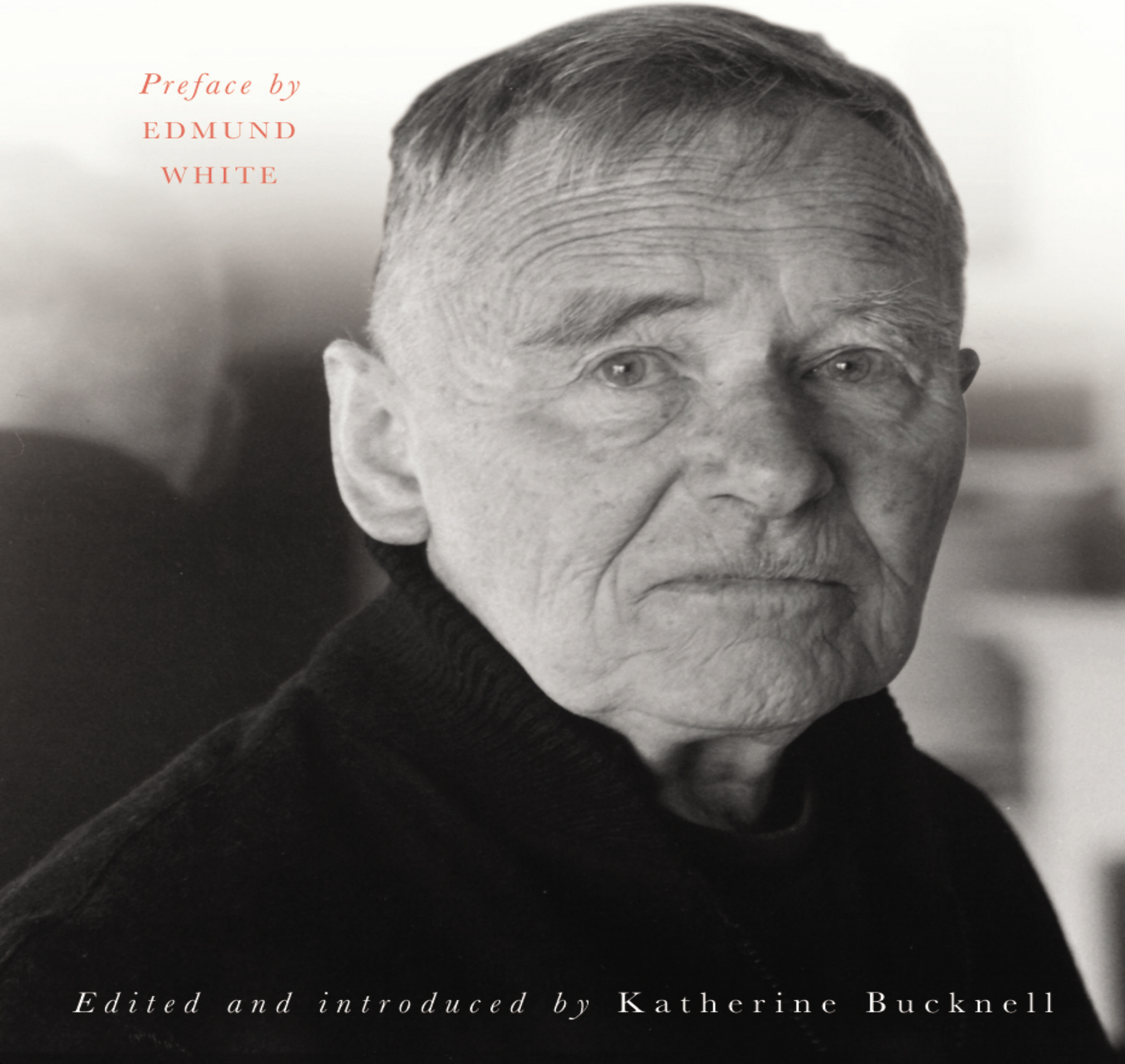
CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

LIBERATION

Diaries Volume Three: 1970–1983

Preface by
EDMUND
WHITE



Edited and introduced by Katherine Bucknell

Contents

About the Book

‘A slip of a wild boy: with quick silver eyes,’ as Virginia Woolf saw him in the 1930s, Christopher Isherwood journeyed and changed with his century, until, by the 1980s, he was celebrated as the finest prose writer in English and the Grand Old Man of Gay Liberation. In this final volume of his diaries, capstone of a million-word masterwork, he greets advancing age with poignant humour and an unquenchable appetite for the new; even aches, illnesses, and diminishing powers are clues to a predicament still unfathomed. The mainstays of his mature contentment, his Hindu guru, Swami Prabhavananda and his long term companion, Don Bachardy, draw from him an unexpected high tide of joy and love.

Around his private religious and domestic routines orbit gifted friends both anonymous and infamous. Bachardy’s burgeoning career pulled Isherwood into the 1970s art scene in Los Angeles, New York and London, where we meet Rauschenberg, Ruscha, and Warhol (serving fetid meat for lunch) as well as Hockney (adored) and Kitaj. Collaborating with Bachardy on scripts for their prize-winning *Frankenstein* and their Broadway fiasco, *A Meeting by the River*, extended ties in Hollywood and the theater world. John Huston, Merchant and Ivory, John Travolta, John Voight, Elton John, David Bowie, Joan Didion, Armistead Maupin each take a turn through Isherwood’s

densely populated human comedy, sketched with both ruthlessness and benevolence against the background of the Vietnam War, the Energy Crisis, the Nixon, Carter and Reagan White Houses.

