeal of sodomy laws, acceptance of lesbian and gay relationships and an accurate portrayal in the mass media.

In the first years of the movement, tolerance was demanded most of all. Later on the tolerance was superseded by equality.⁴⁰

³⁷ See Summers 24

³⁸ See Trušník 19

³⁹ See Cruikshank 8

⁴⁰ See Cruikshank 9

Another milestone during the twentieth century was the year 1981 with the emergence of AIDS, a disease which made a whole generation of gay authors disappear. Let us mention at least the authors of so called The Violet Quill, a group of seven writers from New York, four of which died before 1990.

3.2. Writing Gay

At this point, the division of pre-Stonewall literature by David Bergman is used. First, Bergman specifies works mostly for heterosexual audience in which homosexuals are only minor characters. Second, he distinguishes highly appreciated authors such as André Gide, Marcel Proust or Thomas Mann. Third group contains pornography for homosexual readers. The works of the fourth category have a homosexual perspective since they do not explain anything but they presuppose homosexual experience.⁴¹ Thus we can see that to define the beginnings of homosexual literature is extremely difficult.

One of the dominant topics has always been the so called coming out – public assertion of one's sexual orientation. However, some authors do incorporate other themes as well, a good example would be James Baldwin.⁴² In the year of Kinsey report (1948), two novels worth mentioning were published, Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and Gore Vidal's *The City and The Pillar*. As Trušník asserts, these two novels represent two different views on homosexual literature.⁴³

Vidal's novel contains all the typical features of a coming-out novel – awakening of one's sexuality, difficult relationship with the hero's father and an escape from hometown. Capote, on the other hand, goes beyond the borders of a

⁴¹ See David Bergman. *American Literature: Gay Male, Post-Stonewall*. 1992. 42-43

⁴² See Trušník 51

⁴³ See Trušník 51

realistic novel and makes use of gothic elements and the grotesque and the coming-out is not incorporated, also because of the hero's low age.⁴⁴

Since the publishers certainly determined what would be published and what not, the writers often resorted to subsidy publishing. In 1956 Edward Uhlan (who worked in subsidy publishing) declared that he extremely often comes in contact with books written by homosexuals trying to explain why they are homosexual and making sure that they are a part of the society.⁴⁵ The themes of gay fiction of those times were indeed not very varied.

As it has been mentioned before, James Baldwin was one of those who included thematic diversity into his novels. Let us mention at least his famous novel *Giovanni's Room*. What made Baldwin exceptional is that he not only incorporated topic of homosexual identity, but also of racial identity.

In the post-Stonewall years until 1981 the gradual liberalization led to publishing more works with homosexual themes. The literary quality of the majority of them, however, was inferior. The exception to the rule is for instance Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*.

Christopher Isherwood grew up in times when homosexuality was a taboo subject. Throughout his long life, he witnessed a shift from the society in which being gay was something disgraceful into the postmodern world of less strict morality.

Isherwood never tried to suppress his orientation in his life, all his friends and family knew from the beginning that he was homosexual. Yet there were phases in his life when kept back, mostly among strangers when he was young. Nowadays, being homosexual is not considered a shame. However, even now there are moments when we realize that the situation is more complicated and there is a not an insignificant number of people who would oppress homosexuals

⁴⁴ See Trušník 52

⁴⁵ See Edward Uhlan. *The Rogue of Publisher's Row: Confessions of a Publisher*. New York: Exposition Press, 1956. 14

rather than give them more rights. Thus we can agree that homosexuality is still a contemporary topic.

4. Isolated in Society and Culture – *Goodbye to Berlin*

Christopher Isherwood was twenty four when he moved to Berlin. The person who introduced him to the world of Berlin bars and boys was his long-life friend, Wystan Hugh Auden, a famous poet and also a homosexual. There are three works which deal with his Berlin stay – *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Christopher and His Kind*. The last mentioned differs from the first two, since it is not a novel in the real sense of the word. *Christopher and His Kind* is more of an autobiography written in the seventies, recalling (among others) the author's Berlin years.

Goodbye to Berlin has been very often thought of as a comic novel. In the fifties it has been remade into a Broadway drama *I Am a Camera* by John Van Druten, later into a film under the same name, both labelled as comedy. A decade later, one more adaptation, a musical called *Cabaret*, gained a worldwide fame also with the subsequent film adaptation starring Liza Minelli. All the versions of *Goodbye to Berlin* chose Sally Bowles as their protagonist with the other Isherwood's characters being only mentioned. Sally Bowles's story unquestionably bears certain comical features. Nonetheless, as it shall be shown in the paper there is much more to the story than its mere comical side.

"Berlin was the most decadent city in Europe;"⁴⁶ says Isherwood in *Christopher and His Kind*. The Berlin society was more open to homosexuals with numerous gay bars and other places they could meet in. That was probably the reason why he decided to relocate. In Berlin Isherwood found there what he was looking for. The change of scenery helped him to find his place in the world. Nevertheless, he did not lose anything from his alertness and he remained a social critic. I believe that it was Isherwood's homosexual orientation which allowed him to reveal the complexity of human character and thus the society itself. As

⁴⁶ Isherwood. *Christopher and His Kind*. 30

Summers claims "[...] The homosexual's unusual relationship to society gives him or her a valuable perspective as social analyst and critic."⁴⁷

The chapter is going to show that no matter how varied Isherwood's characters are, they have one thing in common – they are all pariahs, people living in one way or another on the margin of society. As Isherwood's friend John Lehmann remarked:

"Isherwood [...] almost invariably prefers to take eccentric and fantastic characters as his central pivots, the extreme products of the anarchy and pathological condition of modern society."⁴⁸

One could argue, and would have a point, that people like Otto, Sally or Bertrand are simply not conformists. In his short stories Isherwood manages to express not only various flaws in character but also the spirit of the time, which together make an impressive mosaic of the then life.

Mostly in his Berlin stories Isherwood criticizes the society by means of showing other people's dreary lives. Not very often he resorted to political debates, but still, they are present to some degree in *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and some of the stories of *Goodbye to Berlin*. What interested him more were the social conditions and humanness and throughout his writings he proved to be capable of insightful observations.

Goodbye to Berlin consists of the following stories:

"A Berlin Diary (Autumn 1930)", "Sally Bowles", "On Ruegen Island (Summer 1931)", "The Nowaks" and "The Landauers"

In the next subchapter the thesis will focus on the particular characters and Isherwood's mastery of depicting the Zeitgeist.

⁴⁷ Summers 15

⁴⁸ John Lehmann. *Christopher Isherwood: A Personal Memoir*. New York: H. Holt, 1989.

4.1. A Berlin Diary (Autumn 1930)

The first part of "A Berlin Diary" introduces the narrator, Christopher Isherwood, young writer, his lodgings and his landlady, Frl. Schroeder. The narrator is going to be called Christopher in the thesis in order to distinguish him from the author himself.

The author wisely chose the story "A Berlin Diary" to begin with. In only a few pages, readers are taken into his world which is dissimilar not only to an Englishman's world, but probably also to the majority of the inhabitants of Berlin.

Frl. Schoreder familiarly calls her guest "Herr Issyvoo". The reader learns about various flatmates that Isherwood has and they certainly are an interesting group. This house and its lodgers appear throughout the whole book and thus all the pieces are interconnected.

However, the first story centres on the character of Frl. Lina Schroeder. As Isherwood points out several times, she did not use to be as poor as she is now since before the War and the Inflation she used to be "comparatively well off and even kept a maid."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, those times had passed and she had to settle for a less comfortable way of life. Her lodgers are not of the most respectable kind. The quarter where "Herr Issyvoo" is living now is not of the best in Berlin. However, his landlady somehow supposes that her English guest is from the upper-middle class and rightly so, even though Christopher's financial and social status is not mentioned in the novel. Right from the start the landlady confides in Christopher regarding problems and peculiarities of the others. Readers are also introduced Frl. Kost, a prostitute, Frl. Mayr who is a Bavarian Nazi-minded jodlerin, and Bobby, a mixer. The reader gets a picture of an obscure society the protagonist got himself into.

Nevertheless, Christopher somehow does not fit there. Or, more precisely, that is the effect the author tries to achieve. Yet, it is questionable whether he

⁴⁹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*. 8

succeeded. Herr Issyvoov is becoming a part of the world of the other characters whether he likes it or not. As readers can see, the author used his own name. This, however, can be a little misleading since in the preface he says that "the readers are certainly not entitled to assume that its [the book] pages are purely autobiographical"⁵⁰ and emphasises that " 'Christopher Isherwood' is a convenient ventriloquist's dummy, nothing more."⁵¹

The first part of "A Berlin Diary" contains the famous sentence "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking."⁵² This statement has since been quoted by almost every Isherwood critic. As Isherwood himself proclaims, it expresses the distance of the narrator, "He is the detached foreign observer, getting his first impressions."⁵³ This mentioned detachment is something that the reader notices throughout the whole book.

