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## **Christopher and His Kind** Christopher Isherwood

Originally published in 1976, *Christopher and His Kind* covers the most memorable ten years in the writer's life—from 1929, when Isherwood left England to spend a week in Berlin and decided to stay there indefinitely, to 1939, when he arrived in America. His friends and colleagues during this time included W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and E. M. Forster, as well as colorful figures he met in Germany and later fictionalized in his two Berlin novels—who appeared again, fictionalized to an even greater degree, in *I Am a Camera* and *Cabaret*.

What most impressed the first readers of this memoir, however, was the candor with which he describes his life in gay Berlin of the 1930s and his struggles to save his companion, a German man named Heinz, from the Nazis. An engrossing and dramatic story and a fascinating glimpse into a little-known world, *Christopher and His Kind* remains one of Isherwood's greatest achievements.

A major figure in twentieth-century fiction and the gay rights movement, Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986) is the author of *Down There on a Visit*, *Lions and Shadows*, *A Meeting by the River*, *The Memorial*, *Prater Violet*, *A Single Man*, and *The World in the Evening*, all available from the University of Minnesota Press.

## **Christopher and His Kind Details**

Date : Published September 18th 2001 by Univ Of Minnesota Press (first published 1976)

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Author : Christopher Isherwood

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Genre : Nonfiction, Lgbt, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Gay, Glbt, Queer

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# From Reader Review Christopher and His Kind for online ebook

## Andrew Marshall says

When Isherwood wrote his classic books Mr Norris Changes Trains and Goodbye to Berlin, he positioned himself as a camera recording everything but revealing little or nothing about himself. The decision was partly because it was illegal to be gay in the thirties but mainly because if he had been more honest, his story would have eclipsed his characters (or so he believed at the time).

Christopher and his kind is a memoir from the same period and gives us the back stage story and explains the liberties with truths behind these books and several others. Having read the two Berlin novels quite recently I was a little bored. It is interesting to know more about the relationship between Auden, Isherwood and Spender but the novels are more vivid.

My involvement grew as Isherwood tried desperately to keep his lover out of Germany - moving all over Europe - to avoid military service and when we went backstage in some later novels that I haven't read yet.

On balance, however, I think this is for fans and for fellow writers who want a better understanding of how life feeds into the art of a great novelist

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## E says

Isherwood fills my mind and heart with his intelligence, serenity and pure literate swooning (poising over young boys- excuse the pun, without being irritating or disgusting in the detail). What I mean to say is this, for me, Isherwood, as with Wilde, Gibson (and other gay writers) fills my heart with this sense that, 'we are not alone'.

Clichéd, perhaps, but here's a few thoughts:

1. The top sellers among teenagers in recent years (The Hunger Games, Twilight etc.) have followed 'straight' relationships, rather than the rational, and oh-so-common notion that some of their readers may in fact be GAY.
2. 'Fifty Shades of Grey' sold 60 million copies. That's almost one per person in the UK. Does it follow the (rather disturbing) relationship between two men, or two women? No. But somehow society still condones it, despite the awful fact that many have linked its pages with domestic and sexual abuse.
3. 'Christopher and his Kind' not only demonstrates his homosexuality, but Isherwood admits there were other implications behind it. A sense of rebellion against his mother. His difficult relationship with his brother as a result.
4. We see that it wasn't always easy- Heinz was punished for his homosexuality in the end. And there had to be a victim- there had to be a corrupt party in order for this to take place.
5. This book may be discussing the 30s-40s but the connotations have not escaped the twenty-first century. They're still here.

I, personally, feel that Isherwood is one of the most under-rated authors Britain has ever produced. His work follows his personal life, which I simply love. He depicted straight relationships, gay relationships and all the gruesome details of both. For those reason he talks to our hearts, and with his wit and intelligence, our minds too.

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## Jackie says

11/18/16:

Oh boy. You know what, I'm almost tempted to knock a star off, only because reading this today I find Isherwood's "I" vs. "Christopher" conceit a little annoying. But, but, but. I won't. This project remains unmatched.