In his first book of this period, *Kathleen and Frank*, Isherwood unearthed the family demons that haunted his fugitive youth. When contemporaries began to die, he responded in *Christopher and His Kind* and *My Guru and His Disciple* with startling fresh truths about shared experiences. These are the most concrete and the most mysterious of his diaries, candidly revealing the fear of death that crowded in past Isherwood's fame, and showing how his life-long immersion in the day-to-day lifted him, paradoxically, toward transcendence.

About the Author

Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986) was one of the most celebrated writers of his generation. He left Cambridge without graduating, briefly studied medicine and then turned to writing his first novels, *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial*. Between 1929 and 1939 he lived mainly abroad, spending four years in Berlin and writing the novels *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* on which the musical *Cabaret* was based. He moved to America in 1939, becoming a US citizen in 1946, and wrote another five novels, including *Down There on a Visit* and *A Single Man*, a travel book about South America and a biography of the Indian mystic Ramakrishna. In the late 1960s and ’70s he turned to autobiographical works: *Kathleen and Frank, Christopher and His Kind, My Guru and His Disciple* and *October*, one month of his diary with drawings by Don Bachardy.

Also by Christopher Isherwood

NOVELS

All the Conspirators
The Memorial
Mr. Norris Changes Trains
Goodbye to Berlin
Prater Violet
The World in the Evening
Down There on a Visit
A Single Man
A Meeting by the River

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & DIARIES

Lions and Shadows
Kathleen and Frank
Christopher and His Kind
My Guru and His Disciple
October (*with Don Bachardy*)
Diaries, Volume One: 1939–1960
The Sixties, Diaries, Volume Two: 1960–1969
Lost Years: A Memoir, 1945–1951

BIOGRAPHY

Ramakrishna and His Disciples

PLAYS (*with W.H. Auden*)

The Dog Beneath the Skin
The Ascent of F6
On the Frontier

TRAVEL

Journey to a War (*with W.H. Auden*)
The Condor and the Cows

COLLECTIONS

Exhumations
Where Joy Resides

Christopher Isherwood

LIBERATION

Diaries, Volume Three: 1970-1983

Edited and Introduced by Katherine Bucknell
Preface by Edmund White

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

Preface

Readers of novels often fall into the bad habit of being overly exacting about the characters' moral flaws. They apply to these fictional beings standards that no one they know in real life could possibly meet—nor could they themselves. They condemn a heroine, say, for not facing and condemning her lover's ethical cowardice on some fine point of inner struggle; both her failure and his would scarcely be perceptible in real life. Sometimes it almost feels as if readers, in discussing a book, are showing off, are eager to display a refinement that no one would bother with in the heat of actual experience. In real life everyone is too busy, too submerged in the murk of getting and spending, too greedy to survive and even to prevail to be able to make much out of moral niceties. In any event, friends are always too willing to forgive lapses that they scarcely notice and if they register are sure to share and eager to pardon. Real life is so rough-and-tumble, so clamorous, a bit like an over-amplified rock band on drugs; only in the shaded purlieus of fiction do we catch the tinkling strains of moral elegance coming from another room.

I mention all this because reading the several thousand pages of Isherwood's complete journals is an instructive corrective to the prissiness of reading fiction. Isherwood, whom most of us would consider to be nearly saintly if we knew him personally, had faults that we'd say were

unforgivable in a novel (he was careful to distance himself from these very faults in his autobiographical fiction). He was seriously anti-Semitic and a year never goes by in his journals that he doesn't attribute an enemy's or acquaintance's bad behaviour to his Jewishness. I suppose some people would argue that the British gentry are or at least *were* like that, or that he grew up in another epoch and should not be held to the standards of today. I don't think that that defense quite works. After all, Isherwood lived in Berlin in the late 1920s and early 1930s and experienced first-hand the rise of Hitler to power and witnessed directly the appalling effect of the Nazis on the lives of his Jewish friends. Later he lived in Los Angeles for four decades and worked closely with many Jews; his milieu would never have accepted his anti-Semitism had it been declared. Moreover, he knew perfectly well that every word he wrote, even in these journals, would eventually be published, so one can't even argue that he was simply sounding off in notes not meant for anyone else's eyes.

Then he is a dreadful hypochondriac and in spite of all his much-vaunted spirituality terrified of the least ailment. He worries obsessively about his weight and berates himself when he's a pound or two up on the scale, though he seldom weighs more than 150. He worries constantly (with good reason) about his drinking ("I do hate it so," he admits).