In all the stories, readers learn almost nothing about Christopher. However, they have a chance to learn almost all the details about his stay in Berlin including his private matters in *Christopher and His Kind*, a book written in the seventies. *Christopher and His Kind* is the only genuinely autobiographical record of Isherwood's stay in Germany since he burned his diaries from those times after writing *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the story "A Berlin Diary" lacks any profundity. Even in his short stories, Isherwood incorporated something we could call "a study of character", but this short story does not have any particular character's depiction.

⁵⁰ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*. 6

⁵¹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*. 6

⁵² Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*. 7

⁵³ Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* 51

⁵⁴ See Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* 38

4.2. Sally Bowles

One of Isherwood's most famous stories is "Sally Bowles". Sally Bowles may be considered Isherwood's liveliest characters and her story immortal.

The subchapter is going to focus on the certain imbalance which can be discovered in the story. Two perspectives may be taken into account regarding Christopher's (and narrator's) attitude to Sally. On the one hand Isherwood presents the protagonist as a radiant and energetic young girl enjoying life with all it brings, even the seamy side of it. On the other hand, Sally is also apparently quite hard-bitten as it will be mentioned below.

Sally's character was based on Jean Ross who became Isherwood's friend for many years. In *Christopher and His Kind* Isherwood admits that in the course of time Jean fused with Sally and he actually does not remember anything else about the model for his most famous character.⁵⁵

Sally Bowles is a pretty English girl of nineteen who makes a living of sorts and she is waiting for an opportunity to become an actress. Sally is a singer and definitely not a good one.⁵⁶ Her lifestyle, however, is a bit more costly. Since she is worldly-wise despite her age, she is always on the lookout for a well-off man (or more precisely, *men*): " 'That's the man I slept with last night,' she announced. 'He makes love marvelously. He's an absolute genius at business and he's terribly rich.' "⁵⁷ This she announces at the beginning of the story, just after Christopher is introduced to her. No matter how experienced or even hard-bitten she might seem, one cannot miss certain childishness. Actually, the further one keeps reading, the more immature she gets.

One cannot say that Sally is not happy with her life. Yet she very often needs to be assured that people like her and that is one of signs of her immaturity mentioned before. Christopher is asked whether he likes her and after his

⁵⁵ See Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* 53

⁵⁶ See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 30

⁵⁷ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 28

affirmative reply she wants to know if he is in love with her.⁵⁸ At this point, the author did not give readers any hints of Christopher's homosexuality. Frl. Schroeder even considers Sally Christopher's girlfriend, "I should never have expected you to have a lady friend like that!"⁵⁹ In reply Christopher does not say anything to disclaim their romantic relationship. The reason might be this situation being a safety measure not to be suspected of homosexuality. In *Christopher and His Kind* we learn that real-life Frl. Schroeder, Frl. Meta Thureau, of course knew about Isherwood's liaisons for he did not try to conceal them in any way. She slept on a couch in the central living room so she heard all the sounds from the bedrooms she was renting. She was very understanding, exclaiming after one of Isherwood's lively nights " 'How sweet love must be!' "⁶⁰

As it has been said before, Sally is on the one hand almost childish and theatrical. She is extremely moody, about one of her good friends she says " 'That man bores me so! [...] I should like to kill him!' "⁶¹ This is what Sally says about almost everybody.

On the other hand she is also quite realistic. She came to Berlin with a friend named Diana who actually did the same as Sally. Diana tried to find a job there but she was not as successful as Sally and thus she resorted to an easier solution: she soon found a lover who would provide for her and took her away from Berlin. Sally definitely could have been mad at her for leaving her, the younger, unexperienced one, at the mercy of a big city. However, Sally expresses deep understanding and says that " 'Everyone's got to look after themselves. I expect, in her place, I'd have done the same.' "⁶² This shows that Sally knows the ropes.

There is one more moment I would like to mention. Sally gets pregnant with a now-ex-boyfriend of hers. When she first becomes suspicious she does not even want to go to the doctor:

⁵⁸ See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 38

⁵⁹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 39

⁶⁰ Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* 52

⁶¹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 48

⁶² Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 32

" 'I wonder,' she said suddenly, 'if I'm going to have a baby.'

[...] 'But hadn't you better see a doctor?'

'Oh, I suppose so.' Sally yawned listlessly. 'There's no hurry.' ⁶³

It may seem strange that in a situation like this a young girl who surely cannot afford to have a baby does not really care, either about prevention or consequences. But then, when her pregnancy is confirmed, she keeps a cool head. There is no happy ending, no smiling happy family of a suddenly-grown-up Sally. She decides to have an abortion which in her situation was the only option. However, here we can perfectly see the conflict in her personality, conflict between a grown up and naïve Sally.

There is one more example of Sally's naivety I would like to emphasize. One day a man named George P. Sandars visits Christopher with an oblique plea for a loan. Christopher of course refuses to give him anything but before the man leaves, he asks Christopher whether he knows any actresses since he sells a face-cream especially invented for them. Christopher imprudently gives him Sally's address and it has tragicomical consequences. Sally not only lends him a sum of money but also sleeps with the man (who introduces himself as Paul Rakowski now) and even accepts his marriage proposal and all this in less than 24 hours. Eventually he disappears with all Sally's money. Basically, this is a comical situation but with the possibility of a serious impact. In fact, Sally ignores any experience she has gained about men and she again and again makes the same mistakes.

Before this incident she tells Christopher that she is " '[...] beginning to think that men are always going to leave [her].' ⁶⁴ One cannot wonder at that.

⁶³ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 49

⁶⁴ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 53

Sally's behaviour is flirtatious and she herself says: " 'I'd do anything, just now, to get rich. If you're rich you can afford to stand out for a really good contract.' "⁶⁵

So is Sally simply a gold-digger? Behind all this there is just a young girl who is trying to do something with her life. Nevertheless, she, in her inexperience, attracts mostly men who abuse her (even though not physically). Sally keeps stumbling but always gets up again.

Finally, it seems that Sally is growing mature when she pronounces that " 'I'm sick of being a whore. I'll never look at a man with money again.' "⁶⁶ Yet, it is only an illusion. After Christopher's short stay abroad he finds out that Sally's attitude to him has changed a lot. On one occasion she expresses deep contempt of Christopher's way of life:

" 'I don't disapprove of you'- but she couldn't look me in the face – 'not exactly.'

'I merely make you sick?'

'I don't know what it is...You seem to have changed, somehow...'

'How have I changed?'

'It's difficult to explain... You don't seem to have any energy or want to get anywhere. You're so dilettante. It annoys me.' "⁶⁷

At this point we have to admit that she might be right about Christopher being dilettante for he admits that he had not written much until his stay abroad.⁶⁸ Yet one has to wonder whether it is not Sally who has changed. She moved out from FrI.Schroeder and seems not to suffer financially now. One can ask how she

⁶⁵ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 48

⁶⁶ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 54

⁶⁷ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 66

⁶⁸ See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 59

came by big money because there is no job she would mention. The reader might rightly guess that it all came from the expectable source – men.

However, this is not the end of their friendship. A few pages later, after the incident with Mr.Sandars-Rakowski they find common ground. Still, there is no absolution and it seems that even no progress in Sally's attitude to life.

I dare say that her relationship with Christopher is the only one which is worth something. Christopher is the only person who does not leave her and who sees under the surface. I believe that the reason for this is the nature of their bond – there is no sex. Even in relationships with girls it always plays certain role in form of jealousy. Isherwood himself claims that the relationship between himself and Jean Ross was "truly more intimate than the relationships between Sally and her various partners in the novel."⁶⁹ With Christopher there is no intercourse, no intent to change their status and no jealousy either. Nonetheless, as I have mentioned, all this remains unsaid because of Christopher's concealed homosexuality.

Even though it might seem so, Sally is not considered a victim by Christopher. Christopher can both laugh at her and be disgusted with her. The narrator wants us to remember Sally Bowles in her bloom even with the mistakes she keeps making.

4.3. On Ruegen Island

The next short story in *Goodbye to Berlin* is "On Ruegen Island (Summer 1931)". There are two main characters – an Englishman named Peter Wilkinson and a German working-class boy Otto Nowak (sixteen or seventeen years old). "On Ruegen Island" is not the only story where we can find Otto, he is also one of the main characters of "The Nowaks", in which we also learn more about his social background.