5/5/13:

Something compelled Christopher Isherwood to set the record straight. Or, rather, to wade through all the suggested straightness (none of which I assumed, but that's the benefit of distance, *Cabaret*, an English degree, and a working knowledge of biography) in previous stories and banish it once and for all. ("I am doing what Henry James would have done, if he had had the guts.") It's easy to understand this in the context of gay liberation, but it's even more interesting to look at it as an author meticulously revealing all his tricks. Reading Truman Capote, or Armistead Maupin, or any number of other writers, you often have to stop and ask yourself, "So who is this supposed to be, exactly?" In *Christopher and His Kind* Isherwood does all the work for us. Or does he? We'll never know. Perhaps, after all, all this truth-telling is just the outlines of another "Christopher." Or not, if what Isherwood says is true, all the Christophers were ultimately the same man, and "the evasiveness is in the Narrator's nature, not in his name."

Where to begin reviewing a book I've already read before in three different iterations? As Isherwood crosses and recrosses the ground he covered in *Berlin Stories*, *Lions and Shadows*, and *Down There on a Visit*, he discusses and muses on the fates of primary, supporting, and tertiary characters alike.

Most poignantly, the fictionalization of Wilfrid Israel, who becomes Bernhard Landauer:

The story of Bernhard Landauer ends with the news of Bernhard's death. "Isherwood" overhears two men talking about it at a restaurant in Prague, in the spring of 1933, just after he himself has left Germany for good. One of them has just read in a newspaper that Bernhard has died of heart failure and both take it for granted that he has really been killed by the Nazis. The killing of Bernhard was merely a dramatic necessity.

Wilfrid Israel's story is ten times richer, more interesting, and more dynamic. The seven pages Isherwood devotes to it here are reason enough for the book to exist. The only "dramatic necessity" I see, is the necessity to prevent Israel's story from completely taking over the book.

And:

I wish I could remember what impression Jean Ross--the real-life original of Sally Bowles in *Goodbye to Berlin*--made on Christopher when they first met. But I can't. Art has transfigured life and other people's art has transfigured Christopher's art. What remains with me from those early years is almost entirely Sally. Beside her, like a reproachful elder sister, stands the figure of Jean as I knew her much later.

And:

At school, Christopher had fallen in love with many boys and been yearningly romantic about them. At college he had at last managed to get into bed with one. This was due entirely to the initiative of his partner, who, when Christopher became scared and started to raise objections, locked the door, and sat down firmly on Christopher's lap. I am still grateful to him. I hope he is alive and may happen to read these lines.

Ah, yes. The "Christopher felt X, as I recall" mode. Instead of finding it irritating, I was charmed. Throughout, Isherwood is more a historian than a memoir writer. He goes back over his diaries (those he didn't burn), his correspondence, and the correspondence of friends and relatives. He cites meticulously. And yet...there is so much he leaves unexplained.

More than anything, it's a book about writing. Even more than David Mitchell's character waiting room, I appreciated the following assessment of the writing of what would eventually become *Berlin Stories*:

Confronted by all his characters and their stories, Christopher was like an official who is called upon to deal with a crowd of immigrants and their belongings. They wait, absolutely passive, to be told where they are to live and what their jobs will be. The official regards them with growing dismay. He had imagined that he could cope with them all, somehow or other. Now he is beginning to realize that he can't.

In setting the record straight, Isherwood comes across as endearing, conceited, oblivious, insightful, cruel, vulnerable, and (he would be thrilled to learn) lost as ever. These are the traits that have appeared in each version of the narrator. These traits, above all, are the truth. I was thrilled to read about Isherwood's friendship with E. M. Forster, because I am drawn to their writing for the same reason: they are unsparingly fond of all of their characters, it seems, and they are at their best when they are describing the most mundane exchanges. Christopher's mother Kathleen is a prime example. We see her several times through his eyes, always in the context of hearth and home and convention, and as his understanding of her grows ours does too.