And then he can be quite nasty about women friends and their writing. When he travels down to Essex to see Dodie Beesley he reads her novel and says, 'It is *exactly* what I feared: one of those patty-paws romances, a little kiss here, a little wistful regret there, one affair is broken off, another starts up. Magazine writing. What's wrong with it, actually? It's so pleased with itself, so fucking smug, so snugly cunty, the art of women who are delighted with themselves, who indulge themselves and who patronize their men. They *know* that there is nothing, there *can* be nothing outside of

the furry rim of their cunts and their kitchens, their children and their clubs." Then, in a reversal typical of Isherwood, he writes, "… I am indulging in the luxury of being brutal about it because I know I will have to be polite about it to Dodie tomorrow—I also know that I shall *want* to be polite, because I do respect her and she is indeed so much wiser and subtler and better than this silly book."

Oh, yes, he's full of faults and yet I think any fair-minded reader who applies to Isherwood the very approximate demands of life and not the overly exacting standards of fiction will have to admit that he or she has seldom spent so much time with someone so generally admirable. To say so in no way mitigates the obnoxiousness of his real faults. But we should forgive him with the same liberality we apply to ourselves and our friends.

He loves his partner Don Bachardy with a constant devotion that is almost unparalleled in my experience. In the preceding volume, which covered the 1960s, Bachardy was endlessly quarrelsome and difficult. But in this volume, the last, which covers the final decade of Isherwood's life, Bachardy has achieved a measure of worldly success as an artist and has escaped the confines of domesticity enough to enjoy plenty of sexual adventures—enough to catch up with all the sex Isherwood himself had enjoyed in his youth in England, Germany and America. In total contrast to the anger and spite of the 1960s, in this volume Don is endlessly playful and affectionate and kind, and Isherwood (who was thirty years older) is deliriously happy. His main regret about dying is that he must leave Don, though as a Hindu he must have imagined he'd join Don in a future life.

After he has lunch with a friend called Bob Regester who is having problems with his lover, Isherwood writes: "So of course I handed out lots of admirable advice, which I would do well to follow, myself. Don't try to make the relationship exclusive. Try to make your part of it so special that nobody can interfere with it even if he has an affair

with your lover. Remember that physical tenderness is actually more important than the sex act itself." We learn that Chris and Don no longer have sex but that they consider their relationship to be very physical; they sleep together and they are constantly touching each other. At a certain point Chris writes, "I'm glad people have had crushes on me, glad I used to be cute; it is a very sustaining feeling." I remember the ancient Virgil Thomson once telling me in Key West that he, too, had had a lot of sexual allure and success in his day.

We seldom count a happy marriage as a real accomplishment and yet it so clearly is—it is virtually an *aesthetic* achievement. It requires the same sense of proportion, creativity, empathy, patience, perseverance, equanimity and generosity of spirit as does the making of a novel or play. Isherwood's happy marriage with a tempestuous young man is, unlike the writing of a novel, a *collaborative* act (in that way it's more like preparing a play —and not incidentally Chris and Don were constantly working on film and theater scripts together). Anyone who has ever had a happy marriage knows that it is never stable, never finished; it changes every day and is always being created or at least celebrated anew. I suppose in that sense it is like cooking, something that requires a skill that can be acquired over time but that needs to be done every day from scratch. Isherwood understands the vagaries of love better than anyone and he feels (partly to Bachardy but largely to the gods) *gratitude*, the most appropriate of all the amorous emotions.

Another thing we admire about Isherwood is his seriousness and his curiosity. His reading lists reveal how far-flung his interests are and how deep they go. He is constantly reading demanding books that inform him about every aspect of the world past and present. At one moment, by no means atypical, he is reading Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*, Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* and *The*

Autobiography of Malcolm X. His curiosity about the people around him is equally far-reaching. He wants to know what everyone is up to. His old friends—especially David Hockney, Hockney's erstwhile lover Peter Schlesinger, W.H. Auden, Tony Richardson, his neighbor Jo Masselink, and of course the whole Vedanta crew starting with Swami—make nearly monthly, sometimes weekly or even daily appearances. When Isherwood travels to New York he sees the composer Virgil Thomson and when he goes to England he sees E.M. Forster and the beautiful ballet dancer Wayne Sleep (portrayed in a wonderful canvas by Hockney) and travels north to visit his strange, alcoholic brother Richard.

For me this book sometimes felt like old-home week since I know or knew Virgil and Hockney and Howard Schuman and Gloria Vanderbilt and Edward Albee and Dennis Altman and Lauren Bacall and Allen Ginsberg and Gore Vidal and Brian Bedford and Lesley Blanch and Paul Bowles and William Burroughs and Truman Capote and Aaron Copland and on and on. I never met Jim Charlton but towards the end of his life he sent me dozens of letters that were nearly incoherent. I drop all these names because I suppose I feel that I can testify that Isherwood is accurate in his depictions and almost too generous in his assessments.

We learn how important Forster was to Isherwood; at one point he even considers writing about both Swami and Forster and calling it *My Two Gurus* (of course what he did was to write about Swami alone in *My Guru and His Disciple*, a book I praised in the *Sunday New York Times Book Review*). He seems delighted when Forster tells him that Vanessa Bell "was much easier to get along with than her sister, and how Virginia would suddenly turn on you and attack you." He admires Forster's equanimity, his relationship with his policeman friend, Bob Buckingham, and Buckingham's wife, May.

