Université de Montréal

Christopher Isherwood's Experience in Weimar Germany

A Testimony of the State of Homosexuality in Weimar Germany

Par

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Ce mémoire intitulé

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A été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes

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Résumé

Ce mémoire vise à explorer la situation de l'homosexualité sous la République de Weimar à travers la perspective de Christopher Isherwood. Durant ses séjours à travers l'Allemagne de Weimar, Isherwood à retranscrit et fictionnalisé un nombre important d'évènements et d'expériences qu'il a vécus. De cela découle une interprétation d'événements et d'émotions que je qualifie dans ce mémoire de traduction d'expérience. Cette expérience offre une perspective sur diverses problématiques liées à l'homosexualité dans la République de Weimar et présente la particularité d'être présentée d'un point de vue que s'affranchit de l'exigence de la vérité au profit du ressenti de l'auteur face à l'exactitude d'un évènement. Les œuvres de Christopher Isherwood telles que *Goodbye to Berlin, Mr. Norris Changes Train*, ou bien son mémoire *Christopher And His Kind* manipulent et interrogent divers discours sur la prostitution masculine, la dynamique des relations homosexuelles de l'époque, la relation entre le langage et la notion de « vérité », ainsi que la romantisation de la République de Weimar à travers les récits et les arts.

Mots-clés : Homosexualité, Allemagne, Weimar, LGBTQ+, Christopher Isherwood, sexualité, prostitution, masculinité, vérité, langage, romantisation.

Abstract

This memoir explores the state of homosexuality in the Weimar Republic from Christopher Isherwood's perspective. During his stays throughout Weimar Germany, Isherwood transcribed and fictionalized a critical number of events and experiences he had. From this comes an interpretation of events and emotions, which I qualify in this memoir as a translation of experience. This experience offers a perspective on numerous questions linked to homosexuality in the Weimar Republic and has the particularity of being presented from a point of view which frees itself from the concept of truth, and benefits the emotions of the author instead of the accuracy of an event, Christopher Isherwood's work like *Goodbye to Berlin, Mr. Norris Changes Train*, or his memoir *Christopher And His Kind* open many discourses on male prostitution, the dynamic in homosexual relationships of the era, the link between language and the notion of "truth," and the romanticization of the Weimar Republic through stories and the arts. I decided to explore these topics through three respective chapters.

Key Words: Homosexuality, Germany, Weimar, LGBTQ+, Christopher Isherwood, sexuality, prostitution, masculinity, truth, language, romanticization.

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In memory of *Étienne Ducas-Vézina*

Introduction

In 1929 Christopher Isherwood moved to Berlin and explored the city's homosexual sub-culture. His experience and encounters in Berlin led him to translate his experience into works of fiction, such as *Goodbye to Berlin* or *Mr. Norris Changes Train.* In these novels – and his memoir *Christopher And His Kind* –Isherwood freed himself from the constraints of truth. In doing so, he chose to portray his experience through the frame of his emotions and experiences. He prioritized feelings over truth and therefore created a unique perspective on fictional truth, which I chose to call a translation of experience. The purpose of this memoir is to explain how Isherwood's unique - and foreign - perspective on Weimar Berlin helps to answer the following question: what was it to be homosexual in Germany during the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazi party? Furthermore, I look at the discourses of male prostitution and homosexual relationships, the link between language and "truth" in Isherwood's work, and the romanticization of the Weimar Republic in movies inspired by Isherwood's novels and memoir. In this introduction, I want to provide the necessary legal and scientific background and contextual information on the history of homosexuality, which is essential to fully comprehend the situation on which Isherwood chose to base his novels.

The "Third Sex" Theory

For individuals to fully develop their personality, they must have access to equal rights and consideration by others. A complete and truthful identity relies upon what individuals have the right to express and live: "He must address a discourse of "truth" to himself. But this discourse does not have the function of telling the subject the truth about himself; it should teach him, given what sexual acts are by nature, how to resort to them in a way that conforms as closely, as strictly as possible to that nature" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality V.3 143*). For Michel Foucault, the discourse of "truth," and, by extension, the "truth" about someone, is connected to the nature of

the sexual act. The sexual act and sexual desires are part of one's truth. Sexual identity and the right to love freely are part of what constitutes someone's identity. Recognizing homosexuality as a sexual identity and not a mental disorder marked significant progress for many since it allowed them to develop their identities more freely. When looking at the history of sexuality, Foucault rhetorically questions the repression of sexuality when approaching the work of Sigmund Freud:

> But have we not liberated ourselves from those two long centuries in which the history of sexuality must be seen first of all as the chronicle of an increasing repression? Only to a slight extent, we are told. Perhaps some progress was made by Freud; but with such circumspection, such medical prudence, a scientific guarantee of innocuousness, and so many precautions in order to contain everything, with no fear of "overflow," in that safest and most discrete of spaces, be-tween the couch and discourse: yet another round of whispering on a bed. (*The History of Sexuality V.1* 5)

Foucault shows how Freud's work was constrained by the same unconscious repression it was meant to counter. Indeed, the many scientific precautions and "the fear of overflow" (*The History of Sexuality V.1* 5) kept Freud from truly liberating his work from the influence of sexual repression. For all intents and purposes, it is worth noting that Foucault regarded Freud's method as "on the couch." Although he looked at sexuality from a clinical perspective, his method was still a secularized version of religious confession. By repressing his discourse through "medical prudence" and keeping his work in the frame of safe and discrete space, Freud is not able to bring his work outside the influence of repression and is, therefore, unconsciously censors himself. Even if Freud tried to erase the label of "sin" from the notion of sexuality, it stayed a "secret" that had to be analyzed when one was deemed subject to a psychological disorder. Indeed, Sigmund Freud focused a vital part of his psychoanalyst career before the First World War on the study of

sexuality. Examples of his work on sexuality are his book *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and his essay *The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life* (1912), which exposed the early stage of research on sexuality through psychoanalysis. Furthermore, Freud came from Austria, which was a profoundly Catholic state. His work scandalized many in his homeland and was often associated with his corrupting influence as a Jew[1]. Freud's unconscious need to censor and repress sexual discourse is linked to a fundamental aspect of Christian society[2] which pushed to suppress anything involving desire or sex. But it is the instrumentalization of the power of repression that forced the notion of desire into the realm of shame, therefore censoring an essential part of one's "truth" and identity from the collective unconscious. Followers of Freud came to distinguish "basic" repression used to maintain civilization from the "surplus" repression, which is added to preserve other forms of social structures such as heterosexual or patriarchal social structures. Given this distinction, optimistic Left followers of Freud opposed the persecution and criminalization of homosexuality and pushed for social reforms. Progress in the scientific, legal, and public consideration of homosexuality was crucial to forming LGBTQ+ rights and activism. Moving from religious to scientific and medical ways of thinking allowed the theorization of homosexuality beyond religious dogma. Hubert C. Kennedy points out this transition in his essay *The "Third Sex" Theory of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs*:

[1] Psychoanalysis in general and Freud, in particular, became frequent targets in Nazi and far-right campaigns. These persecutions forced Freud to flee Vienna.

[2] "An imperative was established: Not only will you confess to acts contravening the law, but you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse. Insofar as possible, nothing was meant to elude this dictum, even if the words it employed had to be carefully neutralized. The Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech. The forbidding of certain words, the decency of expressions, all the censorings of vocabulary, might well have been only secondary devices compared to that great subjugation: ways of rendering it morally acceptable and technically useful." (*The History of Sexuality V.1* 21)

> Although the foundations for the change were laid in the eighteenth century, the transition from the religious model to the medical model of homosexuality occurred mainly during the nineteenth and took firm hold during the first half of the twentieth century. It has been argued that 'one of the causal factors for the change was the attempt of certain elements in the medical community to bolster traditional Western attitudes toward sex--attitudes that were being challenged by the new rationalism of the period'. One of these challenges to traditional attitudes was the theory of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs that the homosexual male has "a feminine soul confined by a masculine body." Ulrichs' popularization of his theory in the 1860s brought comfort to many, but the rise of the medical (discase) model of homosexuality, in combination with the internal weakness of the idea of a "third sex" brought about the downfall of Ulrichs' theory. (Kennedy 103).

This transition from the religious aspect to the scientific scene allowed scholars and scientists to discuss the realities surrounding the question of homosexuality. Even if the scientific community minimized Ulrich's theorization, it is one example of how homosexuality began to be seen through different perspectives.

Homosexuality and Legal Struggles

Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code was a law that effectively criminalized male-to-male sex in Germany. Enacted by the German Empire in 1871, this law faced opposition from sexual reformers and left-wing political parties before[3] and after the First World War. It was almost

[3] Kurt Tucholsky expressed his opposition to paragraph 175 in an essay for *Die Weltbühne* which earn the support of the Social Democratic Party's leader, August Bebel: "We oppose the disgraceful paragraph 175 wherever we can; therefore, we may not join voices with the chorus that would condemn a man because he is a homosexual."(*The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* 714)

suppressed from the Criminal Code in 1929 after a coalition of left-wing parties voted against the law. This was cut short by the rise of the Nazi party. The law underwent many modifications and extensions before being finally removed from the German Criminal Code in 1994. In the first chapter of *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity*, Robert Beachy recounts how Karl Heinrich Ulrichs pleaded with the Association of German Jurists to decriminalize same-sex love. His advocacy failed to advance his agenda, but it marked a milestone in the history of LGBTQ+ activism. It was followed by what Beachy calls "the first coming-out in modern history" (Beachy 4). Laurie Marhoefer points to the radical aspect that Ulrichs' plea had at that time in *Sex and The Weimar Republic*: "This type of activism, which I am terming "narrower," was quite radical in its day. It challenged fundamental norms of gender and sexuality. It would be hard to call Ulrich's public speech against the sodomy law before the Congress of German Jurists in 1867 anything but radical" (Marhoefer 213). As radical as they seemed, Ulrichs' actions would eventually become inscribed in a broader movement of emancipation that took hold in the Weimar Republic: "Yet by the Weimar period, if not sooner, the constituency for a broader movement that challenged other norms in addition – such as those of class, criminality, disability, and respectability – was apparent" (Marhoefer 213). This broader movement of emancipation laid the groundwork for a discourse of liberation that addressed the reality faced by the German population. Like Kennedy, Beachy considers Ulrichs the pioneer who "helped inspire the world's first movement for homosexual rights, launched a generation later in Berlin, in 1897" (Beachy 4-5). Beachy traces the origins of the term "homosexual" in the German language:

> The word "homosexuality" was itself a German invention and appeared as *Homosexualität* for the first time in 1869 in a German-language pamphlet that polemicized against the Prussian anti-sodomy statute. An odd amalgam of Latin and Greek, *Homosexualität*

> became the enduring appellation for same-sex erotic love. Its precise definition varied, certainly, and while sympathetic doctors or homosexual rights activists used the word in a more neutral fashion to suggest the condition of having a fixed sexual orientation, others felt that the word suggested that same-sex desire was caused by disease or degeneration. (Beachy 134)

By giving it a name - homosexuality - more legitimacy accrued to this concept and thus to a shared consciousness of it as a sexual orientation. At the same time, a more progressive approach by German psychiatrists raised the possibility that homosexuality could be congenital:

> [Hüllessem] might have adopted the view that homosexuality was inborn or congenital. In this sense the Department of Homosexuals[4] actually gave life to a theoretical construct—the theory of the inborn homosexual—by projecting it as a social and cultural identity and allowing it to develop within a network of bars and same-sex entertainments. (Beachy 56)

Beachy's exploration of Ulrichs' activism and of the state of homosexuality in Germany at the end of the 19th century allows for a better understanding of what will lead Berlin to become a capital of sexual liberation and homosexuality in the early 20th century.

Das Institut für Sexualwissenschaft

The early 20th century was a milestone in the psychological understanding of sexuality. The end of the German Reich and the rise of the democratic Weimar Republic allowed the public and scientific community to look at the questions surrounding sexuality more openly. A primary

[4] "Department of Homosexuals" (Homosexuellen Dezernat) was a Berlin Police department founded in 1885. Refer to Beachy, Robert. *Gay Berlin* (p. 54).

example is the opening of Magnus Hirschfeld's *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexual Science) in Tiergarten:

> The institute offered medical and psychological counseling on a range of sexual issues to thousands of individuals, including heterosexual men and women, homosexuals, cross-dressers, and intersex individuals. The institute also represented the first attempt to establish "sexology," or sexual science, as a topic of legitimate academic study and research. Nowhere else in the world was there so much as a university department or chair devoted to the subject, much less an entire institute. (Beachy 160)

Being the first and only institute of this type in the early 20th century, the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* marks the beginning of the institutionalization of sexual science as a legitimate field of study: “The Institute for Sexual Science championed the principle that science rather than religious morality ought to dictate how state and society responded to sexuality” (Marhoefer 4). Beachy's sixth chapter, "Weimar Sexual Reform and the Institute for Sexual Science," recounts the significant progress made in psychological studies on sexuality in Germany. Notably, support came "from Berlin's police president, who then promoted the idea to the Prussian minister of the interior" (Beachy, 160). It also attracted the attention of the socialist and mainly left-wing movements. The institute's reputation reached the nascent Soviet Union, marked by the visit of a delegation of Soviet doctors backed by the Soviet Ministry of Health[5] and by the Commissar for Health in the Soviet Union, Nikolai Semashko[6]. Through its reputation, the *Institut für*

[5] Lauritsen John, Thorstad David. *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864–1935).* New York: Times Change Press. pp. 28–29. 1995.

[6] Healey Dan. Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent. 2001. pp.132-133.

Sexualwissenschaft enabled research to expand in the scientific sphere and fostered a public willingness to democratize sexual education, research and understanding of sexuality.

Homosexual Emancipation in Weimar: Toward a New Definition of Homosexuality

With the establishment of the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* and thanks to the basis offered by late 19th-century homosexual activism – mainly directed toward the abolition of paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code – German activists laid the groundwork for homosexual emancipation in Europe: "German activists – Hirschfeld foremost among them – did much to set the terms of gay activism that remained in place throughout the twentieth century, and not only in Germany" (Marhoefer 8). By defining and opening discourse around sexuality and what it is to be homosexual, activists placed the question of sexuality in the foreground of public discourse and challenged public opinion. However, the grounding of homosexuality in the field of "sciences of biology and sexology" (Marhoefer 8) and its emancipation came at the cost of public exposure: "The gains of homosexual emancipation in the Weimar period were contingent on the renunciation by homosexuals and transvestites of an assertive public presence, though they did carve out a limited subcultural presence. This sort of bargain about public space was a key issue for later movements as well" (Marhoefer 8). Even if the homosexual subculture did not vanish with the attempts at emancipation, it moved from a confined to a public space. This reluctance to assert a public presence can be explained by the change in power dynamics brought by the shift from confined to shared space. When homosexuality was limited to subculture, its power came from its hidden aspect. By being somewhat hidden from the public sphere, it could be considered outside the reach of power and enjoy a form of independence. However, under the gaze of public opinion, power dynamics changed by subjecting the homosexual subculture to the reach of power. But thanks to activism and the scientific definition of homosexuality, it could withstand outside power

by asserting its own forms of pleasure: “Under the Weimar Republic, a movement based on these claims had real success in winning reforms – most crucially to censorship – for the first time in history” (Marhoefer 8). Emancipation from the constraints of censorship was an essential step in allowing German’s homosexual subculture to expand and radiate even beyond its borders.

I.

Goodbye to Berlin: A Perspective on Male Prostitution and the Dynamics of Homosexual Relationships

Berlin: A Force Against Inhibition

In 1939, Christopher Isherwood published *Goodbye to Berlin.* This autobiographically based fiction tells the story of Christopher, Isherwood's alter-ego's stay in Germany between 1929 and 1932. Through Isherwood's eyes, this novel presents the state of Weimar Germany and, in particular, Berlin. His stay in Germany allowed him to experience the transition between Weimar Germany and the Third Reich and create a picture of life before the Nazis came to power by focusing on the outcasts of German society and the minorities that the Nazis would later persecute. Through other works like *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* or *Christopher And His Kind*, Isherwood also highlights the situation of homosexuality in Weimar Germany and what it meant to be homosexual in this period of impending doom.