And there are his friends, the awesome Edward Upward, whose fictional counterpart I found so endearing in *Lions and Shadows*, and Stephen Spender, the reason for this moment of hilarious grace:

Stephen was back in London, suffering from a tapeworm which he had picked up in Spain. The problem, in removing a tapeworm, is to get rid of its head... Sometimes the head can't be found in the stool so the doctor doesn't know if it has been lost or is still inside the patient. Christopher bought a particularly repulsive postcard photograph of the head of Goebbels and sent it to Stephen, inscribed: "Can *this* be it?!!"

Above all, I am left with an overwhelming desire to read this story a fourth time. Not, I hasten to point out, as narrated by Isherwood, "Christopher," Christopher, or any of the others. No, I want to read this all over again from Auden's perspective. This is no Hemingway-Fitzgerald bathroom measurement contest. This is a lifelong friendship of multiple layers and nuances.

It was sad, sad as dying, to leave these loved ones behind. But neither Wystan nor Christopher wanted to admit that this was in any sense a death or that they were the objects of a wake. As the boat train pulled out of the station and they need wave no longer, Christopher felt a quick upsurge of relief. He and Wystan exchanged grins, schoolboy grins which took them back to

the earliest days of their friendship. "Well," said Christopher, "we're off again." "Goody," said Wystan.

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## **Jesse says**

The first book that I picked up after completing the last course for my English M.A. program was one that had been hovering near the top of my to-read list for a long while: Isherwood's elegant autumnal autobiography *Christopher and His Kind*. If I had realized how much of it is devoted to clarifying references contained within *The Berlin Stories* and other earlier texts—almost all of which I have not yet read—I might have held off, but it turns out prior knowledge is not at all necessary to enjoy Isherwood's book. Rather, I was constantly drawn to the formal quality of "rewriting"—of Isherwood very consciously revisiting events that had found their way into his autobiographical writing over the years, and then later attempting to set the record "straight" about them. Wonderfully enough, being set "straight" in this situation entails being forthright about queer dimensions that had had to be necessarily encoded, deleted, or obscured. It's a wonderful account of a great 20th century queer life, and the many figures and events that intersected it. In addition, with the careful differentiation between "Christopher" and "I" Isherwood perfectly captures the sensation I often experience when revisiting my own memories: of feeling at once both connected to and severed from them, as if they were observed but not actually experienced firsthand, and that it is only through the process of writing them down—and rewriting them again and perhaps even again—that makes them feel most "real."

[Capsule review from the post *My Year of Reading Queerly* over at my blog, *Queer Modernisms*.]

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## **Nigeyb says**

### **Frank, and beautifully written, however I was less captivated than I'd expected**

Immediately prior to reading "Christopher and His Kind" by Christopher Isherwood I read, and really enjoyed, "Mr Norris Changes Trains", so I was excited to find out more about Christopher Isherwood's life during the 1930s.

"Christopher and His Kind" is an autobiographical account of Christopher Isherwood's life from 1929, when he left England to spend a week in Berlin and decided to stay there indefinitely, through to 1939, when he arrived in America. I hoped "Christopher and His Kind" would provide new insights into both Berlin in the 1930s and, in particular, the events related in "Mr Norris Changes Trains".

The first thing that struck me was the use of the third person. Christopher Isherwood wrote "Christopher and His Kind" in the early 1970s and so I assume he decided to treat "Christopher" (his younger self) as a separate character. If so, whilst I understand the rationale, I found it both distracting and confusing.

Christopher Isherwood explains how he kept himself out of the Berlin stories as he thought his homosexuality would distract from the narrative and, understandably given the attitudes of the era, he was guarded about being explicit. There is no such evasiveness or coyness in "Christopher and His Kind" - he is frank and open about his sex life and his relationships. As such "Christopher and His Kind" also reflects the

era in which it was written (the early 1970s) as gay liberation was gaining momentum whilst Isherwood was writing this book.