Isherwood was extremely important to me but I was just a blip on his screen as I learned reading his book. He gave me a blurb for my 1980 book *States of Desire*, though he told me he hadn't liked my earlier arty fiction. In those two novels he'd seen the bad influence of Nabokov, he claimed (*Lolita* he'd once dismissed as the best travel book anyone had written about America). I saw him and Don in New York and again in Los Angeles and I talked to him several times on the phone (he told me that he didn't have the patience to answer letters but that he was happy to receive telephone calls). In the years that followed I would mention in interviews that Isherwood and Nabokov were the two writers who'd had the most influence on me, just as a few years later Michel Foucault in Paris became my last mentor —in spite of himself, since he didn't believe in being or having a mentor. Perhaps it is my fate that Nabokov, Isherwood and Foucault, the three men who had the greatest intellectual impact on me, would have had to scratch their heads to remember anything about me or even my name.

We learn so much in this book precisely because it is so detailed and daily. We hear about the earthquakes, mostly small and soon over. We learn how much Chris hates to travel. We hear about his money fears (at a certain moment he is triumphant because he has $74,000 in savings). When he asks Don how he will respond to his death, Don assures him he'll give him a great send-off. Chris refers to himself several times as a "ham" who loves to show off in public and please crowds. We realize through a few hints that he, Chris, still has a sex life with various young and less young men.

Isherwood had spent most of his life in the closet, as anyone of his generation and social class would have, but in this volume he is relieved when an English journalist, almost in passing, refers to him directly and without hedging as a homosexual. In *Kathleen and Frank*, his

memoir about his parents which he wrote during the period covered by this volume, he comes out in print for the first time. To be sure, he'd written frequently about homosexuals previously, notably in the groundbreaking novel *A Single Man*, but only now in the 1970s was he "out" in his own right, clearly and openly, without any screen of fiction between him and the reader. In the seventies he took an interest in gay politics, attended a few gay events and gave talks to gay groups. At one point he admits quite frankly that part of his original attraction to Vedanta lay in the fact that it accepted him as a homosexual.

Like any old man or woman he is surrounded by dying friends and family members. Isherwood is unusually calm and undramatic about these deaths (including that of his brother Richard), but he is never unfeeling. Perhaps because he thought so much about his own approaching death, he was able to take the death of his generation and of his elders in stride.

Even in old age Isherwood is still very much the working writer, sometimes collaborating with Bachardy (on a joint volume of texts and drawings called *October*, for instance), most often working alone. We learn that Bachardy had a true gift for naming things. Just as he'd thought up the title *A Single Man* in the sixties, now *My Guru and His Disciple* and *Christopher and His Kind* were among the titles he suggested to Isherwood. Constantly Isherwood, like any writer, is lamenting his laziness and lack of progress, but somehow or other the old nag or "Dobbin" as he calls himself plods on toward the finish line. He is also hard at work on film scripts and theatrical adaptations of his various "properties," though he had nothing to do with *Cabaret*, the musical and movie that made him the most money and earned him the widest fame (nor did he much like *Cabaret*, though he was attracted to Michael York).

Isherwood had a personality that sparkled. When he entered a room everyone sat forward and smiled. He avoided all the accoutrements of the famous man. He asked questions and listened to answers. He refused to be complimented and if some earnest young admirer persisted, Isherwood broke into a whinny of laughter. His laugh could be deflating; once I called him from Key West to read him the end of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* in which the author seizes his cross and walks bravely down into his grave. I was in tears but Chris thought it all so absurd that he laughed uncontrollably and I was puzzled then offended then (slightly) enlightened—I could just begin to see it was all pretty silly. When my ex, Keith McDermott, played in a theatrical adaptation of one of Chris's novels, I remember that all the Hindu monks in the play were endlessly laughing in ways a Christian divine would have considered beneath his dignity. Laughter for Chris could be deflating or just merry or impertinent—or divine, the very sound the planets make as they dance their eternal dance.

He was still startlingly handsome with his piercing eyes, shaggy eyebrows, straight nose and downturned mouth which was constantly turning up in a smile. He had a lot of charm but his charm did not stand in the way of his expressing strong opinions, especially about literature. How open writers are with one another is partly a question of nationality (the English are thick-skinned, the French thin-skinned, the Americans very thin-skinned) and generation (writers in the nineteenth century were much franker than twentieth-century writers). Isherwood came from a knock-about world of confident, upper-middle-class men and women from Oxford or Cambridge; they never minced words, any more than Martin Amis or Christopher Hitchens mince words now.

But of course he wasn't really one of his old London crowd. He'd been a pacifist and had moved to America on

the brink of World War II, which had earned him the enmity of most of his countrymen—and of some Brits even to this day. He was openly gay; sophisticated heterosexuals treat gays as if they're a bad joke that's gone on too long. Tiresome. A bit silly. Tiresome and juvenile. And then, worst of all, he was a Hindu. That seemed a very "period" thing to be in Britain, something out of the dubious, not quite hygienic mysteries of Madame Blavatsky, a pure product of the 1890s. In America, Hinduism was more puzzling than anything ("Why didn't he go directly on to Zen?" most of us wondered; Hinduism seemed to Zen what Jung seemed to Freud: seedy, not very rigorous, slightly embarrassing).