⁶⁹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 56

Christopher is spending a long holiday with the two men on an island in the north of Germany. They are almost always together, swimming, sunbathing and quite often fighting. In the course of the plot the atmosphere darkens and the protagonists drop off their masks. Isherwood once again shows how he can see beneath the surface of people's words and smiles. Eventually

Even though the nature of Peter's and Otto's relationship is not clearly stated anywhere in the story, there are many hints of their homosexuality. In *Goodbye to Berlin* there are not many insinuations of gay or lesbian encounters, yet, as Malinowski and Brelin point out, "Even when suppressed or disguised for legal or artistic reasons, homosexuality is a felt presence in Isherwood's novels."⁷⁰ In "On Ruegen Island" homosexuality is not explored as a topic but it can be viewed as a main feature to be able to make any sense of the story.

The relationship between Otto and Peter is not perfect, in fact, they resemble opponents rather than lovers. This is partly because of the nature of the relationship – Otto is basically paid by Peter. So it is clear that to use the word *boyfriend* is a little exaggeration since the relationship is mostly based on money Peter supplies Otto with. As Isherwood states in *Christopher and His Kind*, it was quite usual for the men of the upper class (and moreover foreigners) to pay for the boy's expenses in exchange for sex. Christopher himself had an affair with Otto and it ended with the same result.

The narrator first introduces Peter and explains his unhappy past. His mother died when he was a child but before that she had managed to "coddle him into a funk"⁷¹. Several times he considered a suicide, yet for this act he was not courageous enough. The relationship with his father and siblings is rather non-existent since he proved to be good for nothing – he was not interested in the family business nor did he have any other occupation or at least a hobby. The author is trying to describe Peter as a misfit.

⁷⁰ Malinowski and Brelin 286

⁷¹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 82

Yet, Peter face brightens when he is with Otto (in case they are on speaking terms). It seems that these are the only moments when he is not distressed. Otto is the only person Peter cares about and he is basically dependent on him. Before Peter came to Berlin, he spent a lot of money on a therapist whom he attended three times a week. Then he heard of a Berlin analyst who was cheaper so he decided to leave for Germany.

"And are you still going to him [the German analyst]?"

I asked.

'No... I can't afford to, you see.'⁷²

The reason why Peter cannot afford his therapy now is Otto. Peter has literally exchanged the doctors for a lover, and it did not come to his expectations.

While Peter's homosexual orientation is clear, "Otto preferred women to men", Isherwood explains in *Christopher and His Kind*.⁷³ Nevertheless, even the reader of "On Ruegen Island" comes to this conclusion, for instance Otto goes dancing with girls at the Kurhaus every day, to Peter's distaste. Otto not only goes dancing, but he also flirts with a young woman, a school teacher. It must be said that Otto does all this ostentatiously to provoke Peter even more. Otto on the one hand needs Peter, on the other hand he does everything to drive him away.

"One evening, we were all walking up the main street [...]. Otto said to Peter with his most spiteful grin: 'Why must you always look in the same direction as I do?' This was surprisingly acute, for, whenever Otto turned his head to stare at a girl, Peter's eye mechanically followed his glance with instinctive jealousy."⁷⁴

The reason of Otto's behaviour is possibly an attempt to break free from Peter's financial domination. Otto is paid for his company but he does not accept

⁷² Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 85

⁷³ Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* 39

⁷⁴ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 92

his inferior status. And this behaviour only strengthens Peter's dissatisfaction. Claude Summers describes it as a "spoilt homosexual idyll [...]"⁷⁵ It is important to emphasize that Peter's motive is not a need to be dominant but his need for love.

While in the beginning of the story the atmosphere is light and optimistic, towards the end it deteriorates as well as Peter and Otto's relationship. Peter starts to treat Otto as a child, for instance he commands him when he has to come home from the dancing. Naturally, Otto does not like Peter's attitude and starts rebelling, really as a child.

" 'Come here,' [Peter] said again, in a sharp tone of command.

'Oh, leave me alone,' said Otto, 'I'm sick of you. I want to sleep now. Tomorrow I'm going back to Berlin.' "⁷⁶

And later on he really leaves. A few hours before Otto disappears, Christopher is talking to Peter about Otto.

"I asked: 'You don't think he cares for you, at all?'

'At the beginning he did, perhaps... Not now. There's nothing between us but my cash.' "⁷⁷

This conversation concludes with Peter's confession that it would be better for him to leave Otto altogether but that he is not capable of that. All this just before they come home and discover that the young man has left for Berlin together with some of Peter's clothes and all his money, leaving just a short note, "Please forgive me, I couldn't stand it any longer here so I'm going home. [...]"

⁷⁵ Malinowski and Brelin 287

⁷⁶ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 95

⁷⁷ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 98

Don't be angry."⁷⁸ Soon after him Peter leaves as well and goes back home to England to find another therapist.⁷⁹

Even though it cannot be said about either character that they live on the margin of society, there is something they share with those who do. Peter, being a homosexual, is predestined to never fully fit in. Together with his family background and fragile psyche the result is an isolated, depressive individual dependent on others and their affections.

No matter how different Otto seems, he has a few similar features. Otto is caught in a situation which does not suit him and this makes him angry even with people he once liked. The financial aspect of his relationship with Peter is something that he on the one hand needs, on the other hand it makes him despise himself. This contempt he feels is transformed into exasperation. So we now see that despite their differences both of them are engaged in their isolation and cannot help each other.

4.4. The Nowaks

As I have mentioned before, "The Nowaks" captures the family of Otto Nowak, one of the main characters of the previous story. Christopher is looking for a cheaper room to live in and visits the Nowaks, who live in Wassertorstrasse, to ask if they know of any free lodgings nearby. Frau Nowak is at first shocked: "'But you can't live in this part of town – a gentleman like you! Oh, no. I'm afraid it wouldn't suit you at all.'"⁸⁰ Nevertheless, after their conversation she offers him to stay with the family in their small two-room flat. She is embarrassed to do it herself so she sends her younger son Otto to tell Christopher. The flat they live in is shabby and damp, yet Christopher accepts their offer.

⁷⁸ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 99

⁷⁹ See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 100

⁸⁰ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 104

The family consists of Frau Nowak, Herr Nowak, Otto, Grete and Lothar, a man of twenty. Christopher is to sleep in the back room with Otto while the rest of the family sleep in the living room, four people in two beds. Nowhere in the story it is expressed but Otto and Christopher are sleeping together, in fact, they are having the same kind of relationship as Otto and Peter Wilkinson had before. Peter's name is mentioned just once:

" 'Do you ever hear from Peter? I asked.

[...] 'Please...' he was gently reproachful, 'please, never mention Peter's name to me again. [...] Peter hurt me very much. I thought he was my friend. And then, suddenly, he left me – all alone...' "81

Even though Christopher does not express any astonishment, Otto's description of the events on Ruegen Island is very strange indeed. It was Otto himself who abandoned Peter. This certainly shows that Otto is still just a boy who needs to be ensured of the love of other people. After all, he does not differ from Peter very much. Only the way he shows his solitude is different. He loves to exaggerate and apparently enjoys acting as well, as it is several times also mentioned.⁸²

An attentive reader detects signs of something more than just friendship between the two. After breakfast, Otto usually exercises while Christopher writes, for "his admiration"⁸³. Otto knows the impact it has not only on girls but on men as well, to see his young body stretching and sweating and it is all done for a purpose. Otto wants to be wanted, more precisely he needs to be wanted.

The reason for this may lie in the family. Otto's relationship with his mother is far from ideal. Throughout the story Frau Nowak gets more and more space. It is her character which deserves a more detailed analysis. It seems that the mother has given up hope that her children, maybe except for Lothar, appreciate

⁸¹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 116

⁸² See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 104

⁸³ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 100

what she does for them. As David Thomas states, "the description of Frau Nowak is detached, almost cruel."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, it is the life which has been cruel to her and Isherwood depicts all of this very faithfully.

Even though they all live together, it cannot be said that they have a close relationships There are few moments, when Christopher finds what he was looking for – the solidarity among them. One of these occasions is Christopher's first evening with the Nowaks, Frau Nowak cooks a hearty dinner paid for with Christopher's money and they are talking and dancing.⁸⁵ Yet, most of the days the atmosphere is tense. The reason for the tension is mostly Frau Nowak's relationship with her younger son and her daughter. Grete is a fat girl of twelve who does not help her mother at all:

" 'Mummy! Come and look at the pretty flowers!'

'I've got no time for your pretty flowes,' exclaimed Frau Nowak at length, in great exasperation: 'Here am I with a daughter the size of an elephant, having to slave all by myself, cooking the supper!' "⁸⁶

In this moment Otto steps in and scolds Grete for just sitting around doing nothing. Otto's intervention is grotesque since he certainly does not set a good example. Even though he is seventeen, he does not do anything, not at home, nor anywhere else. Once he had a job as an apprentice to an upholsterer but after a few weeks he left, for as he says: "The master was so unkind to me. He always gave me the hardest jobs to do. [...] And do you think I put up with that?"⁸⁷ He certainly did not. In general, Otto does only what he wants exactly as a small child.