Christopher Isherwood's motivation for visiting Berlin is summarized by one famous sentence from his autobiography *Christopher And His Kind*: "To Christopher, Berlin meant Boys" (*Christopher And His Kind* 9). This desire to seek sexual experiences in Berlin is the result of Isherwood's reluctance to experiment with men from his own country or social class: "This was because Christopher was suffering from an inhibition, then not unusual among upper-class homosexuals; he couldn't relax sexually with a member of his own class or nation" (*Christopher And His Kind* 9). The "inhibition" he felt while living in England led him to cross the German border, where he would experiment more fully with his sexual desires. An essential part of his experience in Berlin is comprised in his novel *Goodbye to Berlin,* a work that takes the form of a novel while incorporating many autobiographical aspects. Isherwood fictionalizes real people to protect their identities or preserve his narrative's continuity. While modifying some names and events, he works to keep the true nature of his environment intact. He tells what I would call essential lies to translate his reality to the reader and to create a more conveyable narration of his

experience abroad. Isherwood's texts are full of historical, cultural, and intellectual detail that reveal his sophistication. *Goodbye to Berlin* is an excellent example of this process. It is openly influenced by Berlin's physical, social and cultural environment and by authors close to Isherwood like W.H Auden and Stephen Spender. This novel is a testimony to a Berlin and a Germany that were to be transformed by fascism, oppression, and the darkest hours of the 20th century. Berlin, before the Nazis, was considered the haven of progress for sexual freedom. An excerpt from Stephen Spender's *The Temple* describes this feeling, shared by many of Spender's friends toward Weimar Germany:

> 1929 was the last year of that strange Indian Summer - the Weimar Republic. For many of my friends and for myself, Germany seemed a paradise where there was no censorship and young Germans enjoyed extraordinary freedom in their lives. By contrast England was the country where James Joyce's *Ulysses* was banned, as was also Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* - a novel about a lesbian relationship. England was where the police, at the order of Mr. Mead, a London magistrate, took down from the walls of the Warren Gallery pictures from an exhibition of D. H. Lawrence's paintings. (Spender 12)

The strong opposition to censorship and the desire for freedom are important reasons why authors like Isherwood or Spender, who wanted to live and create without England's restrictions, were attracted to Weimar Germany. Weimar's push toward progress put the whole country, particularly Berlin, at the centre of the attention of the artistic community.

'On Ruegen Island": Domination and Submission in Same-Sex Relationships

During his stay in Germany, Isherwood's role as an observer allowed him to depict events from the perspective of an outsider who tries to fit into a foreign environment. The reader is incited to pay attention to the narrator's environment and how Christopher can adapt to his new reality. In

Isherwood's chapter "On Ruegen Island," the focus is on the relationship between Peter Wilkinson, an Englishmen, and "a German working-class boy from Berlin, named Otto Nowak. He [was] sixteen or seventeen years old". (*Goodbye to Berlin* 94). At first sight, the relationship between the two men can be considered toxic since it relies on a constant dynamic of conflict and money. Since the island is isolated and free of outside influence, the relationship between Otto and Peter can be considered free from social pressure.

Peter's place in the relationship is ambiguous. He is characterized by his strong desire to possess Otto. This desire creates an opposition between the two men: "It is Peter's will against Otto's body. Otto is his whole body; Peter is only his head" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 95). This opposition creates a struggle in which Otto's physical dominance tries to outweigh Peter's mind and will. Peter's desire to hold onto Otto leads to some violent outbursts: "Suddenly Peter slapped Otto hard on both cheeks" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 106). The reason for the fight is left unexplained, but it is an example of how the relationship seems to be in a constant state of conflict. Peter's disapproval of Otto's behaviour is expressed through violence and frustration, Peter's ways to enforce some sort of control over Otto: "He wants to force Otto into making a certain kind of submission to his will, and this submission Otto refuses to instinctively make" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 107). The word "submission" can be understood from different perspectives. Peter's desire to keep Otto under his influence can be sentimental or driven by feelings of vulnerability, leading to a desire to feel superior to Otto. The idea is that Peter wishes to humiliate Otto to preserve an illusion of superiority. The age difference might also be a factor since Peter is around thirty years old, Isherwood's age, while Otto is a minor. Peter seems to enjoy a position of superiority over his lover. This superiority is translated through the financial security he is offering Otto, which, in Peter's mind, should be enough to keep Otto under his control. By having his feeling of superiority

threatened by someone much younger, Peter keeps this conflict dynamic alive to deny Otto's refusal to submit to him. Submission can also be looked at from a sexual perspective. Even if sexuality is not directly mentioned in this chapter, Isherwood insinuates that it is not absent from this story. The context of conflict and the desire for submission could be the expression of Peter's sexual desire, which seems extremely difficult to express since Otto maintains an independent nature throughout the text. Sexual submission might be a source of excitement for Peter and, therefore, fuels the constant conflict between the two. It creates a vicious circle where conflict nourishes the relationship and the desire for submission, reinstating a state of conflict.

Otto Nowak and the Place of Male Prostitution in Weimar Berlin

While less ambiguous than Peter's, Otto's place in the relationship still holds a double meaning since he is both a gold-digger and the personification of Weimar Germany. Otto's intentions are clear; he is only with Peter for his money. This focus on money and the place it takes in the relationship is linked to the economic situation in Weimar. The aftermath of the First World War brought many unprecedented economic struggles to Germany. The financial retributions imposed by the treaty of Versailles, the great depression of 1929[7] and the hyperinflation of Weimar's economy[8] forced many to seek different sources of income. Prostitution enabled people to live more comfortable lives: "For some prostitutes, such as Berlin's transvestite prostitutes, selling sex was a primary occupation. But for other people, occasional prostitution was a ready source of spending money. Men in low-paying jobs, like clerks, telegram boys, and street sweepers, could

[7] Marhoefer, L. (2015). *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German homosexual emancipation and the rise of the Nazis*. University of Toronto Press. p.14

[8] Fergusson, A. (1975). *When Money Dies: The Nightmare of the Weimar Collapse.* Kimber.

make their lives more comfortable with a little bit of money to buy things like cigarettes and theatre tickets" (Marhoefer 118-119).

Otto enjoys a commercial relationship with Peter. Otto's motivation to engage in this relationship is strongly influenced by money. Still, the emotional aspect of their relationship is much more complicated. He openly flirts with the teacher during his stay on the island. Since the teacher is a woman, the reader doubts Otto's sexuality. Isherwood keeps Otto's sexual orientation ambiguous in *Goodbye to Berlin*. He could be bisexual or simply with Peter despite being heterosexual. Laurie Marhoefer comments on Otto's sexuality in *Sex and the Weimar Republic:* "Otto was a muscled, macho, working-class type who, Isherwood reported, "preferred women to men" but nevertheless embarked on a long, emotionally involved affair with Isherwood. Their relationship was no simple exchange of money for sex" (Marhoefer 118). Otto flirting with the teacher seems to worry Peter enough to expose some critical insecurities in their relationship. Peter is unsure about Otto's sexual orientation and true intentions. At the same time, Otto is fully aware of his sexual attraction and impact on Peter. Brian Finney's *Christopher Isherwood: A critical biography* highlights Otto's awareness of his sexual attraction and his similarities with Sally Bowles, an important character encountered by Christopher. She is an aspiring actress and singer whom Isherwood also portrays as a gold-digger:

> What lures Sally to Berlin, for example, is manifested in characters like Otto, whom she never meets. Nevertheless, they both are gold-diggers; both are prepared to use their considerable powers of sexual attraction for their own ends; and both are in the final analysis victims more often than victimizers, failures in the game of love for money from which only Frl Kost, the professional, seems likely to win any permanent betterment for herself. Yet perversely it is

> their vulnerability that attracts Isherwood (and us) because their failures signify the triumph of humanity in them over the profit motive. (Finney 149)

Finney highlights how Otto uses his relationship with Peter for his own ends. However, the idea of Otto as a victim due to his failure at the "game of love" is interesting since it suggests this is a broader context for Otto's desire to use Peter. Indeed, it seems that Otto has reasons for trying to get the most money he can from him. Otto's "vulnerability" is what drives him – like Sally – to become a gold-digger. Financial distress and material ambitions lead them to trade some of their freedom to achieve a better life. However, their humanity wins out over the economic motivations for their actions. For Otto, the relations he creates might be motivated by money. However, he still develops structured feelings toward the older men.

Otto's prostitution and gold-digging are tied to the socio-economic context. While commercial sex (Marhoefer 118) or money-driven relationships – similar to "escorting"[9] – became a norm in Berlin's homosexual community, the homosexual emancipation movements tended to see male prostitution as a threat to their actions:

> Commercial sex was not an issue that homosexual emancipation could ignore. Many homosexual emancipationists saw it as something from which they ought to distance their movement. It was one of the most public and disreputable forms of male-male sex, and homosexual emancipationists who prized respectability – that is, most homosexual emancipationists – derided it. *Friendship* magazine ranted against just the sort of Tiergarten

[9] The term "escorting" designates the practice of providing someone to escort a person. This practice is mainly motivated by the mark of social rank a male or female escort can provide to a client. This practice is regularly associated with sex and prostitution.

> cruising that Hiller[10] enjoyed. Yet at the same time, homosexual emancipation could not credibly claim to have nothing to do with male prostitution. Male prostitutes were men who had sex with men, and some, although not all, self-identified as homosexual. In addition, many "respectable," middle-class homosexuals paid for sex or engaged in relationships that had a commercial element, like Isherwood's relationship with Otto. (Marhoefer 118-119)

The pervasiveness of male prostitution created a kind of *entre-deux* situation where homosexual emancipationists wanted to distance themselves from male prostitution. Still, male prostitution was a means for homosexuals to emancipate their sexuality. Isherwood's relationship with Otto represents precisely this kind of *entre-deux* situation. Isherwood's relationship with Otto exemplifies how male prostitution in Berlin was a service prised by Berlin's bourgeoisie. The large amount of money necessary to maintain Isherwood's relationships with Otto shows that male prostitution was reserved for the few who could afford it, meaning the German bourgeoisie and foreign visitors who enjoyed a similar social status. Magnus Hirschfeld believed that "the criminalization and stigmatization of male-male sex drove homosexual men to pay for sex: they had to keep their sex lives secret because of social scorn and the law, so they hired prostitutes" (Marhoefer 118-119). The fact that such relationships were criminalized created a form of excitement in which the "respectable" bourgeoisie collided with the wild atmosphere of the working class. Together, these two social classes defied the law through their relationships, which became a source of thrill for the bourgeois men. They could enjoy the thrill of sexual inter-class relationships while at the same time preserving their privacy. Hence, the criminalization and the

[10] "Kurt Hiller was a baby-faced, balding man in his thirties, who held a doctorate in law and came from a middle-class Jewish family. He was Hirschfeld's ally and a member of the leadership of the homosexual emancipation group that Hirschfeld had co-founded decades earlier, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (Wissenschaftlichhumanitäres Komitee, WhK)" – (Marhoefer 6)

stigmatization of homosexuality in Weimar Berlin created a state where prostitution became the preferred way to enjoy a relationship or sexual desire. It also allowed male prostitutes to enjoy social and economic security and became essential for Berlin's homosexual community.

In Isherwood, the normalization of male prostitution is portrayed through the character of Otto. Otto is the human representation of the male prostitution phenomenon and its influence. He can attract the desire of a "respectable" Englishman and maintains a commercial relationship with Peter and Isherwood. Through the character of Otto, Isherwood shows the importance of male prostitution and how it was an integral part of the homosexual sub-culture in Weimar Berlin. Also, Isherwood's relationship with Otto shows the influence bourgeois society had on male prostitution and how the stigmatization and criminalization of same-sex relationships ironically created the demand necessary to maintain a need for male prostitution.

Commercial Relationships, Economics, and the Dynamic of Power

Otto and Peter's relationship can be considered a commercial one, in which Peter can be seen as Otto's client. In a way, this opposition between Otto and Peter also echoes the political situation in Weimar Germany by creating a symbolic representation of the Entente's occupation of the Ruhr Basin after World War I. In *The Myths of Reparations: Central European History,* Sally Marks notes:

> The only feasible Entente action of consequence was an occupation of the Ruhr Basin, which Britain opposed with mounting vigor as the prospect came closer. Britain stood aloof, denouncing the occupation as immoral and illegal, but rendered it feasible by permitting France to mount it on British-controlled railways in the Rhineland. (Marks 241-243)

As mentioned by Marks, the British actively participated in the Ruhr Basin's Occupation by permitting, maintaining, and controlling the railways, which are essential for the movement of goods, and the maintenance of infrastructures. Even if the British denounced this Occupation, they rapidly sought to take control of a critical aspect of its application. Peter's repeated attempts to exercise control over Otto, even if he knows that this desire cannot be fulfilled, echoes Britain's actions and seemingly irresistible urge to take control – even if it recognizes this control as immoral. Isherwood, as a strong pacifist[11] and anti-imperialist, used his character to denounce imperialist actions and oppression. It seems that Peter is a metaphor for the Entente's oppression and desire to tame Germany and its population. Peter represents Britain's complicity and inaction in the Occupation. He tries to preserve the illusion of his superiority at the cost of his moral integrity. He tries to impose conditions through a commercial relationship, but Otto's instinctive refusal is also a metaphor for Germany. Peter's pride also echoes the actions of the victorious Entente. While Otto represents a form of passive resistance that resonates with Weimar Germany. Even if Otto complies with some of Peter's demands, he does so in his own interest. By ending his relationship with the teacher, he can reassure Peter and maintain his power over him. Since he does not give into Peter's demands immediately, Otto shows that he still holds influence over Peter and can negotiate. He reaffirms his position as an equal to Peter. Peter's interest is emotional and driven by pride; Otto's interest is economical, driven by money and is, therefore, more calculated.

Finney points out how Isherwood shows how Weimar Germany's economic and social disarray impacts its population, particularly its youth. Weimar promised much to its population but could not meet its objectives in the aftermath of the war. The political system also brought

[11] "He felt obliged to become a pacifist, he refused to deny his homosexuality, he wanted to keep as much of his leftism as he could" (*Christopher and His Kind* 310).

confusion. Germany rapidly transitioned from a monarchy to a democracy. The proportional representation in the Reichstag allowed the formation of an important number of political parties that confused the electorate. According to Stephen J. Lee: "With 30 or more parties contesting each election, and no national threshold to eliminate the smallest of them, coalition governments quickly became a 'fact of life" (Stephen J. Lee 19). The constant disagreements within the government and its instability became norms that obstructed any political change. Also, the Treaty of Versailles brought social instability since the population blamed the Weimar Republic for its unfairness. Finally, the economic vulnerability was brought about by the reparation payments and the later collapse of the economy in late 1929[12]. The Crash was particularly traumatic, since the country had been masking the scars of the past war and past regime with a strong desire for progress and economic prosperity:

> The Reichsbank was convinced that it had to ensure the availability of credit for business and paper currency for daily transactions. Only these measures, it believed, would keep the economy humming and maintain social peace. So by various instruments it continually increased the money supply, which of course only provided more fuel for inflation. (Weitz 134)[13]

Germany's focus on its economic prosperity was based on unrealistic economic doctrines. The continuous flow of money did not maintain social peace since it destroyed the population's buying power. The hyperinflation exposed a fundamental problem with Weimar's economic politics,

[12] Lee, S. J. (2010). The Weimar Republic. Routledge. p 53-54

[13] Weitz, Eric D. *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

which did not sufficiently consider social factors. The socio-economical perspective concealed the social aspect of policy. It jeopardized the very social stability it was tasked to maintain:

> In December [1922], the Prussian statistical office concluded that unskilled chemical workers were earning only 69.4 percent of the minimum existence requirement for a married couple with one child; for skilled workers, it was 76.1 percent, and printers, a traditionally well paid occupation, earned only 58.2 percent of the required minimum[14]. (Weitz 134)

Economic instability led to social inequalities and turmoil. By not considering the country's economic realities, the Weimar government endangered its legitimacy as a competent government. In *The Temple*, Stephen Spender illustrates through a dialogue the political confusion brought on by this instability:

> 'I am late,' said Joachim without, however, apologizing, 'because I have spent the entire morning in the most stupid way possible. Sheer imbecility!'
>
> 'Doing what?'
>
> 'Well, there is an election today here in Germany, and I am supposed to vote, so, as I know nothing of politics, I have spent the entire morning reading the programmes of fifteen different political parties.'
>
> 'Are there fifteen?'
>
> 'Far more - thirty-seven in all, I think.'

[14] Table printed in Feldman, Gerald D. The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics and Society in the German Inflation, 1993. P. 613.

'Why?'

That's because of the wonderful system which we have under the Weimar Republic.'

'What system?'

'I don't know exactly what it's called, but the result of it is that anyone who forms a political party which in the whole of Germany can obtain as many votes as are 1-500th (or whatever the total of parliamentary seats in the Reichstag amounts to) of all votes of voters in Germany can elect a member to the Reichstag. I believe there is a dachshund-lovers' party.'

'So how will you vote?'

'I won't vote.' (Spender 150-151)

The lack of connection with social realities fuelled distrust in the government, leading the population to seek a solution in more radical ideologies. The trauma of the First World War, particularly its last years, was overlooked when considering economic policies. The population saw inflation as a direct result of the war. Its impact was devastating on youth: "Everybody stole. Everybody sold what they had to sell — themselves included. A boy of fourteen, from Krampf's class, peddled cocaine between school hours, in the streets" (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 230). Just as Otto Nowak hides his vulnerability behind his appearance, Weimar Germany hides its own through a façade of prosperity that crumbles under the weight of socio-economic realities.

