

The
Animals



Love Letters

between

Christopher Isherwood

and *Don Bachardy*

EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY
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About the Book

The love story between writer Christopher Isherwood and artist Don Bachardy – in their own words.

Christopher Isherwood was a celebrated English writer when he met the Californian teenager Don Bachardy on a Santa Monica beach in 1952. They spent their first night together on Valentine's Day 1953. Defying the conventions, the two men began living as an openly gay couple in an otherwise closeted Hollywood. *The Animals* provides a loving testimony of an extraordinary relationship that lasted until Chris's death in 1986 – and survived affairs (on both sides) and a thirty-year-age-gap.

In romantic letters to one another, the couple created the private world of the Animals. Chris was Dobbin, a stubborn old workhorse; Don was the playful young white cat, Kitty. But Don needed to carve out his own identity – some of their longest sequences of letters were exchanged during his trips to London and New York, to pursue his career and to widen his emotional and sexual horizons.

Amidst the intimate domestic dramas, we learn of Isherwood's continuing literary success – the royalty cheques from *Cabaret*, the acclaim for his pioneering novel *A Single Man* – and the bohemian whirl of Californian film suppers and beach life. Don, whose portraits of London theatreland were making his

name, attends the world premiere of *The Innocents* with Truman Capote and afterwards dines with Deborah Kerr and the rest of the cast, spends weekends with Tennessee Williams, Cecil Beaton, or the Earl and Countess of Harewood, and tours Egypt and Greece with a new love interest. But whatever happens in the outside world, Dobbin and Kitty always return to their 'Basket' and to each other. Candid, gossipy, exceptionally affectionate, *The Animals* is a unique interplay between two creative spirits, confident in their mutual devotion.

About the Authors

Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986) was one of the most celebrated writers of his generation. Born in Cheshire, England, he left Cambridge without graduating, and went to Berlin ('Berlin meant Boys') where he wrote *Goodbye to Berlin* on which the musical *Cabaret* was based. He emigrated to America with W. H. Auden in 1939; whilst Wystan stayed in New York, Chris struck out for California and became a US citizen in 1946. He became involved with Don Bachardy on Valentine's Day 1953 and their life together is chronicled in Isherwood's later *Diaries*. Bachardy (b.1934, Los Angeles) pursued a successful career as a portrait artist and Isherwood went on to write another five novels including *A Single Man* (which was made into a movie directed by Tom Ford in 2009). In the 1960s and '70s he turned to autobiographical works including *Kathleen and Frank* and *Christopher and His Kind*. Don continues to live in the house which he shared with Chris for 33 years, overlooking Santa Monica Canyon.

Katherine Bucknell is editor of all four volumes of Christopher Isherwood's *Diaries* and of W. H. Auden's *Juvenilia: Poems 1922-1928*. She is co-editor of *Auden Studies* and a founder of the W. H. Auden Society. She is also the author of four novels and is currently working on a major new biography of Christopher Isherwood.

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
Liberation, Diaries Volume Three: 1970–1983
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

The Animals

Letters Between
Christopher Isherwood and Don
Bachardy

Edited and introduced by Katherine
Bucknell

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

"Let's put our faith in the Animals. They have survived the humans and will survive."

*Inscribed by C.I. in a
copy of Down There on a
Visit that he gave D.B.,
February 14, 1963*

Introduction

From February 14, 1953 until January 4, 1986 the conversation between Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy never stopped. When they were apart, they continued by letter, telegram, and telephone a dialogue of intimacy, depth, and urgent, tender concern. They first exchanged letters in February 1956 when Isherwood took the twenty-one-year-old Bachardy on a tour of Europe. On their way home via England, where the winter was harsh, Isherwood went alone to Cheshire to visit his mother and brother for a few days while Bachardy stayed behind in their London hotel because Isherwood wished to spare him the primitive accommodation and the cold at his mother's manor house, Wyberslegh Hall. This very first pair of letters shows how, in absence, they both reassessed their three-year-old relationship, valuing it the more for being separated. This first pair of letters also mentions the animal identities which expressed the instinctive, unbreakable bond that had already formed between them. "I miss rides through London on old Dobbin," wrote Bachardy:

. . . (especially in the snow yesterday) and think a lot about him, sleeping in a strange stable, eating cold oats out of an ill-fitting feedbag and having no cat fur to keep him warm. And don't let them put any frozen

bits in his mouth. And tell him an anxious Tabby is at the mercy of the RSPCA and counting the days till his return.¹

In their most private interactions, Isherwood was a stubborn grey workhorse, Dobbin; Bachardy was a skittish, unpredictable white kitten usually called Kitty. Over the years, these “pet” personalities were to be elaborated upon and decorated by each of them with stories and events from literature and life, evolving as a camp that allowed Isherwood and Bachardy to masquerade and to play about the serious matters of love and commitment and thereby to reveal themselves more fully to one another. They generally spoke of the Animals in the third person, distancing themselves from the sentimentality in which their Animal identities allowed them to indulge. Although these grew more complex over time, one of the most important characteristics of the Animals remained their simplicity, their innocence of ulterior motive. The Animals embodied the instinctive life—the submission to creaturely needs and to a humble, unforeseeable destiny.

The Animals are homosexuals and never would or could deny this. The Animals are thirty years apart in age, but nevertheless must be together. The Animals have busy social lives, many shared and separate friends, and even outside love affairs, yet some of their most contented waking hours are spent nestled together in the dark, watching films and munching junk food. The Animals have intensely cerebral artistic lives and enormous ambition, but their

subverbal bond makes intellectual and professional activities seem merely worldly and unimportant. The Animals fight, sometimes savagely, run away from one another, suffer blinding pangs of loneliness, and yet always return to their basket, their silent world of warmth and comfort. They never accuse or absolve; they don't experience guilt or regret; they live in the present rather than the past or the future. Foolish or wise, their behavior is characteristic, ritualistic, unavoidable; they don't consider why they do what they do. They will always be together, and The Others—in general straight people, but also sometimes any outsiders—enter their world for brief spells only and, however welcome or involved they may seem there, are always turned out again in the end.

When Isherwood died in 1986, his full set of tiny, white-jacketed Beatrix Potter story books still stood on his library book shelves. These had been among his favorite nursery reading, and the animal world portrayed in them—in both narrative and watercolors—offers a miniature comic universe in which character brings about both action and consequences, including suffering, but in which humor and compassion prevail over moral judgement.

In 1925, when he was twenty-one and working in London as secretary to the string quartet of Belgian violinist André Mangeot, Isherwood composed some poems to accompany sketches of animals, some dressed in human clothes, which were drawn by eleven-year-old Sylvain Mangeot, the beloved

younger son of the household. The poems and pictures were published much later as *People One Ought to Know* (1982). They are clumsy compared to Beatrix Potter, but they offer an equally broad range of characters, delineated with resourceful and eccentric detail.

With his friend, Gore Vidal, Isherwood shared another camp, borrowed from *The Wind in the Willows*; they called one another Mole (Isherwood) and Toad (Vidal), pointing up the fussy, self-important rivalry in their relationship, but also the natural dignity and heroism, the shared wish to be the best they could be, to show off for the world and one another, and to make one another's lives more interesting than they might otherwise have been. Mole and Toad are courteous, noble, and gentlemanly as well as petty and striving. Of course, Isherwood and Vidal were also laughing at the smallness and unimportance of any two creatures anywhere anytime—apart from to one another.

The ability to create a world, a safe and separate milieu, was a great gift of Isherwood's. As a homosexual, he spent decades half-hidden below the surface of ordinary social activity. For many, such a buried life might have been lonely, painful, angry, colored by bitterness, guilt, even self-loathing. But Isherwood knew how to spread hay around his stable, put up bright wallpaper, and attract a good-looking and entertaining crowd. He drew Bachardy into his semi-secret realm, and they made their lives into the finest private party in town. On New Year's Eve, 1960, Isherwood wrote in his diary:

Very good relations with Don, all this time. Yesterday evening—I forgot to record—we did something we haven't done in ages; danced together to records on the record player. A Beatrix Potter scene—the Animals' Ball.[2](#)

The second set of letters Isherwood and Bachardy exchanged were about a year and half after the first, in June 1957, when Bachardy's spring semester at Chouinard Art Institute ended; he marked the start of his summer vacation by travelling alone to New York to stay with Lincoln Kirstein. In June 1958, Bachardy made a similar trip, travelling first to New Orleans to stay with his close friend, Marguerite Lamkin, a dialogue coach on the original production of Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Isherwood remained behind, working, at the house they were then renting in Santa Monica. He enormously enjoyed the dramatic, closely observed report Bachardy sent him of the attempted suicide of Marguerite's father. Throughout the Isherwood-Bachardy letters, figures and events familiar from Isherwood's diaries are discussed by both correspondents with even greater candor than in the diaries; many others are mentioned here for the first time. Bachardy, the sexy, turbulent boy, proves to be a thoughtful, articulate, and highly analytical writer with as broad and penetrating an interest in human character as his mentor, and with a startlingly robust voice.

