

**THE ARTIST'S SEARCH FOR  
SELF-IDENTITY : A STUDY OF  
CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD'S NOVELS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL  
FOR THE DEGREE OF Ph. D. IN ENGLISH**

*By*

*Debashis Chatterjee*

*Supervisor:*

*Dr. G. N. Roy*

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL  
2001**

*Ref*  
823-912  
C495a

146161

14 MAR 2002

# Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements.....	i
Chapter I : INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter II : THE OLD GANG : <i>All the Conspirators</i> .....	13
Chapter III : THE HALLOWED DEAD : <i>The Memorial</i> .....	26
Chapter IV : THE CIVIL MONSTER : <i>Mr. Norris Changes Trains</i> .....	35
Chapter V : THE LOST : <i>Goodbye to Berlin</i> .....	47
Chapter VI : THE LOSS OF THE SELF : <i>Prater Violet and The World in the Evening</i> .....	64
Chapter VII : THE NETHER WORLD WITHIN : <i>Down There on a Visit</i> .	89
Chapter VIII : THE PROFESSOR : <i>A Single Man</i> .....	101
Chapter IX : BETWEEN TWO BROTHERS : <i>A Meeting by the River</i> .	111
Conclusion.....	122
Select Bibliography .....	128

## *Preface and Acknowledgements*

*Christopher Isherwood is one of the stimulating novelists of the generation of the thirties. He came of age too late for the First World War and too early for the Second, and survived, in letters and deeds, through their terrible tests. Tossed as he was between 'two worlds at war', Isherwood along with all his contemporaries like W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, William Mac Neice etc., felt everything rocking round, the self remaining the only stable element in the fleeting world. The fact is that the thirties writers, products as they were of a bourgeois society, were preoccupied with the larger objective world around them but always with the individual at the pivot. Their chief objective was to accommodate between self and world, all the more to establish their identity while maintaining connection with the vast wave of humanity around them. Evidently, then, 'self' remained to these writers of 'The Divided Generation', as Spender labels his colleagues, a recurrent theme for all that they wrote, and autobiography a popular literary form.*

*My present study of Isherwood's novels is intended to chart out the whole pattern of the rebellious artist's evolution as he confronts his self at different periods of his life : his iconoclasm at home, flirtation with communism and his ultimate conversion to Vedantism. Isherwood's journey to the USA and his subsequent embrace of Vedanta provoked a plethora of critical opinions, all adverse, among his critics and scholars, even more among his friends like Stephen Spender. I have, however, tried to explore the significant political events of the day and the artist's own psychological traumas that prompted the artist to drift to Vedanta as the means of defining his authentic self. With this end in view a brief survey is made in the introductory chapter of the whole panorama of social decay and contemporary political turmoil that Isherwood lived through and of the important philosophical influences that gave shape to the themes of most of his novels and to his own intellectual*

*growth. In fact, a critical study of Isherwood's novels, of their themes and concerns, is a necessary step to trace the consecutive phases of Isherwood's development and growth as an artist. The entire scope of my study is devoted to that end — to chart out the complete trajectory of the artist's evolution from his early iconoclasm to his final acceptance of Vedanta in terms of all his nine novels by referring, on a couple of occasions, to his non-fictions.*

*My work, however, would have never been realized but for the constant advice and encouragement of Dr. G. N. Roy, Reader, Department of English, University of North Bengal. Dr. Roy, my supervisor and mentor, has not only been my source of inspiration, endowing me with a zest to carry on my work, but also has offered me ready help and loving guidance, enabling a successful completion of this study. I put on record my unmixed gratitude to him.*

*I pay sincere compliments to all the teachers and staff of the Department of English and also to all the members and staff of the University Library for their co-operation and help. I am also grateful to the members and staff of the National Library, Calcutta and to those of the British Council Division, Calcutta for the immense help they extended to me.*

*Last but not least, I am deeply obliged to my wife, Kalyani, who herself bore singlehandedly all the cares of the family and saw to it that they do disturb me the least. My daughter, Saheli and son, Reon, too deserve every bit of my affectionate thanks for being so nice and forgiving during my work.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

More and more I write for myself, I think, more and more writing is appearing to me as a kind of self-analysis.

— Christopher Isherwood.

At the end of *Down There on a Visit*, Paul says to the author - narrator: 'You know, you really are a tourist to your bones .... That is the story of your life' (Isherwood : 1985, 269-70). The story of Isherwood's life is the story of each of his novels in turn. In other words, 'a traveller, a wanderer' as he thoroughly was, Isherwood puts into his works the varied experiences as he confronts his self at different periods of his life : his early iconoclasm at home, his flirtation with communism and his latest conversion to Vedantism. At each successive transition the artist finds some new revelation and each new revelation urges him on to a further probing into his identity until the final revelation comes only at the end of his career. In an interview with Stanley Poss, Isherwood thus said : 'More and more I write for myself, I think, more and more writing is appearing to me as a kind of self-analysis' (Poss : 1961, 42). This relentless search for self, for establishing his identity as an artist, is what precisely underlies all that Isherwood wrote right up to the end of his career. His novels, in fine, constitute, as it were, a long 'Bildungsroman', tracing as they do the whole trajectory of a rebellious artist's evolution towards self-discovery.

Born in the turbulent period of the twentieth century, Christopher William Isherwood Bradshaw (1904) along with the group of writers of the thirties, say, W.H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Stephen Spender etc., with whom he was generally associated, found everything rocking round, the self remaining the only stable element in the mercurial world. In fact, the writers who came of age too early for World War I and too late for the Second were overpowered by the generation's anxiety and perplexity, more so by the dilemma they confronted over their private and public selves : for them the problem was achieving integrity. Virginia Woolf points out in her essay 'The Leaning Tower'

that the tumult and revolutions around the globe were what prevented my younger colleagues in the thirties from producing meaningful art. A sense of dislocation seemed pervasive, prompting Stephen Spender to label the era 'The Divided Generation'. Ostensibly, then, the writers of the thirties, caught as they were between, as Day Lewis put it, 'two worlds at war', desired some accommodation between self and world, and all of them took as their favourite subject matter the 'comparatively stable' self. Art and experience could not be neatly divided, for public events did affect private sensibilities, especially when these reflected disorder. W.H. Auden, for example, in 'Psychology and Art Today' defined art as tied to both individual and society, and sought reconciliation between private and public selves; Day Lewis related the search for personal identity in 'It is Becoming Now to Declare My Allegiance'; Spender explored the tension between compromise and self-betrayal in his autobiography, *World Within World* (1951). Similarly, Isherwood's novels, perhaps all of them, exemplify a tussle between private and public issues — a dilemma as to how to express a feeling that had started as a public emotion and later became private. Right from *All the Conspirators* (1928) down to his last novel, *A Meeting by the River* (1967) Isherwood shows a sustained attempt to establish contact with the objective world around. The reasons are not far to seek. The overriding concern with the time's deformity and the anxiety of the generation led the young authors of the decade to be exclusively aware of their self, of the importance of individual identity as a source of stability.

The common 'anxiety' that figures so prominently in the literature of the thirties writers may be said to have originated from their acute awareness of the historical as much as the contemporary political and social conditions of the century. They were keenly alive to what happened around them and survived their terrible tests : 'The Great War and its lacerating effects from which the world had not yet recovered, its shattering aftermath, Marxism, Freudianism, the Spanish Civil War, the Sino-Japanese war, Pre-Hitler Germany, the Second Great War and the moral and spiritual crisis of the time...' (Piazza : 1978,195). The Great War of 1914-18 which was to end all wars settled nothing, composed nothing and satisfied nobody. The Treaty of

Versailles (1919) which imposed unbearable war debt upon Germany only intensified the Second World War (1939). However, the inter-war years were the worst years of economic depression, widespread unemployment, chaos and despair. People became neurotic and their ruling emotions were fear and anxiety at the gathering storm of an imminent war. War-phobia became the dominant metaphor and recurrent image in most of the contemporary writings. Graham Greene's *It's a Battlefield* (1934), W.H. Auden's *The Orators* (1932), *The Dance of Death* (1933), Christopher Isherwood's *The Memorial* (1932) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) offer a bleak picture of a class struggling against bourgeois values and haunted by a sense of guerilla war. Samuel Hynes says: 'Indeed, social, political and economic conflicts together seemed to amount to another war, a third shadow over the thirties that touches lives and imaginations as deeply as the shadows of these wars, the one that was past and the one that was coming' (1976,41).

In the thirties, literature became socially and politically a conscious art. The outstanding writers of the decade, say, George Orwell, Graham Greene, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, C. Day Lewis show an acute awareness of contemporary politics. Politics formed the prominent subtexts in novels or poems. Rex Warner has clearly enunciated this peculiar marriage between politics and literature: 'Moreover, we have learnt that a novel can exercise as much (or even more) political influence as can a procession or an official leaflet' (1946,129). Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1937) catches the atmosphere of politics of the day and convey an overriding sense of disruption and dislocation, confusion and anxiety of its generation. In Greene's novels of the thirties we notice his preoccupation with the thought of an impending war and neurosis of the people. His early novel, *Stamboul Train* (1932) is tinged with politics, while *In the Quiet American* (1955) presents two opposing forces: communism and colonialism, materialism and catholicism. Rex Warner in *The Aerodrome* (1938) and *The Professor* (1941) reveals how the radicals and the reactionaries were at war with one another in this decade. This sense of dislocation and disintegration, crisis and despair led Stephen Spender to call the era 'The Divided Generation.' Virginia Woolf believed that uncertainties and tumult possessed her younger colleagues so

much that 'they had nothing settled to look at, nothing peaceful to remember, nothing certain to come' (1967,176).

A significant aspect of the writers of the thirties is that they were largely Leftist in their political leanings. The Spanish Civil War promised a new course as the young found their opportunity to rally in support of the Republican Government's attempt to resist a Franco aided by both Hitler and Mussolini. They entered the Communist Party or flirted with Marxism. The instant success of Russia in economic sphere following Lenin's New Economic Policy prompted the contemporary intellectuals to believe that communist system would provide a panacea for all their political and economic problems. Thus W.H. Auden and his followers, basing their thought on left-wing political ideology took up the causes of the poor masses with genuine sympathy and often with striking sympathy. C. Day Lewis' *The Magnetic Mountain* (1933) is one of the poet's best political verses, which clearly traces Auden's strong influence. Lewis found hope for a distracted world in left-wing political ideals. Stephen Spender, a member of the Auden generation, served as a non-combatant with the Republican armies during the Spanish Civil War. His *Poems* (1933) and the autobiographical book, *World Within World* (1951) clearly expose the attitudes of the generation and show the writer's political faith in the Left. Christopher Isherwood, an anti-Fascist as he was, gives expression to his proletarian sympathies and flirtation with Marxism in his Berlin novels. In *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), for instance, he takes up the cause of poor Otto and offers a vivid account of how Otto became a victim of politico-economic conditions under which he was living. W.H. Auden in his drama, *The Dance of Death* (1933) portrays the decline of a class, its members' dream of a new life, which is no more than a secret desire for the old, for there is only death inside. The fact is that the writers of the decade were all bourgeois artists in revolt. In short, they were all individualists and their major preoccupation was to present a picture of the decaying world order. As regards the political character of the thirties writers, Virginia Woolf's observation seems to be pertinent here : 'In 1930 the youngmen at college were forced to be aware of what was happening in Russia, in Germany, in Italy and in Spain.... They read Marx. They became communists. They became anti-Fascists' (1967,172).

During the inter-war years vested interest in psychological research turned the novelists to a deeper investigation of the hidden impulses of man. The fact is that owing to the outbreak of the First World War the acknowledged values of life were shattered and the process of inwardness was quickened, fostered by the writings of Bergson, Freud and William James. Freud's 'Dream' analysis and the concept of 'Father Fixation' or 'Mother Fixation' opened the way to the exploration of the vast fields of the subconscious and unconscious, and thus inspired the novelists' tendency to dwell more and more within the mind of their characters. The leading novelists of the period, say, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf resorted to the technique of 'Stream of Consciousness' to capture the ebb and flow that occur, concur and even clash in the dark chamber of the human psyche. The term 'Stream of Consciousness' was taken over from *Principles of Psychology* by William James in 1890. James said : 'Consciousness does not appear to itself chopped up in bits .... It is nothing jointed; it flows.... Let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life' (quoted in *Robert Allen* : 1954,331). However, this technique of 'Stream of Consciousness' along with the interior monologues has been used in plenty by the novelists of the period to catch the pre-speech level of consciousness and to enable the reader to share the epiphanies and the continuous as 'present' of the consciousness of the characters.

Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915-35) presents a mental history of Miriam Henderson, whose impressions recorded from time to time enable her author to convey the very sense of life. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) marks a complete break with the traditional novels in respect of subject matter, technique and language. The novel is written in a variety of styles, and seeks to reproduce not only the sights, sounds and smells of Dublin but also the memories, emotions and desires of his people in the drab modern London. Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) depicts the psychological time as contrasted with the mechanical time. The chiming of the clock serves an artistic purpose helping the novelist to portray the very shift of thought.

Before the thirties, no other generation had shown so close an interest in psycho-analysis, instinctual life and spiritual disturbance as to create a growing assumption that all men are cases to be diagnosed. In fact, after

Richardson, Joyce and Woolf in the twenties, Graham Greene, Rex Warner, Christopher Isherwood in the thirties reproduced the flow of man's thoughts, feelings and reveries, and we notice in their writings the influence of dream upon reality and reality upon dream. The ideas of death-wish, the supremacy of the unconscious, repression and guilt, conflict between ego and super ego, neuroses and anxiety abound in the novels of the thirties and testify to the influences of Freud, Groddeck and Kierkegaard. Freud had shown the effect of interaction of the various elements in man's mind upon his activities and asserted that the unconscious is the major and more dominant level of the mind. The mind is the reservoir of our dreams and desires and the source of our instincts. But to Groddeck, the unconscious is a part of the psyche, a part of the 'Id'. The 'Id' being the deepest recess of man represents the instinctual side of his existence. The 'Id' is something similar to Shaw's 'Life Force'. Freud's concept of the neuroses or Love's psychosomatic theory of diseases and of the harmful effects of repression and Groddeck's theory of illness are well noted in the novels of Isherwood and Auden. Isherwood felt that 'Sigmund Freud was responsible for the greatest literary event of his time' (quoted in Fryer : 1977, 78). It is significant that through Freud Isherwood as well as the whole lot of his contemporaries accepted the belief that their parents were responsible for absolutely everything that stunted the growth of their children. The parents' crime was that they failed to recognize that a psychological revolution had taken place. 'It was all their fault' Isherwood says 'and we would never forgive' (quoted in Fryer :1977,78). Victor in Isherwood's first novel, *All the Conspirators* (1928) is left sexually crippled as he used to repress his feelings in accordance with the ethos of his elders, which ultimately made his life 'one gigantic lie'. Isherwood's indebtedness to Groddeck may be traced to his awareness of the 1920's myth of psychologically determined illness of the intellectual younger generation. Both Auden and Isherwood write of the prevailing guerilla warfare that is being waged between the young and the old, a concept principally derived from Groddeck. This formed the very theme<sup>of</sup> Isherwood's *All the Conspirators* (1928) and *The Memorial* (1932).

Graham Greene entered the field of psycho-analysis and pathology in the powerful accounts of the tortured souls. *The Power and the Glory* (1940) and *Brighton Rock* (1938) are studies of morbid psychology. In *The Wild Goose Chase* (1937) and *The Aerodrome* (1938) Rex Warner studies the neurotic men of the thirties, and is concerned chiefly with the drama of the soul. In *All the Conspirators* (1928) Victor's thought-stream in which he is thinking of Philip's sitting-room as a specimen of 'an adult male extrovert', in which he would see 'observable tendencies of narcissism' and 'claustrophobia' shows Isherwood's vested interest in the flow of man's thoughts and reveries. Another novel *Down There on a Visit* is Isherwood's successful attempt of reproducing 'that nether world within the individual which is the place of loneliness, alienation and hatred'.

But the most prominent influence that the writers of the thirties imbibed in the presentation of 'the despairing mass of displaced persons and paralysed Hamlets' came from Soren Kierkegaard, the father of Existentialist philosophy. The thirties was mainly the decade of anxiety and the term 'Angst' that became recurrent in the literature of the period was derived from Kierkegaard. In Kierkegaard's concept of 'Dread' and 'leap into faith' the writers found a convincing solution to the problem of guilt and anxiety that overpowered man's soul. The anxiety that the writers of the period gave clear and loud voice to in their work was the dilemma they faced in their attempts to connect their individual self to the society they lived in. The writers were aware of the current social issues, of the fast-changing public world and of their impact upon their private lives. The young intellectuals such as Auden, Isherwood and Orwell were torn between writing and the urge to accommodate with the world. Auden in such poems as 'O What is That Sound' and Spender in 'The Shadow of a War' and *World Within World*, Greene in *The Power and the Glory* and Isherwood in his Berlin novels like *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) shows actions as self-consciously symbolic and analyse social issues as allied to the conditions of self. The anxiety, then, that sprang from their desire to connect the self to the objective world or their 'desire to be whole, to be

human' as Mrs. Virginia Woolf puts it (1967, 176) indicates the influence of Kierkegaard on the thirties writers.

Isherwood's novels, in particular, exemplify how society or the objective world affects the individual and demands his involvement. It is involvement, not escape, finally, that gives meaning to the artist's life. He emphasized society and the world at large but always with the individual at the centre. Isherwood chose the novel as his means of self-exploration indicating thereby his desire to examine his beliefs dramatically as well as emotionally, reflecting at the same time upon them as a private individual. It is this overarching concern with the self that lies at the heart of his novels and presents a sensitive appreciation of the social forces and emotional needs that define and shape a man's life. The dramatization of the interaction between the self and the world is thus crucial to Isherwood as his novels form a 'Bildungsroman' recording the growth of the artist as he confronts his self at the various stages of his development.

Isherwood started his career as an iconoclast, revolting against the authority of his parents at home. Because 'ancestor worship was vile' (Isherwood : 1971, 304). He junked the image of his warrior father and chafed at the idea of living all through as 'a Sacred Orphan'. The first two books, *All the Conspirators* (1928) and *The Memorial* (1932) sprang from this initial revolt. *All the Conspirators* <sup>3</sup> as Alan Wilde says, '*means* to sound the cry to the barricades' (1971,27) and stressed Isherwood's gesture of defiance against all that is spurious in the 'Old Gang'. In the second novel, *The Memorial*, dealing with the Great War of 1914-18 and its crippling effect on his generation Isherwood reverts to the theme of his first book :dislocation of time or intergenerational conflict. In both the novels, indeed, the artist, a self-styled Angry Young Man, directs his rebellion against the authority of his parents, as all familial ties were believed to stunt his growth as a self-determining individual. They mark for Isherwood a turning point in his career as they force him to turn inward in order to confront outward reality more intimately. But the problem that one never misses in the first two novels is: what 'identity' to give to his persona, or with whom to identify. It is in his two

most popular Berlin novels, say, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1937) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) that Isherwood tries to negotiate the problem of the authentic portrayal of self by placing himself directly into the texts.

After completing *The Memorial* Isherwood decided to leave England. As he feelingly puts it in his autobiography, *Lions and Shadows*, 'I hadn't advanced an inch, really,...' (1985, 187). He needed a change, a total change from England and the old life. On 14 March 1939, at the invitation of W.H. Auden, Isherwood left for Berlin to seek a fresh lease of life in Germany after the war. The years spent in Germany during Hitler's rise to power which prompted *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* also saw the process of the artist's self-discovery continue unabated. The two Berlin books hinge on political themes, but they are no less concerned with the artist's private experiences. The story of Mr. Arthur Norris, a con man, is an occasion for the young artist who wants to see things as larger than life itself and wants to present himself to the outside world in broad connection. However, it is with *Goodbye to Berlin*, dealing largely with the contemporary political goings-on during the final days of the Weimar Republic, that Isherwood shows his psychological development and change of attitude to the Communist Party to which, along with Auden, he was earlier drawn. He displays his disgust in 'tomorrowless politics' of Europe, a growing ease in confronting various forces which he once revolted against and thus asserts his independence in its wider range, as best as he can. In fact, an awareness of who he is and how he acts marks the artist's further probing and growth and demonstrates an advance upon the earlier novels.

Isherwood's emigration to America in 1939 and his growing interest in Eastern religions and subsequent conversion to Vedantism which gave birth to his religious novels beginning with *Prater Violet* (1945) and culminating in *A Meeting by the River* (1967) marked the third and the most decisive stage in the artist's search for the self. The emphasis now shifts from that of the earlier novels like *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* or *Goodbye to Berlin*, from how people relate to the narrator to how the narrator relates to others. For establishing his identity an artist should necessarily determine not only who he is but who he is in terms of the world at large. Evidently, the theme of

connection or union envisaged on Vedantic line becomes recurrent in all his novels written after his conversion. In *Prater Violet* (1945) and *The World in the Evening* (1954) Isherwood explores the problem of intimacy, of concord, but the kind of intimacy he longs for remains still unrealized. It is in *Down There on a Visit* (1962) that he is aware that bonds between people are what provide definition to the self and that the bonds are the bonds of love. In his last two novels, *A Single Man* (1964) and *A Meeting by the River* (1967), by giving plenty of references to the Hindu philosophy of Vedantism, Isherwood solves the problem of identity by merging his individual self with the Universal Self, Brahman, the God Transcendent. Vedanta, indeed, shows him the right path to transcendence and offers a fitting conclusion to the artist's prolonged search for the self.

A critical appraisal of Isherwood's novels shows that there may be quite a number of ways of describing Isherwood's achievements over more than forty years, 'but it is the theme of rebellion and growth', observes Vinson James, 'which dominates everything he has written' (James: 1976,705). As Isherwood's career amply demonstrates, the central core of his novels, written as they were vis-à-vis his personal life, may be studied as a series of initial movements towards selfhood, followed by a counter-movement of spiritual rebellion against self or ego. His nine novels are, in fact, nine autobiographical glimpses, and 'Taken together, these <sup>nine</sup> glimpses', says Paul Piazza 'coalesce to form a reflected image of what <sup>might-be</sup> called "essential Isherwood"' (1978,196).

In my dissertation I propose to explore the process of Isherwood's evolution as an artist in terms of his novels by challenging most of the existing critics who have tended to study Isherwood either as a Berlin communist or as an American Vedantist, practising *Sannyas* and nothing more. They do not trace the final stage as the culmination of a long spiritual evolution of the man and artist. Bruce Cook, writing for *The Critic*, is thus ready only to accept his three novels (*The Last of Mr. Norris*, *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Prater Violet*) as comprising the 'essential Isherwood'.

Isherwood's <sup>↑</sup> movement towards Hollywood where he met Swami Prabhavananda and subsequently became his disciple provoked his

distractors all the more. A number of contemporary journals like *Action*, *Reynolds* expressed their feeling of disgust and resentment at his eventual conversion to the Vedantism. To most critics and reviewers, however, the question was not merely whether Isherwood could write better fiction in America but whether he could write any fiction at all. But in spite of this critical disappointment one may note that two-thirds of Isherwood's fictional output were composed after his conversion. Moreover, attempts of critics down the years have been directed to estimate Isherwood's career in segregated form or by parceling out the artist's life into discrete fragments, which have always led to confusion in the comprehensive understanding of the 'essential Isherwood.' To speak of Isherwood merely as an iconoclast or a Berlin communist or as a Hindu mystic is to miss the whole thrust of his literary career of which the thirties were only the beginning and his final acceptance of Oriental religion its logical culmination.

Paul Piazza, in his book, *Christopher Isherwood : Myth and Anti-Myth* (1978), shows two mutually exclusive worlds in the artist's career : one is the world of false and traditional values that stunts the growth of a rebellious artist, and the other, the world of independence that evolves out of the artist's anti-myth, of his continuous revolt and rebellion. For Piazza, the two worlds remain apart. But his theory of 'myth' and 'anti-myth' is static and does not seem to reflect adequately the process of evolution in Isherwood's career. Carolyn G. Heilbrun in *Christopher Isherwood* (1970) and Brian Finney in *Christopher Isherwood : A Critical Biography* (1979) have made only detailed critical study of the themes of Isherwood's novels. Heilbrun offers an illuminating study of Isherwood and E.M. Forster and traces the formative influence of Forster on Isherwood's narrative technique. Jonathan Fryer in *Isherwood* (1977) has made a threadbare biographical account of the artist. But one would still miss the complete artist in these books. Alan Wilde's *Christopher Isherwood* (1971) is by far the most illuminating study of Isherwood and his novels. But the book has put its major focus on the novelist's 'ironic consciousness'. It is only Lisa M. Schwerdt who has recently made an attempt to trace the growth and maturity of Isherwood as an artist. But her critical study, *Isherwood's Fiction : the Self and Technique* (1989) is,

in the main, confined to Erik H. Erikson's theory of growth and maturation. She hardly takes into consideration the various psychological props and spiritual insights that prompted the process of evolution of the artist from iconoclasm to communism and then to Vedantism.

The objective of my study is, therefore, to explore comprehensively the evolving trajectory of Isherwood's career as an artist : to chart out the consecutive phases of growth and evolution of the artist in his search for the authentic self-hood as he confronts himself at various periods of his life. My attempts are also made to analyse contemporary political forces along with the psychological traumas Isherwood lived through and the spiritual insights that contributed to the process of the artist's evolution.

In fine, whatever Isherwood wrote during his long career of over forty years shows his ceaseless preoccupation with the self. His conversion, which ignited critical fire among some of his critics as well as friends, must not be studied as a break from the past. Indeed, what George Woodcock writes about Aldous Huxley that 'conversion is not a break from the past, but a redirection of it' (quoted in Piazza : 1978,199) is equally true of Isherwood. An iconoclast in the beginning of his career, Isherwood may be said to have ended up as an icon-worshipper in the widest possible sense of the word.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THE OLD GANG *All the Conspirators*

Our youthful author is so emotionally involved in the great war between the old and young that he keeps forgetting his lesser loyalties and antagonisms. His motto is : My generation — right or wrong.

— Christopher Isherwood.

Right from his school days at St. Edmund, the young Isherwood developed an attitude of revolt against all established authorities including his monstrous mother, Kathleen. He discovered quite early in his life that every form of authority presents some constricted existence which stunts the growth of an artist. For a young rebellious artist, therefore, the construction of a counter-myth is a ready-to-hand escape from the domain of dependence that authority presents. Stephen Spender in *World Within World* records how Isherwood, as a child, grew into more than a mere rebel 'passing through a phase of revolt against parents, conventional morality and orthodox Christian religion' (1977, 128). By that revolt Isherwood built his anti-myth in fictions and non-fictions as well. This spirit of revolt is one that enabled him to define his self, to establish his identity as an artist and to instill a certain pattern into his works.

A burgeoning iconoclast, Isherwood sought to demolish all that his family, particularly his domineering mother represents. When he was a child, he found his mother, Kathleen, enforced by all outward circumstances, to nurse her grief for her warrior husband, Frank, who went to the war but never came back. The sensitive child was quick to react against his mother's mourning, as he made the shattering discovery that it was a matter more of form than of feeling. He also chafed at the idea of living all through as 'a Sacred Orphan' under the tutelage of his 'Hero Father' and to carry on 'the absurdity of the military mystique and its solemn cult of war and death' (Isherwood : 1971, 503). Isherwood also rebelled against what his parents demanded of him. His mother wanted him to become a 'Don' at Cambridge, but he deliberately cut a poor figure in his examinations; when his mother wished that he should secure a job, he became

an artist; his mother persuaded him to marry, but he told her frankly, he was a homosexual. It may, however, be noted in passing that homosexuality was not Isherwood's mere nature, much more, it was his own particular form of rebellion against the traditional establishment of heterosexuality. Homosexuality is anti-sex, anti-family and anti-marriage.

Years later, the young descendant of the Bradshaw family discovered that he was 'obviously the offspring of a doomed line and must expect to be dragged off, some day soon, screaming in a strait-jacket' (1971, 305). He soon turned himself into what he calls in the Foreword to the 1958 American edition of *All the Conspirators* 'a pre-historic Angry Young Man.' In the Foreword, Isherwood writes : 'To-day's Angry Young Man is angry with society and its official representatives .... The Angry Young Man of my generation was angry with the family and its official representatives; he called them hypocrites; he challenged the truth of what they taught' (8). Isherwood's anger with his family, along with his ancestral hatred, as he traces it in his 1930 translation of Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals*, marked an important step in the rebellious artist's quest for authentic self and also became, in spirit and mood, the *raison d'etre* of his first two novels, *All the Conspirators* (1928) and *The Memorial* (1932).

Isherwood's iconoclasm is no less evident in his defiance of the whole environment of the public school at St. Edmund and of the Corpus Christi College of Cambridge. He writes in his autobiography: 'I had arrived at my public school thoroughly sick of masters and mistresses, having been emotionally meshed about by them at my preparatory school' (1947, 12-13). He felt that the public school ethos was absolutely uncongenial to the attainment of one's cherished ideals. Abetted as he was by Edward Upward's hatred of the school authority and disenchanted with all normal public school values, Isherwood left Repton, and moved to Cambridge in 1923. At Cambridge, too, both Isherwood and Upward developed an intense disgust of the authorities of the University for their preferential treatment of the privileged as against the working class students. As they felt, they were 'venturing like spies into an enemy stronghold' (1947, 23). They reacted against the whole ethos of the University of Cambridge by fabricating a private world of fantasy, of surrealistic nature, *Mortmere*. *Mortmere* refers, as Isherwood formulates in *Lions and Shadows*, to a bizzare

village peopled by Christopher and a group of rebellious artists like Edward Upward. It provided them with an escape from the daily odds at the University of Cambridge. It also signified the depraved state of men in the post-war period and a form of rebellion, particularly, against the corrupt and crumbling disorder that lay concealed under the whole fabric of education. In fine, 'the anti-myth, begun as a revolt in the nursery or anti-nursery' says Paul Piazza, 'materialised at Repton and was expanded at Cambridge with Upward and after Cambridge with Auden' (1978,8).

These early experiences were, however, of great significance, as they formed the very foundation of his first autobiographical book, *Lions and Shadows* — the book that formulated the essential matrix of Isherwood's art in his early fictions. Isherwood started his autobiography as early as 1914, completed it in 1925 but did not publish until 1938. As a faithful record of the first stages in a life-long education — the education of a novelist — the book occupies an important position in the sequence of Isherwood's writings as it provides, perhaps, the clearest insight into the artist's overriding concern with identity. Within a month of finishing *Lions and Shadows* Isherwood embarked on a novel, *Christopher Garland*, in February 1925. The plot consists of Isherwood's experiences of a young Cambridge undergraduate with literary pretensions, who finds the University utterly stultifying. The novel, which shows Isherwood's relentless penchant for defining his new self, was, however, abandoned.

In January 1926 Isherwood was at Scilly Isles. There he met Edward Upward and turned his experiences into a novel, written in the Forsterian technique of 'tea-tabling', which was to be called *Seascape with Figures*. E.M. Forster's technique of 'tea-tabling' refers to the toning down of the tragic incident to its lowest possible pitch, and was first used, with remarkable success in *Howards End*. However, *Seascape with Figures*, based as it is on Isherwood's effort to establish identity in relation to the society he belongs to; shows his increasing bitterness with his mother. But it was rejected by two publishers, and Isherwood set it aside. After *Seascape* being rejected, Isherwood started a new novel in imitation of Balzac in its elaborate plot construction. The novel was entitled *The North-West Passage* and was intended to be a massive survey of

the post-war generation and had references to Isherwood's friends, Chalmers (Edward Upward), Weston (W.H. Auden), Philip (Hector Wintle) etc. The book shows Isherwood's recurrent and most favourite use of Test which became more rationalised after his reading of Bleuler's psychological writings. Isherwood's categories of Manhood as such — as found in *The North-West Passage* — fit in with the Chinese philosophy, the Truly Strong Man being the Taoist sage who sees through the world's imbecility or the Confucian 'Cheng-tzu' (gentleman). However, Isherwood's myth of Truly Strong Man and Truly Weak Man, as elaborately dealt with in *The North-West Passage*, would inform all Isherwood's pre-war fiction, finding its first clear expression in *All the Conspirators* and its proper definition in his 1938 edition of *Lions and Shadows*. Isherwood's interest in Truly Weak Man and Truly Strong Man continued and cropped up again in his short story 'Gems of Belgium Architecture'.