It is no wonder that his mother favours her older son, Lothar, who works hard and even attends an evening school. That does not mean she detests Otto; she

⁸⁴ David Thomas. "'Goodbye to Berlin': Refocusing Isherwood's Camera." *Contemporary Literature* 1972: 44. *JSTOR Journals*.

⁸⁵ See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 108

⁸⁶ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 107

⁸⁷ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 114

is, to a certain extent, tolerant, "Otto's not a bad boy, but he's such a scatterbrain."⁸⁸ The word scatterbrain is indeed an understatement. Nevertheless, she continues her monologue by praising Lothar, she even terms him "a model son"⁸⁹.

The constant comparing of Lothar to Otto always leads to, as Isherwood called it, "a sermon about the Good and the Worthless Brother"⁹⁰. Otto's reaction to Frau Nowak's declaration that he is no son of hers⁹¹ is dancing around the room and behaving like a mad man. There is one more thing regarding Otto which embarrasses Frau Nowak – and that is his relations with men. During the first evening the head of the family, Herr Nowak, hints at Peter:

" 'Christoph doesn't like our food,' said Herr Nowak.

'Never mind, Christoph, you'll get used to it. Otto was just the same when he came back from the seaside. He'd got used to all sorts of fine ways, with his Englishman...'

'Hold your tongue, father!' said Frau Nowak warningly."⁹²

To none of them occurs that Christopher spent the holiday with Otto and "his Englishman". Frau Nowak apparently knows that the Englishman was not just a friend. I dare say that Herr Nowak also, yet he does not mind to express himself even before a stranger. It is thus his wife who is at least trying to maintain the decorum.

Although the disputes, most often between Otto and his mother, usually start with a comical note, in the course of the story the participants are frequently becoming slightly aggressive. It must be said that for the most part it is Otto who escalates the rows attacking his mother verbally, " 'You respectable!' Otto sneered.

⁸⁸ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 107

⁸⁹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 107

⁹⁰ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 122

⁹¹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 122

⁹² Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 109

'When you were a girl you went around with every pair of trousers you could find.' ⁹³ On the one hand Otto is mean and spiteful, on the other hand he poses as a grateful son. Nevertheless, his maliciousness dominates and it culminates in his attempt to slash his wrists with the words " 'I wanted to show her.' " ⁹⁴ The hate for his mother is evident.

Not only Frau Nowak's family is problematic, her health as well – she keeps coughing night and day. The insanitary conditions of their dwelling only make her trouble worse. Finally, it is decided that she is going to a sanatorium for a few weeks.

Towards her departure Christopher spends more and more time away from the flat. Before Frau Nowak leaves for the sanatorium, he moves out altogether. Otto manifestly expresses his fears that within six months he will die, no cause mentioned. He also again shows his childishness by saying that his father will not give him anything to eat. ⁹⁵ At Otto's age he should be able to take care of himself. Yet, when he hears the word "work", he bursts into tears. ⁹⁶ Otto is posing himself into the role of a victim, only to draw attention.

Few weeks after Frau Nowak leaves, Christopher visits the family. There are only Herr Nowak and Grete in the flat, both sons spend more time with their friends. Christopher finds Herr Nowak drunk, dancing with Grete only by candlelight since the electricity bill has not been paid. The flat is very messy since there is nobody who would care now. It is clear that none of them cares about any of this. Without Frau Nowak the family falls apart, nobody appreciates what she was doing to keep the things going and Christopher no longer feels comfortable in their company.

One day Otto and Christopher visit Frau Nowak in the sanatorium. They are introduced to the woman she shares her room with and the whole day is jolly.

⁹³ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 124

⁹⁴ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 129

⁹⁵ See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 127

⁹⁶ See Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 127

Since Frau Nowak does not have to do anything there, just take care of herself, she feels better now and "[looks] years younger."⁹⁷

What is surprising is that the problems seem to have disappeared, there is not a single fight between her and Otto. But still, she assumes it must have been Christopher who organised the visit: "Ah, Herr Christoph, how nice of you to come! How nice of you to bring Otto to visit me!"⁹⁸ Although the visit is the only occasion when Otto and his mother are not quarrelling, she seems to have given up on him. She does not expect any kindness from her son's side.

The concluding scene is one of Isherwood's best and it shows Otto Nowak from a different angle. When the two visitors are getting on a bus a crowd of patients surrounds them saying goodbye to their families. " 'Go in, mother,' begged Otto. He was almost in tears himself. 'Please go in! You'll catch your death of cold!' "⁹⁹ One might declare that all Otto's complaining, his hate and anger had been only pretence for he truly cares about his mother. Yet, by one kind sentence Otto does not redeem himself and the truth is as always somewhere in the middle.

In conclusion, "The Nowaks" it is the mother who is given most space. Thus Isherwood shows her suffering. Frau Nowak is the person who holds the family together. Nonetheless, it is not acknowledged by anybody. She is a very unhappy person but she still can find joy. Her health is constantly deteriorating and not a single one of her children cares to help her with the household. She is always surrounded by people but no one can give her what she needs. The only way she shows her woes is constant scolding. She is isolated, in her suffering, even though she is not alone.

⁹⁷ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 132

⁹⁸ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 133

⁹⁹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 138

4.5. The Landauers

The Landauers is a story in a way unique. The uniqueness is caused by the complete commonness of the Landauer family. Christopher tells a story, again with no definite beginning or an end, of a Jewish family owning one of the biggest department stores in Berlin.

Towards the end of *Goodbye to Berlin* Isherwood's voice is transforming. As a matter of fact, Isherwood slowly deviates from the usage of let's say caricatures as his protagonists. The tone becomes more serious as also the subject matter evolves; the suffocating atmosphere of pre-war Berlin starts to dominate over the comic.

The reader is gradually introduced the whole Landauer family, the individuals of most interest being Natalia Landauer and particularly her cousin, Bernhard Landauer.

Natalia is a young girl training her English. It may be noted that she is the only character of *Goodbye to Berlin* who is quite ordinary, there are no hidden secrets, no overt theatricality or bursts of anger. However, Isherwood undoubtedly did not mean to indicate her flawlessness; she cannot get rid of certain childishness but that may be easily overlooked due to her age.

Natalia, being so ordinary, is of great benefit for the author because it is her who holds the mirror up to the society. Compared to her settled life the cruelty of Nazism is in stark contrast. Natalia is not only normal, she also respects her parents and what they do for her is also much appreciated. In this respect a fundamental difference between her and Otto Nowak can be found.

One day an experiment is conducted, Christopher wants Natalia to meet Sally Bowles. To put it mildly, it is not a success. It is clear from the beginning, Sally starts to describe who she slept with last night. The two girls are so extremely different from each other that the only possible outcome was a faux pas. When

Sally asks Christopher to walk her to the Eden, he knows that it is Natalia's "test of loyalty"¹⁰⁰ and he fails it. In a few second she walks away "as if she never wished to set eyes on either of [them] again."¹⁰¹ The friction was certainly expectable due to the difference of the girls' natures. The question remains what did Christopher want to achieve. Since none of the girls seems to be preferred by the narrator, one of the solutions may be simply an experiment.

Even though many pages are dedicated to Natalia's cousin, a reader does not get to know him at all. Bernhard Landauer very successfully manages his uncle's department store. Although he and Christopher soon become friends, Christopher is well aware of certain barrier.

"He is sympathetic, charming. But his gestures, offering me a glass of water or a cigarette, are clothed in arrogance. [...] He is not going to tell me what he is really thinking or feeling, and he despises me because I do not know."¹⁰²

Christopher is just the opposite, he shares many of his thoughts and feelings with everybody, his students, friends and flatmates. Bernhard's motive to being withdrawn is never explained, however, it may be assumed that the political situation is to blame.

Bernhard believes in discipline renouncing all the politics. However, he is highly influenced by it owing to the Nazi boycott of Jewish shops. In all Bernhard's behaviour one can sense the futility of trying to build something. Bernhard Landauer is, in fact, the only character of *Goodbye to Berlin* influenced by the politics that much. "His smile contracted, vanished. Once again, the impassivity of mortal weariness fell like a shadow across his strangely youthful face."¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 161

¹⁰¹ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 161

¹⁰² Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 140

¹⁰³ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* 155

Isherwood apparently sees and comments on the hopelessness of the life in Berlin just before the Nazi era. Bernhard, even though he is not interested in politics, suffers by the political steps made by the Nazis. The whole Landauer family manages to escape but Bernhard, as Christopher learns long after he himself left Berlin, gets killed for his business, probably not willing to betray his principles.