Beyond economics, however, Finney shows how Isherwood draws a broader psychological parallel between Otto and Weimar Germany:

> [Peter] displays its own neuroses and even seeks its own unsatisfactory cures, substituting Otto for his expensive Berlin analyst. "On Ruegen Island' uses the metaphor of mental illness and disease to make a complex statement about German society at large. As always Isherwood works through the actual and the particular. Otto represents the best and the worst of Germany during the final years of the Weimar Republic. He has the health and vitality of an animal and like many very animal people, he has considerable powers of healing - when he chooses to use them' (p 406). Also, like an animal, he is utterly selfish, seeking his sustenance and his pleasure with complete indifference to those around him. Peter seeks to cure his own neurosis by buying Otto and in doing so resembles all those other foreigners who were flocking to Berlin at the time for similar reasons. (Finney 150)

Otto's "animal-like" nature exposes a form of trauma. He is obsessed with his body: "Peter has bought him a chest-expander, and, with this, he exercises solemnly at all hours of the day" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 95). Otto's obsessive attitude toward his body gives him the strength to oppose Peter's will. Otto's body is also a way to escape his reality; his body is an argument to seduce other men. Otto can escape his environment and reality thanks to his body and access a standard of living higher than the one available to most working-class citizens. His body and his strength become a shield against reality. Otto hides his vulnerability and his flaws behind a seemingly perfect appearance. His "animalistic" nature hides a desire to overcome a vulnerability born of past traumas. Otto, like Weimar Germany, is scarred by his past and hides his trauma. Still, he opposes the country he is meant to represent by expressing a will to fight and overcome Peter's desires. He does so to the detriment of the common good, putting his personal interest first.

By representing Germany through the character of Otto, Isherwood shows how while Weimar's ambitions are legitimate, they cannot be fulfilled since they are built on shaky premises.

This instability, however, does not negate the value of the social progress made throughout the Weimar years. This progress, however, generated conflict inside the homosexual emancipation movement itself. For example, Marhoefer recounts how Magnus Hirschfeld dismissed a suggestion by Kurt Hiller that "a large number of homosexuals should publicly declare themselves. This tactic of "mass self-denunciation" had been proposed and rejected by homosexual emancipationists for decades. Hirschfeld called mass declaration a "utopian" fantasy; the "internal and external inhibitions" of the homosexual psyche would prevent a significant number of people from allowing themselves to be publicly identified as homosexual" (Marhoefer 7). Disagreement over the correct way to advance the emancipation movement and Hirschfeld's warning about "internal and external inhibition" shows how it was believed that not many homosexuals would be comfortable enough to participate in a mass "coming out." Such a massive declaration would have seemed mostly improbable since the condition for a mass emancipation were still far from being optimal. He shows that the public opinion and the mindset of early 20th-century homosexual men were not entirely ready to endorse public homosexual emancipation. Trauma from the criminalization of homosexuality and the oppression of homosexuals strongly impacted the psyche of homosexual emancipationists.

Sexuality, Psychoanalysis and Political Radicalisation

When adopting a psychological perspective on German society, one might further look at the question from a psychoanalytic perspective. In Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, Otto's animalistic nature resonates with an early Freudian concept; the naïve:

> The naive originates when one puts himself completely outside of inhibition, because it does not exist for him; that is, if he seems to overcome it without any effort. What conditions the function of the naive is the fact that we are aware that the person does not

> possess this inhibition, otherwise we should not call it naive but impudent, and instead of laughing we should be indignant. The effect of the naive, which is irresistible, seems easy to understand. The expenditure of inhibition which we usually make suddenly becomes inapplicable when we hear the naive and is discharged through laughter; as the removal of the inhibition is direct, and not the result of an incited operation, there is no need for a suspension of attention. We behave like the hearer in wit, to whom the economy of inhibition is given without any effort on his part. (Freud 763)[15]

The irresistible aspect of the lack of inhibition makes it even more difficult to dissociate from the naïve. As seen through Freudian psychoanalysis, Otto's lack of inhibition shows his naiveté. The absence of inhibition is part of the personality he displays to Isherwood. Still, it is unclear if it is his real personality or just a made-up personality – similar to an act – that he has created to appeal to other men. Indeed, Isherwood points out that Otto had the habit of acting differently in his presence: "Otto, as usual, had begun acting at once" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 126). This carefully calculated made-up personality is something proper to Otto. It is part of his act as a gold-digger, but it becomes part of him. This made-up personality, qualified as "acting," is so natural for Otto that he can instantly switch his behaviour. Otto's made-up naiveté becomes part of his identity. Since, for Freud, the naïve is irresistible, Otto understands the power his naiveté gives him. It is a way for him to appeal to others. He is met by the laughter of Isherwood but also by Peter's indignation. Freud warns that reacting to the naïve with laughter is comparable to encouraging naïve behaviour. Peter's reaction is precisely what Freud says is the reaction that might accentuate the naïve. Isherwood's symbolic link between Otto and Weimar Germany shows the place the

[15] Freud, Sigmund, and A. A. Brill. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. Modern Library, 1995.

naïve holds in Isherwood's environment. Given Otto's role as a representation of "the best and the worst of Germany during the final years of the Weimar Republic," the question of the naïve also impacts the country Isherwood depicts in his novel. Germany's lack of inhibition can be seen in its lack of action toward the radicalization of its population. The government kept working as if the economic issues did not affect the population and kept making political promises without the means to achieve them. This naïve idea from the government that the population would support democracy in a time of economic and social turmoil kept it from recognizing the rapid political drift of the population. Daniel Guérin writes about this political drift in *The Brown Plague*: "Nobody, to tell the truth, knew the *why* of anything any longer. And so we saw Nazi workers take part in strikes against the Papen decrees. And we also saw the uncommitted drift from one camp to another with disconcerting ease: Social Democrats becoming Nazis, Nazis becoming Communists, and vice-versa" (Guérin 72). The turmoil brought political instability, which ultimately led to a political drift to the extreme. Without an effective government, the population lost its political inhibitions, which led to the naïve idea that drastic decisions would solve its problems: "Nazis and Communists found common ground in their hatred of Social Democracy and in the poisonous slogan for National Liberation. Socialists and fascists found common ground in the myths of a centralized economy and apolitical trade unionism integrated into the state structure" (Guérin 72-73). For Guérin, Nazis and Communists developed a similar hatred toward the Weimar government. Those similarities echo the irresistibility of the naïve that Freud mentions. The attraction of these extreme political parties is due to their complete lack of political and social inhibition. They differ from mainstream parties by operating militias and expressing intense hatred and direct violence against one another. Inhibition is absent from the Nazi and Communist parties in Weimar Germany. At the same time, the population satisfies itself without political inhibition

as it drifts quickly between extreme ideologies. Weimar's lack of reaction strengthened the people's naiveté, which was already growing in the collective unconscious: "And above all, weariness took its toll. There was no sign of economic recovery. Would one ever find work again? The political parties had promised so much. So many posters had been read, so many leaflets had been skimmed. There had been so many electoral campaigns, so many ballots cast in vain" (Guérin 73). This general distrust is the direct consequence of Weimar's naïve attitude toward its population. The continuous flow of political promises was overshadowed by the harsh reality of poverty in the working class. The population developed a survivalist nature which pushed it to prioritize its survival over its "inhibition" and political integrity. The discourse of the average worker would therefore become contradictory to his original political beliefs: "And from the most disoriented workers I heard this monologue, the death knell of democratic Germany: "Ah, if only the leaders could work together! But this is a remote and unlikely possibility. So why shouldn't I listen to these new saviors who promise bread and jobs, to free me from the chains of the Treaty of Versailles, and who swear that they are a revolutionary socialist workers' party, too? Heil Hitler!"" (Guérin 73). The survival instinct creates a condition where workers end up in a political paradox: the worker is convinced that the government failed him; he is tired of the failed promises of the Weimar government; he seeks comfort in the promises of the Nazi party, which he accepted as a "revolutionary socialist workers' party." Despite the intentions of the Nazis to eradicate social liberties, the worker only focuses on his survival and does not consider the party's full intentions.

The radicalization of the German electorate also had a direct impact on the homosexual community. At both extremes of the political spectrum, homosexuality was presented as a vice. The Nazi party maintained a solid hostility toward homosexuality during its rise to power. Robert

Schwartzwald writes about the Nazis' perspective on homosexuality in his Introduction to Daniel Guérin's *The Brown* Plague:

> Despite the fact that certain leading Nazi figures, including SA leader Ernst Rohm, were known to be homosexual, the party's shrill response on being canvassed on its views toward homosexuality ought to have served as sufficient warning of the persecutions to come should the Nazis ever assume power: "Anyone who even thinks of homosexual love is our enemy," they warned. "We reject anything that emasculates our people and makes it a plaything for our enemies, for we know that life is a fight and it's madness to think that men will ever embrace fraternally .... [H]omosexuality ... robs us of our last chance to free our people from the bondage which now enslaves it" (in Steakley, 84). (*The Brown Plague* 15)

After taking power, the Nazis sent a clear message when Hitler ordered the execution of Ernst Röhm during The Night of the Long Knives. In his book *Nationalism and Sexuality: middle-class morality and sexual norms in modern Europe,* George L. Mosse notes:

> Two years after his defense of Rohm, Hitler personally directed the murder of the S.A. chief of staff. The purge of the S.A. was officially justified as a blow against homosexuality. Indeed, Hitler's instructions to Rohm's successor as S.A. chief of staff, which were made public, commanded him to run an organization to which mothers could entrust their sons (thus admitting implicitly, what he had denied two years before, that the sexual comportment of the leader mattered). (*Nationalism and Sexuality* 159)

The purge of the S.A. and the directive given to Rohm's successor mark the application of the Nazi doctrine against homosexuality. Despite Hitler's previous passive position on sexual

comportment[16], the Nazi position against homosexuality was an essential part of their ideology[17]: The eradication of same-sex behaviour was an integral component of Nazi efforts to achieve the racial purification of Germany, as defined by historian Rüdiger Lautman as "an attempt to keep the Fatherland free from taint."[18] Repression of homosexuality was necessary to protect a "fit and healthy social organism, the racial community, a Volksgemeinschaft," or Volk – the pinnacle of Nazi social organization" (*The Enemy Within: Homosexuality in the Third Reich, 1933-1945,* Eliot H. Bode 3). In this regard, the naiveté of the Weimar regime directly affected the German homosexual community. Weimar's failure to act regarding the rise of Nazi ideology and its anti-homosexual ideas can be seen as one of the manifestations of the regime's naïveté: "The particular naïveté with which such vituperations were dismissed or ignored was fatal to Weimar, a society in which Spender had vainly searched for a "political will to survive" among the cultural splendours and advanced attitudes" (Schwartzwald in Guérin 15). Weimar's dismissal of the threat posed by the Nazi party and its ideology is one of the main reasons for its demise. Even with a progressive approach for the era, its lack of "political will to survive" meant that it could not do so without confronting the Nazi party. By allowing the Nazis to spread their ideology, they allowed them to present homosexuality as a threat to the nation. They undermined the previous work that had fought for its emancipation.

[16] "Hitler's views on the appropriate treatment of homosexuals were more ambiguous. Hitler was fully aware of the homosexuality of one of his closest subordinates, Sturmabteilung (SA) chief of staff Ernst Rohm, and was unconcerned by it. As long as the "brownshirts" continued to be a useful paramilitary force, Hitler was of the opinion that Rohm's "private life was his own affair as long as he used some discretion." Hitler's opinion evidently changed after the purge of the SA in 1934 and the onset of war six years later. In 1941, Hitler ordered the purge of any homosexual elements in the SS, and that "police officers who committed lewdness with another man or permitted themselves to be misused were to be given the death sentence." Thus, although Hitler was initially tolerant of homosexuality, he later demanded the most severe punishment for offenders" (*The Enemy Within: Homosexuality in the Third Reich, 1933-1945*, Eliot H. Bode 5)

[17] Reefer to Steakley's quote p.22

[18] Rüdiger Lautman, "The Pink Triangle: The Persecution of Homosexual Males in Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany," in Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality, ed. Salvatore J. Licata (New York, Haworth, 1981): 144.

Isherwood provides another example of how Nazi ideology permeated all sectors of society through the doctor on Ruegen Island. When introducing the doctor, Isherwood takes care to highlight the doctor's urge to control a game of volleyball, which he invited Peter and Otto to play: "The little man, after introducing himself as a surgeon from a Berlin hospital, at once took command, assigning to us the places where we were to stand. He was very firm about this — instantly ordering me back when I attempted to edge a little nearer" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 103). The quasi-militaristic instructions given by the doctor quickly present the reader with an idea of his personality. Like the Nazi party, the doctor assumes a role he thinks is rightfully his. His instructions must be followed precisely since, for the doctor, it is the only way the game can be played correctly. He does not give space to individual decisions or freedom in the game. He prioritizes his perspective of discipline over the pleasure of the game. The doctor's decision to stop the game to explain the right way to throw the ball also shows how confident he is in his teachings:

> Then it appeared that Peter was throwing in quite the wrong way: the little doctor stopped the game in order to demonstrate this. Peter was amused at first, and then rather annoyed. He retorted with considerable rudeness, but the doctor's skin wasn't pierced. "You hold yourself so stiff," he explained, smiling. "That is an error. You try again, and I will keep my hand on your shoulder-blade to see whether you really relax . . . No. Again you do not!" He seemed delighted, as if this failure of Peter's were a special triumph for his own methods of teaching. His eye met Otto's. Otto grinned understandingly. (*Goodbye to Berlin* 103)

The doctor's reaction to Peter's failure shows that he is convinced that his teaching is superior to what Peter can do. For him, it is not the teaching methods that need to be reconsidered but rather those who fail to benefit from them. For the doctor, Peter is simply not competent enough to

understand his methods, hence proving his own superiority. This perspective on his teaching suggests to the reader that the doctor has assimilated Nazi ideology into his personality. Therefore, in Isherwood's chapter, he becomes a metaphor for Nazi ideology and its impact on the environment of his stay on Ruegen Island. The doctor is also an example of how Nazism justifies its hatred of the ones who do not fit Nazi ideology by blaming mental illness:

> "Because there isn't any such thing as communism. It's just an hallucination. A mental disease. People only imagine that they're communists. They aren't really."
>
> "What are they, then?"
>
> But he wasn't listening. He fixed me with his triumphant, ferrety smile.
>
> "Five years ago I used to think as you do. But my work at the clinic has convinced me that communism is a mere hallucination. What people need is discipline, self-control. I can tell you this as a doctor. I know it from my own experience." (*Goodbye to Berlin* 106)

The doctor uses his medical authority to argue that communism is not a political belief but a mental illness. He justifies his claim through his 'personal experience.' Still, he does not advance any scientific proof, which is particularly odd for someone who presents himself as a surgeon. Thus, the doctor shows the irrationality of Nazi ideology, especially its blind belief that discipline would solve what he considered an illness. Nazism links mental illness to every concept that opposes its political agenda or diverges from its conceptualization of the "Aryan" man. The doctor also makes a distinction between what he calls "Nordic" people and Jews: "The other day I was over at Hiddensee. Nothing but Jews! It's a pleasure to get back here and see real Nordic types!" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 105). Like the ideology he represents, the doctor does not consider Jews as humans.

As for Otto, the doctor refers to him as one of the boys he considers to be degenerate: "I know this type of boy very well', he repeated. 'It is a bad degenerate type. Their tonsils are almost invariably diseased'" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 109). Even if homosexuality is not explicitly mentioned, it is implied that his sexuality is part of why he regards him as sick. The doctor looks at Otto as he would look at a deviant animal, dehumanizing Otto and reflecting at the same time the views of the Nazi party on homosexuality and the Weimar government. For Finnley:

> if Peter Wilkinson and his Kind parasitically seek to cure their psychological disorders at the expense of Otto Nowak's and of a decadent Germany, there are other Germans, like the Nazi doctor, who have a very different concept of health care. His approach is strictly scientific, and if it fails to work with Peter (when he tries to teach him how to throw) he has no doubts about what ought to be done in Otto's case: 'I believe in discipline. These boys ought to be put into labour camps' (p 415). When one remembers Peter's own wilful attempts to discipline Otto it becomes apparent that Isherwood is also peripherally suggesting how closely fascism resembles English Imperialism. Both are products of repression and disease, and both seek to cure an illness in others that in fact underlies their own love of power. (Finnley 150)

Where Peter seems to look for a cure in Otto, the doctor dehumanizes him by seeing him as a failed experiment. For the doctor, if Otto is not fit for society, he should be transferred to a facility where he could be repurposed or reprogrammed. Also, the fact that Peter seeks a cure in Otto and that the doctor looks at Otto from a medical perspective shows that both dehumanize him. The only difference is that Peter wants Otto to cure him. In contrast, the doctor sees Otto as a subject that needs to be studied, evaluated, and repurposed. The dehumanization of Otto is also a foreshadowing of Nazi ideology and what Nazi Germany would do to homosexuals after the

establishment of the Third Reich. Homosexuals in the Third Reich were deemed “degenerates” and outside of what was considered “Aryan” masculinity. The dehumanization of the people judged as incompatible with the “Aryan” standards led to what the Nazi doctor foreshadowed, the internment of homosexuals in concentration camps and the use of homosexuals as workforce for hard labour.