He was a wonderful host, and that's how I choose to recall him. Carefully dressed, he'd climb out of an easy chair and greet a friend warmly, show him around his house. I remember seeing a photo of the very young Don with Marilyn Monroe and Chris with Joan Crawford ("our dates," Chris emphasized). In his study he showed me a school picture of Auden and himself, something he kept close by. He mentioned Tennessee Williams ("We had an affair in the 1940s when we were both still rather presentable"). There were Hockneys to be seen and works by other artist friends and of course Don's studio to be visited. If we drove to a nearby restaurant for dinner Chris lay down in the back seat ("I was driving Don mad with all my wincing, so if I lie down I don't see anything or complain"). It gratified me that even if I was a very marginal player in his drama, nevertheless he accorded me all his warmth and cleverness and kindness, if only for an evening.

Edmund White
New York City
February 25, 2011

Introduction

In his novels and autobiographies, Isherwood typically traces one thread at a time—a single character or relationship, at most a milieu in cross-section over a short period. In the pages of his diaries, he weaves together, entry by entry, week by week, the surprisingly diverse areas of his life, every thread touching upon, reinforcing, and contrasting with every other thread, so that the rich cloth of his own life also portrays the fleeting sensibility of his time. The pages teem with personalities, but even as Isherwood becomes an icon of the gay liberation movement and a sought-after participant in the celebrity culture which burgeoned in the 1970s, he continues to tell us as much about his housekeeper, his doctor, the boy trimming his hedge, or his weird and reclusive brother in the north of England as he does about David Bowie or John Travolta, Elton John or Jon Voight. Isherwood was fond of a great many people. He was a practiced, self-conscious charmer who worked hard to draw others to him. Some of his acquaintances and friends have been surprised and upset by what he wrote about them in his diaries, concluding that he withheld from them in life his true opinion recorded secretly. But what he wrote in the diaires is not what he *secretly* thought, it is what he *also* thought, on the particular day when he wrote it. It is part of a complete portrait that is perhaps never even completable. To him, a human individual was comprised of many traits; he found

the so-called bad traits just as interesting and sometimes more attractive than the so-called good traits. Here is what he wrote about the woman doctor he selected in his old age to see him out of the world: “She’s a nonstop talker, an egomaniac, a show-biz snob, and extremely sympathetic. Don’s in favor of her, too.”[1] And he criticized nobody more harshly in his diaries than he criticized himself and his companion, the American painter Don Bachardy, whose physical glamour and creative vitality transfigured Isherwood’s last thirty-three years.

Throughout his writing life, Isherwood urged himself to work at his diary more often. In 1977, he wrote, “isolated diary entries are almost worthless … the more I read the later diaries, the more I see how worthwhile diary keeping is.”[2] He tracked his weight, his sleeping patterns, his trips to the gym, his illnesses and injuries; he recorded chance encounters, fragments of dialogue, and jokes, along with the more obviously important progress of his books and film scripts, his private life and his friendships, his teaching and public appearances. Thomas Mann once wrote that “only the exhaustive is truly interesting”;[3] for Isherwood a more accurate phrase might be only the exhaustive is truly illuminating. He wanted to make a record of the whole human creature in context, in its natural habitat, so that he could consider and analyse its habits and commitments, its rituals and choices. He used his diaries as raw material for his novels and autobiographies, but also as a place to evaluate his life and decide whether to change his course. As a follower of Ramakrishna, he meditated almost every day for nearly fifty years, training himself to withdraw from his ego and study it from the outside; this complemented his diary writing, further developing his detachment and making his powers of observation the more acute.

But he was also looking for something more. He was a follower of Freud, too, and above all Jung, and he believed that he could edge the unconscious, the rich inner life, out

into the open if he took note of everything it was delivering into the conscious arena. He kept a constant watch at the threshold between the inner and the outer worlds, impatient for new pieces of information, monitoring the revealing accretions of facial expression, posture, gesture, dress, casual gossip, dreams, all of which form the backdrop for premeditated speech and deliberate action. He jotted down coincidences, synchronicities, and numinous dates, trawling among them for clues to a hidden trajectory, an unrecognized mythology. Any stray detail could be the all-important detail that might unlock hidden meaning. His appetite for this hidden meaning increased as he grew older because he began to look upon the threshold separating the conscious and the unconscious mind as the very threshold which was separating him from death. Over his disciplines of observation and assessment hovered an ultimate goal: absolute knowledge might bring absolute liberation.

At the end of the 1960s, Isherwood and Bachardy began to work together writing plays and movie scripts. Collaborating brought them enormous pleasure, but in order to make money they had to keep several proposals going at one time. As this diary makes clear, they were well aware that whatever work they put in might eventually come to nothing because every project waited for the interest of a studio boss or a theatrical backer who could finance it, and then for a director and actors—preferably stars—who were equally committed and could make themselves available all at the same time. The diary charts how they and a number of their friends—writers like Ben Masselink, Jim Bridges, Ivan Moffat, Gavin Lambert, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, directors like Tony Richardson, John Schlesinger, John Boorman—had to adapt their talents constantly according to changing tastes, changing social values, and new technology. Throughout the 1970s, formats

also changed more quickly than ever before, sometimes for unpredictable commercial reasons, as story-telling possibilities diversified from feature films into television, including live T.V. drama, T.V. serials, made-for-T.V. films, and videotapes.

