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The Sixties

Christopher Isherwood

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THE SIXTIES

Diaries, Volume Two: 1960–1969

Edited and Introduced by Katherine Bucknell
Preface by Christopher Hitchens

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Preface

Why and when did we cease as a culture to divide time into reigns or epochs (“Colonial,” “Georgian,” and so forth) and begin to do so by decades? Very few decades really possess an identity, let alone an identity that “fits” the precise ten-year interlude. Thus, there were hardly any “forties” or “seventies”, whereas there really *were*, with a definitive definite article, “the thirties” and “the sixties”. And in both of these, albeit in different ways, Christopher Isherwood played an observant and a participant role.

Decades are nonetheless ragged: the thirties probably start with the 1929 financial crash and end with the German invasion of France in 1940. The sixties proper don’t seriously begin until the Cuba crisis and then the Kennedy assassination, but they are still going on, in some ways, well into the mid-1970s. An emblematic book of the latter decade was *Voices from the Crowd*, a collection of essays against the bomb that came out in 1964 but had been provoked by the events of two years earlier. Among the contributors were Bertrand Russell, Philip Toynbee, John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, and James Kirkup. One of them, Ray Gosling—then considered a literate voice of “the teenagers”—was very struck by the novel Christopher Isherwood had brought out that year: *Down There on a Visit*, and in particular by Christopher’s recorded reaction to the Munich crisis of 1938:

> E.M. went back to the country by a late afternoon train. Keeping up my mood of celebration, I had supper with B. at the flat. Since I was there last, B. has brought a big mirror and hung it in the bedroom. We drank whisky and then had sex in front of it. “Like actors in a blue movie,” B. said, “except that we’re both much more attractive.”
>
> But there was something cruel and tragic and desperate about the way we made love; as though we were fighting naked to the death. There was a sort of rage in both of us—perhaps simply rage that we are trapped here in September 1938—which we vented on each other. It wasn’t innocent fun, like the old times in Germany—and yet, just because it wasn’t—it was fiercely exciting. We satisfied each other absolutely, without the smallest sentiment, like a pair of animals.

Having revered Isherwood as a radical oppositionist of the 1930s, the angry young Ray Gosling writing his piece—entitled “No Such Zone”—in 1964 felt that there was something rather escapist about this reaction. (He perhaps underestimated, as Isherwood never did, the usefulness of Eros as a means of warding off Thanatos.) Anyway, here is what Isherwood was writing on October 23, 1962, at the height of the crisis over the Cuban missiles and when the threat of actual annihilation seemed even more immediate than it had two dozen years previously. This time he was at the gym in California:

> If we are to be fried alive, it seems funny to be working out; and yet that’s precisely what one must do in a crisis, as I learned long ago, in 1938. I have also been prodded into getting on with both my novel and the Ramakrishna book today, and I have watered all the indoor plants. Now I must write to Frank Wiley and Glenn Porter, before I go to have supper with Gavin.

Exceptional in point of its dating, this is otherwise very nearly a “typical” Isherwood sixties diary entry. (Though the type and style of “workout,” one is compelled to note, has altered or at any rate evolved since 1938.) But the themes are constant: a persistent register of anxiety about the outside world combined with a sort of fatalistic distancing from same, a permanent conscience about being behindhand with work, and a second-to-none commitment to friendship and socializing that forces one to wonder how he ever got any work done at all.

Of course this summary of mine does not include the consistent, ever-renewing love and concern that Isherwood felt for his companion Don Bachardy, but that phenomenon is imbricated in and with every page of this diary, even when it is not explicitly so.

Of the various types of “sixties” that were on offer—the political, the psychedelic, the black and ethnic or “identity” movements, the sexual, the newly uncensored musical and showbiz—Isherwood contrived to be a sort of quizzical Zelig at all of them. And yet, if you are a certain kind of British reader, you will not fail to notice that beneath all this hedonism and experiment there still remains a somewhat austere and self-reproaching English public-school man of the kind he’d sworn to escape,[1] forever piously reproving his own backslidings, vowing to do more manly exercises—even when these involve the telling of *japam* rosary-beads—and (to annex a line of Auden’s) swearing to “concentrate more on my work.” In similar key, there are endless regrets about wasted time and especially about evenings squandered in drink and drunkenness. It’s often difficult to tell how hard on himself he’s being here, since unlike Byron he never itemizes his booze intake. On the sole occasion when I met him, at Marguerite Lamkin’s in Chester Square in the late 1970s, he sat with Don under the David Hockney painting of the two of them and

appeared very lean and lucid. (That meeting led to a bewitching drawing by Don of my guest James Fenton. Incidentally, after the famous line that introduces his Berlin stories, it's charming to notice how Isherwood observes that Hockney always carries a camera.)