I didn't enjoy this book as much as I hoped or expected. As always, Christopher Isherwood writes beautifully about the pre-war era, however it was too detailed for my level of interest and, as I said at the outset, the use of the third person did not work for me.

I enjoyed reading about Gerald Hamilton, the real life Arthur Norris from "Mr Norris Changes Trains", and who was every bit as venal and morally bankrupt as his fictionalised version, and there are also some interesting anecdotes involving Isherwood's friends W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and E.M. Forster.

Overall though I was less captivated than I had hoped and expected.

3/5

[Click here to read my review of "Mr Norris Changes Trains" by Christopher Isherwood](#)

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## **Barney says**

*"he must never again give way to embarrassment, never deny the rights of his tribe, never apologize for its existence..."*

*christopher and his kind* provides a fascinating depiction of (privileged) gay life in western europe in the tinderbox years before ww2. what struck me thoroughly was how relatively uninhibited isherwood and his close circle of gay friends were. if i do come across gay characters set in this period, i'm used to them being deeply repressed and thoroughly self-hating, often torn between family/duty and love - it was refreshing to read that here it wasn't really the case. while persecuted by society, they still lived and loved relatively openly.

interestingly isherwood uses 'christopher', rather than the first person, for what is essentially an autobiography. in all of the books of his i've read so far, you get a real sense of isherwood having lived each moment through what he could later write about it - placing himself as a character ('christopher') in his own autobiography is an extension of that. it also somewhat mischievously makes the book even harder to categorize, to its merit.

also worthy of mention, and something that (for some reason) i wasn't quite expecting, was the sheer amount of famous people who pop up in. it's almost ridiculous! w.h. auden, e.m. forster, virginia and lenoard woolf, benjamin britten, thomas mann and his family, to name just a few.

to get the most out of this book, i think you have to read isherwood's earlier works - he goes into them in quite some detail, fleshing out the real people behind his eccentric cast of characters, and filling in the (gay) details left unsaid or subverted in his earlier fiction.

part travelogue, part memoir, part fiction, part revisionist history, i don't think i've ever read anything quite like it.

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## Peter says

I really liked this book and thought that Christopher Isherwood comes across as a generous, warm, funny and self-deprecating character. His love for his friends shines through despite the odd bitchy argument.

He is much more interesting character here than in either of his fictional versions of the period (Mr Norris Changes Trains or Berlin Stories). As he says himself, when he wrote those he was much more guarded about the gay aspects of himself and his characters and here he is more open about it.

That is a strong reflection of the different eras in which the books were written – by the time this was published in the seventies it was the beginning of the gay liberation movement. Also interestingly Christopher mentions the film Cabaret - in which his character is bisexual and the play I am Camera in which his character was straight. The recent adaptation for the BBC of Christopher And His Friends which used scenes from this and The Berlin Novels was very explicitly gay - more so than the book. So all these versions go to show how acceptance has changed over the years.

The truer versions of the characters sexuality also helps make the characters more rounded than the earlier books. Though I would still recommend reading those first as he quotes chunks of them here.

He writes beautifully about this period just before the war and gives an account of the tribulations and the happiness that he encountered in Berlin and England and Europe during these tumultuous times.

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## Seth says

Christopher Isherwood wrote several books about his experiences in the 1930s, including his *Berlin Stories*. But on the first page of *Christopher and His Kind*, he tells us that he wasn't completely honest in these earlier works, that he left out important details about himself, and that he now intends to, um, set the record straight.

To tell his story, he draws on both memory and documentary evidence in the form of letters, diaries, and passages from his novels. The book has a definite "meta-" quality, in the sense that he uses "Christopher" to describe himself in the 1930s, "I" to describe himself in the present, and "Isherwood" to describe the narrator of *Berlin Stories*. (I see other reviewers complaining this is weird and difficult to follow, but this wasn't my experience.)

So what's the book about?

Like any memoir, it focuses on the subject's day-to-day life: we see him interact with famous friends; move from place to place (he winds up in China at one point); react to historical events (Hitler, etc.); and write books, plays, and film scripts. We also see his private life, which (not to put too fine a point on it) revolves around twinks, specifically 16-17 year-old boys.

"Why do I prefer boys?" he asks early-on. "Because of their shape and their voices and their smell and the way they move..."

Clearly not for the faint of heart.



Of course, from our 21st-century perspective, we can't help asking a couple of questions here:

- (a) Um...isn't that illegal?
- (b) You know teenage boys create a whole lot of drama, right?

The answer to both questions is Yes, although it's (b) rather than (a) that causes Christopher's problems.

Well, (b) plus a little thing called Fascism.

So is the book worth reading? Absolutely. First, as a chronicle of gay life in the 1930s, with descriptions of the boy bars, dance halls, and hook-up culture of the time. Second, as the story of a man accepting who he is - not all at once and not without difficulty - and realizing, "*My will is to live according to my nature, and to find a place where I can be what I am...*"

This place, of course, turns out be California - but that's the story for another book.

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### **Lizara says**

cada libro que leo de este hombre hace que se consolide más como mi autor favorito (y que le quiera más a él y a auden)

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### **Shawn Mooney says**

Allow me to bitch my way towards praising Isherwood's memoir: it grated that he told it in the third person with a few retrospective first person observations; too much of it was an undisciplined diary dump, too much again a dull exposé of who, and, tediously, to what degree, his characters were based on real people. That said, there are too many wonderful stories here of 1930s gay and literary life for this not to be an enthusiastic pick.

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### **Jeff Miller says**

A most fascinating book on many levels, and one that offers so much to the reader, providing insight into a period of time that has been much written of before, but coming from an angle perhaps not previously considered. It offers insight into the changes in Germany in a most turbulent period, but one filled with art, life, hope and beauty; it glimpses the literary world of the Bloomsbury Group as it came towards the end of its focus; it provides an insight into how one of the Twentieth Century's great writers went about his craft and, of course, is an invaluable record of what it was to be a homosexual during this period, but taking in many different cultures and classes as Christopher moves around a variety of Countries.

It takes a few pages to get used to him writing in the third person, but this is not an autobiography, or even a biography written by the subject, this is a reflection of history and a correction to what he may have previously elaborated or altered in his works *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye To Berlin*. This is setting the record straight with an incredible level of honesty and candour.

I love Christopher Isherwood. He is from a time I would have loved to have known and believe I would have been more suited to. Indeed the people who casually appear in this book read like my list of heroes; Orson Welles, Bertolt Brecht; Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya amongst many others.

His level of honesty is occasionally shocking, but that's who he was, and throughout the book I kept returning to an early quote "My will is to live according to my nature, and to find a place where I can be what I am". As someone who has lost many people in my life due to being who I am and never flinching from this, I can truly believe that Mr Isherwood would have accepted me as one of his kind.

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### **Terence Manleigh says**

Demmit, I do wish I didn't find biography, autobiography, and memoir so tedious. This frank memoir has its moments, but give me artful fiction any day and I'll be quite happy, thank you. It's a failing, I know, but the recounting of facts has never grabbed me as much as the unfolding of a good novel.

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### **Tori says**

*He asked himself: Do I now want to go to bed with more women and girls? Of course not, as long as I can have boys. Why do I prefer boys? Because of their shape and their voices and their smell and the way they move. And boys can be romantic. I can put them into my myth and fall in love with them.*

*Couldn't you get yourself excited by the shape of girls, too—if you worked hard at it? Perhaps. And couldn't you invent another myth—to put girls into? Why the hell should I?*

*My will is to live according to my nature, and to find a place where I can be what I am... But I'll admit this—even if my nature were like theirs, I should still have to fight them, in one way or another. If boys didn't exist, I should have to invent them.*

I wish I had the words this book deserves to have lavished upon it. Christopher's thoughts and experiences resonate decades later, and his writing style is so compelling and hilarious. I laughed aloud at least a dozen times, which made the times that I gasped and cried with his heartbreak all the more moving. I'm so thankful that I got to read this, and I look forward to reading more by Christopher Isherwood and his other gay author friends that he made me fall in love with while reading *Christopher and His Kind*.