While Isherwood was working on his books and Bachardy painting or drawing every day, they remained alert to script writing opportunities. These came haphazardly, as individualized whims of the popular culture of the day, someone else's idea of what would sell. One of the few projects which they themselves originated, making a play out of Isherwood's novel *A Meeting by the River*, occupied them off and on for a number of years. It had some success in small staging, but made a resounding flop on Broadway in 1979. Actors, directors, and agents were mercilessly sketched by Isherwood in his diaries as he and Bachardy struggled to get the play put on. During the spring of 1970, Isherwood spent a month alone in England, waiting around for occasional meetings about a production that never happened; he endured this lonely episode of anticipation and disillusionment by socializing extravagantly and by making a vivid record of swinging London in his diary.

Such episodes amount to a kind of cautionary tale. In fact, Isherwood was almost indifferent to the ultimate fate of the stage and screen writing he did with Bachardy. A novel was entirely his to control, but plays and screenplays depended on the input of countless other people. As a longtime Hollywood writer, once he had sold his contribution, he tried to forget about it. In 1973, when he and Bachardy watched the television film of their "Frankenstein: The True Story," they were both horrified at what had been done with their work, yet he wrote: "the life we have together makes all such disasters unimportant, even funny.…"[4] Nevertheless, their script went on to win Best Scenario at the International Festival of Fantastic and

Scientific Films in 1976. In fact, the gothic fantasy was an ideal subject for them, and their version reflects their life together in a number of revealing ways. They made Frankenstein's creature beautiful, thus uncovering the Pygmalion myth latent in Mary Shelley's story and recasting it as a coded tale for their tribe. Their "monster" is presented as a suitable love object, and he stands for the "monstrous" homosexual—as George feels certain his neighbors see him in *A Single Man*—who in 1973 when "Frankenstein: The True Story" was broadcast in the U.S. would still have been a shocking subject for television. But their monster's beauty is betrayed by his makers. The creative process is reversed through a scientific error, and he begins to show on his face and body the moral decay of Dr. Frankenstein and his assistant Henry Clerval—as if he were the portrait and they the living originals in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Plenty have looked upon Bachardy as Isherwood's creature. Certainly he was a great beauty when Isherwood met him on the beach in Santa Monica in the early 1950s; he was preternaturally intelligent, strangely innocent for all his apparent sexual precocity, and still genuinely unformed. Isherwood once wrote that what he most adored about the very young Bachardy was that, "He is so desperately alive";[5] in a grimly funny sense, this is exactly the problem with Frankenstein's creature. But although Isherwood took Bachardy travelling, encouraged him to read, to converse, to go to college, to go to art school, to pursue his talent to the maximum, he could not make him happy. And so the creative process reversed, and moral ugliness began to show in the perfect boy. In their script, the struggles of Frankenstein's creature hilariously exaggerate Bachardy's predicament; and the sly, Edwardian charm of Dr. Polidori—the mad, malevolent scientist they added to the story and named after Byron's real life physician, John Polidori—mocks Isherwood's own. Indeed, Polidori and most of their

characters seem to have walked out of the pre-Monty Python fantasy world which Isherwood invented with his boyhood friend Edward Upward in the 1920s and which they called Mortmere.

Isherwood was mildly contemptuous of the Universal executives and their enthusiasm for “Frankenstein.” “When people say it is a ‘classic,’” he wrote, “they really mean only that the makeup is a classic, as long as Boris Karloff wears it.”[6] Nevertheless, he was flattered to be wanted by the striving world of commercial television, and it was easy for him to share in their nostalgia for the lost atmosphere of his own cinema-besotted childhood. “It pleases my vanity that I am still employable and that my wits are still quick enough to play these nursery games.”[7] Outsiders suspected Bachardy’s contribution, much as they had suspected the relationship since it began. In one studio meeting, an executive seemed to Isherwood to be “astonished to hear that Don had *any* opinion of his own. No doubt Don is being soundly bitched already as a boyfriend … brought along for the ride.”[8] Isherwood found the rudeness toward Bachardy close to unbearable, and neither he nor Bachardy had any illusions about the authenticity or indeed the difficulty of their collaboration. The diary reveals that they both felt impatient with Bachardy’s inexperience as a scriptwriter: “Don is upset because he feels he is a drag on me. Actually he is and he isn’t.... without him I wouldn’t work on the fucking thing at all. And he does very often have good and even brilliant ideas.”[9] As they thrashed about trying to bring their story to a close, Isherwood records proof of this:

> … we have made one tremendous breakthrough, entirely due to Don. He has had the brilliant idea that the Creature shall carry Polidor[i] up the mast and that they shall both be struck by the same bolt of lightning—killing Polidor[i] and invigorating the Creature! This is a perfect example of cinematic symbolism. For, as Don at

> once pointed out, it was always Polidor[i] who hated electricity and Henry (now part of the Creature) who believed in it.[10]

Polidori is past his prime, and his hands have been eaten away to mere claws by an accident with his chemicals, symbolizing his moral deformity—his craze for power. But because of his hands, Polidori, the monomaniac, cannot work alone. As it happens, Isherwood was suffering from Dupuytren's Contracture, which was deforming and disabling his own left hand. He had been having trouble typing for some time, and so, experienced, bossy and power hungry though Isherwood was, Bachardy typed everything when they worked together. In September 1971, just after the "Frankenstein" script was finished, Isherwood had surgery to alleviate the condition.