In conclusion, the atmosphere darkens and the main characters start dying. Nonetheless, at this point Isherwood leaves Berlin, both literally and figuratively speaking. In his next novels he does not get back to the topic of the Second World War or Germany in general

5. Spiritual Isolation – *A Single Man*

When Isherwood wrote *A Single Man* he was sixty years old. It was published in 1964, still a few years before the Stonewall Riots. However, the gay liberation movement had already started. This novel is often categorized as a novel of the homosexual subculture.¹⁰⁴ The issue of sexual orientation is certainly incorporated, yet, it is not the subject matter of the novel as several critics point out. Roman Trušník emphasizes that the topic of a midlife crisis plays a more prominent role than homosexuality.¹⁰⁵ Even though the theme of homosexuality is not the focal point, it is presented as a given fact.¹⁰⁶ George does not come out as a gay in the novel. The reason of this is the society for the novel takes place not in the sixties but a decade before. The time of the story is extremely important since these were the times when one's homosexuality was still a private matter inappropriate to talk about. Thus George has to hide his orientation.

A Single Man differs from Isherwood's Berlin stories in the aspect of the narrator. The change in the style of narration is considerable. The third person is preserved but the narrator is also the hero, unlike *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, in which the attention was centred on the people around him. Just as Summers claims, "Although Isherwood's novel features an omniscient narrator, for much of the book the narrator's vantage point is so closely aligned with the protagonist's that it reads as an extended interior monologue."¹⁰⁷

The novel also definitely shares many things with his previous works. What makes *A Single Man* peculiar in all Isherwood's writings is that his previous novels (possibly with the exception of the ones which he collaborated on with Auden) miss some key features of *A Single Man*.

¹⁰⁴ Anthony Burgess. *Ninety-nine novels: the best in English since 1939: a personal choice*. London: Allison & Busby, 1984. 92

¹⁰⁵ See Trušník 61

¹⁰⁶ See Trušník 64

¹⁰⁷ Summers 190

As Summers asserts, "the novel is almost impossible to summarize, because (like a poem) its effects are all local."¹⁰⁸ One can say that throughout the book the protagonist puts on several masks. To distinguish "the real George" seems almost impossible since Isherwood uses George to point out that every single human being is hard to sum up in a few words. Nevertheless, this is exactly what the author does in Berlin stories. The most important difference between his early works and *A Single Man* is that he finally diverged from labelling his characters.

The main character is a middle-aged university professor named George, an Englishman living in Los Angeles whose partner Jim died several months ago. The novel captures one day of George's life. In this aspect it is similar to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and as Williams emphasises, "[...] mortality and the aging process are topics that pervade Woolf's and Isherwood's texts through the inner dialogues of the protagonists."¹⁰⁹

A Single Man is the only Isherwood's novel which lets the reader know the hero's mental processes. None of Isherwood's previous works employed the stream of consciousness and the author works with it very meaningfully. The chapter is also going to show how Isherwood's choice of one day time-span allows him to capture all aspects of the position of a person in a society.

A Single Man is not an autobiographical novel. Yet, although no Isherwood's partner had ever died (since 1953 Isherwood lived with his life-long partner, Don Bachardy, thirty years his junior, in a more or less happy relationship), there are certain similarities between George's and Isherwood's lives.

The analogies between the two are for instance the British origin, place of living and also the position. Isherwood finally settled in Santa Monica in California and for several years he also taught at Los Angeles State College (now

¹⁰⁸ Summers 56

¹⁰⁹ Hannah Williams. "A Single Day: Isolation And Connection In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* And Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*." *Oswald Review* 15.(2013): 43. *Publisher Provided Full Text Searching File*. 47

California State University). Apparently Isherwood used a few of his own characteristics for the hero of *A Single Man*. In a documentary called *Chris & Don: A Love Story* Isherwood's partner Don Bachardy states that when he reached his thirties, there was a period of separation for Bachardy needed time to rethink the relationship.

"1962, 1963 was our bumpiest period. And that's really what prompted him to write *A Single Man*, which is all based on the supposition of a man of his age losing his lover in an automobile accident, and what does he do? And Chris was seriously contemplating what kind of life he would lead without me."¹¹⁰

The presupposition that even *A Single Man* bears certain autobiographical features is then vital. At the time when *A Single Man* was being written, Isherwood was a man in his fifties, finally settled and the relationship with Bachardy seems to have changed him into a more perceptive individual. All this led to Isherwood's opening up.

Happening in one day, most of the time just talking to people, *A Single Man* seems to be "a deceptively simple novella,"¹¹¹ as Victor Marsh stated. Having described one day in George's life (which may be his last) Isherwood achieves to capture more than that. Claude J. Summers has suggested that : "The protagonist of *A Single Man* is the most fully human of all Isherwood's gay characters."¹¹² As opposed to *Berlin Stories*, in this novel Isherwood ponders about the nature of human existence as it will be shown in the next subchapters.

¹¹⁰ *Chris & Don. A Love Story*. Dir. Tina Mascara and Guido Santi. Asphalt Stars Productions, 2007. DVD.

¹¹¹ Victor Marsh. "On 'The Problem Of The Religious Novel': Christopher Isherwood And *A Single Man*." *Literature And Theology* 24.4 (2010): 378-396. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. 384

¹¹² Summers 199

One of the themes that recur throughout the novel is one's identity. The hero, being a homosexual, cannot fully expose himself to everyone. As Claude J. Summers says: "Though George is by no means defined solely by his homosexuality, it is, in fact, the characteristic that most pervasively defines his life."¹¹³ The impossibility to open up to the people he interacts with leads him to take on several roles. The role of a neighbour, a teacher, a friend and a lover. As Woodhouse asserts, some of these roles have been imposed on him and he can no longer escape.¹¹⁴

The question is who the real George is. One can state that even being George is a role. In the very beginning of the novel, the hero is depersonalized:

"Waking up begins with saying am and now. That which has awoken then lies for a while staring up at the ceiling and down into itself until it has recognized I, and therefrom deduced I am, I am now."¹¹⁵

The first couple of sentences suggest that waking up is seen as an act of birth; when one is born, he is a *tabula rasa*. The pronoun *it* is at first used to describe George until he, let's say, recognizes himself. After such recognition, there is no more *it* but *am*, yet, still no *George*.

After getting up, there are rituals that he has to undergo to become George: "It knows its name. It is called George. By the time it has gotten dressed, it has become he, has become more or less George."¹¹⁶ Clothes thus make him, who he is. Without them, he would again become a nameless entity.

The absence of a surname is an interesting aspect as well. In general, a surname is designation of a larger entity, let us mention a family for instance.

¹¹³ Summers 203

¹¹⁴ Woodhouse 156

¹¹⁵ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 4

¹¹⁶ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 4

George does not have any family name and, as a matter of fact, no family. Being a solitary man, without any closer bonds is a key attribute of the protagonist. Isherwood makes his protagonist an everyman, easy to identify yourself with.

5.1. George as a Neighbour

The house of Jim and George on Camphor Tree Lane was the only place where they could be who they were, the house was their sanctuary. The secret-looking house is surrounded by trees and accessible only by a bridge. George comments on the house: "As good as being on our own island."¹¹⁷ They lived separately of the other neighbours and it satisfied their needs.

In the very beginning of the novel Isherwood presents the picture of life in the sixties. The whole morning the attention is centred on the neighbourhood where the house shared by George and Jim stands. By depicting the everyday rituals Isherwood manages to capture the major flaws of a typical citizen, self-righteousness being the most prominent one.

His neighbours' children do not participate on the masquerade of their parents. To them, not understanding exactly the reason of his exclusion, he is a mere strange man from the house next door. For the neighbour's children he has taken the form of an "old storybook monster"¹¹⁸ which he enjoys:

"This is the role George has found himself playing, with increasing violence, since he started to live alone. It releases a part of his nature which he hated Jim to see."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 7

¹¹⁸ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 8

¹¹⁹ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 8

Jim's death had another impact on George, in contact with children George changes. He gives vent to something inside him and it transforms a calm elderly man into a savage individual.

After George's breakfast there is a long toilet scene. While sitting on the toilet bowl, he is reading a book and contemplating about his neighbours. The bathroom is on the ground floor and as there is a large window, he can see what is happening at the neighbours' yards. George in length describes the whole day of their prototypical families.

Whilst sitting and reading, he is watching the children play during what he calls "the Mothers' Hour"¹²⁰. He does not observe their morning rituals with envy, on the contrary, he sees under the surface of a polished family. A son of Mrs. Strunk, living just across the street, is "murdering"¹²¹ scales:

"Ah, here's Benny, hammer in hand. He hunts among the trash cans set out ready for collection on the sidewalk and drags out a broken scale. As George watches, Benny begins smashing it with his hammer, uttering cries as he does so; he is making believe that the machine is screaming with pain."¹²²

After his mother sees Benny's aggressivity towards the object, she does not yell or reproach him for his conduct since "she has read all the psychology books"¹²³ and calmly asks him to stop. Overall she thinks that her liberal upbringing is being successful but as George remarks, the boy stops smashing the scales not because his mother told him to but because he got bored of it.