Generally, it was Bachardy who left home for a few days or weeks to stay with friends, to travel, to work,

or to combine all these things. He wanted to lead an independent life and to explore the world and his talent on his own terms. Isherwood was determined not only to let him, but also to encourage him because, in fact, Bachardy found it psychologically daunting to leave home alone at all. It took all his nerve and self-discipline to pull away from his sheltered life with Isherwood and from their productive day-to-day regime. The energy he invested in departing left him, in younger years, so emptied that he typically arrived at his destination wondering why he had come. But as the letters intermittently make clear, the relationship with Isherwood survived and succeeded partly because of these separations.

In 1960, Bachardy got his first big assignment as a professional portrait artist when Tony Richardson asked him to draw the cast of *A Taste of Honey* for exhibition in the Broadway theater lobby, and this led to several other East Coast jobs—drawing posters for Tennessee Williams's *Period of Adjustment* and Julie Harris's *Little Moon of Alban*. By 1961, Bachardy was ready for a much bigger step, and he moved to London to study at the Slade School of Fine Art. He intended to remain for six months, supported mostly by funding from a Californian acquaintance wealthy enough to act as a patron of the arts. The Animals found the parting excruciating, and at first Bachardy found it so difficult to be alone that he was unable to work and felt, for a time, both disappointed and overwhelmed by the Slade. Yet he craved the challenge of solitude, and writing to Isherwood

strengthened him. They reported their activities to one another in minute detail, keeping their daily concerns very much in one another's thoughts and never allowing their intimacy to dwindle. Bachardy soon involved himself with Isherwood's circle of London friends, and he grew close to the painter Keith Vaughan, with whom he was studying at the Slade, to the socialite doctor Patrick Woodcock, and to Cecil Beaton. Before long he was painting five hours a day, and he went often to the theater and movies, sharp reviews of which cram his letters to Isherwood throughout the decades.

Isherwood tried to lose himself in work. He completed the draft of his new novel, *Down There on a Visit*, and worked with Charles Laughton preparing a Plato monologue for Laughton to perform as a one-man stage show. At the same time, he chased down some extra funds inherited from his mother and, with Bachardy's help, pursued London scriptwriting jobs so that he could afford to join Bachardy from April to October 1961. When his final draft of "Paul," the last section of *Down There on a Visit*, was complete, Isherwood posted it ahead, and Bachardy, who had read an earlier draft in September 1960, wrote back praising it highly. Bachardy also drafted a passionate critique, which he never mailed, warning Isherwood to cut what they referred to as the hashish section, based on their visit to Paul Bowles in Tangier in October 1955, and later published separately as the short story, "A Visit to Anselm Oaks."

They had discussed the cut before, and Isherwood was relying on Bachardy and on Isherwood's school

friend Edward Upward for guidance. In his letter of March 11, 1961, Isherwood says, "You and Edward will have to decide about this." Since their years together at Repton and Cambridge, Upward had read all Isherwood's work before publication, and he would continue to do so, but Bachardy's opinion now mattered most. In his draft letter, which perhaps reflects telephone and face-to-face conversations about the book, Bachardy argues that experimenting with drugs should not be presented alongside the narrator's religious journey as if it were equally serious or important. The hashish episode seemed to Bachardy more in the nature of a "cheap thrill,"³ a merely chemical adventure that involves no inward transformation or spiritual or philosophical work on the narrator's part and which is not a path to anything more. He worried that Isherwood's candor would invite sceptics to dismiss his religious beliefs as if they, too, were a brief experiment or even a moment of irresponsibility, like being drunk at a party. He was at pains to foresee and forestall critical attacks from outsiders, and his tone is at once protective, adult, and proprietary, even as he prepares with humility and maximum efficiency to pass the typescript quickly to Upward for his opinion.