But then who else was around to notice that Aldous Huxley, who died on the same day in November 1963 as the assassination in Dallas, was being given regular doses of LSD to sweeten or to soften his end? Who else might have had a conversation with Mick Jagger, under the auspices of Tony Richardson, in the Australian outback, and elicited from him the gossip that the Beatles had abandoned the Maharishi after the guru had made a pass at one of them? (I wonder which one, don't you?) And who else was still matter-of-factly saying "Jewboy" or "nigger," depending entirely on how he happened to be feeling? Who else felt practically nothing at the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, refused to sign any petitions about Vietnam, and apparently didn't even notice the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia? This is an idiosyncratic, unillusioned tour of the sixties that has few if any rivals.

The dead-pan and matter-of-fact humor is also rather distanced, as though seen through a lens. Don reads in the paper that "Norman Mailer" has stabbed his wife and thinks he's seeing the words "Arthur Miller," which cause him to feel that Marilyn Monroe has been unfairly deprived of a mention: surely we are witnessing the birth of celebrity culture? Gore Vidal rings up and says: "Mole? Toad." Even the famous Swami is not always treated with unmixed reverence, at one point scattering sacred Ganges water over his devotees "vigorously, as if he were ridding a room of flies with DDT."

If one could follow just two Isherwoodian threads through the labyrinth of this decade they would be (apart from the devotion to Don and the amazing willingness to

put up with the Swami, and the slight weirdness of that "green flash" that he keeps on seeing at sunset out to sea) the agony of creative collaboration and the distinct but related hell of solitary literary effort. It is astonishing, for someone like myself who took such pleasure in the final production of *Cabaret*, to read of how bleak and sour were the original discussions with Auden and Chester Kallman, and how unpromising was the whole original scheme and many of its successive stages. Surely the idea of a Berlin musical was "a natural." Ah, but nothing of that sort does come "naturally," and Isherwood was probably wise to understand that one only lives once but frets and worries enough for several lifetimes. His best maxim, taken from that other great English public-school and Cambridge queer "Morgan" Forster, was, "Get on with your own work: behave as if you were immortal." These industriously maintained diaries, written at a time when many people were mistaking work for play and vice versa, and taking their own desires as realities, are at once a vindication of that Forsterian injunction and an illustration of its limitations.

Christopher Hitchens
Washington, D.C.
May 30, 2009

[1] Even the passage cited above from *Down There on a Visit* concludes by saying: "Whatever happens, I mean to work a lot on the China book. And I'll start doing my exercises again. For the first time this year." Isherwood was also working throughout the sixties on the genealogical and other research for what became *Kathleen and Frank*, his oblique homage to the Victorian and Edwardian—not the "eighties and nineties and noughties"—values of his parents and other forebears.

Introduction

Christopher Isherwood had been pioneering the cultural trends of the 1960s ever since the 1930s. When Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley despaired of Europe's future and took their pacifist vision to California in 1937, Isherwood soon followed them, and, emulating them at first, experimented during the 1940s and the 1950s with mysticism, Eastern religion, psychedelic drugs, and sexual freedom. As the black-and-white, buttoned-up Establishment of the post-war period was gradually overrun in the sixties by the Technicolor warmth of pop culture and youth on the march, he continued to lead the way in doing his own thing. He wanted not only to write well but also to live well. Yeats once argued that, "The intellect of man is forced to choose/Perfection of the life, or of the work";[1] Isherwood's lifelong friend W. H. Auden retorted that "perfection is possible in neither";[2] but Isherwood never ceased trying for perfection in both. With great determination in the face of social disapproval and emotional difficulty, he forged a notably unconventional and, eventually, deeply happy personal life. At the heart of this volume are the intertwining stories of his continuing devotion to his Indian guru Swami Prabhavananda and his intimate and complex relationship with the American portrait painter Don Bachardy, who was thirty years his junior. If the 1960s was the decade of rebellious youth, the decade of the generation gap, Isherwood was living right on the gap. This diary begins on his fifty-sixth birthday,

when Bachardy was only twenty-six and desperately trying to grow up. In a sense, Isherwood had to grow up all over again with him, and this pulled him all the more tightly into the central impulse of the time.