Another Mrs. Strunk's son starts shooting a carbide cannon, again with no consequence. Mrs. Strunk attitude to bringing up children is according to George inappropriate. As George observes, Mrs. Strunk is a perfect example of a

¹²⁰ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 9

¹²¹ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 8

¹²² Isherwood, *A Single Man* 8

¹²³ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 9

conformist who likes (or needs) to be told what to do and what to think, and not only regarding her children.

The day in Camphor Tree Lane is always the same. After the Mothers' Hour, there is also a Father's hour when the husbands come home. The weekends are special since the families always spend them together, doing barbecue etc. All this is a fairly standard picture of life in the sixties. George comments sardonically: "Mr. Strunk and Mr. Garfein are proud of their kingdom."¹²⁴ He knows that he is different and that he simply does not belong. The Strunks and the Garfeins are aware of George's difference as well.

Their attitude to George is something he calls "new tolerance – the technique of annihilation by blandness".¹²⁵ George meditates on his neighbours' stand to him. Anything anomalous is considered a threat: "Among many other kinds of monster, George says, they are afraid of little me."¹²⁶ He perceives this behaviour as cowardly and it leads him to resentment of the society. He, however, is more assimilated than he would admit or even than he believes.

What George shares with Isherwood's characters from the Berlin stories is certain alienation. But while in the case of the heroes of "Sally Bowles", "The Nowaks" or "On Ruegen Island" the estrangement was caused by the life circumstances, George's isolation is triggered by his orientation.

The passages which comment on the Strunks or Garfields are one of the most insightful. George, as he says, "sees them" but they do not see him since he is only the poor widowed homosexual, an outsider.

5.2. George as a Lover

¹²⁴ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 10

¹²⁵ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 10

¹²⁶ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 10

Another topic reappearing in *A Single Man* is love. As Forster points out, love in novels is different from real life. In real life love is far more complex impression, it is not constant, and if it is constant, it is more of a social habit, not a human relationship.¹²⁷

Jim, George's dead partner, is reminded to him all the time, every day. The mornings are good for George, for their indefiniteness which causes certain unconsciousness. The breaking point comes at the moment of descending the stairs.

"The doorway into the kitchen has been built too narrow. [...] And it is here, nearly every morning, that George, having reached the bottom of the stairs, has this sensation of suddenly finding himself on an abrupt, brutally broken off, jagged edge – as though the track had disappeared down a landslide. It is here that he stops short and knows. With a sick newness, almost as though it were for the first time: Jim is dead. Is dead."¹²⁸

George every morning undergoes the same pain time and again, the pain of realization of Jim's death. Curiously, this cruel awareness does not come in a place they spent more time in, such as the bedroom, or the living room couch. The acute pain George is feeling disappears, yet, Jim's death became reality again and George is reminded of the fact that he is all alone.

A Single Man is the only story where love is essential. Summers points out that "the relationship of George and Jim gradually emerges to become the most deeply felt love story in all of Isherwood's fiction."¹²⁹ Nonetheless, it is possible that George's and Jim's love had become a social habit. All George has got now are memories and as time passes he tends to embellish them.

¹²⁷ See Forster 62

¹²⁸ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 4

¹²⁹ Summers 202

Why is love so prominent in the novel? "I believe that these are the reflections of the novelist's own state of mind while he composes, and that the predominance of love in novels is partly of this."¹³⁰ What Forster asserts corresponds with Don Bachardy's previously mentioned statement in the film *Chris & Don* about Isherwood pondering about life without Don, life without love. Thus one has to agree that without love, either current or past, George would not be the George the reader gets to know.

It seems that the only reason of George's loneliness is Jim's death. However, it is not so. It is true that when Jim was still alive, they had their own world and were companions for each other. Yet, one can be isolated even as a half of a couple. Jim, even though only a memory, is a main part of the novel. As Wilde said, "Some day you will find, even as I have found, that there is no such thing as a romantic experience; there are romantic memories, and there is the desire of romance – that is all."¹³¹ A reader does not get to know George's life before Jim's death. Nevertheless, according to Wilde's words, nothing was probably as rosy as the surviving recalls.

George has not coped with Jim's death; it still has a huge impact on his life. Nevertheless, towards the end of the day he meditates on finding a new partner.¹³² This is only a pure fantasy. George is not capable of any other relationship than those he has or those he has lost. "You won't and you never will,"¹³³ he remarks bitterly.

Before the novel was published, W. H. Auden was offered to read it and review it. Auden's judgement corresponds with Isherwood's, "[it is] by far the best thing you have done."¹³⁴ Nonetheless, several criticisms were given by Auden, two worth mentioning "That there is too much made of homosexuals' right to be

¹³⁰ (Forster) 63

¹³¹ Colm Tóibín. *Love in a Dark Time: And Other Explorations of Gay Lives and Literature*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. 57

¹³² See Isherwood, *A Single Man* 90

¹³³ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 8

¹³⁴ Christopher Isherwood. *The Sixties*. Ed. Katherine Bucknell. New York: Harper Perennial, 2011. 335

regarded as a minority, in the same category as the Negroes and the Jews. And that Wystan was shocked when George thinks that he will 'make a new Jim.' "¹³⁵ Even though George rejected the idea, it seems to have offended Auden.

In his diary Isherwood noted that "[...] Wystan refuses to believe that this is my own attitude toward human beings."¹³⁶ To what extent Isherwood meant it, is hard to say. We already know that *A Single Man* may be well considered his confession about his and Bachardy's. Nevertheless, in *A Single Man* he resorted to a more conservative solution.

5.3. George as a Teacher

George is a university teacher and his attitude to the students is certainly of high interest since it reflects his world view.

Isherwood uses the metaphor of a factory to describe the campus. The process of transferring information from teachers to students is viewed as manufacturing, "male and female raw material which is fed daily into this factory [...] is to be processed, packaged and placed on the market: Negroes, Mexicans, Jews, Japanese, Chinese, Latins, Slavs, Nordics, the dark heads far predominating over the blond."¹³⁷ George on the one hand sees the vainness of the effort to actually educate the students. He ponders the purpose of education and the conclusion he comes to is "preparing themselves for life, which means a job and security in which to raise children to prepare themselves for life which means a job and security in which."¹³⁸ George sees all the endeavour as futile. Nevertheless, one has to admit that this is one of the desired outcomes. No doubt

¹³⁵ Isherwoodn, *The Sixties* 335

¹³⁶ Isherwoodn, *The Sixties* 335

¹³⁷ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 19

¹³⁸ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 19

the schooling functions as preparation of young people for life, yet, George keeps asking himself if it is enough.

Yet, on the other hand, he also enjoys the environment since it seems that coming to the university campus enlivens the protagonist. -" [...] he feels an upsurge of energy, of eagerness for the play to begin"¹³⁹ It certainly is a performance since "with the skill of a veteran he rapidly puts on the psychological make-up for this role he must play."¹⁴⁰ A contradiction between George's enthusiasm while teaching and his need of "psychological make-up" is again caused by his dissimilarity.

The question is whether his attitudes would change if he was not gay. In fact, it seems that George would not alter his opinions. His homosexuality certainly differentiates him from the majority. Nevertheless, his main personality trait is the ability to see right into other people's souls and that would stay the same. Throughout the novel George casts doubt on issues which by many are considered only natural.

As a matter of fact, George enjoys his position at the university for at least three reasons. The most banal one is the opportunity to observe boys, just like he was watching two young men playing tennis whilst he was talking to Dreyer.

"[...] the cruelty [of the game] is sensual and stirs George into hot excitement. [...] From his heart, he thanks these young men for their beauty. And they will never know what they have done to make this moment marvelous to him, and life itself less hateful..."¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 18

¹⁴⁰ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 17

¹⁴¹ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 23

Why George hates life is obvious, the pain of losing Jim has not yet passed. The campus offers him distraction and, to some degree, joy. However, a moment of the cold realization comes back to George every time.

Being employed in a university brings George the joy of sharing his thoughts and trying to excite those more promising students. Nevertheless, communication is never one-sided and thence George also acquires something back, be it new impulses or simply feedback.

After entering the classroom George stands in front of his student for several minutes until complete silence. He seems to enjoy the moments before he starts talking for his the student's expectations:

"His lips curve in a faint but bold smile. Some of them smile back at him. George finds this frank confrontation exhilarating. He draws strength from these smiles, these bring young eyes. For him, this is one of the peak moments of the day."¹⁴²

After the shared silence he must "spoil everything,"¹⁴³ he must speak. During the first few moments we see that George is not as cynical as he believes, he still finds joy, moreover, he finds joy in company of other people.