Back home in the Autumn of 1927 Isherwood started revising the rejected novel, *Seascape with Figures*, the plot of which he and Upward conceived during their visit to the Scilly Isles in 1926. The two central characters were a medical student and a would-be painter and writer. The artist persuades the medical student to give up his medical career and to leave home as well in the pursuit of art and of ascertaining his position as an artist. Edward Upward appreciated the plot of the book but disliked its title. Both Christopher and Edward toyed with many titles — *An Artist to His Cycle*, *The Family of the Artist*, *The Old Life*, to name a random few. Finally, Isherwood recalled a quotation from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which he learnt during his school days: 'All the Conspirators save only he / Did what they did in envy of great Caesar'. It decided Isherwood's choice. *All the Conspirators* had a better ring to it, though little or no relevance to the context of Shakespeare's play.

*All the Conspirators* (1928) is Isherwood's first published novel that continues the writer's search for the self with a vocation to become independent. Based as it is on 'the great war between the old and young', the novel gives vent to the author's gesture of defiance at the generation of the diehards, here represented by his termagant mother, Kathleen. While Isherwood was writing this novel his relations with Kathleen were at their worst. It was clear to Isherwood

that his mother, masking her strength under the appearance of weakness, using tears and sighs as her primary weapons, seemed to be his chief enemy on the way to becoming independent. Just as Michael Ransom, in *The Ascent of F<sub>6</sub>*, who loses all his energy, crew and more importantly, his idealism in a bid to reach the peak of F<sub>6</sub>. So the young artist hurls a lively revolt against 'the family and its official representatives'. *All the Conspirators*, 'the angriest of all Isherwood's novels' as Alan Wilde says (1971,27), is a voice of protest against the barricades, and like Auden's poem **1929** there is the feeling for the need of regeneration and demand for the death of the 'Old Gang'.

The novel opens with Philip Lindsay, the protagonist, who fights hard to become free from his mother's domination. Being egged on by his friend, Allen Chalmers, he quits his job in an Insurance firm and flees to a remote island. A mock Stephen Dedalus, Philip fancies himself as an artist in exile. On the island Philip dabbles on various canvases, contemplates upon the nature of art and squabbles with Allen. Both Victor Page and his uncle, Colonel, who are sarcastically called 'Poshocrats' (a term Isherwood and Upward used for the rich, privileged Cambridge Dons) are stock Edwardian types. Philip has every reason to avoid their company, for the Pages represent what Philip has already renounced by leaving home. But Mrs. Lindsay, Philip's mother, disapproves of his attempt to break free from home and office. She employs all her tactics of 'domestic guerilla warfare' (*All the Conspirators*, 79) and thus constricts his consciousness. Philip lives in her presence but dreads direct encounter with her. When he meets her accidentally, as on the stairs, he is stricken with 'a queer atrophy of the will' and feels 'bored, shamed, wishing only to get away' (*All the Conspirators*, 44). Indeed, the undeclared warfare between the monstrous mother and the aspirant child, as Alan Wilde observes, 'is psychological above all, and the chief enemy is Dorothy Lindsay, widow, matriarch and survivor of a dead (deadening) Edwardian world. Progenitor of that line of "Evil Mothers", as Cyril Connolly calls them, who appear in Isherwood's work, Mrs. Lindsay symbolizes all that is worst in the family' (1971,27).

Evidently the novel gives vent to a dislocation of generation, and Isherwood here introduces his favourite theme of intergenerational conflict which is inherent

in every social set-up and is necessary for ensuring continuous rejuvenation of human life. The 'Old Gang' often appears to the younger generation as 'diehards' clinging to authority and power, and are the real 'Conspirators' against the youth to whom the title of the book appropriately refers. Philip Lindsay, bent as he is on becoming an artist, fights hard against his 'evil' mother who says: 'And it is not till you grow older that you begin to see how true old proverb is of the Hare and the Tortoise. The people who have idled about and wasted their time, get left behind' (*All the Conspirators*, 50). Mrs. Lindsay never understands Philip's instinctive urge for art and calls him 'frivolous'. But Philip is too much his mother's son to remain inactive. With Victor Page, a potential member of the family, he vies with his mother to clinch him as an ally in his struggle for artistic independence.

One day Philip frets before Victor, cavilling about his sterile life and middle-class job, and thus exhorts Victor's sympathy. But Mrs. Lindsay is not to be disconcerted. She senses that Victor has joined with Philip in the war at home. She skilfully contrives to remove Victor from the family by suggesting to him that Joan, her daughter, has attraction for Allen and has promised to marry him. Victor, who is aware of Allen's debauchery on the island, recoils from Joan. Joan is goaded by her mother to get engaged with Allen, and tells Victor frankly: 'I'm sorry. I ought to have known our affairs would bore you, sooner or later' (*All the Conspirators*, 118). Afraid as he is of his sexuality, Victor retires into his weak and diffident self. So, both Philip and Victor are unable to emerge victorious in the 'domestic guerilla warfare'. All the young people in the novel consider break with the past to be a major operation, and they are portrayed as victims of an 'Old Gang'. They all fail to establish a link between the self and the world outside, represented by their elders. Through their interior monologues and reminiscences the readers are aware of their attempts to cope with the repressive elders, their negative responses to the objective world that is hostile and frightening, and the result is inevitable failure of communication. Alan Wilde says: 'Among the people, Allen takes the role of a rebel; Joan, of victim, and Victor, of surrogate for the old gang. Philip encompassing all these, as well as Allen's negativism, Victor's imperciience and Joan's unconscious imitation of their mother, points up what is common to them all and to the generation they

symbolize : the failure to emerge from the battle against their elders with the prize of authentic selfhood' (1971,32). It is, after all, the undeclared warfare between mother and son, between an older and younger generation that invests the novel with an overpowering feeling of genuine passion. So Isherwood wrote that 'he keeps forgetting his lesser loyalties and antagonisms. His motto is : "My generation — right or wrong"' (*All the Conspirators*,8).

Isherwood's first novel, therefore, mirrors vividly the whole attitude of the younger generation of the twenties. In his introduction to the 1939 re-issue of the novel, Cyril Connolly observes : 'Like *Prufrock*, which was a key to T.S. Eliot and to the Teens, this first novel is a key to Isherwood and the Twenties' (quoted in Piazza : 1978, 29). Although the novel never touches nor was intended to touch such areas of the life of twenties as poverty, political upheaval, women liberty among others, it is invaluable as a key to the attitudes of the upper middle-class young people of the twenties. All four characters of the book, Allen, Philip, Joan and even Victor Page suffer from the restlessness of intercepted growth and are in a state of revolt against 'the official representatives' of their family and the whole establishment that imposed repressions and inhibitions. All of them experience the oppression of empty lives. They respond to this emptiness and react to the general state of suppression either by escaping into fantasy or by exploding into violence. Allen, the most self-aware and romantic of the four, feels from time to time 'helpless and physically sick' (*All the Conspirators*, 13). Both Joan and Victor, although engaged to each other, are controlled by Mrs. Lindsay with her heavy hands and become symbols, like E.M. Forster's Wilcox, of the inadequacy of the outer life and of the inability to connect. Victor predicts inevitability of conflict and uneasy compromise, while Joan foresees the terrible consequences of a married life without love. Mrs. Lindsay sensing that Victor might stand beside Philip in his bid to flee from her dominance skilfully makes arrangement for Joan's engagement with Allen. She thus not only cripples Joan's and Victor's instinctive urges but also thwarts Philip's growth.

Philip's life, inhibited as it is, is the most violent in its rhythmic texture. Sometimes he attempts escape, sometimes revolts. But he ultimately fails, partly because he does not have the courage and initiative to venture out into a

world in which he must learn to support himself and more subtly, because he seems to find and enjoy the maternal domination itself. Philip's closest friend, Allen, the hearty man, Victor and his sister, Joan — all of them know what they want — total release from their elders' dominance — and all of them suffer from a paralysis of will that retards their progress. 'None of the characters, in fact', says Alan Wilde, 'are able to establish link between self and world, and their inordinate mingled sense of desire and failure is made most apparent in their self-consciousness' (1971, 29). All are most defensive and most embarrassed when sexually repressed either at the hands of parents or schoolmasters or even by the whole ethos of the society. With their inner lives exposed, it becomes clear that they share certain fears and exhibit negative responses to cope with their repressive elders and with the world they have made. Isherwood's latest critic, Francis King, sharply brings out the basic inertia of the rebellious young in the book: 'What is both saddening and surprising about the book is the basic timidity and impotence of those young, despite all the vehemence with which they denounce their elders' (1976, 5). They all submit to the wills of others and assert their own wills when it no longer matters. It is for the portrayal of these anti-heroes that Isherwood's *All the Conspirators*, as K. W. Gransden has pointed out, belongs to a genre which includes Forster's *The Longest Journey*, Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* or Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*. The basic assumptions of the novel sound identical with W.H. Auden's concluding observation in the final chorus of *Paid on Both Sides* (published in the same year as Isherwood's first novel): 'Though he believes it, no man is strong ... he is defeated .... His mother and her mother won' (quoted in Finney: 1979, 72).

One of Isherwood's eminent critics, Brian Finney, diagnoses various forms of illness and deeper malaise of the psyche, affecting the young people in the novel. In his book, *Christopher Isherwood: A Critical Biography*, Finney observes that '*All the Conspirators*, is, for its time, a subtle exploration of various forms of sickness and health' (1979, 72). Victor Page, by conforming to the rigid codes of his society, is destined to catch psychological morbidity, as did his perverted uncle, given to photographing mating puffins. His capacity for sexual love has been stunted, as Isherwood suggests, by the public exposure at school of his homosexual feelings for another boy. But having to repress his homosexual

urges, Victor is left sexually crippled. Mrs. Lindsay adopts a pre-Freudian and conservative attitude to Philip's poor health, and the readers are aware that none but Lindsay is wholly responsible for his ill-health, both physical and mental. Although she pretends to see Philip 'safely launched ... before anything happens' (*All the Conspirators*, 50), the demon mother tries to convince Philip that he is sick and continues to dominate him. Whenever Philip shows any sign of self-assertion and independence as an adult, Mrs. Lindsay contrives to find some ailment in Philip to prolong his dependence on her. Much earlier in the novel, Philip, after coming back from Scilly Isles, becomes weak; his mother cast a concerned look at him :

His weakness roused her. She emitted a primitive, glabrous sound, as they embraced 'My darling boy'.

As soon as possible, Philip went up to his bedroom and lay down. Ten minutes later, he was vomiting (*All the Conspirators*, 51).

Indeed, whatever she does and whatever she says, she is propelled by her complex sentiment to retain her domineering hold on her son. Brian Finney justly remarks : 'Like the old men (according to the 1920's myth) who sent their sons off to die in the war to prolong their positions of power, she (Mrs. Lindsay) has unknowingly sacrificed her son to preserve her own *raison d'etre* as a mother and head of the family' (1979,74). Allen Chalmers, Philip's friend, who has a noble aim to become a doctor, is no less infected by the disease of the psyche. He feels 'physically sick' (*All the Conspirators*, 13) and 'has got a rotten headache' (*All the Conspirators*, 23). Boredom drives him to drink; his addiction is an indication of the whole adolescent world getting affected through sexual repression. His 'callousness is diseased' (*All the Conspirators*, 56) which retards him from entering into life. This is one reason why Isherwood accuses the older generation, in the Foreword to the 1958 American edition of the book 'of reactionary dullness, snobbery, complacency, apathy', and explains what particularly angered him and his contemporaries was that 'a Freudian revolution had taken place of which they were trying to remain unaware' (8). The younger generation of the novel suffers from a repression so fundamental that their life has become 'one gigantic lie', and 'are infected' as Brian Finney finely sums up, 'by the cancer of a pre-war ethos' (1979,75).

*All the Conspirators* continues, though at a less obvious level, Isherwood's penchant for Test — the proving of oneself which was so important to his generation and to the establishment of individual identity. That concern was already prominent in his earlier book, *Lions and Shadows*. The protagonist, Leonard Merrows, served as a model for fashioning the character of Philip Lindsay in *All the Conspirators*. As Merrows was prevented from encountering the Test at public school by a bout of rheumatic fever, so is Philip prevented from facing the Test by becoming ill. The Test implies, for Isherwood, rebellious artist's need to secure his independence from parental dependence, which is of paramount importance in achieving identity. Philip sets a Test for himself: at loggerheads as he was with his mother, he determines to leave home, quit his job in the Insurance firm and devote himself to writing and painting. He emigrates to Kenya and with the help of Colonel Page secures a job. In order to avoid his domineering mother Philip, sick with brain fever, flees through thick fog, down sombre dirty streets among crowds of malevolent people. He thus asserts his rebellious gesture for establishing himself outside the family. By the end of the novel Philip is found to accomplish his overt goal : he is selling his paintings and winning prizes for his writing. He does so, however, not by standing up to his mother, but by indicating that he is going to follow what he has all along craved for : to establish his individual identity. As Paul Piazza says : 'With ... mother hovering in the background, and with Joan ministering to his every need, Philip has established his own island' . (1978, 27-... ). Philip's departure from home and commercial success as a painter clearly indicate his position as an independent artist. Alan Wilde remarks that Philip's last-minute flight from his 'evil' mother is an indication of 'the determination of his ego to survive on any terms' (1971, 32-33).

Philip Lindsay, however fails to achieve his overt goal of becoming an independent adult. His departure for Africa signifies his inability to survive on his own conscious terms. He is not secure enough to risk confrontation with his domineering mother and the possible consequent withdrawal of her love. None but Philip knew, he went out into the oncoming fog to avoid his Test by taking a job in East Africa. He intensely craves for his mother's presence; for without his mother he merely hangs about — impotent, even paralysed. Almost overnight

Philip's vague gesture of rebellion founders. He falls ill, collapses and returns in a huff to London. Philip's retreat from South Africa to his mother's household prompted Alan Wilde to remark that 'Isherwood's Philip neither learns nor develops. Instead, he retrogresses with decreasing awareness and degenerating moral fiber from early gesture of activity to, at the last, a state of passive and ludicrous defeat' (1971,32).

At home, Joan, outraged and horrified, suddenly usurps her mother's place; for no one can nurse Philip but Joan because of 'the special things to do with the nursing' (*All the Conspirators*, 152). She is terrible in her determination to block Philip's departure. Ostensibly, her reasons are that the climate and the job 'will kill him (Philip) inside a year' (*All the Conspirators*, 119.). Like Joan, Mrs. Lindsay's attitude also softens. Earlier she had been charged with the iron will and ruthlessness of Lady Macbeth. Now Isherwood's portrait of Mrs. Lindsay sags; she is 'too full of the milk of human kindness'. Seeing Philip come back, she 'was radiant. She looked years younger' (*All the Conspirators*, 148). In fact, the relationship between Philip and Mrs. Lindsay finally appears to be complex. As Paul Piazza observes: 'Both are locked in a symbiotic union. Without him, Mrs. Lindsay is grim and morose; without her, Philip cannot even begin a painting or a book' (1978,23). For, no one is sure of her or his success in the 'great war between the old and young'. Not Philip, because he has come back home and lives with his mother; not Mrs. Lindsay, because she has relinquished her motherhood to Joan. 'Perhaps not an individual', says Piazza 'but the family has won, with Mrs. Lindsay's and Joan's and Philip's separate conspiracies uniting them into a family.' (1978,28).

Stylistically, one may find in Isherwood's *All the Conspirators* an aura of modern literary 'tricks'. But what seems appealing to Isherwood was the Joycean interior monologues and the method of 'tea-tabling' which he inherited from E.M. Forster, who happened to be Isherwood's preceptor for the craft of fiction as Ezra Pound was to T.S. Eliot for *The Waste Land*. In his Foreword to the 1958 American edition of the novel, Isherwood speaks of the echoes of Forster, Woolf and Joyce. Woolf's influence on Isherwood is least obvious, 'although Isherwood's use of Stream of Consciousness', says Brian Finney 'owes as

much to her way of rendering a character's thought-stream as to Joyce's (1979,70). However, the device of thought-stream is well handled and adds clarity, establishing tone without recourse to third person omniscience. We may mention Victor's thought-stream in which he fancies that Philip's sitting-room would be one of 'an adult male extrovert' where he would see 'observable tendencies of narcissism and claustrophobia' (*All the Conspirators*,72). Isherwood's free use of this technique brings forth unnecessary complications but makes the novel realistic and shows the influence of psychology on modern fiction. This is why Isherwood thought of the novel essentially in terms of technique, of conjuring, of chess. This is what he tells us in *Lions and Shadows*: 'I imagined a novel as a contraption — like a motor bicycle, whose action depends upon the exactly co-ordinated working of all its inter-related parts' (1985,159).

But E.M. Forster's influence on Isherwood was far more profound. While reading Forster's *Howards End* Isherwood discovered that Forster was the only one who understood what modern novel ought to be. In *Lions and Shadows* he writes: 'Our frightful mistake was that we believed in tragedy: the point is, tragedy is quite impossible now-a-days.... We ought to aim at being essentially comic writers' (1985, 107). The whole of Forster's technique is based on 'tea-tabling': instead of trying to screw all his scenes up to the highest possible pitch, he tones them down until they sound like 'mother's meeting gossip'. Isherwood followed the method both in theory and practice in his novels. The tragic spectacle of the murder of a girl, which was planned for *Seascape with Figures*, is tea-tabled down to an indecisive, undignified scuffle in Joan in *All the Conspirators*. Victor's murder is also perfectly tea-tabled, and the ending of the novel becomes an apotheosis of 'tea-tables', a decrescendo of anti-climaxes. Again, the Forsterian 'flash back' is no less found in Isherwood as it enables the novelist to focus interest more on the reactions to an event than the event itself. For example, Mrs. Lindsay and Miss Durant discuss Joan's engagement, but not before ten pages are we privy to Victor's apparent proposal. Thus the scenes frequently appear as a series of episodes, the action moving from place to place or time to time, the same events presented to the readers sometimes as they occur, yet not necessarily in chronological order.

To conclude, though the final judgement of the novel is non-committal, if not deluding, *All the Conspirators* marks, for Isherwood, as for Philip Lindsay, an important milestone in defining his self. It records his feelings about his family, his attempts to break free of his domineering mother and his awareness of his individual identity as an artist in a hostile world. Philip may fail in his pursuit, but his motivation is clearly discerned by one and all, his wholehearted efforts to overcome his weaknesses are counted. 'We shall not perish' declares Edward Upward in the epigraph to his novel, *Journey to the Border*, 'because we are not afraid to speak of our weaknesses, and we shall learn how to overcome our weakness' (quoted in Wilde : 1971,36). The sentiment is Isherwood's, as evinced in his later novels that trace the artist's ceaseless toil to tide over the hurdles in his way to self-realization. As time wore on, Isherwood's rebellion was further intensified; his desire for freedom from parental control more determined, leading ultimately to the dislodging of the mother-figure. No wonder, this development is reflected in his next novel, *The Memorial* (1932) which shows a greater objectivity of the artist who wants to discover himself in terms of others.

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE HALLOWED DEAD

### *The Memorial*

It was to be about war, not the war itself, but the effect of the idea of War on my generation. It was to give expression to my own 'War' complex.

— Christopher Isherwood.

*All the Conspirators* was published in the summer of 1928. At that time, as Isherwood's biographer, Jonathan Fryer, records, Isherwood was at Freshwater Bay, where he came across an ex-soldier, Mander. Mander with his bitter experiences of war awakened in Isherwood the feelings of trauma about war, which later supplied inspiration for *The Memorial* (1932). Mander also prevailed upon Isherwood to go in for the medical courses. Accordingly, Isherwood got admitted to the King's College of medicine at the end of October 1928. Isherwood's decision for studying medicine seemed to be partly influenced by his desire to leave home and to break free of all familial ties with his mother. Encouraged as he was by Edward Upward, Isherwood believed that the medical career would help him avoid facing the Test since people accorded doctors respect and they did not have to fight in wars: 'With a medical degree in my pocket, I had fancied, I could face the world' (Isherwood:1985, 187).

However, by the end of the first term of the course, Isherwood got flabbergasted with his medical career, and the examination performances being poor, he decided to leave the medical college. He felt that he 'hadn't advanced an inch, really, since those Cambridge days' (1985, 187). He needed a change, a total change from England and old life. In his autobiography Isherwood records his feelings thus: 'First of all, I must leave England altogether — the break with the old life must be complete ... I'd go to Berlin' (1985, 188). With this longing, on 14 March 1929, Isherwood left for a two-week visit to Berlin to find a new lease of life in Germany to see the Weimar Republic from inside. However, back home that summer, both Auden and Isherwood got engaged on *The*

*Enemies of a Bishop*, an unrealized play. Auden also prevailed upon Isherwood to translate Baudelaire's *Journaux Intimes*, a work that appealed to Isherwood since Baudelaire's journal reflects anger and antipathy towards his family and rebellion against the weakness of the will — the feelings that Isherwood experienced at home with his mother, Kathleen and that sparked off *The Memorial* that followed soon.

Published as it was in 1932, *The Memorial*, which had for its author the private title 'War and Peace' is concerned with the attempt of the self to transcend its subjective boundaries and to merge with the world at large. As Isherwood was thoroughly obsessed with integrating his life into his fiction, the novel traces, in graphic details, various stages of psychological development through which he, as an individual, passed on his way to maturity. It also reflects the universal problems of adolescence : the movement away from parents, the establishment of a sexual identity and the acceptance of individual responsibility in the world. If *All the Conspirators* concentrates on the goal of independence, the major concern of *The Memorial* is paradoxically the necessity for involvement, a theme avidly pursued in all his subsequent novels. Indeed, Isherwood's second novel, as Alan Wilde observes, 'is concerned with the attempt of the self to transcend its subjectivity by managing both to assert its independence of the world of others and, on another level, to establish a connection with it : to achieve individuality while overcoming isolation' (1971,37). Whereas *All the Conspirators* may be described as an emotional version of Isherwood's life or a discharge of emotions, *The Memorial* is an expression of emotions.

The seminal theme of *The Memorial*, as Isherwood announces in *Lions and Shadows*, 'was to be about 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' (1985,182). Isherwood's ideal was no less a novel than Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, as his ambition was to present the whole panorama of the life of his generation through the history of a family : 'Like Tolstoy, I would tell the story of a family; its births and deaths, ups and downs... all "The Externals".... I was out to write an epic;... an epic disguised as a drawing-room comedy'

(1985,182). But the social problem and upheaval of a whole generation is too ambitious and colossal a theme to be treated in a 'drawing room comedy.' Unlike *All the Conspirators*, Isherwood deals here with the aftermath of war, that is, with a social problem rather than a personal one, and at the end, the real theme of the novel turns out to be the deformity of time.

However, unlike his contemporary writers of war, say, Rupert Brooke, Rex Warner, Wilfred Owen, Isherwood does not concentrate on the pity and pathos of war but on the crippling effect of the idea of war on the surviving generation. He was not a combatant in the Great War; he was simply a casualty. But the trauma of the war was psychologically so profound on Isherwood that he could curb his own pathological obsession from rearing its ugly head in his books. Piazza's observation may be noted here. He pertinently says that 'to Isherwood, the idea of war is far more nightmarish than the actual fact of war' (1978,80). D.H. Lawrence writes in a memorable chapter in *Kangaroo*, called 'Nightmare', that it was at home that 'the world was lost', at home that 'the proud human spirit collapsed' and 'sordid, rampant, raging meanness' triumphed. 'The bite of a jackal is blood-poisoning.... And they bit us all. And blood-poisoning... set in' (Lawrence : 1968,221). Isherwood's *The Memorial* presents an embittered and debased post-war England where the shell-shocked and amnesiac people have inherited nothing but 'a heap of broken images.' They are physically alive, but in every other respect benumbed. They show disintegration, frustration and despair — all symptoms of a world in the grip of a moral disaster. George A. Panichas vividly exposes the effect of war on Isherwood and his generation in his introduction to *Promise of Greatness* (1968): 'After 1918 the values of a settled civilization were gone. The years of the war remained as the chief remembrance of things past and the future was uncertain.... Those who lost their lives lost all their bitterness. But those who survived felt sorrow without end' (quoted in Piazza : 1978,81). Indeed, to Isherwood, war is an apocalyptic event, an ancestral curse inherited by his generation; it invests 'the atmosphere of pessimism' and 'impending ruin'.

In *The Memorial* Mary Scriven, Lily's sister-in-law, is a middle-aged lady of aristocratic birth, who forgets her past and leads a hectic life while launching

into self-delusion of doing social work. She sees the Memorial at Chapelbridge as a hypocritical bore which must be shut out of her consciousness. Her room with its 'camouflaged divan surrounded by the day's debris' (*The Memorial*, 10) is symbolic. The disorder in the room suggests disorder in the life of the characters and makes it clear that like Anne, Mary's only daughter, who cannot find a sleeping place in the 'roomful of rubbish', the children of England were in quest of some solid support among the wreckage of life in the post-war England. Maurice and Anne lead an amnesiac life, deliberately opting for death of love. Edward Blake vacantly loiters; his mind is hammered by the irrevocable loss: 'Richard is dead ... This is what we have got <sup>left</sup> of Richard' (*The Memorial*, 123). Eric Vernon, the protagonist of the novel, whose father died in war, is a mass of neuroses and finds certain satisfaction by causing injury to his health. But, of all the war-survivors in the novel, Lily, Eric's mother, is perhaps most pathetic; war makes her emotionally derelict and psychologically maimed. Indeed, what Eric and Edward Blake speak of the moral repercussion of the war is true for all the characters of the novel: 'We are indeed at the crossways: every way lies tragedy, every way sorrow: the world must choose between evil and lesser evil; but always evil' (quoted in Piazza: 1978,85). There pervades in the novel a moral and psychological epidemic abroad, which leaves no one unaffected. It is this moral context which lends importance to the novel. 'The only assertion' says Brian Finney, 'which is given narrative authority <sup>to</sup> its position at the end of the novel is a negative one: "war ..., it ought never to have happened"' (1979,100).

The title of the novel is ironically derived from a scene of Chapelbridge Memorial where the war survivors of the Vernon family pay tribute with wreaths of flowers to the memory of the war victims. The Memorial service brings all the members of the family into a sort of unity and sets into relief all the varying features of the different characters. However, the sense of unity and relief proves to be short-lived as the shell-shocked war survivors soon differ in their attitude to war. The Memorial cross becomes symbolic of the cleavage between two generations: on the one side of the cross stand those whom Isherwood labels the 'Others' who romanticize in the Rupert Brookean manner the cause of war; on the other, stand Isherwood and his generation, embittered, disillusioned and neurotic who suffer from guilt for not participating in war and find no nobility in

the terrible massacre of what D.H. Lawrence calls 'a pack of jackals'. Lily, Major Charlesworth and old Mr. Vernon would line up on the far side of the cross, while Mary and her children would presume to join the embittered young. Eric and Edward would belong to Isherwood's 'My Generation'. Again, the Memorial cross might bear biblical allusion. It stands as a blasphemous antithesis to the cross of Christ. Its disciples are not animated with life, but sentenced to life-in-death like Eliot's Wastelanders. Paul Piazza's observation seems to be pertinent here as he says, 'inheriting nothing but "a heap of broken images", they are debased figures crouched in the shadow of a sterile cross' (1978,86).

*The Memorial* presents, though not as much pronounced as in *All the Conspirators*, a conflict between two generations : the 'Old Gang' and the 'New'. There is, on the one hand, a portrait of the dead world of the past with its moral and physical debris, as symbolized by Lily Vernon, a widow who lost her husband in the front and clings to obstinate mourning according to all traditional rites and rituals; on the other, a world of the living where people try to liberate themselves from the dead weight of the past. This world is represented by Eric Vernon and Lily's sister-in-law, Mary Scriven. Lily withdraws from the world to pass the rest of her life in endless mourning. It is ironical that instead of being overwhelmed with grief at the Memorial service in honour of those killed in war, Lily's attention is drawn to the orthodox rites and rituals. She silently repeats the name of Richard before the Memorial, although in the innermost recesses of her heart there is a depressing thought: 'Richard isn't anywhere. He's gone. He's dead' (*The Memorial*,90). Lily is, in fact, the relic of a world which is dead. On the contrary, Eric belongs to the new world born after the communist revolution when the old world crumbles out of existence. The result is the estrangement between an Edwardian mother and her rebellious son desperately trying to find an authentic self.

Mary Scriven, Lily's sister-in-law, who in her youth eloped with an ordinary bank clerk and subsequently after the birth of a boy and a girl was divorced, is a foil to Lily and a representative of Isherwood's 'My Generation'. Indeed, Isherwood's characterization of Mary and Lily, two mother-figures, is based on sharp contrast. Although Mary leads a truncated life, she crowds her personal

life with noisy excitement. She reveals a determination not to be borne down by the assumptions and demands of the past. She achieves a degree of liberation which no one does in the novel. Mary's house, as described by her daughter, is 'rather like the inside of a caravan' in contrast to Lily's empty, lifeless flat. She stands for a vigorous, mobile and happy-go-lucky way of living in the present as opposed to Lily who has adopted a death-in-life way of living. As Mary stands in front of the Memorial cross, she thinks: 'All this cult of dead people is only snobbery.... Living people are better than the dead ones. And we've got to get on with life' (*The Memorial*, 98). Indeed, Lily denies life, Mary impersonates it.

Eric Vernon, repulsed as he was with his mother's constricting grief, naturally responds to the elan of Mary and her children, Anne and Maurice, who indulge in moral *laissez faire*. He believes that if he could live with Mary, not with Lily and his cousins, 'he could expand like flower, breaking out of his own clumsy identity gaining strength and confidence' (*The Memorial*, 150). Their life at Gatesley is the affirmation of mother-child love, and Mary here stands just opposite to Lily: 'In aunt Mary's house he was a different being. The presence of his cousins seemed to give him power. He felt wonderfully calm and sure of himself' (*The Memorial*, 145). Indeed, Mary seems to be Isherwood's and consequently Eric's dream of motherhood come true. But what is interesting is that Eric is always haunted by his mother's ghoulish grief and the guilt it has planted in him. In fact, the past that had begun with his father's death and his mother's mourning clings to Eric. Eric cannot forget Lily 'hideous with grief. Her eyes swoll'n into slits... her face blotch'd and sallow' (*The Memorial*, 132). He vows never to marry and to live for ever with her. Lily, on the other hand, indicates very early in the novel her feeling that the present is of no use to her, and with Richard gone, Eric will become her only comfort and companion.