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### **Jamie says**

I should confess up front that I have never read *The Berlin Stories*, nor have I even seen *Cabaret*. Blasphemer! The ultimate bad gay!

...but I do like Isherwood? Or at any rate I loved *A Single Man* (novel & film!). I was a bit baffled to see so many reviews here note that reading about the writing of *The Berlin Stories* was tedious, because I actually found Isherwood's reflective, sometimes nostalgic relationship to his own earlier writing endlessly fascinating, particularly in the sense of his comments about self-censoring and the ways in which he felt his sight about the situations he was narrating appears so limited in hindsight. More interesting was Isherwood's hazy delineation between the writing-I and "Christopher," as he frequently referred to his past self/selves. Recently I read Edmund White's "City Boy," where he has no interest in a kind of metatextual consideration

of identity--memoir writing should be founded on fact and authenticity to White's mind; on the other hand, Isherwood/"I"/"Christopher" seems almost to eroticize his relationship with his past, and clearly believes that there can't be an objective relationship between the self and the world that the self experiences, because we are not transparent to ourselves, and our understanding of our social being necessitates far too many subjective filters. Despite White's protestations, I found Isherwood's notion of memoir writing far more truthful and nuanced.

All that said, the memoir is also incredibly fun to read. It covers his major Berlin years--basically, from when he went there at the end of the 20s until he decided to sail for America at the end of the 30s. We see his love affairs, his novel-writing, his "slumming," his experience with the Hirschfeld Institute. There's a great deal of his passionate friendship with Auden, and Stephen Spender and the Woolfs and Thomas Mann and his daughter all wriggle in and out of the narrative here. Obvs the rise of European fascism (well, mainly Hitler) casts a broad shadow over Isherwood's time in Germany. There's a terror to this tale that recalls V Woolf's journals and letters--also, *Between the Acts*, her final novel and the one most anxious about the oncoming War. Isherwood is a quite exciting prose writer, too: even in mundane sections, nothing seems to drag, as he's constantly tossing a witticism or a strange anecdote or a viciously honest comment on himself in. This was my first of a journey into the "gay memoir" (well, gay male memoir--for whatever reason, I have, like, a pretty solid history with lesbian fiction, but almost none with the tradition of *My People*??), and I couldn't be more glad to have it as the initial touchstone, though I imagine using it as my yardstick may be a bit overreaching. We shall see...

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## **Sean Kennedy says**

(3.5 / 5)

A fascinating view of Hitler's rise to power through the eyes of a group of friends, but Isherwood's style of narrating in both first and third person tends to distance you from it emotionally. Sometimes this is effective, but there are also times when it is to its detriment.

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## **Erik says**

The most ironic part of being a reader of "Christopher and His Kind" is that one regrets having not read the rest of his oeuvre while simultaneously experiencing the dragging feeling that one really doesn't want to read the rest of his works. While this work is certainly speckled with important thoughts about pre-war gay life and vibrant recountings of the fear and anxiety that rifled much of the European continent in the 30s, it is weighed down by the oblivious bourgeois narcissism of, who would later become, one of Britain's foremost writers of the decade.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the book is Isherwood's decision to give a third-person retelling - supposedly as a way to demarcate a distinction between his older self and his much younger (naive?) self. In the end, this makes it difficult both for the reader to emotionally connect with young Christopher and, in turn, it makes Christopher Isherwood himself come off as described above. This coupled with the fact that Isherwood-the-narrator regularly intercedes into the telling of Isherwood-the-protagonist, made this a book that was both emotionally shallow and difficult to connect with (which is surprising considering what should

have been deeply emotional source material involving friends and lost lovers.)