Finally, Finnley's comments on the similarities between fascism and English Imperialism are interesting. While Isherwood suggests that English Imperialism echoes aspects of fascist ideology in many ways, Peter does not want to study or repurpose Otto, nor does he describe Otto as a degenerate. Instead, Peter primarily represents how English Imperialism also tends to control and extract resources or power from its Others for its own benefit. Even if Isherwood compares English Imperialism with Nazism by showing how both ideologies dehumanize people, he reveals the particular dangers that Nazism represents.

II[19].

Language and Truth

[19] This chapter has been presented at the 2022 EGSS conference at the University of Montreal.

Isherwood's Approach to Reality: A Translation of Experience

In his memoir *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood oscillates between the translation of experience and realism. In David J. Geherin's *An Interview With Christopher Isherwood,* Geherin asks Isherwood about the relationship between autobiography and fiction in his work:

> I was always concerned primarily with live models. But I was trying to show the inwardness of the models that I was using for my characters. That is to say, I was trying to show what it was about them that really interested me, why they seemed to me more than themselves, why they seemed to me to be almost archetypes, and therefore why I was writing about them, what was magic about them, what was numenous[20] about them. In order to show that, I didn't hesitate to alter actual facts and create scenes which never actually happened, invent circumstances of all kinds. The analogy I usually use here is that of a horse that you're showing off at a show. You want to put it through its paces. In the same way you want to put a character through its paces, provide scenes which will make it behave in the way which is almost characteristic of itself. Therefore you very quickly get away from what really happened into what might have happened-that is to say, you get into fiction. (Isherwood and Geherin 145)

Isherwood's desire to show the "inwardness" of his life-based characters led him to adapt ‘reality’ in order to express his experience with those characters and the moments he lived with them. If such modifications imply that Isherwood tends to transform his reality into fiction, there is a distinction between fiction and what I call a translation of experience. Isherwood concedes that his

[20] From the word “Noumenon”: “(in the philosophy of Kant) a thing as it is in itself, not perceived or interpreted, incapable of being known, but only inferred from the nature of experience Compare phenomenon – *Noumena Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary*. Noumena Definition and Meaning Collins English Dictionary, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/noumena.

work falls into the realm of fiction. Nevertheless, if we take his words for granted, the experience he tries to convey is authentic. Isherwood is translating his experience into a context or an event that can fit his narrative. The reader can relate to this experience through fiction in a more scripted manner than through a diary or a memoir since it conveys experiences and emotions through a constructed narrative rather than pure facts or events.

The horse's analogy is interesting since it illustrates the concept of translation of experience. In this analogy, the horse is real. It is not a metaphor or an actor playing a horse. The context presents the horse in a particular way. Therefore, the horse is not fictitious but a real animal in a fabricated context. The emotions and the experiences the horse conveys through its actions or behaviours are authentic since the horse is not someone who would try to impersonate a horse. The context does not matter; the viewer can relate to this fabricated context, even if the show in which the horse is presented is made to picture an event that happened in a different context. What the viewer sees, therefore, is a translated experience rather than pure fiction. The essential aspect of the metaphor, and therefore, the critical element of the translation of experience, is that the horseshow is purposely organized to showcase the horses' qualities. For Isherwood, the character should be able to exhibit what is essential for the reader to understand a specific context or situation. Therefore, Isherwood must invent situations better suited to reveal the character's "truth." He does not invent characters but modifies them through his translation of experience to provide a narrative that would put them at their best advantage. In another context, for example, in a play, what is presented to the audience can be pure fiction and is not always the product of a translated event. The actors themselves can be real, but the context, the story, the emotions, and the characters they represent might not be authentic or real at all. But the horse in the analogy is an element of the original story – the true story – but exposed in the context of a show. In the case

of Isherwood's work, he does not modify the persona of the people he tries to represent in his writing but instead transforms the context to translate his own experience more effectively. Much like in the analogy of the horse, Isherwood transposes the characters of his stories into a context that puts them in a better spotlight and brings out the essential features of their personalities. The critical aspect of this translation is that it does not give an accurate account of what happened but conveys how the author experienced it.

However, not all of Isherwood's writing is a translation of experience. Many events, characters or places described in *Christopher And His Kind* and *Goodbye to Berlin* can be confirmed as authentic. Even if we cannot take everything Isherwood writes at face value, his insights are valuable to understand Berlin's social, political, and economic contexts and the perception of homosexuality it the city. More specifically, Isherwood comes to distinguish between the moments he considered 'magical' and those that occurred after his perception of Berlin's reality evolved:

> For Christopher, the Cosy Corner was now no longer the mysterious temple of initiation in which he had met Bubi; Berlin was no longer the fantasy city in which their affair had taken place. Their affair had been essentially a private performance which could only continue as long as Wystan was present to be its audience. Now the performance was over. Berlin had become a real city and the Cosy Corner a real bar. He didn't for one moment regret this. For now his adventures here were real, too; less magical but far more interesting" (*Christopher and His Kind* 29).

Considering that the previous accounts of his experience were happening in a 'fantasy city,' Isherwood now acknowledges that what he wrote was only a perception of his surroundings and might not be completely accurate. The word 'performance' when describing his relationship with

Bubi is essential since Isherwood explicitly tells the reader that the reality surrounding his relationship has been at some point modified to fit with his narrative. These modifications fit into Isherwood's 'fantasy' about Berlin. By referring to W.H. Auden as the audience for his metaphorical play, Isherwood suggests to the reader that what she is reading is a translation of experience similar to a theatrical performance. The emotions behind Christopher's relationship with Bubi were at some point real. Still, Isherwood had to artificialize them to integrate them into the theatrical perspective of his experience in Berlin. By separating Berlin into two separate realities – one closer to a 'fantasy' and a 'real' one –, Isherwood admits that his emotions can alter his reality and that his writing is also subject to some alteration of reality. The role of Isherwood's narrator also plays a part in his metaphorical play. Throughout his writings, the narrator shows the ability to fluently alter his role depending on what Isherwood intends to convey.

In the essay "Unravelling One's Personal Myth: Christopher Isherwood's Autobiographical Strategies," Rose Kamel looks at Isherwood's approach to the line between biography and fiction. She also looks at the creation of Isherwood's personal myth through his narrator: "Chameleon-like, he was both the self-effacing narrator viewing history with the purported objectivity of a camera eye and a fictional character leading a picaresque existence he would later validate as fact" (Kamel 162). Isherwood's narrator is a chameleon-like entity that evolves differently depending on the context. The fictional aspect of his work coexists and contributes to the autobiographical element Isherwood created about himself: "Isherwood's novels epitomize the well nigh possible task of separating out autobiographical fiction. Indeed, he maintains that his work is all part of an autobiography" (Kamel 162). Isherwood creates a duality between his narrator and his persona. If we look at *Goodbye to Berlin*, this duality gives some credibility to some fictionalized episodes of his time in Germany. Most of the events on Ruegen Island depend on the narrator's observation

and what he judges as relevant or authentic. Kamel notes that Isherwood's narrator "creates fiction from his reality which is almost more expressive than a simple observation" (Kamel 162). Kamel refers to Samuel Hynes' study of the Auden generation[21]. Kamel states that "the Auden generation demonstrates that writers used allegories, fables, myths as parable art, e.g., didactically to link aesthetics with political imperatives" (Kamel 162)[22]. This generation of writers emphasized the political imperatives of the time by altering their realities, making those issues stand out to the reader. The fictional truth or translation of experience's ability to convey the Auden generation's reality outweighed pure historical truth. The reliability of what can be considered historical truth can also be heavily questioned. When Isherwood admitted that fictional elements had altered his writings, he distanced himself from historical criticism concerning his novels.

Language and Hauntology

Language has an impact on Isherwood's approach both to his literary persona and to "truth." Kamel mentions the use of the word "invent" by Isherwood following a quote from *Christopher and His Kind* [23]: "The key verb "invent" indicates that in the language he uses to recreate them, Christopher's lovers have a conjuring function. They serve as muses that help to engender his

[21] The Auden Generation, also called the Auden group, is an expression designation a conglomeration of poets of the early 20th century: "In the 1930s, Britain was in a period of social crisis, with the aftereffects of The Great War still felt and another world war looking likely. The working classes were dissatisfied with what they saw as a ruling bourgeois society and a series of failed social reforms. This time of crisis brought with it a new trend for collective identities, and the Auden Group, predominantly a journalistic tool (evident since 1936), was one of these. Also known as Thirties Poets, the group which centred around Auden and Isherwood represented a new, more experimental literary style. The Auden Group, in fact never worked together as a whole, and were connected together mainly by their similar ages, Oxbridge education, Socialist leanings social feelings, and embarrassment about their own middle-class origins. The term continues to be used to categorise a wide range of cultural output from the 1930s, including literature, theatre, music and art" National Portrait Gallery – *Auden Group.* The term expression "Auden Generation" is used in Samuel Hynes' work, *The Auden Generation*.

[22] For other analyses of how the 1930's influenced the forms used by the literary intelligentsia see also Julian Symons, The Thirties: A Dream Revisited (London: Cresset Press, 1960) and D. E. S. Maxell, Poets of the Thirties (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969).

[23] "If boys didn't exist, I should have to invent them." (*Christopher And His Kind*, 26, 12)

books" (Kamel 166). Kamel points out that Christopher's lovers are sources of inspiration for his books. The reconstruction of these characters fits with Isherwood's perspective on autobiography. The purpose of the characters prevails over the "truth" behind their existence. This constant need for a translation of experience creates a gap between reality and fiction. There is a gap where truth is absent and present simultaneously. Hence, this brings Derrida's theorization of hauntology in *Spectres of Marx* into the picture: "To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. This is what we would be calling hauntology" (Derrida 202). The concept of truth is set in a perpetual in-between in Isherwood's work, and "truth" and fiction create a void. This void in which truth is present and absent in time and space can influence Isherwood's translation of experience. It can be argued that it also corrupts his desire to revive the phenomenal world. Where Derrida felt the haunting of Karl Marx's ghost in revolutionary ideology[24], Isherwood is directly affected by the spectre of "truth."

Nevertheless, Isherwood does not give in to the influence of this ghost. Consciously or not, he counterbalances this spectral influence by conjuring his lovers as characters and, therefore, deploys the opposing force to Hauntology, which is Ontology: "Ontology opposes it [Hauntology] only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration" (Derrida 202). As Kamel has observed, the conjuration function of his lovers is essential to Isherwood's creativity. By conjuring these characters, Isherwood exorcises the ghost of "truth" from his writing. He limits the influence of the gap between "truth" and fiction and maintains a form of control over his narration. It is a pattern that is proper to the Auden generation in general. Wilde uses *The Dog Beneath the Skin,*

[24] Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres of Marx*. 128.

Isherwood's collaborative work with Auden, to showcase the need for an exorcism to maintain a form of control:

> In theory at least, the method of achieving control follows the usual pattern of depth psychology: to bring to light, by conscious expression, the secrets and fears of the personality - "the woman in dark glasses and the humpbacked surgeons/And the scissor man" (Dog, p. 8) - and thus to exorcise them; to expose and, in the process, to cure the sense of guilt or impotence or distance the decade rehearses in its endless litany of unworthiness. (Wilde 487)

This pattern could easily be applied to *Goodbye to Berlin* or *Christopher and His Kind*. To paraphrase Kamel[25], Isherwood's use of language and exorcism of "truth" is essential to building his myth. The myth of Christopher can only be established if the ghost of "truth" is exorcised from Isherwood's writing. When Isherwood states in his interview with Sarah and Marcus Smith that fiction or non-fiction is not a very important distinction to him[26], it is an instance where he confronts the ghost of "truth" and tries to exorcise it by acknowledging it. He also faces his narrator's relation to "truth" in *Christopher and His Kind*: "Because he hated it, he despised the middle class for aping its ways. That left him with nothing to admire but the working class; so he declared it to be forthright, without frills, altogether on the path of truth" (*Christopher and His Kind* 30). Isherwood denounces the lack of truthfulness of the middle class through Christopher, but despite his admiration for the working class, Christopher – and Isherwood – still belong to the middle class. Therefore, he inscribes himself in this lack of truthfulness, confronting once more

[25] Kamel, Rose. *"Unravelling One's Personal Myth": Christopher Isherwood's Autobiographical Strategies.* 163.

[26] Orphanos, Stathis. "Christopher Isherwood: A Checklist 1968-1975." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 22, no.3.

the ghost of "truth" that hovers over his social class. Isherwood also confronts "truth" with his persona in *Christopher and His Kind*:

> Christopher's declared reason for burning his Berlin diary was unconvincing. He used to tell his friends that he had destroyed his real past because he preferred the simplified, more creditable, more exciting fictitious past which he had created to take its place. This fictitious past, he said, was the past he wanted to "remember." Now that I am writing about Christopher's real past, I sadly miss the help of the lost diary and have no patience with this arty talk. The Berlin novels leave out a great deal which I now want to remember; they also falsify events and alter dates for dramatic purposes. (*Christopher And His Kind* 41)

Isherwood tries to dissociate 'him'-self from his mythical self by quoting his alter-ego, Christopher, when writing about the burning of his diary. However, he re-associates himself with Christopher by using "I" when admitting that he now wants to remember the content of this diary. The quotes on the word "remember" also tell us something important about Christopher's relation to his past. Christopher knew that what he would remember would not be the 'truth' but chose to tell this story as if it were facts. He lied to his friends to convince himself that the fiction Christopher made from his diary was the truth.

Nevertheless, the quotes show that even Christopher could not wholly convince himself that this was the truth. Isherwood acknowledges his mistake of burning the diary and admits that he altered his story to give it "dramatic purposes." By doing so, Isherwood shows that his narrator, Christopher, is constantly unreliable and should not be trusted. He also directly confronts the ghost of "truth." He warns the reader that this confrontation will last throughout *Christopher and His Kind* and that any mention of 'truth' from Christopher's perspective might be treacherous. As I write about the ghost of "truth" haunting Isherwood's work, I must also acknowledge its presence

in my writing for it to be adequately exorcised. The spectre of "truth" manifests itself in every article or analysis surrounding Isherwood. Its place between the void of space, time, truth, and fiction makes it omnipresent. I believe it is impossible to entirely exorcise this ghost from Isherwood's writing. Still, it is possible to reduce its impact by admitting its presence. It allows for a broader understanding of Isherwood's translation of experience, creating a space where "truth" is not essential to comprehend the structure of the Auden generation's world.

In Isherwood's writing, language is closely linked to the notion of "truth." Language is a way to create, convey, or modify the notion of "truth." In *Language and Surface: Isherwood and the Thirties*, Alan Wilde explores the Auden generation's approach to "truth" and language: "Isherwood and his fellow writers see language, then, not, in Symbolist or post-Symbolist fashion, as a means of discovering or evoking some final and ultimate "Truth," but as a way of releasing the self and of thereby making the phenomenal world once more the scene of purposeful action" (Wilde 486). The prevalence of the self over "truth" and the desire to make "the phenomenal world once more the scene of purposeful action" reinforce Kamel's idea that Isherwood "creates a fiction from his reality which is almost more expressive than a simple observation. (Kamel 162). This is not to say that Isherwood's reality is "boring," but that the complexity of his reality forces some forms of alteration to make it more conveyable to a broader audience. Creating purposeful action out of the phenomenal world outweighs the need for "truth." Language becomes a tool to create this purposeful action and a weapon against the notion of "truth." "Truth," as a notion and an essential aspect of reality, becomes a boundary that the Auden Generation tries to cross or destroy.

"Truth" as a Figure Absente

Throughout my reading of Isherwood, it came to my attention that Christopher's depiction of his experience in Berlin and his approach to the notion of "truth" strongly echo Swiss

francophone poet and translator Philippe Jaccottet's conception of poetry, as expressed in his collection *Paysages avec figures absentes*. His work reflects on the condition of being a poet and also calls upon Derrida's Hauntology – and subsequently Ontology. Jaccottet's work can help us understand how Isherwood's translation of experience plays with the notion of "truth." Dominique Kunz Westerhoff writes about Jaccottet's approach to imagery and its relation with Ontology and on what is a *figure absente* in his article "Profondeur de l'image : Paysages avec figures absentes de Philippe Jaccottet":

> Chez Jaccottet, l'écriture du paysage est inséparable d'un discours critique sur l'image. Le soupçon de celle-ci relève de l'Ontologie, voire parfois de la morale : « L'image cache le réel, distrait le regard »[27] […] Pourtant, parce que l'expérience du paysage est toujours l'histoire d'un rapport, parce que le langage a le défaut de ne pouvoir simplement nommer le réel, le poète est confronté à la nécessité de l'image. De ce qui pourrait constituer une aporie, il fait alors un usage dialectique, se prêtant à une délibération ironique (Kunz Westerhoff 183)
>
> With Jaccottet, the writing of the landscape is inseparable from a critical discourse on imagery. The presence of it comes from Ontology, and even sometimes from morals: "the imagery hides the truth, distracts the gaze" […] Yet, because the experience of a landscape is always the story of a relation, because the language has the defects of not being able to name the real simply, the poet is confronted with the necessity of imagery. From that which could have constituted an aporia, he makes a dialectic that lends itself to an ironical deliberation. (Kunz Westerhoff 183 – Translated by Calvin Le Brun)

[27] Philippe Jaccottet, *Paysages avec figures absentes* (PFA), Paris, Gallimard, (1970), éd. revue et augmentée, 1976, p. 74.

