

**T.C.  
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**



**CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD: A LIFE “STORY” DEDICATED TO THE  
ACT OF WRITING IN SEARCH OF AN ARTISTIC, SEXUAL AND  
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY**

**Ph.D. THESIS**

**Gökben GÜÇLÜ**

**Department of English Language and Literature  
English Language and Literature**

**Thesis Advisor: Prof. Dr. Hatice Gönül UÇELE**

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T.C.  
İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ  
DOKTORA TEZ ONAY BELGESİ

Enstitümüz İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Doktora Programı Y1112.620001 numaralı öğrencisi Gökben GÜÇLÜ'nün "CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD: A LIFE "STORY" DEDICATED TO THE ACT OF WRITING IN SEARCH OF AN ARTISTIC, SEXUAL AND SPIRITUAL IDENTITY" adlı doktora tez çalışması Enstitümüz Yönetim Kurulunun 01/06/2018 tarih ve 2018/16 sayılı kararı ile oluşturulan jüri tarafından ..... ile Doktora tezi olarak ..... edilmiştir.

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Prof. Dr. Özer KANBUROĞLU

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results, which are not original to this thesis. (28/06/2018).

**Gökben GÜÇLÜ**





## FOREWORD

Since the foundation of this study depends on life stories, I'd like to thank and express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Hatice Gönül Uçele, who has always played a key role in my personal life story. Her significance in my life cannot be limited to a teacher-student relationship. Witnessing my university years at Beykent University, where I spent the best and happiest four years of my life, Prof. Uçele was and still is more than a teacher to me. It was a time when I was about to get my share of life's unfairness. Without knowing the fact that the worst surprises were ahead of me, I was struggling to know who I was and to cope with life and its difficulties. At this time, Prof. Uçele was the only one who believed in me and supported me when I stumbled. After supervising me in my master's thesis, she has now offered her knowledge and support, her patience and encouragement, but most importantly it is her understanding and empathy with my never-ending problems and struggles in life that I will always remember and be grateful for. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that "Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee." Prof. Dr. Gönül Uçele is the one who has long opened the door by believing in me.

I'll forever be thankful to Prof. Dan P. McAdams (Northwestern University) first of all, for replying my emails and generously sharing his articles with me. I was extremely happy when he spared his valuable time to read the introduction of this study. His valuable insights gave me hope and confidence to believe that I was on the right track.

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The lesson we've learned and the motto that we've embraced is to keep going and don't give up. For this reason, I know that these pages mean more than a simple study for them, since it involves all the pain, bitterness and sorrows of those tired and weary years. I hope that it will also be the beginning of peace and happiness ahead. As a family, we all deserve to see this dream that we've longed for to come true. I deeply miss my father, who is not with us to see this day and share the joy with us, but I always feel his presence in my heart and mind.

**June, 2018**

**Gökben GÜCLÜ**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| <b>FOREWORD</b> .....  | vii  |
| <b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....   | ix   |
| <b>ÖZET</b> .....  | xi   |
| <b>ABSTRACT</b> .....  | xiii |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....   | 1    |
| <b>2. CHAPTER I</b> .....  | 13   |
| 2.1 Life Story Model of Identity .....   | 16   |
| 2.2 Christopher Isherwood’s “Life Story” .....   | 23   |
| 2.3 Formation of Artistic Identity & Early Novels: All The Conspirators & The Memorial ..... | 31   |
| <b>3. CHAPTER II</b> .....   | 47   |
| 3.1 Isherwood in the 1930’s: Mr. Norris Changes Trains & Goodbye to Berlin ...               | 47   |
| 3.2 Formation of Sexual Identity.....  | 59   |
| <b>4. CHAPTER III</b> .....  | 69   |
| 4.1 Isherwood in America .....   | 69   |
| 4.2 Vedanta & Formation of Spiritual Identity .....  | 73   |
| 4.3 Prater Violet .....  | 81   |
| 4.4 The World In The Evening.....  | 84   |
| 4.5 A Single Man .....   | 96   |
| <b>5. CONCLUSION</b> .....   | 115  |
| <b>APPENDIX</b> .....  | 125  |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....  | 127  |
| <b>RESUME</b> .....  | 133  |



## **CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD: SANATSAL, CİNSEL VE MANEVİ KİMLİK ARAYIŞINDA YAZMA EYLEMİNE ADANMIŞ BİR ‘HAYAT HİKAYESİ’**

### **ÖZET**

Yazıya farklı anlamlar yükleyen bir yazar olarak, Christopher Isherwood’un yazın amacı, gerçekte kim olduğunu çözmek ve hayatının ne anlama geldiğini bulmaktır. Isherwood için yazı eylemi sıradan bir şey değildi. Sanatının ham maddesi kendi kişisel deneyimleri ve hayat hikâyesi olduğundan pek çok eseri otobiyografik ve kendini tanımlayan bir yapıdadır. Bu yüzden Isherwood yazını hayat hikâyesinden bağımsız olarak yorumlamak mümkün değildir. Bu çalışmayı kuramsal çerçevede güçlendiren teori, kişilik psikoloğu Dan P. McAdams’ın Kimliğin Hayat Hikâyesi Modeli’dir. Yazar olarak kariyerinin başından sonuna kadar, Isherwood’u yazmaya teşvik eden kendi deneyimlerini anlatmak, onlardan anlam çıkarmak ve bunları eserlerine yansıtmaktı. Isherwood’un hayatı boyunca yaşadığı olaylar, onun yazını anlamakta kritik bir rol oynamaktadır ve yıllar sonra Dan P. McAdams, Isherwood’un yazınında tam olarak ne yapmaya çalıştığını kavramamıza yardımcı olacak bir yaklaşım ortaya koymuştur.

Araştırmam boyunca yapmaya çalıştığım şey, Christopher Isherwood’un hayat hikâyesi ve yazını arasındaki ilişkinin McAdams’ın hayat anlatıları hakkındaki fikir ve gözlemleriyle nasıl örtüştüğünü ortaya çıkarmaktı. McAdams, kişisel hikâyelerin kimliğimiz olduğunu iddia eder. Tıpkı bir roman yazarı gibi, hayatımızı anlamlı kılmaya ve ondan anlamlar çıkarmaya çalışırız. Hayattaki deneyimlerimiz, değerlerimiz, inançlarımız ve hedeflerimiz kimliğimizin oluşmasını etkiler. McAdams’a göre kimlik; olay örgüsü, ana fikri ve karakterleriyle birlikte başlangıcı, ortası ve sonu olan bir hikâyedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, McAdams’ın Kimliğin Hayat Hikâyesi Modeli kuramından faydalanmak suretiyle Isherwood’un romanlarındaki kişisel hikâye anlatımı ve kimlik oluşumu arasındaki ilişkiyi betimlemektir. Bu araştırmadaki nihai amaç, kendi hayat hikâyesini gerçekleştirirken ürettiği yazını inceleyerek, Christopher Isherwood’un hayatının farklı dönemlerinde kurduğu sanatsal, cinsel ve manevi kimliği ortaya çıkarmaktır.

McAdams, her insanın hayat hikâyesinde önemli olaylar olduğunu belirtir. Isherwood’un hikâyesi; dönüm noktası olarak göze çarpan geçişler, kazanımlar, kayıplar ve mücadelelerle doludur. Bu sebeptendir ki bu çalışma Isherwood’un hayatının üç farklı dönemine odaklanır: Londra, Berlin ve Kaliforniya. Bu şehirlerde edindiği deneyimler Isherwood’un hikâyesinin anlatış şekline de katkıda bulunur; ve farklı zaman ve yerlerde ürettiği yazını daha iyi anlamamıza yardımcı olur. İlk eseri olan All the Conspirators’dan başlayarak sırasıyla The Memorial, Mr. Norris Changes Trains, Goodbye to Berlin, Prater Violet, The World in the Evening ve son olarak herkesin takdirini ve beğenisini kazanan A Single Man isimli romanlarında; Christopher Isherwood’un yazar, eşcinsel ve spiritüel bir birey olarak kimliğinin nasıl oluştuğunu, değiştiğini, geliştiğini ve tutarlı bir hayat hikâyesiyle nasıl bütünleştiğini gözlemlemek mümkündür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Christopher Isherwood, Dan P. McAdams Kimliđin Hayat Hikâyesi Modeli, Hayat Anlatısı, sanatsal, cinsel, manevi kimlik.*

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

### **ABSTRACT**

As an author who attributed a deeply significant personal meaning to writing, Christopher Isherwood's main purpose in fiction was to discover who he really was and what his life meant to him. The act of writing was not something mundane for Isherwood. The raw material of his art was his own personal experience and life story. For this reason, the structure of his many works are autobiographical and self-defining. Therefore, interpreting Isherwood's fiction independently of his life story is impossible. The theoretical framework that strengthens this study is the 'Life Story Model of Identity' theory presented by personality psychologist Dan P. Mc Adams. Beginning from his early career as a writer until the end, Isherwood's motivation for writing was to speak out of his own experiences, making meaning out of them and reflecting them into his fiction. The incidents he went through in life play a critical role in understanding his fiction and, years later, Dan McAdams has provided an ideal approach that helps us to grasp what Isherwood was really doing with his fiction.

During my research, what thrilled me most was exploring how the relationship between Christopher Isherwood's life story and his fiction chime with McAdams' claims and observations about life narratives. McAdams claims that personal stories are our identities. Like a novelist, we work on our lives to make sense and meaning out of them. Our experiences, values, beliefs and objectives in life affect the formation of our identities. For McAdams, identity is a story which has a beginning, a middle and an ending, with a plot, theme and characters in it. Drawing upon the framework of Dan P. McAdams' life story model of identity, the aim of this study is to portray the relationship between personal story telling and identity construction in Isherwood's novels. By analyzing Christopher Isherwood's fiction within the performance of his life story, my intention in this research is to unravel the formation of the artistic, sexual and spiritual identities that he constructed in different periods of his life.

McAdams notes that there are key scenes in every individual's life story and Isherwood's life was full of with transitions, gains, losses and struggles that stand out as turning points. For this reason this study focuses on three different episodes of his life: London, Berlin and California. The experiences he had in these cities contributed Isherwood's storytelling and help us to reach a better understanding of the fiction he produced these distinct times and places. Starting from his early work *All the Conspirators* continuing with *The Memorial*, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet*, *The World in the Evening* and finally until his most critically acclaimed novel, *A Single Man*, it is possible to observe how the identities of Christopher Isherwood have been shaped, changed, developed and integrated into a coherent life story as an author, as a homosexual and as a spiritual individual.

**Keywords:** *Christopher Isherwood, Dan P. McAdams Life Story Model of Identity, Life Narrative, artistic, sexual, spiritual identity.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

All my life I have had an instinct to record experience as it is going by and somehow to save something out of it and keep it. ... For me, art really begins with the question of my own experience, and what am I going to turn it into? What does it mean and what is it all about? I suppose that I write in order to find out what my life means and who I am. ... There are many other motives for writing, but as I promised to speak always out of my own experience, this has been my motive. (Berg ed. 2007, pp. 53-54).

Christopher Isherwood's quotation above is the inspiration for this study. For Isherwood, one of the main motivations for writing was to transform his own life experience into fiction. According to Isherwood, life is the one and only source of inspiration in producing a literary work and it is through writing his experiences that he attempts to find meaning in his life. Isherwood's novels are based on biographical facts. For this reason, his narrative is self-defining. The personal facts that he chose to narrate in his fiction are important in understanding his "life story." Life stories are always interesting. We all love to hear or read about other people's stories. It is not that we are hunting for sensation or scandal. It is the desire to know how other people perceive the world, how their experiences of life are similar to or different from our own. Every life story is subjective. They tell us different things about the person to whom they belong.

For Isherwood, the act of writing is closely related with his personal experiences and life story. Every piece of writing is a step toward learning about himself. This is exactly what differentiates him from many other writers. As he narrates his experiences via fiction, the identity that he discovers becomes more visible to his readers. Beginning with his early novels, it is possible to recognize the gradual transformation of this naïve and inexperienced young author into a mature, grown-up man who takes every chance to face life and what it brings. Each new experiences at different stages of his life contributes something in the formation of his identity. This quest to know himself is always

apparent in his narrative and as for readers it is also possible to gain insights of how he creates the persona of “Christopher Isherwood.” In *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*, personality psychologist Dan P. McAdams states that:

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

The question of where our lives are going, where we have been, and what we desire or plan in life contribute to our own formation of identity. In the field of psychology, one way of approaching identity is to perceive it as “constructed in life story narration” (Gregg 2006, p.63). When you ask the question “What is your story?” to a person you recently met, the answer would tell a lot about that particular individual. The incidents s/he chooses to narrate about his/her life reveal some data regarding the personal identity that has been constructed.

In a family memoir called *Kathleen and Frank* (1971). Isherwood illustrates his parents’ relationship through their letters to one another. Although the narrator is Christopher Isherwood, he refers to his younger self as “Christopher” as if he is talking about a totally different individual. When Isherwood’s father, Frank Isherwood, died in World War I, both Kathleen and Christopher were devastated. Life was never easy for Christopher after his father’s death. He was expected to live up to his father’s example and he was constantly criticized and pressured by his school teachers and his mother with whom he never got on well. Isherwood recalls what he felt in those days with these words:

However Christopher soon found that being a Sacred Orphan had grave disadvantages-that it was indeed a kind of curse which was going to be upon him, seemingly, for the rest of his life. Henceforward, he was under an obligation to be worthy of Frank, his Hero-Father, at all times, and in all ways. (Isherwood 1971, p.502).

Here, he makes sense of his life by connecting Christopher at preparatory school in the past with Christopher Isherwood’s present self in the 1970s. In this way he constructs a life story which reveals the reason why he felt inferior during his adolescence and his hatred of his school masters, who promoted the certain

values such as heroism, patriotism and courage. As Developmental Psychologist Jennifer L. Pals states in her essay, “*Constructing the Springboard Effect: Causal Connections, Self-Making and Growth within Life Story*,” life story narration “...involves an interpretive process of self-making through which individuals highlight significant experiences from the past and infuse them with self-defining meaning in the present by interpreting them as having a causal impact on the growth of the self” (McAdams et al. 2006, p.176).

Isherwood’s fiction depends heavily on his experiences from the past and it is possible to detect from his narrative that he forms an identity of his own out of these experiences which all contribute to his self-growth. This brings us to the ultimate objective of this study. By drawing on “narrative and life story” concepts, this study aims to reveal how Christopher Isherwood, whom Somerset Maugham once described as the man holding “the future of the English novel in his hands”, constructed his artistic, sexual and spiritual identities and how he placed this self-defining narrative into his fiction.

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

McAdams’ answer to this question is that “you are a novel. You are an extended prose narrative featuring a main character” (2015, p.240). This is the foundation of McAdams’ *Life Story Model of Identity*. McAdams claims that identity is a story with its “setting, scenes, character, plot and theme” (2001, p.101). It is in the period of late adolescence and young adulthood that we begin to participate in social life, take active roles, and develop certain beliefs and values. According to McAdams, at this point of life, people begin “to put their lives

into self-defining stories” (2001, p.102). and it is through those stories that people “provide their lives with unity and purpose.”

In the field of psychology, researchers use the concept of “Narrative Identity” to describe how individual life stories contribute to who we were in the past and who we are today. Narrative identity is described as “the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life” (Schwartz et al. 2011, p.99). The methodology of this study depends highly on narrative identity, especially personality psychologist Dan P. McAdams’ “Life Story Model” of identity. Dan P. McAdams is currently working at Northwestern University in Chicago. Among his research interests, there are various topics such as narrative psychology, the development of a life-story model of human identity, generativity, adult development and the redemptive self. Throughout this study, McAdams’ theory will provide guidance to understand the relationship between personal story telling and identity construction in Isherwood’s novels. The contribution of the field of psychology to literature and literary criticism is indisputable. Many years researchers have benefitted from Freud and psychoanalysis. In this study, I’d like to present a new angle in understanding an author and his works. I strongly believe that Dan McAdams’ theory could also be used for interpreting other authors who narrate life while living it.

I contacted Dan P. McAdams years ago when I was at the very beginning of this study. Since my major is not psychology, I told him about my fears of making an academic mistake in this field and asked his advice. He replied to my email and sent some of his articles which I had been unable to access. On December, 2017, I sent him the introduction of this study. He replied me in a few days and assured me that I’ve made “very good use of the life narrative literature in psychology” (McAdams 2017). He sent me two more articles which have direct contributions to the final touches of this thesis. His input has been very useful and illuminating to me. Our final correspondence was on 4 May 2018 in which he congratulated me and gave permission to include our correspondence in this study.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dan P. McAdams’ replies to my emails can be found in the Appendix.

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

As Christopher Isherwood grew and stepped into adulthood, he begins to narrate life incidents in his novels. Gradually he forms a “life story” of his own. In *Narrative Development in Adolescence*, it is stated that:

A life story is not a full representation of one’s life, but a coherent narrative that weaves together experiences that help a person to explain how he or she came to be at this point in time. In addition to the life story itself, the process of narrating stories is also seen as influencing identity more traditionally conceptualized, that is, identity in terms of beliefs, ideological commitments, social roles, and even self-views. Thus, the process of narrating experiences is also one in which identities of all types are explored, committed to, evaluated, discarded, and maintained (McLean & Pasupathi, 2010 p.xxi).

Starting from his first novel, *All the Conspirators* which was published when Isherwood was only 24 years old, he began to form a “coherent narrative” out of the incidents of his life. The identity that Isherwood was constructing at his early age is already emerging in his fiction. Until his last novel, Isherwood continued to work on his identity; developing and reshaping it. Since it was his intention to speak out of his own experiences, it is the readers’ job to complete the pieces of the puzzle in order to observe how the “Christopher Isherwood” persona was formed. As stated in *Narrative Research Reading Analysis and Interpretation*, “People are meaning-generating organisms; they construct their identities and self-narratives from building blocks available in their common culture, above and beyond their individual experience” (Lieblich, Masiach & Zilber 1998, pp.8-9). Isherwood made meaning out of his experiences and these experiences directly contributed his self-narrative and fiction. The incidents he had gone through in life play a critical role in understanding his fiction.

Yet, it would be a mistake for anyone to assume that this study will present a simple biography of Christopher Isherwood. It doesn’t aim to reveal a hidden

fact or incident regarding the author's life. Since a lot has already been documented and said about his life, any reader of Christopher Isherwood knows the fact that his novels are autobiographical. But there are some crucial points in his life that will definitely be touched upon in order to understand how he became "Christopher Isherwood." He witnessed the 1930s, when the world was drifting into one of the bloodiest periods in history. He was in Berlin while Hitler and Nazism were gaining power, he observed the pain and suffering in the Second World War. The generation he belonged to was still trying to deal with the after-effects of World War I, but was expected to be ready to fight in World War II. They were in the middle: They had already realized how certain values like self-sacrifice and heroism were meaningless. Plus, Isherwood had first-hand experience of the pain, since his father was killed in the World War I. Together with Wystan Hugh Auden and Edward Upward, Isherwood described themselves as "The Angry Young Men" who were totally against the "dullness, snobbery, complacency" of the British tradition. In his early novels, it is possible to observe how he personally deals with these issues, especially the concept of "war and the test," which will be analyzed in the following pages.

In his twenties, like many adolescents and young adults, he had his own struggles to fit the world he was living in. This period of his life, with all his weaknesses and insecurities, is reflected in his three novels, *All the Conspirators*, *The Memorial* and *Lions and Shadows*. These were the times that he was trying to form an artistic identity heavily dependent upon James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. Yet his novels were not merely imitations of these writers. Despite his youth, he also had his own issues to talk about. So it can be said that in terms of style and techniques, it is possible to observe these other writers' shadows but as for content and enthusiasm, he took his first steps in reflecting what he truly felt and experienced. The self-defining life story that Isherwood constructed and reflected in his novels at this period of his life was highly personal. His discomfort with the British education system, his inability to fit into society, constant disagreements with his mother, a never ending desire to leave the country and his attempt to be an independent individual, free of the expectations and pressures of his family, were all part of his individual experience and they definitely had a great effect on his life story.

As noted sociologist Anthony Giddens observes: “A person’s identity is not to be found in behavior, nor— important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (Giddens, 1991). In 1929, Isherwood’s journey to Berlin not only caused his narrative to continue but also to take a turn for the better. The years 1929-1933 were a period of significant change for Isherwood. Personal dilemmas which can clearly be seen in his pre-Berlin fiction gradually began to change. Going through a process of personal growth for the first time in his life, he found a chance to integrate same-sex desire into his life story. Berlin in the 1930s was like a heaven for gay men and Christopher was so ready to meet with “his kind” that he immediately realized how psychologically and sexually repressed he had been in England. In *Christopher and His Kind*, while he is narrating his experiences in Berlin, he states how he felt in those times with these words: “My will is to live according to my nature, and to find a place where I can be what I am...” Isherwood (1976, p.12).

In their essay “Making a Gay Identity: Life Story and The Construction of a Coherent Self,” Bertam J. Cohler and Phillip L. Hammack observe that

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

While the city of Berlin provided enough material to improve his fiction artistically, at the same time he began to make sense and meaning out of his life through acting out his sexual identity. Although in *Goodbye to Berlin* he didn’t dare to announce his own sexuality for both literary and personal reasons, he wrote a whole chapter about a homosexual relationship between two men. Lieblich, Masiach and Zilber observe that a “particular life story is one (or more). instance of the polyphonic versions of the possible constructions or presentations of people’s selves and lives,” (Lieblich, Masiach & Zilber 1998, p.8). In Berlin, Isherwood discovered the sexual aspect of his self. So the life

story he constructed in Berlin becomes an important part of his personal narrative and the foundation of his identity.

In *Writing Desire: Sixty Years of Gay Autobiography*, Bertram Cohler focuses on how homosexual men born in different generations make meaning out of their same sex desire. He observes that “These meanings are influenced by their own life circumstances and also by the time and place in which they live” (Cohler 2007, p.22). In 1932, Isherwood began his first longtime relationship with a German boy, Heinz Neddenmayer. For almost six years, Isherwood did everything he could to prevent his lover being conscripted into the Nazi army. They wandered around different cities from Greece to Paris, trying to buy citizenship for Heinz. In life stories, there are turning points or “emotionally charged events” (253). that affect the individual notes McAdams. 1937 was a turning point in Isherwood’s life because Heinz was arrested by Gestapo agents on his way to Belgium. Psychologically and emotionally devastated, Isherwood, writes in his novel *Christopher and His Kind* that he felt like “a house in which one room, the biggest, is locked up.” (1976, p.282). He had already lost his father in a war and now he was losing his lover in another. His visit to China as a war correspondent contributed to his hatred toward anything associated with war. As the political atmosphere changed in Berlin, especially after Hitler came to power, a sexual and racial witch hunt began. In 1939, when he sailed to New York with Auden, he was sure of only two things: he was a pacifist and, as he writes in *Christopher and His Kind*, that “He must never again give way to embarrassment, never deny the rights of his tribe, never apologize for its existence...” (1976, p.335). In “*The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent and Author*” McAdams claims that

Into and through the midlife years, adults continue to refashion their narrative understandings of themselves, incorporating on-time and off-time events, expected and unexpected life transitions, gains and losses, and their changing perspectives on who they were, are, and may become into their ongoing, self-defining life stories. (McAdams 2013, p.280).

America gave Isherwood a chance to rewrite his life story; to assess his gains and losses while he was in Berlin. Although he and Auden were warmly welcomed in America, attending meetings and lunches, Isherwood had already lost meaning and purpose in his life. In his diary, he writes “They wanted to



meet Christopher Isherwood. And who was I? A sham, a mirror image, nobody!” (Isherwood 2011, p.9). On his visit to Los Angeles to learn more about the pacifist way of life from his friend, philosopher and writer, Gerald Heard, who was deeply involved in spiritual studies, especially a Hindu philosophy called Vedanta.

In their essay “*Identity and Spirituality: A Psychosocial Exploration of the Sense of Spiritual Self*” Chris Kiesling defines spiritual identity as “a persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviors that are consonant with the individual’s core values” (Kiesling et.al., 2006, p.1269). Vedanta restored purpose and meaning to Isherwood’s life, something which at that period of time, only Vedanta could do. Up to that point in life, Isherwood had always rejected any form of religion and relationship with God, but his meeting with Swami Prabhavananda, who founded the Vedanta Society of Southern California, played a crucial role in the formation of spiritual identity. One of the main premises of Vedanta philosophy is “The oneness of existence and the divinity of the soul” (Sarvapriyananda, 2016). In Vedanta philosophy, it is believed that our true nature is divine and we are not aware of who we are. We are ignorant of our true nature and we need spiritual knowledge to be aware of our nature. As Swami Sarvapriyananda claims, one cannot only reach this kind of knowledge from written texts. We should turn it into a “living reality” through meditation. Since it is a belief that needs to be experienced, Isherwood felt closer to Vedanta as he began to meditate. Moreover, Swami Prabhavananda was always there to encourage Isherwood and answer his questions. Naturally, Isherwood’s experience with Vedanta and his close relation with Swami Prabhavananda, reflected in his fiction. He wrote a book called *My Guru and His Disciple* in which he presents honest portrayal of his feelings, fears and weaknesses during the period of embracing Vedanta and becoming a disciple.

While he was engaged in Vedanta, he earned his living by writing scripts for movies. In 1945 he published his first novel in America. *Prater Violet* shows readers that Isherwood’s habit of reflecting real life incidents and experiences continues unabated. In *Prater Violet*, the narrator Christopher Isherwood revisits the 1930s and fictionalizes his relationship with the director Berthold

Viertel during their collaboration on a movie called “Little Friend.” Finally there are two books that present a complete blend of his artistic, sexual and spiritual identities. Although *The World in the Evening* (1954). is not known to many people today, Isherwood successfully manages to reflect what he has in his pocket so far. It can be regarded as the harbinger of his widely known novel *A Single Man*. (1964). In the final chapters of this study these two novels will be explored to show how the identity that Christopher Isherwood constructed throughout his life as an author, a gay man and a believer of Vedanta is integrated into his fiction.

This study can also be treated as a narrative research. After all, any kind of study analyzing the narrative material can be defined as Narrative Research. (Lieblich, Masiach & Zilber 1998, p.2). Narrative analysis is such a broad term that it can be applicable to all the areas of humanities and social sciences such as anthropology, psychology sociology or history. One of the objectives of this study is to show that a narrative or life-story methodology can light our way in understanding certain writers whose lives are the raw materials of their fiction. “Literature is a wilderness, psychology is a garden.” (Albright 1996, p.19). says scholar Daniel Albright. Although there are basic differences between the two disciplines, they both deal with human beings and human experience. While literature presents portrayals of different aspects of human nature, psychology analyzes the motives behind those aspects with its methodologies and techniques. Yet, both disciplines are in the same boat. We need the map and compass of psychology to find our way in the wilderness of literature.

The first chapter of this study centers on Dan McAdams’ Life Story Model of Identity theory and its basic principles. Apart from Dan P. McAdams, various scholars such as Donald E. Polkinghorne, Kate McLean, Manusha Pasupathi and Jerome Bruner’s ideas will also be shared in order to reveal how we make meaning in life. Christopher Isherwood’s ‘life story’ will also be analyzed in the light of Dan P. McAdams’ arguments. Various key scenes and turning points from his childhood and early school years will be addressed in order to understand the period just before his early literary career. The formation of Isherwood’s artistic identity as a writer and an analysis of his early novels, *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* will be the final part of this chapter. My aim

here is to reveal young Christopher Isherwood's attempts to make personal meaning out of his life.

The second chapter focuses on the years he spent in Berlin in the 1930s. There are two novels that dominate this part of the study: *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* will be analyzed in detail to show how Isherwood's experiences in this city at this specific time contributed to the formation of Isherwood's artistic and sexual identity. As he became more involved with the gay subculture of Berlin, Isherwood gradually came to terms with his homosexuality. The incidents that can be marked as turning points in this period of his life are also touched upon in order to render the third and last phase of his life understandable.

In the third and final chapter, Isherwood's decision to move to America, his pacifism and the first steps in forming a spiritual identity as a result of his meeting with Hindu philosophy, Vedanta, will all be explored. Most importantly, it is in this period that his narrative understanding of himself and meaning making began to change as his midlife years began. His three novels, *Prater Violet*, *The World in the Evening* and *A Single Man* will be analyzed to illustrate how Isherwood's life story and understanding of himself changed as he aged.



## 2. CHAPTER I

Doris Lessing once said that “A story is how we construct our experiences.” All of us make meaning out of the things that we experience in life such as pain, happiness, love, success, disappointments, failures pleasures, and death. In a way, they all are the cement of our identities. As the years pass by, these experiences transform us, mature us, and most importantly help us to know who we are. In *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, Donald E. Polkinghorne who is a Professor and Chair of Counseling Psychology at University of Sothern California observes that “The basic figuration process that produces the human experience of one's own life and action and the lives and actions of others is the narrative” (Polkinghorne 1988, p.167). The word narrative is an umbrella term. It has connections with various disciplines such as sociology, history, anthropology, philosophy, literature, psychoanalysis and psychology. In this study narrative is viewed from the perspective of psychological studies; mainly identity construction.

In many dictionaries, the denotative meaning of the word narrative is “story” or “description of series of events.” Human beings are meaning makers. As a matter of fact, making meaning is so embedded in our daily lives that any kind of novel you read, a song you listen to or a movie you watch can contribute to this process because we have a tendency to be drawn to stories. For instance when you read a novel the interaction between the reader and the author is twofold: As a reader you approach the text from your own perspective. Every aspect of your personality, the experiences you had in life affect the meaning that you make out of the text. On the other hand some authors like Christopher Isherwood present stories about their lives and their “experienced reality” (Lieblich, Masiach & Zilber 1998, p.7). It is pointed out that:

... stories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world; at the same time, however, they shape and construct the narrator's personality and reality. The story is one's identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover

ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell (Lieblich, Masiach & Zilber 1998, p.7).

Literature is full of these examples. The texts that some authors produce tell readers a lot about the “inner realities” of their personal lives. For instance In *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath definitely had her own reasons for beginning the novel by saying “It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York.” (Plath 2005, p.1).

Alongside all the positive feelings that summer is associated with, she chooses to place death in the same sentence. The rest of the paragraph is full of indications that Plath's personal narrative at that time was dark and pessimistic. One month after the publication of the novel, she committed suicide. When Mark Twain a.k.a Samuel L. Clemens begins *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by saying that "You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth." (Twain 1985, p.1). He wants his readers to know that he is aware of what he is portraying, he is familiar with the people, setting and life alongside Mississippi River, the frontier spirit, and the thin line between slavery and freedom because they were all part of his own reality and experience in those times.

“I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life ...” (Thoreau 2004, p.96). says Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*. While he was writing these lines in 1845 he was trying to make his life meaningful by living by Walden Pond, away from people and civilization but close to the heart of nature. Jack Kerouac writes in *On the Road* “...the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time,...” (Kerouac, 2000 p.7). He is not only constructing a fictional story but at the same time he is reflecting a personal story, a personal stance against all the conformities of life in the 1950s, an endless energy to live, a great effort to turn the tide of life which commands people to live ordinary, meaningless, and robot-like lives.

Our world is shaped out of stories. All the examples that are shown above indicate that while readers are putting their own interpretation on to the text, based on their experiences and background, authors are reflecting their way of experiencing things by writing. After all, as famous French philosopher Paul Ricoeur perfectly observes, stories are "models for the redescription of the world." (McFague, 2010, p.134). In his article "*Narrative and Self Concept*," Donald E. Polkinghorne observes that the process of giving meaning to experiences is called Narrative and it is a "cognitive process that gives meaning to temporal events by identifying them as parts of a plot." (Polkinghorne 1991, p.136). It is the plot of our life stories that we construct as a result of our experiences. In *Narrative Development In Adolescence* Manusha Pasupathi and Kate McLean argue that "The idea is that via the process of narrating their experiences, people eventually build a sense of how their past informs the person they are today and how both their past and present point toward an emerging future" (Pasupathi & McLean 2010, p.xxi).

Your past experiences have significant effect on who you are. In a way they provide you with the raw material to form a personal narrative of your own. At this point, Harlene Anderson's definition of narrative is helpful to establish a basic structure for the concept.

Narrative is a dynamic process that constitutes both the way that we organize the events and experiences of our lives to make sense of them and the way we participate in creating the things we make sense of, including ourselves. In a narrative view, our descriptions, our vocabularies, and our stories constitute our understanding of human nature and behavior (Anderson 1997, p.212).

This definition of Anderson above signifies that we perceive the world in accordance with the way we welcome life. Since we each embrace life differently, we have different stories to tell and these stories tell us a lot about us as individuals. As we live by these stories, various incidents can contribute to your life narrative, either positive or negatively. For instance Isherwood's hatred of any form of authority or pressure was a result of his nightmarish years at preparatory schools. The pressures and expectations of school masters and the strict education system turned Isherwood's childhood years upside down. Years later, it is possible to see their effect on Isherwood's life narrative and fiction as well. According to McLean and Pasupathi life narratives are "manifestations of

the subjective representation of one's life course." (McLean & Pasupathi 2010). At this point some specific personal experiences that one has gone through in life affect the personal development of an individual. By beginning to ask questions like who am I and how have I become the person I am now, you take the first step in constructing an identity based on your life story. This brings us to the concept of "Narrative Identity and Dan P. McAdams' "Life Story Model of Identity."

Dan P. McAdams is a professor of psychology and the director of the Foley Center for the Study of Lives at Northwestern University. In 1985, he contributed to narrative identity studies by proposing his own model, called "Life Story Model of Identity." McAdams describes narrative identity as "the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life." (Schwartz et al. 2011, p.99). How, then, can an individual construct life stories? The incidents we go through in life, the people we meet, the way we approach problems, the way we deal with any kind of feelings and emotions, in short, the way we struggle with life, contributes to this construction of life stories. That's why life stories, like novels, have characters, plots and themes. (Bauer, Mc Adams &Pals 2008).

## **2.1 Life Story Model of Identity**

In the summer of 1982, while McAdams was teaching a graduate seminar on self and identity, the question that he asked to his students was the starting point of his claim: "What is identity? What would identity look like if you could see it?" (Yancy & Hadley 2005, p.120). A few months later McAdams established the foundations of his theory: "If you could see identity, I surmised, it would look like a story. A story incorporates a beginning, middle, and ending, working to organize a life into a reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future" (Yancy & Hadley 2005, p.121).

If identity is a story, we need a storyteller to tell these stories. In that case, an individual's life itself is the raw material of this story. Just as in novels and plays, a person's life has a beginning, a middle and an end. While writing or performing a life story, an individual experiences all the facets of life. During this period, he or she grows physically and mentally, determines goals, believes



in certain values (religious and spiritual beliefs), makes decisions (right or wrong). and reaches a certain point of maturity.

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

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

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

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

The ability to narrate experience is closely related with our ability to make meaning. In his poetically written book *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Jerome Bruner deals with “what constitutes a narrative” and what are the codes of meaning making. He claims that there are “two modes of cognitive functioning,

two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality” (Bruner 1986, p. 11). One mode is the Paradigmatic or logico-scientific Mode.” It is a “cognitive functioning” provides “*distinctive* ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality.” (Bruner 1986, p.12). This mode “attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation.” (1986, p. 12). As Bruner notes, the paradigmatic mode provides “good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, sound argument, and empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis” (Bruner 1986, p.13).

The Paradigmatic mode reveals “empirical truth.” The language of paradigmatic mode “is regulated by requirements of consistency and noncontradiction.” (Bruner 1986, p.13). It is at the heart of logic, mathematics, various sciences. On the other hand, the Narrative Mode is regarded as “*an art form*” by Bruner (1986, p.15). He thinks that “The great works of fiction that transform narrative into an art form come closest to revealing “purely” the deep structure of the narrative mode in expression” (1986, p.15). While the paradigmatic mode makes us to evaluate things from a logical perspective, the narrative mode “deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place” (Bruner 1986, p.15).

At this point, it should be stated that Jerome Bruner gives both modes of thinking equal importance. He never tries to outweigh one mode of cognitive functioning with the other. Actually, both modes are needed when we approach narratives. For instance, in the name of making Bruner’s observations more concrete, one can think about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories. He wrote almost sixty stories, in which he employs a combination of the paradigmatic and narrative mode of brain functioning. In his personal “life story” medicine plays a crucial role because studying medicine helped him to acquire a keen sense of logic and problem solving. On the other hand, it was apparent that he had a talent for story-telling. Thus, the genesis of Sherlock Holmes stories is unsurprising if you know the little details about Conan Doyle’s “life story.” In many of his stories, he solves the mystery with his powerful paradigmatic way of thinking, by utilizing forensic methods, focusing

on footprints ciphers, fingerprints and even the behavior of dogs in solving cases. On the other hand, his narrative mode of thinking indicates that he is also sensitive in touching upon various themes. For example, his portrayal of female characters, like the brave, clever and independent Irene Adler in *A Scandal in Bohemia* signifies that he is finding his own meaning on the issue of the role of women in the late Victorian period.

Since the framework of this paper concerns narrative understanding of life stories, Bruner's perspective on narrative is significant. One final assertion of Bruner is that "Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions. And since there are myriad intentions and endless ways for them to run into trouble- or so it would seem-there should be endless kinds of stories" (Bruner 1986, p.16). What then are the "the vicissitudes of human intentions"? The idea that Bruner tries to underline is that we all have different realities in our lives. Our experiences, goals, actions and purposes are all different. That's why every individual's narrative differs from every other, depending on the incidents and experiences s/he has gone through.

After proposing his life story model of identity, McAdams conducts interviews with middle aged adults and asks the participants to treat their lives as if they were novels. He asks them to divide their lives into chapters, by thinking about the key scenes, such as "high points, low points and turning points," in their lives. (Yancy & Hadley 2005, p.123). Finally, he asks them to imagine "the future chapters of their stories" (Yancy & Hadley 2005, p.123). After an analysis of the life narratives of these individuals, in his essay "*Personal Narratives and the Life Story*" McAdams produces data regarding the conflicts, changes and personal development of the participants. Some of their stories are simple, some are complex. But the common denominator among them is that life stories:

function to make lives make sense by helping to organize the many different roles and features of the individual life into a synthetic whole and by offering causal explanations for how people believe they have to come to be who they are (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.243)

As a result of his studies, Dan McAdams concludes that there are six common principles in the narrative study of lives. The first principle is that "The self is storied." As human beings, we are surrounded by stories. Although they may

come in different forms, such as folktales, myths, history, cinema, novels, biographies, or reality shows, their function is the same: they help us to understand human nature. The act of storytelling is subjective. ‘I’ whose stories about personal experience become part and parcel of a story ‘me.’ The self is both the story teller and the stories that are told” (McAdams, 2008, p.244). Starting from their early age, children tell stories out of their own personal experiences and in their adolescent years they put the “remembered episodes” of their lives into their “autobiographical storehouse.” They are our selected “autobiographical memories” or as McAdams observes they are “the story recollections of our past” which carry facts about lives as well as personal meaning. (McAdams, 2008).

The second principle is “Stories integrate lives.” Apart from their educational, motivational, inspirational or entertainment functions, stories provide *synchronic* and *diachronic* integration. By *synchronic integration* he means that people may show different “self-ascribed tendencies, roles, goals and remembered events” in their life stories but at the same time the way they participate in life can be the opposite of these tendencies. For instance, McAdams gives the example that life stories can explain how a “gentle” and “caring” person can become a successful “litigator” (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.243). On the other hand, *diachronic integration* provides explanations of “how a rebellious teenager” can become a respected person in society.

The third principle is “Stories are told in social relationships.” When we tell our story, it cannot be “understood outside the context of its assumed listener or audience, with respect to which the story is designed to make a point or produce a desired effect” (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.245). because storytellers “anticipate what their audience want to hear and these anticipations influence what they tell and how they tell it” (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.245). Storytellers embrace the position of both narrator and protagonist while they are telling their stories. Stories change depending on who the listener is.

The fourth principle of the narrative study of lives is that “Stories change over time.” McAdams draws readers’ attention to the fact that autobiographical memories are unstable because as the years pass by, one can forget the details of the events, and this causes changes in life stories. He argues that people’s

“motivations, goals, personal concerns and social positions” can change, and this may also lead a change in their memories of important events.

The fifth principle is “Stories are cultural texts.” McAdams argues that life stories are like mirrors of culture. Stories are “born, they grow, they proliferate, and they eventually die according to the norms, rules and traditions that prevail in a given society, according to society’s implicit understanding of what counts as a tellable life” (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.246). So stories change in accordance with the culture to which the individual belongs. McAdams presents a comparison of American and Chinese life narratives by sharing various scholars’ studies regarding the issue. For instance, in a study conducted on American and Chinese participants, subjects were asked to reflect upon autobiographical memories. While American participants presented “memories of individual experiences, Chinese participants reflected “memories of social and historical events.” (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.247). Moreover, more Chinese participants recalled “past events to convey moral messages than did Americans” (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.247).

The sixth principle is “Some stories are better than others.” McAdams claims that “A life story always suggests a moral perspective, in that human characters are intentional, moral agents whose actions can always be construed from the standpoint of what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’ in a given society” (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008, p.248). When life story narratives are analyzed by the researchers, it turns out that certain stories reflect maturity, self-growth, professional and personal satisfaction with life. There are also some stories which cannot be told to anyone. These stories are generally traumatic stories that contain too much pain or shame.

As Jean Paul Sartre says:

a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it (Speight 2015, p.18).

Life stories tell us who we are. Everyone is the writer and performer of their own story. We learn from them, we make meaning out of them. It is through the life stories that we perceive the world we live in. They are the raw material of our identities. Every aspect of our identities are formed as a result of stories.

Over the course of life, we put our stories together to present meaningful personal narratives. We are born with stories, we grow with stories, we depend on our stories, and we die with stories.

## **2.2 Christopher Isherwood's "Life Story"**

Lesser known and celebrated than many of his contemporaries, Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood is one of the few writers who successfully blends real life with fiction. The habit of recording his personal life story and his ability to present it in a fictionalized way are not the only features that make him special as a writer. The act of writing itself is a personal journey to discover his identity. Fame, commercial and literary success always held less importance for him. His aim was simple: keep recording life as it is and write about it. The ultimate purpose of this study is to emphasize that for Isherwood, writing was a way of self-exploration, a quest to discover who he really was and how he became that particular person. The experiences and the events he had gone through were gathered to be presented to the readers, sometimes in form of fiction and sometimes in form of autobiography or memoir. In terms of his "life story", Christopher Isherwood's life can be divided into three episodes: His life before going to Berlin, his life in Berlin and his life in America where he finally found inner peace and spent productive years as an author. By presenting three different episodes of Isherwood's life, the intention is to make a writer's journey to maturity and self-growth visible in the works that he produced.

Within the framework of Dan McAdams' work, the previous chapter introduces the "life story model of identity" and how the treatment of identity evokes as an "evolving self-story." In his essay, "The Psychology of Life Stories" Dan McAdams claims that

A person's evolving and dynamic life story is a key component of what constitutes the individuality of that particular person, situated in a particular family and among particular friends and acquaintances and living in a particular society at a particular historical moment. (McAdams 2001, p.101).

Similarly, this chapter is an exploration of those "key components" which played a critical role in the formation of Isherwood's artistic identity. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: Before focusing on Isherwood's attempt to

form an artistic identity, some biographical information will be given in order to reveal insights about Isherwood's "life story." These insights contribute to Isherwood's identity construction, and how he came to be that particular person. By touching upon some personal moments or life changing events in Isherwood's life, the aim is to show what motivated Isherwood while portraying a particular character or an event in his early novels.

McAdams states that the starting point of constructing a life story goes back to infancy and childhood. It is in this period that an individual "gathers materials" for his or her personal story to be formed in the future. To understand Isherwood's early novels and his persona behind them, it is necessary to focus on certain childhood episodes which had a direct effect on the formation of who Isherwood was and how he later became a particular person. Born on August 26 1904, Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood was raised as a typical child of an upper middle class British family, with a house full of servants and a nanny, in Wysberlegh and Marple Hall. His father, Frank Bradshaw Isherwood, was a Captain in the British army who had a taste for music, theatre, books and eastern religions. His mother, Kathleen was the daughter of a wine merchant and was raised "more conventionally bourgeois than Frank," according to Isherwood's biographer Jonathan Fryer. (1993, p.7). Apart from her highly colorful life, with balls, parties, picnics, German lessons and visits to galleries, Kathleen's mother came from "a large and remarkable family, the Greenes, thus making Christopher a close cousin of the novelist Graham Greene." (Fryer 1993, p. 8).

Isherwood had a happy childhood. Thanks to Frank and Kathleen, from a very early age, Christopher began to develop a taste for music and drawing. Most importantly, it was Frank who introduced stories into Isherwood's life. He was a good story teller who "charmed his son with imaginative tales and drew cartoons for him" (Fryer 1993, p. 9). While Frank was teaching Christopher elementary level French (because Kathleen and Frank's conversations were in French when the housemaids were in the room), at the same time he helped Christopher in learning how to read by producing "a daily, illustrated journal for him called "The Toy-Drawer Times. This gradually evolved into a comic strip, eagerly awaited by Christopher" (Fryer 1993, p. 14). As McAdams observes in



*Narrative Identity*, in “the third and fourth years of life, most children come to understand that intentional human behavior is motivated by internal desires and beliefs” (Schwartz et al. 2011, p.122). He continues that it is the age of interpreting “the actions of others in terms of their predisposing desires and beliefs ...” (Schwartz et al. 2011, p.122).

Isherwood was encouraged to develop a sense of creativity and imagination when he was very little. He was four and a half years old when he directed his own play at a theatre which he built. Fryer observes that “Christopher’s ‘actors’ were china animals and other handy ornaments and his earliest ‘theatre’ was a shoe box artfully converted by Frank. Over the next few years the boy spent countless hours engrossed in his toy theatricals ” (Fryer 1993, p. 13). McAdams notes that “Autobiographical memory and self-storytelling develop in a social context. Parents typically encourage children to talk about their personal experiences as soon as children are verbally able to do so. (Schwartz et al. 2011, p.123). An entry of Kathleen’s diary dated November 1909 says that Christopher made up his first story entitled ‘The Adventures of Mummy and Daddy’ “but [it] seems to have been mainly about himself” (Fryer 1993, p. 13). Kathleen also helped her son to develop a daily writing habit: “During the winter of 1910-1911, they produced together a tiny handmade book-not surprisingly more Kathleen’s work than her son’s – entitled the History of My Friends” (Fryer 1993, p.14). As a writer, Christopher Isherwood took note of everything. He was a regular diarist and, according to Fryer, this was an instinct he took from his mother, Kathleen.

Forming narrative identity is to become “an author” of your life, and McAdams argues that simple narration of personal life stories is not enough to become an author. You need to “articulate what personal memories mean”(McAdams 2013, p.153). Personal memories are important in life stories. The act of deducting meaning from personal experiences is called “autobiographical reasoning.” In “*The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author*” McAdams describes it as “a wide set of interpretive operations through which people draw on autobiographical memories to make inferences about who they are and what their lives mean” (McAdams 2013, p.279). In other words, some memories have permanent effects in our lives. They can either be good or bad, but they

contribute to our personality. An event in the past can be considered a turning point in life and can indicate much about who we are. The month of May was the month of a similar turning point in Isherwood's life. Because on May 1, 1914 he was sent to St. Edmunds preparatory school and on May 8, 1915 his father was killed in the battle of Ypres.

St. Edmunds Preparatory school was a typical British public school, with harsh and brutal conditions. Many students who studied in this kind of school had no pleasant memories about it. In his famous essay "Such Such Were the Joys," George Orwell reveals how he was beaten with a cane by his teacher at St Cyprian because he used to wet his bed at the age of 8. Orwell describes what he felt with these words: "It was possible, therefore, to commit a sin without knowing that you committed it, without wanting to commit it, and without being able to avoid it" (Orwell 1981, p.5).

In his autobiography *My Early Life*, Winston Churchill, who attended St. James preparatory school reveal a similar agony by saying that:

How I hated this school, and what a life of anxiety I lived there for more than two years ... I counted the days and the hours to the end of every term, when I should return home from this hateful servitude ... (New Learning n.d.).