While I appreciate this work for its significance to gay literature and history and for its truthful tellings of pre-war Europe, it lacked the depth needed to draw readers in and keep them connected. Whether or not I pick up another Isherwood (I have already read "A Single Man," but any others...) is still to be determined.

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## **Eric says**

In this memoir of 1930s Berlin Isherwood reflects on the writing of "The Berlin Stories," shifting back and forth between his real-life friends and events and the fictional characters and events they inspired. It sounds tiresome but it really works, and is even comprehensible to someone who hasn't read "The Berlin Stories."

Because Nabokov lived, worked and set almost all of his Russian novels in 1920-30s Berlin, I'm accustomed to thinking of the city as his ground, but Isherwood made his own world of it, too.

The cover of this edition is rather lame, a Herbert List photograph of a scrawny teen in tighty-whities, standing contrappasto in knee-deep water. Now, I realize that publishers cannot issue a book by a gay writer without a homoerotic cover image, but come on: Herbert List has better pictures...and there's always August Sander if you want great images of German society at the time.

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## **katrina says**

So many things I loved about this book-

1. Clever switching between first and third person throughout. He'll say "I think that Christopher should have realized bla bla bla" when speaking about his current opinions and thoughts on himself in the past.
2. I had previously read "The Berlin Stories" and loved the way in which he described the "fictional" characters. In this work, he introduces them again but as actual people. It was funny to hear him admit that the girl upon whom "Sally Bowles" is based is somewhat warped in his memory, because of the version of her in the book, the version of her in the play, the version of her in the movies, and all of the actresses who have played her. No one is any less interesting, and it was good to meet the narrator of the stories- Isherwood was always very careful to leave himself (and mainly his homosexuality) out of the stories in order for the reader to better relate to him and the action.
3. There is very little plot, which some might have a problem with. The main action of the book is Isherwood traveling with his lover all over the world for several years, avoiding the oncoming war with Germany. The characters all react to this imminent danger in different ways, catastrophizing or genuine bravery or ignoring it entirely.
4. If you know anything of Isherwood's biography, the last passage of the book will just kill you. Especially if you ever get a chance to see the film "Chris and Don: A Love Story". I highly recommend it.

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## Val says

Young Christopher Isherwood spent much of the 1930s in continental Europe, including a few years in Berlin. He wrote a novel and some short stories based on his experiences there.

Middle-aged Christopher Isherwood wrote this book about young Christopher Isherwood, in the third person and gave details of what young Christopher was up to and how he came to write the stories.

The style of talking about himself in the third person is rather off-putting until you get used to it, but it does work. The older author can look back and make sense of the younger man's experiences, while the younger one keeps the immediacy of those experiences. It is a very candid autobiography and includes details of his homosexual affairs and liaisons with teenage boys, which he could not have been quite as open about at the time (although he did not try to hide them from his friends and family).

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## martin says

Oddly enough, I read this after seeing cabaret but before reading the Berlin Novels.

It's a fascinating (partial) autobiography - at times embarrassingly, almost painfully personal and honest - but what would you expect from a skilled writer recalling life in Berlin with several other bright young literary stars at one of the most fascinating periods of its history?

The Christopher here is not the rather confused, bisexual and passive Christopher we know and love from Cabaret or the Berlin Novels. He's far deeper, far more angst-ridden, aware of his sexuality and also far more interesting in many ways. The joys of Bohemian life in Berlin with a small group of privileged and talented friends are juxtaposed to the sad and desperate realities of his relationship with a young German lover whose life seems increasingly threatened by the onset of Hitler and Nazism.

It's fascinating to read this alongside the fictional account he gives in the Berlin Novels and the even more fictionalised Cabaret film. The atmosphere and mores of contemporary Britain and America limited in some ways the plot of his novels but this tells a truer and often less flattering picture.

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