The image of the aging scientist electrocuted by the very bolt which rejuvenates the Creature also makes fun of the changing dynamic in the sexual relationship between Isherwood and Bachardy, as Bachardy now had more partners and Isherwood fewer. And it resonates with the fact that Bachardy's career was taking off. About a year before writing "Frankenstein," in September 1970, he was the only portrait artist included in a group show organized by Billy Al Bengston and hung in Bengston's studio. The other artists were Ed Moses, Larry Bell, Joe Goode, Tony Berlant, Ed Ruscha, Ron Davis, Ken Price, and Peter Alexander. These were some of the most exciting and successful American painters, printmakers, and sculptors of Bachardy's generation, mostly Californians. A few of them became friends, and their names appear more and more in Isherwood's diary from 1970 onward as Bachardy introduced them into Isherwood's life. Bachardy recalls that they were a somewhat macho group in which being gay was barely acceptable, although it helped that Isherwood was an older, established writer.[11] Such a

nuance demonstrates that Bachardy was admired by the best of his contemporaries for the quality of his work—in spite of being somebody's attractive young boyfriend rather than because of it.

Around this time, Bachardy was also taken on by a new dealer, Nicholas Wilder. During the 1970s, Wilder was to become the most influential contemporary art dealer in Los Angeles. He discovered and promoted a number of West Coast artists and showed Hockney, Helen Frankenthaler, Barnett Newman, and Cy Twombly. Wilder offered Bachardy an exhibition of his black and white portrait drawings, and Bachardy decided to show Wilder his recent color portraits, which nobody but Isherwood and Bachardy's previous dealer, Irving Blum, had seen: large-scale, head-and-shoulder images painted on paper in limpid water-based acrylics.[12] According to Isherwood:

> Don was very dubious about the paintings, afraid that Nick would be put off by them—which was only natural, after the negative reactions of Irving Blum. But I argued that a dealer is like a lawyer, you can't afford to have secrets from him if you want him to represent you, and Don agreed and we finally picked out about a dozen paintings—that's to say mostly the blotty watercolors.
>
> Well, to Don's amazement and to my much smaller amazement but huge joy and relief, Nick loved the watercolors and was altogether impressed by Don's versatility and said that he wants to give Don a show in which the whole front room of the gallery is full of watercolors with a few drawings in the back room. And, when we met Nick again, yesterday evening, at the opening of a show of Charles Hill's work, Nick told Don that he had nearly called him that afternoon, because "I can't get your paintings out of my mind."[13]

Only two of the paintings sold, yet Bachardy considers the exhibition was his successful public launch as a painter.[14]

Bachardy's growing self-confidence added to Isherwood's contentment. In December 1972, Isherwood describes their life together as "my idea of the 'earthly paradise.'"[15] He longed to write about the mysterious beauty of their relationship. In March 1971, he had begun a notebook about himself and Bachardy in their secret animal identities—Bachardy as the vulnerable and irresistible "Kitty" with unpredictable claws, Isherwood as the stubborn workhorse "Dobbin"—but he felt that any such project about their attachment was impossible:

> I shall never, as long as we are together, be able to fully feel or describe to myself all that our love means; it is much much too close to me. Don tells me from time to time that I should write about it, but how? Even my attempt to keep a diary of the Animals has failed. I can't see any of this objectively. Any more than I can really grasp what Swami means and has meant to me, in an entirely dfferent way.[16]

The following summer he observed, "the objection is, as always, that I feel it is a kind of sacrilege to write about the Animals at all, except privately."[17]

Only in his diaries was he able to record scraps of detail about himself and Bachardy. On Christmas Eve 1973, driving to a Palm Springs house party hosted by John Schlesinger, they talked at length of the form into which their relationship was settling and of Bachardy's present attitude toward various aspects of his life. Isherwood's account of their conversation implies they no longer had sex with one another and that, by mutual agreement, Bachardy looked for that with others:

> I asked how he feels about his meditation and he said that it is now definitely part of his life but that he doesn't at all share my reliance on Swami as a guru. "If anybody's my guru, you are." Well, that's okay, as long as he merely believes in my belief in Swami. Then I asked him about sex. He said that he doesn't mind our not having sex together any more; he agreed with me that our relationship is still very physical. The difficulty is that what he now wants is a sex object, not a big relationship, because he's got that with me. But no attractive boy wants to be a sex object; he wants to be a big relationship. I suppose I knew all this, kind of. But it was good to talk about it. Our long drives in the car are now almost our only opportunities to have real talks. As Don himself says, he is obsessed by time and always feels in a hurry, unless he is actually getting on with doing something. He says that there are now quite often moments, while he is drawing, when he feels that this is the one thing he really wants to do and experiences a great joy that he is actually doing it. But, even during the drawing, he says that he also feels harassed because he isn't drawing as quickly and economically as he could wish.[18]