In *The Memorial* Isherwood presents the mother-figure of Lily as contrasted with the monstrous mother, Mrs. Lindsay of *All the Conspirators*. Although both of them continue the tradition of Evil Mother, there is now a telling shift in motivation. Both mothers are 'evil' in that they do not allow their children to grow into independence. Mrs. Lindsay is always alert about her sense of dominance and never allows her son to break free of her. Lily Vernon, on the contrary, seems

to be sympathetic to her son's problems and tries to understand his needs. Because she is not overtly malicious and as inhuman as Mrs. Lindsay, there is softening in the portrait of the mother-figure, and because the mother-figure softens and mellows, the protagonist can emerge fully, showing, and becoming more aware of, his inner feelings. One may recall here that Isherwood's stay at Berlin, owing to prolonged absence from his mother, enabled him to obtain this new understanding with regard to his tie with his mother. He is aware, as much as Eric, of why he quarrels — he wants his mother's love and needs her concern and at the same time he needs his own independence. What Isherwood presents here is an adolescent's classic dilemma — one who seeks to solidify his new identity and to modify his parental ties. In *The Memorial* the novelist shifts from the unbridled anger and rebellion of the son in *All the Conspirators* to an awareness of the hurt which caused it, indicating a growing awareness of himself as a self-determining individual. Isherwood invests Eric's concern with that of his own and gives vent to one of the worries dominating his own life: how to modify his ties with his mother so that he can develop his own identity while still maintaining the tie.

But as the novel progresses, the readers are at once aware that Eric has submitted neither to Lily's past nor to Mary's present. He is tossed between two contrary forces of Lily and Mary — the forces that split him as a child and at the same time continues their destructive work in his adulthood. Propelled as he was by an inner urge to assert independence and at the same time to get involved in the objective world around him, Eric abandons a promising career at Cambridge. He temporarily embraces Marxism and tours the slums at Wales. He accepts catholicism which ultimately proves to be a temporary escape, yielding no permanent solution to his personal problem. His confused motives rattle him. Eric becomes a tense, befuddled adolescent. It is here that one may construe a mutual tie between Eric and Edward Blake as both of them are destined to face the same conditions of life and as both are propelled by the same spirit of identity. To Edward, Eric is 'the only person I can trust' (*The Memorial*, 47), as Edward reveals in his suicidal note. Again, it is from a letter to Edward that we come to know Eric's decision to become a catholic.

Both Eric and Edward represent what Isherwood in *Lions and Shadows* calls 'the neurotic hero, the Truly Weak Man' (1985, 128), and the two characters are meant to suggest 'the two halves or aspects of the same person', one is to become 'an embodiment of the other's dream of himself as an epic character' (1985, 130). Edward Blake, in his search for something that will excite him and make his life meaningful, makes sincere attempts to break out of his limitations and to find a resting place in an unsatisfactory world. In fact, 'most self-conscious and self-aware, most active and mobile of all the characters in the novel, in his inabilities and frustrations', Alan Wilde observes, 'Blake is the Fisher King of Isherwood's 1930's *Waste Land*' (1971, 50). However, Edward and Eric are what is called the 'Truly Weak Man'. Both are doomed in the face of a hostile world — Edward commits suicide, while Eric is defeated.

Eric's problems, as those of Philip in *All the Conspirators*, stem from his commerce with his mother : he is a prey to his mother's constant, nagging mourning, 'to the semi superstitious fear... of meddling with the past' (*The Memorial*, 136) and to the simmering discontent with, and rebellion against the whole way of life as represented by his mother. What is implied here is that like Philip, Eric is drawn to the movement of life, but he always guards himself against involvement and ultimately retires into her personal 'inferno'. His life in Mary's household inspires him to evolve a fresh identity but his mother appears before his mind's eye like a demon — an obsession which he tries his best to exorcise but always in vain. Torn as he was between the claims of past and future, of Mary and Lily, of death and life, Eric leaves no stone unturned to find his authentic self but moves relentlessly back to the starting point. His movement from Cambridge to the Communist Party and then, finally, to catholicism, only reveals disintegration of his personality and will, and his absence from the third section of the novel shows his retirement into the state from which he started his quest for self-identity. For Eric, life is constantly a Test — a succession of hurdles which he never manages to tide over, and Isherwood's characterization of Eric is, indeed, an exploration of, and an obsessive concern with, the idea of failure. Isherwood here indicates that what seems to be the gesture of commitment may be simply and ultimately the refusal to make contact with life.

What one, then, derives from *The Memorial* is a world where isolated people make frantic attempts to make communications with others, but they ultimately recede to the Prufrockian inertia. The characters in *The Memorial*, unlike those of *All the Conspirators*, face a more oppressive world, not because they fail to communicate with each other, not because they struggle against the 'Old Gang' but because they struggle against the conditions of life in general. The result is that no one succeeds either in making communications with others or in modifying his parental ties; each one vacillates, as Eric does. As a character, then, Eric remains opaque, undefined; but as an embodiment of a problem he is distinct. We hardly develop any sense of Eric's individuality : what sort of life he leads, what gives him pleasure, what he thinks, whom he loves etc. In Eric there does emerge a fairly clear portrait of an adolescent making gestures to fashion and solidify a new identity, although it remains only a shadow portrait of a man.

Isherwood's knowledge of self thus influences his graphic portrayal of an adolescent artist seeking to establish a new identity as an independent adult. In *All The Conspirators* the rebellious artist remained thoroughly at loggerheads with his mother; in *The Memorial* Eric makes frantic attempts and becomes, to a certain extent, successful in modifying his ties with his mother and other people around him. He demonstrates a growing awareness of the meaning of experience and shows a better understanding of himself in relation to other characters who people the world of the novel. The novel thus marks a turning point in Isherwood's career and shows a step further in the artist's quest for self-identity. But Isherwood does not know what identity to give to his persona or, indeed, with whom to identify; yet the desire to do so is strong. In his subsequent novels like *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, *Goodbye to Berlin*, *Prater Violet* and *Down There on a Visit* Isherwood solves the problem of authentic portrayal by placing himself directly into the text, by identifying himself with the narrator protagonist — a device which would allow him to deal with the self as both subject and object and enable him to turn inward in order to confront outward reality more objectively.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE CIVIL MONSTER

### *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*

I had arrived in Berlin with a look out for civil monsters. And since my imagination had very little contact with reality, I soon persuaded myself that I had found several.

— Christopher Isherwood

Since the publication of *The Memorial* in 1932 Christopher Isherwood had written nothing worthy of his name. In March 1933 he contributed 'An Evening at the Bay' to Michael Roberts' *New Country*. Based as it was on a visit of Isherwood and Edward Upward to Freshwater Bay in the spring of 1928, the work shows the artist's penchant for placing himself directly into the text. As early as 1931, during his stay on Reugen Island with Walter, later joined by Spender and Auden, Isherwood started to think, as he wrote to Roger Berford, about 'a book of stories and novels about Berlin' (quoted in Finney: 1979,85). The book was to be called *The Berlin Stories* or *The Lost*, originally thought in German to be *Die Verlorenen*. Berlin had, for Isherwood, a peculiar fascination, and his trip to Germany on March 13, 1929 structured the artist's literary career during the thirties.

Isherwood spent his years in Berlin mostly by attending communist meetings and translating several reports on the communist organization. He used to come across Nazi monstrosity under the leadership of Hitler. A rebel by birth, Isherwood ultimately hit back. He sided with the communists and even wished to become a member of the Communist Party: 'It's the next nearest thing to being a Communist' (Isherwood: 1993,108). But Isherwood never became a communist, a Marxist either. An artist as he was, he abhorred political chauvinism, and much like T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, shows his acute awareness of the 'modern inferno' that Hitler's Germany was.

While in Berlin, Isherwood kept a detailed diary which would later supply him with most of the material to create the period and ambience of the Berlin

novels. In the preface to *The Berlin Stories* he writes : 'From 1929 to 1933, I lived continually in Berlin .... Already, during that time, I had made up my mind that I would one day write about the people I'd met and the experiences I was having' (v). Evidently, the external events in which Isherwood got involved and the individuals he met in Berlin structured Isherwood's life and literary career as well. In May 1930 he came in contact with a bisexual, Walter, who would appear as Otto Nowak in the Berlin novels. A few weeks later Isherwood moved to a neighbouring slum of middle class Berlin. Here he came across Jean Ross, Gisa Soloweitschik and Wilfred Israel who would later appear in *Goodbye to Berlin* as Sally Bowles, Natalia Landauer and Bernhard Landauer. Again, sometime early in 1931 Isherwood came across Gerald Hamilton, a journalist, portrayed in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* as Arthur Norris. But the most significant event that occurred in Isherwood's life during these years was his meeting with Heinz, a seventeen-year-old German. Isherwood lived with Heinz as his homosexual partner until Heinz's arrest and imprisonment in 1937. The relationship played an important part in the artist's quest for identity, for asserting independence of an adolescent from his familial or parental ties. However, Isherwood turned to these persons repeatedly to establish a sense of self and to refine his artistry. As he had in *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial*, in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* Isherwood presents himself and his concerns, but here with added investigatory elements which deepen the meaning of experience and purpose. In the Berlin books, the artist is found to be more introspective. He looks more broadly at the outward world in order to look inward more deeply, which catalyzed the artist's process of self-quest and of the ethics of salvation.

*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, published on August 1934, is a pruned product from the heavily plotted novel, *The Berlin Stories*, later called *The Lost* but it never materialised. Indeed, both the Berlin books were derived from *The Lost*, as both of them were intended by the author to portray those who have lost their way — that German mass who were now marked down as Hitler's victims and those whom respectable society regards as moral outcasts. G.S. Fraser in *The Modern Writer and His World* writes : 'The deep theme of both books is the decay of a civilization, the decay of tradition and its tragic or stultifying, or sometimes absurd and ridiculous effects on individual human lives' (1961,91).

*Mr. Norris Changes Trains* is concerned with the problem of deception and political hypocrisy. The title of the book was intended by the novelist to mean not only that Mr. Norris keeps changing trains — that is to say, keeps changing countries in a hurry to escape his creditors and the police — but also that he keeps changing allies and political colours. Alan Wilde observes: 'Mr. Norris's drama and those of all the characters in the book are played out against a larger political and social background — specifically, the coming to power of the Nazi Party in the chaotic Germany of the 1930's'<sup>7</sup> (1971, 60). In short, the secretive Mr. Norris, with his wig and equivocal habits of speech, is the most complete example of the tissue of lies, evasion and deceits which also characterised the sexual and political underworld of Berlin in the novel.

The novel has at the heart of its story Mr. Arthur Norris whom William Bradshaw, the narrator, once meets in a train to Berlin. Arthur's behaviour towards the passport officers rouses Bradshaw's suspicion, yet he cannot imagine Arthur to be a real rogue. Then after his arrival in Berlin Bradshaw goes to Arthur Norris and is at once puzzled by the two doors of the house — one, with a nameplate 'Arthur Norris, Private' and the other 'Arthur Norris, Export and Import'. Bradshaw's suspicion mounts when he finds a German young man, Mr. Norris's secretary, Schmidt, to appear at the 'Export-Import' door and after a short while, to reappear at the other. The narrator senses some mystery in the behaviour of both the employer and the employee who play regular hide and seek to dodge a creditor who finally goes away threatening Mr. Norris. He also partakes of the masochistic pleasures offered by stern young ladies in leather boots and accepts other people's perversions without qualms. Like Isherwood's friend, Hamilton, Norris is an epicurean, a leaden butterfly tasting the nectar of flowers across the world. One day Bradshaw is implored by Norris to go to the Swiss Sports Resort accompanied by Baron Von Pregnitz, alias Kunc, to be introduced to Mr. Van Hoorn. At the Swiss Sports Resort he tries to know the identity of Margot, a business tycoon of France. Suddenly a telegram comes to William from the communist Ludwig Bayer, asking him to return to Berlin. Bradshaw rushes back to Berlin immediately and meets Bayer, who tells him that Norris is a foreign spy and Van Hoorn is none but Margot. He also manages to know that Arthur Norris collects information about the communists by posing to be a sympathizer

to them and sells it to the agents of the French Secret Service. However, Mr. Norris, who ultimately turns out to be a political fraud, a spy and is expelled from Germany by the political police, is the medium through whom Bradshaw has his first acquaintance with Berlin life.

The whole story of Mr. Norris, shrouded as it is in mystery and suspicion, has resemblance with a detective or a mystery novel. Bradshaw's first impression of Arthur in the train is 'of a schoolboy surprised in the act of breaking laws' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 1). There is an air of mystery when the narrator comes across two nameplates in Arthur's drawing-room — 'Arthur Norris, Private' and 'Arthur Norris, Export-Import.' Moreover, Arthur's wig to which Bradshaw's eyes repeatedly stray and equivocal habits of speeches become the major expression of the attempt to disguise reality with contrived appearance. Indeed, everything about Arthur, including the elaborate ritual of the dressing table, suggests that he is not what he seems to be. Alan Wilde remarks: 'Both the narrative technique and characterization of the book are at least superficially analogous to those of the mystery novel' (1971, 56). But in a mystery novel the reader's interest centres round some mysterious incident and he tries to understand who has done it. In *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* the interest is centred round the protagonist. Wilde himself offers argument in the following words: 'For the "who-done-it" of the detective novel, Mr. Norris substitutes the "What-is-he" of the modern roman d' aventure. The question is most insistent with respect to the titular hero of the book himself' (1971, 56-57).

*Mr. Norris Changes Trains* has got historical value and political significance not because of the book's political commitment but because of the novelist's brilliant record of the social decay and political hypocrisy that prevailed in Berlin during the last days of the Weimar Republic. The scene of the bootfetish house, with its obnoxious portrait of the homosexual Pregnitz reclining 'in the embrace of a powerful youth' and Mr. Norris enjoying his debasement before a painted prostitute underlines this decay. Indeed, Isherwood, a foreigner in a doomed capital, brilliantly records as he saw everywhere civilization crumbling, everywhere war more immanent: 'Berlin was in a state of civil war. Hate exploded suddenly, without warning, out of nowhere...' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 107).

Apart from this, Mr. Norris's self-centred hedonism parallels the attitudes of the Berlin population. His sexual masochism resembles the political debasement of the contemporary Berlin demagogues. Arthur's distortion of language to conceal the truth from Bradshaw and everyone else is but a literary analogue of the debasement of linguistic meaning by the politicians and the press as the political confrontation between the Right and the Left heightens. Isherwood uses Norris's long absence from the book to bring the political situation to the forefront of the narrative. There are frequent authorial interjections describing the political scene in Chapter XI and XVI. Almost all the characters become embroiled in the political maelstrom. We are not, however, given a lot of abstract argument about how Hitler rose to power or about the moral implications of Nazism, but we can perceive Isherwood's insight into political themes. What the novelist exactly does in portraying the contemporary political situation is finely observed by Hena Maes-Jelinek: 'Isherwood does not discuss the consequences of the event but shows how it affects people' (quoted in Piazza: 1978, 90).

In *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, as in the earlier novels, Isherwood is preoccupied with the self and its relation to the world: Here he sets to write a 'dynamic portrait' and uses the term for Mr. Norris as he sought to describe the novel as one whose interest depends on the gradual revealing of a character rather than an action, crisis and confrontation. What the action of such a novel does is to remove layer after layer of the 'skin' of outer appearance — thus taking the reader inward from his first superficial impressions and too hastily formed judgements until he is face to face, at last, with the 'real' individual. Isherwood wanted to keep the reader's attention concentrated on Norris, which is why the narrator, the 'I' of the story, William Bradshaw (a name derived from Isherwood's own, Christopher William Isherwood Bradshaw) had to be as unobtrusive as possible. The narrative method encourages the reader thoroughly to put himself in the narrator's shoes, to share his experiences, to identify with him in all his reactions. As the novel progresses, it is William Bradshaw, even more than the reader, who becomes aware of the double dealing of Arthur Norris. The narrative method of the story thus enables the narrator also to know his own self in the process of exploring that of Mr. Norris.

In the earlier novels, *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* both Philip and Eric made themselves approachable heroes to reorder their private lives. But they were not, like William in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, gifted with the investigative approach. Bradshaw does not merely tell us how he feels, he questions whether his feelings, perceptions or judgements are correct or valid; and if not, why not. Arthur Norris's story is simply an occasion for the reader to understand William Bradshaw: why he is attracted to Arthur, what he learns, what his ultimate motivation is etc. And as the story advances, some advance is also noticeable in the character of the narrator: William undergoes a form of education out of his experiences of the world he faces and of the individuals he meets *en route*. What Alan Wilde remarks, speaking of the use of 'I' narrator in Isherwood's fiction, is relevant here: 'All of Isherwood's first-person novels, whatever their ostensible subjects, concern the education of the narrators' (1971, 63). The William Bradshaw who emerges at the end of Arthur Norris's story is but a continuation of the Christopher Isherwood himself who sets off at the end of *Lions and Shadows* for Berlin.

On the surface, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* is concerned with the adventures of a small-time con man in pre-Nazi Germany. Beneath the surface can be discerned the story the narrator wishes to tell, of himself, a story directly related to Isherwood, the man. At the novel's outset, as soon as William meets Arthur and sees his fear at having his passport checked, he says, 'I felt more than ever protective towards him at that moment', and with hindsight he understands how 'this affectionate protectiveness, which he so easily and dangerously inspired in me, was to colour all our future dealings' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 10). A year later William receives Arthur's letter explaining his unannounced departure from Germany and admits that 'My feelings for Arthur had been largely possessive' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 100). Throughout the whole course of the novel's action William maintains this 'protective' and 'possessive' attitude towards the 'amazing old crook', who conceals his criminal activities from the world adopting a mask of snobbery and aestheticism.

However, in spite of his duplicity and deception we are compelled to suspend our moral judgement because the transparency of his intended

deception lends him a pervasive charm. Nor is William Bradshaw ever found to carry through any confrontation with Arthur. The narrator thus mentions: 'Stage by stage I was building up a romantic background for Arthur.... I was fond of Arthur with an affection strengthened by obstinacy' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 44). Modelled on the character of Isherwood's friend, Gerald Hamilton, an epicurean, Arthur Norris is at any rate an unusual combination of charm and wit balanced by a complete absence of moral principles. His morning toilet, his habit of travelling first class, of eating at the best restaurants, of happily pawning the sitting-room carpet to finance his birthday party — all add up to the picture of a lovable eccentric — someone who deserves one's sympathy and understanding. In fact, what Hamilton said of himself that he was not 'everybody's cup of tea but a certain person's liquor' (quoted in Finney : 1979, 112) is true of Arthur Norris also.

The more one examines Norris's explanations of his conduct, the more one realises how gullible William Bradshaw is. On every occasion the narrator is outwitted by Norris. He unconsciously assists Arthur in his elaborate game of deception by turning him into a romantic criminal for the benefit of the 'old crook'. Schmidt, Arthur's secretary, assists his master in the crimes he perpetrates and bears all the odium attached to such immoral activities as blackmail and treachery. But the question that invariably arises is why does the narrator indulge in Arthur's crimes and fails to combat the sinister aspects of the rogue so blatantly apparent in his alter ego, Schmidt. David Thomas has suggested that William Bradshaw is a successor to Eric Vernon, another Truly Weak Man who 'attempts to purge himself of neurotic fears ... by the familiar Baudelairian descent into the nether world — the society of criminals, sexual eccentrics and revolutionary politics' (quoted in Finney : 1979, 114). Although Isherwood nowhere tells us anything about William Bradshaw's past, it is our assumption, however tacit, that he was a victim of puritanical English social and moral norms and was thus compelled to suspend all judgement.

John Whitehead has, however, offered a convincing interpretation of William Bradshaw's complicity with Mr. Norris. He points out that there prevailed 'a filial relationship between the narrator and Mr. Norris, who becomes for him

"a disreputable Father-figure", reminiscent of the relations connecting Hall to Falstaff (quoted in Finney : 1979, 114). William's relationship with Arthur allows the author, as in *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial*, to explore whether or not a young person can have an independent life, yet still be close to and on good terms with a parent-figure. William sees Arthur as a Father-figure and feels an affectionate protectiveness towards him. Arthur also puts the matter most keenly, pointing out to William that 'After all I'm old enough to be your father' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 157). In many ways, therefore, the father-son relationship is inverted. William is also found to act as a steadying influence on the older man and is able to suggest how Arthur can overcome his troubles. This dimension of their relationship suggests the narrator's confidence in his own abilities.

*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, among other things, portrays not only the adolescent's task of modifying relationships with parents but explores, unlike the earlier books, the limits of influence the individual possesses. The reader gains an understanding of William as one who tries to sway the objective world around him. Philip Lindsay in *All the Conspirators* could only rant and rave; Eric Vernon in *The Memorial* could only ask, 'why?' But William Bradshaw in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* displays a stronger sense of the self in viewing the world realistically rather than idealistically and in influencing the people he meets. We learn that William helps Arthur dress in the morning, that he feels an 'affectionate protectiveness' towards him and that he helps Norris, on several occasions, to tide over his difficulties. The narrator, therefore, develops a conviction in his ability to influence the life of others. Indeed, an awareness of who he is and how he acts is probably the most significant difference between Isherwood's protagonist in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and those in the earlier fictions.

William Bradshaw, the narrator of the story, who seems from the beginning a detached spectator of a game, apprehends terrible public consequences of Mr. Norris's private crimes. Alan Wilde, in this connection, observes that 'For a poet like Spender, the problem is to show what happens to the private self in the light of the public one; for Isherwood, as we have seen, it is to indicate the

public consequences of private acts' (1971,60). Evidently, then, Mr. Norris's whole drama of deception and moral *laissez faire* brings into limelight the whole panorama of political chaos and social and moral decay that engulfed the Berliners in the 1930's Germany. Any reader is at once struck by the profusion of 'animal' images in the book, say, lions, tigers, cats, cobras etc. When the novel opens, Mr. Norris and William are found to meet at Zoo station, and it ends with Mr. Norris's secretary, Schmidt, who is referred to as 'Reptile'. The 'animal' images only establish the truth of what lies beneath the outward civilized surface of Berlin life where the pimp Otto, the journalist Helen Pratt, Schmidt and even Mr. Norris are, in their respective amoral paths, struggling incessantly, to be among the fittest to survive. The whole of the novel is, in fine, a moral study of the nature and consequences of amorality that prevailed all over Berlin during Hitler's rise to power.

Only the communists, as Isherwood portrays them in the novel, particularly, Ludwig Bayer, show some signs of virtue and moral gesture. One day Bradshaw attends a party meeting. He is struck by the strength and restrained passion of the participants : what struck him 'most was the fixed attention of the upturned rows of faces; faces of the Berlin working class...' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 59-60). The crowd shows, by implication, an attractive enthusiasm for a commitment or cause to the humanity at large. The character of Ludwig Bayer, dedicated and astute as he is, is an embodiment of tolerance and virtue. When he exposes Norris's duplicity to William — 'Mind, I have not said against him as a man; the private life is not our concern.' — Bayer suggests the dominant ethical assumption, if there is at all any in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*. Bayer's 'animal eyes' and constant smile, his outmanoeuvring of Arthur Norris and his final rescue of Bradshaw from Norris's complicity only establish the fact that his actions are performed in the service of a cause which puts him in a class apart from others.

The moral flaws, however, which Bradshaw is rather late to detect in Norris reveals to the readers the fact that Norris is the 'civil monster' whom Isherwood was trying to find out in Berlin. Isherwood writes in '*Mr. Norris and I*' that 'I arrived in Berlin on the lookout for civil monsters. And since my imagination had very little contact with reality, I soon persuaded myself that I had found several'

(1966, 86). The communist leader Bayer discloses to Bradshaw the abominable features of Mr. Norris's character: 'Nevertheless it is true. I can prove it if you wish. Norris has been paid to keep an eye on us, to give information about our plans and movement' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 158). Norris, who uses Kuno in political spying and in gratifying his sexual perversions, is according to Alan Wilde, 'the slow unfolding of the psychology of a monster, egoistic, conscienceless, totally unaware of the evil he is doing' (1971, 59). The treachery to Bradshaw, to Baron Von Pregnitz and to the Communist Party, which is disclosed in the aftermath of the 'Swiss Project', provides the turning point in the reader's and in William's understanding of Arthur Norris. Isherwood writes: 'And if in my letters to England, I sometimes referred to him as "a most amazing old crook", I only meant by this that I wanted to imagine him as a glorified being: audacious and self-reliant, reckless and calm. All of which, in reality, he only too painfully and obviously wasn't' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 44).

What we perceive from the remark is a young man who wants to see things as larger than life and wants to present himself as worldly with exciting connections. These are in fact not the wishes of the narrator; they are the concerns of Isherwood's life as well. As long as William is looked upon by Norris as a parental figure, he is incapable of sufficient distance from the latter. Not until Bayer, the communist, reveals the extent of his duplicity does the narrator achieve sufficient distance from him to see him in true colours. During his interview with Bayer he is compelled to realize his gullibility in his past dealing with Norris. When he discovers that Norris has used him as a decoy with Baron, he indicates that his anger with Baron is with himself 'for being such an idiot'. After this confession he is at best purged of his romantic fantasies about the criminal world to which he was so neurotically drawn at the beginning of the novel. Cyril Connolly has rightly observed that 'Bradshaw does undergo a form of education in the course of the book by the end of which he has grown up' (quoted in Finney: 1979, 114).

Isherwood's use of the first-person narrator in the books beginning with *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and ending in *A Meeting by the River*, provides the narrator with a powerful means of self-discovery. The narrator's perceptions and feelings during the whole course of the novel serve as a process of learning.

In *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* William Bradshaw's observations serve to tell us how William feels and thus allow us to discern a narrator who is more aware of his self than any other narrator Isherwood has ever presented:

I felt more than ever protective towards him at the moment (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 10).

I was as hurt as a spinster who has been deserted by her cat (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 100).

I felt myself harden towards him again (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 204).

These feelings of the narrator form a kind of education which charts a possible growth in the character of William. What he obtains comes as a result of what he learns about Norris from the latter's part in the 'Swiss' affair. Although William Bradshaw maintained characteristic detachment from Norris and despite his failure in carrying through any confrontation with the 'amazing old crook', he does give evidence of self-development. Much earlier in the novel, when William came across a communist rally where Norris delivered a lecture with rhetorical gestures, he felt: 'One day, perhaps, I shall be with it, but never of it' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 60). This perception, whether it indicates Isherwood's own feeling or not, well suggests the narrator's growth in self-awareness, and as the novel suggests, and as the narrator looks back on his adventure, it is clear that he is never 'of it'. Indeed, the William Bradshaw, who at the end expresses his moralistic distaste at Arthur's duplicity and shows aloofness, is not the same person whom we met at the outset of the book. This reversal surely marks a step in the artist's search for identity and for stabilising it in the midst of an unstable world.

*Mr Norris Changes Trains* is an overt expression of Isherwood's homosexual nature. It is freer and more direct presentation of the author's sexual identity and preference than any of his previous novels. Although the narrator, William Bradshaw, maintains aloofness from Norris's excesses of sex; his sexual involvement is never glossed over. Instead of protesting against Baron's proposal of homosexuality, he agrees to meet him in the Baron's personal 'flat'. Indeed, William's apparent indifference to sex in the midst of a salacious environment only implies an obvious fascination for it. There is no reticence in portraying the sexual relationships, and the sexual scenes are more straightforwardly integrated into the text than they are in the earlier books. In *All*

*the Conspirators*, Philip's homosexuality is strained and self-conscious. Eric Vernon in *The Memorial* experiences repressed homosexuality, which is the symptom of his psychological disorder. But in the Berlin novels, beginning with *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, Isherwood openly proclaims his homosexuality and seeks to find out not only his sexual identity but explores whether a homosexual artist can find his place in the society. Isherwood, therefore, in his love for Heinz, is creating a new life, establishing himself on his own terms and realising his own desires, no longer concealing his homosexuality but committing himself, in word and deed, to this new identity.

In fine, the impression that we form of Christopher Isherwood in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* in the light of his awareness of Arthur Norris along with contemporary politics of Berlin and of his own sexual identity is further confirmed in the companion novel, *Goodbye to Berlin*. Here Isherwood's own circumstances and the political events of Germany, however, made him more self-reflective and serious. He moves away from his concerns with self and sex to wrestle with his place in the world as he works through the adolescent's task of viewing the world realistically rather than idealistically, of seeing people around him in true colours rather than romantically. Indeed, in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* one discerns a sense of adventure, intrigue and wonderment; but in *Goodbye to Berlin* one encounters a deeper sense of life, endurance and understanding, envisaging a fuller growth on the part of the artist.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## THE LOST *Goodbye to Berlin*

All these people are ultimately doomed. This evening is the dress-rehearsal of a disaster. It is like the last night of an epoch.

— Christopher Isherwood.

*Goodbye to Berlin* is one of Isherwood's most popular novels. It was published in 1939. During the four years that intervened between *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and the present one Isherwood wrote three verse plays, all in collaboration with W.H. Auden and also completed the first version of his autobiography, *Lions and Shadows* (1938). The first of the dramatic trilogy *The Enemies of a Bishop*, retitled later by Rupert Donne as *The Dog Beneath the Skin* was, however, published in 1935. By the close of 1936 Isherwood turned again to a new novel, *Paul Is Alone*. Like *The Lost*, the novel records Isherwood's experiences with such people as are ultimately 'doomed'. The character of Paul is modelled on Arthur Norris and represents one of Berlin's 'lost'. The work was, of course, ultimately abandoned due to its huge structure, lacking in coherence.

Isherwood's verse plays, which included, along with *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, *The Ascent of F<sub>6</sub>* (1937) and *On the Frontier* (1938) are, in general, experimentations on the German Expressionist line and display the author's awareness of contemporary politics. Isherwood worked only on the plotting and part of the prose of the plays, while Auden contributed to their versifications. However, whatever share he had in their final accomplishments, the plays, perhaps more than the fictions, established Isherwood as one of the period's representative figures. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* and *On the Frontier* are noted for their close scrutiny of the complexities of human behaviour and for their accurate portrayal of the dichotomy between the forces and manifestations of the Establishment on the one side and the all-embracing concept of love on the other. *The Ascent of F<sub>6</sub>* is by far the best of the trilogy. Based on its hero's, Ransom's, struggle for reaching the hitherto

unscaled peak of  $F_6$ , the story becomes for Isherwood the symbol of success under the spur of a domineering mother. The play affords to Isherwood 'the opportunity to accomplish what the protagonists of the novels successively fail to do,' says Alan Wilde, 'to engage themselves in and become part of some corporate spirit larger than the narrow confines of the self' (1971, 79).

Soon after completing three verse plays Isherwood turned to work on *Lions and Shadows* which was started as early as 1925 but not published till 1938. The title of the book is taken from C.E. Montaigne's *Fiery Particles* ('arrant lovers of living, mighty hunter of lions and shadows'); its subtitle, 'An Education in the Twenties' has implication that the book is concerned, above all, with the various stages in the life-long education — the education of an artist. The fact is that throughout his literary career Isherwood was engaged in a search for identity, as reflected in his novels, and of which *Lions and Shadows* is but another example. The book speaks of the rage of a young artist against the elders of his family and of the problems of a would-be artist. It depicts how the protagonist acts and encounters a series of people and places in the 1920's and what he learns and overcomes in the course of his education in order to become an artist. A faithful record as it is of his thoughts and feelings which provide its narrative interest, *Lions and Shadows* is indeed a study in growth of the novelist — his gradual maturation into a self-conscious individual.

*Lions and Shadows* has, of course, evoked controversy among the readers as to whether it is an autobiography or a novel. In the 'Preface. Isherwood himself says that the book is not 'in the ordinary journalistic sense of the word, an autobiography', and that one should 'read it as a novel'. Again, a few readers are fond of calling it a memoir. But in a memoir the narrator - character remains in the background, whereas in an autobiography he would be in the forefront. It is in this sense that *Lions and Shadows* may be studied as an autobiography. Isherwood is always at the forefront of his book in narrating his actions and experiences which enabled him, in course of his literary career, to formulate the fundamentals of his art and to flesh out his personality. Isherwood himself, however, seemed to find little difference between autobiography and fiction. He always looked upon his novels as a kind of fictional biography, just as autobiography is always fiction. In *Kathleen*

and Frank he admits that his novels are a kind of fictional biography. However, what is significant about *Lions and Shadows* is not the extent to which it is fact or fiction, but the artist's penchant for self-discovery, which provides the essential matrix of his fictions and for which his autobiography occupies an important position in the corpus of his literary writings.

The publication of *Goodbye to Berlin* soon after *Lions and Shadows* is significant in terms of the artist's growth and of the overall development of the namesake narrator. In his study of Isherwood's novels Alan Wilde observes: 'Self-analysis is what, on one level, at least *Lions and Shadows* is, and it is also what Christopher achieves as a result of his education' (1971, 25). This 'self-analysis' as the artist's sole objective is established as the book's *raison d'être* and is, at the same time, enabled him to present himself in name and deed in *Goodbye to Berlin*.

Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* carries on the general tastes and tendencies of the 1930's especially those associated with W.H. Auden. Auden and the whole lot, say, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis and others, being products of the middle-class training and expensive education against which they revolted, were caught between two worlds : the self and the world. They desired, both in letter and spirit, to reconcile the two and thereby to merge themselves with the rest of humanity. Virginia Woolf, in her essay 'The Leaning Tower', offers an illuminating study of the general tendency of the writers of the thirties. She writes : 'When everything is rocking round one, the only person who remains comparatively stable is oneself'.... So they wrote about themselves'(1967, 177). Referring to the writers of the thirties as 'Tower dwellers' Mrs. Woolf further stresses that they were great egotists and the strength of their most valuable works lay surely in their ceaseless exploration and establishment of the 'comparatively stable' self. Furthermore, when Stephen Spender labelled his friends as 'The Divided Generation', he referred only to his contemporary writers who were mostly caught between 'two worlds at war'. We have also Auden's and Day Lewis's poems of internal struggle and doubt, Isherwood's thoroughly discontented protagonist in *Lions and Shadows* — all substantiate Mrs. Woolf's observation that these writers made some strenuous attempts to achieve the ideal of commitment — 'to be whole, to be

human ... to be down on the ground with the mass of human kind' (1967, 176).

This is what Isherwood exactly does in *Goodbye to Berlin* : to assert his self in a hostile world and to conjugate it with the others. From now on, preoccupation with the self is, for the artist, not merely narcissistic but a process of dynamic exploration, whether one can establish independence while keeping commerce with the vast wave of humanity. Isherwood found that Germany's political situation was gradually deteriorating. He had been forced to live among the poor and the 'lost' — the individuals whom respectable society abandons in horror and contempt. A number of his friends were harassed by the German police. Heinz, a seventeen-year-old German boy who lived with Isherwood as his homosexual partner for a pretty number of years, was arrested for draft evasion. Heinz was convicted of reinforced onanism with Isherwood. In fact, Isherwood's worry about Heinz and the contemporary political events of Germany led to the change in the artist's concern with self. This change finds its expression in the book's leading theme, making the narrator much more pensive, serious and self-reflective than that of *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and suggests a progression in the narrator's psychological development. Isherwood now feels a growing ease in his relation to those people and forces who were once deemed to be hostile to him. Now he learns how to relate and connect with them.

The novel consists of four short sections, 'Sally Bowles', 'On Reugen Island', 'The Nowaks' and 'The Landauers', and two 'Berlin Diaries' — one at the beginning and the other at the end. All the four of the six sections had been published earlier and had actually been planned as part of the unweildy novel, from which *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* had been extracted, originally to be called *The Lost*. In an interview with Brian Finney Isherwood explained that 'The Lost would have been like Balzac's *Splendeurs et Miseres des Cortisanes* — very complicated, all sorts of absurd contrivances to bring it all together, hundreds of characters... And so what I did was I took up all the broken bits and put them into *Goodbye to Berlin* just as slivers of something' (quoted in Finney : 1979, 143). All six sections are neatly organized and acquire a coherence and meaning when fitted into each other. They follow in chronological

order: the first section is dated 'Autumn 1930', while the final section is subtitled 'Winter 1932-33'. The other four sections span the intervening period — 'Sally Bowles' covers October 1930 to Autumn 1931; 'On Reugen Island' Summer 1931; 'The Nowaks' Winter 1931-2; and 'The Landauers' flashing back to October 1930 and forward to May 1933, and the final diary, ending as it does, in May 1933. In all sections, as in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, the narrator — the characterized 'I' — is Christopher Isherwood himself. This characterized 'I', whom Isherwood calls 'ventriloquist's dummy', appears under different names in different stories. He is 'William Bradshaw' in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 'Herr Issyvoo' in Berlin diary, 'Chris' in 'Sally Bowles' 'Herr Christoph' in 'The Nowaks' and simply 'Mr. Isherwood' in 'The Landauers'.

Isherwood's first story of the novel, 'Sally Bowles', represents sexual perversion of the Berlin society, which invariably leads to disease and death. Dealing with 'the romance of prostitution racket' the episode exposes the pathos in the life of one of the Berlin's 'lost'. Sally, like Arthur, is oblivious of the debacle around her. But she is at once innocent and naughty, sophisticated and naive, and her capacity for make-up and for using people to her end is what Arthur Norris badly lacked. Originally an English expatriate who lives for fast money and success as a cabaret entertainer, Sally adopts a German name and becomes a call-girl. She tries to shock the uninvolved narrator, Christopher, with her vulgarity and nasty approach. Every love affair, as Isherwood's story unfolds, in which Sally is involved, either with Klaus or with Clive, earns her a huge sum of instant money. But Sally's economy suffers all the time since that she has to incur a lot for abortion; her love affair ends with abortion. However, what is redeeming in Sally is her childishness and innocence — which enables her to begin afresh after each failure.

The nasty side of Sally's character might rouse the reader's moral indignation. But the reader, as much as Christopher, cannot help pitying Sally when she holds cushion in her arms and imagines it to be her baby who was never born: 'I imagin'd how it'd grow up and how I'd work for it and how, after I'd put it to bed at nights, I'd go out and make love to filthy old men to get money for its food and clothes' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 73). The story is both an attempt to satirise 'the romance of prostitution racket' and yet, to show that even the greatest

disaster leaves a person like Sally essentially unchanged. Brian Finney comments : 'The two aims tend to conflict as the satire is undercut by Sally's unflagging powers of recovery after each successive setback' (1979,149). Sally is made to pay more heavily for her third attempt of love with one George P. Sanders who lifts a large sum of money from her bag before leaving her. At the end, again, Sally is duped by a sixteen-year-old con man who calls himself Paul Rakowski, pretending to be a European artist, promises her a leading role in a new movie but leaves her in the lurch when she wants money from him. In fact, 'Sally's continuing emotional naivety' says Brian Finney, 'runs counter to the hard financial lessons she has been taught. Her abortion which *she* should have linked her to the images of disease and death that attach themselves to the remaining representatives of a dying society leaves her virtually untouched, the most ephemeral member of the lost' (1979,149).

The next episode 'On Reugen Island' uses the metaphor of mental illness and disease, and is a critical statement about the decadent German society at large. It is a pastoral interlude which takes place away from Berlin. The story presents a Nazi surgeon Peter Wilkinson and a sexual sponger of German origin, Otto Nowak. Both are homosexuals. Peter bought Otto in order to cure his own psychological disorder and neurosis, and in doing so he joined that lot of English foreigners who flocked to Germany, particularly to the decadent Berlin for the purposes of male prostitution. Peter is a hypersensitive Englishman, about Christopher's age, who ultimately fails to cope with the shallow but violently sensual Otto. On the other hand, Otto Nowak, who has the health and vitality of an animal, cures others with his animal strength. But like an animal he is selfish too, seeking his sustenance and pleasure with a complete indifference to those around him. 'A sexual sponger' says Alan Wilde, 'indiscriminately prostituting himself to men and women, Otto is far less capable than Sally of sustaining a personal relation' (1971, 70). But despite his animal vitality Otto is psychologically a derelict. Poverty and unemployment have turned him into a life-long actor who can believe in nothing beyond the scene in which he is participating. More often than not he feels alienated from the people around him and from himself as well : 'Nobody understands me here. Nobody is good to me. They all hate me really. They wish I was dead' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 144).

The fate of Otto, unfortunate and pitiful as it is, is the terrible consequence of the sexual exploitation of the Nazis. At a broader perspective, Otto is a wretched victim of the decadent Berlin society beset by the worst evils of Fascism during Hitler's rise to power. He represents, as Brian Finney observes, 'how closely Fascism resembles English Imperialism. Both are products of repression and disease, and both seek to cure an illness in others that in fact underlies their own love of power' (1979,150).

'On Reugen Island' is followed by 'The Nowaks'. The third section of Isherwood's novel explores the economic origins of the sickness that afflicts Otto and her mother, Frau Nowak, who has contracted tuberculosis. They live in a slum where poverty invariably begets fatal diseases like tuberculosis. Christopher now freely mixes with them and with all those who are abandoned by the respectable society of Berlin. As he was out of cash, he rents a bed in an already crowded bedroom. He is at once horrified to see the Sanatorium where the overworked, underfed Frau Nowak, Otto's mother, now consumptive, was sent by the Board of Health. Indeed, the history of the Nowak family as well as the scene of the Sanatorium records the deep sense of failure of the existing social system to accommodate the poor and the sick. Frau Nowak, a charwoman, slaving through the day for livelihood for her family, lives in a condemned apartment where she coughs and often spits blood. She is doomed, therefore, to tramp the streets and catch tuberculosis. The description of the condemned apartment, with its tight quarters, its squalor and destitution, reveals more forcefully than any sociological extrapolation of Isherwood, the inner poverty of the Nowaks and of the majority of the Berliners during the final years of the Weimar Republic.

Isherwood does not spare even the doctors who disagree and often delay in meting out proper treatment to the patients. No wonder that the Sanatorium with all its provision of well ventilated rooms, balcony, diet and comfortable surroundings could not permanently cure the poor patients whose disease relapsed as soon as they were discharged and went back to their life of drudgery: 'Frau Nowak told us that Muttschen had been three times in this Sanatorium already. Each time she has been discharged as cured, but within nine months

or a year, she would have a relapse and have to be sent back again' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 168). From the deepest layer of his nature, Isherwood condemns the social system which cannot provide any permanent cure to these patients. As Frau Nowak dies, the whole family falls apart : Otto comes down to the street for his living; Lothar, his brother, disappears; Herr Nowak, their father and Greete, their sister, lapse into the most primitivistic existences. Brian Finney aptly remarks: 'Clearly his (Otto's) circumstances have turned him into one of the 'lost' whose resemblance to his dying mother makes Isherwood on at least one occasion see both of them as creatures demonically possessed' (1979, 151). The Nowak family, thus, typical of so many Berlin families, moving inevitably towards its doom, signified not only the economic crisis but also social injustice, hatred and inequality of outlook towards the poor people in Germany in the thirties.

The fifth section of the novel 'The Landauers' anatomizes the theme of alienation and paralysis — the two cancerous germs deeply embedded in Capitalism. The Landauers are a wealthy, Jewish family, owners of a huge department store. The master of the family, Bernherd Landauer, once asked Christopher to pay a visit to his apartment. The narrator's details become symbolic. On his first visit, he found that Bernherd lived in consummate solitude. Bernherd's flat had four doors to insulate him from reality. He was hermetically sealed from the world: inside, Christopher can hear nothing from outside. Bernherd's oriental robes further stress his convoluted seclusion. Never did Bernherd speak directly; instead, he insinuated through stories and oblique references which shrouded him in mystery. It is significant that the connection between character and environment is nowhere more pronounced than in this episode. Bernherd's is perhaps the most complete statement of the theme of the 'lost'. He once admitted to Christopher that he was 'getting out of touch with existence' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 222). He cannot act; he seems to be already dead. He is wholly possessed by some inertia of the Prufrockian kind. When Christopher demurs 'What about tomorrow?', Bernherd replies, 'Tomorrow is too late' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 224). Like his mother who died of cancer, Bernherd's denial of life leads him virtually to commit suicide.

Bernherd is doubly damned, as a capitalist and as a Jew. In the latter

capacity, he is representative of his fellow Jews who also met a similar fate. Needless to mention, ubiquitous is the threat of a political disaster in all four sections of *Goodbye to Berlin*. During the thirties, the whole of Germany was engulfed by political upheaval, resulting in Jew-hunting by the Nazis. Berlin was at this time passing through a critical phase of its history, and a general feeling of disaster was prevalent everywhere. When the Nazis came to power, they were out to exterminate the Jews. One of the factors that enabled them to continue their inhuman treatment was the silence of the conscience of Europe. Isherwood offers us a foretaste of the impending crisis through the mock-humble remarks of the polished young Jew, Bernherd. When Bernherd asked Isherwood 'Are you happy here?', he replied, 'Very happy'. Bernherd then responded with a sarcastic remark: 'That is wonderful. I think ... most wonderful. A spirit possessed of such vitality that it can be happy even in Berlin' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 194). When Christopher was unexpectedly taken to a garden-party at Bernherd's cottage, he was thinking at the end of the party that 'all these people are ultimately doomed. This evening is the dress rehearsal of a disaster. It is like the last night of an epoch' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 219). This uneasy feeling and premonition of a general disaster pervaded the whole of Germany during Hitler's regime and siphoned off the very lifeblood of the common Berliners. They are destined to live a life-in-death situation. Piazza's observation seems to be worth quoting in this connection: 'The last story, "The Landauers", placed before the final diary, with chilling horror, brings the stories to the same conclusion as that of Joyce's "Dubliners": Paralysis' (1978,96).

The two Berlin diaries — one at the beginning, dated Autumn 1930, and the other at the close, dated Winter 1932-3, deserve special notice, both thematically and structurally. The opening diary, naive and light-hearted as it is, presents a state of glee involving Frl. Schroeder, Isherwood's landlady, Frl. Mayr, a tenant and Frl. Glanterneck, a Galician Jewess. The narrator is amused and fascinated by the zeal and zest of the Berliners to survive and to resurrect into a fresh lease of life even after the Great War that devastated the whole of Germany. In the later diary, the tone shifts, from comedy to pathos, from the narrator's curiosity to horrible incredulity. In the first diary, Christopher is found to feel happy to see the glitter of Berlin in its make. In the final diary,

Berlin appears as a doom-laden city — a city of the 'lost' : 'The sun shines, and Hitler is master of this city ... and dozens of my friends ... are in prison, possibly dead' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 255). In fact, the two diaries are set against each other in dialectical relationship which corresponds to the internal contrapuntal organization of the whole structural network of the novel. For instance, the heterosexual promiscuity of Sally Bowles contrasts with the homosexual relationship of Otto and Wilkinson on the Reugen Island. The proletarian Nowaks are contrasted with the wealthy Landauers. The contrapuntal polarities that characterize the two diaries also reflect the real polarization of attitudes to democracy during Hitler's regime in Berlin. According to Paul Piazza, 'The opening and concluding Berlin diaries are like weather maps which record the increasing velocity of the approaching storm. Both diaries are well-planned inventions, intended to mesh with the tone and temper of the stories they intersperse' (1978,98).

In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood, therefore, portrays with the objectivity of an artist, much like T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, the 'modern inferno' which was Hitler's Germany in the thirties. In each section of the novel each of the principal dynamic portraits represents one of Berlin's misfits. They might either be sexual outcasts like Sally or psychological outcasts like Peter Wilkinson, either economic misfits like Nowaks or social misfits like Landauers. Finally, the whole novel becomes a compendium of the 'doomed' and the 'lost'. Brian Finney aptly says: 'The whole <sup>of</sup> Berlin society (and not just the Capitalists and the Nazis) is corrupt, Isherwood implies' (1979,153). But what is interesting about the author-narrator is that he is not just content to portray the sham and the 'lost', but freely joins the whole lot. He does involve with the 'doomed' with a penchant for examining his self — for exploring whether it is possible for an artist to assert his individual identity while connecting with the vast wave of humanity around him. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood, in fact, drops his blinkers to the real world. He gives up what is ideal and shows it in its true colours. In 'Sally Bowles' the narrator depicts the piteous spectacle of a call-girl who is sexually exploited time and again and is finally duped. In 'The Nowaks' he shows how poverty and unemployment breed diseases like tuberculosis. At Bennherd's Tea-party Isherwood's realization that 'all these

people are ultimately doomed' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 219) and his horrifying perception in the final Berlin diary that 'whatever government is in power, they are doomed to live in this town' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 255) only reinforces Isherwood's awareness of the real rather than the ideal or wonderful, as in his earlier novel, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*. These insights not only make the namesake narrator more penetrating and self-reflective than that of the earlier book, but record the growth of his self.

We also find Isherwood connecting his life with the dirty slum denizens of the 'lost' city of Berlin. He freely mixes with Sally and makes friends with Bernherd. He stands by those who are poor, sick and are abandoned by the respectable society. This involvement elevates the novel from the level of mere political pamphleteering to the burgeoning of realization of personal selfhood and universal brotherhood. Christopher forges a link between him, the narrator or the creator and his characters. In this connection, Stephen Spender in *World Within World* writes: 'Christopher, so far from being the self-effacing spectator he depicts in his novels, was really the centre of his characters, and neither could they exist without him, nor he without them' (1977, 124). The namesake narrator is as involved in contemporary politics and connect with the 'doomed' in different sections of the novel as Isherwood was during his years in Berlin. The namesake narrator's friendships with such characters as Sally, Nowak or Bernherd provides Isherwood with the potential means of examining his self. Search for self is not, by now, for Isherwood, mere establishment of individual independence. He seeks to solidify his identity while relating his self to others. Alan Wilde thus says that 'it might be most accurate to say that his friendships, such as they are, are his means to self-understanding, just as they are, more concretely, the readers' means to understanding him' (1971,72).

In *Goodbye to Berlin* Isherwood also shows advancement in his familial ties. As time rolls on, he becomes mature in understanding the fundamental relationship between parents and children. It is interesting to note that he now feels, as he never did in his earlier novels like *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial*, a growing ease in his relation with his termagant mother, Kathleen. Christopher's relationship with Fraulein Schroeder affords perhaps the best example of this progress. Mary Scriven in *The Memorial* is drawn in a positive

light. Nevertheless, Frä. Schroeder in *Goodbye to Berlin* is by far the more sympathetic to her boarders than any in Isherwood's novels of the early period. She heartily looks after her boarders and takes care of them in all their hazards. Another mother character in the novel, Frau Nowak, is portrayed as quite hospitable to Herr Christoph. She also tries to understand Otto's problems. Again, Frau Landauer, who seems to be protective towards her daughter, Natalia, shows her liberal attitude in encouraging the tutor, Mr. Isherwood, to take Natalia to the movies. The mother figures, therefore, as presented by Isherwood, unlike the monstrous Kathleen, seem to be understanding their sons' needs and problems. This suggests Isherwood's growing ease in his familial ties with his mother. On the other hand, Kathleen, too, does not appear offended by her son's behaviour. She also seems to be seriously concerned with the problems of her son. Isherwood writes about the latest development in his ties with his mother in *his autobiography*: 'She is infinitely more broad-minded, more reasonable than she was to the old days' (1993,222). Isherwood also believed, with the coming of maturity, that concern about self does not preclude familial ties, but finds its fruition only when an individual overcomes the hurdles at home and in the world around him. It is noticeable in all his novels from *Goodbye to Berlin* onward that Isherwood's process of self-identification becomes suggestive of the fact that he must learn to relate art to life and try to connect with those who once seemed to be at loggerheads with him.

Along with the portrayal of self and familial relationships, the novel also exposes Isherwood's sexual nature. In the earlier books, Isherwood had only hinted at his sexual practices, but never turned them as the themes of his novels. In *Goodbye to Berlin* the signals of his heterosexuality, as in 'Sally Bowles' and of his homosexuality too, as in 'On Reugen Island' are unmistakable. Sally, a call-girl openly invites Christopher: 'Do you mind if I lie down on your sofa, darling?', to which he replies: 'No, of course, not'. Comfortably settled, Sally also bursts, 'I'm most terribly tired. I didn't sleep a wink last night. I've got a marvellous new lover' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 47). But a homosexual as he was, Christopher's terms with Sally does not last long. He feels bored to continue his love with Sally. So, when Sally exclaims — 'Oh, for God's sake.... don't start being English!', Christopher scolds her 'Well, then, if you want to know, it rather

bores me' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 47). Later, Sally asks Christopher, 'But you're not in love with me, are you?', and the narrator curtly says, 'No, I'm not in love with you' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 49). 'On Reugen Island', however, explores a different type of sexual nature. It is significant to note that Isherwood deliberately refrains from straightforwardly identifying himself with the namesake narrator's homosexuality, since he was aware of Oscar Wilde's imprisonment for overt portrayal of onanism. Yet, one sees clearly depicted Isherwood's homosexual relation with Walter. Again, Peter Wilkinson's homosexuality with Otto Nowak for the cure of psychological disorder is an open statement on sex. Otto, of course, was, in reality, Isherwood's boy-lover. The namesake narrator's description of Otto's physique only reflects back on Isherwood's own homosexual nature: 'Otto has a face like a very ripe peach. His hair is fair and thick, growing low on his forehead' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 100).

The final pages of the Berlin diary epitomizes Isherwood's handling of the homosexual motif. Isherwood describes that a few drunk American youths, in one of Berlin's parties, were amazed to see 'men dressed as women', and asked 'what's on here?' Fritz replied, 'Men dressed as women'. Then one of the young Americans became surprised and asked: 'Men dressed as women? As women, hey? Do you mean they're queer?' Fritz answered: 'Eventually we're all queer' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 238). This show of 'queerness' is suggestive of the knotty issues of homosexuality which runs through *The Berlin Stories* 'like an accompaniment — not merely the advertised, painted boys of the notorious brothels, but the more poisonous homosexuality that is comradeship and masculinity gone awry' (quoted in Piazza: 1978, 178-79). The open handling of homosexuality as such is a positive indication of Isherwood's growing ease with his own sexual nature, which enables him to grow in the understanding of his self. He need no longer conceal his homosexuality, and we continue to perceive the progression in an honest presentation of sexuality, thematically much denser here than it had been in *All the Conspirators* or *The Memorial* or even *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*.

*Goodbye to Berlin* is also a successful attempt, on the part of Isherwood, at reconciling the claims of the artist and the claims of the moralist. The theme

as such has lent the book a certain amount of literary value and interest which earned it wide reading public during the thirties and at the same time absolved it from being called a mere documentary novel on Berlin. John Lehmann was the first to point out that Isherwood's work is entirely revolutionary and humanist. In *New Writing in England* he describes *Goodbye to Berlin* as 'one of the few successful solutions in recent years of the problem of reconciling the claims of the artist and the claims of the moralist who is aware of, and passionately rejects social injustice and social decay (1939,25). The artist here presents us with a photographic representation of the scene of decay and degeneration, while the potential moralist silently condemns the injustice which he finds in contemporary Berlin society, injustice leading to the disruption of its social order. From the opening pages of the book clearly evident is the sharp antagonism between the Nazis and the Jews, which caused immense political uproar in the whole of Germany threatening every individual living in the Fascist regime of Hitler. The Nazis, who were politically backed by Hitler, were not just content with shouting anti-Jewish slogans, but were desperately trying to exterminate the Jews from every walk of life. Once two Jews were attacked in an open street by a Nazi for taking two call-girls into their private car, as he 'felt it his mission to defend the honour of all German women against the obscene anti-Nordic menace' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 236). The Jews, however, get away by jumping into the car and disappear. After a little commotion, the crowd disperse, but when the narrator, Christopher, returns to the same spot after three hours, 'the Nazi was still patrolling up and down, looking hungrily for more German womanhood to rescue' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 236). These events, however, incidental they are, are symptoms of a greater tragedy, of a disaster that was fast approaching. Again, when Christopher was taken to a garden party at Bernhard's country cottage, he is found, at the end of the party, to contemplate upon the inevitable doom of all Berliners: 'All these people are ultimately doomed. This evening is the dress-rehearsal of a disaster' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 219). These premonitions of an impending calamity, which no one could escape, seemed to threaten the very basis of Berlin life at large.

The social and moral decay was largely caused by economic degeneration due to the collapse of the Darmstadter und National Bank, and the consequent

hopelessness which was rampant in Berlin society found its expression in sexual perversity. Sally became a call-girl as she could not find any other source of money-making in Germany. The poor Nowaks are the worst victims of an economically bankrupt society. The gradual degradation of the Bernherd family which was once affluent and wealthy in the whole of Berlin may be traced to the general collapse of the country's economy. And as the economic situation degenerates, traditional moral values break down. Frau Kramf does not hesitate to stoop to her perverted butcher to obtain cutlets or steak. The whimsical butcher will not sell a piece of meat unless and until he has the pleasure of pinching and slapping the cheeks of a sensitive well-bred girl. The Reformatory School boys no longer have a choice between the engineering works and prison when the former goes bankrupt. One of the most vivid images of Berlin's general decay, on the eve of Hitler's rise to power, is of the jaded decadence of the 'Salome' which was so decorated as to look like a hell, where the 'stage lesbians' imitate 'the laughter of the damned'. The whole of Berlin society, in fact, contracted a malady that was hardly curable.

Right up to the end of the novel, Isherwood's penchant for exposing the vacuum in the lives of the 'lost' is conspicuous. But what is significant about the namesake narrator is that he hardly, or even never, passes any judgement. He only exhibits values without stating them and by illustrating their absence. In this connection, Colin Wilson mentions that Isherwood's objectivity is 'a little too cold and detached' (quoted in Finney:1979, 153). Colin's argument is that Isherwood has to maintain distance if he has to prevent his readers from prejudging his characters and to keep them aloof from traumatic experience of their characters. This detachment is, indeed, essential if he is to draw our sympathy for the 'lost'. When he utters 'Berlin is a skeleton which aches in the cold : it is my own skeleton aching' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 230), he certainly sympathizes with Berlin and its 'doomed' inhabitants and epitomizes 'the predicament of the "lost" to whom he too spiritually belongs' (Finney : 1979:154).

Finally, Isherwood's narrative technique in *Goodbye to Berlin* is worth mentioning, since it evoked controversy among the readers and scholars alike. The controversy consists in the artist's open declaration at the beginning of the novel that 'I am a Camera with its shutters open, quite passive, recording, not

thinking' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 9). The novelist's role as a 'Camera' in the narrative of his story may be cited as evidence of a new school of fiction. G.S. Frazer, for instance, found Isherwood as the leading practitioner of the 'documentary' novel of the thirties which was parallel in intention and achievement to British documentary film movement of the period. However, Isherwood's narrative motto as such—to be objective as a camera — was, perhaps, inspired by E.M. Forster's fictive method of maintaining objectivity without abjuring humanistic truth, philosophical credo and attention to detail. Colin Wilson, of course, holds a different view, believing that 'the essential idea came from Kierkegaard, via Rilke, James, Joyce and Huxley' (1976,316). The fact is that the writers of the thirties were obsessed with exploring their self, hence the use of a first-person narrator well fitted in their plea for achieving subjective truth in an objective way.

But a host of literary critics have been unduly harsh and severe on Isherwood's opening statement of the novel. Norman Friedman, for instance, points out that the declaration 'I am a Camera' only suggests the final extinction of the author. Literature is not mere recording, and a writer-artist cannot remain blind to the artistic principles of selection and rejection nor he can avoid reflecting on his individual moods and feelings. When Isherwood says — 'Berlin is a skeleton which aches in the cold: it is my own skeleton aching' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 230), he surely expresses his own feelings for the 'doomed' of Berlin; he does sympathize with the inhabitants of the 'lost' city.

Years later, in an interview with Robert Wennesten, Isherwood explained 'What I really meant by saying "I am a Camera" was not I am a camera all the time, and that I'm like a Camera.... My usual mood would have been to rush downstairs and get into action. The idea that I was a person very divorced from what was going on around me is quite false' (quoted in Fryer: 1977, 166). This is one reason why within four or five pages of the remark 'not thinking' we find him falling into meditating on the inevitable destiny of Berlin and its 'lost'. After presenting Frä. Schroeder, the narrator reveals: 'When I have seen listening to her for sometime, I find myself relapsing into a curious trance-like state of depression. I begin to feel profoundly unhappy' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 14). However, critics like Isaac Rosenfeld and Richard Mayne insist that the namesake narrator reveals nothing of himself, that Isherwood is a self-effacing

onlooker, making no judgement, forming no attachment, yet every reader is convinced that the namesake narrator does make friendship with Sally, Otto or Bernhard and pronounce his judgement. No one can deny that Isherwood sympathizes with and pronounces his judgement on, the inevitable destiny of the 'lost', when he says 'whatever government is in power, they are doomed. to live in this town' (*Goodbye to Berlin*, 255).

We see, then, that Isherwood's art in *Goodbye to Berlin* finds its perfection in exploring not just what concerns an individual, as in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, but how he embraces the larger world around him. Alan Wilde remarks: 'All of Isherwood's first-person novels, whatever their ostensible subjects, concern the education of their narrators' (1971, 63). What Christopher learns along the progression of this novel is that true art cannot be divorced from people, from politics and from life. It may be noted in passing that in the novels written after Isherwood's conversion to Vedantism, beginning with *Prater Violet*, the narrator is exclusively concerned with art in relation to life and to the society he lives in. He moves beyond his self, his ego and seeks connection with the larger objective world. *Goodbye to Berlin*, in this sense, may be said to have bidden goodbye to the world of the thrives — the world of the ego.

# CHAPTER SIX

## THE LOSS OF THE SELF

### *Prater Violet & The World in the Evening*

For to take that other way would mean I should lose myself. I should no longer be a person. I should no longer be Christopher Isherwood.

— Christopher Isherwood

The Berlin crisis egged Isherwood on to make further probe into the growth of his self. In the final diary of *Goodbye to Berlin* Isherwood seemed to turn inward; the curiosity which once propelled him to visit Berlin is now changed into personal despair. To Isherwood's horrifying torment of the 'lost' city was added an acute anxiety about the explosive political state of contemporary Europe: the Sudetenland Crisis in August and September 1938, the big jolt that the communists suffered at the Spanish Civil War, the fall of the Weimar Republic, the Munich Crisis and above all, Isherwood's 'own "War" complex' only compounded his personal crisis. In fact, as Paul Piazza says, 'Isherwood is so much engrossed with himself that he does not see his despair macroscopically reflected in Europe's; instead, he sees England's and Europe's problems mirrored in his own manic behaviour' (1978, 103). In short, Isherwood found the whole contemporary world as too insane.

One noticeable change that occurred in Isherwood's life, during this time of crisis and despair, was his gradual disillusionment with the Communist Party. The disillusionment was, invariably, the result of his serious concern about the future prospect of his homosexual practice. The fact is that, in 1934, the communist government of Russia retracted its 1917 recognition of the private sexual rights of the individual. This only exacerbated Isherwood's resentment with the Communist Party, causing on his part a retreat into the private self. He writes in *An Approach to Vedanta* (1963) : 'I should have to put my emotions back from a political one on to a personal basis' (10). He also realized that his attempts at left-wing orthodoxy had been abortive. He said to Auden : 'You know, it just did not mean anything to me anywhere — the Popular Front, the

party line, the anti-Fascist struggle' (1993,97). He felt that 'all the slogans I had been repeating and living by were essentially materialistic' (1963, 10). Isherwood thus realized that he was neither an iconoclast nor an anti-son of Kathleen and Frank, nor even a Marxist but a pacifist. Isherwood's trip to China, in 1938, accompanied by W.H. Auden, where he got the traumatic experience of war, was no less significant in intensifying his idea of pacifism. As he himself admits : 'The visit to China brought me back from a world of political principles to a world of human values which I had temporarily lost' (1963, 8). This realization was a necessary prelude to some possibility of change and marked, evidently, a turning-point in the author's career as well as his overriding quest for the self. In a letter to John Lehmann he thus wrote : 'I have discovered what I didn't realize before, or what I wasn't till now, that I am a pacifist. That is one reason why I am going out to Hollywood, to talk to Gerald Heard and Huxley' (quoted in Piazza:1978,108-9).