Jaccottet gives more relevance to what is absent from the landscape he describes through his poetry rather than to what he can see. The poet uses language to face an event, moment, or landscape in the poet's environment and extract what is hidden from the gaze. The *figures absentes* are elements that can be expressed but cannot be observed. Their absence can also suggest their presence in various aspects. They can be felt and expressed by words, but if we look at reality, they cannot be seen or completely understood. Language becomes the only medium to convey a *figure absente* and extract it from the picture. Thus, Jaccottet exorcizes reality and truth from his environment through a translation of experience. He extracts meaning from his environment with language through his poetry. He exorcises the ghost of truth from the untrustworthy mist that the image of a landscape might create. Just like Jaccottet, Isherwood's imagery is inseparable from his discourse.

Where Jaccottet looks at the critical discourse of a landscape, Isherwood looks at the critical discourse of his political and social environment. The killing of Bernhard Landauer in *Goodbye to Berlin* is a clear example of Isherwood's exorcism of "truth" from his experience: "The killing of Bernhard was merely a dramatic necessity. In a novel such as this one, which ends with the outbreak of political persecution, one death at least is a must. No other major character in *Goodbye to Berlin* has been killed, and Bernhard is the most appropriate victim, being a prominent Jew" (*Christopher And His Kind* 71). To convey the threat and the political persecution of the Nazis, Isherwood chose to kill what he describes as "the most appropriate victim." The killing of this character prevailed over the real inspiration for this character, who would die later during the Second World War. Thus, Isherwood preserves the continuity of his narrative and evokes the threat of Nazism through the character of Bernhard. The reader may well become intrigued by the story of the actual person who inspired this character and learn how he contributed to the fight against

Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, the character of Bernhard still reflects the dangers of Nazism on the eve of its seizure of power. It evokes the need to fight its influence in a way that fits Isherwood's narrative and continuity. Therefore, Isherwood uses his narration to include elements absent from his actual experience and adapts them into his novel, thus conveying a message through the death of a fictionalized character.

However, his exorcism of truth is not always perfect. The ties he has with his fictitious self "Christopher" complicates this exorcism: "The fictitious Isherwood takes the attitude of an amused, slightly contemptuous onlooker. For example, he nearly gives himself away when he speaks of "the beautiful ripe lines" of Otto's torso. So, lest the reader suspects him of finding Otto physically attractive, he adds that Otto's legs are "spindly." "Otto's original in life had an entirely adequate, sturdy pair of legs, even if they weren't quite as handsome as the upper half of his body" (*Christopher And His Kind* 42). Isherwood shows an almost voluntary association with his fictional/mythical counterpart. This association keeps him from fully exorcising "truth" from his translation of experience. Nevertheless, it seems he wanted to leave this faint association in the text. This association serves as a clue for the reader. With it, the reader is able to understand what Isherwood tried to convey behind his words as Christopher. By depicting Otto's attractiveness to the reader, he supports the *truthful* aspect of his narrator by letting a piece of his judgment in the narration as the author rather than as the narrator. Isherwood tries to implicate himself in the environment of his fictitious self as a *figure absente*. He is not present in the reality he created for his narrator but manifests himself in the mind of his narrator. Thus, even if Isherwood himself is absent from his narration, he is present as a thought in his narrator's mind.

"Truth" as a Border Between The Auden Generation and Reality

When looking at Isherwood's vision and conceptualization of truth, it is imperative to look at other authors who shared it to some extent, especially Stephen Spender and W.H Auden. Spender's *The Temple* is intertwined with Isherwood's narrative and Auden's experience in Germany in time and space, even though it does not explicitly refer to them. In the novel, a conversation between Paul and William exposes William's "true" identity and shows the relation between *The Temple* and *Goodbye to Berlin*: "'Allow me to introduce Otto!' says Bradshaw in a voice that indicates that Otto is strongly under his protection. Paul shakes Otto's hand enthusiastically while Otto produces his one phrase of English: 'How you do?" (Spender 121). Spender opted to call Christopher Isherwood and W.H Auden by the aliases William Bradshaw and Simon Wilmot, respectively. This is the first manifestation of an alteration of truth the reader encounters when looking at *The Temple.* By doing so, Spender inscribes his novel as autobiographically inspired in the same manner as Isherwood.

Spender takes a similar approach to the notion of translation of experience. He adapts the "truth" surrounding his experience to fit his narrative and modifies the names of important characters. The difference with Isherwood is that the narrator is in the third person. Spender also changes more names than Isherwood, including the name of his main character, Paul. Where Isherwood creates an alter-ego to express his translation of experience, Spender creates a different character through another name. His translation of experience tends to inscribe his novel in a more fictional perspective than Isherwood's. Interestingly, names like Otto Nowak create a form of intertextuality with Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*. Paul's encounter with Otto exemplifies this intertextuality and establishes a connection between Spender's and Isherwood's writing. Isherwood acknowledges this meeting in *Christopher and His Kind*: "This is an attempt to describe

the relationship between Christopher and Otto as it may have appeared to a third party, Stephen Spender. Stephen was then living in Hamburg and they went to visit him there for a few days, that summer" (*Christopher and His Kind* 49). This intertextuality gives credibility to both narratives. This credibility creates a space where "truth" as a notion and as a tool to legitimize experience becomes troubled. Spender and Isherwood create their own truth by interconnecting their narrations. Intertextuality supports their translation of experience and legitimizes what Isherwood - as Christopher - or Spender - as Paul - writes.

The German Language: A Linguistical Support for Isherwood's Translation of Experience

When reading Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, a person who does not speak German might have trouble completely understanding some passages. Indeed, Isherwood's narrator, Christopher, does not translate everything he hears during his stay in Berlin:

> "Ist dass Du, mein Liebling?" Her mouth opened in a fatuously sweet smile. Fritz and I sat watching her, like a performance at the theatre. "Was wollen wir machen, Morgen Abend? Oh, wie wunderbar . . . Nein, nein, ich werde bleiben Heute Abend zu Hause. Ja, ja, ich werde wirklich bleiben zu Hause . . . Auf Wiedersehen, mein Liebling . . ." (*Goodbye to Berlin* 28)

Even if Christopher translates his thoughts into words the reader can understand, he does not translate everything. This monologue is an instance where Isherwood chose not to translate German. Christopher accepts language as a fundamental element of his experience and part of his true environment. The words "like a performance at the theatre" show that the narrator expresses some fascination with the language and with the performance offered by Sally Bowles when she speaks German. Language holds a dual meaning since it is part of Christopher's reality and

experience but, at the same time, is presented as something that can be used to impress an audience. Considering German as a performance, therefore, questions the impact of language in Christopher's experience in Berlin. Thus, the reader is not expected to understand German but is expected to be perplexed by the meaning of the words and to be as fascinated by Sally's performance as Christopher would be.

However, even if his narrator lacks knowledge of German, he criticizes the language when spoken by another character: "Frau Karpf, Liebling, willst Du sein ein Engel und bring zwei Tassen von Kaffee?" Sally's German was not merely incorrect; it was all her own. She pronounced every word in a mincing, specially 'foreign' manner. You could tell that she was speaking a foreign language from her expression alone" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 33). The mention of the words "specially 'foreign'" show the theatricality of Sally's German. For her, language is not only a way to communicate. It is also an element of her character as an actor. She uses the language to portray herself differently depending on the situation:

> Sally's German was so much more than usually awful that I wondered whether she wasn't deliberately exaggerating it in order, somehow, to make fun of Natalia. During the rest of the interview I suffered mental pins and needles. Natalia hardly spoke at all. Sally prattled on in her murderous German, making what she imagined to be light general conversation" (*Goodbye to Berlin* 150).

Sally deliberately uses the language to her advantage. By 'murdering' her German, she can express a version of herself that will be despised by the character of Natalia. Being able to act on the German language at her will, she can manipulate how other people may see her. She can attract or push people away through her German. Christopher's observation and subsequent criticism of Sally Bowles' German betray at least some grammatical and syntaxial understanding of German.

Christopher points out the "foreign" aspect of Sally's German and shows that Sally, like him, is confronted with the barrier between English and German. Even if Sally can speak and be understood in German, she is still an English speaker. She cannot fully consider herself a German speaker, but she shows a desire to cross the language barrier. Isherwood hides his understanding of German and hides the truth that his narrator also tries to cross the language barrier. He depicts his narrator as an admirer of the German language who cannot understand the language but can still be amazed by it. Isherwood created a narrator –his alter-ego – who displays a limited knowledge of German, even if Isherwood himself had a more extensive understanding of the language. Thus, he can convey the admiration of the German language without being tied to the need to translate or the "truth." Therefore, he creates an essential lie to convey the obstacle encountered when trying to translate his experience and amazement of language.

Sexuality: A Border of the Mind and the Body

To comprehend their true self and its inner borders, one must fully consider sexuality. As we asserted at the outset of this thesis, the freedom to love and the expression of desire are part of one's inner truth. For W.H Auden, like other artists from his generation and inner circle, Weimar Berlin was a place where such frontiers could be explored and experienced. The sexual emancipation Auden witnessed in Berlin contrasted drastically with the British understanding of sexuality and sexual freedom. In Tony Sharpe's *W.H Auden in Context*[28], Sharpe writes on Auden's need, in his letters, to conceal his reality in Berlin due to British censorship: "'Is Berlin very wicked?' he had written to a friend knowing full well the answer. But British censorship and laws against homosexuality meant that the city's vibrant demi-monde appears only fleetingly in

[28] Sharpe, Tony, ed. *WH Auden in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

the poetry" (Sharpe, 25). Auden's poetry became the only way for him to express Berlin's atmosphere. Indeed, British and German approaches to censorship were drastically different. Although Britain and the Weimar Republic still criminalized male-to-male sex[29], Weimar's lenient censorship allowed for a context where queer life and sexual liberation through experience or culture were possible: "Relative media freedom under the Weimar Republic made queer lives more possible, and part of the Republic's reputation for sexual liberation is due to its less restrictive censorship" (Marhoefer 71). British censorship was stricter than Weimar's. Auden had to be careful since, as a British subject, anything that he wrote might be analyzed by the British Office of Censorship and used against him when returning to Britain. Explicit accounts of his experience in Berlin could have been used to accuse him of sodomy back in Britain, and Oscar Wilde's fate[30] came quickly to mind when considering what British law could inflict when someone was thus accused.

The male prostitution milieu of Weimar Berlin offered Auden a way to counter British psychological influences. Tony Sharpe points out how Berlin acted as a counter-influence to British imperialistic mental oppression and as a means to transcend other types of barriers:

> The city was a place that catalyzed his imagination, but where Auden could not remain imaginatively. John Fuller pithily sums up this crucial year, 'during which he (a) found personal liberation among the male prostitutes of Berlin; (b) established his critique of

[29] "The distinguishing of significant sex acts from insignificant sex acts by the former's involvement of a penetrating penis was well established in German law. Paragraph 175, the sodomy law, reflected it. German courts had struggled for decades to determine which male-male sex acts, exactly, were banned by Paragraph 175. Everyone agreed that the law's explicit prohibition of "unnatural sodomy" (*widernatürliche Unzucht*) covered penis-anus penetration (*Päderastie or immissio in anum*)" (Marhoefer 73).

[30] Oscar Wilde was condemned to two years of prison following allegations of male-to-male sex after his trial against the Marquess of Queensberry backfired against him. Refer to: Adut, Ari (2005). "A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde". *American Journal of Sociology*. ***111*** (1): 213–248. doi:10.1086/428816. ISSN 0002-9602

> Freud's conventional morality; and (c) broke off his engagement'. What Berlin offered was not quite liberation, however, despite Auden's vigorous immersion in the city's gay sex trade or his troubled friendship with John Layard, a student of W. H. Rivers who introduced him to the theories of educator and psychologist Homer Lane. Rather, the city offered a prism through which to defamiliarize the English landscape and body politic. (Sharpe 25)

For Sharpe, the city holds power over Auden's imagination. It is not only a physical place but also a mental place and state of mind that can help Auden focus on new concepts. Sharpe argues that the city offers Auden some personal liberation but is primarily a frame in which he can restructure his mind. Auden's poem *The Capital*[31] gives an idea of his relations to cities in general and how the city's atmosphere could impact his creative mind: "You with your charm and your apparatus have abolished/ The strictness of winter and the spring's compulsion" (W.H Auden 78). Auden is prone to personify the city and praises it for its charms and ability to warm the mind. In Berlin, sex and male prostitution were part of the city's charm and made it stand apart from other cities. Sharpe's quote of John Fuller touches on the idea that Auden's personal liberation and sexual liberation were partly due to the time he spent in the milieu of male prostitution. Sharpe's vision of the city as a "prism" rather than a liberating entity contradicts his statement regarding the idea that the city created a space where "Auden could not remain imaginatively." If Auden's creative mind was subjected to a "prism" per se, it would mean that the city did not act as a catalyst for Auden. I would advance that Berlin was indeed a catalyzer for Auden and allowed him to transcend the barriers of his inhibitions rather than putting his imagination in a prism, which would be similar to implying that his imagination would have been contained in a frame created by the city. Auden, therefore, broke free from any prisms he would have been subjected to before he arrived in

[31] Auden, Wystan H. *Selected Poems*: Ed. by Edward Mendelson. (1979).

Germany. Through such liberation, Auden created a space where he could defamiliarize himself from "the English landscape and body politic."

British repression of male-to-male sex and widespread censorship of sexual freedom shows a strong desire on the part of the British government to exercise power over its subjects. Michel Foucault highlights the relation between power and sexuality in *The History of Sexuality.* In *Volume 1: An Introduction,* he argues: "We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required" (*The History of Sexuality V.1* 5). Foucault sums up the repressive hypothesis to challenge its establishment. This theory claims that sexual repression is an aftermath of the establishment of capitalism and bourgeois family norms. From his perspective, the medicalization and legal discourse of sexual activities are linked to creating distinct sexual identities. These new identities can be pictured as 'launchpads' from which counter-discourses against the established notions of power can be launched. Auden and Isherwood's decisions to travel to Germany and to live through Berlin's homosexual subculture inscribe themselves in what Foucault qualifies as precisely these kinds of actions. While Auden and Isherwood's experience in Berlin transgresses British and German law, still writing poetry or novels that include even fragments of their experiences also contests the influence of prohibition through words. They rewrite their own "mechanism of power" thanks to the relative liberties offered by Weimar's homosexual subculture and Germany's lenient censorship. By transgressing the law, they separate themselves from the influence of power and the influence it has on their sexuality: "If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition,

nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom" (*The History of Sexuality V.1* 6). For Foucault, speaking about sex is a direct act of transgression against the power and the law that aim to forbid or repress it. By doing so, one will be outside the reach of power and will prepare a form of *avant-garde* context for the expansion of sexual freedom and the acceptance of one's inner truth: "But it appears to me that the essential thing is not this economic factor, but rather the existence in our era of a discourse in which sex, the revelation of truth, the overturning of global laws, the proclamation of a new day to come, and the promise of a certain felicity are linked together" (*The History of Sexuality V.1* 7). Foucault sees sex as a fundamental link interconnected with truth, the defiance of power and progress. The discourse of sex and sexuality is essential if one is looking for their "inner" truth or looking to be part of a promising future. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is clear that Auden and Isherwood's contemporaneous writings, subsequent work, and correspondence about their time in Berlin contribute to this discourse. By opening a perspective on the discourse of sex and defying the law and power enforced by the British or German government, they explore the extent of their inner-truth, and at the same time, contribute to the discourse of homosexuality as a matter of identity.

***Mr. Norris Changes Train*: Isherwood on Sexual Freedom**

Isherwood's ideas about sexual liberation can be traced to his experience of sexuality and sexual desire. *Mr. Norris Changes Train* is an example of how Isherwood looks at sexual freedom and the perspectives Berlin has to offer. Through his narrator and alter-ego, William Bradshaw, Isherwood approaches the character of Arthur Norris and the sexual freedom he represents:

> "I've got some very valuable books here," he told me. "Some very amusing books." His tone coyly underlined the words. I stooped to read the titles: The Girl with the Golden Whip. Miss Smith's Torture-Chamber. Imprisoned at a Girls' School, or The Private Dairy of Montague Dawson, Flagellant. This was my first glimpse of Mr. Norris' sexual tastes. (*Mr. Norris Changes Train* 28)

From William's accounts, we understand that Arthur is upfront about his sexual fetishes and describes himself as a masochist. Arthur is amused by his fetishes and values the content of the books he presents to William. The word "valuable" shows the importance of such sexual fetishes for Arthur. His sexual tastes are part of his being and hold value to his persona. Jonathan H. Fryer writes about Arthur's sexual orientation and fetishes in his essay *Sexuality in Isherwood*: "Mr. Norris himself is proudly heterosexual, but a dedicated convert to the minority practices of masochism and boot fetishism, for which Berlin seems to have been a Mecca" (Fryer 346). Arthur Norris can be seen as the personification of Weimar Berlin's sexual liberation and sexual underworlds. His sexuality and fetishes allow him to access another of Berlin's sub-culture. Sadomasochism and BDSM practices were also part of Berlin's sexual environment and sub-culture. His desire for sexual freedom led him to cross the borders of Germany, where his sexuality led him to experience freedom as it could be offered in Berlin.