They still slept together, and Bachardy recalls that this kept them physically close. Sex had dwindled only because it no longer seemed necessary. In fact, they did have sex on several occasions after this conversation, "as an instinctive means of reassuring ourselves that it was still plausible, that nothing had basically changed between us."[19] But the passionate sexual jealousy and conflicts of the 1960s were behind them, and other aspects of their relationship had become relatively more important. They identified more and more closely with one another until, as Isherwood wrote in 1975, "we are no longer entirely separate people."[20] Isherwood twice records in the diary that they

could not tell their speaking voices apart, for instance, when they were revising their script of *A Meeting by the River*, "A weird discovery we have both made: since using the tape recorder to record our discussions of the play, we have both realized that we cannot be certain which of our voices is which!"[21]

But into the Animals' "golden age," as Bachardy once called it,[22] death was creeping. Isherwood was a year older than Bachardy's father. Fit and boyish as he was, his very body revealed the future bearing down on both of them; time together was short. Bachardy had the greater darkness to face, and he saw it clearly. Life with an old man, followed by the death of the old man. He says that he tried not to think about it.[23] Bachardy was more restless and more impatient than Isherwood by temperament, and whatever natural anxiety he possessed about the passage of time must have been exacerbated by living as he had done since youth, with a man thirty years his senior. If, as he told Isherwood during the drive to Palm Springs, the activity of drawing or painting lifted Bachardy out of time and freed him, at least a little, from this obsessive anxiety, nevertheless, his perception of what was to come is painfully evident in his work. He says that people praise his portraits generously as long as they are of somebody else. When they see their own faces emerge under his hand, they are often silent because they are shocked at how starkly the portraits reveal their advancing age.[24]

But of course, Isherwood also felt the passage of time, and in his diary he frequently mentions the poignancy this cast over his contentment: "the joy of waking with [Don] in the basket—the painful but joyful tenderness—painful only because I am always so aware that it can't last forever or even for very long, Kitty and Old Drub will have to say goodbye."[25] He knew that he was growing increasingly dependent on Bachardy, who drove him more and more

often in the car and performed an ever greater share of domestic and social chores, and, as always, he recognized how difficult their situation was for Bachardy:

> Some of the inner rage he feels against me is because of the fact that I am going to leave him. He feels that this is a trick which I shall play on him—have, indeed, already played, by involving us so with each other. Any sign I show of illness, even of fatigue, makes him intensely nervous; he behaves as if it were a kind of bitchery on my part.[26]

And Isherwood's own friends were dying. Laughton in 1962 and Huxley in 1963 died before their time. Anyway, they were much older than Isherwood. So were Forster and Gerald Hamilton who died in 1970, and Stravinsky and Gerald Heard who died in 1971. But 1973 took contemporaries and friends of his youth—William Plomer; Jean Ross, who was the real-life original of Sally Bowles; and Auden, his closest English friend, whom he followed to Berlin in 1929, with whom he collaborated on three plays during the 1930s, and with whom he emigrated to America in January 1939:

> Wystan died yesterday—or anyhow sometime during the night of September 28–29.… This is still so uncanny. I believe it, I guess, but it seems utterly against nature. Not because I thought Wystan was so tough as all that. He seemed to have been ruining his health for years. And then, whatever he may have said, he was awfully lonely—isolated is what I mean—he made a wall around himself, for most people, by his behavior and his prejudices and demands. Perhaps he deeply wanted to go. His death seems uncanny to me because he was one of the guarantees that *I* won't die—at least not yet. I think most of us, if we live long enough, have such

> guarantee figures. On the other hand, the fact that he has gone first makes the prospect of death easier to face. He has shown me the way.…
>
> An odd thing: That night he died—or rather, in the afternoon here, which might have been the exact time of his death in Vienna—I started a sore throat, the first I've had in a long long while, and it got so bad during *our* nighttime that I couldn't swallow. And today, despite doses of penicillin, I still have a fever and headache and feel lousy. This makes me glad. I like to believe that he sent me a message which got through to me.[27]

Did the message admonish Isherwood, like sore throats triggered by encounters with Auden in the 1920s, to be true to his inner nature, and to tell the truth in his writing? In his early autobiography *Lions and Shadows*, Isherwood writes of the Auden character, Hugh Weston, "I caught a bad cold every time we met: indeed the mere sight of a postcard announcing his arrival would be sufficient to send up my temperature and inflame my tonsils."[28] Isherwood was now struggling to get started with the book that was to become *Christopher and His Kind*. Auden's death not only warned him that he had better hurry, it also freed him to handle the material without anxiety that he might bruise Auden's feelings or invade his well-guarded privacy. In his lifetime, Auden never publicly acknowledged he was a homosexual, and he told friends he wanted no biography. Isherwood was among the few who could tell Auden's story—or his own story for that matter—and he knew this. As he wrote in his diary when *Christopher and His Kind* was nearly finished: "I am writing little bits about Wystan in my book.… I can't help feeling, wishes or no wishes, it is better if those who knew Wystan write now, instead of leaving it to those who didn't know him, a generation or two later."[29]

About a month after Auden's death, Isherwood saw that *Christopher and His Kind* must above all explain why he