Isherwood left for the USA on 19 January 1939, accompanied by W.H. Auden — a journey which Cyril Connolly described as 'the most important literary event since the outbreak of the Spanish War' (quoted in Piazza :1978, 108). In America he contemplated more and more on pacifism. He met Gerald Heard in California, along with Aldous and Maria Huxley who had been there since 1937 advocating pacism while studying Eastern Religion. Months later, Isherwood left for Los Angeles where, through Viertel, he met Thomas Mann, Greeta Garbo and Charlie Chaplin among others. But his most important introduction came from Gerald Heard through whom Isherwood met Swami Prabhavananda, a Hindu monk who had set up a centre for Vedantic philosophy. He continued, for hours, to wrangle with the Swami over a number of issues related to Vedantism. He was, however, ultimately convinced and accepted Vedanta which speaks of the essential truth about human nature and also answers to the problems that he had faced during those critical years of his life. This is why, in the autumn of 1940, Isherwood officially became the disciple of Swami Prabhavananda, and accepted him, as he himself admits in *My Guru and His Disciple*, 'as my first and only religious teacher; my Guru' (1980, 38).

Isherwood's predilection for Vedantism was a corollary to his early revolt

against Christianity. He had no faith in orthodox Christian religion which seemed to have turned God into a constitutional monarch. He writes in *The World in the Evening*: 'I could never make much out of Church religion. They seemed to me to have turned their God into such a very constitutional monarch' (1966,236). Apart from this, Christian mysticism, theologically, indeed, is based on dualism, which suggests that a Christian mystic hardly attains spiritual transfiguration, while Hindu mysticism, as Vedanta would have it, is essentially monistic, providing potential means of transformation of an individual self into some impersonal or transpersonal or universal self through the steady process of meditation or Yoga ('Yoga' comes from 'yoke' which means 'union'). One explanation offered for this by S. Radhakrishnan in his *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western* (1953) is that 'while Western mysticism is Christo-centric and seeks to repeat in the soul the experience of Christ, the Eastern centres on the acceptance of the Holy Spirit of God for deification of the whole personality from within' (195). The Holy Spirit is Immanent in the created world as well as implanted by grace in man. So there is not in the East the same tendency to find a dualism between the natural and the supernatural as there is in the West,. Now, if the goal of mysticism is the communion of the individual self with the Universal Consciousness, or Brahman in Vedantic terms, there the Hindu philosophy of monism is affirmative. Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine and that the aim of man's life is to discover or recognize that divine nature within, which is called Atman and thereby, to become an illuminating part of Brahman, the Godhead, the unchanging Reality. Within the Vedantic belief, then, an individual is able to merge his essence with Brahman. Isherwood thus writes in the Introduction to *Vedanta for the Western World* that 'the Atman in Christian terminology is God Immanent. Brahman is God Transcendent. Atman and Brahman are one' (1945,2).

Vedanta also accommodated Isherwood's homosexual nature and resolved a number of psychological problems which had beset him ever since. Vedanta does not disapprove of homosexuality but views it as another form of attachment. The dichotomy between the spiritual and the carnal is one that has never been resolved for thousands of years; complete devotion to the one demands the rejection of the other. Isherwood had discovered that an active sexual existence

without spirituality was an empty experience. In this connection, Jonathan Fryer says: 'Eastern religions in general admit contradictions more readily than does the Western heritage of Judaco-Christianity' (1977, 217). Isherwood also shared the belief, only after prolonged debate with the Swami, that sex and spirit, both God-given, rightly reside in the same body in healthy co-existence. Vedanta, therefore, seemed to resolve Isherwood's problem with sexual practices and enabled him, in course of time, to find the right balance.

Now the question that invariably arises is to what degree Isherwood's conversion to Vedanta shaped his art. One important precept that Isherwood learnt from Vedanta is that he must relate his own self to the larger humanity around him. The Swami also recommended that 'Christopher should first open himself up to feel the all-pervading Existence around him, both those visibly near and those far off' (quoted in Fryer :1977,198). This is evident in the fundamental themes of the novels written after Isherwood's conversion. In the earlier novels, Isherwood was chiefly concerned with the establishment of individual identity; in the later novels, he explores how to merge one's self with the people around. This is one reason, perhaps, why the artist's quest-motif in the novels of the Vedantic period, shifts emphasis from his concern with 'Who am I?' to 'Who am I in connection with others?' This idea of connection or wholeness — derived as it was principally from Vedanta — constitutes the thematic concern of Isherwood's later novels. After his conversion, Isherwood's new faith convinced him that all men are 'the children of God' and also 'the children of art' (Isherwood : 1961, 71). He should, therefore, manage to combine his individual needs with those of the people around him. The novels written after conversion, beginning with *Prater Violet* (1945) right up to the concluding one, *A Meeting by the River* (1967), well measure up to the values and precepts inculcated in Vedanta. They all reflect Isherwood's knowledge of man derived out of his knowledge of God and thus convey, in the words of Alan Wilde, 'a double vision of man seen through his own eyes and, as it were, through those of God' (1971, 100). Evidently, then, Vedanta not only shaped Isherwood's art in his later novels, but also a pattern of growth for him.

First among the novels of the Vedantic period, *Prater Violet* (1945) continues Isherwood's obsession with the self. One may, however, find a

spectacular drift in the emphasis given here to the world without over the world within. The artist's sense of self deepens, his self-assertion grows stronger and the namesake narrator looks at himself more critically and objectively rather than idealistically as in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains or Goodbye to Berlin*. As Isherwood feels more comfortable with his self, he is able to solve the problem of communication with others and ultimately with the universe by subordinating his needs to those of other people. Isherwood reconciles with his mother; he no longer argues with her and lives peacefully with his brother, Richard. So by the time of publication of *Prater Violet* Isherwood stands no more on the rocky ground with Kathleen as in the 1930's. He also establishes bonds with a parent-figure, Friedrich Bergmann, who teaches him, through his own conduct, how the artist must learn to compromise with the society he lives in. The father-figure is not like just Richard Frank, the heroic father to rebel against, not just Arthur Norris, teaching by negative examples, but a potential guide, drawn in the model of Swami Prabhavananda, the Guru, who instructs Isherwood that the essential matrix of art lies in communication with the people and the universe at large.

Conspicuously, therefore, *Prater Violet* demonstrates a new orientation in the novelist's thematic concerns. In 1943, Isherwood wrote to John Lehmann that 'he will have to find a new tone of voice; because the "ventriloquist's dummy" has changed somehow and needs a new dummy' (quoted in Lehmann : 1960, 154). This new tone of voice emerges from the change in the nature of the protagonist, from the new belief he derived from Vedanta. According to Paul Piazza 'The novel is significant because it bears witness to Isherwood's reinterpretation of reality in terms of Vedantist philosophy and because, for the first time, his hero establishes intimate contact with another human being whom he fittingly calls "father"' (1978, 57). However, based as it is on a comprehensive and coherent system of beliefs and values, *Prater Violet* does not merely recount the narrator's growth in self-assurance but concentrates on his education in what he should do with his self, how he should accommodate others, underscoring, thereby, the seminal theme of the novel : Union.

The plot of the novel, though extremely brief, is based on Isherwood's collaboration with Berthold Viertel in London in 1934 on the film 'Little Friend'.

Here again 'Isherwood' is the person who tells the story. One day the narrator receives an unexpected telephone call, asking him to write the script of a film 'Prater Violet' (artificial violet) to be set in old Vienna during 1933-35. Chosen to direct the film is an extraordinary Viennese genius, Friedrich Bergmann. The young narrator and Bergmann at once establish between themselves a close rapport of, as it were, an affectionate son and a sympathetic father. Intelligently cultivated, sometimes solemn and sometimes playful, Bergmann is the symbol of the race to which he belonged, and became, in course, Isherwood's teacher, the Virgilian guide to the path towards spiritual illumination.

Bergmann dominates the whole film world and as a director plays an important role to breathe life into every corner of the studio world. As a young script writer Isherwood gets introduced into the studio world and perceives, within a couple of days, its simplicity, malice and final reconciliation. He is not, however, deeply involved in the day-to-day happenings inside the studio; he only observes, as in the Berlin novels, as a detached onlooker. We are given a detailed account of how Bergmann teaches his novice the art of script writing, and the methodology of his teaching is reflective of his mastery in film-making. One day he said to Isherwood, the author-narrator: 'Let me tell you something, Master, he began. The film's a symphony. Each movement is written in a certain key' (*Prater Violet*, 38).

Through the character of Bergmann Isherwood also offers a few glimpses of the turbulent state of Europe during mid-thirties and treats the problem of the artist's relation and commitment to the society he lives in. While in Germany Bergmann saw the Nazi Storm-Troopers moving on the streets like 'bandits'. He lost most of his money in consequence of the atrocities by the Nazis. His family was left in a state of uncertainty at Vienna. It is at this time of sheer anxiety that Bergmann was suddenly instructed to leave Germany and come to London to direct a motion picture. Bergmann could hardly afford to refuse the offer of the Imperial Bulldog's Chatsworth as he was in need of money. But the basic irony of the situation is that on the eve of 'Putsch' to power by the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss, a hunted man was required to direct a motion picture which would create the illusion of peace in Vienna. Bergmann recalls the trauma of

the pre-war revolution in Germany and Austria thus : 'The attack on Vienna, Prague, London and Paris, without warning by thousands of planes, dropping bombs with deadly bacilly...' (*Prater Violet*, 43). He airs his gloom when he narrates the present topsy-turvy state of Europe : 'Death comes nearer. Syphilis. Poverty. Consumption .... We are dying with our heads together in the oven' (*Prater Violet*, 43).

Nevertheless, Bergmann accepts the offer of the Imperial Bulldog to direct the film in London, by allowing his wife and children to stay at Vienna. The Viennese Director, Isherwood would suggest, is a brilliant example of a true artist who is aware of the commitment the society demands from his end. Bergmann teaches the young narrator to what degree an artist is responsible for the world around, and how one must accept, in Vedantic terms, one's *Karma*. When Vienna is embattled and his home and family are threatened, Bergmann hardly affords to think of abandoning his job. Through his conduct and instance he teaches Isherwood that true art cannot be separated from people, from life, despite all its harshness, and that, as he learnt from his own vicarious experiences, he must not use the pretext of art to divorce himself from life as he was wont to do early in the novel.

In *Prater Violet*, Isherwood, indeed, takes a few tentative steps on the path towards illumination, and progresses from bewilderment to the beginning of spiritual illumination. He has got Bergmann as his guide who teaches that one must recognize the reality that lurks beneath the outer consciousness and accept his obligation to the world and not just be concerned with self alone. It may be noted in passing that Bergmann's dialogue with Isherwood in connection with the age-old dichotomy between appearance and reality has philosophical depth and has its origin in the Hindu religious scripture, the *Gita*. It is a fact that *Prater Violet*, written as it was after Isherwood's conversion, was inspired by the *Gita*, translated by Isherwood in collaboration with Swami Prabhavananda, a year before the publication of the novel under discussion.

In an article 'The *Gita* and War', published in *Exhumations* (1966), Isherwood speaks of the major theme of the novel : the illusory nature of appearances.

In the *Gita*, Arjuna has Krishna for his charioteer, a fellow mortal, 'personal friend and his illuminated teacher' (1966, 106). Before the battle begins Arjuna asks Krishna to drive his chariot into the no man's land between the two armies. Krishna complies, and Arjuna surveys the hundreds of people, all his near and dear ones on the other side. He is deeply shocked at the idea that he will have to slay them for a victory in the war. He uses his will to act and refuses to fight. Krishna's reply untangles Arjuna's problems and crystallises the whole meaning of action and life. Krishna reminds Arjuna that he should not shrink from the act of killing, because 'in the absolute sense, there is no such act', because 'the Atman, the indwelling God is the only reality .... He only seems to kill' (1966, 107). Isherwood quotes from the *Gita* : 'Some say this Atman / Is slain, and others / Call It the slayer : They know nothing / How can It slay / Or who shall slay It?' Therefore, 'if Arjuna is objecting to the act of killing, as such, he need have no scruples. For he only seems to kill' (1966, 107). Then as a fellow mortal Krishna addresses Arjuna thus : it is Arjuna's caste-duty to fight. Hence he must wage war, without fear and desire in a spirit of detachment. For Arjuna, a member of the warrior caste, in defence of his family and property, is undoubtedly righteous. Being eventually illuminated, Arjuna confidently and joyously obeys.

Arjuna's education, derived as it was from Krishna, consists in distinguishing appearance from reality. The Vedantists would call it a journey towards light, the path of analysis or knowledge. It consists essentially in purifying one's vision, training the eye to distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit. Bergmann in *Prater Violet* seems to be the analogon of Krishna. He is the Virgilian guide, the Jewish Socrates, a friend and a teacher to Isherwood, the disciple, the learner. Like a teacher of the Vedas, Bergmann seeks to reach out to the truth behind the appearance. He teaches how to fathom what lies at the deeper stratum of life. He also tells Isherwood what Vedanta teaches : that every individual has two selves, the apparent, outer self and the invisible, inner self. The inner self is unchanging, immortal and therefore, Real. Reality is beyond sense-perception, beyond appearances. In *Vedanta for the Western World* (1945) Isherwood writes : 'I see the Reality within the appearance. I see the world within Reality. And I love it as I love the Reality

itself' (7). Vedanta holds that the universe which is perceived by our senses is only an appearance. It is not what it seems. Beneath this appearance there is flux, there is an unchanging Reality, which Vedanta calls Brahman, the Godhead. Brahman is Existence itself, Consciousness itself. Isherwood further notes : 'If there is indeed an essential Reality, a Godhead, in the universe, then it follows that this Reality must be omnipresent '(1945,2). Every individual, then, has to realize his essential nature, unchanging nature, which the Vedantists call Atman. Atman and Brahman are synonymous; both exist beneath our sense-perception, our ego-consciousness. The aim of human life is to discover this Atman and hence our identity with the one, underlying Reality, that is, Brahman.

Isherwood's education in *Prater Violet*, pertaining to the reality of life, thus resembles Arjuna's. It enables him to move towards the path of analysis or the path of spiritual enlightenment. However, Bergmann's role as a Virgilian guide, as an exemplar of Isherwood's ideal man, is reinforced through the connection between him and Isherwood as father and son. There are, for example, at least three direct references to Bergmann as 'father' and to Isherwood either as 'son' or 'child', as well as several others that are implied. It is probable that Isherwood's acceptance of Swami Prabhavananda as *Guru*, internally and emotionally motivated, seems to have provided him with a positive resolution to his relationship with a father-figure. In an article 'What Vedanta Means To Me', published in *Vedanta and the West*, Isherwood clearly shows that the search for a father and the search for a religion had become inextricably interwoven in his consciousness. One may, however, find that in Isherwood's fiction two father types appear : in the early novels, the heroic father whose legend kept alive by Kathleen, emasculates his son; in the later books, after Isherwood's adoption of Vedanta, the sympathetic, broadly human, anti-heroic father. It is not unexpected then that in *Prater Violet* we see the namesake narrator on a more equal footing with his parent-figure, Friedrich Bergmann, than he was ever before.

A true artist as he was, Bergmann confronts Isherwood, the narrator, with a choice and makes explicit what the narrators of the Berlin novels only sensed. He may either accept 'the paternal, revolutionary tradition' which reminds him

of his duty as its anti-son and be loyal to 'the artistic tradition', or he may choose 'the bourgeoisie dream of the mother' which he had earlier revolted against and abandoned in utter contempt. Isherwood makes the correct choice : he accepts his role as the artist's son and thus assures himself of being able to distinguish the real from the artificial and understands his own responsibility towards the world. Bergmann teaches Isherwood that every artist must do what he can and that there are limits to what one can do. In Vedantic terms, one accepts one's *Karma*, without expecting any return, and in virtue of his *Karma* he is able not only to serve others but to connect him to the whole mankind. Through his own conduct Bergmann shows the narrator how the artist must adjust himself to the community he belongs to as well as to the people he creates in the realm of his art.

Isherwood is Bergmann's greatest creation. Earlier in the novel Bergmann's statement that he would teach him from 'the beginning' only keeps us waiting for the results of the education obtained by the disciple. At the close of the novel we see the butterfly scrambling out of his cocoon. Isherwood appears with a fresh spiritual illumination. The moment of reckoning arrives. In fact, the real action of *Prater Violet* builds up with the artist's philosophical musings in the final seven pages. The narrator and Bergmann, after a party celebrating the completion of the movie, are found walking back home. It was dead of night. The lonely deserted streets, the unusually bright street-lamps and the silent atmosphere make Isherwood reflective. He feels, in a state of reverie, as if, that he is travelling to an indefinite end. He sees, with new fire and energy, Bergamann, Europe, his own life, all of life, from a radically changed perspective. He tries to move out of 'a separate secret consciousness, locked away within itself' (*Prater Violet*, 122). For the first time, the inner life of Isherwood unfolds here. He ponders over man's consciousness of himself and of others, and the possibility of a Greater One. Isherwood here poses a few fundamental questions about life and death. Life, according to him, is full of boredom, and this feeling of boredom is the inevitable result of our ego-consciousness — consciousness that we have a separate individual existence, that our obstinate belief that all our behaviours are conditioned by our environment. Our daily life is nothing but a habit, and we go on living like automations. Even our love-affairs are more or

less a habit. The consciousness of approaching death, either as a fearful or a longed-for event always haunts our mind and motivates us to go on doing our daily round of duties. Isherwood raises this question of 'boredom' in the Introduction to *Vedanta for the Western World* (1945). He points out that 'life's subtlest riddle: the riddle of human boredom' (4) makes man feel 'an emptiness' after attaining 'the world's advertised objectives' (4). As a solution to this riddle of boredom Isherwood prescribes the antidote of realization of one's own essential nature, which is called Atman in Vedanta. This Atman (Godhead within) exists in every individual and his recognition of this divine self serves as a therapy for all modern malaise infecting contemporary people, and gives 'a lasting strength, wisdom, peace and happiness' (1945,4).

At the close of the novel, Isherwood further suggests, as also what Vedanta would have it, that every object of the universe is an effect of Brahman, the Universal Consciousness. It stands to Brahman in the same relation as heat to fire. They are inseparable. Fire burns one but warms another, and is neither cruel nor kind. Here Isherwood puts another question: 'Now how do I stop being Christopher Isherwood?' Answer: 'By ceasing to believe that you are' (1945,5). In other words, Vedanta teaches us that so long as man sticks to his ego-consciousness, to the belief that he stands apart from other people, he remains in a state of endless personal gloom and despair. If he is confined within his rigid ego, he is debarred from viewing the world objectively, from getting connected with the larger humanity. Isherwood further mentions that the scientists would agree with me that 'every living creature and every object are interrelated biologically, psychologically, physically, politically, economically. They are all of a piece' (1945,5). The truth, therefore, as the Vedantists would have it, lies in the antidote of self-realization, Atman, which enables one to get rid of his facile self and thereby to become connected with other people around him and finally, with the Supreme Being, Brahman.

The final pages of *Prater Violet* constitute a kind of epilogue to the book and also show Isherwood's epiphany. The novel begins with persistent self-confirmation ('Mr. Isherwood?' 'Speaking'. 'Mr. Christopher Isherwood?' 'That's me'), but it becomes, in the final impression, the artist's Dantesque journey

from inveterate ego-reinforcement to a loss of name and identity. It is a paradox that during 'that hour of the night at which man's ego almost sleeps' and 'the sense of identity, of possession, of name, address and telephone numbers, grows very faint' (*Prafer Violet*, 121), the narrator feels most burdened by the awareness of himself as an oppressively separate identity. He begins to lay bare the unstable foundations on which he has been building his life. He reveals in the process the state of modern man, as described by Alan Watts: 'In the act of pulling everything at a distance so as to describe and control it, we have orphaned ourselves both from the surrounding world and from our own bodies — leaving "I" as a discontented and alienated spook, anxious, guilty, unrelated and alone' (quoted in Wilde: 1971, 94). Isherwood realizes the absurdity of his world and of himself, the detached world dominated by ego, as portrayed in the earlier novels: the 'I' which was once deemed to be his definition is now felt to be his prison; and the experience as such comes, obviously, as the culmination of what all his earlier protagonists felt and suffered.

In the final section of the novel, the narrator also faces the problems of communication and identity. He asks some important questions: 'What makes you go on living?' No more the earlier narrator's 'Who am I?', but now 'Why am I?' These questions are at the heart of the novel. It is, perhaps, the presence of these fundamental considerations of life which prompted Viertel to comment that although Isherwood has his namesake 'in every book he has written, (he has) never before (been) so frankly exposed' (1946, 297). Isherwood, however, finds that he 'goes on living' because there are things to do: 'We had to go on playing them as long as we were together' (*Prafer Violet*, 125). This desire for duty is the desire for communication, for destroying barriers and even more radically for merging the self with something other than the self. We perceive the need for union fighting its ideological and emotional battle against the protagonist's habitual sense of separateness and fear. Isherwood tries various alternatives in a bid to overcome the barriers of communication, to remove the fear of isolation and thereby, to progress from the personal to the impersonal. But each solution points more emphatically to the final and inevitable dissolution of the self as a necessary condition to integrate the divisions within himself.

Isherwood, first, explores the experience of love as a means of some transpersonal union. He paints a sentimental picture of his vocation with J., his lover, but he begins to see the possibility of its failure to establish communication. The narrator uses the initial letter of the name of his lover and says : 'After J. there would be K. and L. and M., right down the alphabet. It's no use being sentimentally cynical about this or cynically sentimental. Because J. is not really what I want' (*Prater Violet*, 124). He realizes that J. is not important in his life nor are other anonymous lovers, because none of them can establish communication. The love which he imagines is egocentric and narcissistic and centres round the ego to escape from itself into oblivion. He feels frustrated in his quasi-anonymous lovers or in the sexual act of itself. The problem is not that his lover is meaningless and therefore deserves no individualising. Isherwood does not place him in the gallery of K., L. and M., which would suggest involvement in a number of physical affairs. The point is that this individual has no more meaning than any other. He recognizes that there will be K., L. and M., 'because J. is not really what I want. J. has only the value of being now. J. will pass, the need will remain... the pain of hunger beneath' (*Prater Violet*, 124). Thus neither love-making nor sexual partnership offers the possible 'way that leads to safety' or provides any potential means of intimacy, of merging his self with others.

Finally, the narrator goes to explore the fear of death — 'death the desired, the feared'. He is surely afraid of death and unable to face it rationally. He accepts this fear as part of himself, 'but how infinitely faint, how distant, like the high far-glimpse of a goat track through the mountains between clouds, I see something else : the way that leads to safety' (*Prater Violet*, 125). Although the narrator glimpses, in his mystic vision, 'the way that leads to safety', the novel does not make clear what the way is. However, the image of 'the goat track through the mountains between clouds .... To where there is no fear, no loneliness, no need of J. K. or M.' suggests union with the infinite and subsequent loss of the solipsistic self. Isherwood's imagery of 'the high far glimpse of a goat track through the mountains' reminds us of the following sloka from *The Song of God : Bhagavad Gita* (1954) : 'Let him who *atim* / In meditation / To heights of the highest / Union with Brahman / Take for his path / The Yoga of action'

(63). Paul Piazza explains Isherwood's movement as forward and upward, 'for to know the path one must travel in life is a step on that path and certainly a prerequisite for salvation' (1978, 70). For Isherwood, then, the means to overcome fear of death, of loneliness, is to lose his self, his personal identity: 'I should lose myself. I should no longer be a person. I should no longer be Christopher Isherwood' (*Prater Violet*, 125). Isherwood here obviously refers to his spiritual life, to the realization of the Supreme Being, the knowledge that enables one to say 'I know Him who is self-illuminating like the sun beyond all the darkness of ignorance. Only by knowing Him alone can one overcome the fear of death. There is no other way out' (*The Principal Upanishads*, 747). The final pages of the novel thus offer what could be called Isherwood's epiphany — his mystical feeling of connection with the Supreme Being, and conveys, as it were, the lyrical mysticism of a miniature *Bhagavad Gita*.

So, *Prater Violet* is, for Isherwood, the longest journey that begins with the artist's persistent confirmation of the self, but ends, paradoxically, with its loss — the abnegation of the self. Mrs. Trilling aptly remarked that 'it is a book written in the author's own person, yet utterly without ego' (quoted in Piazza: 1978,67). Thus with *Prater Violet* Isherwood seems to have largely resolved his question about identity and to have discovered as well the means of attaining it.

After *Prater Violet*, Isherwood published a few books on Vedanta, showing his commitment to the spiritual life and his belief in the values the books inculcate. Towards the end of 1945 *Vedanta for the Western World* was published by the Vedanta Society of Southern California. The book was chiefly a collection of pieces from *Vedanta and the West*, edited the previous year. In 1946, Isherwood completed the translation of *Shankara's Crest Jewel of Discrimination* with Swami Prabhavananda. He also collaborated the Swami on the translation of Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms*, published later in 1964. By this time Isherwood frequented the Vedanta Centre at Los Angeles and lived openly with Caskey, a vigorous farm boy, as his homosexual partner.

In 1953, however, Isherwood turned to a new novel, *The World in the Evening* which was published in 1954. The novel is concerned, as already

suggested in *Prater Violet*, chiefly with the problem of establishing intimacy. The earlier protagonists had tried to find the answer to 'Who am I?' But *The World in the Evening* reflects a more mature version of the question and asks 'Who am I with someone else?' The fact is that Isherwood, from now on, had begun to see himself and his relationships with others differently, and we would expect to find this reflected in his work. The tentative suggestions of 'that other way', 'the way that leads to safety' in *Prater Violet* are here thoroughly and more intensively explored with a view to expressing the artist's dominant concerns which become central to the leading themes of the present novel and of those that follow it. Comfortable as he felt with his own self, Isherwood now tries to fuse his identity with that of others, reconciling, ultimately, the tension between intimacy and isolation. Intimacy, as Isherwood believed, denotes not only a commitment to an affiliation, but the ethical strength to live by the commitment which requires significant sacrifice of one's self. In *The world in the Evening* the artist, then, moves from being cared for to caring for others and love becomes for him potential means of connection and concord, which underlie the major themes and concerns of his novels of the Vedantic period.

As regards technique, the novel marks a bold departure from the earlier ones. Isherwood here uses the device of the third-person narrator, which had been used so extensively in the previous books. Since thematic emphasis has now shifted from self to selflessness and the artist begins to see his identity in a new light, he finds it pertinent to abandon the egotistical namesake narrator. In 1947, Isherwood wrote to Edward Upward : 'I'm determin'd to write in the third person and abolish 'Christopher Isherwood', but this other character has to be such lot of things which I am and also am not' (quoted in Fryer : 1977, 224). This is why, Stephen Monk, the protagonist of the novel, shares much with Isherwood in the outer events of his life, but differs from him in his inner feelings. His spiritual odyssey from anger to acceptance mirrors Isherwood's, but the novel portrays feelings which are obviously Stephen's. In fact, Isherwood's new awareness of others and of their feelings exerts pressure on him to leave the namesake narrator and move beyond the self as the only means to salvation. The decision was also motivated more by the professional considerations than personal ones — the artist seeking to experiment but the man still needing to portray, analyse and affirm his self.

The title of *The World in the Evening* seems to have been derived, as Alan Wilde believes, from John Donne's poem *The progress of the Soul* — 'I sing the progress of a deathless soul / .... And the great world to his aged evening;/ From infant morn, through manly noon I draw' (quoted in Wilde :1971,103). The borrowing provides a clue about the major focus of the novel : Stephen's progress from a selfish adolescent to a mature adult, and this progress is worked out through three large segments of the book : 'Part One — An End', 'Part Two — Letter and Life' and 'Part Three — A Beginning'. This partitioning signifies the jumps in time. The first section concentrates chiefly on Stephen's egocentricity and jealousy — his failures to be united with others in love. Part Two focuses on past action, as contained in the letters of Elizabeth Rydall, allowing Stephen a scope for reliving the past and rediscovering the self. The final section is fittingly entitled 'A Beginning' as it portrays the Dantesque 'purgatorio' in the career of the protagonist whose spiritual growth offers him a fresh lease of life.

Stephen Monk, the protagonist of the novel, is a wealthy American adolescent of thirty six. He is shocked to find that his second wife, young and lovely Jane falls in love with a screen star in a Hollywood party. Disgusted and jealous, he bolts back home, wrecks her bedroom and flees to Aunt Sarah, the Quackeress at Twelfan, in Dolgelly, Pennsylvania, where he was brought up under Sarah's care. It is significant that, for the first time, an Isherwood hero seeks to solve his problems indoors; instead of fleeing from home he seeks home as a place to sort them out. Stephen married twice, the first time a renowned writer, Elizabeth Rydall and second time a society lady, Jane. Both had public celebrity in their own way. He was jealous of the fans of his first wife and married Jane, but ultimately suspected Jane for having been pregnant by another man and divorced her. Stephen also developed homosexual relation with Michael Drummond, which did not last long.

At Pennsylvania, Stephen meets the German refugee girl Gerda Mannheim whose husband is in interment camp. Sensing that he still cannot face his failures, he deliberately steps in front of a speeding truck. He is injured badly and gets a little better by Gerda's expert nursing and sisterly care. During his

convalescence he re-reads and the letters of Elizabeth and is recalled to life. The major part of the novel treats Stephen's physical and psychological recovery as he recalls the past. At the end of the novel, however, Stephen and Jane meet on friendly terms. But there is no remedy for the mischief already done; but in the hero's confession to Jane of his past misdeeds we discern his growth — the progress of his soul.

Ostensibly, then, *The World in the Evening* is about growth and self-understanding, as Isherwood's novels always are. He must understand himself in his intimate relationship with his two wives and his lover, Michael Drummond. But like the earlier protagonists who never succeeded in overcoming their private temporal world of ego, Stephen too remains aloof, his loneliness suggesting an egotism which is responsible for his failure to negotiate his adulthood for close identification with others. In *Prater Violet*, Isherwood is aware of a need for something beyond sex, but the intimacy he longs for is beyond his grasp. Stephen has all that Isherwood desires, but he lacks the discipline intimacy calls for. As the first part of the novel suggests, Stephen is never propelled by the true passion of love to get closer either to Elizabeth or to Jane or even to Michael. Goaded as he was by a sense of pride and inferiority complex, he always kept aloof from Elizabeth, the celebrated novelist. As he himself admits, 'a perverse pride or stubbornness would make me move away from her, as far as I could get, the moment the introductions were over' (*The World in the Evening*, 145). Stephen's childish carelessness was also responsible for his indifference to Elizabeth. After their marriage Elizabeth describes her young husband, ten years her junior, to Cecilia as 'a child lost in fairy - story forest' (*The World in the Evening*, 84). This purple romantic utterance may be an exaggeration on the part of a newly married woman, but it is an exaggeration of the vital truth that Stephen displays his childishness and even childish cruelty on more than one occasion. Referring to Stephen Gerda once said, 'This Kid I can see in you I like very much only, Stephen, you know, children can be cruel sometimes, by not thinking' (*The World in the Evening*, 60). Like a child, again, he looked upon marriage as a funny game and enjoyed the idea that unknown people should think of him as Elizabeth's husband: 'I suppose, I still regarded marriage as a kind of game' (*The World in the Evening*, 131).

Stephen lacks consistency. In the beginning, he feels jealous of the fans of Elizabeth, but then he does the work of her secretary and house keeper and leaves Elizabeth free to think about her novels. However, he cannot shake off his feeling of jealousy and egotism. He remains a misfit who cannot adjust himself with the intellectuals and fans admiring Elizabeth or with the fashionable society to which his second wife Jane belongs. Moreover, it is Stephen himself who is responsible for Jane's supposed unfaithfulness. The idea of a baby sharing the love of his wife, even if it is his own baby, drives him mad and he pretends to Jane that another man, Martin, must be the father of the baby. Again, he feels relieved on hearing the news that Elizabeth has got her abortion. Further, Stephen's brief affair with Michael Drummond is not only a betrayal of his relationship with Elizabeth, it is also a betrayal of the gift of love she has given him. When Michael reappears in Stephen's life and lets him know that he has come back because he still loves him, Stephen hardly cares for his passion of love. In fact, Stephen's cold-hearted treatment of Michael provides an example of his failure to develop an ethical sense necessary to sustain any relationship. His childish immaturity and jealousy, coupled with his inveterate egotism dissuaded him on every occasion to see the problems of others, to feel the needs of others as his own and finally, to get connected with others in love.

In the second part of the novel, 'Letters and Life', Stephen relives the past by reading the letters of Elizabeth, which he hopes to edit for a book in the same way as J. Middleton Murray edited Katherine Mansfield's letters and journals. At Sarah's house at Twelfan, he lies on bed with his broken thigh, and reads Elizabeth's letters. While reading these frank, inspirational letters, he vicariously relives the struggle of this perceptive, sensitive woman seeking to comprehend her work, her inner life and her life with him. The hours Stephen spends with her letters are transformed into moments of high truth during which he re-experiences his own past. The letters of Elizabeth, however, reverberate two themes which occupy a large part of this larger section of the novel : her honesty as a writer and her heroism. As Stephen himself affirms, Elizabeth never made any compromise. When Gerda denounces Elizabeth's novels as irrelevant to politics, Stephen replies that Elizabeth never dealt directly with

'world-situations or big-scale tragedies'. Even at her death she remained committed to her craft and its values.

The confessional letters of Elizabeth Rydal who is modelled on Katherine Mansfield, however, serve as a therapy to Stephen. Paul Piazza observes that 'Isherwood intends Stephen's letter-reading to be more akin to prayer than to nostalgic recall of a former lover's words and actions' (1978,47). By reading Elizabeth's letters and by recapitulating the memories of the past, Stephen discovers a new life in the giant shadow of his dead wife, who is more present to him than anyone else. Her memory does not eclipse, rather it floods the present with life. He faces his dependence on Elizabeth, his egoistical cruelty to Jane and to Michael, his homosexual lover. He manifests his guilt over having betrayed Elizabeth first by his obsession with her memory and then by offering himself up to her completely. What Stephen does, in effect, is to open himself to the truth of his past life of childish dependence and egotism, in addition to his lack of integrity in personal relationships. These experiences he conveys as counsel to Charles Kennedy and Bob Wood who are verging on a separation. Stephen indeed grows up. He has travelled through the Dantesque woods as referred to in the letters of Elizabeth, and obtains mystical experiences as indicated in Isherwood's Vedantic books.

As Stephen grows, so does Isherwood. In his mature years Isherwood is found no longer at loggerheads with his mother. He seems to feel repentant for what he has already done towards her and revises his stand vis-à-vis his mother. This is clearly indicated in Elizabeth's novel, *As Birds Do Mother*. The idea contained in the book is Elizabeth's, but the sentiment is surely Isherwood's. The title of the novel is taken from an expression that occurs in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Isherwood reads a new meaning in Shakespeare's expression. In *Macbeth* Lady Macduff thinks that Macduff is killed and she asks her young son, 'And what will you do now? How will you live?' The boy replies sportively : 'As birds do mother.' Elizabeth is intrigued by the young boy's answer and goes on to contemplate on the two generations represented by mother and son. Unlike the monstrous mother, Kathleen, Lady Macduff, utterly and angrily alone with her tragedy longs to break down the barrier

between them; to get through to him and make him share what she feels. In his mature years too, Isherwood seemed to be sympathetic to his mother's needs. Trying desperately to unclench Kathleen's grip on his life — by refusing an academic career, by revolting against religion — he separated himself from his mother. But, ironically, in his later years, Isherwood accepted the job of teaching and became an academician. He became a religious person by embracing Vedanta. Indeed, an irony seems to be at work in Isherwood's life exactly as it takes place in his novels. And Paul Piazza rightly observes that 'the irony with which he (Isherwood) decks his novels he begins to glimpse in his own life as a saving grace' (1978,52). Towards the end of his life, Isherwood realized that there is no real basis of quarrel between two generations and it is because they try to avoid involvement and commitment that they fail to understand each other.

Renewed and purged of his egotism, Stephen, at the close of the novel, admits to Jane, his second wife, a number of important facts about him : that he provoked Jane into adultery, that he rekindled their affair out of guilt over his betrayal of Elizabeth and that he had judged people according to his private standards. This understanding and acceptance of responsibility marks Stephen's growth. Stephen's confession as such is immediately followed by 'Part-Three — A Beginning'. Indeed, reading Elizabeth's letters over again and learning how she had viewed and loved him in the past — have all served for Stephen's spiritual illumination. Stephen is greatly invested with Elizabeth's grace and mystical experiences as revealed in the letters. As he reads Elizabeth's letters, the question that Stephen asks is not Isherwood's to Bergmann in *Prater Violet* :not 'What makes you go on living?' but 'How can I possibly be of any interest to you?' The protagonist learns that the reassurance and love he demands from others requires an investment of self in them which he has here-to-fore been unwilling to make. In the final pages of the novel, he explains to Jane how he lacked the sense of 'togetherness' in his earlier dealings with his two wives, how his exclusive concern with individual self led to the break-up of the marital ties one after another. He also realizes that he cannot exist alone, that his existence becomes meaningful only when it is connected with others. It is only after Stephen has 'cut all life lines' that he can understand the meaning of life,

and that he can assert 'I do really exist'. This is no doubt a new development in the career of the protagonist and in the career of Isherwood too : the emphasis is not on existence, but on existence in connection with others.

One may, however, find a narrative fault in the way Isherwood effects Stephen's self-realization. Stephen reads Elizabeth's letters and achieves freedom through the discovery of himself as Elizabeth has known him, loved him. He gives expression to this discovery in a letter to Jane. But Isherwood has not dramatised Stephen's change in action or in deeds, as he had done in case of Christopher in *Prater Violet*. This is how the narrator distances himself from the protagonist. Because he has abandoned the device of the namesake narrator, he cannot experience the narrator's feelings; he cannot dramatise Stephen's feelings convincingly. The only option, therefore, left to Isherwood, is to reveal himself through the secondary characters, who function as various segments of Isherwood's personality and of his self-analysis.

Elizabeth Rydal, among these secondary characters, easily come to the forefront, since she represents in her writings what Isherwood thought about life and art or what he learnt from Vedanta. Carolyn G. Heilbrun sees Elizabeth as 'probably the closest Isherwood has come to a self-portrait... portrait of the humanly suffering individual with the 'dharma' of an artist' (1970,41). In his earlier novels Isherwood's namesake narrators have all been would-be artists, and the novelist has made close identification with them. Even in Bergmann is presented the fortune of a suffering artist. The point is that Elizabeth represents the writer and embodies the intuitive aspect of Isherwood's personality and vision. Isherwood's spiritual interests are also carried forward through the characters of Gerda and Sarah. Gerda represents what might be called 'worldly spirituality'. Like Bergmann in *Prater Violet* she also believes that art must not be divorced from politics, or from life, and that an artist must suffer to grasp the realities that lurk under the surface of life. Sarah Pennington, even more than Gerda, injects into the novel's texture the view of 'religious spirituality' in her devotion to and involvement with the Quakers. As Alan Wilde says, '(She) functions in the novel primarily as another embodiment of spiritual reality' (1971,109). Indeed, Sarah Pennington, through her practice of Quakerism,

becomes an instance of involvement and commitment — an ideal which is obviously Isherwood's.

It is, however, Elizabeth Rydal who explains, for Isherwood, the religious connotation of the novel. Elizabeth's religion is Isherwood's. Like Isherwood, Elizabeth had little faith in the orthodox Christian religion : 'I could never make very much out of Church religion. They seem to me to have turned their God into such a very constitutional monarch' (*The World in the Evening*, 236). Like a true Vedantist, she refers to God as 'It' rather than 'He', and believes that the Vedantic God, unlike the Christian God, is not vindictive nor does He intervene in human affairs. Isherwood, true to the spirit of Elizabeth, also writes in his book on Vedanta that 'Brahman does not intervene in the world's affairs .... It has nothing to do with the shifting standards of good and evil, pleasure, unhappiness, right and wrong' (1945,5). Elizabeth believes in the source of life within her, which cannot be destroyed : 'There is a source of life within me — and that it cannot be destroyed. I shall not live on, but It will' (*The World in the Evening*, 236).

Elizabeth also accepts what Isherwood described in his Vedantic writings as 'Non-attachment' (Nishkama Dharma) — the ability to perform an action successfully, without fear or desire. And to make this point Isherwood devotes a large part of the novel to Elizabeth, to affirm the primacy of her integrity and of her ethics of creativity. The thoughtless cruelty of Stephen makes Jane vindictive and she poses to be unfaithful. But in the case of Elizabeth Stephen's heartlessness never produces the feeling of humiliation. When she comes to know that her husband is making love, at her back, with an American girl, Jane, she does not feel hysteric nor does she burst out into fury. She tries to get over her ego-sense which suggests an attempt at self-discipline. She sees 'life as pain, attachment as pain, possession as pain, and in the midst of this realization found some charity and peace' (*The World in the Evening*, 236<sup>1/2</sup>). Elizabeth believes in the principle of 'Non-attachment' and transcends all pains and afflictions, fears and desires, and is, thus, able to move to the path of spiritual peace and serenity. This is clearly echoed in Isherwood's statement that occurs in *An Approach to Vedanta* (1963) : 'Theoretically, at least ... every action ...

may be a stepping stone to spiritual growth, if it is done in the spirit of non-attachment' (61). In confirmation of Isherwood's statement Elizabeth Rydal achieves this awareness for which her whole life is a vicarious preparation. Evidently, we find in Elizabeth a real saint, and with her mystical experiences she resembles what is called 'Sthitapragna' in the *Gita* — a mystical being who remains unmoved either by sorrow or by happiness and rises above lust, fear, anger or disappointment. In fine, Elizabeth could be said to have a unique combination of the artist, the saint and the social activist within herself. It was equally Isherwood's endeavour.

Three minor characters in the novel, Bob Wood, Charles Kennedy and Michael Drummond are drawn with a view to carrying Isherwood's precept of the novel. Bob is a militant young man who characterises plea for freedom. Charles Kennedy, a doctor, with the aspiration to write, resembles Isherwood much more than any other character in the novel. But, of all the minor characters in the novel, it is Michael Drummond who is drawn as close as possible to the protagonist, Stephen Monk. He is intended to serve as a dramatic foil to Stephen. On the one hand, he represents the positive image of a homosexual and on the other, the negative image of Stephen, exposing the latter's covert fantasy of freedom from responsibility, his cruelty and ego-centricity. Bob and Charles, in their marital relationship, extend the novel's overall theme of commitment and connection more than Stephen and his wives could do.

However, since Isherwood's major concern in the novel is to portray the spirituality of connection — the ideal he derived from Vedanta — he concentrates, ultimately, on Stephen's growth, and the final section of the novel is largely devoted to that end. Stephen's growth consists in self-knowledge which implies transcendence through union with Universal Consciousness and discovery of God within. Eastern philosophies such as Vedanta place great value on self-knowledge. Isherwood explains the notion of self-knowledge as another part of ourselves which is non-individual and eternal. Alan Watts pertinently explains that 'the main resemblance between these Eastern ways of life [Buddhism and Taoism, Vedanta and Yoga] and Western Psychotherapy is in the concern of both with bringing about changes of consciousness, changes

in our ways of feeling, our own existence and our relation to human society and the natural world' (1961,3-4). Both the approaches stress transfiguration of individual identity with some Impersonal Being through an understanding of others as intimate part of one's life.

At Twelfan, Stephen's convalescence from his broken thigh makes him conscious of the memories of the past. But Stephen mentions that consciousness is not mere recapitulation. It is not identical with memory, for 'memory pieces things together gradually making a chain; this was total instantaneous awareness' (*The World in the Evening*, 100). Giving vent to his 'experience of the split moment, Stephen admits that thousands of bits of his life are scattered around him like the furniture of a room, all simultaneously present: 'What was aware of this was a simple consciousness that had no name, no face, no identity of any kind, consciousness lay here anonymous and looked at the accumulated clutter of half a life time' (*The World in the Evening* 100). The 'consciousness' which is referred to here is complete withdrawal of an individual self from the world of time and sense perceptions. When a person resigns himself to pure consciousness, his individual self stops working and Time, with its distinction of past, present and future, stops its function. In *How to know God : The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (1953), Swami Prabhavananda and Isherwood explained Patanjali's 'aphorisms' thus: 'Every perception arouses the ego-sense which says "I know this". But this is the ego speaking, not the Atman, the real self' (17). Stephen's confession that 'consciousness was not I' conveys the Vedantic belief, which is also Isherwood's, that the secret of happiness lies in an escape from the ego, from sense-perceptions and in the discovery of the Atman, the God in man, the Universal Consciousness. Stephen does achieve this bliss of communion, the joy of togetherness. When he is sitting in the Meeting House with Sarah and other Quakers, he says: 'Togetherness grew and tightly enclosed us, until it seemed that we must all be breathing in unison' (*The World in the Evening*, 48).

This sense of togetherness, the idea that we are not alone but that all of us are manifestations of the same Atman and as such are related to one another surely marks Stephen's growth and spiritual enlightenment. Isherwood's burgeoning concern with connection and intimacy, thus, requires him to move

beyond a concern with personal identity. The artist, whose concern has always been to establish his self, seems to find fulfilment, most ironically, in the extinction of his self to the needs of others. It is significant that if Isherwood's artistic popularity lies with the pre-war fictions, dealing as they do with the world of self and time, his greatest strength may be found in the post-war fictions which limn with depth the world of spirit and eternity.

The two novels under consideration, *Prater Violet* and *The World in the Evening* may, however, be said to exhibit what Alan Wilde calls 'irony of liberation' and 'irony of reconciliation', as contrasted with the earlier novels which suggest 'irony of limitation'. In the earlier books, the irony dwells in between the limited and temporal world — the world of time and ego — and the moral values they inculcate. The protagonists like Phillip, Eric, William and Christopher are restricted to the dimensions of time and are exposed in terms of their failures to face the odds of life, and to act upon the values underlined in those books. On the contrary, in the novels written after his conversion, the irony rests in the disparity between the world of time and the world of spirit. The protagonists of *Prater Violet* and *The World in the Evening* move between two opposed worlds, the worlds of ego and Atman. But they are shown to achieve the realization that they must transcend their egos as a pre-condition to self-discovery that would yield real freedom and salvation. Both the characters evince, in words and deeds, the feeling of the need of self-abnegation in the interest of others as a means of release from one's ego and reconciliation with Brahman.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **THE NETHER WORLD WITHIN** ***Down There on a Visit***

Down there refers to that nether world within the individual which is the place of loneliness, alienation and hatred.... Visits to them are, at the same time, visits to the down there inside himself.

— Christopher Isherwood.

Dedicated to Don Bachardy, *Down There on a Visit* (1962) records the final appearance of Isherwood's most favourite device of the namesake narrator, which was abandoned in *The World in the Evening*. The novel's action spans over a long period from 1928 to 1953 and reverts to the themes already exploited in the novels of the early years, sometimes by alluding directly to their events, sometimes by implying their presence in the intervals among the stories. The narrator is concerned, as in the earlier novels, with an investigation of the self and particularly of the conditions of selfhood. Once again, Christopher poses to himself the familiar question: 'Who am I?' 'What does it mean to be I?' Once more, therefore, the search for identity is carried on, but here, as the thematic details of the novel suggest, by referring to the themes of the previous novels.

Episodically structured as it is, *Down There on a Visit* consists of four short stories, each focusing on a different person, each taking place at a different time, offering a view of the namesake narrator as he progresses. The author remains at the centre of the novel as he recapitulates four men who had influenced his life. The four sections named after four protagonists of the episodes represent four different experiences that Isherwood had had in the past, as he descended into his personal 'inferno' of alienation and despair: 'Mr. Lancaster' projects Berlin as the embodiment of moral and political decay; 'Ambrose' conveys political disenchantment; 'Waldemar' shows political despair during Munich Crisis in London, and 'Paul' represents spirituality as the potential means of connection. The summations of all the experiences, recorded in all four sections of the novel, depict the various

stages of the artist's growth at different periods of his life and 'thus provide' as Alan Wilde observes, 'a synoptic view of Christopher's and, mutatis mutandis, of Isherwood's life and career' (1971, 112).

The 'I' narrator, in all four sections of the novel, is recognizably Isherwood and is seen, thoroughly, to play two roles. The characters who in the earlier books had been simply a namesake narrator now becomes both namesake narrator and author-narrator. This appears confusing. But within the text Isherwood makes the distinctions clear and meaningful. In a lecture at Berkley he describes the book as an attempt 'to show myself now writing about the situation and also at the same time, the 'I', other than 'myself', involved at that time with these characters, and so <sup>he</sup> attempt, a kind of autobiography in depth'. Thus Isherwood is both narrator and protagonist, but at different times in his life. In other words, the namesake narrator who presents the earlier story is now older, while consciously looking back he comments on the experiences of his younger self. The novel, therefore, records experiences both of the past and the present filtered through the fluidity of memory and the consciousness of time. Soon after the opening of the book, the author-narrator, thus, says: 'The Christopher who sat in that taxi is, practically speaking, dead; he only remains reflected in the fading memories of us who knew him. I can't revitalize him now. I can only reconstruct him from his remembered acts and words and from the writings he has left us' (*Down There on a Visit* : 1985, 7) Conspicuously, then, three separate characters emerge : the young man acting in the present time of the story, the young man telling that story and the older man commenting on his younger counterparts.

As regards the structural symmetry of the book, critics have doubted whether it is an integrated novel or four separate novelettes featuring the same narrator. Brian Finney notes that during the period of its composition Isherwood was himself convinced of its essential cohesion. Soon after its publication, he announced to his English publisher that he had broken up the material into several pieces, and stressed how they would nevertheless relate to each other 'loosely but efficiently to give the whole a unity and make it something one could describe as a novel' (quoted in Finney : 1979, 235-36). The real unity among the four sections of the novel is, however, achieved as

much by their common themes of loneliness and alienation as by the presence of a slowly maturing narrator. Isherwood also explained that the second of the novel's twin themes was 'about the attitudes to life which one individual can hold at different times — engagement versus disengagement, to use the French post-war jargon' (quoted in Finney: 1979, 236). When the novel opens, we are aware of the narrator's engagement with Art which gradually gives way to world-weariness. In the next section is portrayed Ambrose's non-attachment; to the sensual world. The third section shows the narrator's obsession with European politics which turns, again, in the final section, to non-attachment, this time in purely and profoundly religious sense, presupposing more direct and active involvement in the life of other individuals. Isherwood, indeed, traces a linear growth in the life of the narrator. Art gives way to world-weariness and the narrator invariably turns to politics. But politics being found too inadequate a means to offer any solution, he commits himself to a deeper belief in a divine reality which underlies all the lesser forms of engagements. One can, therefore, discern how the narrator keeps growing steadily at successive stages of his life and ultimately establishes his self as connected with the whole community he lives in.

The opening section of the novel is entitled 'Mr. Lancaster', and presents the namesake narrator in 1928, the year in which Isherwood's first novel *All the Conspirators* was published. The theme is built on the narrator's anger with and hostility towards the older generation. Much like the heroes and anti-heroes of the earlier novels, the protagonist of the book defines his self by anger, by opposition and particularly by his hostility towards the older generation, here represented by Mr. Lancaster. When the narrator, Christopher, first met Mr. Lancaster, his cousin, some forty years back, during his trip to Berlin, he felt him a 'bore'. Very soon he developed an attitude of hostility towards his cousin: 'As far as I was concerned, everyone over forty belonged with a mere handful of honourable exceptions, to an alien tribe, hostile by definition but in practice ridiculous rather than formidable' (*Down There on a Visit*, 6). Much like Philip Lindsay of *All the Conspirators*, who sailed for Africa, out of pride, to reassure his self, Christopher went to Germany and displayed his opposition to the diehards by pouring scorn on Mr. Lancaster: 'I loathed Mr. Lancaster ... because I suspected Mr. Lancaster of bluffing'

(*Down There on a Visit*, 6). Once again, caught up in much the same situation as Eric Vernon in *The Memorial*, Christopher was attracted yet repelled by the older male figure. On arriving at Mr. Lancaster's city he found his cousin, as a reviewer in *The New Yorker* caricatured, as 'a protean bore, an argumentative bore, a mystifying bore, a patronizing bore' (quoted in Piazza : 1978, 127). Later, in London, Christopher tried to re-establish connection with his cousin but, as the end of the story as well as the pattern of imagery suggests, Mr. Lancaster could not eschew his instinctive authoritative dislike for his younger nephew. The following year in Berlin, Waldemar, who was working under Mr. Lancaster, informed Christopher that his cousin had praised his book, had denounced his hostile critics and had even claimed Christopher as his nephew. 'I believe', said Waldemar, 'he was really fond of you ... who knows Christoph, if you'd been there to look after him, he might have been alive to-day' (*Down There on a Visit*, 46). But Isherwood understands that Mr. Lancaster, ensconced in his own 'sounding box', singing his 'epic song' of himself, 'didn't need me. He didn't need any kind of human being' (*Down There on a Visit*, 46). Left thus alone, Mr. Lancaster, at the story's end, shoots himself out of despair.

What is significant about the opening story of the novel is that it functions, for Isherwood, as a metaphor for loneliness and pride — the egotistical nature of an individual, which barricades the possibility of commitment. Brian Finney explains how both Mr. Lancaster and 'Christopher' himself share what Isherwood in *Lions and Shadows* called the 'Coriolanus-myth'. Mr. Lancaster, as suggested by the end of the episode, turns everyday experience into a myth in which he features as an epic hero. Like Coriolanus, he had developed an inflated idea of his own significance until he can hear nothing but 'his own reverberations, his epic song of himself' (*Down There on a Visit*, 46). Like Coriolanus, too, his pride is the cause of his despair which leads to death. The fact is that when the difference between reality and myth becomes impossible to bridge, Mr. Lancaster ceases 'to believe in the epic any more'. He is overtaken by despair and ultimately puts an end to his life. Committed thus to the world of *Maya*, the world of individual ego, he fails to accommodate his self to others. 'Mr. Lancaster... has become so attached to the charade he has mistaken for reality', remarks Finney, 'that he can only stop acting out his role by opting out of life itself' (1979, 240).

Like Mr. Lancaster, the young Christopher too, concerned with himself and his own needs, could not allow himself to care for others. What debarred Christopher, in his early years, to get connected to others around him, was his inability, as the second voice of the 'Thunder' in T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* commands, to sympathize. Too engrossed with his personal needs, he simply ignored those of his fellows. It was less due to his ignorance than egoism, his entrapment, to borrow another of Eliot's images, within the prison of his personality. The story of 'Mr. Lancaster', therefore, serves as a fable to the older Christopher — to get involved with others. It allows him to take steps in the process of maturation. Mr. Lancaster 'had lived too long inside his sounding box, listening to his own reverberations, his epic song of himself' (*Down There on a Visit*, 46), and by implication, unless Christopher moves beyond self, he may suffer the same fate.

Set in 1933, the second section of the novel, called 'Ambrose', is considered one of the most accomplished of the stories. Its action occurs five years after that of 'Mr. Lancaster' and is based on Christopher's account of a summer spent on a Greek island with Waldemar, the two English men, Ambrose and Geoffrey, Ambrose's bodyguard, Hans and three Greek servants, Aleko, Petro and Theo. Once again, Isherwood aims not only to make vivid the confusions and complexities of his protagonist's thought but to anatomize his horribly simple 'despair'. Once more, indeed, he prepares himself, as the opening statement of the section indicates — 'This is May 1993 — and here I am starting another journey' to escape from the uncomfortable existential reality of his situation.

Christopher arrives on the island with Waldemar, the young German he had met at Mr. Lancaster's flat. The island of St. Gregory is no less than an independent and autonomous realm, a kingdom with Ambrose as 'one of its exiled Shakespearean kings' (*Down Three on a Visit*, 83). 'Ambrose' evokes the world of *The Tempest* as 'Mr. Lancaster' took its controlling metaphor from Coriolanus. However, the island offers Christopher an illusory prospect of retreat from the future and the past which so terrified him in 'Mr. Lancaster' 'because my mind is busy with anxiety about the future and regrets about the past. But not now, not here' (*Down Three on a Visit*, 80). The island, therefore, represents, initially and of course, momentarily, a state of mindless bliss and

so Christopher, in his attempt to escape from his guilt-ridden, time-bound self, sees Ambrose as a potential Messiah, one who possesses 'the sort of indifference to discomfort and hardship which you would expect to find in a great hero or saint' (*Down Three on a Visit*, 83).

But the island is ultimately found, as the story's imagery suggests, as an island of despair and death. The order of St. Gregory is, in fact, disorder; its ruler, Ambrose, an anarchic lord of misrule and corruption. It is surrounded by boys who are inhumanly destructive. Even the animals on the island suggest 'death'. There is a goat like a lean, black, shaggy-legged devil with goblin teeth and slanting Levantine eyes' (*Down Three on a Visit*, 75). So, Christopher, motivated as he was by the need to escape to St. Gregory where he looked for 'some basis of genuine feeling', he ultimately found it as a 'charming Devil's island'. As Paul Piazza aptly says, 'The island escape sought by Philip Lindsay in Isherwood's first novel is finally revealed for what it is : a world of Kafkaesque fantasy, sequestered from humanity' (1978, 132). Alone on the island, Ambrose is, in fine, both one of the 'lost', as sterile as the people the earlier Christopher meets and identifies with in Berlin, and 'absolutely self-sufficient within his own world' (*Down There on a Visit*, 58). Christopher is made conscious of his own loneliness, of the forces of his oppressive self. While on the island, he is propelled by the need to move beyond the self. But the marooned life gives him only an intense view of his crisis of identity and he seeks desperately for possible means of salvation through belief in Satanism.

The second section of the novel shows the epiphany of the older Christopher : his retrospective understanding of the feelings and sentiments of others. He can now both examine the attachments he has had with others in the past and appreciate them more fully in the present. At the end of the story he looks in the mirror and notices 'a look in my eyes which hadn't been there before. By the time I got back to England, no one could have had any difficulty in recognizing me as my familiar self. Only I caught glimpses of that look now and then while shaving' (*Down There on a Visit*, 113). The 'mirror' symbol is here brilliantly conceived. It is perhaps the best symbol for the novel as a whole — recreating what is, yet in the very act of reflection, creating something new. Christopher had learnt that to be alone and independent as

he was with Mr. Lancaster is no longer comfortable, but he cannot as yet, find any path to move about. However, this desire to move marks Isherwood's growth: he does not reveal how he felt but how he feels about his responsibility and relationship to others; what he thinks of himself is not important but what others think of himself in his relation to others. As regards the narrator's new awareness and growth Alan Wilde says: 'Anticipatory as well as summary, the (above) comment testifies not only to the growth in Christopher's self-awareness but to the direction, both out of time and away from self, in which he is hereafter to move' (1971, 120).

The third story of the novel 'Waldemar' records Isherwood's descent into his personal 'inferno'. Written against the background of the Munich Crisis, it focuses, almost exclusively, on Christopher more than do the other three parts of the novel; the Waldemar-Dorothy relationship seems almost incidental. But this subject becomes important as it is, in effect, a way to explore Heinz and Isherwood's experiences. However, apart from the Munich Crisis we are also made aware of the Sudetenland Crisis in August and September, 1938, which inflamed his old sickness into death. The narrator also tells us about Chamberlain's well-intentioned but ineffectual attempts to replace the fear of war by the security of peace. In fine, political commitment as a *raison d'être* in itself is largely explored, but it is underplayed to emphasize Christopher's personal despair. As Paul Piazza notes, 'The political crisis stokes Isherwood's personal crisis' (1978, 105), and Isherwood as a result vacillates between hope and despair. But it is not merely the political crisis which exacerbates his pangs; his anxiety over Heinz, who was not allowed to obtain a permit for entering England, only intensified his personal despair. In short, Isherwood's neurotic fear of war, his despair at the political situation of Europe and finally, his anxiety and guilt of having lost Heinz make 'Waldemar', as Piazza further observes 'one prolonged, desperate scream from beginning to end' (1978, 103).

To Isherwood's political crisis was added the story of Dorothy and Waldemar. Dorothy is an English girl whom Christopher came across in Berlin. She brings Waldemar to her family, a typically conservative English family and announces their engagement. But Dorothy's family responds to Waldemar as any middle-class family would. Waldemar to them is hardly better than a

servant. Dorothy made some futile attempts to save their engagement but Waldemar comes to see the reality of his situation and finally leaves her. To Christopher, Dorothy's family represents all that he detests in England — Kathleen's England which had rejected Heinz. So, though Brian Finney notes, as he was told by Isherwood in an interview, that the Dorothy-Waldemar relationship was based on 'a fanatical worker-worshipping English woman he knew who worked at the Communist Headquarters in Berlin and a German carpenter married and travelled around with' (quoted in *Finney: 1979*, 242), the feelings and sentiments presented here more really parallel Isherwood's experiences with Heinz.

In 'Waldemar', then, Isherwood relays his thoughts and feelings, often as in diary entries and in direct narration as well. After detailing his obsession with the signals of war, his political despair and various personal crises, Isherwood admits that 'underneath all my various feelings about the crisis is a cold rock-bottom resentment against being forced' (*Down There on a Visit*, 134). We find, therefore, that Isherwood resents whoever or whatever intrudes on his progress. He says, 'I prefer to keep hold of what I have' (*Down There on a Visit*, 116). In this assertion of self, however, lies a new-found awareness. He no more wishes for the 'aloneness' he felt at the end of 'Ambrose', he now values the company of real friends: 'I want to be with people who think about themselves, not me' (*Down There on a Visit*, 141). What is suggested is that the namesake narrator, who until this novel has not truly contemplated how he feels about connections with others, here explores: 'How do I appear to my friends and acquaintances?' (*Down There on a Visit*, 115). His assertion of self is as solid as his sense of connection. There is justification of his statement when he says that his actions are mostly attempts 'to prove I can play (the Others') game' (*Down There on a Visit*, 116). It also reflects Isherwood's optimism in the movement of self, which finds its full expression in the final episode of the novel 'Paul'. This is, perhaps, one reason why 'Waldemar', 'the least complete in itself of the four episodes', as Isherwood wrote to Upward 'relates a lot to Paul, which follows it' (quoted in *Finney: 1979*, 243).

'Paul' is the novel's final episode and its action takes place in Hollywood. There Christopher, engaged as he was in script-writing and Hindu spirituality,

meets Paul, a dissolute male prostitute. The 'fabulous' Paul conforms to Isherwood's conception of the 'sinner-saint', who achieves spirituality through a conscious immersion in evil. He moves from a life of the flesh as 'the most expensive male prostitute in the world' (*Down There on a Visit*, 161) to the pursuit of what Christopher calls 'this thing that's inside us and yet isn't us' (*Down There on a Visit*, 174). There are references in this episode to sexual promiscuity, supposed rape and impotence along with Isherwood's didactic explanations of religious and Yoga meditations. The protagonist, Paul, at the story's end achieves sanctity through his belief in Satanism and breaks free of the body, and overcomes all obstacles leading to man's essential separateness. One may find here, as Brian Finney notes, that Isherwood's 'sinner-saint' pattern in this episode as also the very title, *Down There on a Visit*, has obvious reference to Huysmans' *Lá-Bas*. The protagonists of both books achieve transcendence through involvement in evil. Paul is, however, the dramatised version of Isherwood's Oriental belief that sex is no bar to spirituality, a dramatised aspect of Isherwood's own spiritual credo — 'The kind that makes dangerous criminals, and very occasionally, saints' (*Down There on a Visit*, 199).

Christopher first meets Paul, in Hollywood, at a lunch with their mutual friend, Ronny. Paul invites Christopher to visit him at his residence and explain his religion. Christopher feels that 'Paul smiled at me in quite a new way, with such charm and intimacy that I began to feel something between us — a kind of ease — which might ever lead to friendship' (*Down There on a Visit*, 177). But Christopher discovers that Paul is in need of money and is haunted by the fear of death because of his impotence. Paul also exposes to Christopher his past life of decadence and his plan of committing suicide. Christopher gives half of his money to Paul and refers him to the Yoga instructor, Augustus Parr (who is modelled after Gerald Heard but fulfils Prabhavananda's role as a spiritual guide). Christopher also rescues him from the police, offers him shelter and invites him to live with him as long as he wishes. Paul agrees. They start living together, and when they meditate together, Christopher felt that 'as if we were both sitting there naked — the situation had that kind of intimacy .... I needed Paul every bit as much as he needed me. Our strength and our weaknesses were complementary' (*Down There on a Visit*, 209).

The relationship between Paul and Christopher, however, deteriorates in the course of the novel. Both fail to sustain their ability to maintain intimacy. Very soon Paul's behaviour seems to irritate Christopher who screams: 'You utter bitch! Do you know what you're doing? You are slowly but surely manoeuvring me into the position of being a jealous husband' (*Down There on a Visit*, 225). Christopher is afraid that his relationship with Paul who had a past life of decadence might give rise to a public scandal. This is the young Christopher we used to meet in the earlier fictions — the young narrator wholly engrossed within himself. However, a few years later, the war being on, both Christopher and Paul meet each other, as they were registered as conscientious objectors. Months later, the doctor at the Camp, being jealous of Paul's influence on the younger men, discharges him on the pretext of heart murmur. Christopher drives to the Camp and invites Paul back to live with him as a matter of form. Later on, we learn that Paul abstains from such addictions as opium eating. He becomes an enthusiastic self again and goes to the world of people. He decides to return to his old friends, not to make any further attempt to commit suicide. He also shows, as the narrative suggests, some degrees of inwardness which gives him the final understanding of self. And the novel ends with an emphasis on connection. The namesake narrator's final words, as also the last ones of the novel, reflect the vision of concord that Paul achieves at the end, and that also gives a fitting finale to *Down There on a Visit*: 'You, Christopher and Ruthie and I were the only close friends he (Paul) ever had' (272).

With Paul, then, Christopher experiences a kind of relationship in which, as he himself admits, 'we were tied together ... not by sex' (*Down There on a Visit*, 225). The spiritual unison becomes possible, since both Christopher and Paul were aware of each other's ties and responsibilities, since both of them were in a continuous search for something that will bridge the gap that separates them. They become sympathetic to each other, and this element of sympathy, Christopher would suggest, rightly springs from their love for each other. So, in course of conversation that establishes a true intimacy Christopher says to Paul: 'What's really important is .... I'd suddenly found there was a word I could not say to Paul. Only this time the word was "love"' (*Down There on a Visit*, 257).

In the figure of Paul Isherwood also portrays the model of a potential saint who believes that love is the only solution to the problem of connection. We learn, as does the narrator, that it is possible for every individual to achieve transcendence of the self through a ceaseless struggle, and that sainthood does not necessarily imply denial of fellow feeling. Sanctity may be obtained through the gift of love, which takes us outside of self to join us with the people around. Paul comes to realise, after he goes back to his old friends, that one must not use his fellow people for selfish ends, and that love must be mutual and shared — this is what the older narrator learns. His awareness that only a saint is capable of developing infinite love as the means of connection shows Isherwood's own maturity of vision and final growth.

The whole thrust of *Down There on a Visit* is, indeed, based on a pattern which suits the life of Isherwood well and is by far his most self-revealing novel. The four episodes of the book represent four hells, signifying Isherwood's experience of the nether world within — of isolation and despair at various periods of his life. On reviewing the novel, Malcolm Bradbury suggested that all of the four main characters 'represent to us facets of Isherwood himself', and they are not merely 'versions of his own degradation' but also 'solutions to a predicament which the narrator shares with all the four characters' (*quoted in Finney* : 1979, 238). Like each of them Isherwood confronted his own hell. He might have succumbed to despair like Mr. Lancaster, or to the isolated fantasy-world of Ambrose, he could also have been as politically despairing an individual as Waldemar, or even a Paul, a male-prostitute, turned a saint. One may find here, very appropriately, indeed, the novel's parallel to Huysmans' *Lá-Bas*, a novel about hell. Both Huysmans and Isherwood seem to believe that religious sanctity may be obtained through a belief in Satanism, that despair may be evaded only by transcending the private hell of ego. Living exclusively in the world of debauchery and promiscuity, Paul, in the final section of the novel, achieves sainthood, and by transcending his own prison-cell of personality, by going back to the world of people he overcomes alienation and despair. 'Not helpless, negative despair. Dynamic despair. The kind that makes dangerous criminals, and very occasionally saints' (*Down There on a Visit*, 199).

Compliciously, then, as the title of the novel signifies, 'Down There'

refers to that nether world within each individual which begets loneliness, despair and anxiety. The novel in four episodes describes characters shut up inside private hells of their own making, committed to an egocentric world. 'Visit' here means, therefore, visit down there inside themselves. Isherwood by tracing his experiences of the four hells explores the self itself, evincing a deeper awareness of it. Alan Wilde succinctly sums up the process thus : 'Moving dialectically through the various hells where he meets Mr. Lancaster, Ambrose, Waldemar and finally, Paul, Christopher arrives, one might say, at a higher level, of the spiral his life describes and becomes a better and steadier, certainly a more self - aware individual' (1971, 125).

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE PROFESSOR

### *A Single Man*

The real importance about [George] is loneliness. What I was really working for was, of course, a picture of middle age. That was the central thing in the book.

— Christopher Isherwood.

Early in the summer of 1960, as Isherwood's biographer Jonathan Fryer reports, Isherwood accepted the offer of a guest professorship in English at Los Angeles State College and the University of California at Santa Barbara. The experience of teaching was rewarding. Within two months of starting his career as a professor Isherwood thought of writing a new novel in which he would incorporate his penchant for teaching. The plot of the novel evidently revolved around an English professor who happens to meet the female protagonist, the mother of one of his students. The novel was to be called *An English Woman*. But, by the close of 1963, Isherwood wrote a second draft of the novel and made a few modifications on the earlier one. The focus shifted from the English woman to the professor, now called George, turned the earlier son into Kenny and concentrated on 'a single day (early in December 1962) in the life of a middle-aged English man who lives in this town (California), teaches at a local college and is queer' (quoted in Finney : 1979, 249). This is how *An English Woman* evolved into *A Single Man*. Ostensibly, then, the novel becomes a study of middle-aged loneliness and alienation. Thus Isherwood wrote to Edward Upward : 'Behind it I glimpse something quite a new approach to middle age'; and 'was fundamentally' he also wrote to the Beesleys 'about me, at my present age, living right here in the Canyon, but under rather different circumstances' (quoted in Finney : 1979, 248-49).

Published a year later, in 1964, *A Single Man* marks, for Isherwood, a bold departure in both content and technique. In the earlier novels the artist was concerned with defining his identity as an individual, in the later works

he determined how that identity could be realized through contact with others. So, the novels written after conversion, beginning with *Prater Violet* right up to *Down There on a Visit*, are explorations whether one can merge his self with the needs of others. In *A Single Man* the emphasis shifts from the artist's concern over self to those who follow him, to the budding learners who obtain instructions from him. The protagonist is no longer preoccupied with discovering his self, with 'Who am I?', but with imparting his followers what he discovers, with letting people know what he is or 'Who I am?' Therefore, instead of being instructed, as he was by Bergmann in *Prater Violet*, the protagonist himself does the job of instruction. Isherwood's argument is that man needs to teach, not because people require to learn, not because he seeks to solidify his identity by teaching, but because only through teaching is he able to display what he has managed to learn in his life; because he is what he has learnt plus what he lets others know about him. This desire to impart knowledge rather than to discover it adds, surely, a new dimension to the artist's prolonged search for the self.

Technically, *A Single Man* marks off from the preceding novels by abandoning the namesake narrator in favour of a third-person one. Complacent as he feels with his own self, Isherwood makes use of the third-person narrator who invites the reader to examine the life of a middle-aged homosexual lecturer, George. The narrator is all-knowing and charged with authority, always moves with the protagonist and passes comments on the protagonist's actions, thoughts and the kind of life he leads. The narrative technique as such invites us to share George's feelings and never allows us to detach those feelings from Isherwood's. Isherwood thus never distances himself from his protagonist nor from the readers. He does display his interest in self, even more than he was wont to do earlier, but without jeopardising the balance between presentation and authorial intention. The detached narrator, therefore, involves us with the hero on the one hand, and on the other, presents the hero in a detached light, providing us with a detailed account of George's life from his awakening to his consciousness of the whole day on through his intimations of universal connection in terms of Isherwood's Vedantic beliefs concerning Atman and Brahman.

In *A Single Man* Isherwood presents a day in the life of George, a middle-aged homosexual and professor of English at a college in California. George's homosexuality and pathetic mourning for Jim, his lover, who died in a car accident, only intensify his very state of loneliness. Isherwood has suggested, on several occasions, through the book's major images, that middle age implies loneliness. But George's loneliness is not merely the result of his middle age but of his homosexuality too. Isherwood made his protagonist not only middle-aged but also homosexual in order that his novel might be an exclusive study of alienation. George, then, in the novel, by being both middle-aged and homosexual, living as he did apart from others, becomes a potential metaphor of loneliness, and as Paul Piazza says, 'his distorted life a Giacometti study in personal distance, the void in which men suffer remote from their fellows' (1978, 153).

Within a few pages of opening his novel Isherwood presents George as delivering in the class his lecture on Aldous Huxley's novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. The class in which George teaches is typical, consisting of scholars, both male and female, from different nationalities and age-groups: 'With an infuriating sheep obstinacy, they love to huddle together confronting their teachers from behind a barricade of empty seats' (*A Single Man*, 44). Among the students there are Ross Dreyer, a scholarly American young man with special curiosity about literary problems, sister Maria who belongs to a teaching order, middle-aged Mrs. Netta Torres, with motherly feeling for George and also Kenneth Potter (Kenny) who tends to do the opposite of what most people do. However, when George refers to Huxley's novel and concentrates on the mythological allusion contained in the title of the novel, he is crossed by a student named Dreyer. But he avoids Dreyer's question and tells the class: 'But before we go any further, you've got to make up your minds what this novel is about' (*A Single Man*, 54). George dislikes discussing typical questions without experiencing the real pleasure of literature. Thus he revolts at the student's crossing. He believes that 'as for the minority, who have cultivated the about approach until it has become second nature, who dream of writing an about book of their own day, on Faulkner, James or Conrad, proving definitely that all previous about books

on that subject are about nothing' (*A Single Man*, 54). But the students pay no heed to him and start making offensive remarks against Huxley. One of them speaks 'about mescaline and lysergic acid, implying that Mr. Huxley is next door to being a dope addict (*A Single Man*, 56). George tries to control his students but fails to hide the fact that Mr. Huxley used to make experiments with drugs like mescaline and LSD, not for fun but with a certain end in view.

The lecture on Huxley, however, ends more or less as a seminar in which the political rather than the literary aspect of Huxley's novel is discussed. But George's urge for producing creative literature, his tendency to approach literature aesthetically to experience its marvels are hardly appreciated by the students. So 'George hates them, hates their basic indifference as they drain quickly out of the room' (*A Single Man*, 60-61). George is utterly flabbergasted at the prevalent system of education and calls the college a modern factory : 'When the factory is fully operational, it will be able to process twenty thousand graduates' (*A Single Man*, 33). The system of education was, according to George, dehydrated of any motivation or real end in view. George's description of the college as a 'modern factory' and its students as mere 'raw material' show Isherwood's old hatred of the mechanical process of education due to which the students are spoonfed with measured quantities of knowledge. One may recall, in this connection, the fact-oriented, utilitarian system of education conducted by Gradgrind in Dickens's novel *Hard Times*. Gradgrind, as Dickens portrays, used to look upon the students as mere 'vessels' to be filled with 'facts' and never allowed them to exercise freely their finer emotions and imaginations. Similarly, as George observes, the students are never propelled by any urge to contribute something original, and the lecture is deemed to be a 'public utility'. George also deplors the lack of personal contact between teachers and taught. The students never worry about the personal life of their professor; he were, as if, really a 'machine' only some parts of which are useful to them : 'They do not want to know about my feelings or my glands or anything below my neck. I could just as well be a severed head, carried into the classroom to lecture to them from a dish' (*A Single Man*, 41). The feeling that the students do not care him only aggravates George's sense of loneliness and ultimately turns him into a cynic.

To George's pinching sense of loneliness was added the agony of the loss of Jim, his homosexual friend, who died in a car accident. The spirit of Jim, who is dead and gone, seems to be hovering over the entire novel just as the spirit of Richard Vernon haunts the life of his wife in *The Memorial*. The repetition of the words 'Jim is dead. Is dead' seems to be echoing Lily's 'But Robert isn't here. He's dead'.

Isherwood's *A Single Man*, thus, turns to be a manifesto of loneliness, an epic tale, as it were, of man's essential separateness and alienation. Apart from George's, the novel also relates the story of two other women, both George's friends, locked in their own selves. One of them is Charlotte, a divorced wife, who brought up her only son all alone, in the course of which she experienced a lot of hurdles due to the absence of the father. That son has, however, left her for his girl friend. George occasionally visits her, stays to have drink, recapturing memories of Jim together, since she always acted as an intermediary between them. Another woman called Doris was also involved. She was with Jim at the time of accident.

Jim did not survive, and after his death, Doris is turned into 'a withered flesh'. When George visits dying Doris in the hospital, he finds her a little more than a 'skeleton' but experiences a rekindling of something vital in himself as she was a link to Jim. In the past, George hated both Jim and Doris as they eloped to Mexico, leaving him alone; but the hatred, ironically, tied them closely. Now the tie is broken. On visiting Doris, George recovers the memories of Jim and feels 'life-energy' surging softly back through him. The recapitulation puts him in touch with Jim in life and makes him aware of his physical cravings. George cannot forget the memories of Jim who had no 'substitute' in his life. As the only confidant and sympathiser of the lonely man Jim signified life to George. But now that he is dead, he can no longer play that part and George tells himself that Jim should be rejected as a symbol of the past. George thus wafts in the vast wave of seclusion, refusing to recognise any contact either with Jim or any of his neighbours.

George, therefore, accepts the loss of Jim and finds him anew when he understands that life with Jim has taught him the meaning of life itself. George learns what the Isherwood of *Prater Violet* only sensed. To the earlier

protagonist, the lovers were not important, it was 'the warm naked embrace' that was important. 'But this is not enough; there is still the pain of hunger beneath everything' (*Prater Violet*, 124). And the hunger resulted, invariably, from the experience of sex without commitment and love. George is, however, more mature. He understands that he and Jim shared commitment and that it is the state of sharing with Jim that was important, not Jim by himself and also that it was their love that heightened experience and made life worthwhile. George learns from his past life with Jim that sharing of self or attachment with other individuals accounts for the real significance of life. This is what George feels impelled to convey to his student Kenny. Mere accumulation of experience is not important; what George feels is that he must communicate what he has learnt from his experience of life.

It is significant, therefore, that Isherwood aptly makes his protagonist a professor. The choice as such mirrors Isherwood's own contemporary role and allows him to make didactic and instructive comments about his own experiences. It is equally important, then, for George to connect with Kenny, his student, as he wants him to understand the significance of his experience of 'being together'. The emphasis, thus, shifts from discovering to communicating. The relation between George and Kenny is an important event to which the later action of the novel builds, because the dialogue between them is not a mere conversation but a means in which one experiences the need of sharing, of 'being together'. In a beech bar George and Kenny meet and drink together. Their verbal intercourse approaches the symbolic dialogue. George cannot imagine such a relationship with a woman nor with a man of his own age. However, being bored by the whole conversation Kenny abruptly proposes George to swim in the ocean. George accepts the proposal. As they swim, the moment is jubilant. Isherwood turns this moment of swimming into a mystical experience, symbolizing both George's and Kenny's mergings with the Greater Consciousness, for which both yearn and from which both learn. Immersed in the water of the ocean George feels a thrill of ecstasy all over his body. Then a prodigious wave, apocalyptic in nature and climactic as death, swallows the 'single man' into a Greater Being. Isherwood's imagery suggests that George is completely given

over to Being Itself, though he is personally unconscious of it. George's immersion in phosphorous is reminiscent of the scene of boat-capsizing at the end of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*; both images suggest the mystical experience of unification with the Higher Being, all distinctions and barriers being obliterated.

After the end of the midnight escapade Kenny drags George out of the ocean. In a drinking bout George convinces Kenny why he wants him, why he seeks to continue his dialogue with him. George insists that Kenny must find out for himself what George knows, for George is like a book that must be read in order to discover its contents. A book cannot read itself to any one. It is Kenny's duty, then, to read and find out what this man called George contains, what he is about. Kenny must know what George knows and George is what George knows, what he has learnt from his experiences with Jim, Doris and Charlotte. Everything that we do and experience becomes part of us and the only way experience can be communicated is for someone to experience us as we are. We do not learn through instructions. We learn through sharing. What Kenny finally learns, or what George knows, or the fact that Isherwood seeks to drive home is that love is experience and experience is life. The most important sharing is love and love is the most potential means of merging one's self with the vast wave of humanity.

*A Single Man* concentrates on a single day in the life of George, and makes an in-depth study of this individual as a constellation of impulses and sense-perceptions. Underlying the attempt there is the elementary Vedantic presupposition, as Isherwood points out in *Ramkrishna and His Disciples* (1965) that the everyday conception of the self is an illusion, *Maya*, and the world made on it is equally impermanent. Throughout the day, George, as we have seen, shows his commitment to the world of *Maya*. The very nature of his personality is an 'illusion', deceptive, changing several times as he changes one role after another. Sometimes he is 'Uncle George', sometimes, as at San Thomas College, 'a severed head carried into the classroom. Again, his performance varies from 'the hummy harmonies' of his opening speech to that of 'the voice of the judge' only to become 'an attendant at a Carnival

booth'. One may find, therefore, Georges 'personality' fragmented into innumerable and incoherent selves. So, George's body is assembled before the bathroom mirror to confront the image of his own Karma, to see what a 'mess' it performed during its fifty-eight years, to see the multiplicity of past selves 'preserved like fossils', now always in fear of 'being rushed' to the inevitable extinction.

The novel begins with the beginning of George's day. For the first two pages the hero remains anonymous and impersonal referred to as 'it'. When George wakes up, he becomes part of the flux of time. 'Waking up begins with saying 'am' and 'now'. That which has awaked then lies for a while, staring up at the ceilings and down into itself until it has recognized 'I' and therefore deduced I am, I am now' (*A Single Man*, 44). Isherwood's narrative method mirrors the circular journey of George's day : from unconsciousness to self-awareness and then to the loss of personhood, the Vedantist ideal. George's waking up symbolizes his return to ego-consciousness, to the flux of time, and the moment he gets back his ego-consciousness, he has premonition that 'it' will come. 'it' means death. The fear of death overpowers him when he is committed to his ego-consciousness — to the obstinate belief that 'I am, I am now'. But George and the world, the world of *Maya*, that he embraces are products of Brahman and he is also unconsciously a part of the Reality. Isherwood thus near the end of the novel introduces a marvellous image which establishes George's relation to the Greater Reality which the Hindus call Brahman. George is likened to the rock-pool and the Greater Reality to the ocean. The rock-pool retains its separate identity at the low tide but merges with the ocean at a high tide and is left separate when it ebbs once more. Isherwood converts the image into a rich religious parable : 'And just as the waters of the ocean come flooding darkening over the pools; so over George and the others in sleep come the water of that other ocean; that consciousness which is no one in particular but which contains everyone and everything, past, present and future and extends unbroken beyond the uttermost stars' (*A Single Man*, 155-56).

Isherwood's image of rock-pool and the ocean has another suggestion,

which presupposes his Vedantic belief that man's ego is fragile and temporary construct, afraid of impending death. We fear death because we fail to merge with the Universal Consciousness, which is Brahman, by transcending our ego-consciousness and by withdrawing ourselves from the flux of time. The Katha Upanishad says: 'Whatever is here, that is there, whatever is there, that is here. He who does not believe in this presence of the same Brahman as also there, after death gets death alone' (*The Principal Upanishads*, 634). In other words, one who ceases to be his own self and thereby becomes part of the Greater Reality, death never means total annihilation. Isherwood justifies this Vedantic truth with a scientific proposition that only the material part of the body dies and the rest disperses. When the novel opens, George is a part of the flux, confined to his individual ego, saying 'am' and 'now'. Next he enters the space 'here' and more specifically 'at home'. The sharp contrast between 'home' suggesting the individual consciousness at the outset of the novel and 'homeless' signifying universal consciousness, which comes after the corporeal frame of the body, the living organism, ceases to exist. The analogy of the 'ocean' and the 'rock-pool', therefore, points to the universal and individual consciousness as part of each other and may offer a spiritual solution to the most momentous problem of modern man — the problem of isolation and fear of death. The all-engulfing consciousness is God and the particular consciousness of every single man is God Immanent. According to the Hindu philosophy of Vedantism, God, the Transcendent and God, the Immanent are one and knowing Him man transcends the fear of death,

As George's 'day' gradually declines, the novel turns to its inevitable end. And as Isherwood begins to complete the circle, George resumes dialogue within, and the final action of the novel turns to George's monodrama. In a question-answer format, similar to Bloom and Stephen's post-brothel dialogue in *Ulysses*, George reviews his day, his whole life, as it were. He resolves that he will find another Jim. Turned as he is to a Greater Consciousness as the 'rock-pool' image suggests, George now possesses what he sought for in Jim, what he seeks for in Kenny. Now what he obtains enables him to satisfy 'the hunger beneath' and 'gives him kinship' as Paul Piazza says, 'with

Isherwood's saint' (1978,156). So, both *Prater Violet* and *A Single Man* conclude with a Vedantist epiphany. However, extending his analogy of the 'rock-pool' Isherwood prepares for George's death by describing the mysterious dying of the rock-pool creatures. In the dark full flood, some of the creatures are lifted from the pools to drift far out over the deep waters, never to return again. Centring the reader's attention back on George's body, Isherwood uses the image of the ship and its crew and describes George's dying in medical terminology. When George's cortex and brain-stem become out of order in the blackout, throttled out of their oxygen, the lungs go dead, their power-line cut. The great ship of George's body founders and then there prevails 'total blackness'. Evidently, then, Isherwood graphically traces the gradual necrosis of George's body. His spirit can no longer associate with what lies on the bed. It must, at long last, merge with the Greater Consciousness, which George has searched for throughout the day, his life, and which Isherwood has tried to demonstrate throughout the novel. So, 'in death, George is no longer the single man" as Piazza concludes, 'who is George? Isherwood's Everyman' (1978,161).

To conclude, *A Single Man*, is a proclamation of the meaning of life. It teaches the lesson that integration and love are the sum and substance of life. It answers questions raised earlier by the namesake narrator in *Prater Violet* : 'What makes you go on living?' and re-affirms the namesake narrator's realization in *Down There on a Visit* : 'What's really important is is... "love" '. Technically, *A Single Man* appears atypical in that it shows the ground that Isherwood has broken by abandoning the namesake narrator of the earlier novels. But though the novel disperses with the namesake narrator, in reality it presents an objectified connection between narrator and the protagonist. In his mature years, Isherwood realised that instead of directly contemplating his own problems, he must move beyond self to attempt a more universal statement. The narrative technique of *A Single Man* evinces, therefore, a logical outgrowth and development of Isherwood. In his next and last novel, *A Meeting by the River* Isherwood explores further the meaning of life and turns the theme of integration and connection into that of universal brotherhood in Vedantic terminology.

# CHAPTER NINE

## BETWEEN TWO BROTHERS

### *A Meeting by the River*

What separates me from them is not important, not ultimately. What unites is the one and only thing that matters.

— Christopher Isherwood.

A year before the completion of *A Single Man*, Isherwood embarked on the final typescript of what he called his 'weary old *Ramkrishna and His Disciples* ... a necessary work of popular biographical journalism' (quoted in Finney: 1979, 256). In October 1963, as Finney notes, the Ramkrishna Order had approved of it 'vetting its accuracy chapter by chapter' (1979,256). That winter in December and January of the following year, Isherwood accompanied Swami Prabhavananda on a flying visit to Calcutta to participate in the Centenary Celebrations of Vivekananda's birth. The celebrations lasted a whole year and the two visitors from California took part in mass meetings at Belur Math near Calcutta. As his contribution to the celebrations Isherwood delivered lectures in English to a crowd of thousands most of whom understood nothing of what he was saying. Nevertheless, it was important for him to be there. However, on his way back to America Isherwood was contemplating seriously reflecting on his experiences in India. He decided to incorporate them into a workable novel to be based on a confrontation 'between two people meeting on neutral territory between two worlds rather like Jesus of Nazareth and Satan meeting in the wilderness' (quoted in Fryer : 1977,270). Isherwood further realised that the confrontation would be more effective if one of the protagonists were a monk and another a worldly-minded man; the venue was a place near Calcutta, on the Ganges, and hence *A Meeting by the River*.

Isherwood's last novel to date, *A Meeting by the River* (1967), however, posed a serious problem to its author in so far as the protagonist of the book was intended to be a saint. E.M.Forster in *Some Aspects of the Novel* points out that 'Homo Fictus' is totally different from 'Homo Sapiens'. What Forster

means to say is that 'Homo Fictus' is deprived of a great many ordinary human attributes, and can hardly afford to be, in any work of art, an exact transcript of the 'Homo Sapiens'. Herein lies, according to Isherwood, the root of the problem of a religious novel, because a saint is different from all recognizable types. Isherwood, however, tides over his difficulty by following the manner in which Somerset Maugham has presented Larry, a 'Homo Sapien' as a perfect 'Homo Fictus' in his novel *The Razor's Edge*. He believes that *The Razor's Edge* is popular because Maugham does not stick to the popular, conventional idea of a saint-hero as a lanky, serious man. He makes his hero, Larry, a lively, natural, humorous character wearing sweet smile on his lips. Isherwood's Oliver, the protagonist of *A Meeting by the River*, is closely modelled on Maugham's Larry. Oliver is portrayed as quite normal and ordinary, with a middle-class family background, whose inner satisfaction at the prospect of becoming a full-fledged *Sannyasin* of an Indian monastery at Belur Math radiates in his smile and in practical jokes. Isherwood also might have in his mind what Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter to Mr. Francis H. Legget, dated 6 July 1896, in London: 'It is a funny world and the funniest chap you ever saw is He — the Beloved Infinite' (*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 419). A man who has felt in the depth of his heart this love need not put on grave look or serious appearance. Isherwood, thus, in his novel, delineates Oliver as an ordinary man with child-like prattle and candour and who is capable of making innocent practical joke, which Ramkrishna himself did in his day-to-day dealings with his disciples.

Another problem that Isherwood faced in *A Meeting by the River* relates to its form and narrative technique. He himself speaks of the novel as 'very experimental, because it is entirely told in letters and diary' (quoted in Finney 1979, 259). The fact is that Isherwood here abandons any stylistic individuality in favour of an epistolary novel. Paul Piazza says: 'It is as if in his last novel he is trying to bring the book as near as possible to the experiences of Joneses, the Smiths, the Browns, by casting the book in the form of letters and diary jottings' (1978, 161). The narrator or his namesake is absent here. The novels employing the namesake narrator had successfully proved that good art enables one to develop a better awareness of the self. Herein lies the novel's

essential problem: we tend to look for narrative authority in either one brother or the other one who seems to give vent to, as Alan Wilde says, 'a summary of Isherwood's intellectual and emotional development' (1971, 139). Isherwood, however, solves his problem by bringing two brothers into a confrontation and finally effecting an integration of the opposites, towards which the novel seems to move. Written in epistolary form, the novel presents two brothers, Patrick and Oliver, who are apart at the opening but are brought together at the close. Neither brother in fact comes to an understanding of his needs by the end of the novel, yet each decides that he must and will fulfil those needs. In drawing two brothers toward each other, by suggesting a shared change, Isherwood attempts fully rounded characterization in which both Patrick and Oliver present Isherwood's life as he interprets and lives it. It is also significant that the creation of two brothers, inhabiting two different worlds, enables Isherwood to examine his own dichotomy within — the dichotomy between flesh and spirit — one that haunted Isherwood throughout his life, and the fact that the two brothers embrace each other at the close of the novel does indicate Isherwood's own vision of concord, which he imbibed from his knowledge of Vedanta.

Thematically, *A Meeting by the River* is based on the struggle that goes on in the mind of an ordinary man to renounce the old, worldly life and to accept the new spiritual one. When the novel begins, the young American Oliver is found to be a novice in a Hindu monastery at the Belur Order near Calcutta and is waiting for his final initiation. And here comes Oliver's worldly minded elder brother Patrick, with his Western attitude of analysis and reasoning and with a prying curiosity to know what has attracted his brother and if possible, to persuade him to give up the idea of taking monastic vows. Ostensibly the novel describes a confrontation between two representative figures who hold utterly opposed sets of values. Patrick revels in the world of fact and flesh; Oliver renounces it. Patrick is an atheist, Oliver a theist. Patrick personifies ego; Oliver transcends it. Isherwood, however, expresses the matter in unique terms when he shows within the space of two pages of the novel first Patrick and then Oliver discovering within themselves an unmortified ego. Each brother sticks to his own world, consciously keeping aloof from

that of the other for fear of losing his identity as is evident from what Oliver says 'I get afraid that I'll start, behaving like him and lose my identity altogether' (*A Meeting by the River*, 95). But being brothers, both, however, share some common traits and also crave for unity. In their own ways, they turn out to be searching for a sense of unison with others and more especially, with each other, but each one is separated from the other by ego. According to Vedanta philosophy, the ego is what separates the individual from the fundamental reality that embraces all individuals. Isherwood suggests at this stage of the novel that both Patrick and Oliver, apart as they are, have sincere yearning for connection, which occurs only at the end of the novel, when two brothers transcend their own ego, understand each other's needs and finally, come under the magic spell of the Hindu philosophy of Vedantism, which proclaims unity of all in one Universal Truth, Brahman.