Fryer points out how Isherwood manages to portray Arthur favourably, despite the prejudices which could be attached to sexual fetishes like masochism. Such biases can be observed in Fryer's comment on the character of Arthur Norris: "He is surely the most endearing pervert in the history of literature, a man who wears his weaknesses on his sleeve and who is forgiven anything. That Isherwood manages to convey this favourable impression of the roguish individual, without at any time propagating the moral, sexual, or political deviations incorporated in Arthur

Norris, is itself a worthy tribute to the total control he has over his material" (Fryer, 346) Fryer sees Arthur's sexual desires as a weakness and a form of perversion. However, Arthur's acknowledgment of his sexual desires and fetishes makes him a powerful character. Arthur's sexual freedom and unapologetic acceptance of his sexual tastes echo Weimar Berlin's atmosphere. Arthur becomes the personification of Berlin's sexual openness and freedom. This casual openness shows how he can free himself from the social constructs around sexuality at that time. He is the master of his body and his mind. Just like the city he represents, his openness and unapologetic approach to his true self is what sets him apart from other characters. By assuming his fetishes, Arthur creates a space where he can explore and experiment with his sexuality without the mental pressure of any body politic. Berlin was the perfect place to explore such boundaries. Isherwood's portrayal of Arthur Norris is also proof of Isherwood's ability to use his translation of experience to invite the reader to transform their view of sexual fetishism.

The Auden generation's time and experience in Weimar Germany provide an insightful perspective on the idea of physical and metaphorical borders. Weimar Berlin was the perfect space in the early 20th century to survey and experiment with a diversity of limits, given what was socially acceptable at that time. Authors like Isherwood, Spender and Auden experimented with the limits of their inner frontiers through their experience in Germany. Isherwood's translation of experience tackles the notion of truth by transforming it into a flexible tool that can be manipulated to fit a narrative. Experience prevails over documentary truth and liberates the author's experience from its spectre. The intertextuality between different authors of the Auden generation reinforces the credibility of the concept of translation of experience. These authors oppose the rules and the constraints of body politics. Still, they are also subject to the inevitable effects of time. Where their experience can free their psyche, their desires are still constrained by the laws of reality, such as

time and space. However, such restrictions are minimal compared to the greater freedom attained by the cultural, linguistic, and sexual liberation provided by their experience in Weimar Berlin.

III.

The Romanticization of Weimar Germany

The Nazi's "New Man": The Fascist Remodeling of Masculinity

In *Christopher Isherwood: A Psychological Gold Mine,* Mary Bancroft, American novelist and contemporary to Isherwood, recalls reading-Isherwood's *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* when it was first published under the title *The Berlin Stories.*[32]: "I had just returned from a trip to Nazi Germany. The impact of Isherwood's novel on me was tremendous, so precisely had he captured the atmosphere of the Germany that I had just encountered. I gushed to Miss Wolff about Isherwood's vivid descriptions of the dreary Berlin streets, the sleazy cafes, the political turmoil, the random and still somewhat furtive violence" (Bancroft 28). Bancroft's description offers an insightful perspective into the impact Isherwood's translation of his experience of the situation in Weimar Berlin had on readers. Her mentioning of how "he captured the atmosphere" of Germany – considering that this Germany was depicted before the Nazi's ascension to power - shows that Isherwood's translation of experience expressed the essence of the situation faced by Berlin's population. Indeed, the translation of experience focused on the emotions and feelings that this atmosphere radiated through eruptions of violence and political turmoil.

The Nazi paramilitary groups like the SA and the SS[33] had a significant role in the "furtive violence" (Bancroft 28) of the opposing Communist and Nazi paramilitary groups during the late years of the Weimar republic. The persecution and violent actions of the SA and the SS would only increase after the Nazis came to power. Before the establishment of paramilitary groups and under the conditions of post-WWI Germany, many young men looking for community and

[32] This edition was comprised of Isherwood's *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. Those titles were republished individually at later dates and their content were also altered.

[33] Paramilitary organisations of the Nazi party – Bendersky, Joseph W. (2007). *A Concise History of Nazi Germany.* Plymouth, England: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc. p. 96.

cohesion looked toward the *wild cliques*. Daniel Guérin points to the creation of Germany's *Wild cliques*:

> In Germany, cliques are nothing new. They were born out of the chaos of the war and the postwar period. As early as 1916-1917, it was possible to run into troupes like this in the working-class districts [*faubourgs*] and suburbs of the large cities. They were made up of adolescents whose fathers were at the front and mothers in the factories. Nobody at home took care of them. The postwar inflation and the unemployment over the past two years have multiplied these gangs. For uprooted and often homeless youths, they offer a communal way of life, camaraderie, and a sense of danger and adventure. To escape the temptation of suicide, they create a fantasy world for themselves, a world that rests upon precepts that are completely different from those of accepted morality, a world given over to the most unbridled instinct, a world of hatred toward the society which has abandoned them. (Guérin 66)

German youth expressed a strong desire for community, however high unemployment undermined the communities that used to be managed by the primary worker parties. The weakening of the communities of traditional worker parties left a void which proved to be fertile for the creation of *cliques*. Those *cliques* offered a form of order and community that was desperately needed. This need for a community and the lack of employment opportunities for the youth prepared the ground

for organizations like the SA. Part of their manpower originated from these groups[34], as Daniel Guérin recounts in a chilling anecdote:

> Two years later, the journalist for the Neue Weltbuhne (who had since become my mother-in-law) would confide to me that after Hitler came to power, she met a sinister and powerful SA member in a Berlin street. To her surprise, the Nazi called out to her in a familiar, even affectionate tone. Finally, she recognized him. It was the former chief of the clique whose friendship she had won. It was Winnetou[35] [36]. (Guérin 68)

The formation of the SA and other paramilitary groups contributed to the political chaos in Berlin. Such groups' presence impacted the German public, and violence became part of the scenery in Berlin. Guérin mentions that the partisans of paramilitary groups were not outsiders to the city. This helped to normalize their presence in the streets. The political tension was fertile for sudden eruptions of violence. Isherwood witnessed and integrated such violent outbursts into *Mr. Norris*:

> Berlin was in a state of civil war. Hate exploded suddenly, without warning, out of nowhere; at street corners, in restaurants, cinemas, dance halls, swimming-baths; at midnight, after breakfast, in the middle of the afternoon. Knives were whipped out, blows

[34] The majority of SA members came from other sources, especially before the Nazis came to power: "The original SA had consisted largely of the war generation, containing many former Freikorps members, but during 1927 it began to be regarded as a vehicle for working-class recruitment, largely through street marches in working-class areas. Goebbels, in particular, projected the image of the SA as a working-class body, with, apparently, young and unemployed workers being particularly attracted to the SA. In terms of size, too, the SA's character altered as the economic crisis deepened. It grew from a relatively small, protective troop into a paramilitary force of perhaps 30,000 men by August 192929 and 60,000 men by November 1930 with a national rather than a primarily Bavarian membership as had earlier been the case" - Fischer, C. *Stormtroopers (RLE Nazi Germany & Holocaust): A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis 1929-35* (1st ed.). p, 5. Routledge. 1983.

[35] Leader of a *clique* – see Guérin p.65

[36] Foot note from *The Brown Plague* written by Robert Schwartzwald: "Not all the Wild-frei wound up in the service of the Nazis. On the contrary, groups of youth continued to "wander" and hide in the forests throughout the years of Nazi rule, including the war years. Some of these groups actively harassed the Hitler Youth and engaged in other antigovernment activities; see Peukert (chap. 3)" (Guérin, p.68)

> were dealt with spiked rings, beer-mugs, chair-legs, or leaded clubs; bullets slashed the advertisements on the poster-columns, rebounded from the iron roofs of latrines. In the middle of a crowded street a young man would be attacked, stripped, thrashed, and left bleeding on the pavement; in fifteen seconds it was all over and the assailants had disappeared. (*Mr. Norris changes Trains* 91)

Isherwood's enumeration of the places where violence would suddenly erupt shows its omnipresence. It is further heightened by its randomness. No one was safe from attack. This constant threat looming in the streets of Berlin created a new space of terror that clashed with Weimar's subcultures. Isherwood's description of the attacks' casualness helps us understand this terror's new spatialization.

To adequately convey the reality of Weimar Berlin, Isherwood's narrator must witness and describe the violence. He integrates it into the narration to the extent that it indirectly impacts the narrator's relation to his environment: "My pupils looked at them and shook their heads, apologizing to me for the state of Germany. "Dear, dear!" they said, "it's terrible. It can't go on."" (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains* 91). The reaction of the narrator's pupils shows how this state of political chaos created a sense of "shared guilt" in the minds of people outside the circle of paramilitary or political organizations. The pupils' acknowledgement of the chaos echoes Bancroft's. She opposes the celebratory myth of "Babylon-Berlin" to the violent reality of political chaos. The clash between the two awakens guilt in the minds of the narrator's pupils as if the narrator were not supposed to witness the violence or be affected by it. Bancroft praises Isherwood for his style and narration: "Isherwood's elegant, lucid style, his intelligence, his understanding of human nature, his eye for detail, the deadly accuracy of his ear for dialogue, the characters he had chosen through whom to portray the decadence and corruption of the Berlin demi-monde in the

pre-Hitler year of 1931" (Bancroft 28). Bancroft's note on Isherwood's understanding of human nature and his ability to integrate his dialogues and narrator to portray Berlin's chaos shows that Isherwood's translation of experience is tightly linked to his narrator and, more precisely, to how his narrator can accurately convey such feelings of chaos.

The Narrator's Role in Mr. Norris Changes Trains

As in *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood's narrator in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* adopts an observer role and uses his alter-ego only to convey the narrative of his experience. Lisa M. Schwerdt writes about the impact the narrator, William Bradshaw, has on the reader in *Isherwood's Fiction: The Self and Technique:*

> In *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* Isherwood presents himself and his concerns, but here with an added investigatory element that lends suspense and mystery. A deepening of meaning and purpose results, becoming evident primarily through the style, which now allows us to realise that even though the action is unfolding before our eyes, we are presented with the past - a past seemingly unaltered by present awareness. (Schwerdt 56-57)

The quality of mystery in Isherwood's narrator emphasizes the importance of the reader as an essential part of the narrative. The reader becomes the investigator of Isherwood's past, with the task of uncovering the purpose and meaning of his experience. Bradshaw becomes a conduit across time and space, enabling the reader to transcend the gap and become an observer. The narrator allows the reader to set aside "present awareness" and transcend the reader's "self." By "self" here, I mean what constitutes the bias someone might have formed regarding the situation of Weimar Berlin through what Schwerdt calls "present awareness." The narrator becomes a way to bypass these constraints and confront the reality of Weimar. This is done without any potential prejudices

posed by the modern romanticization of the Weimar era. Thanks to Isherwood's narrator, the reader can experience the Weimar era the same way as Isherwood –or the narrator and the characters surrounding him - experienced it. The narrator's retelling of the events is not one of critical retrospection; instead, it allows the reader to experience the events as he did at the time:

> The narrator, William Bradshaw, tells his tale, but without interrupting it to explain those errors in judgement or moral lapses he had made in the past. Although he will explain how he felt at certain times, he will not inform us when he has made a bad or wrong decision. Thus, in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* Isherwood seeks not only to present situations, but to do so honestly without excuses; the intent here is not to judge or interpret. (Schwerdt 57)

Schwerdt shows how the narrator maintains his position as an observer by not compromising the narrative with corrections of "judgement or moral lapses." In a sense, Isherwood's narrator, William Bradshaw, is immune to Isherwood as a writer. His presence in the novel as a narrator is not shaped by Isherwood's later evaluation or moral judgment of past events. Through his narrator, Isherwood undergoes a form of travel through time, space, and the very notion of the "self." His "self" does not impact the narrative since the story is not told from Isherwood's perspective; but rather from the perspective of his narrator and alter-ego. Here, Isherwood not only translates his experience, as he did in *Goodbye to Berlin* but also confronts the reader with the reality of Weimar Germany through the purest perspective possible. As mentioned by Schwerdt, his honesty is what forms the baseline of his narrative in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains.* It is free from the alterations that any interpretation of his experience might cause. Also, the narrator's stoic and cold attitude strengthens the reader's trust in the narrator.

The reader can overlook the *novel-ification*[37] of Isherwood's experience since the narrator creates a form of complicity with the reader by inviting them into the narrator's process of reflection. Therefore, the reader may find it more interesting to learn more about William than Arthur Norris, the main character of *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*: "No dramatic event involving Arthur has occurred. The events that have seemingly centred on Arthur have in fact centred on William" (Schwerdt 57). The narration pushes the reader to pay attention to William's thoughts and considerations, which provide insights into his personality and the proper "self" of the author. William's mind becomes a door to understanding Isherwood's perspective on his environment: "The novel is not about Arthur Norris but about William Bradshaw, a thinly disguised Isherwood, a character whose name is a portion of Isherwood's own - Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood" (Schwerdt 57). Although Schwerdt emphasizes the disguising of Isherwood under his alter-ego of William Bradshaw, I would argue that it is more a matter of protection than disguise. Using a name intimately connected to him, he creates a link with the character. Still, since he never actually used this name[38], he also creates distance between Isherwood and William. Isherwood was connected to William but never "met" him during his life.

William is treated like a different person who shares a form of metaphysical connection with Isherwood. By disassociating himself from the narrator, Isherwood allows the reader to live the novel through the narrator's experience: "He also wanted the reader 'to see with the Narrator's eyes, to experience his experiences, to identify with him in all his reactions'" (Schwerdt 58). This distance from the narrator and the creation of this separate personality allows the author to let the

[37] Like *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood wrote this novel with the support of his personal diary. The term I use here implies that Isherwood turned his real experience into a conveyable novel thought the translation of his experience.

[38] *An Interview with Christopher Isherwood* by David J. Geherin, also mentioned by Schwerdt on page 58 of *Isherwood's Fiction: The Self and Technique*: "I gave myself an assumed name. It was in fact my two middle names, but nevertheless it was an assumed name since I have never called myself William Bradshaw" (Geherin 143).

reader explore his nature through the prism of a copy of himself. This copy sets aside some details of Isherwood's true personality and notably his homosexuality. In the novel, the narrator does not express sexual preferences, a choice he explains in allegorical terms in *Christopher and His Kind:*

> For example, the Narrator is at a Beethoven concert, he sees and smells a juicy steak in a restaurant, he wakes in the night to feel his cheek being licked by the tongue of a non-venomous snake. The ordinary reader, being convinced of the Narrator's ordinariness, will take it for granted that he is feeling pleasure in the first instance, appetite in the second, and terror and disgust in the third. The reader will share these feelings. But suppose that the Narrator shows no pleasure in the music? Suppose that he shows disgust on seeing and smelling the meat? Suppose that he shows no fear of the snake and even starts to pet it? Suppose, in other words, that he proves himself to be a tone-deaf, vegetarian herpetologist? The ordinary reader may be repelled by, or sympathetic to, such a Narrator's reactions, but he will never identify with him. He will always remain aware that the Narrator is an individual who is very different from himself. (*Christopher and His Kind* 177-178)

In other words, for Isherwood, defining the character as homosexual would have diverted attention toward the narrator and away from the story itself. He felt that this attention would have been dangerous for his narrative: "This is what would have happened if Christopher had made his Narrator an avowed homosexual, with a homosexual's fantasies, preferences, and prejudices. The Narrator would have become so odd, perhaps so interesting, that his presence would have thrown the novel out of perspective" (*Christopher and His Kind* 178). But this fear of drifting away from the narrative was not the only factor restraining Isherwood from defining William's sexuality. As Mary Bancroft points out in her commentary on the same excerpt, presenting the narrator as heterosexual would, in a sense, have been even more shameful: "However Isherwood scorned

making the Narrator heterosexual. This seemed as shameful to him as pretending to be heterosexual himself. So he decided that the Narrator should have no explicit sexual experiences, which resulted in one reviewer referring to the Narrator as 'this sexless nitwit.'" (Bancroft 31). Isherwood's shame played a role in his decision to de-sexualize the narrator. It could be argued that denying any sexual orientation to his narrator also flowed from Isherwood's worry that it would connect him too much to his alter-ego. Keeping such details hidden from the reader makes the narrator even more disconnected from the author. It is not directly influenced by his moral judgments: "The unlucky creature is, indeed, no more than a demi-character. It is as if Christopher has told him: "Don't call any unnecessary attention to yourself; don't get more involved with anybody than you absolutely have to.'" (*Christopher and His Kind* 178). Nevertheless, this idea of "not calling too much attention" echoes Isherwood's desire to make his alter-ego as bland as possible. However, considering that *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* were first published together, it is difficult to accept that the narrator's de-sexualization was motivated by the fear of backlash from critics about his homosexuality since homosexual desire and relationships are approached in *Goodbye to Berlin*. For Isherwood, the de-sexualization of the narrator has to do with his desire to keep his narrator as an observer and as a reliable character in the narrative:

> [Geherin:] You once said that what strikes you today about the Christopher Isherwood persona in *Mr. Norris* is its heartlessness. Do you think if you had emphasized or developed the persona's homosexuality, this would have helped to explain his behavior more?
>
> [Isherwood] Well, it would have made the persona more human and, insofar as somebody is more human, he is less heartless. What one means by heartlessness is indifference, a characteristic of robots. The Christopher Isherwood persona is more than somewhat of a robot. (Geherin 145)

In his interview with Geherin, Isherwood points out the importance of the robotic character of the narrator, a trait that he considers compatible with the role of observer. Like in *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood seemingly puts the narrator in the background. He is part of the action but, at the same time, has little influence on events. His interactions with other characters do not define the narrative but only work to convey the overall reality of his environment. Therefore, his lack of humanity is essential for the novel since the reality evoked by *Mr. Norris* - or at least the reality emanating from his experience in Weimar Berlin - must be as accurate as possible.

The romanticization of suicide in gay literature: Isherwood's opposition to the Weimar gay narrative

The de-sexualization of the narrator emancipates Isherwood's work from the traditional narrative of gay literature in Weimar Germany, while paradoxically allowing for a romanticization of homosexual life and relationships there. Indeed, the approach of *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* to homosexuality, and the integration of homosexual relationships in the narrative, offers a hopeful perspective on the matter. This perspective opposes Weimar's conventional narrative regarding gay men, which tended to doom homosexual characters to suicide. Samuel Clowes Huneke explores the impact of suicide in homosexual discourse in his essay *Death Wish: Suicide and Stereotype in the Gay Discourses of Imperial and Weimar Germany*: "The narrative discourse of gay suicide that dominated the period's literature synthesized the antipodal treatments of suicide in the sexological and the masculinist traditions. Unlike heterosexual literature from the period, which certainly contained examples of suicide, it became the norm for gay characters to follow a rigid narrative that almost always ended in death and for authors to depict those deaths in a Romantic register" (Huneke 129).

Huneke's look at the typical gay narrative is insightful since it allows us to better appreciate how Isherwood stepped away from the stereotypes of gay narrative during the Weimar era. Isherwood's approach to the gay narrative is very much centred on his experience in Weimar Germany, with the novelization of his diaries adhering closely to the reality of his relationships. Thus, he does not fall into the dramatic narrative proper to Weimar novelists of the time. First, the novelization of his experience on Ruegen Island shows a form of emancipation from the Weimar gay narrative. As Schwerdt notes, "The story is in fact about Isherwood and Walter [the real Otto] - not Peter, Otto, and Christopher the narrator" (Schwerdt 83). Isherwood chose to translate his experience of this relationship through the eyes of his narrator Christopher, observing a fictionalized version of himself under the alias of Peter. This fictionalized version allowed Isherwood to convey his experience through a form of third-person observation. Christopher describes Perter and Otto's relationship from an outsider's perspective. However, Isherwood's narrator – Christopher – is, in fact, Peter. Christopher creates another protagonist in the narration of his experience on Ruegen island. Thanks to this new character, Christopher can covey a third-person impression of his relationship with Otto. Thus, Isherwood can portray the experience of his relationship with Walter [the real Otto] through the eyes of his narrator, without having his narrator directly involved in the relationship. This complex duplication of alter-egos allows Isherwood to express the translation of his experience on Ruegen island without the bias of his own emotions or judgments. This chapter of *Goodbye to Berlin* still adheres to the overall gay narrative by minimizing, but still acknowledging, the presence of suicidal thoughts. Peter's contemplation of suicide at the end of his relationship with his tutor is one example of Isherwood's acknowledgement of the notion of suicide in gay narrative and the minds of gay men: "Next morning, the tutor left, leaving a ten-page letter behind him. Peter meditated suicide" (*Goodbye to*

Berlin 79). The mention of suicide in Peter's background story and the overall novel acknowledges its presence while exorcising its presence. Following Jacques Derrida's theorization of Hauntology[39] and Ontology[40], Isherwood summons the ghost of suicide that haunts the gay narrative to exorcise it from his own narrative. The reader is confronted with Peter's acknowledgment of this thought and understands that, for Isherwood, even if suicide cannot be wholly erased from the gay narrative, it is not an inevitable fate. Isherwood also raises suicide in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*: "'You're very mysterious.' For an instant the thought even passed through my mind that Arthur was perhaps meditating suicide. But the very idea of his attempting to kill himself was so absurd that it made me begin to smile" (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains* 72). William's reaction to the idea of Arthur killing himself lets the reader understand that suicide is not a solution that fits in Isherwood's narrative. Suicide is not a significant theme in either novel, even if Isherwood acknowledges the issue's existence in both. The mention of suicidal thoughts in these novels is an echo of the presence of suicide as a romanticized solution for gay men in Weimar culture and literature: "This Weimar-era narrative thus accepted the Hirschfeldian assumption[41] that sexual desire constituted a discrete and insular identity while adopting the masculinists' sympathy with death in depicting that identity. In turn, the works that made use of this narrative reproduced the very stereotype, so familiar today, that gay people are cursed with a death wish" (Huneke 129). Isherwood's acknowledgment and refusal to incorporate suicide as a narrative element in *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* may be regarded as part of a counter-

[39] "To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. This is what we would be calling hauntology" (Derrida 202)

[40] "Ontology opposes it [Hauntology] only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration" (Derrida 202)

[41] "In Homosexuality in Men and Women (1914), for instance, [Magus] Hirschfeld asserted that the suicides of gay men in Berlin were "something of the everyday." In fact, Hirschfeld estimated in 1914 that 3 percent of gay men committed suicide, one-quarter had attempted it, and three-quarters had experienced suicidal thoughts" (Huneke 135)

cultural movement which works to de-romanticize suicide of gay men and to normalize homosexual relationships in narratives.

Isherwood and Modern Media: Romanticization of the Weimar Republic in Modern Media

The normalization of homosexual relationships offers the reader a different perspective. It creates a more hopeful perspective on the reality of gay men in Weimar Germany. It might be argued that Isherwood paradoxically romanticizes homosexual relationships by de-romanticizing suicide and the dramatic aspect of same-sex love in the early twentieth century. On the one hand, it could be argued that the romanticization of the homosexual narrative in Weimar Germany hides or minimizes the reality faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the early twentieth century. But on the other hand, the aestheticization and romanticization of suicide for LGBTQ+ characters can be even more dangerous: "By aestheticizing the suicides of gay men and women and thus robbing their deaths of the critical power with which Hirschfeld and his associates had endowed them, Weimar authors crafted a narrative that not only led gay characters inexorably into death but exulted in the beauty and meaningfulness of their suicides" (Huneke 157). The aestheticization of the suicide of gay men and lesbians in literature and culture still presents a threat that must be recognized since it still has an impact on modern gay identity: "Their existence complicates the progressive narratives of contemporary queer historiography, suggesting that gay emancipation advanced in tandem with the idea that all gay men and lesbians ought to be tragic suicides. It is the Weimar-era stereotype that most powerfully shaped later understandings of homosexuality, for it is the

idiom of romanticized suicide that continues to mark depictions of homosexuality[42] in literature, television, and art today[43]" (Huneke 157). The romanticization of suicide as part of the gay narrative and the romanticization of gay space and relationships in Weimar Berlin undeniably impact LGBTQ+ individuals, even in the 21st century[44]. Nevertheless, the romanticization of homosexual relationships in Weimar also has an important presence in modern media and counters the stereotypical approach to the gay Weimar narrative.

To study Isherwood's work, it is also necessary to study the cultural impact of his novels. The first case that might arise from such a study is the 1966 musical *Cabaret,* based on John Van Druten's 1951 play *I Am a Camera*, adapted as a film in 1955 and directed by Henry Cornelius. The musical *Cabaret,* starring Liza Minnelli as Sally Bowles, was adapted for the screen in 1972. Harold Prince directed the original Broadway production of *Cabaret*, and the film was directed by Bob Fosse. Isherwood discusses the plays and the movies in *Christopher and His Kind*:

> In the film of *I Am a Camera*, Christopher gets drunk and tries to rape Sally. She resists him. After this, they are just good friends. In the musical play *Cabaret*, the male lead is called Clifford Bradshaw. He is an altogether heterosexual American; he has an affair with Sally and fathers her child. In the film of *Cabaret*, the male lead is called Brian Roberts. He is a bisexual Englishman; he has an affair with Sally and, later, with one of Sally's

[42] Refers to the elements outlined by Hirschfeld and Mann which characterize suicide as a noble act for LGBTQ+ individuals: "His characterization of suicide as a noble act, his melancholy tone—these both rely on precisely the idiom used by other Weimar authors to romanticize suicide. To kill oneself was to be free of the "'burden'" (Huneke 157)

[43] This article by Samuel Clowes Huneke was first published in the *New German Critique* 136, Vol. 46, No. 1. In February 2019. The time mark "today" therefore refers to the early 21st century, contemporary with the writing of this memoir.

[44] Refer to *The Trevor Project*'s statistics and studies on LGBTQ youth suicide: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/

> lovers, a German baron. At the end of the film, he is eager to marry Sally. But Sally reminds him of his lapse and hints that there may be others in the future. Brian's homosexual tendency is treated as an indecent but comic weakness to be snickered at, like bed-wetting. (*Christopher and His Kind* 65)

In the adaptations of Isherwood's work, every director took important creative liberties with the original narrative of *The Berlin Stories,* mainly *Goodbye to Berlin*. In his memoir, Isherwood points out the liberties taken regarding the sexuality of the male lead and his relationship with Sally Bowles. All these interpretations show a reticence to portray the male lead as homosexual. Indeed, *I Am a Camera,* and the musical play *Cabaret* represent the male lead as entirely heterosexual. The film *Cabaret* takes a different path from the other adaptations. It portrays the male lead as a bisexual male. Still, it emphasizes heterosexual relationships over the affair between the main character, Brian Roberts, and the German Baron, Maximilian von Heune. These modifications to Isherwood's original narrative make these adaptations differ significantly from *The Berlin Stories*. Since they do not acknowledge Isherwood's main reason for his visit to Berlin - "Boys!"[45] - the sexual freedom offered by the city, I would argue that these adaptations efface a core element of Isherwood's experience in Weimar Berlin. Instead, the various directors seem obsessed with forming a sexual relationship between Christopher's many alter-egos and the character of Sally Bowles. While the film is largely faithful to Sally's character as drawn in

[45] " At school, Christopher had fallen in love with many boys and been yearningly romantic about them. At college he had at last managed to get into bed with one. This was due entirely to the initiative of his partner, who, when Christopher became scared and started to raise objections, locked the door, and sat down firmly on Christopher's lap. I am still grateful to him. I hope he is alive and may happen to read these lines. Other experiences followed, all of them enjoyable but none entirely satisfying. This was because Christopher was suffering from an inhibition, then not unusual among upper-class homosexuals; he couldn't relax sexually with a member of his own class or nation. He needed a working- class foreigner. He had become clearly aware of this when he went to Germany in May 1928, to stay with an elderly cousin who was the British consul at Bremen. He had no love adventures while there, but he looked around him and saw what he was missing." (*Christopher And His Kind* 9-10)

Goodbye to Berlin - for example, the gold-digger aspect of Sally's character is explicitly represented in the movie - the love triangle and the implicit sexual tension it creates makes for a divergence from the original character of Sally Bowles. Fosse's adaptation maintains this idea of a relationship between Brian and Sally, but it still allows his male lead to have an affair with the German baron. However, even if the audience is led to understand that Brian has had an affair with the Baron, it is never explicitly discussed except in a discussion between Brian and Sally:

> [BRIAN]: Oh! Screw Maximillian
>
> [SALLY]: I do.
>
> [BRIAN]: So do I.
>
> [SALLY]: You two bastards!
>
> [BRIAN]: Two? Two? Shouldn't that be three? (*Cabaret* 1:26:18)

The audience understands that a certain sexual tension is present between Sally and Maximillian and between Maximillian and Brian. Even though Sally's relationship with the baron is more explicitly developed, it is the only dialogue in which both characters admit that they had a sexual relationship with the baron. Sex becomes an obstacle between Brian and Sally. Brian's acknowledgement of his relationship with the baron seems shameful, even though the inspiration for his character was more openly homosexual. Also, the brevity of this discussion implies that Brian's bisexuality is anecdotal. His sexuality is used only to add a slight twist to the movie's narrative. Still, it has no tangible impact on the character's behaviour or experience of Berlin. *Cabaret* fails to convey Isherwood's experience in Berlin due to the liberties taken by the director. Fosse romanticizes Weimar Berlin and Isherwood's experience by developing a more "heteronormalized" narrative. Despite the excellent acting of Liza Minnelli as Sally Bowles and

Michael York as Brian Roberts, the movie denies an essential part of Isherwood's translation of experience to please a conventional audience of the time by picturing Brian's bisexuality as an obstacle to his relationship with Sally.

Contrary to the previously mentioned adaptations, the 2011 film *Christopher and His Kind,* directed by Geoffrey Sax, takes a more accurate approach to Isherwood's work and translation of experience. Produced by the BBC, this film takes inspiration from Isherwood's memoir. Still, it retains some of the characteristics proper to earlier adaptations like *Cabaret,* echoes of which are present in the scenes surrounding Jean Ross[46].

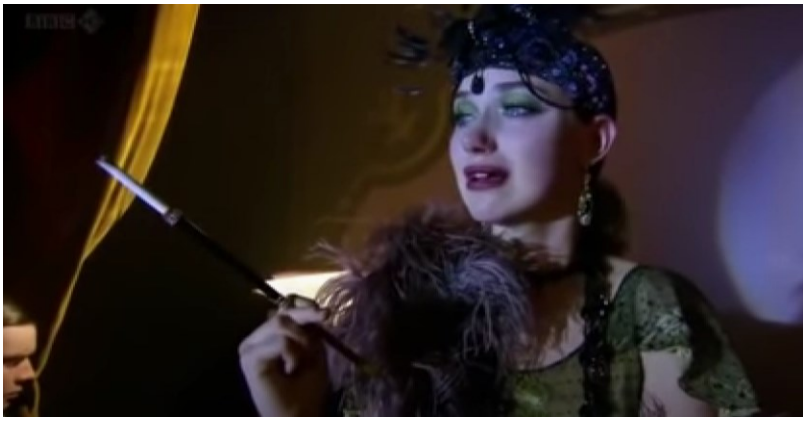

Figure 1 – Jean Ross singing in a cabaret - *Christopher and His Kind,* Geoffrey Sax (57:05)

Music plays a lesser role in Sax's *Christopher And His Kind,* but the scene pictured in *figure 1* shows an instance when Jean's music overlaps with the next scene. Here, Jean's singing adds to the narrative and echoes the aesthetic of the cabaret, the musical and the movie *Cabaret*. However, the approach to Jean Ross's character is more realistic. Imogene Poots, who played Jean Ross, portrayed her character through the accounts Isherwood offered in his memoir, not through Sally's

[46] See Fig. 1

character. From her Britishness to her ability to sing[47], Poots created a version of Jean who is less romanticized and more adapted to the narrative of Isherwood's translation of experience: "Jean was more essentially British than Sally; she grumbled like a true Englishwoman, with her grin-and-bear-it grin. And she was tougher. She never struck Christopher as being sentimental or the least bit sorry for herself" (*Christopher and His Kind* 64). However, Sax's approach to Isherwood's adaptation of *Christopher And His Kind* inscribes itself in the same category as *Cabaret*. While in *Cabaret*, the Nazi presence is portrayed through scenes such as the spontaneous singing of the song *Tomorrow Belongs to Me,* the Nazi threat and presence are explicitly acknowledged and portrayed in Sax's adaptation through scenes like the one where Christopher is hiding from an S.A march, or when he is witnessing the burning of books by Nazis. Such scenes emphasize the constant fear and pressure posed by the Nazis during Isherwood's stay in Berlin.

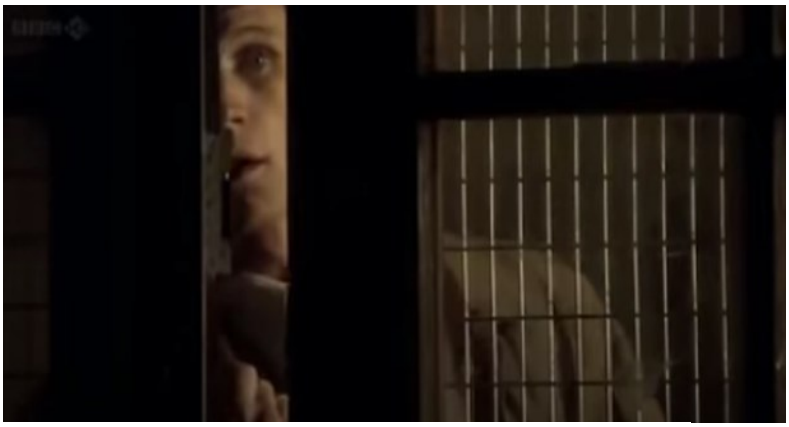

Figure 2 - Christopher Isherwood hiding from a Nazi partisan - *Christopher and His Kind*, Geoffrey Sax (37:28)

[47] Refers to: Harvey, C. (2011, March 18). *Christopher and His Kind, BBC Two, Review*. The Telegraph. Retrieved May 30, 2022, from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8391758/Christopher-and-His-Kind-BBC-Two-review.html

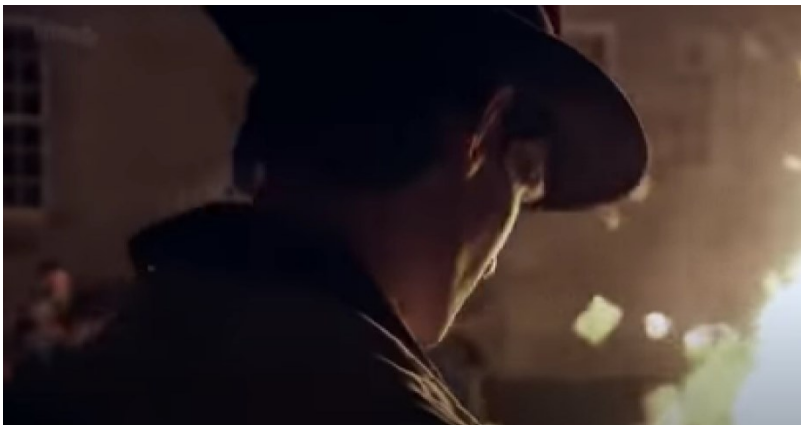

Figure 3 - Christopher Isherwood Witnessing the burning of books - *Christopher and His Kind*, Goeffrey Sax (1:01:30)

The events Christopher witnesses throughout the movie and the strong presence of Nazi iconography in the background of many scenes constantly remind the audience of the Nazi threat. The director's choice to punctuate the narrative with such scenes shows a will to deromanticize Weimar Berlin's narrative and integrate the city's sociopolitical turmoil into the narrative by returning to Isherwood's observations. In one such scene, Christopher realizes that one of the S.A posted at the entrance of a Jewish-owned shop is one of his former lovers, Bob:

> "When the Nazis held their first boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, Christopher went to see what was happening to the Israels' department store. Nothing much, it appeared. Two or three uniformed Storm Troopers were posted at each of the entrances. Their manner wasn't at all aggressive; they merely reminded each would-be shopper that this was a Jewish store […] When he came out again, having made some token purchase, he recognized one of the boys at the entrance. They knew each other from the Cosy Corner" (*Christopher And His Kind* 121)

In a way, Sax's adaptation of Isherwood's words could even be considered as a continuation of his translation of experience. He also adapted Isherwood's narrative to create a story in which he felt Isherwood's translation of experience would be best represented. Thus, Sax's adaptation is not

immune to artistic interpretation, including mixing fictional events with Isherwood's memoir to create a conveyable storyline. One example is Christopher's encounter with Gerald Hamilton at the beginning of the film. Indeed, Christopher meets Gerald in conditions similar to the ones pictured in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*. Nevertheless, in his memoir, Isherwood recognizes that this encounter is fictitious: "When William Bradshaw (the I-narrator of the novel) meets Mr. Norris on a train, their encounter seems remembered, not imagined, although its setting is fictitious" (*Christopher And His Kind* 76). Even though Isherwood acknowledges that he did not meet Gerald Hamilton in these conditions, Sax decided to include it to present a narrative that would fit the image of the Christopher he created for the movie. Thus, Sax shows that even if his adaptation tries to give a more accurate representation of Isherwood's experience in Berlin, he is still influenced by Isherwood's previous translation of experience and is incorporating the myth that Isherwood created about himself. In this case, he perpetuates the myth of Isherwood and Gerald's (William and Arthur's) encounter.

Unlike *I am a Camera* or *Cabaret*, Sax's *Christopher And His Kind* openly portrays Christopher as homosexual. By basing the film on Isherwood's memoir, it allowed the director to visualize the Berlin homosexual sub-culture encountered by Isherwood. From scenes in the house where Isherwood resides to scenes in the Cozy Corner, Sax offers an exciting perspective on Isherwood's memoir. His particular combination of the elements of Isherwood's memoir and novels presents an insightful approach to the place of truth in the adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's experience. It is important to acknowledge that the era in which *I am a Camera* (1955) and *Cabaret* (1972) premiered is significant when we compare the place of sexuality in those movies to Sax's *Christopher And His Kind*. In the earlier period, public opinion on homosexuality was unreceptive to portraying a movie's main character as homosexual. When homosexuals did

appear in cinema from the early 20th century until the end of the 20th century, the representations were stereotypically negative.

In his essay "The Depiction of Homosexuality in American Movie", Rudy Rudy approaches this issue: "gay love stories are frequently associated with fun and laughs, too. Those scenes are intended to amuse the audience, such as those shown in American gay movies, like Adam and Steve (2004), Another Gat Movie (2006), Wedding Wars (2007), The Broken Hearts Club (2000), etc." (Rudy, 62). Rudy Rudy refers to Benshoff and Griffin's essay *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian film in America* when he emphasizes how those stereotypes anchored themselves through time: "This social stigma has been seen in the social life for such a long time," Rudy points out that: "By the 1920s, a stereotypical image of male homosexuality was prevalent both in the cinema and in real life: the pansy. Pansy was a term used colloquially to describe a certain type of queer man- a flowery, fussy, effeminate soul given to limp wrists and mincing steps.' 'Effeminate' behaviour of gay characters seems to be a stereotype[48]. It becomes the general signature of gay people" (Rudy, 62). The prevalence of stereotypes in the representation of gay characters in movies could have been an obstacle for the directors and writers of *I am a Camera* and *Cabaret*. Considering public opinion on homosexuality, it is understandable that adapting Isherwood's novel and matching the main character's sexuality with Isherwood's sexuality would have meant taking a considerable risk. We could speculate that the best way to convey Isherwood's narrative at the time was to erase or lessen the impact of sexuality in the adaptations. Furthermore, Isherwood's experience, as narrated in *The Berlin Stories,* did not match the stereotypical tragedy that surrounded the typical fictionalization of same-sex relationships:

[48] Rudy refers to: Wlodarz, J. (2009). "'We're not all so obvious': Masculinity and Queer (in)visibility in American Netweork Television of the 1970s" *in Queer Tv,* G. David and G. Needham (eds.). New York: Routledge.

> From around 1930's, there were many novels and films in which gays are constructed as sad and twisted creature [with] preserve desires [who] would inevitably lead to a tragic down fall[49]. This means that same-sex relationships are the stuff of tragic plots and hidden identities, no matter how frail or loose they might be. Such desire tends to enable and complicate many aspects of their lives[50] (Rudy 66)

Isherwood's Berlin novels do not entirely conform to this stereotypical representation of same-sex relationships. Indeed, the tragic aspect of these relationships, as depicted by Isherwood, tends to normalize same-sex relationships instead of dramatizing them. Peter and Otto's relationship is an example of such normalization. Their issues are not only linked to their sexuality. Peter and Otto's interpersonal dynamic and clashing personalities are mainly responsible for their tumultuous relationship. This is not to say that sexuality plays no role at all. Still, it is not what defines the characters' entire relationship.

Nor does Isherwood adopt a tragic approach when he confronts the reader with the reality of male prostitution in Weimar Germany, and its impact on gay men's relationships. Instead, he

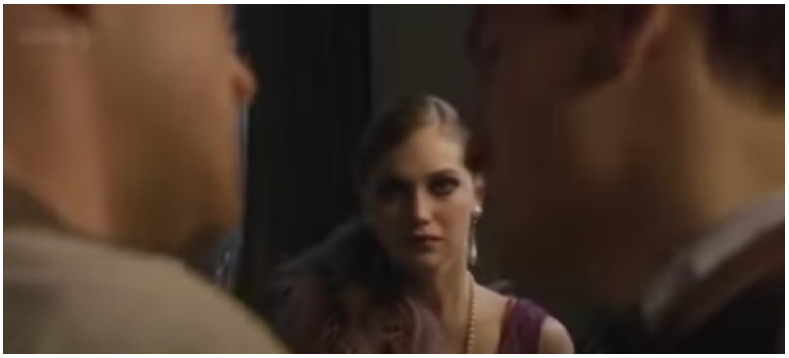

Figure 4 - Christopher, Jean and Heinz enter a dispute with Gerhardt - *Christopher And His Kind* (49:24)

[49] Rudy refers to : Sullivan, N. (2003). *A Critical Introduction to Queer Therory.* New York: New York University Press.

[50] Rudy refers to: Flora, M. J. and L. H. Mackethan. (2002). *The Companion to Southern Literature.* Louisiana: Louisiana State University.

draws on his own experience and writes from an acknowledgement of his reality. The political turmoil of Weimar Germany also impacts relationships in Isherwood's novels. Homosexuals are not "twisted creatures" tormented by their desires; instead, they are targets of an increasingly hostile environment toward them. Isherwood normalizes homosexuality by presenting it as a natural element of the narrator's milieu/ atmosphere. While sexuality does not define a character in Isherwood's narrative, the characters are impacted by how their environment might receive their sexuality. Sax's *Christopher and His Kind* follows Isherwood's normalization of homosexuality by acknowledging the stigmatizing homosexual narrative of the Weimar era and by separating Isherwood's experience from these stereotypes. A scene in which Christopher, Jean and Heinz enter into a dispute with Heinz's brother, Gerhardt, echoes the stereotypes referenced by Rudy[51]. Gerhardt's reaction to Christopher and Jean's presence in the apartment resonates with Rudy's description of the stereotypes of gay males in movies and in real life.

The word "pansy" – translated from the conversation between Heinz and Gerhardt in German – resonates with the assumptions surrounding homosexuals in the early 20th century. In this scene, the characters are faced with the stereotypes propagated by the commonly accepted homosexual narrative of the time. Moreover, the characters are also faced with the presence of Nazi ideology in their environment. Gerhardt expresses his trust in Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. His devotion to Nazi ideology and Hitler represents *a desire for nationalism* through a rejection of tolerance. His fanaticism contrasts with *the spirit of tolerance* expressed by Jean and Christopher. Here, Sax shows how the desire for freedom and the hopeful perspectives projected by Weimar Berlin clashed with the rise of fascism and the stereotypes anchored in the public's mind. Heinz's desperate attempt to come to terms with his brother shows his refusal to comply with the tragic

[51] See figure 4.

plot and stereotypes that his environment would like to inflict. Sax normalizes and deromanticizes same-sex attraction in the Weimar era by exposing the audience to the pressures exerted by a hostile world. In Sax's *Christopher And His Kind,* characters are not defined by their sexuality, even if their environment tries to define them through this prism by enacting stereotypes anchored in the romanticization of tragic gay narratives. The movie exorcises the stereotypes of the gay narrative and deromanticizes the Weimar myth by presenting the multifaceted realities of same-sex relationships.

Conclusion

In the early 20th century, Berlin was a beacon of hope for the study of sexuality, a sort of island of progress in the turmoil of the aftermath of the First World War. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs's earlier theorization of the *"*Third Sex*"* and the opening of the Institute for Sexual Science by Magnus Hirschfeld exemplifies this desire for a deeper understanding of sexuality and its questions. Nevertheless, this leap forward had to confront the reality of the social, economic, and political turmoil that rose from the First World War's ashes. The desire for a better understanding of sexuality and its sub-cultures collided with the harsh realities of Weimar Germany. Berlin's blossoming homosexual scene rose amidst this instability, radiated beyond Germany's borders, and attracted foreigners like Christopher Isherwood, eager to discover what this new Berlin had to offer. Indeed. British censorship drove artists like Isherwood to seek greater freedom in Germany, where Berlin's sexual openness stood in stark contrast with other major cities, London among them. Isherwood's time in Germany led him to explore, compile and subsequently fictionalize his experience in the novels *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Mr. Norris Changes Trains.*

Those novels were first published as *The Berlin Stories.* Isherwood's fictionalized account of his experience in Germany offers an insightful look at different issues faced by homosexual individuals during this troubled era. It provides a new perspective on what it means to write fiction. For Isherwood, fiction was a way to explore his reality, including the dynamics of same-sex relationships and the prevalence of male prostitution. Isherwood plays a lot with the notions of reality and truth throughout his works. The concept of truth is constantly in motion with Isherwood and plays itself out in the distinctions drawn between Isherwood as the author, and his alter-ego, Christopher, as the narrator. For example, sometimes Isherwood understands someone speaking German perfectly well. Still, his alter-ego Christopher is unable to translate the words. He is fascinated by the language's foreignness rather than the words' meaning. Isherwood creates

essential lies to convey a feeling rather than a meaning - in this case, the feeling of amazement when confronted with a foreign language and culture. By transforming his reality into fiction to convey his experience in Berlin, he foregrounds his emotions rather than facts or events. These emotions and experiences are authentic, but Isherwood frees himself from the "truth" by privileging his own perspective of reality and his experience. He does not transform the personality of the people he encounters but uses them to create his characters. The accuracy of an encounter or an event is of secondary importance in Isherwood's translation of experience since its primary purpose is to convey how the author feels about it.

In Isherwood's work, the narrator is the one who takes responsibility for adapting the narration to convey the best possible translation of the experience. Therefore, the narrator adjusts his role depending on the context and the message he wishes to bring to the reader. The narrator has "chameleon-like" attributes that enable him to evolve, depending on his environment. The narrator is a means for the author to create fiction from his reality and, therefore, to create a myth around his persona. What emerges is a fictional truth that prevails over the historical accuracy of an event. His work is not to be understood as a historical account of Weimar Berlin but as a rendering of how a foreign artist experienced the city's atmosphere. Furthermore, Isherwood voluntarily lets the ghost of truth haunt his experience to convey a part of himself in this fictional reality. Isherwood's punctual association with his alter-ego – Christopher – legitimizes his translation of experience. Isherwood can call upon "truth" for his own needs instead of being subservient to it. Isherwood's appropriation of "truth" as a tool is also a way for him to release himself from the influence of the factual world. The author takes the reader along with his fictional past by leaving them with the task of uncovering the purpose of his translation of experience. The narrator helps the reader transcend their bias regarding the situations depicted, especially any

romanticization of the Weimar era that might influence the reader's judgment. Thus, the narrator is immune to "judgement or moral lapses" (Schwerdt, 57) or from anything external to the narration, like criticism, a romanticization of events, or even the author's judgment.

Through this process, Isherwood can offer a realistic and hopeful approach to homosexual relationships in his narratives. This approach diverges from the conventional discourse around gay relationships of the Weimar era, which focused on the tragic fates that were presented as integral to them. This tragic fate revolved essentially around suicide and how it was a crucial *dénouement* in homosexual narratives. By translating and romanticizing his experience in Berlin, Isherwood can de-romanticize suicide and counter the aestheticization of suicide by gay men. This romanticization of suicide in gay narrative and early 20th-century stereotypes of homosexual relationships has impacted modern media into the 21st century, so further studies on how previous work similar to Isherwood's countered this influence would be helpful to assess suicide's place in the modern gay narrative and how to counter it in a contemporary context.

Through his novels and the more recent screen adaptations of his work, including Geoffrey Sax's Christopher And His Kind, Isherwood normalizes homosexuality as a natural element of the narrator's environment and as something that does not define a character. Instead, the character is impacted by their environment's perspective on sexuality. Rather than being defined by sexuality, characters are influenced by the stereotypes and stigmatization imposed by their environment. Isherwood recognizes this stigmatization and normalizes sexuality and sexual freedom by confronting the reader with the reality of Weimar Berlin. Isherwood's translation of experience through his novels and memoir deromanticizes and destigmatizes sexual freedom and homosexuality in Weimar Germany by exposing the reader to his experience and emotions without the stigmas and judgments of the time. Thanks to Isherwood's work and its continuing legacy, it

is possible to understand the atmosphere and the issues faced by homosexual individuals in Weimar Germany and Weimar Berlin. Christopher Isherwood exorcises the ghost of tragic gay narratives in Weimar culture through his works. He reduces its influence on the modern conception of what it meant to live as a homosexual individual during the troubled Weimar era and the rise of the Third Reich. Indeed, conditions for homosexuals deteriorated significantly following the Nazi's ascension to power in Germany: "Persecution of homosexuals was an indispensable component of the Nazi regime's plans to rid the German population of "undesirable" elements. Homosexuals were apprehended and imprisoned alongside political dissenters, Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies, Jews, and various "asocial," such as alcoholics and prostitutes. In total, between 5,000 and 15,000 homosexuals were detained in concentration camps throughout Germany, where they received brutal treatment." (Boden 3). The Nazi position on homosexuality meant to erase any progress made during the Weimar era. Focussing further on how contemporary and post-war literature has represented the extent and the impact of these persecutions strikes me as an interesting area for further study.

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