These pages are thick with novel writing, script writing, college teaching, and Isherwood's myriad friendships with the creative stars who shaped the sixties—Francis Bacon, Richard Burton, Leslie Caron, Julie Harris, David Hockney, Jennifer Jones, Hope Lange, Somerset Maugham, John Osborne, Vanessa Redgrave, Tony Richardson, David Selznick, Igor Stravinsky, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, and many others. His psychological insight often takes us right underneath the skin of his subjects, and in the background he unfolds, week by week, a concisely referenced sketch of the period. He records the mounting anxieties of the Cold War in Laos, Berlin, and Cuba, the end of the colonial age presaged by the Algerian war for independence, the space flight of Yuri Gagarin, the Kennedy–Nixon election, the eruption of assassinations and the burning of America's inner cities, the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement, the coming of Diggers, Hippies, Flower Children, Timothy Leary, Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull, the Summer of Love, the walk on the moon, and the changing fashions—for pointed winkle-picker shoes, minis, maxis, moustaches, Afros, the illustrations of Bouché, and the costume designs of Beaton.

Isherwood began the new decade by completing his seventh novel, *Down There on a Visit*, about four earlier phases of his life when he was a tourist among the marginalized—eccentrics, neurotics, defective lovers, refugees—indulging himself in a long deliberation about possible modes of living. His title reflects a debt to Hans Castorp, the tubercular hero of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, who keeps saying on his arrival at the

Sanatorium Berghof, “I am only up here on a visit.” Castorp stays for seven years, enchanted by his spiritual as well as by his physical condition. By 1960, Isherwood had lived with Bachardy for seven years, and with *Down There on a Visit*, he wrote himself out of possible alternative lives into the orderly and productive calm of his healthy present reality. He was a successful middle-aged writer, well-connected, widely admired, settled in his own house in Santa Monica with a young partner he adored, looked up to in his community as a part-time professor and literary personality. His geographical and spiritual wanderings were behind him. Since 1939, he had been a regular temple-goer at his local Vedanta Society, the Hindu congregation led by his guru Swami Prabhavananda. Isherwood was committed to his path. That year, he worked with Charles Laughton on a play about Socrates, and he taught at Los Angeles State College and at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Fellow writers like Auden and Truman Capote were to tell him *Down There on a Visit* was the best book he had ever written. Over the next decade, he would write two more novels and then turn away altogether from invention and fantasy to autobiography, writing only about real life.

But a longlasting storm was about to break; Don Bachardy was preparing to make a bid for independence. In January 1961, he moved to London to study painting at the Slade. Although Isherwood joined him a few months later, their relationship entered a period of strain that was to evolve dramatically into repeating and intensifying crises. Over the next few years, Bachardy had debut exhibitions in London, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and elsewhere. He was courted on several levels by various different kinds of admirers, fell in and out of love, struggled to find his way forward as an artist, and felt more and more

trapped by Isherwood's self-confidence, Isherwood's fame, Isherwood's bossiness, Isherwood's years.

On June 10, 1961, in London, Isherwood records in his diary that Bachardy continues to seem "a sort of magic boy" as he had done since 1953: "I still feel that about him now and then. Yesterday evening, for example … he absolutely sparkled like a diamond. He seemed a creature of another kind, altogether." But ten days later, Isherwood recognizes that while Bachardy needs bolstering as he prepares to launch his first-ever gallery show, he is constantly at risk of being sidelined by Isherwood's presence. When Auden sat for Bachardy—for a work later acquired by the National Portrait Gallery—Auden talked over his head:

> Right now Don is drawing Wystan, who keeps talking to me as I write: Falstaff and Don Quixote are the only satisfying saints in literature, etc. etc.… I think [Don] would like me to go away for quite a bit of the time between now and his show, when he needs my moral support. It's the old story: he can't have any friends of his own as long as I'm around, because, even if he finds them, they take more interest in me as soon as we meet.[3]

Bachardy could never fully participate in the lifelong conversation between these boyhood friends, however fond or well-disposed Auden may have felt toward him; yet he was riveted at the margin of the scene by the opportunity to witness and to portray Auden's celebrated talent and extraordinary face. It was the same with many of Isherwood's friends, and since Bachardy couldn't risk sharing his own friends, he had to learn to hide them, an investment in duplicity with which he gradually became more and more uncomfortable. In New York six months later, for Bachardy's second gallery debut, he and

Isherwood were both made miserable by the cold, by the city's hectic pace, by tight hotel quarters; Bachardy slammed a taxi door in Isherwood's face, breaking the skin. Isherwood returned to California alone.