The private view on October 2, 1961, for Bachardy's debut show at the Redfern Gallery, heavily attended by celebrities and press, was a moment of triumph and fulfilment for both Isherwood and Bachardy. By the time Isherwood returned to Santa Monica, Bachardy was launched on a new phase of professional activity. He was inundated with

portrait commissions in London, and he began to plan a second show for January 1962 at the Sagittarius Gallery in New York. But when the Animals met in New York, Bachardy's success came between them. There were more portrait commissions, many social opportunities, and a hectic pace affording little privacy. On his return to Santa Monica, it was Isherwood's turn to draft a letter that he did not send, "Won't write a Kitty and Dobbin letter. That's sentimental. Though it's a beautiful poetic sentimentality. But I think we can still talk to each other by our own names—I mean, even when we're not mad." The magical intimacy seemed to be shattered, the pet names dropped as if they were masks for a show that was over. The Animals had become two ordinary, separate people again: "I realize I am deeply selfish. You admit that you are . . . My selfishness is that I want you to stay with me. Your selfishness is that you ask yourself couldn't you do better; considering you are young."⁴

Bachardy came home in late February, 1962, and they returned to established modes, but the emotional tension was to get much worse over the following year and a half. Bachardy struggled to capitalize on his achievements as a portraitist and fashion illustrator and to progress with his painting, and he explored an independent sexual and romantic life that profoundly changed his relationship with Isherwood. In principle, each encouraged the other to have outside sexual affairs, but such was the intensity of the attention that they had, until now, focused on one another that neither was really

prepared for the seismic emotional shifts that would come about when this attention was directed, even in part, elsewhere. The Animal essence of their relationship relied on close and constant physical interaction, on uncontested physical possession, and, especially on Isherwood's side, on being together from twilight to dawn. In fact, Isherwood found it very hard to spend nights alone. Early in 1963, Bachardy became absorbed in a love affair with Bill Bopp, and Isherwood repaid him by spending the night in their own bed at Adelaide Drive with Paul Wonner, a close friend who, they both knew, had just the qualities that might offer a genuine threat to Bachardy's place in Isherwood's affections, in particular the animal sensuality Isherwood so adored in Bachardy. Wishing to allow one another freedom, both found it difficult to be entirely honest about outside sexual activities and the emotions they prompted; in fact, Isherwood thought too much honesty was destructive. But he believed their Animal personae had a mythic power that could keep the relationship alive: "I often feel that the Animals are far more than just a nursery joke or a cuteness. They *exist*. They are like Jung's myths. They express a kind of freedom and truth which we otherwise wouldn't have."⁵

Nevertheless, in April 1963, the Animals parted. Isherwood went north to San Francisco, where he lived in a borrowed house and gave some lectures. Bachardy turned into "the blackest of black cats,"⁶ so tense that he was almost unable to function and the more miserable for being alone with himself and the things about himself that he did not like. Isherwood

returned for Bachardy's birthday in May, but the meeting was a disaster. On Bachardy's birthday card, he wrote, "I dreamed Dobbin died . . ." [7](#)

But they did not give up. By June, they were living together again, and by the end of September, Bachardy felt less distressed and was able to work a little. On Christmas Eve, Isherwood wrote from India, where he had travelled with his guru Swami Prabhavananda to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Vivekananda and to observe the final vows of two Hollywood monastics, John Yale and Kenneth Critchfield, "[T]his is not my life and could never become my life," a realization about monasticism that was to form the basis of his last novel, *A Meeting by the River*. His life was with Bachardy: "I want to talk Cat-Horse again." [8](#) On his return journey, they had a happy rendezvous in New York, where Bachardy was arranging an autumn exhibition at the Baner Gallery. By the time Isherwood arrived alone in Santa Monica, they had agreed that Bachardy would design the cover for *A Single Man*, Isherwood's masterpiece inspired by the fear of losing him.

In June 1964, Bachardy travelled abroad with a new lover and another friend to Egypt, Greece, and Austria. Isherwood recorded in his diary on May 26, "This is Don's 'birthday present' for his thirtieth birthday. He wanted to do it 'with my blessing.'" [9](#) A sea change had come about. And the word "blessing" is a key to the new dynamic in their relationship, which had been recast as, fundamentally, father-son or guru-disciple. A lover who betrays is harder to

forgive than a prodigal son who wanders and returns. The prodigal son receives unconditional love and is always welcomed home, whatever the emotional cost; Bachardy was now free to wander and philander as he liked. His reports of his travels with his two age-mates are like those of a student backpacker—eyefuls of monuments and scenery, differing cultural attitudes to money and how it should be dished out, confidential grumbles about strange food and the lack of privacy and independence.

He was in New York again for the opening of his show at the Baner Gallery in October while Isherwood assembled *Exhumations* and worked on a film script of *The Sailor from Gibraltar* for Tony Richardson. The exhibition led, as always, to new interest in Bachardy's work, and at the start of 1965, he settled in New York for what proved to be six months, drawing the dancers of the New York City Ballet and the actors of the American Shakespeare Festival on a commission from Lincoln Kirstein. Isherwood began teaching a writing seminar at UCLA and got to work on *A Meeting by the River*, but after visiting Bachardy briefly in late January and early February, he was lonely for him and wrote often with tempting gossip such as what was afoot on the set of Gavin Lambert's film, *Inside Daisy Clover*. "Old Dub thinks and thinks of his dear Kitty and is happy to do whatever Kitty says, because he now belongs to Kitty entirely and will just try to be useful in the few ways old horses can."[10](#) Meanwhile, Bachardy brooded, somewhat in the way that Isherwood had done in the

late 1940s and early 1950s before he met Bachardy, on how he was meant to spend his life:

Kitty is continually rejecting possible bowls of cream and yet he doesn't know quite what he wants instead—except that he does long to devote all of his fur to *something*. To painting, to Ramakrishna, to old Dub, maybe even to all three. He realizes he has never made up his mind really. He has always been testing and tasting, dipping his paw in here, his tail in there, trying a tunnel as far as the point where his whiskers touched the sides. But then sometimes Kitty feels that perhaps this is the nature of life, at least of his life, a succession of glimpses, some satisfying, some not. Perhaps, he thinks, the state of waiting, of expectation, of near desperation sometimes, is a quite rewarding, maybe even profound state to be in, if he can just manage to accept it and go along with it.[11](#)

Nevertheless, he was drawing portraits, painting in oils as well as in acrylics, and socializing with writers, painters, composers, actors, dancers, and musicians, and he sent Isherwood insightful and acerbic assessments of New York cultural life.

In mid-February 1966, Bachardy again established himself in New York, this time for a little over two months. His drawings of the New York City Ballet were to be reproduced for sale at performances, and while he oversaw the engraving and printing, he did portraits several times a week. In September and October the same year, he remained in Santa Monica while Isherwood travelled to Austria to draft a television script about the song “Silent Night.”

Isherwood's travelogue home has the easy brilliance of an old hand returning to a familiar German-speaking world and taking in with pleasure some previously unknown sights.

He returned by way of England, and reported from there his excitement as he began to burrow into family papers for the book that he was eventually to call *Kathleen and Frank*. He also sent Bachardy news of their ever-growing circle of English friends. One was to figure significantly in their lives:

Last night I saw Patrick Procktor (who sends you much love) and went with him and Bob Regester and the director named Anthony Page (not sure you'll remember him—quite bold, youngish, rather nice) to that Chinese restaurant in Limehouse –“New Friends”—and then on a tour of pubs.[12](#)

Within a year and a half, Isherwood's new friend Anthony Page was to become a new and very particular friend of Bachardy, and Bachardy's 1968 letters reveal that his relationship with Page was to come closer than any other to separating Bachardy from Isherwood altogether.

Meanwhile, in May 1967, Isherwood returned to London for about a month to promote *A Meeting by the River*. While he was there, he worked towards arranging another London exhibition for Bachardy and sent him catalogues from shows that he saw of Francis Bacon and Patrick Procktor. He spent time with some of his oldest friends, and again visited his brother at Wyberslegh to consult family papers.

Bachardy's letters from Santa Monica during these two trips fizz with maturing enthusiasm about his work and with his characteristically tough observations about the friends and acquaintances he and Isherwood shared at home. Harsh though he could be towards false pride, bad manners, or lack of consideration for sensitive feelings, he nearly always extended benevolence to the shy, the underdog, and those without self-confidence. He was a great one for spotting a light hidden under a bushel. His reports to Isherwood humorously exaggerate his own demanding and haughty demeanor towards their friends, and thus obliquely reveal how he longed for Isherwood to spoil him with the loyalty and understanding that Bachardy was never able to find elsewhere. They also show how grateful he was. He gave dutiful accounts of the income flowing from the stage musical *Cabaret* (based on Isherwood's novel *Goodbye to Berlin* and playing to packed houses on Broadway since November 1966) and of the resulting taxes. All the while, he worked steadily in his studio towards a Los Angeles exhibition in November 1967.

Bachardy spent a month in New York from late August to September 1967, then in April 1968 he flew to London for what he thought would be a two-and-a-half-week trip. But, almost certainly as a result of Isherwood's introduction, he became romantically involved with Anthony Page. One postponement of his return led to another. Such was his absorption with this new relationship that Bachardy didn't even get in touch with other London friends, for a time not even with his favorite, Marguerite Lamkin. He forgot

to tell Isherwood about the death of Iris Tree, one of Isherwood's closest and most long-standing women friends, and he didn't attend her memorial service. By the end of April, he was obliged to warn Isherwood not to telephone him at Bob Regester and Neil Hartley's, where he was supposedly staying: "Don't call me here except in an emergency. I feel very uncomfortable around Bob & Neil and so spend most of my time away."[13](#) For the time being, he didn't say where.

Page had hired Bachardy to draw portraits for a John Osborne play that he was directing at the Royal Court, *Time Present*, and, in his letters to Isherwood, Bachardy makes much of the genuine difficulties of the personalities involved, in particular Osborne himself and the notoriously challenging Jill Bennett, then becoming Osborne's fourth wife. He soon revealed to Isherwood that he was staying with Page, but he presented it as an uncomfortable, makeshift arrangement, acceptable only while he reluctantly completed the portraits. And he said Page was caught up in a complicated affair with another man on the premises:

Old Cat misses his Angel Horse so very much and thinks of him so much and pines for his warm basket with the huge Hide cushion which comforts him so. But Kitty is being terribly fussed by these Show Biz people who keep plucking at his fur and spinning him around . . . I am staying with Anthony Page (68 Ladbroke Grove, W. 11). I was so ill at ease at Bob and Neil's that I asked him if he would put me up for a few days. The place is very primitive (but still

preferable to Bob's) and though much more inconvenient than Cadogan Square, I at least can get a ride into town in the morning when Anthony goes to rehearsal. He has been having [. . . an] affair of many months with a guy named Norman who lives in the flat above with a lover [. . .].

Cadogan Square is a few blocks from the Royal Court; Page's flat in Notting Hill is probably twenty minutes away by car and longer by tube. The letter tells no lies, but it is a careful delivery of truths that avoids articulating the real excitement of his involvement with Page. "I am very fond of Anthony and he is fun to be with," Bachardy writes, but he goes on to imply that Page hardly notices him and that Isherwood would be equally involved in the friendship if Isherwood, too, were in London:

. . . much of the time he is so wrapped up in the play and rehearsals that he can't really concentrate on anything else. He still talks of the possibility of your writing this thriller for him though I hear nothing that makes me think it might really happen. It could very easily happen if you were here. He is a terribly out-of-sight-out-of-mind person.[14](#)

On May 8, Bachardy mentions again the possibility that Isherwood might write the screenplay for the French thriller Page was thinking of adapting, *The Praying Mantis*, and although he dismisses the novel as contrived and reiterates that Page is too busy with his stage play to focus seriously on it, he nevertheless gives Isherwood the name of the American publisher and tentatively offers himself as

a collaborator: “. . . a kitten might lend a paw if asked. That way the Animals could put their heads together out of the basket as well as in. But you might hate it and think it unworkable. Anyway, we’ll see.”¹⁵ On May 15, he sends a long explanation of why he will not be home for his birthday—delays in printing the theater program in which his drawings were being included—and a critique of Page’s movie-directing skills in *Inadmissible Evidence*. On May 18, he assures Isherwood his return is imminent, but then on May 29, he writes to say he has begun a set of drawings for a new Osborne play, *The Hotel in Amsterdam*. He finally returned to Los Angeles on June 10, two-and-a-half weeks having become two-and-a-half months. Through all this time, Isherwood never wrote a letter to Bachardy, because he constantly expected him to return, and because he wanted Bachardy to feel the pressure to do so, rather than be allowed to relax into a routine of back-and-forth exchanges. Bachardy’s letters are full of reassuring assertions that he longs impatiently to be with Isherwood, and he encloses with them pictures of helpless, damp-eyed kittens clipped from glossy magazines. A cruel truth, though, about the Animal personae is that they could be deployed falsely, and thereby maintain a sentimental fiction of harmony when there was none.

Like any set of conventions, the Kitty and Dobbin life achieved a reality all its own, and Bachardy drew on this resource adeptly now and at other times when he was inwardly preoccupied with an emotional trajectory that had nothing to do with Isherwood.

Despite the betrayal this implies, it allowed Bachardy to maintain a balance among a variety of conflicting needs in his own life. He created private space in which to have the kind of sexual and romantic experiences Isherwood had had before the two of them met, and which Isherwood knew Bachardy envied and desired; meanwhile, he continued to make the necessary ritual observances to their household gods. It was not unlike the way in which Isherwood kept up his meditation and prayers through periods of spiritual dryness in the hope that feelings of belief and refuge in Ramakrishna would return. Isherwood's diaries make clear that he knew at least a little about many of Bachardy's affairs, sometimes because Bachardy told him and sometimes because he recognized the signs. Although he occasionally rebelled against too much intimacy with outsiders, he certainly preferred an open relationship to losing Bachardy altogether. He himself had love affairs, too, or at least plenty of sex with boys and men he found attractive. Sometimes he even had sex with people he didn't find all that attractive. In one letter, he entertained Bachardy with details of a date with a "skinny Maths professor":

He really is quite bright and has a nice little house all to himself on 15th St., and a little money apparently, which is a drag because he wants to "return my hospitality." He is very closet, or rather, not even that; just restrained and somehow reserved for something, like a folded napkin. He played the piano to me afterwards, Brahms, quite fairly nicely but not well. I imagine he would be good to draw; his face is

rather endearing when playing, like a fish rising to the surface. The enormous advantage of mathematics is that it can't be explained so one is excused from all that.[16](#)

Bachardy's offer of himself as a collaborator for Isherwood is another inspired combination of self-interest and shared interest. He tells Isherwood repeatedly that Page is obsessed with his directing work, and it seems clear that Bachardy wanted to enter Page's world more completely, to be not just an artistic observer recording it, but also a creator participating in it. It's unlikely this was simply in order to get Page's attention; hanging around with Page, Osborne, Jill Bennett, and the other actors in *Time Present* might make anyone ambitious to join in. Bachardy had been a constant movie-goer since childhood; he was a natural critic; and he had begun haunting the theaters and tried writing a play about his family in 1956, the very first time he was alone in London. A few years later, he and Isherwood had worked together on a stage adaptation of *The World in the Evening*; they titled it *The Monsters*, completing a draft in 1959 which they showed to Dodie Beesley and Cecil Beaton. Bachardy possesses just the sort of obsessive temperament suited to the intensely communal and temporary interaction of staging a play, and it suited Isherwood's needs to be used as a ticket to involvement in this way. Isherwood had already conceded that he was there to serve Bachardy, and he meant it. A new dynamic for the

Animals would certainly contribute to keeping their bond alive and strong.

When Auden realized in 1929 that Isherwood was not in love with him and never would be, he had proposed that they write a play together. They went on to write four, and they continued to be intimately involved with one another for more than a decade, partly because of this, while other boyfriends came and went. Collaboration formed a central theme of their lifelong friendship, and Auden later wrote that collaboration was more satisfying to him than any erotic bond: “In my own case, collaboration has brought me greater erotic joy—as distinct from sexual pleasure—than any sexual relation I have had.”¹⁷ By the end of the 1930s, when they finished their last play together, they had stopped having the occasional schoolboyish sex that each wrote and spoke about. Their relationship was now primarily intellectual. The Bachardy-Isherwood bond had begun very differently, as a real love affair, and it retained that aura permanently; still, in times when erotic energies were flowing elsewhere, securing the bond by other means, however manipulative, was politic and smart.

Isherwood and Bachardy spent the summer of 1968 together, and Bachardy’s suggestion that “the Animals could put their heads together out of the basket as well as in” took quick and unforeseen shape: they adapted Isherwood’s novel *A Meeting by the River* into a stage script, a project Isherwood originally initiated with the writer and director Jim