St. Edmunds plays an important role in the formation of Isherwood's identity. The foundations of his protest and reaction against British tradition and authority were laid in St Edmunds. Isherwood describes St Edmunds as "an aggressive gabled building in the early Edwardian style, about the size of a private hotel... in the foreground is a plantation of dwarf conifers, such as are almost always to be seen in the grounds of better-class lunatic asylum."(p 194 *Exhumations*). In St. Edmunds, Divinity was an important part of the curriculum. Going to chapel twice a day was compulsory; Latin and Greek were central to the curriculum. Apart from being in such a strict school, Isherwood had also an important disadvantage. St. Edmunds was run by cousins of the Isherwoods, Cyril Morgan Brown and his sister Monica. Christopher's relationship with the headmaster and his daughter was a disaster. This mutual dislike led to stressful days for Isherwood. In his book *Kathleen and Frank*, he says that he "found the staff much harder to cope with than the boys." (Isherwood 1971, p.398). Biographer Jonathan Fryer describes the education

goal of St Edmunds as “to produce disciplined, upright, God-fearing youths.” which of course Christopher Isherwood rejected all his life. In Kathleen and Frank Isherwood observes that being at a school run by a relative was not something that one can be proud of. He observes that “The relationship made them expect more of him than the other boys, it also made them afraid of seeming to show him any favor” (1971, p.398).

When war was declared on August 4, 1914, Isherwood was at home for summer holiday. Since his father, Frank, was ordered to go France, he came home for a few days for the last time and found a chance to spend time with his son. In the month of May 1915, the battle at Ypres resulted in thousands of casualties and unfortunately his father Frank Isherwood was among them. At first, he was announced as missing and a few days later a letter arrived to Marple Hall saying that Frank was wounded. Weeks later, his identity disc was finally found and all hopes and optimism regarding Frank Isherwood’s survival were dispelled. Meanwhile at St. Edmunds, the head master, Cyril, was making speeches extolling British heroism and courage. Students whose fathers were killed in the war were supposed to wear a black armband, which was an object of respect from the other students. After his father’s death, Isherwood also joined the group wearing black armbands. Now, St Edmunds became more unbearable for him. In the Afterword of Kathleen and Frank, Isherwood he states that “being a sacred Orphan” and the effort to be a son worth of his father cause a feeling of inferiority which never left him during his adolescence.

While he was surrounded by sympathy and condolences, he had to cope with “reprimands” of the teachers “as they reduced the boy to tears by accusing him of not living up to Frank’s example” (Fryer 1993, p.26). This was the beginning of Isherwood’s gradual hatred for the school authorities and “disrespect for the British Establishment” (Fryer 26). The only benefit of St. Edmunds for Isherwood was his meeting with Wystan Auden. Their friendship began in 1917 and became stronger as the years passed by. In 1919, when Isherwood was accepted at Repton, (another important public school of the time). he was 14 years old. However the effect of St. Edmunds on Isherwood was crucial. In his half autobiographical novel *Lions and Shadows*, he expresses his feelings with these words: “I had arrived at my school thoroughly sick of masters and

mistresses, having been emotionally messed about by them at my preparatory school, where the war years had given full license to every sort of dishonest cant about loyalty, selfishness, patriotism, playing the game and dishonoring the dead. Now I wanted to be left alone.” (Isherwood 1974. p.9)

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

The emotional and psychological baggage that he was carrying within himself for many years came to light in the form of short stories. With his close friend Edward Upward, they created a clutch of fantasy stories called Mortmere. These stories and their attitude toward the authority figures in school life played an important role in Isherwood’s early novels. In the Mortmere stories, they invented an Enemy called Laily. Laily who represents conventional values and traditional pressures, “became metamorphosed into a comic history don with clod boots, serge suit, pink flesh and continual perspiration.” (Finney 1979, p.48). Against this Enemy, Isherwood and Upward formed allies out of English literary figures. They were called Wilfred, Kathy and Emmy. (Wilfred Owen-Katherine Mansfield-Emily Bronte). According to Jonathan Fryer, the Mortmere stories “served the valuable purpose of enabling their creators to write out their discontent and to rebel against the prevailing prudery and conventions of their times.” (Fryer 1993, p. 47). It was in this period that Isherwood began to work on his first novel, *Lions and Shadows*, which was completed in 1925 but wasn’t published until 1938.

In 1925, Isherwood wrote a story for the *Oxford Outlook* (an Oxford undergraduate literary review). The story is called “The Hero” and it tells the

story of a boy who fails to save his drowning friend's life although he immediately jumps into the water. He fails to save his life but he was welcomed at school because of his bravery. But for Isherwood, after a childhood moulded by stories and speeches of heroism and heroic self-sacrifices in war, the word "Hero" connoted nothing but the failure and incapability which he felt at that time. This was probably the reason why he wrote such an ending because no matter how successful he became, it wasn't enough. He felt that he was constantly doomed to failure. The state of mind that Isherwood was in at that period, can not only be explained from a personal perspective. Isherwood surely had his own personal reasons to feel that way but on the other hand he belonged to a generation which felt the after effects of World War I heavily. As Brian Finney points out in *Christopher Isherwood A Critical Biography* "The war is symptomatic of a wider malaise affecting old and young alike. In fact, the post war generation is seen to suffer as much damage from the war as the previous generation which participated in it directly" (Finney 1979, p.93).

The best literary analysis regarding the 1930s British writers came from Virginia Woolf. In her essay "The Leaning Tower", Woolf observes that writers like "Day Lewis, Auden, Spender, Isherwood, Louis MacNeice" were writing in a chaotic world:

When they looked at human life what did they see? Everywhere change; everywhere revolution. In Germany, in Russia, in Italy, in Spain, all the old hedges were being rooted up; all the old towers were being thrown to the ground. ... The whole of civilisation, of society, was changing (Project Gutenberg Australia 2015).

As Woolf observes above, there was no steady tower that these writers could look at. The values with which they were raised and educated were no longer valid in the world after WWI.

Who can wonder if they have been incapable of giving us great poems, great plays, great novels? They had nothing settled to look at; nothing peaceful to remember; nothing certain to come. During all the most impressionable years of their lives they were stung into consciousness—into self-consciousness, into class-consciousness, into the consciousness of things changing, of things falling, of death perhaps about to come. There was no tranquillity in which they could recollect (Project Gutenberg Australia 2015).

Virginia Woolf perfectly understands these writers' floundering and anger towards anything associated with the British Establishment. Themes such as

heroism, self-sacrifice, glorious deaths had lost their meaning now. This is the reason why, in the Foreword of 1957 edition of *All The Conspirators*, Isherwood writes:

The Angry Young Men<sup>2</sup> of my generation was angry with the Family and its official representatives; he called them hypocrites, he challenged the truth of what they taught. He declared that a Freudian revolution had taken place of which they were trying to remain unaware. He accused them of reactionary dullness, snobbery, complacency, apathy. While they mouthed their platitude, he exclaimed, we were all drifting toward mental disease, sex crime, alcoholism and suicide (Isherwood 1966, p. 92).

Apart from this national dilemma, which he shared with many famous authors of the period, Isherwood had his own personal reasons for being rebellious and angry. In the Afterword of *Kathleen and Frank*, Isherwood calls “the Christopher” after Frank’s death as “a Sacred Orphan” who believes that his father’s death put a curse on his life. He felt that “he was under an obligation to be worthy of Frank, his Hero-Father, at all times, and in all ways.... Later there were many more who tried to do so; people he actually met, and disembodied voices from pulpits, newspapers, books. He began to think of them collectively as *The Others*” (Isherwood 1971, p.501). With these feelings, Isherwood began to look for a way out. He soon started his own rebellion with his decision to leave Cambridge. During the famous Cambridge Tripos exams, he got himself dismissed from school by writing a satirical passage and poems instead of correct answers. Soon after leaving Cambridge, Isherwood spent a summer in Isle of Wight, at Freshwater Bay, sending a letter to Edward Upward in which he said that he was in “heaven; sitting on a veranda” watching the sea view. Isherwood probably left his mother’s house with the intention of avoiding possible quarrels or tension. Fryer’s comment suggests the same: “Kathleen’s strength of personality that made Christopher want to escape from the house at every available opportunity; sometimes slamming the door behind him” (Fryer 1993, p.51).

On his return to London, Isherwood began to look for a job and it was in that period that Isherwood met The Mangeot family. The Mangeots played an

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Isherwood refers to a group of writers like Stephen Spender and W.H. Auden who reflected their disillusionment and despair after WW I in their writing.

important role in Isherwood's life because they were like the family that Isherwood had always wanted. Andre Mangeot was a French violinist living at his big house in Chelsea with his English wife Olive Mangeot and his two children. Andre Mangeot offered Isherwood a job as his secretary. His duty was to deal with Andre's correspondence and schedule. Isherwood accepted the job immediately and became close to each of the family members. Day by day, Isherwood recognized the differences between the atmosphere of his own house and the Mangeots'. In particular, Olive Mangeot was like a mother to Isherwood. He respected her and told her his secrets. In every letter Isherwood sent her, he signed himself as "ever your loving eldest." (Finney 1979, p.58). Olive Mangeot definitely had an influence on his portrayal of the two mother figures in *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial*. He described the two female characters, Mrs. Lindsay and Lilly Vernon, as exact opposites of Olive Mangeot and exact representatives of his own mother Kathleen. The peaceful and loving atmosphere of the Mangeots family, caused Isherwood to start writing again after a year break. This was the atmosphere in which Isherwood began writing his first novel, *All The Conspirators*.

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

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

At the age of 21, Christopher Isherwood took the first step in telling his own story in the way that he knew best. When his writing career began in 1926, England was still trying to deal with political, economic and social after effects of World War I. England's power in exporting goods to Europe had already decreased because European countries were busily recovering from the destruction of the war. America was producing its own goods and was no longer in need of Britain. Since soldiers returning from the war were unable to find jobs, the level of unemployment had also increased. In 1926, the General Strike,

which involved 2 million British workers, put a further strain on the British economy. On the other hand modernism was already on the literary agenda with various works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. (1925).

In such a literary atmosphere, Isherwood naturally came under the influence of these novels. As a matter of fact, in the foreword to *All The Conspirators* which was written in 1958, Isherwood accepts the fact that his first novel can be read as "a period piece- smiling at its naïve attempts at James Joyce thought-stream, its aping of the mannerisms of Stephen Dedalus, its quaint echoes of Virginia Woolf, its jerky flashback narration crudely imitated from E.M. Forster" (Isherwood 1966, p.93). Yet, it would be unfair if we regard Isherwood's early novels as nothing but a cheap imitation of these writers. Isherwood was about to form a different credo that he embraced until the end of his writing career. He came to believe that "*Everything that you are must affect your writing*" (Schwerdt 1989, p.1). With his first two novels, *All The Conspirators* (1928). and *The Memorial* (1932). Isherwood begins to integrate personal experiences into his fiction. The heroes of both novels rely mostly on the autobiographical accounts of Isherwood's life. In his early fiction, one can follow the traces of how Isherwood interpreted the key incidents that shaped Isherwood's identity in the late 1920s and early 30s. The story that Isherwood constructed at the beginning of his literary career contributed to the formation of his artistic identity.

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



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

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

McAdams observes that in the construction of narrative identity "the storyteller can work only with the material in hand" (Schwartz et al. 2011, p. 107). In other words, narrative identity can only be formed out of the facts in life. As an author of the life story, the narrator has to transform these facts into a self-defining narrative. The First World War was one of those facts of Isherwood's life because Frank Isherwood's death not only widened the gap between his mother and Isherwood but also caused a large emotional and psychological gap

in his life. What did Isherwood make out of these facts? By writing a novel like *The Memorial* and by depicting a problematic relationship between a son and his mother, who fails to get over her husband's death in the WWI, Isherwood integrated personal experience into the story.

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

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

In terms of technique and style, he aimed to present an epic with modernist elements. He notes that "I was out to write an epic; a potted epic; an epic disguised as a drawing-room comedy. The worst of all epics, except the very greatest, is that their beginnings are so dull.... Therefore epics, I reasoned, should start, in the middle and go backwards then forwards again- so that the reader comes upon the dullness halfway through, when he is more interested in the characters; the fish holds its tail in its mouth, and time is circular, which sounds Einstein-ish and brilliantly modern." (Isherwood 1974, p.182). Hence, *The Memorial* begins with a scene in 1928; then in the next chapter, events go back to 1920 where you learn more about the characters and their background; in chapter three, we find ourselves in 1925 and finally the novel ends with a fourth chapter opening in 1929.

According to Dan McAdams,

... the stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were,

are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class and culture writ large. The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity (John et al. 2008, pp.242- 243).

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

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

The source of the war/test concept was already a part of Isherwood’s experience. He was the son of a hero-father who died for his country. Moreover,

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

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

In *All The Conspirators*, Philip Lindsay is portrayed as a young man who rejects the future that his mother has planned for him. After quitting his job at the post office, he leaves home and goes to a hotel at seaside with his friend Allen Chalmers. As biographer Jonathan Fryer points out in his book, Isherwood

modelled Philip and Allen on his friends Edward Upward and Hector Wintle “both of whom also have elements of Christopher in them” (Fryer 1993, p.63). At the beginning of the novel, Isherwood presents Philip as a young man who is ready to go after his dream. As the novel progresses, the reader realize that the test that Isherwood sets for Philip is a difficult one to pass. Philip has to win this fight against his mother in the name of being a writer and painter. If Philip succeeds, it would not only be a victory against his controlling mother but it would also be a rebellion against the rules of the system that gnaw at him.

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

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

For Isherwood, writing such a scene is intentional. This was a big challenge that he was forced to face in his personal life and played an important role in his self-defining life story. After Frank’s death, honoring his father was something that Isherwood was expected to do. In the Afterword of his book *Kathleen and Frank*, he states that after his father’s death, he felt he was cursed for the rest of his life. “...he was under an obligation to be worthy of Frank, his Hero-Father,

at all times, and in all ways.... Later there were many more who tried to do so; people he actually met, and disembodied voices from pulpits, newspapers, books. He began to think of them collectively as The Others.” (Isherwood 1971, p.501). Isherwood’s self-analysis proves that his father’s death added a great burden on his shoulders. Trying to be worthy of a “Hero-Father” was something that Isherwood could not deal with at this young age. He began to regard everything that his mother expected him to do as a part of a Test which he fails every time.

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

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

didn't in the least remind one of Richard" (Isherwood 2013, p.67). This kind of comparison with the heroic father was something that Isherwood had always felt during his adolescence. In the novel, Eric is having the same dilemma in his relationship with his mother.

Throughout the novel, as we learn about each character's past, we see that Lilly makes Eric to feel inferior because of his stammer. She warns Eric every time he tries to speak: "Darling you must remember to count every time you speak. You're getting worse than ever... you could cure yourself if you'd only fight against it. You must not lose heart. Everything can be cured" (Isherwood 2013, p.74). She doesn't care to know the fact that the more she warns him the more she pushes Eric back. Because of his stammer, Eric already has insecurities. Like Isherwood's mother Kathleen, Lilly, also wants her son to be a don. "Everyone told her that he was so clever. His history master felt sure that he would get an entrance scholarship to Cambridge.... How happy it would make Richard." (Isherwood 2013, p.91).

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

In *All The Conspirators* and *The Memorial* the mother figures are the symbol of “the Others.” For Isherwood, All the Conspirators and *The Memorial* Isherwood’s anger and hatred can be felt more heavily in the portrayal of Mrs. Lindsay. Mrs. Lindsay’s excessive mothering of Philip affects her son’s ability to make his own decisions and transforms him into an insecure man who is unable to choose a job that he wants. Towards the end of the novel, Isherwood gives Philip a last chance to break free from the pressures of his mother and the job that he hates. He is offered a job at a coffee plantation in Kenya. Philip accepts the position immediately. Mrs. Lindsay’s reaction to Philip’s decision is unexpected. She wishes her son happiness and she declares that if it is for Philip’s own good, she can endure this separation. As a mother who controls his son’s life in every possible way, even by plotting against him, this response proves that she doesn’t believe that Philip will eventually leave. Her quick surrender can be interpreted as bluffing as opposed to Philip’s own way of punishing her.

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

In the Foreword to *All the Conspirators*, written in 1957, Isherwood describes the story as “of a trivial but furious battle which the combatants fight out passionately and dirtily to a finish, using whatever weapons come to their hands” (Isherwood 1990, p.9). The plot in that matter was designed to reflect a battle, “a great war between the old and young!” (Isherwood 1990, p.8). But Philip is not fully equipped to fight in this war. Isherwood was at the beginning of his twenties when he wrote the novel, and the reason why he created a



storyline like this is because of his desire to spill out all the hatred and hostility against the conformist, rule-driven British establishment and its representatives.

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

After losing her husband in the war, everyone expects Lily to be brave but she rebels against such an idea. “Be brave, she repeated to herself. But now that word had no meaning. It sounded rather idiotic. Why should I be brave? ... Who cares whether I’m brave or not? I’m all alone” (Isherwood 2013, p.66). Here, Isherwood successfully reflects two sides of the coin. On the one side, he portrays Lily as a woman who refuses to be strong and hide her pain, in contrast to society’s expectations. She has lost someone she cared about and she doesn’t want to ignore the feeling in the name of being brave. Moreover, since she is so deeply buried in her grief, she doesn’t keep up with the new world. People no longer remember the war. There is no solidarity and understanding anymore. She admits that “There is another generation already... She was living on in a new, changed world, unwanted among enemies” (Isherwood 2013, p.66). Isherwood understands this kind of feeling because he also feels that he was living in a world surrounded by the others.

The other side of the coin reflects a degree of criticism by Isherwood of his mother. When Lily says “I’m all alone,” she forgets the fact that she has a son. Instead of looking for consolation in Eric’s love, she thinks that “how on earth am I to live for Eric, when he’s away at school eight months of the year?” (Isherwood 2013, p.67). She does not perceive Eric as a companion in her pain. As she immerses herself in her inner feelings, she directly contributes to the

emotional gap between Eric and herself. “That’s not life, Lily cried out to herself. That's not life; people being kind to you and talking in gentle voices, trying to think of things which will amuse you. That's not life” (68). Isherwood does not try to justify Lily’s action and her lack of interest to her son Eric, but by portraying such direct and pure feelings, he shows that he is not insensitive and blind to the feeling of emptiness after losing someone you love.

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

Thirdly as Isherwood approached adulthood, he became more preoccupied with sex and sexuality. Although the novel does not offer an analysis of the issue, by including a homosexual character, he at least raised awareness through creating a war veteran, Edward Blake, who happens to be gay. Another representative of

the previous generation is Edward Blake. The portrayal of Edward Blake is important in two ways. First of all, for the first time in his life, he dared to create a homosexual character in his fiction. Secondly, he portrayed him as a combination of Truly Strong Man and Truly Weak Man.

There are four phases in sexual identity development: These are: 'awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/ synthesis.' "Within the awareness phase, at the individual level, one recognizes being different, and at the group level, one acknowledges that there are different possible sexual orientations" (Schwartz et al. 2011 p.593). After this phase, there comes the exploration of same-sex attractions" which "occurs at the individual level and exploration of one's position in the lesbian and gay community begins at the group level." (Schwartz 593-94). When one looks closely at Isherwood's narrative, it can be said that Isherwood's awareness phase goes back to the time while he was in public school. In *Lions and Shadows* Isherwood confesses that he "was grimly repressing his own romantic feelings towards a younger boy" because he was so anxious to pass the test in order to emerge as a "Man" (Isherwood 1974. p.48).

His biographer, Jonathan Fryer, argues that in the years between 1925-1928 "sex was the ultimate topic for unsettling Christopher. Despite his romantic yearnings for younger boys and the one rather unsatisfactory sexual experience at university, Christopher was still in a state of considerable confusion about his sexual needs" (Fryer 1993, p.57). He observes that it was in 1926 that Isherwood and Auden were lovers. "Isherwood later said that they made love unromantically but with great pleasure" (Fryer 1993, p.61).

Isherwood's exploration and deepening/commitment phases probably formed in the spring of 1928, when Kathleen's distant relative, Basil Fry, came to visit them in London and invited Isherwood to Bremen. In his letter to Edward Upward, Isherwood described the town as a place "full of boys." Fryer points out that "Christopher felt an instantaneous sexual attraction to Germany as the home of so many desirable boys." (Fryer 1993, p.66). As mentioned earlier, 1929 was a year that can be considered one of the turning points in his life. As Fryer observes, it was the year when "his great journey of liberation" began. His decision to go to Berlin facilitated the formation of his sexual identity.

Although this period will be examined in detail in the following pages of this thesis, it would not be wrong to observe that the time Isherwood spent in Germany resulted in the creation of Edward Blake.

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

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

the other characters. He is just like the others who are trying to survive life after war.

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



### **3. CHAPTER II**

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

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

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

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

The years between 1929 and 1933 witnessed Isherwood's attempt and desire to fulfill all of the above. He came to Berlin during his emerging adulthood and

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

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

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



Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party increased its seats in the Reichstag from 12 to 107.

As Karl Leydecker states in *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic Intersections of Literature and Politics* this new kind of nationalism became popular among a new generation "who felt that they had gained nothing from the experiment in democracy." (ed.2006, p.8). As for the Jews, Leydecker thinks that

The rising nationalism also fostered a mood of anti-Semitism that had never been far below the surface of the Weimar Republic. The nationalists had stigmatized the Jews as representing an alien and "un-German" liberal-democratic spirit upon which the disastrous republic had been founded. Now they sought scapegoats for the economic misery that the country was suffering (ed.2006, p.8).

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

In *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) he portrays himself as a character who takes a political stance and supports the communists against the Nazis. He attends political gatherings organized by the communists. He even translates a communist manuscript into English. On the other hand, in *Goodbye to Berlin*, while he offers vivid and memorable portraits from German culture, he simultaneously shares the effects of these social and political events on the citizens of the city. Isherwood was a perfect observer. During the years he spent in Berlin, he sensed the dynamics of the culture clearly and in his own humorous way, he touches upon sensitive subjects like the tension between the Jewish and German citizens. *Goodbye to Berlin* reflects this conflict. For instance, a thought-provoking scene between two characters, a 'Galician Jewess' Frau Gllanterneck and Frl. Mayr, who is an "ardent Nazi," shows the fractures in the society when Frl. Mayr defames Frau Gllanterneck by sending a letter to Frau Gllanterneck's suitor claiming that she has bugs in her flat and also has been arrested for "fraud and released on the ground that she is insane." Frl. Mayr also accuses Frau Gllanterneck of using her own bedroom for "immoral purposes and slept in the beds afterwards without changing the

sheets” (Isherwood 2003, p.21). Next morning, Isherwood writes, “we hear that ... Frau Glanterneck is to be seen with a black eye. The marriage is off” (Isherwood 2003, p.21). Although it is a humorous scene to read, it reveals the fact that the two women hate each other because of their race.

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

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

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

This quote above brings a crucial question to mind: How did the city of Berlin in the 1930s contribute to the artistic and sexual identity that Isherwood constructed and reflected to his fiction? The story of his life in this specific period provides us clues regarding this formation. The most significant and distinctive feature of his artistic identity embraced in his Berlin fiction is the attempt to put himself at the heart of the story. In his first Berlin novel, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, Christopher Isherwood is the first person narrator using

his ancestral name William Bradshaw. He is also a character in the story who gets involved in the events, supporting Communists against the Nazis, and being on Mr. Norris' side when help is needed. While readers meet other characters through Bradshaw's eyes, he, at the same time successfully places himself in a mysterious and adventurous spy story.

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

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

time that Isherwood met him, he had been involved in a jewelry theft and imprisoned by the Italians for fraud.” (Finney 1979, p.85). As a writer who nurtures himself on real life incidents and characters, Isherwood was highly fascinated by Hamilton’s stories. In *Christopher and His Kind*, he explains that Mr. Norris wasn’t a prototype:

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

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

The way the narrator William Bradshaw portrays and approaches Mr. Norris is so sympathetic and intimate that readers also fall under the spell of Mr. Norris. He loves and respects Arthur like a father. He wants to become a part of Mr. Norris’ life, which is full of ups and downs, covert affairs and disappearances:

I was fond of Arthur with an affection strengthened by obstinacy. If my friends didn’t like him because of his mouth and or his past, the loss was theirs; I was, I flattered myself, more profound, more humane, an altogether subtler connoisseur of human nature than they (Isherwood 1955, p.35).