Nevertheless, he knew that Bachardy remained the center of his life. He loved their house on Adelaide Drive and enjoyed being there alone for a while, but "the whole affair," owning property, the routine of work and play, "would still have no reason to exist without him. He is the ultimate reason why it's worthwhile bothering at all."[4] He was to write this sort of thing in his diary time and again in the years to come. Thus, Isherwood faced the greatest challenge of his personal life: to love Bachardy for Bachardy's sake rather than for his own. This was the test of his maturity, and, in due course, he was to draw upon all his resources to meet it—his religion, his friends, his teaching, and his work.

When Bachardy returned from New York, Isherwood saw in him, "a reserve. He doesn't seem so childishly open as before."[5] He also saw how hard it would be for Bachardy to go on painting now that the external goals of Slade course work and the first shows were behind him. They discussed creating a studio in the house so that he could do this in privacy. Some of the tension between them was sexual, although Isherwood is initially reticent about this in his diary. He had been the first to claim the right to have other partners, and he owed Bachardy the same freedom, but the practice caused them both considerable anguish as they struggled to find the terms on which it was possible in a relationship as intimate as theirs. Each wished to control what the other knew about him, but neither found it easy to settle on knowing only what the other wished to share. They were possessive and intuitive, and both drew their own conclusions with penetrating accuracy. As they grew older, Isherwood was to have fewer partners and Bachardy

more; the changing dynamic between them called for continual and, for Isherwood, perhaps unexpected adjustments.

Isherwood was Bachardy's mentor and a father figure as well as his lover; like any child trying to break free from a parent, Bachardy still needed someone he could depend on, so even as he tried to establish his own autonomous identity, he clung to the old bond. In April 1962, Isherwood wrote:

> … Don made another of his declarations of independence. He has got to have a studio of his own, here at the house, and his own telephone, and his own money and his own friends.... And he quite realizes that he has to do nearly all of the getting himself. He only asked of me that I shall understand. Well, I do—and I sincerely believe that things would be much better if he could achieve all these objectives. The trouble is, some of them are really opposed to other deeper wishes, or perhaps one should rather say fears, in his nature. For example, he would do much better to have a studio away from the house altogether.… [H]e says jokingly that he wants to keep an eye on me. And I suspect that this isn't entirely a joke. He is afraid of leaving me *too* much alone. He doesn't want *my* independence.[6]

In fact, Isherwood understood Bachardy so well that he sometimes left him no room to discover who he was for himself. This was an especially excruciating feature of the trap Bachardy felt he was in, and he was often at pains to reverse the power structure implied by the vast difference in their ages. The diary records constantly shifting chemistry between them. They had no established code to follow, not only because they were homosexual, and not only because of the age difference, but also because there never can be a code between two individuals who are

continually seeking a more complete fulfilment of self and of vocation. One or the other of them was always trying something new; neither possessed a nature that was easily—if ever—satisfied. And so their relationship followed an ambivalent, wayward path as each felt by turns that it was supporting or holding him back, satisfying his appetites or denying them; they drew closer and apart, closer and apart. A diary entry for June 1962 records, “after the party, drunk, Don told me he wants me to go away to San Francisco and leave him alone all summer.…” But the very same entry introduces Bachardy’s wish to be initiated by Swami Prabhavananda. A week later, they went together to Vedanta Place so he could learn how to meditate, and indeed on December 18 that year, Bachardy became Swami’s disciple. This reaffirmed the depth of his devotion to Isherwood as his model in life and created a new, public bond between them: a shared form and place of worship.