The strength George draws from his students may be their youth. He, in his late fifties, apparently does not abound in energy as he did in the years before. Moreover, he seems devastated by Jim's death which certainly drains him of his strength. Thus the relationship between George and his students may be considered a "symbolic relationship between age and youth."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Isherwood, *A Single Man* 24

¹⁴³ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 26

¹⁴⁴ Paul Piazza. *Christopher Isherwood: Myth and Anti-myth*. New York: Columbia UP, 1978. 154

Aldous Huxley's *After Many a Summer* has been chosen to be discussed. At first George tries to gather the students' opinion but after that an interesting debate breaks out. From discussing death they get to the topic of minorities and George loses control of his emotions.

George, looking at Wally Bryant, apparently a gay, asserts that "[...] a minority is only thought of as a minority when it constitutes some kind of a threat to the majority, real or imaginary."¹⁴⁵ Between the lines one may read that if one considers homosexuals a minority, what is then the threat to the majority? Here one has to recall Mrs. Strunk. On the one hand she seems to be tolerant. But on the other hand, nobody should dare to endanger the moral upbringing. Mrs. Strunk is lenient, yet only until she has to admit existence of homosexuality. Isherwood is able to see through the benevolent masks of pseudo-liberals.

The hate is mentioned as well, nevertheless, George emphasizes the hate of the minority towards the majority which is "not without a cause."¹⁴⁶

"And the more they all hate, and the more they're all persecuted, the nastier they become! Do you think it makes people nasty to be loved? You know it doesn't! Then why should it make them nice to be loathed?"¹⁴⁷

George gets more and more excited. Yet, at the moment he gets lost in his own speech, he realizes that he has lost the students as well.

When George speaks about minorities being different from "us"¹⁴⁸ he intergrates himself into the majority, even though falsely since he is one of "them". He speaks to certain extent openly, however, not openly enough to come out. Even at the academical premises during discussing ideas in literature, he cannot, or simply will not, speak completely freely.

¹⁴⁵ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 31

¹⁴⁶ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 31

¹⁴⁷ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 31

¹⁴⁸ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 31

After the lesson George meets Kenny, a student of his, and they converse on a variety of subject until Kenny asks George whether he has taken mescaline. The question puts George into a slightly different position. He has two options, either maintain the decorum or be frank to his student. He chooses to admit that he has tried it once. Suddenly, "George feels flattered and excited. Kenny has never talked to him like this before. He can't resist slipping into the role Kenny so temptingly offers him."¹⁴⁹

Kenny later admits that believed that George was "kind of cagey"¹⁵⁰ but one cannot really wonder at that. George, trying to be as impersonal as possible, affirms that he wants to tell things, discuss them, absolutely frankly but he cannot.¹⁵¹ There are positively more reasons for this behaviour, yet, a reader senses that both of them know what makes honesty impossible for George.

During the conversation George starts to open up and seems grateful for somebody who wishes to learn something about him. Nevertheless, the momentum is destroyed when George realizes that Kenny has been watching a couple of girls for the last few seconds. George has noticed Kenny's beauty so he may be slightly disappointed after finding out that from Kenny's side there is no sexual interest. "In Isherwood's work, Kenny is flirtatious, even provocative, but he looks to George as a surrogate father not as a potential lover."¹⁵² When George realizes that he accepts that, yet, he does not change his attitude to the young boy. He has got into a talkative mood for the second time that day and finds out that nobody is listening. George appears to withdraw and is alone again.

Since not only students make a university, George is also forced to converse with colleagues. While with Kenny George's mask started to peel off, talking to Grant reinstates it fully. He behaves exactly as it is expected of him and that is to be a "fellow subverter."¹⁵³ There is a feeling of shared radicalism, as

¹⁴⁹ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 35

¹⁵⁰ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 35

¹⁵¹ See Isherwood, *A Single Man* 36

¹⁵² Summers 5

¹⁵³ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 39

George asks " 'What's new? [...] implying, What has the Enemy been up to?'¹⁵⁴ The Enemy now designates everybody outside the campus, people wanting to censor books and others obscurants. Even though George maintains the unwritten conventions of their communication, "[...] laughs in an appropriately sardonic manner, since this is what Grant expects of him,"¹⁵⁵ it is clear that the real George is somehow hidden.

As the previous paragraphs show, George still wants to convey something, wants to share. In particular, he seems to have the intention of, to a certain extent, to raise his students' awareness of issues which he himself reflects on.

The students are those who listen to him more than the adults. In fact, young people are the only ones which may be affected by George in any way. Even though George keeps his distance, to a small number of his students are possibly more perceptive than George would dare say. It may be observed that with these students, such as Kenny, he has tendency to try to change the world.

5.4. George as a Friend

One of the George plays is that of a friend. In general, the protagonist of *Single Man* is not a very friendly person. He chooses very carefully whom to trust. In the novel there are two people who appear to be closer to George. George's vision of the world is on the one hand quite constrained. As it was mentioned in one of the previous subchapters, the neighbours are called The Enemy. The title, however, is not given solely to the narrow-minded, parochial inhabitants of Santa Monica. Women are The Enemy as well.

After the lesson given by George, he goes to the hospital to visit a woman named Doris. Not much information is provided, however, one could expect Doris to be a good friend of George if he visits on her deathbed. However, Isherwood insinuates that Doris used to be Jim's lover years ago, "that body which

¹⁵⁴ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 39

¹⁵⁵ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 40

sprawled stark naked, gaping wide in shameless demand, underneath Jim's naked body."¹⁵⁶ Doris used to be one The Enemy, nonetheless, now she has lost all her vitality and is expecting only death in her embrace.

The hospital environment with its sickrooms and smell of death bring Jim back even though he did not die in the hospital. However, George does not pity himself or actually any other person, he is rather disgusted. Doris is depicted as a "yellow shriveled mannequin with its sticks of arms and legs, withered flesh and hollow belly [...]"¹⁵⁷ The idea of death, either his or death in general, is something that attracts him throughout the day.

Death is a pervading topic in *A Single Man*. Before he leaves the hospital room, he says goodbye to Doris. After her reply, George coldly evaluates: "'Goodbye, George.' [...] Did she mean goodbye? This could be, soon will be."¹⁵⁸ There is no justification for him to believe he will soon die as well. On the one hand, the explanation might be that he sees all the effort to live as useless and George would rather die than suffer. When holding her hand, he thinks "We are on the same road, I shall follow you soon."¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, Doris may as well be only a memento mori, something simply reminding him, that one day, they will meet again. With Doris passing away George's hate for her fades, "As George pressed Doris' hand just now, he knew something: that the very last traces of the Doris who tried to take Jim from him have vanished from the shriveled mannequin, and, with them, the last to hate."¹⁶⁰ Now, he feels nothing and he is leaving one part of Jim behind him.

Isherwood perfectly manipulates with the reader, one cannot be sure about the hero's attitude to life and death. However, one of the aspect Isherwood point out is the art of letting go. In George's case it is not only love for Jim, but also the above mentioned hate. Yet, with love and hate left, what does he have? It would be a brand new George, only wiser.

¹⁵⁶ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 44

¹⁵⁷ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 43

¹⁵⁸ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 47

¹⁵⁹ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 45

¹⁶⁰ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 47

While Doris used to be his rival in love, another friend of his appears to be genuine. Charlotte, familiarly called Charley, comes from England too and she is a little too intrusive sometimes. However, it is George who calls her first this time and asks her to join for dinner. In fact, right after seeing Doris he headed to the gym. George's motivation to go to the gym is clear, after seeing a dying person he felt a spur of energy and wanted to cherish life. Spending time with Charley also seems to remind him of the good old times.

Nevertheless, just after phoning Charley, his mood starts to change, "Do I really want to see her? He asks himself, and then, What in the world made me do that?"¹⁶¹ Even regarding his closest friend he cannot make up his mind.

Isherwood named only two streets in the novel, Camphor Tree Lane and the street Charley lives on, Soledad Way, soledad meaning loneliness in Spanish. And indeed, Charley is lonely. Left by her husband, forgotten by her son, she is left alone with several acquaintances only. "She is a lot younger than George – forty-five next birthday – but, already, like him, she is a survivor."¹⁶² Charley survived an unhappy marriage, a lost son and she is still here keeping her enthusiasm.

One cannot help thinking that this scenario is nowadays common and it does not exactly make her special. However, it is probable that Isherwood had in mind more than that by using the word. Charley survived not only the unsuccessful relationships, but also the translocation from United Kingdom into United States. She struggled as well as George to find her place on the sun and she lost it. But she "hasn't given up,"¹⁶³ and neither has George.