This brings us to the second feature of his artistic identity. While he places himself at the heart of his stories as the narrator-character, he makes his readers

experience incidents as he experienced them in his real life. The same thing also happens in his character portrayals. Auden once described Isherwood as a man who “was wholly and simply interested in people. He did not like or dislike them, judge them favourably or unfavourably. He simply regarded them as material for his work” (Spender 1966, p.101).

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

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

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

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

With a belief in reflecting his firsthand experience and sharing it with people in the form of fiction, today we can absolutely say that he succeeded in awakening that kind of excitement. When one reads Mr. Norris or *Goodbye to Berlin*, we all aspire to be part of those days, to wander around the streets of Berlin. Today

in Berlin people organize “Walking Tours” starting from the street Nollendorfplatz, (Isherwood’s neighborhood in the 1930s). visiting the streets and cafes which featured in his Berlin stories. People read excerpts from his novels, talking about Isherwood and 1930s Berlin. All this suggests that there are still people looking for similar excitement. In *Christopher and His Kind* he shares a quotation from the Russian author Ilya Ehrenburg’s poem, “The Sons of Our Sons,” which was also a quotation embraced by Auden: “Read about us and marvel! You did not live in our time- be sorry!” (1976, p.188). Isherwood already knew the value of those times. The reason why he kept turning back to those years even thirty years later was to revisit the excitement and to awaken the old feelings. He wanted his readers to read his Berlin stories and marvel at the extraordinary times. He took pleasure when people wished to be a part of 1930s Berlin; indeed, his desire to write about the motive for writing about “bizarre” characters or incidents was one of the hallmarks of his Berlin fiction. Although this was a tough task to do, he successfully managed to reflect what he felt, experienced and observed into his stories.

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

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

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Someday, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed (2003, p 9).

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

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

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

1930s not only affected the formation of his artistic identity, but it also affected his life story. In *Goodbye to Berlin* one can observe his gradual transformation into a mature and sensitive person who learns to empathize with other people. This might be the reason why he presents character portrayals from such diverse backgrounds.

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

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

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

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

Like many animal people, he has considerable instinctive powers of healing- when he chooses to use them. At such times, his treatment of



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

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

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

The most famous and unforgettable character in the novel is undoubtedly Sally Bowles. Isherwood moved to a neighborhood called Nollendorfstrasse where he met his landlady Fraulein Meta Thureau, who was to be the basis for Fraulein Schroder in the novel. It was in Fraulein Thureau's flat that he met Jean Ross - aka Sally Bowles- in *Goodbye to Berlin*. With her aristocratic British background and promiscuity, she was clearly an interesting and colorful character portrait for Isherwood to draw upon. Sally Bowles leaves her upper middle class life in England, where she is financially comfortable. In Berlin, she is singing at a club called Lady Windermere, with the hope of becoming famous one day. In the meantime, she sleeps with rich men and goes after every

financial opportunity to survive in Berlin as a 19 year old foreign girl. She believes that a woman cannot be a great actress without a number of love affairs. Throughout the chapter, she puts herself in inconvenient situations many times but somehow Isherwood manages to prevent his readers hating her.

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

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

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

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

In my opinion, Sally Bowles is evidence of how far Isherwood had come as a writer. Sally Bowles is a hopeless romantic, naïve, credulous and brilliant woman who struggles to survive through life in her own way. A superficial assessment might label Sally Bowles as a simple prostitute, sleeping with men for money. However, Isherwood presents his readers with more than that. His camera makes us to see beyond the surface. Isherwood never judges Sally. He understands her. He knows that, one way or another she is trying to remain on her own two feet and looking for something to hold onto. This might be love, a singing or an acting job. Sally Bowles is no different from an ordinary woman who tries to survive despite all the disappointments, hypocrisy and deceit in life.

Isherwood shows his readers that it is not Sally Bowles who ought to be blamed. It is the system, the environment that we are all being a part of.

### **3.2 Formation of Sexual Identity**

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

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

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

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

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

Because Christopher was suffering from an inhibition, then not unusual among upper-class homosexuals; he couldn’t relax sexually with a member of his own class or nation. He needed a working class foreigner. He has become clearly aware of this when he went to Germany in May 1928 ... (1976, p.3).

Berlin provided him with a variety of sexual partners who were effectively “gay for cash.” However, Isherwood took his relationships seriously, and offered his loyalty while his partners were only after his money. His first lover, Bubi, was a blond Czech boy who is described as a wanderer, the lost boy, homeless, penniless. ...” (1976, p.5). Apart from his vulnerabilities, Isherwood was also attracted to him because of his physical appearance. In *Christopher and His Kind*, he writes that:

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

However the blond’s “yang” was only interested in asking money from Christopher.

In Berlin, Christopher also found a chance to observe “his kind” in the famous Magnus Hirschfeld Institute of Sexual Science. Until the day the Nazis destroyed it, the Hirschfeld Institute was the one and only center of sexology. The variety of different things he saw at the institute, from chains, whips, fetish

products, to fantasy pictures painted by Dr. Hirschfeld's patients, caused him to regard sexuality from a different perspective. He writes that he was embarrassed because:

... at last he was being brought face to face with his tribe. Up to now, he had behaved as though the tribe didn't exist and homosexuality were a private way of life discovered by himself and a few friends (1976, p.16).

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

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

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

During the years between 1929 and 1933, Isherwood's life story as a young gay man had gone through a significant transformation. Unlike England, Berlin provided him the freedom that he was looking for. Yet, he was not comfortable with reflecting his sexuality in his fiction. There is no mention of William Bradshaw or Christopher Isherwood's sexuality in *Mr. Norris* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. But he develops a habit of integrating a homosexual character into his fiction. Starting with Edward in *The Memorial* (which was written in Berlin), he goes on to present Baron von Pregnitz as a wealthy homosexual man in *Mr. Norris*. He portrays parties in Baron's house with "... handsome young men with superbly developed brown bodies which they smeared in oil and baked for hours in the sun." (1955, p.46). In *Goodbye to Berlin* in the "On Reugen Island"

episode, Isherwood portrays a homosexual relationship between Peter Wilkinson and Otto Nowak in the summer of 1931. The way he describes Otto's physical qualities and how Peter is attracted to him signify that he knows a lot about the nature of homosexual relationships. He frequently emphasizes Otto's energy in swimming and wrestling and how he "moves fluidly, effortlessly; his gestures have the savage, unconscious grace of a cruel, elegant animal." (2003, p.101). Isherwood presents an honest portrayal of an elderly gay man's perspective on the beauty and energy of the young. Peter is desperate in the face of Otto's youth, beauty, power and energy. Integrating these characters and stories into the plot, Isherwood attempts to insinuate the author's knowledge about such relationships.

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

Similarly, in "*Sexual Lives: The Development of Traits, Adaptations and Stories*" Dan McAdams observes that "Gay men who came of age before World War II constructed self-defining stories in a society that refused to make narrative room for scenes of 'coming out' (McAdams 2005, p.301). In other words, expecting Isherwood to come out in the 1930s through a newspaper or magazine article, as many celebrities do today, is impossible. In *Christopher and His Kind*, he explained the reason why he couldn't make the narrator homosexual: "... he wasn't prepared to admit that the Narrator was homosexual. Because he was afraid to? Yes, that was one reason. Although his own life as a homosexual was lived fairly openly, he feared to create a scandal" (1976, p.185). He continues that he was afraid of embarrassing Kathleen and losing the

allowance coming from his Uncle Henry. But it is evident that he still had concerns about telling the truth to his readers. After all, he is a writer who promises his readers to speak out of his own experience. So if he's unable to tell the truth, he at least chooses not to lie in his fiction:

Christopher dared not to make the Narrator homosexual. But he scorned to make him heterosexual. That, to Christopher, would have been as shameful as pretending to be heterosexual himself. Therefore, the Narrator could have no explicit sex experiences in the story. (1976, p.186).

Although Isherwood dared not to make the Narrator homosexual, he dared to include a homosexual storyline and create homosexual characters in his fiction.

Cohler and Hammack conclude their essay as follows:

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

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

In 1932, Isherwood met his first longtime lover, Heinz Neddenmayer. The two spent the next seven years running away from Germany and the political chaos which ended with Heinz's capture by the gestapo and the couple's heartbreaking

separation. Also, it was in 1932 that, at the age of 26, Isherwood began writing his first autobiography *Lions and Shadows- An Education in the Twenties*. It covers the period between his school years at St. Edmunds and Cambridge and his decision to leave England for Berlin.

In 1933, things were about to fall apart politically in Berlin. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood documents the years of Hitler's gradual ascension to power and how he and his lover, Heinz, were affected by it. On January 30, 1933 when Hitler was announced as the new Chancellor of Germany by President Hindenburg, he wrote Stephen Spender a letter saying "As you will have seen, we are having a new government, with Charlie Chaplin and Father Christmas in the ministry. All words fail." (1976, p.119). On February 27, 1933, the Reichstag building was set on fire probably by the Nazis, though they accused communists of having done it. They put the blame on a Dutch communist, Marius van der Lubbe.

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

January 5, 1934, was one of the turning points in Isherwood's life. He had already planned to invite Heinz to England. He sent him money so that he would be able to show the British officials that he could support himself. He also made Kathleen write a letter inviting Heinz to stay with her for an unknown period.



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

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

The atmosphere in New York was magical for Isherwood. He writes in *Christopher and His Kind* that it was as if "everybody in this city had been yearning for their arrival." (1976, p 313). They gave interviews, photos were taken, they attended parties and met celebrities. One day, Isherwood made a joke that he want "to meet a beautiful blond boy, about eighteen, intelligent, with very sexy legs" (1976, p 314). A boy named Vernon was found

immediately. Finding an American boy, with no language barrier, he realized that he had a lot to talk about with Vernon, who is described in *Christopher and His Kind* as “good-natured, tough and independent” (1976, p 315). Falling under Vernon’s spell, Isherwood perceives Vernon as representing the spell of the American Boys. “The American Boy is also the Walt Whitman Boy. And the Walt Whitman Boy is by definition, a wanderer.” Isherwood immediately forged a relationship with Vernon who wants to leave New York as well. He dreams about establishing “a future wander-comradeship with Vernon in the Whitman tradition”. (1976, p 315).

Vernon played a little role in Isherwood’s decision to go to America for good. However, there were certain factors behind this second biggest turning point in his life. First of all he clearly declares that the “old hostility toward England” was still there. “For him, it was still the land of Other.” (1976, p 316). Secondly he believes that he would be able to regard America as his home. “His public personality would function more freely, more successfully than it could ever have functioned in London” (1976, p 337).

In this case, for Isherwood everything again comes to the point of being able to live freely. In the final pages of *Christopher and His Kind*, he states that “his obligations wouldn’t be the same in the States. He wouldn’t be a member of a group. He could express himself freely as an individual” These sentences proves us that Isherwood, who was 35 at that time, was looking for a place where he can be away from the pressures that he carried in his baggage. Living in had Berlin showed him that such a life was possible, and at that time America was the one and only country that could provide any kind of artistic and sexual freedom.

As for his homosexuality, he confessed to a feeling that he had in the 1930s. He reveals the fact that he had been “wavering between embarrassment and defiance. He became embarrassed when he felt that he was making a selfish demand for his individual rights at a time when only group action mattered. He became defiant when he made the treatment of homosexual a text by which every political party and government must be judged. His challenge to each one of them was: ‘All right, we’ve heard your liberty speech. Does that include us or doesn’t it’ “(1976, p 334).

These words tell us a lot about his position on homosexuality. As an admirer of communism, he always praised the attitude of the Soviet Union when the country decriminalized homosexuality and showed relative tolerance to homosexuals in 1917. However in 1934 and until 1986; homosexuality was recriminalized by the Stalin government and homosexuals were prosecuted. What Isherwood felt at that time was betrayal. With Hitler coming to power in Germany, homosexuals began to be arrested and the heavenly atmosphere of Berlin for gay people came to an end.

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



## 4. CHAPTER III

### 4.1 Isherwood in America

“Why we were going to America? I suppose for myself, the chief reason was that I couldn’t stop travelling... I was also running away from myself: that was why I never stayed anywhere long” (Bucknell 2011, p. 4). Why was Isherwood running away from himself? Was it just because of an unstoppable desire for travelling? If so then, why did he spend the rest of his life in America? The answers to these questions play a crucial role in the life story that Isherwood constructed in America. In *“The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent and Author”* McAdams claims “Into and through the midlife years, adults continue to refashion their narrative understandings of themselves, incorporating on-time and off-time events, expected and unexpected life transitions, gains and losses, and their changing perspectives on who they were, are, and may become into their ongoing, self-defining life stories” (McAdams 2013, p.280). It is for certain that Berlin had positive effects on Isherwood; especially in constructing his artistic and sexual identity. But when we look closely to the events that Isherwood went through before his decision to go to America, it is evident that he was desperately in need of something to hold on to. The “William Bradshaw” and Christopher Isherwood” identities were no longer satisfying. They had to be recreated or reconstructed.

The loss of his lover, Heinz, was definitely a turning point or as McAdams puts it “an unexpected life transition” in his life. He knew that there was a life ahead without Heinz. Secondly, as the world was coming to the brink of war, he needed to take a stand. He thought that by going to New York he could find answers to these dilemmas inside. He writes in his diary that “I must be anonymous until I discover a new self here, an American me.” (Bucknell 2011, p.4). Yet forming a new self was not easy. Amid all the lunches, dinner parties and meetings that he attended with Auden, Isherwood became more depressed.

“They wanted to meet Christopher Isherwood. And who I was? A sham, a mirror image, nobody” (Bucknell 2011, p.9). As McAdams puts it, Isherwood was definitely in need of a new perspective on who he was. This chapter focuses on the life story Isherwood constructed in America, where he went through a spiritual self-exploration and transformation.

Isherwood’s optimism on leaving Berlin gave way to despair and dissatisfaction after a couple of months. He wasn’t happy in New York. In one of his letters to John Lehman he describes the city as “the nervous breakdown expressed in terms of architecture” (Fryer 1993, p.134). He was fed up with all the meetings and literary gatherings that they were expected to talk about China, Berlin and the political agenda of the time. Jonathan Fryer perfectly observes that as Isherwood:

... sensed the ground swell of righteous indignation against the Fascist powers among his colleagues on such occasions, he felt alienated from it. He was getting less political, not more, and needed something much more personal and internal to give him a new sense of direction (Fryer 1993, p. 132).

The key point in Dan P. McAdams’ “Life Story Model of Identity” is the individual’s need to find unity and purpose in life so that they can construct meaningful narratives. Isherwood’s life in the early 1940s of America lacked this kind of unity and purpose. In *My Guru and His Disciple*, (1980). which tells Isherwood’s journey with Vedanta philosophy, he confesses that:

I was empty because I had lost my political faith—I couldn’t repeat the left-wing slogans which I had been repeating throughout the last few years. It wasn’t that I had lost all belief in what the slogans stood for, but I was no longer wholehearted. My leftism was confused by an increasingly aggressive awareness of myself as a homosexual and by a newly made discovery that I was a pacifist (Isherwood 2001, p. 4).

The incidents that he witnessed in Berlin and Hitler’s rising power caused a disillusionment with the Left. The desire not to “deny the rights of his tribe” was also pushing him to be a politically conscious homosexual. He had hated the idea of war since his childhood, and now he was about to face one of the worst fears of his life. In his *Diaries Volume I 1939-1960*, he claims that he had always been a pacifist. He remembers his father who taught him “... by his life and death to hate the profession of soldiering” (Bucknell 2011, p.5). In the process of growing up, Noel Coward, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon lit

his way to “loathe the old men who had made the war. Flags, memorials and uniforms made me tremble with rage because they filled me with terror.” (Bucknell 2011, p.5). His experiences in China as a war correspondent contributed to this hatred and he seriously began to think about it. He believed that “Anti-Nazism had been possible for me as long as Nazism meant Hitler, Goering and Goebbels, the Gestapo and the consuls and spies who potentially menaced Heinz on his travels.”(Bucknell 2011, p.7). Moreover, for years his lover Heinz had been a bleeding wound for Isherwood. He knew that Heinz would be in the enemy line. “Suppose” he says “I have in my power an army of six million men. I can destroy it by pressing an electric button. The six millionth man is Heinz. Will I press the button? Of course not-...” (Bucknell 2011, p.7). Realizing that he was a pacifist now, he had to find out how to act as one.

With all these ideas in mind, he went to Los Angeles, asking for his friend Gerald Heard’s help to learn a pacifist way of life and what his role would be in the time of war. Apart from Heard, meeting Aldous Huxley contributed Isherwood’s understanding of the concept because his book *Ends and Means* was accepted as one of the most important books about pacifism. What Isherwood was expecting from Heard was to learn more about pacifist groups and the necessary training. However Gerald Heard didn’t discuss any of the above with him. In *My Guru and His Disciple* Isherwood writes that “All he could discuss was a form of self-preparation at what he called ‘the deep level.’ To become a true pacifist you had to find peace within yourself: only then, he said, could you function pacifistically in the outside world” (Isherwood 2001, p.11).

This kind of approach and behavior were not easy to grasp for Isherwood because instead of presenting a few basic rules of Pacifism, Heard was showing Isherwood that being a pacifist requires a complete inner peace, which was to be provided through spiritual practices. E. M. Forster describes Gerald Heard as “one of the most penetrating minds in England.” He was an author and lecturer but most importantly he was a well-known philosopher. He was interested in understanding and interpreting life, in individual self-knowledge and control. Heard believed that “The general aim is the individual’s realization of his unity with all life and being; his realization that the universe is alive and that every

creature, himself included, is part of that life” (Barrie n.d.). In 1939, he found a spiritual context that matched up with his thoughts. His meeting with Swami Prabhavananda provided the spiritual background for his theories.

Isherwood witnessed Gerald Heard’s daily meditations and his serious dedication to the cause. Since he had always been a person who hated the word “God” and described it as “the symbol of the capitalist super boss,” Isherwood became more interested in Gerald’s God, which was referred as “this thing” by him. As he discussed more about “this thing” he learned to make peace with God or “this thing.” He gradually embraced the idea that God was not in the sky but

... it was to be looked for first inside yourself. It wasn’t to be thought of as a Boss to be obeyed but as a Nature to be known- an extension of your own nature, with which you could become consciously united. (Isherwood 2001, p.12).

Secondly, he was fascinated by the way Gerald Heard approached life. Heard referred life as “intentional living.” The aim was to eliminate the obstacles to unite with “this thing” through meditation. Isherwood interpreted the concept of intentional living as a way to turn life “into an art form.” (Isherwood 2001, p. 17). In the way the novelist focuses on his novel, the intentional liver is “involved with his whole life experience.” (Isherwood 2001, p. 17).

Mostly because of Gerald Heard and the influence on Isherwood of his ideas about life, God, and pacifism, he wanted to focus more closely on “self-preparation” and meditation. This was how he came to know Vedanta. He wanted Heard to introduce him with Swami Prabhavananda, who was a Hindu monk giving lessons in medication to Gerald. In fact, Isherwood had already begun 15 minute meditation sessions of his own at home. Swami Prabhavananda was the man who played a key role in Isherwood’s spiritual self-exploration and transformation. Isherwood himself acknowledges Swami’s role by saying that Isherwood had once been “an atheist, a liberal, a supporter of the Popular Front and an advocate of armed resistance to fascism, in Spain and everywhere,” but now he was transformed into another man who found himself “unable to disbelieve” in the Swami’s belief in God (Isherwood 1966, p.97).



## 4.2 Vedanta & Formation of Spiritual Identity

Vedanta is a Hindu philosophy which is grounded in “the oneness of existence” “The divinity of the soul, and “the harmony of all religions.” “Veda” means “knowledge” and “anta” means “the end of” or “the goal of.” On the website of Vedanta Society, Vedanta is described as “the search for Self-knowledge as well as the search for God” (Vedanta Society 2016). As Brian Hodgkinson indicates in *The Essence of Vedanta*, Vedanta depends on the “recognition of unity and “the oneness of spirit” (Hodgkinson 2006, p.12). In Vedanta, God is in our hearts and it is called “Atman” or “the Divine Self.” Vedanta also deals with the individual’s struggle to find unity and purpose in life. Human beings feel themselves to be inadequate and incomplete. In the *Introduction of Vedanta, Understanding The Fundamental Problem* Swami Dayananda states that “All struggles in life are expressions of the urge to be complete” (Dayananda 1989, p.22). and human beings attempt to fill this incompleteness. Vedanta philosophy states that there is nothing wrong with change. “Life is a process of constant change” (Dayananda 1989, p.26). This might be one of the reasons why Isherwood was drawn to Vedanta. Isherwood was not happy with his life when he contacted Gerald Heard. He was surely after a kind of change that would make his life meaningful. In a letter to his friend John Lehmann, Isherwood writes that

It’s no use—I shall never write anything till this war’s over. My voice is changing, like a choirboy’s, and I can’t find the new notes. But I am more certain than ever that something is happening inside . . . and there will be something to show for this exile (Zeikowitz 2008, p.12).

That “something” which even could not be named by Isherwood himself happened to be Vedanta because at that time it was the only thing that showed him a way out of his desperate and dissatisfied life.

Yet, we cannot stop ourselves from asking why as a person who strictly rejected any form of religion and relation with God, was influenced by this spiritual leader? Why was he unable to disbelieve what the Swami believed? It might be related with the difference between religion and spirituality. In “*Identity and Spirituality: Conventional and Transpersonal Perspectives*,” Douglas A. MacDonald underlines the difference between the two terms with these words: “Religion is generally seen as “relating to beliefs, doctrines, and practices

associated with membership in a religious institution.” (MacDonald 2009, p.87). Starting from his childhood, Isherwood detested any form of authority and rules including those related to religion. He was wholly opposed to religious sanctions. He reflected this hatred in the character of Eric, who in *The Memorial*, told his mother Lily how he hated religion. On the other hand, what Isherwood experienced in Los Angeles, in terms of believing in “this thing” and the possibility that you don’t have to obey God’s rules but look for him in one’s self, fascinated him. MacDonald describes spirituality as “an experientially grounded sense of connection with, or participatory consciousness of, the “sacred,” “transcendent,” “numinous” or some form of higher power or intelligence” (MacDonald 2009, p.87).

At this point we can also refer to Paul Wink and Michael Dillon’s’ definition of spirituality as “the self’s existential search for ultimate meaning through an individualized understanding of the sacred” (Wink & Dillon 2002, p.79). In their essay “*Spiritual Development Across the Adult Life Course: Findings From a Longitudinal Study*” they argue that this spiritual quest “tends to be relatively autonomous of institutionalized religious traditions even though, in practice, of course, religiously involved individuals can also be spiritually engaged.” (Wink & Dillon 2002, p.79-80). They go on to emphasize that “Critics denouncing the overuse of the term have argued that spirituality is permissively invoked to refer to a wide range of idiosyncratic personal experiences (of nature, love, exhilaration). that are frequently devoid of the obligations, commitments, and practices that are associated with religious involvement” (Wink & Dillon 2002, p. 80).

This was exactly what Isherwood was attracted to. As these definitions speak for itself, human experience was in the heart of spirituality. For a man like Isherwood who strongly believes in the notion that “art really begins with the question” of his “own experience,” and what he is “going to turn it into? What does it mean and what is it all about?” (Berg 2007, p.54). Isherwood finally found something to believe in, not without questioning but with the act of experiencing and feeling it. Being autonomous, having the freedom to observe the doctrines of this spiritual discipline called Vedanta and how it is put into practice through meditation and praying showed him the way to complete the

missing part of his personal identity. Swami was there to answer all his questions patiently. Having somebody around to clear away his thoughts regarding Vedanta and meditation was also important for Isherwood. He was aware of the fact that he was getting himself into something huge. In Diaries Volume I 1939-1960, he even indicates that:

I have never been able to grasp any idea except through a person. For me, Vedanta is primarily the Swami and Gerald. I once shocked a communist friend by admitting that I should only understand Marxism if I'd met Marx (Bucknell 2011, p. 228).

In their first meeting, Isherwood, with all his honesty, told the Swami that he didn't believe he would be able to mediate. Swami told him to be "like the lotus on the pond. The lotus leaf is never wet." (Isherwood 2001, p.24). Although Isherwood did not comment on this abstract and philosophical answer, it might be interpreted that the Swami was giving him enough time and space to learn how to meditate and float like a lotus on the pond without getting wet. When Isherwood admitted to his fears of failure, Swami said "There is no failure in the search of God." For Isherwood the word "God" was an undesirable word, but the Swami surprised Isherwood when he told him that he could say "the Self" or "Nature" instead of God. This kind of thinking devoid of strict and rigid rules, comforted him.

Yet Isherwood did not ask the most important question to the Swami. His answer would play a critical role in Isherwood's perception of Vedanta. He writes in his diary that "If his answer was unsatisfactory to me, there would be no point in our ever seeing each other again." (Isherwood 2001, p. 25). Though he did not remember his exact words, the question was: "Can I lead a spiritual life as long as I'm having a sexual relationship with a young man?" (Isherwood 2001, p. 25). As a man who had vowed not to deny his homosexuality before he sailed for America, the answer to this question was crucial. Swami's answer to this question was:

You must try to see him as the young Lord Krishna." Krishna is regarded as an avatar- "one of the incarnations of this thing who are believed to be born on earth from time to time, and that Krishna is described as having been extraordinarily beautiful in his youth (Isherwood 2001, p. 25).

Isherwood was certainly not expecting such a tolerant and understanding answer from the Swami. His approach encouraged Isherwood because what he felt for his lover Vernon was not only sexual desire but love. In *My Guru and His Disciple*, he writes that he was convinced to be his pupil because the Swami "... hadn't shown the least shadow of distaste on hearing me admit to my homosexuality... From that moment on, I began to understand that the Swami did not think in terms of sins, as most Christians do." (Isherwood 2001, p. 26).

As the months passed, Isherwood began to engage with Vedanta, meditation and Swami's teachings more. It is clear that Isherwood did not perceive this philosophy overnight. Apart from learning its principles by heart, he needed to embrace it as a way of life. He began to visit the Vedanta Centre regularly and began to spend his days in silence, fasting and meditating. He read essays on *Bhagavad-Gita*, a religious book on Hindu philosophy. As he became more familiar with the principles of Vedanta, he found the chance to put the theory into practice. In his letter to Cyril Connolly, he emphasized the importance of Vedanta in his life by saying that it "offers me personally a solution and a way of life which I desperately needed and which seems to work and within which I can imagine living the rest of my life with a feeling of purpose and lack of despair" (Bucknell 2011, p. 366).

In 1940, Swami became Isherwood's guru. The following year Isherwood went to Haverford Pennsylvania to work with the Quakers at an American Friends Service Committee hostel for refugees from Germany. His job was to teach English to German and Austrian refugees. In 1942, he filled out a form to apply for status as a "conscientious objector." After returning from Haverford it was in 1941, the Swami asked him a life changing question: he invited him to come and live as a monk in the Vedanta Center in California.

This offer revealed a struggle that Isherwood had long been repressing. He was visiting the Centre regularly and fulfilling all the requirements, including meditating and reading, but still he had a life outside. He was working as a script writer at M.G.M, pursuing an active sexual life and going out to lunches and dinners. In other words, he still had a connection with the outside world. He knew that if he wanted, he could give up his social life, but as for the sex, that was something that he wasn't sure of. This dilemma caused a struggle between

his sexual and spiritual identity. When he asked the Swami about sex, his guru told him that “all sex-no matter what the relationship- is a form of attachment and must be ultimately given up. This will happen naturally as you make progress in the spiritual life” (Isherwood 2001, p.26).

For Isherwood, the Swami looked like a “coach who tells his athletes that they must give up smoking, alcohol and certain kinds of food, not because these are inherently evil, but because they may prevent the athlete from getting something he wants much more” (Isherwood 2001, p.26). Isherwood was facing a dilemma. He was to give up one part of his identity in order to embrace another. When he had come to New York in 1939, he had been surrounded by lots of people going from one party to another. Sex was an important instinct in his life and he never missed any opportunities when it came. Living a life of a spiritual discipline, meditation and a complete abstinence from sex and all the other worldly activities was the biggest promise he could ever give in his life.

Yet, he decided to devote his life to Swami and live in the Center with the aim of disciplining his life. In his Diaries Volume I 1939-1960, just a few days before he moved to the Vedanta Center, he wrote that living with the Swami:

will keep me on the tracks... my life has been a mess and a lie, a messy lie-everything I've said and seemed to represent has been tainted with disingenuousness. If you'd spoken to me as a stranger on a trolley car and asked 'What are you?' how could have I answered? 'A would-be monk,' 'A writer at Paramount,' 'A celibate as from February 6,'... I've got to belong to the Ramakrishna Order with as few reservations as I can manage. I know that that's the best way for me. The obstacles have been cleared from my path, one by one (Bucknell 2011, pp. 261-262).

Although the Swami did not force him to dedicate his life to Vedanta, Isherwood felt the need to live in the Centre. He thought that it was disingenuous of him to live a spiritual life alongside his worldly pleasures. At that moment of his life, he needed this kind of dedication. On February 6, 1943, he moved to the Vedanta Center at Ivar Avenue. In a letter to his friend Caroline Norment, he states that

I have always felt the need in life, for some sort of dedication and meaning- as who doesn't? ... without in any way giving up writing, I had to look around for some more complete kind of dedication. That was why I came to Haverford. That was why I was at one period interested in socialism. That is why I have come here. To me all these

stages have been part of the same search. And, of course, the possibility of spiritual growth existed in each (Bucknell 2011, pp. 285-86).

We can say that Vedanta came at exactly right period in his life. In his Diary entry on February 1, 1943, he wrote about how he felt peaceful at the Center.

But good or bad, this is the place for me. It will be tough here, but easier than anywhere else.... It is the shrine that really matters. The fact of its being there, always, right in the midst of our household... You feel so safe there. So strangely reassured. And there is such a sense of contact. Like sitting face to face with someone you know very well, and not having to speak (Bucknell 2011, p. 271).

It was extremely difficult for Isherwood, going through a process of sexual celibacy and leaving a socially active world behind. But for the sake of disciplining the body and soul, he knew that this was what he needed. A couple of months later, he wrote in his diary that he had an “unexpectedly, irrelevantly and insanely sexual adventure” the details of which he avoids telling. But when he told the Swami that he had troubles with sex, the Swami told him “It’s a hard life. Just pray for strength. Pray to become pure” (Bucknell 2011, p.313). Isherwood writes in his diary these words: “So there we’re. I’ve got to become pure” (Bucknell 2011, p. 313). This, of course, affected his psychology. I believe that it was the starting point of his realization that it was difficult to cut off his connection with worldly pleasures, especially sex. He continued to meditate and fulfill the spiritual requirements of Vedanta. He lived at the center for about three years, but he always knew deep inside that one day he would leave. Being a monk was not something that he could do.

Despite its difficulties, Vedanta definitely changed Isherwood’s life story and narrative. Until his encounter with Vedanta, Isherwood had tried many ways to find this unity and purpose in his life. His decision to leave England and his move to Berlin and then to America were results of this effort. Vedanta filled the emptiness that he had been struggling with for years. It gave him answers. It taught him to live a life of peace and spiritual fulfillment. In 1945, he contributed to the book *Vedanta for the Western World* with an introduction that he wrote, and he offered his own perspective and understanding of the philosophy. His interpretations of Vedanta reveal how he placed it to the heart of his “life story.” After briefly summarizing the main principles of Vedanta as “First, that Man’s real nature is divine. Second, that the aim of human life is to

realize this divine nature. Third, that all religions are essential in agreement” (Isherwood 2005, p.1). he sets out his personal understanding of this Hindu philosophy.

He emphasizes that we are beings who are deeply involved with worldly worries. As long as we are unable to get rid of these worries we cannot reach the Atman (GOD). We are living a lie if we assume that we are happy with our present selves. Isherwood states that there will always be people who deny this:

On the whole, the majority of us are content. The great mass of normally healthy, well-adjusted men and women, absorbed in their families and their jobs, will protest: ‘Leave us alone. We are well enough off as we are’ (Isherwood 2005, p.p.3).

At this point Isherwood asks: “ ‘Are you? We doubt it’ say Buddha, Jesus, Shankara, Shakespeare and Tolstoy.” He argues that all these people pointed out that “death brings an end to all desire, that worldly wealth is a house built upon the sand, that the beautiful body is a decaying bag of filth...” As human beings we don’t want to hear that. “Their words depress us.” says Isherwood. “For the truth is obvious, if we consider it” (Isherwood 2005, p. 3). Then, Isherwood becomes personal, saying that he is dissatisfied with his life and himself. He has attained all the objectives in the world but he is faced with “Life’s subtlest riddle: the riddle of human boredom” (Isherwood 2005, p.4). He is now ready to find the Atman in his nature. He asks “How am I to realize this nature?”

Like a ventriloquist Isherwood answers his own questions. He suggests that one should cease to be oneself. Christopher replies: “How can I stop being myself? I’m Christopher Isherwood, or I’m nothing.” (2005, p.4). For the rest of his life Isherwood struggled with accepting this idea. In the Introduction of the book, he writes that “Christopher Isherwood is only an appearance, a part of the apparent universe. He is a constellation of desires and impulses. He reflects his environment. He repeats what he has been taught. He mimics the social behavior of his community... All his actions are conditioned by those around him, however eccentric and individual he may seem to be” (2005, p.4).

But there was something that even Isherwood kept forgetting: he had to be a part of that environment in order to produce as a writer. He was a man who promised himself to reflect nothing but his own experience. Being a monk, shutting himself behind closed doors was not something that Isherwood could

succeed at. Yet he tried to erase this “Christopher Isherwood” or diminish its effect in the works that he produced after 1945. It was certain that Vedanta provided him with a way to feel completeness and a means of self- exploration. At least he spotted the source of why he felt without a purpose and unity. In a diary entry written on June 21, 1944, he makes up his mind to leave the center. “I’m not going to be a member of the Ramakrishna Order or any kind of monk, or anything outward. I’ve got to be C. Isherwood, and that’s that. The spiritual life has to turn inward completely” (Bucknell 2011, p. 351).

This entry tells us a lot about how Isherwood felt and the struggle he had in leaving behind the Christopher Isherwood persona because it the same persona that he needed in order to produce. Throughout his life he continued to follow the principles of Vedanta philosophy and he reflected how his perception of the world changed in his fiction. But as for ceasing to be Christopher Isherwood, he couldn’t do that. Even when he was staying at the Vedanta Center, he was writing scripts for Hollywood. Yet, when we look at the works he produced after meeting with Vedanta, it is obvious that readers face a writer who perceives the world with open arms and a more accepting, less complaining attitude. Somehow, he attempts to smooth his egotism away, starting from his first novel written in America.

Leaving the Centre and rejecting the monastic life did not mean that Isherwood lost his connection with Vedanta. He continued to see the Swami and make translations and write articles for the cause. In Introduction to Vedanta Swami Dayananda asserts that “The mature person recognizes from examination of his own worldly experiences that what he seeks is adequacy, and is able to see that the things for which he has been struggling cannot bring that adequacy” (Dayananda 1989, p.66). For the rest of his life, Isherwood lived with a similar awareness. As he reached this kind of spiritual maturity, the stories he produced carried traces of this wisdom.

In *My Guru and His Disciple*, he reveals that at the end of August 1943, he moved out of the Centre. He states that his leaving had nothing to do with the Vedanta society. “I had recently met a young man with whom I wanted to settle down and live in what I hoped could become a lasting relationship. His name was William Caskey” (Isherwood 2001, p.189). After three years at the Vedanta



Center, doing his best to live by its precepts, it was time for Isherwood to find a balance between his sexual and spiritual identity. But he was aware of what he was getting himself into. From a silent, peaceful, uneventful life, he was moving towards a life which he described as “lively, noisy, drunken, sometimes full of laughter, sometimes quarrelsome, with head-on clashes of temperament.” (Isherwood 2001, p.191). He accepted the fact that he felt miserable and full of painful sometimes. But he admits in *My Guru and His Disciple* that “this pain was also perseverely pleasurable, just because it was a genuine feeling. So often when I was living up at the Centre, I had been unable to feel anything at all” (Isherwood 2001, p 191).

### **4.3 Prater Violet**

From 1939 until 1945 Isherwood did not publish any novels, and focused on his spiritual journey. *Prater Violet* (1945). was his first novel written in America. The habit of reflecting real life incidents and experiences continues in this novel. In *Prater Violet*, the narrator Christopher Isherwood, revisits the 1930s and fictionalizes his relationship with the director Berthol Viertel during their collaboration on the movie called “Little Friend.” Isherwood’s friendship with Viertel and his wife provided him with an opportunity to work in Hollywood as a script and dialogue writer. For that matter, he had a chance to observe the film industry closely. But in *Prater Violet*, although the storyline reflects the complicated and painful process of film-making, Isherwood focuses on the ups and downs of the director Friedrich Bergmann (Viertel); not as a director but as an individual who tries to hold on to life without his wife and children, who are in Vienna. Bergmann is aware of the fact that a war is coming and, as a Jew, he knows that his family is in great danger as long as they are in Vienna. His changing mood and constant desperation affects the future of the movie and it is Isherwood’s mission to console and be at his side apart from writing dialogues for the movie. Although *Prater Violet* incorporates many elements from his previous novels, Isherwood tries to reflect the narrator Christopher’s relationship with Bergmann from a different perspective. Unlike Christopher’s relationship with Mr. Norris in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, Christopher-Bergmann duo is like teacher-student or in Vedantist perspective, it can be

interpreted as that of a guru and disciple relation. In his own way, Isherwood tried to reflect a small portion of Vedantic thought and, implicitly, he focuses on this theme.

In Vedanta philosophy, apart from teaching prayers, hymns, rules and rituals, the guru motivates and encourages his disciple to focus on the Atman (God) through meditation. The guru has also to teach a Sanskrit Mantram (Sanskrit words, holy names) to the disciple. It should not be shared with anyone and should be repeated and meditated on until the day he dies. For Isherwood, this forges a bond between the guru and the disciple. Isherwood was very much affected by the idea of this close relationship. As he himself indicates in *My Guru and His Disciple*,

... the tie between the guru and his initiated disciple cannot be broken, either in this world or on any future plane of existence, until the disciple realizes the Atman within himself and is thus set free. Meanwhile, the disciple may neglect, reject, or even betray the guru, but the guru cannot disown him. In such cases, the guru must continue to guide the disciple mentally, from a distance and protect him through prayer (Isherwood 2001, p.67).

As he spends more time with the Bergmann character, Isherwood begins to respect and admire him. He knows that he has a lot to learn from Bergmann and his experiences; not only about film-making but also about his world view. Bergmann's sensitivity and awareness of the threat of war and its probable results influence Christopher. In one of the most powerful scenes of the book, Bergmann depicts the coming war in these words:

It ticks every moment, Death comes nearer. Syphilis. Poverty. Consumption. Cancer discovered too late. My art no good, a failure, a damn flop. War. Poison gas. We are dying with our heads together in the oven.... The attack on Vienna, Prague, London and Paris, without warning, by thousands of planes, dropping bombs filled with deadly bacilli, the conquest of Europe in a week, ... the massacre of the Jews, the execution of intellectuals... (1945, p.41).

Bergmann's startling observations make Christopher see war from a different perspective. For the first time in his novels, Isherwood portrays an individual's helplessness against death. Bergmann knows that war will not spare anyone but the inability to do anything to counter suffering, pain and death makes him miserable. Suddenly, Bergmann points to a fat man sitting alone in a corner:

All these people will be dead, All of them... No, there is one... He will survive. He is the kind that will do anything, anything to be allowed to live. He will invite the conquerors to his home, force his wife to cook for them and serve the dinner on his bended knees... He will offer his sister to a common soldier. He will act as a spy in prisons... He will hold down his daughter while they rape her. And, as a reward for this, he will be given a job as a bootblack in a public lavatory and he will lick the dirt from people's shoes with his tongue... (1945, p.42).

From a simple lunch scene, Isherwood offers a striking analysis of human nature. There will always be people who will close their eyes to harsh realities and make a pact with the devil as long as they remain safe and unharmed. It is Bergmann's awareness that helps Isherwood to see this reality clearly. "This kind of talk had strange effect on me." says Christopher.

... the coming war was unreal to me as death itself. It was unreal because I couldn't imagine anything beyond it; I refused to imagine anything; just as a spectator refuses to imagine what is behind the scenery in a theatre. The outbreak of the war, like the moment of death, crossed my perspective of the future like a wall ... I thought about this wall from time to time, with acute depression... Then, again, I forgot or ignored it... I secretly whispered to myself, 'Who knows? Maybe we shall get around it somehow. Maybe it will never happen' (1945, p.43).

In *An Approach to Vedanta*, Isherwood emphasizes the importance of Swami in his life, saying "The right teacher must appear at exactly the right moment in the right place, and his pupil must be in the right mood to accept what he teaches" (1963, p.17). In *Prater Violet*, Bergmann is the right teacher for Christopher. He portrays Bergmann with this perspective in mind. Bergmann's existence in the novel enables Christopher to understand himself and to see the world differently. Through the end of the novel, it is possible for readers to observe the transformation that Christopher has gone through. Late at night, when Bergmann and Christopher are walking through the dark, empty streets, Isherwood thinks: "It was that hour of the night at which man's ego almost sleeps. The sense of identity, of possession, of name and address and telephone number grows very faint" (1945, p.122). In Vedanta philosophy, it is believed that human beings are deficient. The more he asks for material things the more he or she feels deficient. In *Introduction to Vedanta* Swami Dayananda states that it is a universal human condition for an individual to say "I am a limited, deficient being who must struggle for certain things through which I hope to

become complete” (Dayananda 1989, p 2). Isherwood draws our attention to the fact that there are even times when your identity, material possessions or your position in life are nothing. We are in a struggle to gain the things we dream of but nothing can make you feel secure and complete as long you don’t stop yourself from “wanting.”

#### **4.4 The World In The Evening**

After writing *Prater Violet*, Isherwood went through a writer’s block. He had been working on a novel since 1949 but he was unable to complete it. On January 27, 1953 he wrote in his diary that he felt as if his whole future as a writer had been at stake. “This has been the toughest of all my literary experiences. A sheer frontal attack on a laziness block so gross and solid that it seemed sentient and malevolent...” (Isherwood 2001, p.207). Finally in 1954, five years effort was turned into a book called *The World in the Evening*. *The World in the Evening* is one of the most unpopular and neglected yet poignant of Isherwood’s novels. In my opinion, it paved Isherwood’s way for his critically acclaimed novel *A Single Man* because he finally offers a complete blend of his artistic, sexual and spiritual identities. Years later, Isherwood leaves “Christopher” persona aside and creates a new character, Stephen Monk. Unlike Philip in *All The Conspirators* and Eric in *The Memorial*, Stephen carries the author’s experience and knowledge that he has gained so far; but like Isherwood himself, he feels unable to fit into the society that he lives in. Set in the late 1930s, *The World in the Evening* begins with a Hollywood party at a famous screen writer’s house where Stephen catches his second wife, Jane, with an actor. He leaves everything behind and goes to his Quaker aunt’s home in Pennsylvania to look back over his life and find some peace. Although welcomed by his Aunt Sarah, he decides to leave there, too. Unfortunately, he is hit by a car and seriously injured. Unable to go anywhere, he is confined to bed for many months. This long recovery period pushes him to take control over his life and go through a process of self-discovery.

Although the plot seems simple, *The World in the Evening* can be considered a novel in which Isherwood reflects all aspects that contribute to his personality as a writer. Going back and forth between the late 1930s and early 1940s,

Isherwood divides the book into three chapters: “The End,” “Letters and Life,” and “The Beginning.” Each chapter has its own significance in terms of the progression of the plot and understanding Stephen Monk’s transformation. For the first time in his novels, Isherwood mixes epistolary technique with flashbacks. Stephen’s first wife, Elizabeth Rydal, whom Stephen is unable to forget, is described through a series of letters, while the chronological order of the book is interrupted by Stephen’s memories of Elizabeth. She is a respected author of the famous book “The World in the Evening,” and is twelve years older than Stephen. During their marriage, both of them loved and respected each other, until she died from a heart attack.

The use of these two literary devices help us to understand Stephen Monk better because as the novel progresses, Isherwood turns the novel into a bildungsroman focusing on the psychological and moral growth of Stephen Monk. At the very beginning of the novel, Stephen Monk feels himself like an outsider at the Hollywood party. He describes himself as “an alien who did not belong to their worried movie world” (Isherwood 1966, p.15). He feels like an “animal trapped in a swamp” (Isherwood 1966, p.15). Isherwood portrays Stephen Monk as a person who is dissatisfied with his life and marriage. He was once known just as Elizabeth’s husband, and now he is known as Jane’s husband. He is unable to take control over his life and his relationship with Jane. He keeps talking to Elizabeth in his mind and reading her letters which he has saved.

In one of his letters to Edward Upward, Isherwood writes that he was “determined to write in the third person and abolish “Christopher Isherwood,” but this other character has to be such a lot of things which I am, and also am not” (Fryer 1993, p.224). Isherwood succeeded in abolishing “Christopher Isherwood” but while he was creating Stephen Monk, he couldn’t put a distance between him and Stephen. In the novel, Stephen Monk is obviously different from Christopher in terms of his marriages, bisexuality and Quakerism. But on the other hand, there are a lot of personal issues that Isherwood projects onto Stephen.

When Stephen arrives his Aunt’s home in Pennsylvania, he is emotionally a total mess. He is full of hatred against Jane and he blames his deceased wife

Elizabeth. Isherwood places Stephen's monologues with pinpoint accuracy at this part of the novel and he successfully reflects Stephen's anger towards his wives. Anger and disappointment had always been feelings that Isherwood felt before coming to America. He felt anger and hatred towards his own country when Heinz was deported at the border. Starting from his school years, he was not happy with the system and authorities. He rebelled against anything that his mother and the society expected from him. So, in a way, Stephen carries Isherwood's past anger because he knows what is wrong with him. In one of his monologues, he speaks to Elizabeth:

This is what you always expected, isn't it, Elizabeth? ... Oh sure, you'd have warned me. You were always warning me against something. And you were always right. But why couldn't you ever let me make my own mistakes? Then I wouldn't be so helpless. Then I wouldn't have gotten into this mess (Isherwood 1966, p.25).

The need to depend on somebody or the need to have someone in life who can provide a shelter when things go wrong and show a way out are feelings that both Isherwood and Stephen tried to deal with in life. As a child, Isherwood lacked a father figure. His relationship with his mother was based on Kathleen's expectations of him. When he finally learned to stand on his own feet in Berlin, he began to look for a person with whom he could share his life. It has been stated many times in this study that what Isherwood was looking for in Berlin was not just sex. Until the period when he met Heinz, he was in search of the right person. The loss of Heinz when he came to America affected him greatly. He had many lovers though he tried to have long term relationships with them. When he came to California to learn more about Pacifism from Gerald Heard, he had an empty feeling inside. Years of disappointments, emotional failures and loss of loved ones swept Isherwood into an invisible hole. This was the reason he felt attracted to Vedanta and Swami. Thus, Stephen is in a similar mood, but driven by his own causes. Throughout his entire life, he let two women define him. He never tried to stand on his own two feet. In times of crises, he always expected somebody to reach out to him. Like the guru Swami in Isherwood's life, Stephen comes to his Quaker Aunt Sarah's home. Since Isherwood spent some time among the Quakers when he was working as translator at Haverford, Pennsylvania, he knew the community well. So Stephen's going back to his Quaker roots wasn't just a coincidence.

Stephen feels happy about being in Aunt Sarah's house. Knowing the existence of a place that he can feel attached to makes him hopeful:

Jane had never slept with me here; Elizabeth had never looked out of this window, never seen those woods. This was really a fresh start... After thirty-two years, I had come back to the room I was born in, bringing nobody with me, nothing except a suit-case. Now at last, I told myself with apprehension and excitement, I've actually done it. I've cut all the life-lines, kicked away all the props. From here on in, whatever happens, I'll be entirely on my own (1966, pp.36-7).

Isherwood had similar feelings when he went to Berlin and then to California. When he decided to dedicate his life to Vedanta, he wrote in his diary "I know that that's the best way for me. The obstacles have been cleared from my path, one by one." (Bucknell 2011, pp.261-262). So nothing is coincidental in Isherwood's novels. Even these feelings of Stephen's were coming directly from Isherwood's heart. This explains Isherwood's inability to separate "Stephen Monk" from the "Christopher Isherwood" of the previous novels. Although Isherwood uses the first person narrator in *The World in the Evening*, the habit of speaking from his own experiences as a writer continues in this novel.

The effect of Vedanta on his identity can also be observed in the novel. As a matter of fact, Stephen's decision to leave Jane and take refuge in Aunt Sarah's home is the result of Isherwood's purpose of writing the events from a Vedantic perspective. Isherwood does not want Stephen Monk to leave Haverford. The accident scene and Stephen's compulsory confinement to bed with a broken thigh are significant for Isherwood. He wants Stephen to think about his life and where it is headed. Isherwood wants Stephen Monk to go through not only a physical recovery but also a mental and psychological one. At the beginning of the novel, he portrays Stephen's life as a total mess. He is trapped in an unsuccessful marriage and unsure of his wife's loyalty. He is full of hatred, anger, insecurity, and bitterness. As the novel progresses, Isherwood shows the readers that Stephen Monk is not that innocent. Through flashbacks, it is shown that Stephen has always been dissatisfied with his life even though he was happily married to a mature and wise woman, Elizabeth Rydal. He respects and adores Elizabeth but he can't stop his carnal desires. He had a relationship with a man called Michael who is deeply in love with Stephen and when Elizabeth was struggling with her health, he had an affair with Jane. As his marriage is

coming to an end with Jane, he goes back to his hometown as a disappointed, unhappy man who is morally and ethically weak and who has long lost his sense of direction in life.

In the novel, he keeps talking to Elizabeth in his mind. He sometimes fights with her and sometimes asks for her help. During a Quaker ceremony where people remain in silence for some time, he again talks to Elizabeth: “Elizabeth tell me, was I crazy to come here? What am I getting myself into?” (Isherwood 1966, p.49). From the way he speaks to Elizabeth, one can understand that he is tired of living his life. He is thinking about going to war and getting himself killed. Then he wouldn’t have to think about anything else. He asks Elizabeth “What’s the matter with me? Why do I feel so guilty? What makes me act like this? Only- you’ve got to help me... Promise you won’t ever leave me.” (1966, p.50). He is clearly unhappy with his present self and asking for Elizabeth’s help. The feeling of guilt he keeps repeating in the novel is the burden of the past mistakes. He betrayed Elizabeth twice. He gave false hopes to Michael and did not care about his feelings. Now, his second marriage with Jane is a disaster, he realized that his wife has betrayed him as well.

The reason why Isherwood wrote a storyline like this is also closely related with Karma in Vedanta. In an article called “*Reducing Karma and the Sources of Negative Actions, Speech, and Thoughts*” Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati explains that the word “Karma” means “action.” It “is really our own inner conditionings and processes that are leading us to experience outer effects or consequences in relation to our own actions.” (Bharati n.d.).

In other words, every individual faces the consequences of his or her actions. It is now Stephen’s time to reap what he has sown. Stephen is asking Elizabeth’s help to cope with his present situation. Elizabeth’s answer to Stephen is a reflection typical of the guru and disciple relationship. “I can’t leave you Stephen. Don’t you realize that? Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t leave you as long as you still needed me. We’re not separate people anymore.” (1966, p. 50). Previously it has been stated that there is an unbreakable bond between the guru and his disciple in Vedanta philosophy. Neither guru nor disciple can leave their relationship. In the Introduction to Vedanta, Swami Dayananda, describes a guru as “the one who dispels darkness. The word itself reveals the function; gu



stands for darkness; ru means the one who dispels darkness. A guru then, is a dispeller of darkness... A guru is a teacher, who has the capacity to dispel the ignorance covering whatever it is one wants to know.” (Dayananda 1989, pp.59-60)

In the novel, Isherwood portrays Elizabeth as wise and mature person. She is aware of Michael’s feelings towards her husband. On the other hand, for Stephen, his relationship with Michael is just about sex. He makes it clear to Michael that he is not “that way” and he “won’t ever be.”

If you are, I’m sorry for you. I’m sorry for anybody who’s twisted and warped. But I’m not going to let you spoil my life. You don’t understand the kind of life I have with Elizabeth. You don’t understand any kind of real happiness (1966, p. 203).

But Michael, with all his despair and anger, tells Elizabeth that he had sex with her husband and he is in love with him. He wants Stephen to come away with him. Elizabeth, who can be regarded as one of Isherwood’s most dignified, controlled and mature female characters of Isherwood, sincerely feels sorry for Michael when she hears all about this. She simply says:

I’m sorry... It must hurt you so, having to say all this... I said I was sorry. I am. I am, truly. You’re the only one whose feelings matter, just now. What Stephen or I may feel isn’t important. Because, you see, Michael I’m afraid it’s you who has to face the truth... Stephen isn’t going away with you (1966, p. 209).

Right at that moment, with the advantage of knowing her husband very well, Elizabeth speaks on behalf of Stephen with a decisive and clear attitude. Stephen never questions Elizabeth. As for an incident like this, Elizabeth’s approach is beyond mature. She is like a parent who covers her child’s mistake and decides what’s best for him. Throughout the novel, even after Elizabeth’s death, Isherwood continues to portray her as a teacher or a guru to Stephen. There are many scenes in which readers find Stephen in conversation with Elizabeth.

In his diary entry dated October 27 1956, Isherwood recalls a visit to Swami at the monastery. When saying goodbye to each other, the Swami tells Isherwood to “Come again soon. I like seeing you, Chris” (Bucknell 2011, p.657). Isherwood tells him that he thinks about him all the time and has “conversations with him” in his mind. In *The World in the Evening*, Isherwood tries to reflect a

similar relationship between Stephen and Elizabeth. Since Elizabeth is not in his life anymore, Stephen needs another teacher in his life. Not in the sense of a guru, but someone to act like one. In Haverford, while lying on his bed, two women, Aunt Sarah and Gerda (a German refugee), help him to find his way out of misery and guilt. This is definitely the only novel in which Isherwood offered a positive, understanding and tolerant portrayal of three women.

Sarah helps many refugees who are running away from the Nazis and the war. She is the one who saves Gerda. She tells her that it was Stephen who paid for all the expenses, food, and clothes. Stephen is not aware of anything, because Sarah arranges everything with Stephen's lawyers, and all Stephen does is to sign papers. When Gerda thanks Stephen, he objects "All this has really nothing to do with me." (1966, p.43). and tells Gerda that he's not comfortable with Sarah promoting him as if he's a "saint." In *Vedanta For All*, Swami Satprakashananda states that when a person "performs good deeds, he naturally reaps the benefits of those deeds, here and elsewhere. Those deeds (good or bad). are sure to produce an effect, because every action performed leaves an indelible impression on the mind. (Satprakashananda 2001). So Aunt Sarah's effort to make Stephen a part of these good deeds is the sign that Stephen's transformation process has begun because Stephen faces a totally different world in Haverford. After listening Gerda's story and learning that her husband is in the French army, he realizes that there are other lives beyond his own, who are struggling with their own problems in life.

During those months he spent in bed, Gerda gradually begins to make Stephen realize his misbehavior and mistakes when it comes to his relationships with the people he loves. For instance, in one scene, he upsets Sarah when he doesn't let her help him with the bed. Gerda advises him to show his love towards Sarah. She thinks that there is a child in Stephen, but she warns him that "Children can be cruel sometimes, by not thinking. You must not be cruel to Sarah. She loves you. You love her, too. But you must show her this." (1966, p.60). This kind of selfishness, upsetting people without thinking and acting carelessly are the characteristics that Isherwood emphasizes in Stephen's personality. He never empathizes with the feelings of other people. His relationship with Michael can be given as an example. Although he didn't have the slightest intention of

leaving Elizabeth, he gave him false hopes by sleeping with him. Throughout the novel Stephen learns a lot from Gerda and her approach to life. She repairs Stephen's broken self-respect and trust. She encourages Stephen to take action and to take control of his life. "... believe me, what you really want- that you will find. Those who only think they want-they never get." (1966, p. 287). Her last advice to Stephen is to be alone in his personal life until he knows that he can live without the support of others. (1966, p. 287).

On the other hand, Sarah is portrayed as his guardian. Whatever Stephen does, she supports him. She believes that Stephen will find his way. "Whatever you do, you'll be guided. I know that." (1966, p. 292). When Stephen asks how she knows that, she answers "I just know. Believe me... It isn't the kind of thing one can explain in so many words. But I'm quite, quite sure." (1966, p. 292). At this point, Isherwood invokes a spiritual atmosphere that leads Stephen to self-realization:

It was then, suddenly and for the merest fraction of an instant, that I saw, or thought I saw, what Gerda had seen there was something about the smiling little woman, at that moment; something that wasn't the Sarah I'd known. That wasn't Sarah at all. The look in her eyes wasn't hers. I had an uncanny feeling-it was very close to fear- that I was somehow 'in the presence-' but of what? The whatever-it- was behind Sarah's eyes looked out at me through them, as if through the eyeholes in a mask. And its look meant: Yes, I'm always here (1966, p.292).

One of the basic principles of Vedanta is to believe that:

God dwells within our own hearts as the divine Self or Atman. The Atman is never born nor will it ever die. Neither stained by our failings nor affected by the fluctuations of the body or mind, the Atman, is not subject to our grief or despair or disease or ignorance. Pure, perfect, free from limitations, the Atman, Vedanta declares, is one with Brahman. The greatest temple of God lies within the human heart (Vedanta Society of Southern California 2016).

Reaching this knowledge is of course very difficult. God exists within yourself. It is not something located in you but according to Vedanta it is "you." What Stephen saw in Sarah's eyes might be interpreted as the Avatar- the God which is in human form. According to Swami Shivananda,

If God does not come down as a human being, how will human beings love him? That is why He comes to human beings as a human being. People can love Him as a father, mother, brother, friend—they can

take any of these attitudes. And He comes to each in whatever form that person loves. (Vedanta Society of Southern California 2016)

At that moment, Stephen goes through a realization that god is always with him. It is a “special experience.” In Vedanta it is believed that “...absolute reality is not available through perception or reasoning, it can only be accessed by some special experience” (Vedanta The Yoga of Objectivity 2018).

Elizabeth, Gerda and Sarah are just the teachers or gurus that show Stephen the ways to reach knowledge, but it is Stephen’s job to realize this and achieve completeness. From the start, Isherwood consciously portrays Stephen as a person who is immature, self-centered and spoiled. But these three woman help him to improve. According to Vedanta philosophy one should not forget that our psychology is highly connected with Isvara. Isvara is Sanskrit, and means the Supreme Being. Your psychological condition, feelings of sadness, jealousy and anger, cannot be separated from Isvara. So one should focus on the roots of these feelings and should keep in mind that we need to accept what life offers. If you are unable to change the situation you are in, you should think about the reasons and eliminate “any wrong understanding of the situation with the right one,” (Vedanta The Yoga of Objectivity 2018). In Haverford Stephen learns to put this theory into practice so that he’ll suffer less mentally and spiritually.

In February 1950, when Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that there were communists working for the state department, a state of panic spread all over America. In order to disprove his claims, Deputy Undersecretary John Purifoy denied his accusations but at the same time drew the country’s attention to homosexuals by saying that ninety-one homosexuals had been forced out of governmental positions as security threats. During the Red Scare frenzy led by McCarthy, as David K. Johnson observes in his book *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecutions of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* that “The typical case involved a homosexual confronted with circumstantial evidence that he had associated with “known homosexuals” or been arrested in a known gay cruising area. Almost all those accused quietly resigned rather than risk further publicity” (Johnson 2004, p.3). For McCarthy, homosexuals, as well as communists, posed a threat to the nation. McCarthy’s attack gave birth to a new term: the Lavender Scare, which is described by Johnson as “a fear that

homosexuals posed a threat to national security and needed to be systematically removed from the federal government.” (Johnson 2004, p.9).

In an atmosphere like this, Isherwood was portraying a gay character who wants to march down shouting “... we’re queer, because we’re queer because we’re queer because we’re queer.” (1966, p.116). The significance of *The World in the Evening* lies in two facts. For the first time in his novels, Isherwood describes a gay couple, Dr. Charles Kennedy and painter Bob Wood, living together in a Quaker town. Townspeople love and respect them. Even Aunt Sarah worries for them because Bob might be called back to the army. She says “I’m sure I don’t know what Charles would do without him. Bob’s been like a younger brother to him. ... You should see their house! They’ve made it so charming, in an informal masculine way. I always think it’s so nice when two men get along together, like that.” (1966, p.66-67)

Reading about two gay couples at that time was something like an oasis in a desert. Isherwood received many fan letters after the publication of the novel. In a letter to his friend Stephen Spender, he writes “I believe if I gave the word, right now, I could start a queer revolution; ...” (Berg & Freeman eds. 2015, p.259). In his essay “*Pulp Isherwood Cheap Paperbacks and Queer Cold War Readers*,” Jamie Harker shares a few fan letters written to Isherwood. In one letter, a reader says

It is very early morning and I have just finished reading *The World in the Evening* for the second time. I’ve been crying like a baby. . . . I have felt your love as though it were directed personally to me. If you had sat down for all the painful, wonderful hours of your creation with only one thought in mind: What [do I] need more than anything else in the world at this time? . . . If I could think of a word less abused and more beautiful, I would use it . . . but the word is Love. Whether you know it or intended it or want it or even understand it, you have drawn together all things I’ve known and forgotten (including the pain . . . a great deal of the pain). and made them useful to me . . . because I don’t think I can ever really hate again—not even myself. . . . Thank you forever for *The World in the Evening* (Berg & Freeman eds. 2015, p.260).

This is just one of hundreds of letters which reveal Isherwood’s talent as an author who writes about what he experiences in real life. The author of this letter was probably a gay man struggling with his own sexual identity. In the

novel, the representation of Charles and Bob is so natural and life-like that this reader identified himself with the two characters.

The second significance of the novel concerns Isherwood's sexual identity. When he was leaving Berlin, he made a promise to himself to not "to deny the rights of his tribe." In *The World in the Evening*, he portrays the sort of a relationship that he had always wanted to have. He had had many lovers and sexual relations with other men, but he always desired to be in a committed relationship. When he first realized that it was possible to have one with William Caskey, he left the Vedanta Center. In *My Guru and His Disciple*, he recalls those days and says "I had recently met a young man with whom I wanted to settle down and live in what I hoped could become a lasting relationship." (Isherwood 2001, p.189). He established a home life which he described as "lively, noisy drunken, sometimes full of laughter sometimes quarrelsome..." (Isherwood 2001, p. 191). As a matter of fact, Isherwood was ready to give voice to one of the critical aspects of his life. He clearly felt comfortable when he wrote,

I couldn't regard anything we were doing as evil. It could sometimes have been called shocking, but that was only in the language of others, whose business it wasn't. I was simply glad to be living out in the open at last, with no appearances to be kept up and no need for pretenses (Isherwood 2001, p.191).

People could say whatever they wanted about two men having a relationship and sharing a house together, but for Isherwood, the freedom to live with the person he loved without keeping himself in the closet was an indispensable aspect of his identity. Although his relationship with Caskey lasted only six years, and was full of ups and downs, the relationship between Charles and Bob in *The World in the Evening* was a reflection of the sort of typical gay male relationship that Isherwood had always desired. In 1953, he met Don Bachardy who became his partner, companion, and confidant for the rest of his life. The editor of *Christopher Isherwood Diaries Volume I*, Katherine Bucknell, says that "Isherwood and Bachardy rapidly established the home life and routine which Isherwood had long craved..." (Bucknell 2011, p. 389).

Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one might wonder about what is so unusual about depicting two gay man's relationship but at that time what Isherwood did was important. While gay readers were reading the story of Jim Willard who struggles to accept his homosexuality in Gore Vidal's *The City and The Pillar*, (1948). Isherwood creates two mature men who have already embraced their sexual identities. While Charles Kennedy is satisfied with his career and personal life, Bob Wood is like an angry young man who is full of rage against the conformities of life. He doesn't want the world to ignore his existence as a gay man. Within the character of Bob Wood, Isherwood creates a militant gay character who wants the town to recognize their relationship:

People just ignore us, most of the time and we let them. We encourage them to. So this whole business never gets discussed, and the laws never get changed. There's a few people right here in the village who really know what the score is with Charles and me, but they won't admit it, not even to themselves. We're such nice boys, they say.... They just refuse to imagine how nice boys like us could be arrested and locked up as crooks (1966, p. 110).

Isherwood also focuses on Charles and Bob's relationship equally with the other characters. They are not portrayed more or less than the other characters. There is no extra emphasis on them. Charles and Bob are a part of the town, on good terms with townspeople, respected and admired. Isherwood regards their relationship as an ordinary aspect of life. They are visible and they are no different from any heterosexual couple. In this way, within the characters of Charles and Bob, Isherwood contributed to the representation of gay men not only in American culture and but also in fiction. At the time this novel was written, gay men were regarded as minority, but in Isherwood's novel, they are not separated from the rest.

The book ends with a scene where Jane and Stephen meet after their divorce. Stephen's final sentence in the novel signifies Stephen's transformation complete. "I really do forgive myself, from the bottom of my heart" (1966, p. 300). says Stephen. Over the past months, he has first realized what went wrong with his relationships. Then he learned to live with his mistakes and confront his flawed self. This is exactly what Isherwood planned for Stephen. He wanted him to give up blaming the others for his own faults. In his conversation with Jane, Stephen takes responsibility for the things that went wrong between them.

He also wants him to stand on his own two feet. One last piece of advice comes from Gerda. “Be alone,” she says “until you know that you can live without the support of others. (1966, p. 294). For the first time in his life, he doesn’t choose the easiest way. At the end of the story, he enlists as an ambulance driver and goes to North Africa.

#### **4.5 A Single Man**

A lot has been written and said about *A Single Man*. From queer theory to existentialist studies, the book has been analyzed from many perspectives. This chapter, however, offers a kind of reading which traces the life story that Isherwood constructed in “the afternoon of his life,” (Gammill 2018). as Carl Jung proposed in his essay “The Stages of Life.” In the spring of 1962, Isherwood began to focus on a short novel entitled “An Englishwoman,” which would soon to be transformed into “*A Single Man*,” at the suggestion of his partner, Don Bachardy. At that time, Isherwood was 58 years old and living a domestic life with Don Bachardy who played a critical role in the progress of Isherwood’s “life story” in middle age. In an interview he gave to Stanley Poss in the summer of 1960, at his house in Santa Monica, California, Isherwood gives clues to his personal writing motto:

Yet more and more I write for myself, I think. More and more, writing is appearing to me as a kind of self-analysis, a finding-out something about myself and about the past, and about what life is like, as far as I’m concerned; who I am; who these people are; what it’s all about (Berg & Freeman eds. 2001).

Isherwood clearly admits that his experiences in life are transmitted into his life narrative as a means to know himself better. He was also honest enough to say that he wasn’t writing for a particular reader. He was actually writing to answer a difficult question, a mystery which have very few people in life has ever succeeded in solving: “Who I am?” Who is Christopher Isherwood? Was he the same person who left England and went to live in Berlin in the middle of the modern world’s most chaotic and tense period? How much of this man had changed during his permanent stay in America? What is fascinating is that when he gave this interview to Stanley Poss, Isherwood was 57 years old and still trying to know who he is. He was still trying to give meaning to his life and



make sense of it through his experiences and the personal incidents that he had been through. It is clear that Isherwood in his 50s is different from Isherwood in London and Berlin. He still has things to say. He still has experiences to share. So before moving onto an analysis of *A Single Man*, we need to analyse this new identity of Isherwood through his “life story” narrative and find out how the “life story” of Isherwood affected the formation of *A Single Man*.

“A person’s life is always a work in progress” says McAdams. As you grow older, new experiences are added in your life story. When you begin to make sense of these experiences, a change begins. In *The Art and Science of Personality Development* he observes that “Life stories change over time. They change for two reasons. First, people’s lives change.... Second, people change their stories as they change their understandings of themselves” (McAdams 2015, p.297).

Beginning with the second half of 1945, when Isherwood left The Vedanta Center for good, he was aware of the fact that it was the end of an important period in his life. While he was staying in the center, he began to work at Warner Brothers Studios as scriptwriter. Working in Hollywood during day and coming to the Monastery at night gradually affected his spiritual chores. As he himself states in *My Guru and His Disciple*, “What I actually needed at that time was either complete freedom or much stricter monastic discipline.” (Isherwood 2001 p.187). There was, of course, another man, Bill Caskey, who sped up Isherwood’s decision to leave and gave him the freedom that he was covertly looking for. His relationship with the twenty-four-year old Irish American photographer lasted for six years. In 1947, almost a year after he became an American citizen, he went to England to see his family and friends, eight years after his departure. As Jonathan Fryer points out “He now saw himself as a foreigner in England.” (Fryer 1993, p.161). After his return, he travelled to South America with Bill Caskey and his experiences resulted in a travel book called *The Candor and the Cows*, which according to Fryer, is as one of Isherwood’s most successful books. After his return, Isherwood was offered to work on the scripts of a variety of movies by MGM. This busy period prevented him to produce any novels.

He was having ups and downs in his relationship with Bill Caskey. His mood was very similar to his state of mind when he decided to live in the monastery in 1940. In his diary entry on May 22, 1949, he writes “I’m in a strange condition- highly toxic, I feel- and really verging on some nervous breakdown. Only I probably won’t break down as long as I keep hold of some threads of reason.” (Bucknell 2011, p. 411). He was looking for someone to blame. Caskey was the one, but he was aware of the fact that he needed something to hold onto. Back in the 1940s, there was Swami and the monastery, where he went and took refuge, but right now he had to sort it out. “Prayer, meditation, thought, creation are the only refuge and stronghold. Without them, I’m nothing... I must try to keep this diary. It is an act of sanity.” (2011, p. 414). says Isherwood in another entry. Isherwood’s understanding of life was changing. He was not only struggling to restart his novel (*The World in the Evening*). and to solve the problem of the narrator, but his diary entries clearly show that his advancing age was also affecting his state of mind. He was obviously feeling alone particularly after he ended his relationship with Bill Caskey. He writes in his diary that he feels:

... sick, stupid, middle-aged, impotent. I have just got to make an effort, and not wail and weep. I bore myself beyond tears... I must take my boredom and impotence and cram myself full of them until I gag and vomit up all this poison (Bucknell 2011, p.415).

In accordance with McAdams’s statement, above, Isherwood’s story began to change as his understanding of himself changed. His narrative clearly reflects certain deficiencies and inadequacies. He fails to produce, he fails to find out who the narrator in his novel will be, he even writes in his diary that” he cannot believe in “Stephen Monkhouse or any other fictitious character, as the narrator.” ((Bucknell 2011, p. 414). 418). As a novelist he was experiencing the worst kind of dilemma because, as he himself points out “I can’t get the right techniques for writing this book. Stephen can’t narrate and yet if he doesn’t, I can’t say half the things I want to. I don’t know’ (Bucknell 2011, p. 414). 418).

Moreover while he was facing all this fear, he was alone. Because he feels that, he fails in love as well. He admits that he was experiencing an “emotional bankruptcy” with Caskey. He also began to experience the physical challenges

of midlife. In his diary entry, dated December January 1950, he writes in addition to his sexual impotence:

... there is hyper-tension, worse, I think, I have ever experienced. And so I fail to write. I put it off and put it off, and I do nothing about getting a job... I am lazy and dreamy and lecherous. I hate being alone... I don't believe in myself or my future and all my 'reputation' is just a delayed-action mechanism which only impresses the very young (Bucknell 2011, p.419).

In her article "Development in Midlife" Margie E. Lachman states that middle age begins at 40 and it ends at 60 or 65, and in this period "one must make choices, and select what to do, how to invest time and resources, and what areas to change. To the extent that one has some control over outcomes, one also may take responsibility or blame when things do not go well." (Lachman 2004, p.310). Isherwood was at the point of failing to fulfill any of this. This period of Isherwood's life is very similar to his pre-Berlin period and his early months in America after his emigration. Now he was looking for something or someone to hold onto. However he didn't give up. He kept doing the thing that he knew best: writing. *The World in the Evening* was completed in 1952, just a year before "Sally Bowles" was turned into a play by John Van Druten. The play was called "I am a Camera" and it quickly became popular.

In 1953, he met his longtime partner, Don Bachardy, at a party and the couple never left each other nearly over 30 years until the day Isherwood died. When they met, Christopher was 48 and Don was 18. Christopher was severely criticized by his friends, but the pair were falling in love. According to his editor and friend, John Lehman, Isherwood "was taking a serious personal risk and jeopardizing his whole life-style." (Lehman 1988, p.101). but as Isherwood writes in *My Guru and His Disciple* he was deeply in love with Don Bachardy. He says that he didn't feel guilty about the age difference:

but I did feel awed by the emotional intensity of our relationship, right from its beginning: the strange sense of a fated, mutual discovery. I knew that, this time, I had really committed myself. Don might leave me, but I couldn't possibly leave him, unless he ceased to need me. This sense of a responsibility which was almost fatherly made me anxious but full of joy (Isherwood 2001, p. 209).

In his diary entries in 1953, Isherwood repeats many times that he feels "terribly responsible" (Bucknell 2011, p. 458). for Don Bachardy and he

defines the relationship as “fatherly.” He was so emotionally depended at Don Bachardy that on September 9 1954, he writes in his diary that “The one real responsibility I have is Don. Everything revolves around him, at the moment.” (Bucknell 2011, p. 467)

These feelings exactly match up with Dan McAdams’ ideas about “Generativity.” In his essay “The Life Narrative at Midlife” Dan McAdams asserts that “midlife ushered in an increasing awareness of life’s finitude” (McAdams 2014, p.62). That’s why middle aged adults become more “introspective and reflective as they age.” (2014, p.62). They show more “more nuanced understandings of the self” and reveal “deeper insights into how their life’s journey has shaped who they are” (2014, p.62). Isherwood began to experience “life’s finitude” on February 12 1957, when he discovered a tumor on the lower side of his abdomen. As he writes in *My Guru and His Disciple*, this was his first “cancer scare” He writes that it wasn’t there a night ago and he was shocked how it grew rapidly in one night. He had to go through an operation. He says “During the waiting period, I saw Swami. Without telling him about the tumor, I got him talking on the subject of death.” (Isherwood 2001, p. 224). Luckily the tumor was non-malignant. He writes that he believed in Swami’s beliefs about death, however, he also adds “But there is one problem which he doesn’t have- the extra pain I would feel in parting from Don...” (Isherwood 2001, p.224). Isherwood met Don Bachardy in the afternoon of his life. This can be interpreted as a cruel twist of fate, but after meeting Bachardy, Isherwood became more introspective. With Bachardy’s presence in his life, his narrative shows a new understanding about his life.

It has been repeated many times that life stories tell us who we are, who we were in the past and who we will be in the future. They carry different meanings if you are a child, teenager, or young adult. For the middle aged ones, McAdams observes that life stories are the greatest challenges because they present the problem of “generativity.” McAdams defines generativity as: “the task of guiding and promoting the next generation through parenting, teaching, mentoring, leadership, and engaging in a wide range of activities aimed at leaving a positive legacy for the next generation (McAdams 2013, p.156).

In Isherwood's case, this generativity is personal, and at first wholly depended on Don Bachardy. Since he was gay and didn't have any children, he wasn't expected to invest in his time into a heterosexual domestic life of raising children, thinking about and planning about a child's future, or being a role model. But he fulfilled all of these in different ways in his relationship with Bachardy. As he moved into a domestic life with Don, he began to take care of him and display fatherly feelings. On April 9 1955, he writes these words in his diary:

If only I could help Don more! All my sympathy and understanding, all my quite genuine knowledge-through my own past experience- of what he is feeling- no, they just don't help. I'm not him. Thirty years are between us, and so much else.(Bucknell 2011, p.488).

Here, he not only embraces the role of a lover but he also acts like a parent who things about the well-being of his child and supports him emotionally. Isherwood was ready to pass all his experiences and knowledge on to Bachardy. At one time, Don Bachardy told him why he collected movie pictures because those pictures reminded him of the time he felt secure. After this, Isherwood writes in his diary that "My job is simple- i.e. provide a background of security for Don and at the same time leave the door open for him to issue forth from it any time he wants to." (Bucknell 2011, p.515). He was also aware of the fact that he couldn't control Don. He had to let go of him, if that was what Don wanted. In every way, Isherwood wanted to be more involved in Bachardy's social, psychological and educational life, not only as his lover but as his protector as well.

In "The Psychology of Life Stories," McAdams argues that "The midlife years may be occasioned by considerable identity work for many modern adults. Life span theorists have written about how the realization that one's life is more than half over can bring to the psychological fore concerns about loss and mortality..." (McAdams 2001 p.106). While trying to take care of Don Bachardy, Isherwood was also aware of the fact that the end was getting closer and closer. On March 1 1955, he writes in his diary that he feels "dissatisfied" with himself:

Fattish (I weigh nearly 150). and pouchy faced, I look much older than I did two to three years ago... I look like a toad, or a man who is being slowly poisoned to death. My mind is dull, and my spirit is blunted. This, of course, makes me bad for Don (Bucknell 2011, p.477).

Although it was too early to be in this kind of mood, this period was the beginning of a change in his life story narrative. This sense of “closure and resolution” (McAdams 2001 p.107). would soon affect his literary style. One last diary entry can concretize this feeling of Isherwood’s:

In the night, quite often now, I wake- not with the horrors, but calmly and lucidly. Then I know certain things clearly- it is almost as if they belonged to another order of reality: that I shall die one day- that much of my life has been wasted- that the life of spirit is the only valid occupation- that I really care for Don- ( Bucknell 2011, p.519).

In *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, McAdams once more elaborates on the term generativity and arguing that “To be generative in midlife is to create, sustain, and care for the people and the valued things (and ideas). that will ultimately survive you.” (McAdams 2015, p.274). Generativity, in Isherwood’s case, began to fulfill this definition of McAdams in 1959. Isherwood was offered his first teaching job, which was in the English department of the California State College for one semester between 1959-1960. In 1960 he became a visiting professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara. These lectures were compiled in a book called *A Writer and His World*. Students who were able to attend these lecture were lucky because Isherwood was not only talking about his novels but was reflecting his life experiences, giving clues about writing and directing them how to be good writers. By being a lecturer and involving himself in this aspect of education, I believe that Isherwood was engaged in a generative activity in his own way.

In 1961, Don Bachardy went to London to study painting. In the following years, he became a portrait painter who had his own exhibitions in London, Los Angeles and New York. Over the next couple of years, there were ups and downs in their relationship. In the introduction to *The Sixties: Diaries Volume Two 1960-1969* Katherine Bucknell observes that, as Don Bachardy was “struggling to find his way forward as an artist,” he was “trapped by Isherwood’s confidence, Isherwood’s fame, Isherwood’s bossiness” (Bucknell 2011, p.xiii). The couple had to navigate through some serious crises, but, in addition, Isherwood was battling with his own demons. On his 58<sup>th</sup> birthday, what Isherwood wrote in his *Diary* shows that Isherwood was clearly afraid of losing Don:

Do I hate Don? Only the selfish part of me hates him, for rocking the boat. When I go beyond that, I feel real compassion, because he is suffering terribly. I still don't know if he really wants to leave me, or what. And I don't think he knows (Bucknell 2011, p.xvi).

In a letter written to his friend Edward Upward, he says that “Melancholia is the occupational disease of us oldies.” (Fryer 1993, p. 200). He was really having a hard time between trying to carry on a relationship with a man whom he put at the center of his life and at the same time trying to face the fact that he was getting older. One of the remarkable things about this letter is that Isherwood predicted what he would soon go through, as if he was some sort of seer. He wrote that “It isn't really the finished novel that matters but something that happens to [you] while you are writing it” (Fryer 1993, p. p.200).

A Single Man is the result of what had happened to Isherwood at a certain period of his life. It exactly reflects the story that Isherwood constructed in order to make sense of his life in the early 1960s. He simply transferred his life, his fears, his disappointments and failures into A Single Man. In addition to his stormy relationship with Don Bachardy, he witnessed the deaths of two of his friends' (Charles Laughton and Aldous Huxley). from cancer. In 1963, he himself faced death in a car accident where broke he his rib. He also began to deal with some health problems. He had a serious sore throat that triggered one of the worst fears in his life: throat cancer. It was exactly in this atmosphere that he began and continued to write A Single Man. On October 31, 1963, he writes in his diary that he is happy with A Single Man's progress. “I am almost certain that it is my masterpiece; by which I mean my most effective, coherent statement, artwork, whatever you want to call it” (Bucknell 2010, p. 291).

In his essay “*The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent and Author*” Dan McAdams observes that “middle aged adults showed a more interpretive and psychologically sophisticated approach to life storytelling compared to younger people” (McAdams 2013, p.280). By writing a novel like A Single Man, Isherwood was actually narrating the story of his 58 year old self and the way he approached it. It was a time that he had to face the loss of loved ones. His relationship with Bachardy was already in a crisis. He was really facing the possibility of being a “single man” in life. After finishing the draft of the book on February 3, 1963, he admitted that A Single Man can be read as “study in the

psychology of middle age.” (Parker 2004, p.618). In his essay “*Identity and the Life Story*,” Dan McAdams observes that middle aged adults are concerned with “the endings of their life stories. It is in the nature of stories that beginnings and middles lead inevitably to endings, and that endings provide a sense of closure and resolution.” (Robyn & Haden eds. 2003, p.194).

The ending of *Single Man* is a reflection of how Isherwood works through his own sense of closure by means of the main character, George. The novel covers a day in George’s life. In that matter, it resembles Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. In an interview Isherwood gave to Carol M. Kaplan in 1973, he admitted that while he was writing *A Single Man*, *Mrs. Dalloway* was in his mind. In one of his diary entries he questioned himself whether he could write a book like *Mrs. Dalloway* in his own style and his answer was “I’d love to try.” (Bucknell 2011). As we read the story of George who is a middle aged, gay professor at San Tomas State College mourning for his partner, Jim who died in a car accident, the technique that Isherwood used begins to capture us. Isherwood himself was also satisfied with his artistic skills in the novel. In a letter written to Leon Surmelian, he says that:

In *A Single Man* I used a narrative technique which seems satisfactory to me – I mean for this particular novel. The story is told in the present tense by a non-personal seemingly disembodied narrator who never says ‘I’ and addresses the reader with the air of a surgeon lecturing to medical students during an operation. The ‘patient’ is the chief character, George. The narrator knows everything that George feels and thinks and is present with him all the times (Schwerdt 1989, p.164).

As we read we can feel the existence of the narrator while he directs us and tells us what to do. There are sentences like “Think of two people, living together day after day...” (Isherwood 2010, p.3). “Let us take the particular instant, years ago, when George walked into The Starboard Side ...” (2010, p.151). He also allows us to know George’s psyche and his inner voice. As the narrator, Isherwood reflects how George feels and what he thinks. In this scene when he speaks with Charlotte on the phone, readers can observe George’s reluctance to speak to her. He gives short answers to Charlotte but the things that pass through his mind are longer than his simple “no.”

‘Hello-is that-it is you, Geo?’



‘Hello, Charley.’

‘I didn’t call you too early, did I?’

‘No.’ (Oh dear, she has managed to get him irritated already! Yet how can he reasonably blame her for the discomfort of standing nastily unwiped, with his pants around his ankles?). ...

‘Geo – (very humbly). would you possibly be free tonight?’

‘Afraid not. No.’ (One second before speaking, he couldn’t have told you what he was going to answer. It is the desperation in Charlotte’s voice that decides him. He isn’t in the mood for one of her crises.)” (2010, p.18).

The best example to be given for Isherwood’s approach to George as a “patient” is the opening paragraph of the novel. Moreover, in the very same paragraph, he blends his narrative technique with his belief in Vedanta:

Waking up begins with saying *am* and *now*. That which has awoken then lies for a while staring up at the ceiling and down into itself until it has recognized *I*, and therefrom deduced *I am, I am now*. ... But *now* isn’t simply now. *Now* is also a cold reminder, one whole day later than yesterday, one year later than last year. Every *now* is labelled with its date, rendering all past *nows* obsolete ... (2010, p.1).

Isherwood presents us the process of waking up and reaching consciousness from a Vedic perspective. He describes the transformation of George’s “Soul” or unconsciousness into a physical “Body.” According to Vedic principles, “body and soul are two separate entities. Neither body is soul nor soul is body. Soul exists independent of the body. It is the only body which is subjected to death... Soul manifests itself into body.” (Nath 2002, p.104).

In Vedanta: Death and the Art of Dying, P. Brahma-prana, points out that:

When we fall asleep, our sense of self persists throughout our dreams. And upon waking from dreamless sleep, we know who we are as soon as our feet touch the floor. This ‘I’ is the thread of continuity that runs throughout our lives, from birth to death. (Brahma-prana 2001).

Isherwood begins the novel in a similar thinking. Instead of giving the name of the person who is waking up, he calls him as “it” because it is in another realm. He avoids mentioning its gender or name but he only emphasizes that as soon as this “it” opens its eyes to a new day, he is aware that he exists. In these sentences, existence and time are portrayed as something painful for this “it.” We realize that this “it” is a person who wakes up to a “now,” but is also uncomfortable with the fact that every “now” pushes “yesterdays” away.

Moreover, with this kind of opening paragraph, Isherwood follows a tradition that he had developed in *Good Bye to Berlin*. He is acting like a camera; reflecting what he sees. On the other hand he makes his readers to realize that he knows everything about this “it.” He knows how this “it” feels about when “it” wakes up. He’s portraying familiar feelings because as he himself writes in one of his letters to Dodie Smith and Alec Beesley on December 13, 1962, this book that he was writing at that time “is fundamentally about me, at my present age, living right here in the Canyon, but under rather different circumstances .... It isn't in the first person!” (Finney 1979, p.248-9).

For two pages, Isherwood’s camera focuses on the actions of “it;” how “it” wakes up from the bed and goes to the bathroom looking at its image on the mirror:

What it sees there isn’t so much a face as the expression of a predicament. Here is what it has done to itself, here is the mess it has somehow managed to get itself into, during its fifty-eight years; expressed in terms of a dull, harassed stare, a coarsened nose, a mouth dragged down by the corners into a grimace as if at the sourness of its own toxins, cheeks sagging from their anchors of muscle, a throat hanging limp in tiny wrinkled folds..... the creature we are watching will struggle on and on until it drops. Not because it is heroic. It can imagine no alternative (2010, p.2).

Alongside the physical deformation, this confrontation with the self reflects exactly what Dan McAdams observes as

the most basic issues of living day to day as social actors, conserving energy to focus on the moments left in life, surviving and holding on as well as possible, before death closes the door (McAdams 2015, p.319).

Within this “it,” Isherwood is actually describing the state of mind as life fades away. It pretends to survive and hold on because it doesn’t know what else to do. Isherwood portrays the reflection of lived experience on the face of this “it.”

Staring and staring into the mirror, it sees many faces within its face—the face of a child, the boy, the young man, the not-so-young man—all present still, preserved like fossils on superimposed layers, and, like fossils, dead. Their message to this live dying creature is: Look at us—we have died—what is there to be afraid of? (2010, p.2).

In this scene, “It” is looking at a canvas on which there are different strokes reflecting different stories of life.” With respect to narrative identity,” says McAdams “elderly adults may draw increasingly on reminiscences as they review the life they have lived.” (McAdams 2015, p.318).

Heroes of different phases of “its” life are looking at him. Each of them reflects reminiscences of different stories, but their message is definitely not a positive one. McAdams argues that “the sense of an ending is ultimately about the anticipation of death” (2015, p. 319). In these two consecutive scenes, Isherwood’s mind was once preoccupied with the question of “who am I” is now worrying about death. From the very first two pages of the book, readers are not allowed to know who this “it” is but Isherwood makes sure that we understand “its” psychological state. Although “fifty-eight” is too early to think about death, Isherwood pushes readers into this kind of thinking in order to question what is wrong with this “it.” Throughout the novel, readers begin to understand “its” reasons’ for feeling like that.

In his early novels Isherwood tried to construct meaningful life stories that he could provide a life with unity and purpose, and through narrating his experiences, he constructs an identity of his own, and improves it by turning it into a meaningful life story. Now in his late fifties, Isherwood is trying to find something to hold on to. He had a large circle of friends, he had Don Bachardy, whom Isherwood feared so much to lose, he had a nice home, respected fame; but he was at the same time aware of the fact that he was facing losses alongside the gains. *A Single Man* is like a fake replica of the gloomy scenario “what if?” The feelings that Isherwood expresses are drawn from his own experiences; therefore, they are real. The plot, on the other hand, springs from his personal worries and fears.

On the third page, readers learn that “it” is called George, and that he is struggling to cope with life without his partner, Jim. He has only one friend, Charlotte, with whom to share his grief. Other than that, he is portrayed as all alone in a selfish, merciless, judgmental, heterosexual world. With his partner Jim, George managed to maintain a distance from the world. They created their own world and Isherwood consciously portrays Jim and George as an item:

Think of two people, living together day after day, year after year, in this small place, standing elbow to elbow cooking at the same small stove, squeezing past each other on the narrow stairs, shaving in front of the same small bathroom mirror... bumping against each other’s bodies by mistake or on purpose, sensually, aggressively, awkwardly, impatiently, in rage or in love (2010, p.4).

When the novel was published in 1964, this scene was a dream that every gay man desired. The novelist Edmund White, whose novels portrays homosexuality in America hailed *A Single Man* as “the first truly liberated gay novel in English.” First of all, the novel focuses on George, who is depicted as a gay man from the outset. There is no chance for him to fall in love with a woman. He has already embraced his identity and, unlike, what the title of the novel implies George is not single because of his homosexuality; he feels alone because the love of his life is dead and every passing day is a reminder of his old age. In his essay “*A Single Man, Then and Now*,” David Garness observes that in *A Single Man* “... homosexuality was presented in a natural and life-affirming way. ... George’s sexual orientation is not sensationalized nor is it the pivotal fact in George’s story.” (Berg & Freeman 2001, p.198). Isherwood successfully manages to portray George as an ordinary human being trying to deal with the loss of a loved one. Yet there are clear clues that George is the product of Isherwood’s fiction. As Isherwood once observed:

My life has been mainly occupied in writing about people who don’t fit into the social pattern. They may defy society or be terrified of it, or they may lead lives of scandal and alienate everybody, or they may be the gadflies of society, like Socrates, or they may be true Outsiders (Berg 2007, p.38).

Like Sally Bowles in *Goodbye to Berlin*, Mr. Norris in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, or Stephen Monk in *The World in the Evening*, George in *A Single Man* also has his own idiosyncrasies. In one scene, George is sitting on the toilet and looking out and he sees their neighbor Mrs. Strunk who is a symbol of the heterosexual majority in the 60s. After a few pages of explaining the Strunks’ American way of life, there comes a poetically written passage reflecting a radical outcry which was regarded unacceptable in those times. Isherwood most probably, without knowing, simply defines homophobia. The term was first used by George Weinberg in the late 1960s, and it was first used in print by Jack Nichols and Lige Clarke in a magazine called “*Screw*” in 1969. As George is sitting on the toilet and looking at Mrs. Strunk, Isherwood unfolds his consciousness by emphasizing that the Strunks, like the rest of society are afraid of George and Jim:

They are afraid of what they know is somewhere in the darkness around them, of what may at any moment emerge into the undeniable

light of their flashlamps, nevermore to be ignored, explained away. The fiend that won't fit into their statistics, the gorgon that refuses their plastic surgery, ... the unspeakable that insists, despite all their shushing, on speaking its name. Among many other kinds of monster, George says, they are afraid of little me. Mr. Strunk, George supposes, tries to nail him down with a word. Queer, he doubtless growls. ... I don't give a damn what he does just as long as he stays away from me. ... Your exorcism has failed, dear Mrs. Strunk, ... The unspeakable is still here; right in your very midst (2010, pp.15- 17).

This very well written passage surely is one of the best artistic definitions of homophobia. Through George, Isherwood is proclaiming the fact that there are people who just happen to be gay and who continue to exist so that one day people like Mrs. Strunk will have to acknowledge this fact and speak about it. The word "queer" would no longer be an insult. Anyone who reads the passage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should not forget that in the 1950s and 60s, there were gay conversion therapies in which gay people were shown pictures of naked men while they were given electric shocks to their body in the name of curing homosexuality. Until 1973, homosexuality was considered a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

In *Unlimited Embrace -A Canon of Gay Fiction- 1945-1995*, Reed Woodhouse observes that it is a challenge for the gay writer to know "how to incorporate the "unspeakable" into art, to make it beautiful. He must not make it beautiful by ignoring or trivializing, but by using it, finding a form for it." (Woodhouse 1998, p.26). With *A Single Man*, Isherwood succeeds in creating a kind of "form." He portrays George as a man who doesn't fit into the norms of society not because he is gay, on the contrary, his sexual orientation transforms him into a thoughtful, tolerant and liberated individual in a hypocritical and cruel heteronormative world. This is the reason why he is a single man. He is alone but at the same time he is unique in the way he takes a stand in life. He may not tell his neighbors or his friends at school that his partner is dead, and he may not attend Jim's funeral and mourn with Jim's family as his partner, but this doesn't mean that he is not a warrior. He tries to bear the pain silently every single day, and yet, half-heartedly try to live and survive. Despite the fact that he is getting old, and that he might never find a man like Jim, he finds the life energy to think:

I'm alive, he says to himself, I am alive. And life-energy surges hotly through him, and delight, and appetite. How good to be in a body—even this old beat-up carcass—that still has warm blood and live semen and rich marrow and wholesome flesh (2010, p.82).

This passage above clearly shows that George wants to feel life. He needs something or someone to remind him that he is still capable of enjoying life and all the other feelings that he had forgotten. Like Isherwood in his real life, George shows generative traits. As a result of his research, McAdams concludes that talking about important life experiences is something that midlife adults puts emphasis on. Isherwood's generativity shows itself in accepting the teaching a job and in taking care of Don Bachardy. In *A Single Man*, George's can be observed through two scenes.

First, there is the scene when he enters the classroom and reflects about how he feels to be with a group of young people. "For him, this one of the peak moments of the day. He feels brilliant, vital, challenging..." (2010, 41). He knows that when he walks in, students watch him and wait for his signal to stop talking and focus on him. Secondly his relation with his student, Kenny reinforces George's generativity. Caring and helping other people is a form of generativity, and George does both with Kenny. Despite Kenny's flirtatious behavior towards George and his efforts to make his fantasy of a student sleeping with his professor come true, he also wonders about George's life experiences. "Did you ever take mescaline Sir? What would you say about experience, Sir?" Apart from being his teacher, George is fatherly, and tries to answer all his questions. He even offers his house to Kenny and his girlfriend once a week. When he sees Kenny's embarrassment, the real life lesson, not only for Kenny, but also for his readers, begins. He says that humans are all "miserable fools and prudes and cowards. Yes, you too, my boy. And don't you dare deny it! What I said just now, about the bed in the study that shocked you... Oh God, don't you see? That bed what that bed means that's what experience is!" (2010, p.143).

Although the rest of the speech is too long to quote, it is perhaps the best part from which to understand the fact that you can't get a single worthwhile experience from books or from being a part of a conformist, traditionalist and judgmental society. You need to go out and experience life itself, even if other

people tell you that what you're doing is wrong. You need to discover, you need to feel life. "I'm like a book you have to read. A book can't read itself to you." (2010, p.144). says George to Kenny. In other words, you can't expect someone to explain life, it is something that you have to discover by yourself.

McAdams argues that negative events in our lives, such as "experiences of failure, loss, sadness, fear... challenge the storyteller to explain why the event happened and what it says about the protagonist of the story and about the protagonist's world." (McAdams & Manczak 2015, p.434). The possibility of losing Don Bachardy and the reality that he's getting older drag Isherwood into a gloomy, pessimistic state of mind which is constantly preoccupied with death. *A Single Man* reveals this kind of meaning-making out of Isherwood's fears and anxieties. In the very first pages, readers learn that Jim is dead. In the middle of the novel, George visits the dying Doris, who used to have a relationship with Jim. Isherwood emphasizes that George does not bring her flowers or anything from outside world:

Everything that matters to her is now right here in this room, where she is absorbed in the business of dying. Her preoccupation doesn't seem egoistic... This preoccupation is with death, and we can all share in that, at any time, at any age, well or ill (2010, p.76).

The apparent reason why Isherwood included a scene like this might be related to his visits to Aldous Huxley and Charles Laughton. He was clearly affected by his friends' gradual approach to death; and in the final scene, instead of giving George a chance to start over, or to find another Jim, he chooses to kill George in his sleep. The spiritual reason for this, however, is closely intertwined with Isherwood's narrative identity. The death of George provides moving evidence of how Isherwood makes narrative sense of his basic fear and of how his life story at a certain point in his life in order to determine who he is.

According to P.Brahmaprana, " By facing death, meditating upon death and ultimately embracing death, the Vedantist overcomes a normal instinctual fear with the courage of religious conviction, the strength of spiritual practice, and the ground of philosophical reason. (Brahmaprana 2001). Killing George is a kind of overcoming of Isherwood's fears of death or of losing a loved one. He approaches the issue from a Vedantic perspective, as he did in the beginning of the novel. For Vedanta "I" is "nothing but a faint reflection of our true nature."

It is our true nature that is divine. It is eternal. But in the chaotic atmosphere of life we forget this. “Most of us falsely identify ourselves with our little self, the ego, which blinds us to our eternal nature. Though fundamentally spiritual beings, we are deluded into thinking we are separate psycho-physical entities.” (Brahmaprana 2001). says P.Brahmaprana.

In *A Single Man*, Isherwood portrays an individual who makes a similar mistake and identifies itself with worldly anxieties. In an interview Isherwood gave to Carola M. Kaplan in 1973, Kaplan observes that:

If George’s life were happier, or fuller, you wouldn’t have the sense of his need for philosophical support-which is present no matter happy one’s life is.” Isherwood replies that “The more intense the happiness, the more poignancy one feels in the fact that it can only be for a certain while, that things change, and that one is separated from people by death and circumstances. All that is very true (Berg & Freeman 2001, p. 271-272).

Jim’s death come suddenly and George’s death comes suddenly too. In the closing paragraphs of *A Single Man*, Isherwood intentionally writes:

Let us then suppose that, at that same instant deep down in one of the major branches of George’s coronary artery, an unimaginably gradual process began. Somehow no doctors can tell us exactly why- the inner lining begins to become roughened. And, one by one, on the roughened surface of the smooth endothelium, ions of calcium, carried by the bloodstream, begin to be deposited. ... Let us suppose this, merely. ... Very well – let us suppose that this is the night, and the hour, and the appointed minute. Now — (2010, p.151).

George’s death is Isherwood’s personal way of comforting himself about the issue of death. He wants to remind himself and his readers that one day everything can come to an end. The novel begins with an awakening from a possible dream and ends with a permanent one. In the process of writing this novel, Isherwood was trying to cope with the possibility of losing Bachardy, the agony that he was in because of death of his closest friends and his personal fear that, since he was getting older, death could come and find him at anytime. This was what he was experiencing at that time. On the other hand the ending scene clearly fulfills all the principles of Vedanta. As Brian Finney points out at the end of the book, through George’s death, Isherwood introduces “a marvelously controlled image which explicitly establishes George’s relation to the greater Reality which the Hindus call Brahman” (Finney 1979, p. 253). In



Vedanta, Brahman is a “transcendent Reality” which is” infinite existence, infinite consciousness, and infinite bliss.” (Vedanta Society of Southern California. 2016). Bhagavad Gita, which is a holy Hindu scripture, describes Brahman as “the indestructible, transcendental living entity” (Bhagavad Gita n.d.). “At the moment of death,” says Brahma-prana “all souls momentarily rest in Pure Being, Brahman... The illumined soul merges into that state of Pure Being” (Brahma-prana 2001). Isherwood puts an end to George’s grief by giving him a peaceful death in accordance with the principles of Vedanta.

What makes *A Single Man* special in terms of Isherwood’s life story and his narrative identity is that he finally solves his inner dilemma regarding his sexuality and religious belief. From the start he was in great struggle to balance his homosexuality with the Vedic chores and principles. He even went through a period of sexual abstinence in the name of dedicating himself fully to Vedanta. But in the end it was because of his sexual and romantic involvement with Bill Caskey that he left the monastery. In *A Single Man* while portraying a mature, self-sufficient George who is perfectly all right with his sexuality, he at the same time successfully adds a religious dimension from the beginning of the novel till the end.

In *Isherwood On Writing: The Lectures in California* he tries to answer the question of “how far and in what manner does the novel grow out of the novelist’s personal experience of life?” (Berg 2007, p.241). He says that he is not one of those writers who invent. He claims that his work is “founded on direct experience.” “We all have the impulse to examine our experience – what is happening to us, and hence, what we are. Because what is happening to us is what we are” (2007, p.241). In my opinion Isherwood’s sentences above reveal the ultimate objective of this study. It is in perfect harmony with McAdams’ perception that “human experience is storied” and life stories are our selected autobiographies of personal experiences that provides us unity, purpose and meaning in life. The stories that Isherwood tells about himself by depending on his experiences represent different aspects of his identity. In *A Single Man* he reveals a blend of artistic, sexual and spiritual aspects of Christopher Isherwood’s persona. This is the reason why *A Single Man* should be read in conjunction with Isherwood’s life story.



## 5. CONCLUSION

Drama, poetry, novel, myth or tales... All literary forms centers on one concept: human experience. Because meaning is produced out of it. Each experience tell us what to do in the future while learning our lesson from the past. Experiences are exactly what improves and matures us. Although each of these literary forms have their own way of portraying an experience, the common denominator among them is that they both tell stories about individuals. Whether they are imaginative or real, stories present life and its numerous aspects. Actually life itself is a great writer of stories and human beings are life's story tellers. From cave paintings to Gilgamesh, from Aesop's fables to Homer's Iliad, stories portray human experience, human nature and human relations. Even Aristotle put human experience at the heart of Poetics while introducing various principles of tragedy. We all make mistakes that affect our lives. They may not be as serious and tragic as Oedipus' but we all have our own hamartia. It is difficult not to feel miserable and desperate when we watch Romeo committing suicide because he thinks that Juliet had drunk the poison too. The one who experienced the incredible pain of losing a loved one would most probably understand the meaning of catharsis better. Many examples can be given from different forms of literature, tales, movies or plays that we eventually identify with the characters or learn a lesson. There are also personal "life" stories that affect us. They are the stories of lived experience; stories that our mothers, fathers or grandparents tell us. Are they written by a famous playwright or novelist? No. They are constructed sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously by the individual. Humans love to tell their evolving tales; how they make sense of the world, how they make their lives meaningful and purposeful.

Personally I've always been interested in life stories of authors and I most value novels and stories which are based on author's experiences. When I came across with Christopher Isherwood's quotation about his art, I wanted to know this

author whom Somerset Maugham once described him as the man holding “the future of the English novel in his hands.” Isherwood summarizes the fundamental feature of his art with these words:

All my life I have had an instinct to record experience as it is going by and somehow to save something out of it and keep it... For me, art really begins with the question of my own experience, and what am I going to turn it into? What does it mean and what is it all about? I suppose that I write in order to find out what my life means and who I am, There are many other motives for writing, but as I promised to speak always out of my own experience, this has been my motive (Berg ed. 2007, p. 53-54).

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

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

Throughout Isherwood’s life, various people (characters). had directly contributed the formation of Isherwood’s identities. His father Frank Isherwood

whom he felt himself under a kind of an obligation to be worthy of his “Hero-Father,” his mother, Kathleen whose controlling attitude over his life drove Isherwood crazy, his closest friends Edward Upward, W. H. Auden, E. M. Forster, Gerald Heard and his guru Swami Prabhavananda touched upon his life in various periods. Apart from his native country England, Berlin and California (special settings). were the two cities that had direct effect on the formation of his sexual and spiritual identity. As for the themes in his life, “the War and the Test,” “Truly Weak Man,” “Truly Strong Man,” his homosexuality, pacifism and the discovery of his spiritual identity through “Vedanta” can be given as examples which have already been touched upon in this study.

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

I’ve divided Isherwood’s life story into three chapters: The first chapter is his childhood and adolescent years in England where he attempts writing his first two novels. All *The Conspirators* (1928). and *The Memorial* (1932). carry the traces of young Christopher Isherwood’s struggles which became a part of his artistic identity that he was trying to form at that time. According to Isherwood, his father’s death transformed him into a Sacred Orphan and he believed that he was cursed by God. While he was trying to cope with his mother’s pressures regarding being a responsible and successful son to his dead father, he at the same time had to face the harsh and brutal conditions of the British education

system. All these issues resulted with the portrayal of two very similar characters Philip in *All The Conspirators* and Eric in *The Memorial*. In one of the lectures that Isherwood gave in California he described himself as a person who “believes primarily in his own experience.” And he believes that in both art and life “telling the truth is the most important of all virtues and the one real compass needle pointing out the way for us.” (Berg ed. 2007, p. 138). This perception was obvious right in the beginning of his literary career. He consciously portrays Philip and Eric as the two young man who are looking a way out from their controlling mothers and who show rebellious attitudes against any form of authority and the rules and expectations of society.

There are of course some key life story scenes in this chapter of his life. One of the most important low point incident which according to McAdams described as “the worst or unhappiest moment in the story” is definitely his father’s death. Because he was suddenly forced to face a society that expected him to live up to his father’s example and the over disciplined British preparatory school system which soon became the reason of his disgust and disrespect to any form of authority and traditions. This period ends with two high points (the greatest or happiest moments). for Isherwood. First one is when he got himself dismissed from Cambridge to protest the system that didn’t allow him to change his department from History to English and to rebel against his mother and drive her crazy. Second high point is his first visit to Germany in 1929 because he was soon about to go through a sexual awakening. As it is mentioned in the first chapter, this German experience resulted with a portrayal of the first homosexual character in *The Memorial*.

This second chapter of Isherwood’s life in Berlin between 1929 and 1932 witnessed many high points and turning points. The incidents that he had gone through in Berlin and the people that he met definitely contributed his artistic identity. It was in Berlin that he created his “camera-eye” technique. Although he promises his reader that he’s “a camera... quite passive, recording, not thinking...” he reflects everything from his own personal lens. Readers are limited to see what he allows them to see. But his ability to observe real life characters and transform them into fictitious ones with their all idiosyncrasies like Mr. Norris, Fr. Schroeder, Sally Bowles and Otto Nowak in *Mr. Norris*

Changes Trains (1935). and Goodbye to Berlin (1939). became an important feature of his artistic talent.

As for the other distinctive feature of his artistic identity is his decision to place himself as both the narrator and the character. In one of his lectures he says that a novelist should “depict the circumstances of everyday life and he has to make them vivid and not in any way conceal their reality — what we call reality, the everyday reality.” (Isherwood on Writing 66). Reading the narrator and the character Christopher’s experiences makes his writing more credible and realistic. Unlike his early novels the narrator this time is more mature and sensitive person to people’s problem. In *All the Conspirators* (1928). and *The Memorial* (1932). Isherwood’s camera was on his personal struggles and dilemmas but in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935). and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939). he learns to empathize with the other people’s problems without judging them.

The city of Berlin contributes the formation of Isherwood’s sexual identity as well. The years between 1929 and 1933 is the period that Christopher Isherwood realized his same-sex desire and integrated it into his life story. As a gay man, his life story reflects significant transformation. Throughout the study, I’ve benefited a lot from and Philip Hammack and Bertram Cohler’s essay in which they regard gay identity as “a narrative rooted in sexual desire but motivated by social practice.” (2009, p.152). Similar to McAdams’ ideas, they argue that identity is acquired through life time by telling stories about ourselves. Isherwood’s first visit to Germany was in 1928 and at that period Isherwood was mesmerized with what he saw. In the next couple of years Isherwood felt free from the restraints of England and felt the sexual freedom that he was looking for. For Isherwood, Berlin did not only provide him a sexually permissive life. The years he spent there directly contributed the process of making and embracing his sexual identity. After all, as he himself puts it for the first time in his life he had a chance to observe “his tribe” so closely. However, especially in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it was not possible for Isherwood to come out as a gay man in his fiction but starting from his second novel, *The Memorial*, he began to integrate a homosexual character into his fiction. In *Mr. Norris* and *Goodbye to Berlin* this habit of presenting a gay male continued as

well. Phillip L. Hammack and Bertam J. Cohler argue that “We perform our identities through what we write, say or do.” (2009). I believe that Isherwood’s arrival to Berlin provide him space both to perform and write “his identity” in this sense. After Berlin, being gay became an important feature of Isherwood’s identity and while he was about to leave the city, he clearly stated that he wanted to live according to his nature and to find a place where he could be what he was.

According to Lilgendahl and McAdams “When we share our life stories, our accounts of past events are often accompanied by our interpretations of what role we believe those events have played in shaping us into our present selves.” (Lilgendahl & McAdams 2011). When Isherwood left Berlin and sailed to America in 1939 he was dealing with personal problems and conflicts that would shape his self. He had to face the reality that his lover Heinz was no longer in his life. Moreover the world was at the brink of a bloody war which he hesitated to be a part of it. He was so dissatisfied and depressed that he lacked a unity and purpose in his life. Isherwood soon had to refashion his narrative understandings of himself. His visit to New York to see his friend Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley was the beginning of an important life transition for Isherwood. Two concepts, Pacifism and Vedanta marked this period of his life. In *My Guru and His Disciple*, (1980). he states that he had already decided to be a pacifist and he was expecting Gerald Heard to teach him how to become one.

However Gerald Heard who was an author, lecturer and philosopher advised him to find peace within himself if he wanted to become a true pacifist. It was through Gerald Heard that Isherwood met meditation. As the discussions went deeper, Isherwood realized that he needed to change his conception of life. As a person who had no faith in God or any religion, it was difficult to believe in a “thing” which was the term used by Gerald Heard. Why was a man who hated any of religious practices so open to go after such a spiritual and mystical concept? In my opinion it is closely related with Gerald Heard’s attitude in the process of introducing this “thing” to Isherwood. He didn’t force Isherwood to believe it but he wanted him to give it a chance to try “this thing” by himself. “If, after a reasonable time, you had found nothing, then you were entitled to say it was all a lie (Marsh 2009).



From the beginning of this study, it has been clearly seen that Christopher Isherwood was a man of experience. He always needed to interpret incidents and events from his own perspective and when he met his spiritual guru, Swami Prabhavananda who at that time was the head of the Vedanta Society in Southern California in 1939, the swami respected Isherwood's skeptic approach to Vedanta. He did not put any kind of pressure on him but as Isherwood says in *Exhumations*, "...I have enough belief to make a start. My reason is not offended. My approach is strictly experimental. I will put myself in his hands, and trust him at least as far as I would trust my own doctor. (Isherwood 1966, p.122). Unlike Christianity, Vedanta offers him freedom in experiencing and analyzing its principles. One of the main purposes in his decision to move to Berlin is to experience life and his sexuality freely. Now in America, he finds a chance to believe in something in his own way.

As it is mentioned in the previous chapter Vedanta is "the search for Self-knowledge as well as the search for God." Vedanta perceives God as "infinite existence" and it can be personal so that it can dwell within individuals' hearts." Vedanta encourages every human being to discover the fact that our nature is divine and it is the individual's task to realize it. In order to do this, you should be ready to change because in Vedanta it is believed that "Life is a process of constant change." (Dayananda 1989). The late 1930s was the period that Isherwood was looking for a similar change. Unable to produce anything he writes a letter to his friend John Lehman saying that "My voice is changing, like a choirboy's, and I can't find the new notes. But I am more certain than ever that something is happening inside..." (Zeikowitz 2008, p.12). Through meditation, praying and the Swami's guidance Isherwood begins to find his own way and to fulfill the emptiness growing inside him. Vedanta focuses on the relation between the individual and Isvara (Divine Self and the Inner Ruler of the cosmos). If one appreciates this Divine Self, he/she can see himself or herself as part of a great whole, a larger thing (Vedanta The Yoga of Objectivity 2018). In this way the feeling of incompleteness, despair and emptiness can go away. This was exactly what Isherwood was looking for at that time. In one of his letters to Cyril Connolly, he states that Vedanta offers him "a solution and a

way of life” and a chance to live with “a feeling of purpose and lack of despair.” (Bucknell 2011, p. 366). for the rest of his life.

Another important factor that Isherwood feels himself closer to Vedanta is the Swami’s attitude to Isherwood’s sexual orientation. In his book *My Guru and His Disciple* he writes that he was convinced to be his pupil because the Swami “hadn’t shown the least shadow of distaste on hearing me admit to my homosexuality... From that moment on, I began to understand that the Swami did not think in terms of sins, as most Christians do.” (Isherwood 2001, p.26). For a few years he even lived in the Vedanta Center and went through a period of sexual abstinence. From 1939 until 1945 Isherwood did not publish any novels and focused on his spiritual journey. With Vedanta, he got over his writer’s block and wrote his first novel in America. *Prater Violet* (1945). *The World in the Evening* (1954). and *A Single Man* (1964). are three of Isherwood’s novels which are analyzed in the previous chapter of this study. Three of the novels carry the traces of Vedanta and its principles as Isherwood felt and experienced it at the time of writing.

Isherwood once said that 'Mystical experience itself can never be described. It can only be written around, hinted at, dimly reflected in word and deed'. (Wade 1991, p.68). In my opinion this is a wonderful explanation of how he connected Vedanta with his art. Isherwood had never been a didactic writer. Since reflecting his experience to his art was his main goal, he provided enough space and condition for his readers to go through their own experience as they read his novels. For instance in *Prater Violet* though the last pages of the book, he writes “It was that hour of the night at which man's ego almost sleeps. The sense of identity, of possession, of name and address, and telephone number grows very faint. It was the hour at which man shivers, pulls up his coat collar and thinks: 'I'm a traveller, I have no home’”

As a reader you are not expected to interpret the meaning of these sentences from the perspective of Vedanta. What Isherwood is implying here is something universal; a common experience. We all have experienced this kind of self-realization at night that we are alone in this world. No matter who we are and what we possess, our existence is not permanent in this world. We are here for a short period of time. We don’t know where we will go but when we go, it is for

sure that our ego, possession or wealth won't be going with us. Especially after his engagement with Vedanta, this kind of personal experiences or personal moments leading a person into a self-realization are portrayed frequently in his work. In this respect, *A Single Man* can be considered as Isherwood's personal manifesto in which he offers a perfect blend of his sexual, spiritual and artistic aspects of the Christopher Isherwood persona. Like *Goodbye to Berlin*, *A Single Man* covers a huge place in his career. It is a novel more personal than *Goodbye to Berlin*. The main character George carries every aspect of the 60 year old Isherwood's personality, his concerns and perception of life. Various issues such as love, hate, sensuality, personal fears, getting older and death are portrayed from Isherwood's perspective.


Until his death in 1986 because of prostate cancer, in the last three books that he wrote, Isherwood continued to tell the world his own lived experience. In a way it can be said that he went back to his past and told the evolving story of "Christopher Isherwood" that he constructed to make his life meaningful. McAdams says that in order to formulate a narrative identity, one needs to reconstruct the past to explain how he or she has become the person today. In 1971, with *Kathleen and Frank*, in 1976, with *Christopher and His Kind* and finally in 1980, with *My Guru and His Disciple* he revealed his own development as "Christopher Isherwood". Through this study, all these three works are referred as important sources that provide first-hand information regarding Isherwood's life.

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

Christina Baldwin and “every person leaves life a full book.” (Baldwin, 2005, p. ix). As Christopher Isherwood filled the pages of life, we are privileged to read the story that he carried around with him.

## APPENDIX

 **Dan McAdams** <dmca@northwestern.edu>  19.03.2015   

Alic: bana 

Dear Gokben Guclu,


Thank you for your note. I appreciate your interest in my work. Your study of Christopher Isherwood sounds extremely interesting.

I would not worry so much about making a "mistake" in your analysis. Few people have tried to do what you are trying to do, so it is not likely that you will develop a study that violates some kind of cardinal truth or convention in this area. I have written many things on the life story model of identity. I have attached a few articles and chapter that may be of use, though perhaps you have already run across some of these. I wish you the best in your very interesting line of scholarship.

Sincerely,

dan mcA

 **Dan P McAdams** <dmca@northwestern.edu>  23.12.2017   

Alic: bana 

Dear Gokben,


Thank you for your note and for sending along the piece you have written, which I enjoyed reading. It seems to me that you are making very good use of the life narrative literature in psychology.

Re the issue of postmodern and post-structuralist identities, you are certainly smart to be cognizant of these issues. In Psychology, they arose with some force in the 1990s. At that time, I wrote at least two papers, which I have attached, that aimed to consider the meaning of narrative identity in this intellectual context. I try to find a middle ground between the extremes of psychological essentialism/determinism (identity is fixed and real) and social constructionism (identity is fleeting and ethereal, and can never be pinned down). It is a difficult position to take, I think, but I remain convinced that it is the most intellectually valid.

I hope these 2 papers are helpful. Best wishes,

Dan mcA

 **Dan P McAdams**  4 May   

Alic: bana 

Dear Gokben Guclu,

Thank you for your kind note. And congratulations on finishing your thesis! A great achievement. I am happy with your including the email correspondence in the endnotes. I see no problem with that.

Best regards,

Dan mcA

Dan P. McAdams  
The Henry Wade Rogers Professor of Psychology  
Professor of Human Development & Social Policy  
Director, Foley Center for the Study of Lives  
Northwestern University  
<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/>



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## RESUME



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**Date of Birth:** 16.01.1979  
Female

**Gender:**

## EDUCATION

Istanbul Aydın University, Sefaköy / Istanbul  
**P.h.D in English Language and Literature**  
**2011-2018**

Thesis: Christopher Isherwood: A Life Story dedicated to the act of Writing in Search of an Artistic, Sexual and Spiritual Identity

Beykent University, Beylikdüzü / Istanbul  
**2003 - 2005**

**M.A in English Language and Literature**

Thesis: The Concept of National Self as reflected in Walt Whitman's Civil War Poetry

Beykent University, Beylikdüzü / Istanbul  
**1998 - 2002**

**B.A High Honors in English Language and Literature**

Thesis: George Orwell: Personal Life vs. Politics

Uğur College, Beşyol / Istanbul  
**1990 –1997**

Halil Vedat Fıratlı Primary School, Yeşilköy / Istanbul  
**1985 –1990**

## PROFESSIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Lecturer** – Biruni University, Topkapı, Istanbul  
**2015-**

School of Foreign Languages

**Lecturer** - Beykent University, Istanbul  
**2010 - 2013**  
School of Foreign Languages /Prep School

**Coordinator + Lecturer** - Beykent University, Ayazaga Campus, Istanbul  
**2007-2010**  
School of Foreign Languages / Language Support and Academic Development Program  
Managing & directing staff, planning programs & implementing and curriculum preparation.

**Lecturer** - Beykent University, Ayazaga Campus, Istanbul  
**2005 - 2007**  
School of Foreign Languages / Language Support and Academic Development Program

**Lecturer** - Beykent University, Istanbul  
**2004 - 2005**  
School of Foreign Languages /Prep School

**Lecturer** - Beykent University, Istanbul  
**2002 – 2004**  
School of Vocational Studies

## **PROFILE**

- Teaching technical and sub-technical ESP vocabulary in accordance with students' field of study mainly for the departments of English Language & Literature, Translation and Interpreting (English). Business Management, Economics, Banking and Finance, Management Information Systems, and Translation and Interpreting (Russian), Health Care Management
- Teaching academic English including listening and note-taking, speaking, reading and writing skills.
- Setting learning objectives, establishing a positive learning environment in the classroom, evaluating and assessing students' progress.
- Curriculum design & development
- Dynamic, friendly relationships with students; having excellent communication and interpersonal skills in collaborating with all levels of staff members.

## **RELEVANT COURSES GIVEN**

- Developing Listening and Speaking Skills
- Developing Reading and Writing Skills
- Advanced English for Specific Purposes
- Developing Professional Jargon
- English for Business Life
- English I/II

## **ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Translator**

- Various Translation and Recording Offices

**2007 –2010**

(Translated TV serials and documentaries for TV channels like Show Plus & History Channel)

**Co-organizer & Translator**

**2000- 2001**

- Turkey Jockey Club Trainers and Managers Association

**VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

“Culture and Identity in the Balkans” Conference, Bogazici University Istanbul May 2001

Voluntarily worked as the head of the organization committee during the conference

**LANGUAGES**

English: Proficient

Turkish: Mother tongue

German: Elementary

**COMPUTER SKILLS**

Good knowledge of Microsoft Office Programs and the Internet

**MEMBERSHIPS**

Turkey Jockey Club

**Horse Owner**

**INTERESTS**

Football, volleyball, American Culture and Literature, country music, movies.

**REFERENCE**

Available on request