In June 1962, they turned their garage into the talked-of studio, and Isherwood overcame his fear of material expenditure so they could improve the house as well. The construction produced moments of intense and precarious joy. Over a few days at the end of the month, he described its progress:

> Don and I lay on the deck, which still has no railing and seems as insecure as a flying carpet, with the wind blowing up between the floorboards and the whole Canyon floating in the air around you.…
>
> The workmen have now put up the trellis over the deck, casting a barred shadow. Don is in raptures. The framing of the view gives him exquisite pleasure and now he keeps saying how happy he is here and how happy he is with me. And so, of course, I am happy too.…[7]

But the new domestic arrangements and the mantra were not enough. Things fell apart again in early August, and Isherwood left for Laguna Beach to stay with Swami, much as he used to do when he was unhappy with Bill Caskey in 1950. Almost immediately, Bachardy prevailed upon him to return home, over Swami's strong objections. Isherwood's tone, as he records episodes of screaming and anger, grows grimmer each time the episodes recur, although his underlying convictions do not change. On his fifty-eighth birthday, he writes: "Do I hate Don? Only the selfish part of me hates him, for rocking the boat. When I go beyond that, I feel real compassion, because he is suffering terribly. I still don't know if he really wants to leave me, or what. And I don't think he knows."[8] By September, Isherwood was considering that he ought to move out for a few months because he was older, surer, stronger, and he sensed that he was undermining Bachardy's efforts to grow up:

> Not to do this is to force *him* to go away, and this is wrong because he is the one who didn't feel really at home in this house, and now that he has his own studio he should be free to enjoy it.
>
> Then why don't I go away? Because it is such a lot of fuss and I don't want to leave *my* home and above all my books. I want to stay here and get on with my work, in my own tempo.…
>
> Aren't I bad for him, now, under any circumstances? Probably. He only needs me in his weakness, not his strength; and he hates me for supporting his weakness.[9]

From the heart of this dark period, Isherwood produced *A Single Man*, a novel that articulates his anxieties about living alone and which is, in a sense, his own bid for freedom—freedom from grief over lost love, freedom to reveal to conventional readers the gay "monster" he had so

long been obliged to hide in his published work, freedom from the demands of the ego and the limitations of individual identity. He first conceived of the book as a novel about an English woman. But Bachardy, even as they approached the nadir of their relations together, offered the crucial insight that Isherwood should write about himself: “this morning we went on the beach and discussed *The Englishwoman*, and Don, after hearing all my difficulties with it, made a really brilliant simple suggestion, namely that it ought to be *The Englishman*—that is, me. This is very far-reaching….”[10]

The novel became centered in the daily routine of Isherwood’s contemporary life in California; but the technique derives from Bloomsbury, from the novels of Forster and especially Virginia Woolf, splicing together the British and American literary traditions. It is modelled on *Mrs. Dalloway*, which Isherwood unreservedly praised that summer as: “one of the most truly beautiful novels or prose poems or whatever that I have ever read. It is prose written with absolute pitch, a perfect ear. You could perform it with instruments. Could I write a book like that and keep within the nature of my own style? I’d love to try.”[11] Exactness of “pitch” affords subtle discrimination among sensations, enabling the author to explore the inchoate area between social existence and creaturely unconscious; Isherwood was increasingly drawn to this rich inner world both in his diaries and in almost all of his later work. When he finished reading *Mrs. Dalloway* just before his birthday, he wrote:

> Woolf’s use of the reverie is quite different from Joyce’s stream of consciousness. Beside her Joyce seems tricky and vulgar and cheap, as she herself thought. Woolf’s kind of reverie is less “realistic” but far more convincing and moving. It can convey tremendous and varied emotion. Joyce’s emotional range is very small.[12]

Isherwood's early work is sometimes criticized for having an emotionally bland and undeveloped narrator. In fact, this was a deliberate strategy for concealing the narrator's homosexuality. Now, as the unspeakable homosexual elbowed his way to the center of *A Single Man*, Isherwood had found the technique to reveal the repressed feelings of such a character in all their complexity. The narrative is subtle, exact, unafraid, and powerful. Even fifty years later, the rage lurking behind the cultivated façade of the middle-aged literature professor called George frightens straight readers; civilized human beings hide this kind of anger from one another in order to be able to get along. Bachardy recognized the quality of the book right away:

> Yesterday, I showed Don the first twenty-eight pages of this second draft of my new novel. He was far more impressed, even, than I had hoped. He made me feel that I have found a new approach altogether; that, as he put it, the writing itself is so interesting from page to page that you don't even care what is going to happen. That's marvellous and a great incentive to go on with the work, because I feel that Don has a better *nose* than anyone I know. He sniffs out the least artifice or fudging. He was on his way out after reading it, and then he came back and embraced me and said, "I'm so proud of Old Dub."[13]

And, nearly a year later, it was Bachardy who came up with the title.[14] Isherwood felt that the book "spoke the truth,"[15] and, over the years, he referred to it with growing confidence, as his "masterpiece."[16]

Through the rest of 1962 and the start of 1963, the relationship between Isherwood and Bachardy continued its tumultuous course. In November, Bachardy wanted to

separate for a few months, but Isherwood still refused to uproot himself: “If he wants out, then he must be the one to get out.... Most of the freedom Don is looking for could actually be achieved right here, living with me. He doesn’t realize that yet. Okay, he can find it somewhere outside and then come back.”[17]

What Bachardy found outside was a fairly serious love affair, and he introduced his lover openly at home, pushing Isherwood to acknowledge and to condone his behavior, or perhaps to somehow share in his pleasure or validate his choice. In July, Bachardy had told Isherwood that “he wished we could speak frankly about *everything* that we did.” Isherwood had warned “this wasn’t desirable” and noted in his diary Bachardy’s humorous and defiant reply, “But I get to know almost everything you do, anyway.”[18] In fact, this was Bachardy’s way of warning Isherwood—the reverse would also have to be the case. He knew a great deal about Isherwood’s earlier life and loves, best described by the cliché “the stuff of legend”; modelling himself as he did on Isherwood, he, too, wanted a legendary love life, and he wanted Isherwood to know about it. He sometimes felt he had to compete with all Isherwood’s past partners as well as the optimistic boys still crowding around; so his affairs were partly conducted in self-defense, as a counterbalancing act.[19] For his part, Isherwood was prepared to blind himself to things he did not want to know about Bachardy, even if Bachardy was determined he should find out. They quarrelled about the lover a few days before Christmas; the day after Christmas, Isherwood wrote:

> [These] are not things I want to dwell on yet. Maybe all will work out for the best—but I don’t know that, and I don’t even want to think it. When I suffer, I suffer as

> stupidly as an animal. It altogether stops me working. I am ashamed of such weakness.…
>
> Christmas (which I seem to hate more every year) was placid and almost joyous by comparison.… Don and I lay on the beach and talked affectionately. I think he would love it if he could discuss *everything* with me. But, alas, I am neither the Buddha nor completely senile. I have my limits. I cannot help minding. When I finally stop minding I also stop caring. Then I don't give a shit.[20]

He struggled to weather the affair, admitting to his pain and yet trying to dismiss it: "Am getting into a flap about the … situation. Last night I had two if not three dreams about them.… And meanwhile Don—no doubt because of this—remains unusually sweet and affectionate. I ought to be grateful really. Oh—idiocy."[21] That winter, the younger lovers spent more and more time together, and Isherwood feared that an alternative domestic intimacy was building up in Bachardy's life: "… Don took him some of our plates; admittedly, not ones we use any more. I am wildly miserable, but only in spurts. What I am miserable about is the feeling that Don is gradually slipping away from me."[22] He was resigned to the fact that there was "no question, here, of finding any kind of solution on the personal level. I can only find a solution through prayer and japam."[23]

During this painful phase, Bachardy chose to tell Isherwood that he believed the bond between them was a mystical one. In his diary, Isherwood mentions a "sudden revelation" from Bachardy "about the Bowles experience in Tangier"; but he professes that the revelation left him feeling puzzled.[24] In October 1955, when they had taken hashish with Paul Bowles and his painter friend Ahmed Yacoubi, Bachardy experienced an episode of near-madness during which he sensed a plot to incapacitate Isherwood so

that Yacoubi could force sex on Bachardy while Bowles watched. Alternating with the paranoia was a blissful recognition of his love for Isherwood, his need for Isherwood, and Isherwood's unconditional commitment to him. They left Bowles's apartment abruptly, but the spiral of ecstasy and madness continued into the small hours. When he later read about the *kundalini*—the spiritual energy which, when awakened, rises from the base of the spine through the seven *chakras*, or centers of consciousness located in the spinal canal and cerebrum, until it illuminates the brain—Bachardy recognized that he had had a mystical experience in Tangier. As he recognized this, the experience became vivid to him all over again. He didn't tell anyone because he was overwhelmed by the experience at the time that it occurred, and later, when he came to understand it, he thought it would sound presumptuous. He also knew that Swami disapproved of achieving mystical experiences through the use of drugs.[25] By confiding in Isherwood now, he seemed to wish to reassure him that the bond between them could not be broken by ordinary love affairs.