Brotherhood, as Isherwood has suggested on more than one occasion, is a dominant metaphor in *A Meeting by the River*. Both Patrick and Oliver have a dream-vision in which they become mystically united. Oliver has a parallel vision in which he seeks to get united with his Swami. Isherwood thus traces the spiritual kinship of both the brothers. Paul Piazza observes: 'Oliver construes his vision in terms of a dream, whereas Patrick has read his dream in terms of a vision' (1978, 164). As Oliver says, 'Presumably it was a few moments before waking that I saw Swami', while Patrick admits that 'yes, I can say I did literally see him, although this was not a vision in the working state' (*A Meeting by the River*, 144). Oliver chooses brotherhood of his fellow-monks, while Patrick that of his male-lovers. But both are inspired by a common desire for an ideal of universal brotherhood that will transcend the limitations of every ego. What each brother does for the other is to help overcome neuroses which have prevented them from meeting each other in a spirit of love, whether human or supra-human, sensuous or supra-sensuous. In course of the novel's action, as Isherwood pointed out to one correspondent, Oliver 'overcomes the feelings of inferiority and jealousy which he has always been plagued with' (quoted in Finney : 1979, 262). Patrick, on the other hand, as he writes in a letter to Penelope, sees the possibility of 'safety and freedom' with his brother, just as Oliver sees in his life in the monastery

safety and freedom of a different kind. Patrick at long last, of course, realises that his dream-vision can be attained only with Penelope, his wife. So, he gives up Tom, and writes to Penelope to excuse him for his past life and to accept him as her sincere husband.

It is here significant to note, as Paul Piazza has pointed out, that 'at the centre of dream-visions of both brothers, a third person, either dead or still living, provides a link to the world of spirit' (1978,165). For Patrick, the liaison is his male lover Tom or even his wife Penelope; for Oliver, the dead Swami. Piazza further maintains that, 'it seems essential to Isherwood's conception of the saint that he be joined to the world of spirit through another person who, like Mrs. Wilcox in *Howards End* or Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India*, reconciles the spiritual with the physical realm' (1978,165). In *Prater Violet* Bergmann served as the spiritual guide for Isherwood, just as Elizabeth for Stephen Monk in *the World in The Evening* or Augustus Parr for Christopher in *Down There on a Visit* or Jim for George in *A Single Man*; and it seems safe to say, as Swami Prabhavananda did for Isherwood. However, at the story's end, Patrick, under the magical influence of the Indian monastery with its atmosphere of centemplation and open-mindedness, is changed unconsciously. So, when Oliver and other newly initiated youngmen drop out of the Temple at the end of Sannyas Ceremony, people bow down and touch their feet in expectation of obtaining blessings, Patrick is also found, surprisingly, to touch Oliver's feet. Under the spell of Indian religion and of the Swami, all are reconciled. 'I was aware', Oliver thus writes, 'that he was an established part of our life, the three of us belonged together intimately' (*A Meeting by the River*, 146). When Patrick bows down to Oliver and touches his brother's feet, it is obviously an acknowledgement of the superiority of Hindu philosophy of Vedantism to Christian religion and of its essential precept that both the sinners and the saints alike may be united in a spirit of brotherhood with the God Transcendent, Brahman, through meditation and abnegation of individual ego.

From Oliver's letter to Patrick we understand that he came under the influence of a Hindu Swami at Munich in 1958. Oliver was offered a German

job through the International Red Cross in Geneva and was flown from there to Munich to interview some people. While working, he accidentally meets the Swami whose profound spirituality entrances him. Oliver's remarks parallel Isherwood's first response to Bergmann : 'Something about him fascinated me, from the first moment' (*A Meeting by the River*, 13). Unlike Bergmann, the Swami is 'a new sort of human being, almost' (*A Meeting by the River*, 13). He is not physically impressive, but 'small and frail and skinny, with untidy grey hair cut rather short' (*A Meeting by the River*, 14). His robust inner being, however, flashes out. Oliver describes his first talk with the Swami as the most unsettling conversation of his life. But it is more than a mere conversation, it is a 'confrontation with this individual who, just by being what he was, intrigued and mystified me... as no one else had ever done before' (*A Meeting by the River*, 14). Oliver encounters the Swami — just as Isherwood met Swami Prabhavananda — at that time when Oliver was most open to a spiritual influence. He starts arguing with the Swami and expresses his doubts about the futility of trying to save one's soul and neglect the misery of other people: 'The very idea of mysticism set my teeth on edge' (*A Meeting by the River*, 13). He also raised a few questions relating to the Hindu philosophy of Vedantism. We here perceive Isherwood's own view of spiritual doubts in real life in his 'Introduction' to the lectures delivered by Swami Vivekananda: 'But we must remember that Naren's faith was no facile thing. He doubted greatly because he was capable of believing greatly' (1962, XVI). Oliver understands that there is something in the Swami's religion which gives him an equanimity and openness. Days on end they talked with each other, but Oliver was more influenced by his personality than his cleverness in conversation. In this time, therefore, the Isherwood hero does not rebel against the dead father, nor does he invent his own father ; instead, he actually follows the plan this surrogate father had intended for him. Oliver feels secure in the Swami's rocklike assertion that he will remain with him even after death. He expresses his firm conviction that the Swami 'is with me always, wherever I am' (*A Meeting by the River*, 145) : He is convinced that the power of the Swami works in mysterious ways. So, unlike the heroic father of Philip or of Eric, Oliver's Swami does not return to haunt but to help and heal.

Oliver was, however, greatly impressed by the indifference of the Swami to his personal interests. He was influenced not by the Swami's words but by his monkish life-style. He was convinced that the Hindus do not disdain activity or withdraw from it. They absolutely agree that the world's task has to be done and an attitude of non-attachment should be maintained. This is what Isherwood writes in *An Approach to Vedanta* : 'You know now that you are the Atman and that every action is done for the sake of the Atman alone. Work has become sacramental. No fruits of it are desired, no consequences are feared' (1963, 161). Oliver follows the principles of non-attachment and his life undergoes a marked change under the influence of the Swami, who does not enjoin Oliver to do anything or tries to impose his own will upon him. He submits wholeheartedly to the will of God and thus prepares for taking *Brahmacharyay*, the first monastic vows that give him the official status of a disciple. The vows, according to Oliver, are 'pretty much the same in spirit as the Christian ones — confidence in thought, word and deed, (*A Meeting by the River*, 18). Oliver learns from the Vedantic religion that the Absolute Reality or Brahman is pervading the whole universe and is also present within the mind of man. Vedanta thus postulates : 'Just as the fire enters the earth and takes the shape of the combustible material, so the Atman enters the body of all living beings and just as the wind enters the world and takes the shape of different objects, so the one Atman residing within the body of all living beings has taken the shape of the human body' (*The Principal Upanishads*, 639). Oliver also learns from Vedanta the principle of 'self-discipline' which teaches man how to get over his ego-sense through meditation. This attempt proves to be a test of mental strength in the case of one who seeks to become a *Sannyasin*. He must free himself from the world of illusion and ego. Oliver thus writes in his diary : 'When shall I get it through my head, once and for all, that the ego, the Oliver in me, never will and never can be anything but a vain little monkey ?.... I know perfectly well that I ought to be dissociating myself from it, calmly and firmly .... This is what self-discipline means' (*A Meeting by the River*, 30).

An Irish journalist Rafferty wants an interview with Oliver on the eve of his taking *Sannyas* and manages to get the permission of Mahanta Maharaj,

the head of the monastery, through Patrick. The Rafferty episode is Patrick's own contrivance with a view to dissuading his brother from his chosen path of becoming a saint ; it is also by Isherwood to testify Oliver's practice of 'self-discipline'. Rafferty brings with him a group of Indian journalists. On the eve of his renunciation of Western culture and in fact, of his old self, Oliver passes through a state of acute mental conflict and tries to practise self-control. This is not, admittedly, the proper time for an interview, for privacy is Oliver's greatest need of the moment. He is on preparation for his final initiation through meditation. But the Irish journalist is encouraged by Patrick to intrude into Oliver's privacy. Oliver writes in his diary : 'One lesson I learnt from the Rafferty incident is that it is very important to enter willingly into the game' (*A Meeting by the River*, 104). Oliver is disgusted and the incident is squarely repugnant. But he tries to get over this attitude by calling the Rafferty incident the Divine play of *Maya*. In Vedanta *Maya* is described as the indescribable divine power present both in the good and the bad, a power which can work wonders : 'You should know nature to be *Maya* and God to be the master of *Maya*' (*The Principal Upanishads*, 734). In their translation of Shankara's *Vivekchudamani* Swami Prabhavananda and Isherwood have observed : 'God means Iswara, the ruler of *Maya*..... The circumstances of our life, our pains and pleasures, are all the result of our past actions in this and countless previous existences, from a beginningless time. Viewed from a relative standpoint, *Maya* is quite pitiless. We get exactly what we earn, no more, no less'(1946, 27). By calling the Rafferty incident a Divine play of *Maya*, Oliver is somehow making himself responsible for this untoward incident. If he is moved by the external incidents as such, it means that, he has not got over his vanity. He must rise above his self-consciousness : 'It's Oliver who is fake and I don't have to identify with him' (*A Meeting by the River*, 105). A true *Sannyasin* is one who is capable of facing praise and humiliation alike. Thus Oliver has to undergo a terrible struggle until he overcomes all temptations, material taints and egotism. Through the character of Oliver, with all his honest doubts and their solutions, all his spiritual struggle ending in peace, *A Meeting by the River* becomes Isherwood's exploratory vehicle for moral and spiritual values.

More effective and subtler than Rafferty incident is Patrick's temptation which occurs towards the close of the novel. Patrick finds the qualities of leadership in Oliver, which, in his view, would enable him to become pre-eminent in whatever field he chooses to put his energies into. He speaks straight to Oliver: 'You'd have proved yourself that your faith was strong enough to survive outside in the wicked world' (*A Meeting by the River*, 132). We are here reminded of Satan's offer to give Jesus power over all the kingdoms of the world. Brian Finney says: 'Just as Satan tempts Jesus, after his fast of forty days and nights, to turn stones into bread, Patrick urges Oliver to attend more to his bodily needs and further offers him the temptations of the flesh when he exercises naked before him' (1979, 262). One may also recall, in this connection, the subtlest temptation given to Thomas Becket by the Fourth Tempter in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* to become a martyr for self-glory. Becket wavers a little and ultimately realises the danger — the sin of spiritual pride to which Lucifer or Satan yielded — and resists the temptation confidently. Similarly, Oliver struggles hard to overcome all the temptations, passes all the tests successfully and sticks to his decision to get initiated. Patrick finally submits to his brother's will and endorses the Hindu belief to which his brother is committed. Oliver writes: 'Patrick put his camera away and suddenly without any warning dropped to his knees and took the dust of my feet and bowed down before me' (*A Meeting by the River*, 146). He includes Patrick in the mystical communion of himself and his Swami: 'The general impression I had was that Patrick had got himself into a spiritual state which was very serious, so serious as to be almost ridiculous but that nevertheless he would be alright' (*A Meeting by the River*, 146). In spite of his mistrust and antagonism, Patrick also admits in one of his letters to Penelope: 'And through him, I seem closer than ever to you, my darling — I mean, I feel such cleverness in the thought of us three together' (*A Meeting by the River*, 152). This sense of togetherness as perceived by the worldly - minded Patrick, nurtured in Western culture and Christian values, is indicative of the endorsement of the truth underlying the fundamental precept of Vedantism which Oliver has already adopted. Brian Finney has thus rightly described the novel as 'a metacomedy ending with both brothers and the Swamis, all

laughing at the cosmic joke in which they have participated' (1979, 265).

Now, what Isherwood, in his last novel, seeks to demonstrate, through Oliver's conversion to Vedantism, is that we are all inhabitants of the world of *Maya* and that the Ultimate Reality is Brahman. We all exist in him and as such whether we are saints like Oliver or sinners like Patrick, we have our importance in the vast scheme of the universe. As such, there is no fear of loneliness, no fear of death. Isherwood further affirms that no life, however 'lost', is valueless in this transcendental scheme, the world of Brahman, and no individual should be worried by fear or sorrow if he ceases to be his own self, transcends ego-consciousness and withdraws from the time-ridden world of sense - perceptions, beyond which exists what the Vedantists call Reality. This is how even a modern man, with all neurotic crises, can become what the *Gita* calls *Sthitapragna*, to be achieved through meditation or Yoga. Yoga, which is derived from the English word 'yoke' meaning 'union', is the only mystical technique, as prescribed by the Hindu Philosophy of Vedantism, of union with the Atman. Isherwood learns from the Vedantic literature that the creature is Atman and the Atman is Brahman which must be personified at first if it is to be loved and realized. A monist never disdains the dualism of Christian mysticism. But it is very hard for the rigid dualist to accept monism. Vedanta is essentially monistic, while Christo - centric Western mysticism is dualistic. This is, perhaps, one reason why only a Hindu mystic has access to complete transfiguration of his self into the Ultimate Reality, Brahman, the God Transcendent. Oliver, thus, in *A Meeting by the River* by turning himself into a Hindu mystic, not only overcomes all anxiety and fear of death but, in his final mystical vision, thinks of Patrick and the Swami in spiritual communion with each other. In *Vedanta for the Western World* Isherwood writes : 'It is upon the nature of the final mystical experience that all agree. What is this experience ? It seems that when the ego-sense has, through constant self-discipline, grown very weak, there comes a moment of which the presence of the essential nature is no longer concealed' (1945,8-9). The saint becomes aware that the Atman actually does exist. Furthermore, he experiences the nature of the Atman as his own nature. He knows he is nothing but Reality. This is what the Christian writers call 'the mystic union' and the Vedantists

*Samadhi*. The attainment of this ecstasy is the spiritual being's *summum bonum*.

Within the novel's texture, then, what makes Patrick and Oliver share the need of each other is their dedication to an ideal — the Vedantic vision of universal brotherhood — which gives meaning to their lives. That the novel closes with the reconciliation of the brothers affirms the very Vedantic ideal of oneness. The relationship is meant, in fact, to symbolize the oneness of all beings in the enlightened state. Both brothers express the desire of their deepest selves to overcome isolation. Oliver has the awareness of his Swami's concern for Patrick and of the belief that 'the three of us belonged together intimately' (*A Meeting by the River*, 146). Patrick, on the other hand, informs Tom : 'I'm certain that you could be my brother — the kind of brother I now know I've been searching for all these years' (*A Meeting by the River*, 109). We are here to understand that through acceptance of self the brothers are no longer threatened by one another and now respond with the love they have always felt in the blood. Oliver no longer considers Patrick to be his enemy but rather an essential part of his own being. It is here significant to note that Isherwood in his last novel resolves the old dichotomy between the Truly Strong and the Truly Weak Man. He recognizes that the Enemy is no longer the majority or the outside forces which he earlier called 'Others'. The mature Isherwood can now discern them as capacities residing simultaneously within a person. For Oliver, the Enemy is not the outside world : withdrawal from the world, Oliver realizes, actually binds him to the world's people by his love of them. Hence the Enemy no longer implies spite but the warring self within, and in religious terms one has to reconcile the old self with the new one. Understandably, then, what separated the two brothers is not, finally, important but what ties them together showing up the centrality of Oliver's discovery : 'What unites is the one and only thing that really matters' (*A Meeting by the River*, 99). And Oliver's recognition is Isherwood's, a stage of definite spiritual progress. Oliver is meant to be seen to achieve this self-realization which for Isherwood is man's higher goal in life. Discovery of one's true self may or may not make one holy but it is surely important for one who has constantly and consistently striven for it.

## Conclusion

Perhaps I have travelled too much, left my heart in too many places .... what is the use of caring at all, if you aren't prepared to dedicate your life to die?

— Christopher Isherwood.

Paul Piazza in the concluding chapter of his book, *Christopher Isherwood : Myth and Anti-Myth*, refers to two literary exhibitions : the one entitled 'London in the Thirties' held by the London Museum in 1973 and the other 'Young Writers of the Thirties' hosted by the National Portrait Gallery of London in 1976. The first exhibition contained sixteen books, four of which were written or co-written by Christopher Isherwood. The second programme featured the published and unpublished works of five writers who had profound impact on their contemporaries : Auden, Day Lewis, Isherwood, Mac Neice and Spender. The two exhibitions 'London in the Thirties' and 'Young Writers of the Thirties' only confirm Isherwood's importance and the enormous influence he left on his contemporaries during the thirties. To most critics and reviewers, indeed, Isherwood's reputation rests with the Berlin books. They feel inclined to believe that his talent burnt itself out in the thirties, and with his journey to America, along with Auden, 'left the hope of English fiction' (quoted in Piazza, 1978, 13).

But the significant point about Isherwood literature — one which most critics and scholars miss — is that the whole corpus of Isherwood's writings forms one coherent pattern, based as it is, from beginning to end, on the artist's relentless rebellion and growth. Whatever he wrote right up to the end of his career builds up a trajectory of the artist's evolution from his earlier anger or iconoclasm to his latest embrace of Vedanta. Indeed, as Isherwood's career displays, one would face several Isherwoods : 'The Cambridge Isherwood' of *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial*, 'The Berlin Christopher Isherwood' and 'The American Vedantist Isherwood'. The artist lived and grew through all the successive phases, and to segregate one from the other is to miss the whole thrust of artistic growth in his literary career of which the thirties is only a beginning and his recent conversion to Vedanta its apt conclusion. One might go further and say that as time wears on, Isherwood matures, incorporating

new, original insights into his novels so that the last one becomes a palimpsest recording the results of his modified interpretation of the anti-myth, recalling and reliving the past. In his last novel, *A Meeting by the River*, for example, Isherwood takes a vastly different look at the protagonists of *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial*, held in the clutches of the 'evil' mother. In *A Single Man* he is found to refocus his 'Camera' on the isolation of the lonely observer who appears in the Berlin novels, say, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. In fact, he keeps on, throughout his career, revising and modifying his earlier stand. As he crosses a new frontier, he is imbued with fresh insights. In the light of his new insights and enlightenment, he curbs, softens and in some cases, annuls his early repudiation of his parents, faces his neurotic fear of war and death and finally, reinvestigates his position. So, it is Isherwood's own search for the self and its realization that underpins the entire corpus of his literary output. Every critical appraisal should, then, be directed or confined not to the novels of any particular period, but always taking into account all that he wrote during his long literary career of more than forty years. The lack of a comprehensive study in this line not only leads to the misapprehension of the 'essential Isherwood' but testifies to the state of general neglect. It is a fact that there is probably no writer less justly valued at the present time than Christopher Isherwood, none, therefore, more in need of reassessment and revaluation.

Isherwood is a writer with varied and profound experiences and interests, social as well as political, philosophical as well as religious. Right from the time of *All the Conspirators* he visited several countries, say, Germany, China, America, South Africa, India, and each of the visits inspired him to write either a novel or an autobiography or a memoir. With his natural power of self-analysis he observes in *Prater Violet*: 'Perhaps I have travelled too much, left my heart in too many places' (104). Wherever he went, his experience became very much a part of his own being. Indeed, what Isherwood writes of Upward may be said of himself that 'wherever he is, all places are the same, because all places become part of himself' (quoted in Piazza: 1978, 10). But throughout his literary career nowhere does Isherwood propagate any political creed or ideology. The group of poets of the thirties with whom his name was generally associated

were all one-time communists. But Isherwood never committed himself to any political ideology whatsoever. Jonathan Fryer notes that 'already surrounded by a good number of communist sympathizers at the Hirschfeld Institute, Christopher was in general accord with their leftist tendencies, although he was not politically motivated enough to align himself with them' (1977, 121). Like the narrators of the Berlin books, he detached himself from practical politics. Behind the ironic comments on the low life scene in Berlin, we find no dogma but only the sympathetic heart of the humanitarian artist that Isherwood undoubtedly was. An ever-present sense of dissatisfaction seems to goad him on to enlarge his sympathies or rather to encompass the whole world within the range of sympathetic treatment. Stephen Spender in *World Within World* thus writes : 'Isherwood, according to Auden, held no opinions whatever about anything. He was wholly and simply interested in people ..... He simply regarded them as material for his work' (1977, 101). Isherwood's interest, in all his writings, lies in essential human impulses and eternal human problems along with a quest for their lasting solution.

All Isherwood's writings are autobiographical; they reveal the progressive modifications life brings upon the artist giving rise to successive stages of growth and development. Isherwood writes about his own experiences and incorporates them into the thematic textures of his fictions and non-fictions. In this connection, Isherwood himself says : 'I write because I am trying to study my life in retrospect and find out what it is, what it is made of, what it is all about' (quoted in James, 1976, 705). In *All the Conspirators* Philip Lindsay, the protagonist, who revolts against his mother and all that the past symbolizes may be said to represent his author. Like Philip, Isherwood was always at loggerheads with his termagant mother, Kathleen and broke free of all familial ties in the pursuit of art. In *The Memorial* Eric Vernon's dislike of his mother's dominance and of all aristocratic life as such reflects Isherwood's own attitude. The two Berlin novels, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* are Isherwood's most directly autobiographical works and are something of modern classics too. The characterized 'I', whom Isherwood calls the 'ventriloquist's dummy' is none but the author himself, who appears under different names in different stories.

But the first-person narrative method in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* neither glorifies nor humiliates the author, as he makes friendship with all classes of people as a means of self-examination and of unifying different episodes of the books into one coherent whole. Percy Lubbock well defends Isherwood by saying that 'the first person will draw a rambling, fragmentary tale together and stamp it after a fashion as a single whole' (1921,131).

The novels, written after conversion, *Prater Violet*, *The World in the Evening* and *Down There on a Visit*, show Isherwood's concern with the Hindu philosophy of Vedantism and chart out the artist's growth in the understanding of his self. The namesake narrator now modifies his earlier concern with the self; the emphasis is laid not on what he feels about himself but on how he feels about himself in relation to the vast wave of humanity around him. In the last two novels, *A Single Man* and *A Meeting by the River* we are aware of Isherwood's Vedantic lore which shows him a new path — a path of extinction of individual ego-consciousness into universal consciousness that absolves man from being collapsed into his solitary prison-cell. George, with his profession of teaching and homosexual instincts, and Oliver, who under the influence of a Hindu Swami became a Vedantist, are but fictive transfigurations of Isherwood himself, who after a search persisting through the four decades of his literary career found his real self on turning a Vedantist. Evidently, then, all the nine novels beginning with *All the Conspirators* right up to the concluding one, *A Meeting by the River*, are all concerned with the artist's overriding search for the self. Indeed, what David Pryce-James says is perhaps an apt observation on Isherwood's work as a whole : 'His writing is concerned with himself and his development, and not with abstractions or ideologies' (quoted in Piazza : 1978, 10). Till the end Isherwood continued to mine the self, but always with an eye to the larger world. So whether or not his novels are fact or fiction is ultimately unimportant compared with his representation of a felt life.

One may trace a number of formative influences on the theme and technique of Isherwood's novels. At the time of writing *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* Isherwood was profoundly influenced by Virginia Woolf, James

Joyce and E.M. Forster. His masterly use of the 'Stream of Consciousness' technique which enables the readers to perceive the 'observable tendencies of narcissism' of 'an adult male extrovert', as in *All the Conspirators*, owes as much to Woolf's way of rendering a character's inner thought-stream as to Joyce's. In *The Memorial* is clearly evident Isherwood's indebtedness to E.M. Forster his method of 'tea-tabling'. Isherwood writes in *Lions and Shadows* : 'Forster's the only one who understands what the modern novel ought to be ..... Our frightful mistake was that we believed in tragedy : the point is tragedy's quite impossible today .... The whole of Forster's technique is based on the tea-table' (1985,107). In *The Memorial* the great tragedy of a war-torn generation has been rendered not in great tragic catastrophe but in a quiet, mild tone. Again, a decrescendo of anti-climax, a way in which *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* ends is another example of toning down tragic incidents. Mr. Norris's profound tragedy is described by Isherwood in the following words: 'Tell me, William, his last letter concluded, what have I done to deserve all this?' (*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 136). This mild tone restrains the tragic scenes from attaining their highest possible pitch and is a pointer to Isherwood's brilliant conception of comedy as a far more telling and effective dramatic art than tragedy.

Somerset Maugham and Leo Tolstoy are two other potential literary influences on Christopher Isherwood. Isherwood thought of Larry in Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* as an ideal portrait of a saint. The manner in which Maugham has presented the evolution of Larry from an ordinary man into a saint, steeped in Vedantic knowledge, has been exactly followed by Isherwood in the delineation of the character of Oliver in *A Meeting by the River*. Isherwood turned to Tolstoy, as he intended to present the whole panorama of the life of his war-torn generation in *The Memorial* in the fashion of *War and Peace*. Besides, so far as the apparently arbitrary division of the novel into 'non-consecutive time blocks' is concerned, Isherwood might have derived inspiration from Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*. One would also feel inclined to believe that Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* and Huxley's *Time Must Have a Stop*, instinct as they are with Eastern mysticism, might have influenced the religious

theme of Isherwood's *A Meeting by the River*. Thus, one may trace numerous other literary influences of contemporary writers and their works that contributed to the shaping of the thematic concerns and techniques in Isherwood's novels.

Finally, one other notable aspect of Isherwood's novels is their inventiveness and versatility of narrative techniques. The artist's remarkable achievement consists in his command of stylistic subtleties, in his experiments with wide varieties of narrators and in his use of letters and diaries, which are but ever congruent with the themes and concerns of the respective books. In his first two novels, *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* Isherwood uses the third person narrative method. In the two Berlin novels, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* the narrator is characterized 'I', 'the ventriloquist's dummy', who appears under different names. *Prater Violet* and *The World in the Evening* have namesake narrators, while *Down There on a Visit* abandons it and reverts to the earlier third-person narrative device. Again, in *The World in the Evening* and *A Meeting by the River* Isherwood makes use of the epistolary method, and we also see several diary notes. But what is significant about Isherwood's narrative method is not the variety of forms and techniques he employs, but the innovation he demonstrates and the new experiments he makes with them, to force the reader into discovering for himself the shape of his character and meaning, and also to enable him to grasp the concerns of his respective novels. He was rightly commended for his success with the new forms and was acclaimed as one of the most important novelists of his generation, who 'holds the future of the English novels in his hands' (quoted in Fryer : 1977,186).

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

(Dates of first editions remain within brackets)

#### A. Novels :

1. *All the Conspirators*, 1990, London : Mandrain Paperback (1928); American edition, 1958, New York : New Directions.
2. *The Memorial*, 1988, London : Methuen Paperback (1932).
3. *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, 1987, London : Methuen Paperback (1935).
4. *Goodbye to Berlin*, 1989, London : Mandrain Paperback (1939).
5. *The Berlin Stories*, 1954, New York : New Directions (1945).
6. *Prater Violet*, 1969, London : Penguin Books Ltd. (1945).
7. *The World in the Evening*, 1966, London : Penguin Books (1954).
8. *Down There on a Visit*, 1985, London : Methuen (1962).
9. *A Single Man*, 1978, London : Methuen Paperback (1964).
10. *A Meeting by the River*, 1984, London : Methuen Paperback (1967).

#### B. Autobiographies :

1. *Lions and Shadows : An Education in the Twenties*, 1947, Norfolk, Connecticut : New Directions; 1985, London Methuen (1938).
2. *Christopher and His Kind*, 1993, London : Minerva Paperback (1977).
3. *Kathleen and Frank*, 1971, New York: Simon and Schuster.

### C. Vedantic Writings :

1. *An Approach to Vedanta*, 1963, Hollywood, California : Vedanta Press.
2. *How to Know God : The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, 1962, translated with Swami Prabhavananda, Hollywood : Vedanta Press.
3. *Vedanta for the Western World*, 1945, Hollywood : Vedanta Press.
4. *Shankara's Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, 1946, translated with Swami Prabhavananda, Hollywood : Vedanta Press (Shankara's original work is called *Vivekchudamani*).
5. *Foreword, Paramartha Prasanga*, 1949, by Swami Virajananda, India : Advaita Ashrama, Mayabati, Almora, Himalayas.
6. *Ramkrishna and His Disciples*, 1965, New York : Simon and Schuster.
7. *The Song of God : Bhagavad Gita*, 1944, translated with Swami Prabhavananda, New York : Mentor Books.
8. *My Guru and His Disciple*, 1980, Harmondsworth and New York : Penguin.
9. 'Introduction', *What Religion Is in the Words of Swami Vivekananda*, 1962, ed. John Yale, London : Phoenix House Ltd.
10. *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1960, by his Eastern and Western Disciples, Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama.

### D. Collections and Articles :

1. *Exhumations : Stories, Articles, Verses*, 1966, New York : Simon and Schuster.
2. 'Mr. Norris and I', *Exhumations : Stories, Articles, Verses*, 1966, New York : Simon and Schuster, pp. 85-97 .

3. 'What Vedanta Means to Me', *What Vedanta Means to Me, a Symposium*, 1969, ed. John Yale, New York : Doubleday and Co., pp. 44-58. Isherwood's essay was first published in *Vedanta and the West*, XIV (September-October, 1951).
4. 'Discovering Vedanta', *The Twentieth Century*, 1961, CLXX, Autumn, pp. 64-71.

### SECONDARY SOURCES

1. Allen, Walter, 1954, *The English Novel*, London : Phoenix House Ltd.
2. Connolly, Cyril, 1939, Introduction to *All the Conspirators*, by Christopher Isherwood, London : Traveller's Library.
3. Cook, Bruce, 1964, 'The Trouble with George', *The Critic*, XXIII (October-November), pp. 65-66.
4. Finney, Brian, 1979, *Christopher Isherwood : A Critical Biography*, New York : Oxford University Press.
5. Forster, E.M., 1910, *Howards End*, London : Arnold.
6. Fraser, G.S., 1961, *The Modern Writer and His World*; Calcutta, Rupa.
7. Fryer, Jonathan, 1977, *Isherwood*, London : New English Library.
8. Heilbrun, Carolyn G., 1970, *Christopher Isherwood*, New York and London : Columbia University Press.
9. Hynes, Samuel, 1976, *The Auden Generation*, Sydney, Toronto : The Bodley Head.
10. James, Vinson, 1976, *Contemporary Novelists*, 2nd ed., associate editor, D.L. Kirkpatrick, London Street : James Press.
11. King, Francis, 1976, *Christopher Isherwood*, Harlow, Essex : Longman.
12. Lawrence, D.H., 1968, 'Nightmare', *Kangaroo*, p. 221, New York : Viking Press.

13. Lehmann, John, 1960, *I Am My Brother*, New York : Reynal and Co.
14. Lehmann, John, 1939, *New Writing in England*, New York : Critics Group Press.
15. Lubbock, Percy, 1921, *The Craft of Fiction*, London : Jonathan Cape.
16. Maugham, Somerset, 1949, *The Razor's Edge*, London : Heinman.
17. Panichas George A., 1968, ed. *Promise of Greatness*, New York : John Day Company.
18. Piazza, Paul, 1978, *Christopher Isherwood: Myth and Anti-Myth*, New York: Columbia University Press.
19. Poss, Stanley, 1961, 'A Conversation on Tape', *London Magazine*, 1, June, pp. 41-58.
20. Radhakrishnan, S., 1953, *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western* (Vol. 2), London : George Allen and Unwin.
21. Radhakrishnan, S., 1953, <sup>ed.</sup> *The Principal Upanishads*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
22. Spender, Stephen, 1977, *World Within World*, London : Faber and Faber.
23. Viertel, Berthold, 1946, 'Christopher Isherwood and Dr. Friedrich Bergmann'. *Theatre Arts*, 30, pp. 295-98.
24. Warner, Rex, 1946, *The Cult of Power*, London : Boriswood.
25. Watts, Alan, 1961, *Psychotherapy East and West*, New York : Vintage-Random.
26. Wilde, Alan, 1971, *Christopher Isherwood*, New York : Twayne Publishers Inc.
27. Wilson, Colin, 1976, 'An Integrity Born of Hope', *Twentieth Century Literature, A Scholarly and Critical Journal*, Vol. 22, October, No.3, pp. 312-31.
28. Woolf, Virginia, 1967, 'The Leaning Tower', *Collected Essays (Vol.2)*, ed. Leonard Woolf, London : Chatto and Windus, pp. 162-181.