After having a few drinks, she begins to sob and pity herself. Even though she is a survivor, she seems not to be a hard-bitten one. George accedes to her

¹⁶¹ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 53

¹⁶² Isherwood, *A Single Man* 56

¹⁶³ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 56

game and he patiently listens to her and comforts her, but at the same time he is strangely not affected by Charley's sorrow:

"He is not cold, he is not unmoved. He is truly sorry for Charley and this mess – and yet – la felicidad remains intact; he is very much at his ease."¹⁶⁴

The "felicidad", happiness, he is feeling may be considered a display of selfishness, however, the issue is more complicated. George reached this state after a long time of suffering by suddenly realizing that it is necessary to enjoy every minute he has left.

Although every day is not the same for George, this day somehow accumulated all possible events and experiences which altogether manages to change him. In fact, he endured and all the suffering led him to a revelation of happiness.

Christopher Isherwood selects and points out certain details which portray the position of an individual in a contemporary society. As Piazza claims, "George is very much like Jones or Smith or Brown, for his life is not particularly rich or luminous: if he is different, it is only in degree."¹⁶⁵ George thus becomes a representative of a society he scorns.

¹⁶⁴ Isherwood, *A Single Man* 59

¹⁶⁵ Piazza 150

6. Conclusion

In summary, it has been shown that all the characters of *Goodbye to Berlin* and *A Single Man* stand on the margin of society for various reasons. However, while people like Sally Bowles, Peter Wilkinson, Bernhard Landauer do not really penetrate into it and continue being only oddities, the protagonist of *A Single Man* actually does everything to melt into it. Therefore, George becomes a part of what he scorns and eventually is an outright representative of the contemporary society.

In *Goodbye to Berlin* Isherwood used only the eyes of the narrator, Christopher Bradshaw, to show both the positive and negative sides of his acquaintances. All of them, except for Natalia and Bernhard Landauer, were more of comical sketches or caricatures. Nevertheless, the author managed to point out the major flaws of the contemporary society. While reader laughs at Sally's foolishness, at the same time there is a penetrating sense of gloom. "On Ruegen Island" is not simply a story about a break up but it captures the atmosphere of isolation which cannot be eliminated. While these two mentioned parts of *Goodbye to Berlin* are centered on the characters themselves, the other stories are more focused on the German society and the changes it was going through. All the characters of *Goodbye to Berlin* are, or soon will be, outcasts, either for their descent or for their nonconformity. Nevertheless, Isherwood chose not to moralize since he appreciates all of them for what they really are. Christopher purely shows what he sees and lets the reader to come to a conclusion.

All the characters, for instance Peter Wilkinson or Sally Bowles, are isolated in their own cosmos, not belonging to the majority. The exception are the protagonists of the last story, "The Landauers". For the story Isherwood chose, to a certain extent, ordinary characters only to emphasize the cruelty of Nazism.

Isherwood emphasizes completely different sides of human existence in *A Single Man* compared to his earlier works. Even though homosexuality is not the subject matter, it definitely is a key feature. Without the protagonist's homosexuality *A Single Man* would become a different novel. As has been stated

before, George does not come out of the closet in the book. Yet, by means of a symbolic impersonal dialogue the reader is allowed to see the world through George's eyes.

The four main roles of George have been presented. In every environment he adapts certain mode of conduct, speech and thought. However, if one looks closely, one realizes that after all, the masks George put on are part of everyday life. Isherwood managed to apprehend the variety of humanity, and as Summers points out, he "captures the fullness of an individual life in a particular place at a specific time."¹⁶⁶ Just as place and time were important for the author in case of *Goodbye to Berlin*, the same holds true in case of *A Single Man*.

In all these roles his homosexuality slightly changes his perspective. Having to play the parts of several people at once may seem complicated, however, George this way becomes Isherwood's most complex protagonist.

However, in fact, to say in several words who one is is extremely difficult. It is important to point out that a role, as it has been commented on, is not the same as a disguise. Showing the process of playing parts in life, Isherwood managed to express the true nature of human existence.

It has been proved that despite these differences Isherwood maintained the feature which makes particular – the ability to capture the complexity of human existence and experience. In *Goodbye to Berlin* the particular stories are certain sketches of his acquaintances, sometimes mocked for their faults, other times sympathized with for their fate. The sixties enabled a novel of an overt gayness to be published. It is the novel *A Single Man* which finally allows Isherwood to open up and make use also of his homosexual experience.

¹⁶⁶ James J Berg., Chris Freeman. *The Isherwood Century: Essays on the Life and Work of Christopher Isherwood*. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 2000. 207

7. Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá známým autorem britského původu Christopherem Isherwoodem. Hlavním předmětem zkoumání je komparace dvou nejznámějších a nejúspěšnějších děl, *Goodbye to Berlin* (Sbohem, Berlín; 1936) a *A Single Man* (Svoboný muž, 1964).

Hlavní rozdíl mezi uvedenými díly tkví v tom, že zatímco *Goodbye to Berlin* skečovitou formou uvádí pokaždé jinou hlavní postavu, v druhém uvedeném románu Isherwood vytvořil postavu George, univerzitního profesora středního věku, jemuž zemřel životní partner.

Isherwood se narodil roku 1904 v Anglii do vyšší společenské třídy, záhy si však začal uvědomovat, že upjatost tohoto prostředí viktoriánské Anglie mu kvůli jeho homosexualitě nikdy neumožní svobodné konání. Tématu homosexuality se věnoval celý život, se svým partnerem Donem Bachardym aktivně participovali na hnutí za zrovnoprávnění homosexuálů.

Jelikož Isherwoodův otec zemřel v první světové válce, společně se svým mladším bratrem vyrůstali jen s matkou Kathleen. Ta se pak v Isherwoodově rané dospělosti stala hlavním důvodem jeho odchodu do zahraničí, a to především kvůli jejím konvenčním představám o budoucnosti svého nejstaršího syna a lpění na minulosti. Po neúspěšných studiích na Cambridgské univerzitě opil svou rodnou zemi s vidinou toho, že je to již napořád.

Mladý autor se na několik let usadil v Berlíně, v tehdejší době nejvíce dekadentním městě Evropy. Zde žil mezi lidmi z nižší společenské třídy a mezi jejich řadami nacházel velké množství materiálu pro své dva romány napsané o Berlíně, *Goodbye to Berlin* a *Mr Norris Changes Trains*.

Goodbye to Berlin bývá často považován za komediální román a byl také několikrát adaptován pro divadlo i film. Tato diplomová práce ovšem poukázala na to, že i přes určité komické prvky tento román zdůrazňuje především odloučení jednotlivých postav od zbytku společnosti. Nicméně Isherwood zanechává

postavy ve stadiu jakýchsi skečů a nerozvíjí plně jejich potenciál. Další charakteristikou tohoto díla je také postupně houstnoucí atmosféra v převálečném Berlíně, která je zachycena především v poslední povídce, "The Landauers".

Druhý srovnávaný román byl publikován v roce 1964 a stal se velmi populárním mezi homosexuální komunitou. Hlavní postavou je George, jehož příjmení se čtenář nikdy nedozví.

Je to právě George, který jako jediný z Isherwoodových postav dosahuje největší hloubky. Čtenář s Georgem prožívá celý den, od probuzení až do usnutí (a možné smrti). Vzhledem k Georgově odlišnosti od majority je schopen větší reflexe. Ovšem díky ní je George nucen existovat většinu času v nějaké roli a jeho identita stojí v centru zájmu práce.

George charakterizuje v poloze souseda, milence, učitele a přítele. Práce prokázala, že právě v tomto románu se Isherwoodovi podařilo zachytit samu podstatu lidské existence se všemi kladnými i zápornými stránkami.

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Anotace

Příjmení a jméno: Skálová Petra

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky, FF UP

Název práce: Koncept izolace v díle Christophera Isherwooda a jeho vývoj od *Goodbye to Berlin* k *A Single Man*

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Libor Práger, Ph.D.

Počet znaků: 110 184

Klíčová slova: Isherwood, homosexualita, Berlin, gay, vývoj

Jazyk práce: angličtina

Charakteristika: Diplomová práce se zabývá dvěma nejznámějšími romány autora britského původu Christophera Isherwooda. Práce srovnává tematiku těchto dvou děl a ukazuje, jak autora ovlivnila změna ve vnímání homosexuality společností.

Annotation

Author: Petra Skálová

Department: Dep.of English and American studies, FF UP

Title: Christopher Isherwood's Concept of Isolation from *Goodbye to Berlin* to *A Single Man*

Supervisor: PhDr. Libor Práger, Ph.D

Number of characters: 110 184

Key words: Isherwood, homosexuality, Berlin, gay, development

Language: English

Characteristics: Main theme of the thesis is development of Christopher Isherwood as an author. It analyzes two major works, *Goodbye to Berlin* and *A Single Man*, the first one written in the thirties, the second one thirty years later.