Even if he professed to be puzzled by Bachardy's confidence, Isherwood continued to tell himself that the affair was a good thing for Bachardy, and just as he began to feel that it was therefore a good thing for himself, he discovered in March that Bachardy had begun a new romance. At last, Isherwood planned to move out for a while, mostly because he had found arrangements which suited him. He was reluctant to say much in his diary, remarking only that his relationship with Bachardy might end by summer or "might equally well lead to a much better relationship."[26] In mid-April, he settled in a borrowed house in San Francisco, where he concerned himself with his "psychological convalescence." He wrote, "Oh, I did so need to be alone! Now I am resolved to get on with my

work, I mean my own work; and to exercise—I am hatefully fat.… Oh yes, I am happy to be here.…”[27] Within two weeks, his thoughts turned to Bachardy, but he kept his resolve to leave him alone:

> Am starting to think a lot about Don, miss him, wish he would write. But I won’t pester him. Why does he seem so unique, irreplaceable? Because I’ve trained him to be, and myself to believe that he is? Yes, partly. But saying that proves nothing; the deed is done and the feelings I feel are perfectly genuine.… At least I have proved to myself that I can still live alone and function. In some respects I have never felt so truly on the beam.[28]

It was Bachardy who was having a terrible time. Isherwood copied into his diary part of a letter from him, “‘Fits of doubt and gloom keep descending.… I don’t want you to worry about me. I must do this alone. I must get through by myself. And I try hard to love you instead of just needing you.’” On this, Isherwood commented, “Well, of course I am terribly worried. I am even losing my confidence that this will end all right—though I wrote him a reassuring letter.”[29]

After some uncertainty about whether Bachardy might join him in San Francisco, Isherwood drove home for Bachardy’s twenty-ninth birthday on May 18. But the day was a fiasco:

> Yesterday, I rushed downtown … and bought him a ring with an Australian sapphire, dark blue. This morning at breakfast he shed tears, said he couldn’t accept it. Our relationship is impossible for him. I am too possessive. He can’t face the idea of having me around for another ten years or more, using up his life.
>
> I said I absolutely agree with him. If it won’t work, it must stop. Now he has gone out.… I cried a bit. Then drank coffee, felt a lot better, and began figuring. Don

> should start by getting a studio away from this place, where he can stay whenever he wants to. Also, he should go to a psychiatrist. (That was his idea.) And we must start thinking about selling this house.[30]

Perhaps Bachardy's protracted revolt against Isherwood was a factor in Isherwood's own revolt, which was building up to a climax during this same period, against Swami Prabhavananda. The diaries show that Isherwood invested more and more time and conviction in Swami and his teachings as Bachardy tested to its limits his relationship with Isherwood. Ever the skeptic, Isherwood questioned in the most practical sense whatever Swami taught him, seeking a balance that could work for him as a devotee living outside the monastery in his own household. In February 1961, he had written:

> And what's left, if Don goes out of my life? Swami and Ramakrishna: yes. As much—more so—than ever. My japam has been getting more and more mechanical. But when I told Swami this, he didn't seem worried. He assured me that I will get the fruits of it sometime or other; and I really believe this. The only thing that sometimes disturbs me a little about his teaching is the idea that we—all of us who have "come to" Ramakrishna—are anyhow "saved," i.e. assured of not being reborn. This disturbs me because the idea seems too easily optimistic. But then—who am I to talk? Swami says it, and I do honestly believe that he somehow *knows*.[31]

In a long-running show of duty, Isherwood was completing the first draft of his biography *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* alongside his final draft of *A Single Man*. And he reluctantly agreed to travel with Swami to the Ramakrishna Math, or monastery, in India at the end of 1963 to help celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the

birth of Swami Vivekananda. But he was swept by waves of defiance, manifested in physical illness:

> I still have this thing in my throat. And, psychosomatically, it gets worse every Wednesday when I have to read to the family up at Vedanta Place. A *passionate* psychosomatic revolt is brewing against the Indian trip … I will not surrender my will; be made to do anything I don't like.[32]

In fact, all through 1962 and 1963, the period of his worst troubles with Bachardy and his most painful bouts of jealousy, Isherwood had a recurrent sore throat. In the summer of 1963, he twice records in his diary his intuition that the sore throat was linked to writing about Ramakrishna's death from throat cancer.[33] And he sometimes feared he himself had throat or jaw cancer. But the episodes of illness and the cancer anxiety had started earlier, and indeed, Isherwood had had trouble with sore throats long before. In *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties*, Hugh Weston, the youthful Auden character, announces that tonsillitis "means you've been telling lies!" At that period, the lies were essentially about homosexuality; the Isherwood character concludes that his life and his writing are "sham," so he leaves medical school with its conventional cures and travels to Berlin, where he can indulge his sexuality without guilt, supported by the theories of the American psychologist, Homer Lane: "Every disease, Lane had taught, is in itself a cure—if we know how to take it. There is only one sin: disobedience to the inner law of our own nature."[34]

In the 1960s, as in the 1920s and 1930s, happiness and good health continued to be proof to Isherwood of right living. Illness resulted from dishonesty, from being out of harmony with one's true self. Ramakrishna and Swami Prabhavananda had replaced Homer Lane and his disciple

John Layard (who taught Lane's theories to Auden and Isherwood), and Isherwood had progressed to seeking spiritual liberation through their version of self-knowledge. According to one diary entry, what he admired most about Ramakrishna was his honesty, although he notes that Ramakrishna's honesty is not transparent to everyone, because it sometimes takes an exaggerated form, which Isherwood identifies as camp:

> When Swami used to teach me that purity is telling the truth I used to think that this was, if anything, a rather convenient belief for me to have, because it meant that I didn't have to be pure but only to refrain from lying about my impurity. Well, that's the minimum or negative interpretation. But, thinking about it in relation to Ramakrishna, I saw this: that the greatness of Ramakrishna is not expressed by the fact that he was under all circumstances "pure." No. And even if he was pure, that didn't mean he wasn't capable of anything. You always feel that about him—there was nothing that he might not have done—except one thing—tell a lie.
>
> … It's funny that I, who am steeped in sex up to the eyebrows, can see quite clearly what Ramakrishna's kind of purity is capable of, and that most people just can't. I suppose it's having been around Swami so much *and* understanding camp. I am privileged; far more than I realize, most of the time.[35]

In *The World in the Evening*, Isherwood's character Charles Kennedy explains, "You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance."[36]

When relations were bad with Bachardy, Isherwood didn't like to write in his diary at all, preferring silence to

the risk of prevarication or of articulating indelibly a situation he hoped might improve. In June 1963, struggling to cope with the current lover constantly around the house, he records: “Diary keeping at this time seems definitely counterindicated.… Part of Don wants to run me right off the range and wreck our home beyond repair; part wants to keep on and see how things work out.”[37]

Isherwood, too, was waiting to see how things would work out, and he was barely coping. He could not feel content with his longstanding refusal to come more closely under Swami’s tutelage if his life at home as a householder devotee was the failure that his misery suggested it must be. And he was in no position to proclaim his shaky beliefs to anyone else, or even to read aloud to them from holy texts. And so his voice deserted him in the temple, and at home his diary-writing pen fell silent. The ménage à trois with Bachardy’s lover certainly wasn’t working: “Have now definitely said I don’t want to have to meet [him] any more. I should never have done so in the first place. That kind of thing is messy and was messy in the days of Lord Byron, and always will be messy. Unless one simply doesn’t give a shit.”[38] He continued to be racked by jealousy: “Jealousy: Not what they do together sexually. But the thought of their waking in the morning, little pats and squeezes, jokes, talk through the open doorway of the bathroom. For that one could kill.”[39] A few months later, he had to tell Bachardy again and more fully just how he felt, because nothing had changed.

Airing his feelings strengthened Isherwood, but however much he suffered, he was little interested in advice. From Swami, he wanted information about his spirit and some understanding of what was going to happen to him when he died; he did not want a set of rules on how to behave. As he told Gerald Heard: