Isherwood Foundation Fellows 2008-2009

The main purpose of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation is to contribute significantly to the flourishing of American letters by awarding grants to published novelists and to Isherwood scholars. These grants enable writers to devote time to writing projects and provide funds for research. In 2008 several hundred published novelists applied for our grants. We appreciate each of these applicants whose work testifies to the strength of current American fiction.

The 2008-2009 Isherwood Fellows are:

**Gregory Belliveau** from Cedarville, Ohio. His books include *Go Down to Silence*. He teaches at Cedarville University. Isherwood Fellowship (R.V. Cassill named grant)

**Larry Fondation** from Los Angeles, CA. His books include *Angry Nights* and *Fish, Soap, and Bonds*. Isherwood Fellowship (Thomas Williams named grant)

**David Roy Lincoln** from San Francisco, California. His books include the novel *Mobility Lounge* and *Liberty Boys*. Isherwood Fellowship (with James C. McCormick support)

**Thomas J. Phelan** from Freeport, New York. His books include the novel *The Canal Bridge*. Isherwood Fellowship (with Ahmanson support)

**Emily Raboteau** from New York, New York. Her books include *The Professor’s Daughter*. She teaches at City College of New York. Isherwood Fellowship (with William Goyen/Doris Roberts support)

We especially want to thank the Ahmanson Foundation, The Huntington, Angelina Jolie, Doris Roberts, and Barbara McCormick for their support.
About the Fellowships:

Each year the Christopher Isherwood Foundation awards fellowships in the amount of $4,000 to fiction writers who have already published a novel or a collection of stories. The awards are very competitive. The Foundation also awards non-fiction grants to scholars selected by The Huntington in San Marino, California, as well as grants for Isherwood scholarship in the amount of $4,000. For information on applying for all of these awards, please visit www.isherwoodfoundation.org.
Isherwood Fellows:

2001-2002
T. Greenwood
Eric Miles Williamson
In Non-Fiction: James Berg

2002-2003
Anthony Bukoski
Anthony Doerr
Karen Shepard
Gordon Weaver
Liza A. Wieland
Miles Wilson
In Non-Fiction: Jamie Carr

2003-2004
Debra Di Blasi
Daniel Chacon
Brock Clarke
Ann Nietzke
William Orem
Charles Wyatt
In Non-Fiction: Peter Firchow

2004-2005
Kate Braverman
Daniel Coshnear
Alyson Hagy
Bret Anthony Johnston
John McNally
Nance Van Winckel
In Non-Fiction: Jeff Solomon,
Richard Zeikowitz
2005-2006
Barry Gifford
Lucrecia Guerrero
Krandall Kraus
Richard McCann
Ann Pancake
Aimee Parkison
In Non-Fiction: John Whalen-Bridge

2006-2007
Nick Arvin
Elizabeth Block
Daphne Eva Kalotay
Agymah Kamau
Ruchama King
Mitch Wieland
Mark Wisniewski

2007-2008
Rick Bass
Charlotte Forbes
Charlotte Gullick
William Lychack
Ander Monson
Ted Pelton
In Non-Fiction: Robert Beachy, Matthew Vechinski
Guido Santi and Tina Mascara’s documentary *Chris and Don: A Love Story* opened in theaters on July 4th, 2008. The film was a great success at the Telluride Film Festival, the AFI, and many other film festivals.

The documentary has been widely praised. Kirk Honeycutt in *The Hollywood Reporter* called Santi and Mascara “superb filmmakers, fully alive … to all the undercurrents of art, social class, sexual orientation, challenging relationships and, most especially, the touching love story at the heart of their film.” Chuck Wilson of the *L.A. Weekly* Critic’s Pick described the film as “a fusion of art and love that’s deeply moving.” Stephen Holden in the *New York Times* found the movie “tender [and] extremely touching.” Rex Reed in the *New York Observer* added, “Out of so much sweat and dedication comes a deeply affecting love story of a passion that turned to trust … Don talks about … the intimacy of their lives and the thirst for knowledge that never wavered, with such blasé acceptance that it never seems decadent … What moved me was … how their love transformed a shy, insecure boy who didn’t feel he had much to offer the world into a man of pride and distinction with his own identity intact.” Peter Travers, of *Rolling Stone*, says that the film “shares intimate details that bring the relationship and an era to vivid life … [it is] fiercely funny and touching.”
The film is distributed by Zeitgeist Films, an independent film distribution company recently honored by the New York Museum of Modern Art with a 20-film exhibition of critical works from their catalog. For more information about the movie, visit www.zeitgeistfilms.com or www.asphalt-stars.com. The film is now available on DVD. To buy a copy at a discount, go to www.zeitgeistfilms.com.
Friday morning: “Left on plane for Key West 7:45, arriving 8:30.” Until that morning I had only seen the bright blue-green color of a tropical sea in the movies. We “Took a room at the Casa Marina Hotel. Walked to location of Rose Tattoo filming.” In the date book I’ve inserted an arrow and written above the line “Virginia Grey,” the name of an actress I had liked in movies since the late 30s. The first scene we watched being filmed focused on her at a funeral where an angry crowd of townspeople pulls her black widow’s veil from her head.

At the location we “met Tennessee Williams and Frank Merlo. Went swimming with them in afternoon, had supper with them and went around town with Anna Magnani” – a memorable first day in the tropics!

This particular trip was momentous enough that I wrote the first extensive account of my experience to help me savor it. A physical description of Tennessee from my journal follows:

“His mouth and moustache are his most interesting and
sensual features. Small but full, his mouth cups each word beautifully. His barely-noticeable buckteeth add to the fullness of his lips that flower out when he speaks. His moustache is very soft and consists of two light brown fringes that almost join under his nostrils and gently reach out to the corners of his mouth where they curl slightly inward and down. Guarded by almost-invisible eyelashes of the same blondish-brown color as his moustache, his blue-gray eyes are very soft and quiet and only sometimes look anxious and nervous – as when he suddenly bugs them or rolls them up as though to touch his eyelashes. Neither too large nor small, his delicate nose is almost aristocratic. Though his hairline hasn’t retreated or thinned, the kinked twists of his very fine, unnaturally dark brown hair become sparse at the back of his head and reveal a pink pimple-like knob [a wen] there.

“Small and delicate, his body is well proportioned and his full, round stomach doesn’t disturb the balance – in fact, it seems only natural that it should be there. His large-nippled, round bosoms don’t depend on his stomach for support but just occasionally rest on it, as if taking a nap. His body is almost hairless – only his legs have a number of fine short hairs. Though his feet are small, his toes are long and irregular and the second toe usually sits on top of the big one. He says he suffers a lot from athlete’s foot.”

Yes, I was fascinated by Tennessee. There are no physical descriptions of Frank in my journal, and none of Lancaster or Magnani, so it wasn’t just Tennessee’s fame that interested me. By the end of our stay in Key West, I had a definite crush on him.

Magnani was a decided handful, not only because her ego demanded constant attention but because she was making much of her menopause and complaining regularly of her need for a good man to service her. Her English, too, was almost nonexistent. The word she used for queers sounded like *fro-shah*. Though she knew they were not likely to satisfy her physical needs, she could not criticize them because, of course, she knew about Tennessee and wasn’t about to bite the hand that fed her her lines. Frank was a big help because he knew how to be a pal to her and in a pinch could even speak some Italian. She liked Chris, too, and might just
have believed for a moment that she could get that particular fro-shah in bed with her, but he didn’t allow her to entertain any such notion. I was of no use to her at all – too young, too American, too queer.

She was sallow-faced and the dark, puffy bags under her eyes had a satiny gloss to them. Like a small, overweight but compact bull, she was short with full bosom and hips. Instead of a snout, however, she had a long, finely drawn Italian nose. Off-camera, she liked to wear tan, woolen trousers that looked like riding britches and she often wore a silk scarf around her head.

Natalia Murray, an Italian woman of the same height as Magnani, but a few years older, was Magnani’s companion and translator during the making of the movie. When it was finished Natalia returned to New York and Janet Flanner, with whom she lived. Gravelly voiced and dryly imperturbable, Natalia was good at easing Magnani’s emotional states, but like us fro-shahs, unable to ease Magnani’s sexual angst, or at least not permitted by Magnani to try. I never heard or sensed anything lesbian about Magnani. She was too bent on self-frustration to respond to such a sensible idea. Besides, her seething, sexual hunger was part of her public image. It galvanized her both privately and professionally.

The next day we “Watched Ben Cooper and Marisa Pavan filming at High School.” Though none of the three of us yet knew that Marisa would be cast as the Catherine de Medici of Chris’s script [Diane], what a coincidence that Chris and I should have this preview of her youthful talent. Sweet and capable, Marisa was also cautious and shrewdly determined, but like Magnani, she had a problem with English. This was not such a handicap in playing Tennessee’s character, but her strong Italian accent would prove her undoing in speaking Chris’s formal lines.

Another coincidence: Jimmy [James Wong] Howe was the Director of Photography on The Rose Tattoo. We were delighted to run into him so soon after our first meeting. Equipped with our 16mm movie camera, we were dashed when the assistant director told us that we weren’t allowed to photograph any of the action for the movie. Jimmy, however, had the authority to take our little Bell and Howell in hand, and from his seat behind the large
professional camera, filmed for us a rehearsal of a scene that is in the finished movie. Marisa and Ben Cooper, who plays the young sailor, are on the outdoor metal stairway of what is supposed to be a school auditorium. Since Jimmy’s black-and-white photography became the movie’s strongest asset, we felt extra pride in possessing the only color version of a scene from the movie shot expressly for us by its distinguished cameraman. Also, since the scene in the movie was shot day for night, the brilliant color in ours provides a surprising contrast.

Ben Cooper was a young actor we’d seen in only one other film, Johnny Guitar. Despite the loud messages sent by his dyed, red-blond curly hair, plucked eyebrows and neatly cupped buttocks (well displayed by a tight pair of white sailor pants), I don’t think he was at all queer, only vain and unsure of his acting technique. When his interpretation of his part was criticized, he had no other to offer and only became more mechanical and false. Daniel Mann hadn’t a clue how to help him and even Tennessee’s coaching produced no discernible results. Cooper gradually lost his confidence, and watching him perform in front of the camera made me increasingly uncomfortable.

The next afternoon we went “Swimming with Tennessee.” Tennessee preferred public pools to the ocean because he swam strictly for exercise. I saw Tennessee’s oddly sensual body and, in the changing room, even his cock (its size and proportion were pleasing to me). His legs, too, were shapely and sturdy. Altogether there was something unexpectedly alluring about him.

That day we also “Rented bikes. Rode around town. Ate at the Trade Winds. Saw Ten and Frank later – Magnani and Natalia Murray were there.” At the end of Chris’s entry is a line by me: “Frank gave wonderful drag show.” I can’t remember how he dressed but I know he was funny. As well as being queer, Frank was completely male. That was the source of his attractiveness. Even Magnani joined in the fun and sang a little French cabaret song for us, only one line of which I can remember: “Madame Spic-Maquere, la femme de banquier – .”

After shooting was finished the next day, Magnani and Lancaster gave a photo session for journalists on the pier in front
of our hotel. They answered a few questions, but basically the
two stars were making themselves available to photographers. I
marveled how they could just stand there coolly and patiently with
so many eyes feasting on them. Their heads closely aligned for
easier camera composition, the stars looked pleasant as they gazed
out to sea, but they said little to their doting onlookers and nothing
to each other. Taking advantage of their graciously passive mood,
I moved in for an extended double close-up. The late afternoon
light was soft and a cool tropical breeze lifted Magnani’s black
tresses. For a moment I felt like an ace Hollywood cameraman
with two major stars giving themselves to my lens. That night “We
had dinner with Magnani, Natalia, Ten and Frank at hotel.”

Our routine for most of our time in Key West was a visit
to the filming location after breakfast, then lunch, usually with
Tennessee and one or two others from the film. After watching
more filming, we would go for a swim on the beach or to a pool
with Tennessee in the afternoon. We spent a lot of time alone
with him. I was to discover later that his relaxed mood of these
few weeks was unusual. The activity of the movie company
was soothing to him and his work was going well. He was just
finishing a first draft of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

Tennessee marked our growing intimacy with him by
describing a pass he’d made at Chris in 1944 when they first met.
Tennessee had come to Hollywood to work on the script of a Lana
Turner movie, Marriage is a Private Affair, but instead of riding his
bicycle daily to MGM, he spent most of his time writing The Glass
Menagerie in his small apartment in Santa Monica. He had written
to Chris to introduce himself, and Chris went to his place to meet
him. When they were sitting side by side on a small cot Tennessee
managed to pull Chris down in a kissing embrace. “This won’t
do,” quoted Tennessee as he imitated Chris quickly pulling himself
up. Not catching Chris’s tone, Tennessee’s delivery of the line was
melodiously poetic, and theatrically loaded. Chris would have said
it lightly but to the point.

While Tennessee told his story, Chris was shyly deferential,
like a gentleman accused by a lady of an impropriety. As well as a
taint of female vengeance, Tennessee’s words conveyed an ironical
triumph, as though he were acknowledging that, despite Chris’s rejection, he had become the greatest living American playwright.

On Tuesday, 9 November, we had “Breakfast in hotel and on set to watch Magnani chase Pavan out of house in big scene. Took pictures of scene [Jimmy Howe must have arranged a special dispensation for our camera] and of Pavan on Frank and Tennessee’s porch. Don offered extra part in film. On beach with Ten, I took Magnani, Natalia Murray, Frank and Ten to dinner at Trade Winds.”

Yes, I had been offered “a part.” I was both thrilled and scared by the prospect of my debut in a Hollywood movie. I was to be one of four teenagers in a car that stops in front of Marisa’s house to pick her up. My call was unnecessarily early: “Up at seven and breakfast at Banana Grill. Don on set at eight for part in film. Talked to Virginia Grey, Marisa Pavan and Ben Cooper at Ten’s while waiting for Don’s scene. Lunch on Paramount and Don worked right after until 3PM.”

My eagerness to be a recognizable part of any Hollywood film made me acutely self-conscious, and the longer the shooting of the scene was delayed the tenser I got. There was no call for such nerves, however, since instead of an open car I was put into the windowless back seat of a coupe with a local boy who was also getting his first “break.” There was not the smallest hope that either of us could be seen in the shot. In fact, in the finished movie the car itself is barely visible.

With rehearsals, my big scene took about an hour to film. By the time it was in the can, I was eager to get out of the can I was in. With the midday tropical sun beating down on its roof, the car, especially in the windowless back seat, was hot and stuffy. I could hardly wait for the shot to be over. My companion was suffering, too, and as speechless as I. Was our predicament as great a disappointment and embarrassment for him I now wonder? Humiliated to be used so demeaningly, I blamed myself for imagining that I would be used in any other way. But my debut in movies was a valuable disillusionment. I soon gave up all hankering to see myself on the big screen.

After my ordeal we had a “Swim with Ten. Saw rushes
at Monroe Theatre.” This was a local movie house taken over in the early evenings by the movie company. Viewing rushes is usually sacred and restricted to the initiated few – producer, director, cameraman (Hal Wallis, Daniel Mann, and Jimmy Howe were certainly on hand), as well as the film editor, and perhaps an actor if he’s persuasive enough (neither Magnani nor Lancaster were there). It is really rare for outsiders to be allowed to see rushes, but Tennessee got us in. I don’t know how often he went himself, but he was there that night to see a scene, shot before we arrived in town, in which he appeared in the background as one of the townspeople in a local bar. (Tennessee’s cameo appearance survived and is in the finished movie.) Our day ended with “dinner at Frank and Tennessee’s. Frank fixed beef stew. To bars.”

Because many of the locations for the movie were very near Tennessee and Frank’s house, people from the film company often wandered in and sat down in their small front room. That’s how we first met Virginia Grey and, finding her friendly, I spontaneously sang some lyrics from a song she sings in Flame of Barbary Coast: “I’ve got two great, big, baby blue eyes, and baby I’ve got my eye on you!” Grey graciously feigned flattered amazement, but my foolishness still appalls me.

The following is the first entry in my journal about our tropical adventure: “11 November 1954. Tonight Ten, Frank, Chris and I went to The Bamboo Room and met Ben Cooper there. We were all quite high, except Frank, who seldom wants to get drunk. While I just listened he and Chris got sentimental over Dickens. Busy talking to Cooper, Ten was trying to get him to understand his part, or at least to do a little better with it. He wants some of Cooper’s scenes re-shot and was trying to make Cooper want that too.

“Outside the bar afterward, Frank accused Ten of interfering with both Mann’s direction and Wallis’s shooting schedule and called Ten’s tactics ‘dirty, underhanded and unethical.’ Ten flared up: ‘Frank, who should know what’s best? I’ve devoted my life to the theater!’ He knew Frank was right to criticize him, but because Ten cares about his work and the way it’s performed, he’s prepared to endure disagreements, even insults.
Rather than interference, he regarded his actions as defense of his work.

“When we got back to the hotel Ten immediately wrote letters to Mann and Wallis asking for a conference. He was so engrossed he barely said goodnight to us. Probably Mann and Wallis were not much impressed by Ten’s earnestness, and maybe even ignored it, but I admire Ten’s willingness to do anything that might make the film better. Frank sulked a little but decided to take a let-Ten-be-taught-a-lesson attitude.”

Tennessee would never get anywhere with either Mann or Wallis. His urgings were unintelligible to them. Wallis was interested only in keeping the budget tight and vetoed all suggestions of retakes. Mann humored Tennessee but he listened to him as though Tennessee were speaking a foreign language. As people and as artists, they could not have been more different.

The location for the next two days of filming was meant to be a church bazaar with bingo games. Chris, Tennessee, Frank and I filled in as extras and pretended to be part of the crowd. I record that “Don took lots of pictures of us acting in film,” but the only movie Chris and I were seen in was our own.

On the third day a tropical deluge stymied filming; I was thrilled by the storm. The following is my journal entry for that day, 13 November: “In the morning Chris and I went swimming in the rain off the Casa Marina pier. At about eleven o’clock the really heavy rain began and lasted through the day. We had lunch with Ten at Ramonin’s on Duval Street and, while waiting for the rain to let up, had two bottles of wine.”

After our extended lunch “we couldn’t get taxi” and finally “walked home in pouring rain and waded in water over [our] knees.” At our hotel we got out of our soaked clothes and found our legs thickly smeared with oil that had been washed out of the engines of parked cars by a torrent of rainwater filling the main street of the town. Getting off that dark, clinging oil wasn’t easy.

My journal on that wet day continues: “Ten talked about his crazy sister, Rose, who is two-and-a-half years older than Ten and is now being cared for on a farm in Missouri. Insane since she was twenty-eight, Rose had a lobotomy that Ten says made her
passive and childlike. Just before she went insane he and she were
laughing about a mutual friend of theirs who had gone crazy and
got telephone calls from God, but then Rose had suddenly stiffened
and said it was nothing to joke about. She and Ten were very
close. I told him a little about Ted.

“Chris said today he thinks Ten is a little deaf and often
doesn’t hear what is said. He inclines his head toward you and
says ‘What was that?’ and then laughs when he hears the remark.
Ten is always easy to amuse and loves to laugh, even about silly
jokes and puns, and he always participates in making jokes,
especially about ‘Walrus’ (Hal Wallis) and ‘the Strega’ (Georgia
Simmons, who plays ‘The Strega’ in the movie). He told us that
for many years Lizabeth Scott has been the Walrus’s mistress.

“One day in our hotel room after a swim (he had forgotten
his rubber bathing cap and so his hair was messed and damp), Ten
asked to borrow my comb. While he was looking in the mirror
he bugged his bloodshot eyes, pulled his straggly hair over his
forehead, stretched out his fingers and made crazy high-pitched
cackles, then said: ‘I’d make a much better Strega than Georgia’.”

“Rain stopped during night” and on Sunday “Borrowed
Ten and Frank’s car and drove along keys to Key Largo. Lunch
at ‘Hurricane’ on Marathon Key. Dinner at ‘Trade Winds’ (after
paying $10 traffic fine). To Ten and Frank’s at 10PM. Ten read his
play Cat on a Hot Tin Roof till 2AM.”

I’ve since seen many productions of that play, including the
original directed by Kazan, but the reading that night by Tennessee
was by far the best of them. He held us spellbound. I was amazed
how exciting it was to hear a play read and to watch only the
playwright himself sitting in a wicker chair.

The version of the play Tennessee read that night is also
the best I know of. He made many changes later, some of the
major ones to please Kazan, and I believe all the alterations,
large and small, weakened the play, particularly the relationship
between “Brick” and “Skipper.” Despite Tennessee’s disdain for
mendacity, it seeped into the play as he continued to tinker with
it. When Chris and I flew east a few months later especially to
attend the opening of Cat in Philadelphia, we were dismayed by
the alterations, and the wrong-headedness of much of the casting and staging. I believe that a recording of Tennessee’s reading that night would prove that his original conception of the play was not only truer to its theme – mendacity is evil – but, when compared to the version of the play after Kazan’s influence, would be in itself proof of that theme. In his pursuit of success, Tennessee’s own mendacious compromises had weakened his play.

After lunch the following day, “Watched a big scene with Magnani at church.” In my journal I elaborated: “Between yells and screams she was spitting at the women of the town. At first I felt she was trying to force her tears and they just wouldn’t come, but then suddenly mine came when, after ripping Burt Lancaster’s shirt, she ran after the priest and banged her fists on the door he was hiding behind. Her avoidance of affectation made her loss of dignity pitiful and real.”

Chris and I didn’t see the film until its release the next year, and we were very disappointed in it, and in Magnani, too. Her live performance for the camera had been much more powerful than anything that came across on screen. Tennessee gave his talent to what he really cared about – the theater – and his plays are so finely tuned to it that they aren’t easily adapted to film. His own screenplays merely reprise his plays with little or no visual appreciation. In his work on Tattoo, Daniel Mann demonstrated even less feeling for movies than Tennessee had.

More about that day from my journal: “Lunch with Ten at the La Concha Hotel. (Frank always seems to avoid lunch with us.) Ten told us that in 1939 he himself had chosen the name of Tennessee, for no reason except that he wanted a change. His real name is Thomas Lanier Williams. The three of us swam in the ocean after lunch.”

If he was not establishing his independence from Tennessee, Frank was perhaps giving himself a rest from him. Tennessee wasn’t easy to be around continually. “‘Frankie is too attached to dogs,’ said Ten as he lay flat on his stomach on a sun couch, ‘I don’t approve of it. Frankie really should have children.’ He said this as if it were an admission of something very close to him. He glanced over at me and, when he saw I was listening,
rolled his eyes as if I had taken him too seriously. I often think I put on the wrong face when I’m told revealing statements.”

On Tuesday, 16 November 1954: “Frank cooked dinner for us again (hamburger) and then Ten went to pick up Natalia Murray at the hotel. While he was gone Frank told us how he feels about Ten and their situation. He loves Ten very much and couldn’t live with him (or anyone else) if he didn’t, but Ten’s work takes ninety-five percent of his interest. Though Frank is reconciled to this, he hates having to share the leftover five percent with ‘queens’ (‘trade’ he doesn’t mind). He also hates not having done anything with his life yet but is trying to get used to the idea because he knows he has no real vocation. ‘If it weren’t for Ten,’ he said, ‘I’d probably be a ditch digger or truck driver.’ He snorted at Ten’s lack of belief in Frank’s love for him. ‘I tell Ten I love him more often than he tells me,’ said Frank, ‘I need reassurance, too’.”

These confidences fascinated me because of their pertinence to my life with Chris. Though he was several years older than I, Frank had the same problems as any young man who lives with a famous older man. The young man has to deal with the flies that flit about the famous, and he also has to establish his own identity, for himself as well as others. Frank’s troubles sounded more serious than any I’d yet had – with Tennessee they would be. I wonder now if Frank wasn’t confiding in me (he could have spoken to Chris alone) at least partly to make me value even more my luck in finding a man as supportive as Chris. Frank also made me determined to find myself a vocation; though I loved him, I didn’t want to be in his predicament.

My journal continues: “Ten read the first act of the revised version [Already! Yes, he was a real workaholic.] of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof but felt that, because Natalia wasn’t encouraging him, he couldn’t read well with her there. (At first Chris and I thought she didn’t understand the play but then guessed she was having trouble with Ten’s Southern accent.) Chris himself fell asleep for a minute during the reading, which made me mad and resentful. I felt lost without his help.”

Another problem of living with an older, famous man – and both Frank and I had this problem – is becoming dependent on him
and on his powerful personality; this dependence is as difficult to resist as it is painful to acknowledge.

“Before dinner Ten read from his play, ‘Auto da Fe,’ with Georgia. Though she read badly Ten was marvelous – very controlled and quiet, but with a wonderful tenseness. He sat on the couch wearing a black shirt and looked directly at me, almost as if he were reading it only for me. His face was lit by the dusk-light coming through the window at my back. He looked like a boy and his eyes were enormous. His face had a kind of amused, sly smile, as if he were secretly flirting with me. He never looked more beautiful.

“Ten was very frank with Georgia and told her quite plainly that her approach was all wrong. Frank says that Ten never tells lies, not even social ones.”

My crush on Tennessee was growing steadily. I doubt, though, that Tennessee was really flirting with me. His fondness and respect for Chris would have prevented him. Besides, I don’t think I was at all Tennessee’s type.

My journal account of that day ends with the description of something that quite shocked me. “Magnani and Mickey Knox came in then and wanted to go to the Mardi Gras club. Before going, while we all were waiting in the front yard for Ten, Magnani moved a few feet away and, turning to face us, placed her hands on her stomach, gave it a good slap and farted.”

Though she was an Italian with continental ways unfamiliar to me, Magnani was still a movie star, and movie stars simply didn’t fart. Certainly I had never heard one fart, and never imagined one would make a performance out of it! Too bad Tennessee wasn’t on hand. What a contest there would have been between his Southern politeness and his eagerness to laugh at whatever amused him. He probably would have found my prudish, naïve shock just as funny as Magnani’s indelicate behavior.

Our departure from Key West was the next day and “Lancaster and Mann to house to say goodbye.” In subsequent years, Chris and Lancaster only met once or twice, but Chris later worked with Mann and traveled with him to Austria on a television project about the man who wrote “Silent Night.” Later that day I
wrote in my journal an impression of Lancaster:

“Just before we went to have lunch, Burt Lancaster came in to talk to us. He is cordial and charming, smiles a lot and beams a warm, pleasant friendliness. He seems to want very much to please. He is serious about his work, and he often comes to see Ten about his lines and how they should be said; he always has his own ideas about himself and the film. Ten remarked on his warmth and charm, and his tremendous desire to please. He told us that they were together at a party in Key West with nothing but Paramount employees and Lancaster brought trays of drinks from the kitchen himself. I wonder if Lancaster, by ingratiating himself with everyone, is making sure he gets what he wants. He is very big and looks sensational, with his large arms and bright, piercing blue eyes.”

The lure of those large arms and blue eyes is noted last, but it is noted, lovingly. It hadn’t, however, distracted me from scrutinizing his motivations.

I wrote my journal account for that Wednesday on the flight between Key West and Miami:

“We just said goodbye to Tennessee at the airport. He waited till our plane was ready to board. Chris embraced him first, and then I did, and realized for the first time that Ten has his own smell – a warm, living smell that isn’t like anyone else’s. I think he really likes us.

“Frank drove us around town today to shop. He seemed friendlier in a way, but still aloof and distant. We said goodbye to him at the house. As usual he wouldn’t come to lunch with us. I feel such a determination in Frank to be an individual, to be independent of Ten and his doings. As we were leaving the living room Frank surprised me by hugging me. I wasn’t expecting him to and, because I had my mirrored sunglasses on, felt all the more awkward.”

Four days later I was still thinking hard about Tennessee. “Ten is even-tempered and unexcitable and, despite an occasional air of tenseness, almost always appears relaxed. Once Bufo [Frank’s bulldog] accidentally nicked Ten’s bottom lip while they were playing together and Ten was cross, but only for a second.
Though he pushed Bufo roughly to the floor, he was composed again almost immediately.

“Very sensitive to slights and insults, Ten never forgets them. He’d liked Truman Capote very much until Truman made a bitchy remark. His most vivid impression of Speed (‘a silly ass’ he called him) is when Speed responded to Ten’s unhappiness over the failure of Camino Real by saying: ‘Look what happened to O’Neill, and you haven’t written anything that touches him.’ Glenway Wescott wrote to Ten about his nomination for a playwright’s award: ‘Congratulations, but I hope you don’t get it for another fifteen years, at least.’ Ten always tells these stories with a light, playful air, but underneath he minds. I sometimes worry that he will be offended by the frank but playful remarks Chris makes. Ten, however, is always amused by Chris’s jokes and laughs heartily.”

I suspect that Glenway was trying to flatter Tennessee by suggesting that Tennessee’s rare talent should not be endangered by too much exposure to the eroding effects of success. A remark by Gertrude Stein seems appropriate to Tennessee’s story: “Glenway has a syrup, but it doesn’t pour.” We flew out of Key West that afternoon.
Isherwood in the Academy
By David Shepard

As the work of a British-born Los Angeles resident who wrote for the movies while fulfilling his spiritual calling under the tutelage of Swami Prabhavananda, Isherwood’s literary corpus encompasses varied facets of the twentieth century. A considerable amount of wonderful scholarship has been written on his work on many of the most prominent issues in modern English departments, such as Queer Theory, Postcolonialism, and Media Studies. This article will give a brief overview of some of the recent work that has been done on his fiction, and provide a few entry points to interested scholars or readers.
Queer Theory

As Isherwood was a major figure in the gay rights movement, openly pursuing a relationship with painter Don Bachardy even in the conservative 1950s, Isherwood’s writing has served as a unifying cause for gay rights in the twentieth century. His novels and biographies sympathetically portray the intimate lives of gay characters to demonstrate their normalcy, and he attempts to fit his writing in with the work of other gay authors, creating an identity out of a new tradition. Consequently, the majority of criticism has focused on the various ways in which he championed gay causes in his writing.

That said, a debate remains about how much homosexuality serves as the focus of his novels. Isherwood claimed that the narrator of the *Berlin Stories* is not identified as gay, despite his being named Christopher Isherwood, because focusing on his sexual orientation would have colored his perception of the events too much. At the same time, he encounters the gay couple Peter and Otto and observes what many critics have called the drag-spectacle of Nazism, as well as developing a friendship with Sally Bowles without a hint of sexual tension.

This debate over the Isherwood character of the earlier novels’ sexual orientation plays into the question of the division between Isherwood’s pre-war and post-war novels. Because of the many changes in his life around World War II—his conversion to Vedanta, his pacifism, and his emigration to the United States—scholars have split his work into two periods using many different criteria. Oftentimes, *The Berlin Stories* or *Prater Violet* serves as the breakpoint because of his move to the United States or his conversion to Vedanta, which cause a resultant change in his moral viewpoint, his heroes, or his openness about homosexuality. Stephen Wade places more value on the pre-war writing, but later critics often reverse this trend or refuse to place one period over the other. John McFarland, for example, characterizes the division as one of moral purpose; in the earlier period, Isherwood is searching for it, and in the later period, he finds it with his conversion to Vedanta.

Other critics have also used this same division to address
Isherwood’s comfort with his sexuality. D.S. Savage and Joseph Bristow comment on some novels’ dangerous preoccupation with the past, and contend that such a preoccupation remains to some degree anti-radical or immature. Because the idea of maturation in Freudian psychology indicates growing heterosexual identification, Jamie Carr’s Queer Times questions imposing this Freudian schema on Isherwood’s development as a writer. Instead, she proposes that in his novels, time takes on a significantly different meaning and is not meant to be read as progressive, but as resistant to linear narratives of progress.

The treatment of time and comfort with sexual orientation actually take on an oppositional relationship. As James Kelley has argued in “Aunt Mary, Uncle Henry, and Anti-Ancestral Impulses in The Memorial,” Isherwood always struggled against the tradition he inherited from his family in his early fiction, as early as All the Conspirators (1928), but he approaches the creation of an alternate tradition in Lions and Shadows, a memoir that he suggested be read as a novel. The debate over tradition also emerges in linking Isherwood to earlier gay writers through similar (sometimes called “queer”) aesthetics. Isherwood himself is cited in Susan Sontag’s collection of essays on camp, and many find Lions and Shadows a particular example of camp writing. In a similar vein, Stephen da Silva puts Isherwood into a tradition that includes E.M. Forster and questions the idea that being a gay writer is to be a marginal figure, and asks if this might be a conscious strategy.

**Vedanta and Postcolonialism**

Finding his home far away from his birthplace, and rejecting the strict Anglican theology of his forbearers, Isherwood also found a spiritual home in a religion that originated in another nation. Isherwood published books with and about Swami Prabhavananda, and his conversion to Vedanta was earnest and lasted for the remainder of his life. Some Postcolonial literary criticism rightfully problematizes Western conversions to Eastern spirituality as Orientalism, accusing them of pursuing Eastern traditions because they are exotic, and treating the religions they
convert to with condescension. Treatment of Isherwood’s writing has been different, though; his devotion to Vedanta has attracted attention as a moral driving force, and a limited amount of postcolonial analysis.

Mario Faraone’s “The Path That Leads to Safety” presents an account of the progress of Isherwood’s novels’ greater employment of Vedanta spirituality, and his spiritual path as depicted. Faraone makes a convincing case for evaluating Isherwood’s conversion as a conscious, self-aware choice, rather than as a sublimated flight from Christianity or the material world. Faraone argues that looking for a psychological cause for Isherwood’s conversion is equivalent to looking for a cause of his homosexuality, and is equally demeaning.

Jeffery Paine’s study of English writers and thinkers who were influenced by Indian culture, *Father India: Westerners Under the Spell of an Ancient Culture*, devotes a chapter to Isherwood’s spiritual development. While his portrayal of Isherwood at times can seem disparaging, the book suggests that Isherwood’s conversion helped him to overcome dualistic western thinking, and never questions the sincerity of his conversion. Vedanta was a spiritual middle ground for Isherwood, without fantastic elements or dogma. Paine contends that Isherwood deeply respected and treated the Swami as an equal. The book presents a positive account of Isherwood’s conversion, and shows that as much as he was influenced by India, his was a later, twentieth-century, equitable interaction with a spiritual tradition he respected rather than a flight into the exotic East.

**Media Studies**

An emerging trend in media studies and literary studies has been the exploration of High Modernist literature as responding to the invention of new communications technology. Isherwood’s most famous novel begins “I am a camera with its shutter open.” He also wrote several screenplays in Hollywood, though the films he worked on were generally unmemorable. Regardless, two critics have made the argument that different forms of media inspired elements of his writing. This media studies approach, while a
relatively new school of literary criticism, deserves consideration given Isherwood’s involvement in the movie industry.

In her book *Divine Decadence*, Linda Mizejewski carefully interrogates what Isherwood means by his opening line. While on the surface, the line suggests the narrator’s passivity and objectivity, Mizejewski also points out the self-conscious naïveté of this statement and reads a more sophisticated understanding of the subjectivity of photography into it. Her feminist account of photographic conventions engages the historical links between male subjectivity and viewing, demonstrating simultaneously that Isherwood is well aware of his own perceptions in coloring his account of Sally. She explores the many representations of Sally Bowles through novel, stage, and film, and her comparative study provides a useful feminist account that incorporates a media-studies approach.

Cinema, in particular, also helped Isherwood grow as a writer and a person, a process he depicted in his novels. According to Mario Faraone, Bergmann in *Prater Violet* fulfills the Vedanta role of guru to the Isherwood character for the novel. Bergmann brings about Isherwood’s gradual transformation from a self-satisfied, arrogant aesthete to a man with a genuine social conscience. This education comes about through the collaborative process of writing a socialist fairy-tale with Bergmann at the expense of his momentarily-frustrated career as a novelist. The movie industry contributes to his personal development; cinema is a socializing influence both for the audience and for Isherwood the narrator. The film consequently inspires a conventional print bildungsroman; he considers film a mass medium for simplified storytelling, but reserves the novel to trace, in detail, the process of one man’s growth. *Prater Violet* explores the differences between film and print, but also illustrates their influence upon each other.

At times both memoir and fiction, and British and American, Isherwood’s writing resists easy categorization. He is known for his treatment of gay themes and causes, but his work subverts easy categorization and refuses to be only “gay writing.” Because of this variety of themes, his work remains relevant to the
globalized, media-saturated twentieth century, to audiences both gay and straight, and scholarly and casual.
The Importance of Being Christopher: Isherwood’s Wit
By David Shepard

Examples of Isherwood’s wit:

[December 23, 1939] During the past week, I have found myself repeatedly slipping into the “Real Life” trance … Very symptomatic was the trip Vernon and I recently made to Palm Springs. Because “Palm Springs” isn’t just a place; it’s a symbol … However, we accidentally woke ourselves up in the middle of the “Palm Springs” trance--acting on a sudden impulse, we got out of the car and wandered on foot up a narrow canyon blocked with bushes and rocks. This hot, tiring scramble, without any “object,” in a place not registered as a “beauty spot,” did not belong to the idea “Palm Springs”--and so it recalled us for a little while from our trance. For this reason, it was the only part of the trip either of us really enjoyed. (Diaries, p. 60)

[January 4, 1940] Having seen the beautifully planned classrooms, the wonderfully equipped
theater, the swimming baths, the gymnasium and the library--one can’t help wondering; how long will this strange homage to education continue at all? The barbarian students are so much more vital than the culture they are supposed to be acquiring. This place is simply a temple to a dead religion. (Diaries, pp. 71-72)

[January 7, 1940] In the early morning, as I lie in bed, too lazy to get up, the demons start whispering in my ear: “You’re trying something impossible … why not give up? … Develop paralysis or TB. Wait a minute—isn’t that a pain in your left lung? … It’d serve everybody right. They’d have to look after you … Come on—let’s have breakfast in bed for a start…” (Diaries, 74)

[Jan 14, 1941] The first two weeks of disintoxication [from quitting smoking] were very unpleasant … My nerves were on edge throughout the day. I longed to strangle my secretary, who happened, by ill luck, to be a rather silly murderee girl with eyeglasses. (Diaries, p. 153)

I see my twenty-three-year-old face regarding me with large, reproachful eyes, from beneath a cowlick of streaky blond hair. A thin, strained face, so touchingly pretty that it might have been photographed and blown up big for a poster appealing on behalf of the world’s young: “The old hate us because we’re so cute. Won’t you help?” (Down There On a Visit)

All I could do—and I think it showed great presence of mind—was to drop the notebook into the drawer and take out the revolver. It was at least less embarrassing, I thought, to be caught examining a revolver than an autobiographical poem. (Down There On a Visit)

You’re naturally rather shy with strangers, [Sally,] I think: so you’ve got into this trick of trying to
bounce them into approving or disapproving of you, violently. I know this because I try it myself sometimes. (*The Berlin Stories*)

“You know, Sally … what I really like about you is that you’re so awfully easy to take in. People who never get taken in are so dreary.” (*The Berlin Stories*)

Given their significant stylistic differences, one would be hard-pressed to accuse Isherwood of owing too much to Oscar Wilde. Isherwood as a writer, and particularly a gay writer writing after Modernism, frequently shows evidence of having to come to terms with the question of art for art’s sake, or Aestheticism, a movement in which Wilde was a key figure. Wilde was known as one of the great wits of his time for his piquant and often brusque dismissals of conventional wisdom; his compendium of ironic adages belies a serious concern with morality. The candor of “A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing,” and “A gentleman is one who never hurts anyone’s feelings unintentionally,” or “A man can be happy with any woman as long as he does not love her” is funny for its eloquent inversions, but also for its probing repudiation of Victorian propriety. Inheriting this sardonic legacy, Isherwood’s writing frequently satirizes those who mistake Wilde’s surface vapidity for complete repudiation of purpose. Both Isherwood and Wilde use humor to explore weighty ideas in their writing without pretension; Isherwood especially used humor to appropriate and to criticize Wilde’s legacy. Aestheticism, to Isherwood, was dangerous because it seemed to advocate that artists withdraw from social concern, but he recognized that the surface frivolity in Wilde’s own writing was always imbued with deeper moral questions, as in the ending of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Aestheticism remained a persistent target of satire throughout Isherwood’s fiction, but also a tradition whose legacy he inherited and respected. He used satire to imbue his works with purpose, but also to make them seem unweighty.

Sally Bowles, one of Isherwood’s most memorable
characters, is one example. Bowles herself has become for critics a paradigmatic eternally-optimistic bohemian performer, careless and always on stage. One of her and Chris’s most significant encounters is with Clive, the millionaire who promises to take the two of them traveling. Clive embodies the same disinterested nihilism as Sally, yet unlike Sally or Chris, he is wealthy enough to insulate himself from the consequences. Because of Clive’s promises, Sally comes to revere Clive with “the rapt expression of a theatrical nun.” The last two words can be read as if Sally is on stage as a nun, as a woman who overacts imitating a nun in real life, or as a woman who lives in celibate devotion to the theater. All of these interpretations suggest that her devotion approaches a hope for escape in Clive’s wild exhibition of his wealth. This description parodies Sally’s lack of purpose. With Clive as her foil, her dreams are revealed to be nihilistic, not money-grubbing, but overimpressed with his wealth because she has nothing else. Her quest for meaning is shunted off into performance.

Sally and Clive’s hedonism persists in willful oblivion to growing Nazi power (which enters the story only tangentially). Clive and Sally are both performers, and as such detached from their respective worlds; when we later see that Clive gives “a particularly flagrant professional beggar” alms, a scene described as “something inspired, a kind of miracle,” Clive’s concern turns into a joke. Clive’s act of charity is juxtaposed against Sally’s theatrical nunhood, he only plays the generous rich man. The pseudo-religious overtones of the scene help to explain the rise of the Nazis; the emptiness and profligacy of both their actions show a lack of purpose. Their actions embody a void that Nazi displays of national pride attempt to fill. The Nazis, of course, are no less theatrical, but endow their actions with a veneer of purpose. Though the material explored is serious, the story is filled with humor because of the weighty subject matter. Isherwood trivializes Clive and Sally’s own trivializing of life to show that their refusal to take anything seriously has great consequences. In other words, he turns the thing they practice on them, which makes them absurd. Sally and Clive are sad because they are funny, and funny because they are sad. Isherwood uses humor to make his criticism without
becoming tedious.  

Sally Bowles is only one of the many artists in Isherwood’s fiction. In *Prater Violet*, the narrator Chris, an unsuccessful novelist, takes a job as a screenwriter and must learn how to find moral purpose in art when he is writing for hire. One of the narrator’s major formative experiences in his development from an aloof, isolated aesthete to a mature, socially-concerned individual is an encounter with the technician Lawrence in the offices of Bulldog Pictures. Lawrence insists to Chris, “The incentive [to do a job] is to fight anarchy. That’s all Man lives for. Reclaiming life from its natural muddle. Making patterns.” Lawrence maintains that technicians, with their concern for efficiency and their technical skill, are the only true artists, while filmmakers and writers like Bergmann and Chris complain about artistic prostitution because they lack the courage to force their opinions on the public. Calling “this business about the box office” a “sentimental democratic fiction,” Lawrence reveals that Aestheticism teeters on giving rise to fascism, as he ignores the content of his creation and focuses instead on his job.

While exploring these weighty topics against the backdrop of the Nazis’ rise to power, the novel avoids self-importance by giving the character with the most unsettling opinions the most grandiose pronouncements. The novel also gives Lawrence the last word in the scene, letting his opinions stand on their own, without granting the narrator a rebuttal. The experience changes Chris the character by showing him the most extreme form of disinterested aestheticism, and causing him to see through the vapidity of Lawrence’s obsession with disinterested efficiency. Isherwood the writer leaves these statements without comment, demonstrating Chris the narrator’s eventual change only later and implying the cause of the change rather than directly showing it. Lawrence’s aestheticism makes him a quasi-Nazi, and shows the Chris character that his own initial aestheticism threatens to lead him down the same road.

Even in *A Single Man* the same disinterested Aestheticism emerges as a more subtle but no less dangerous force; Aestheticism is equally associated with oppression. In the early pages of the
novel, George suffers the isolation of living as a gay man in a neighborhood of fertile veterans’ families. Their tacit intolerance cuts them off from George; as his neighbor Mr. Strunk says, “I don’t give a damn what he does as long as he stays away from me.” Isherwood colors this tepid statement of tolerance with a vicious, angry tone to parody it, but also more subtly juxtaposes it against George’s encounter with Aestheticism.

George reads Ruskin as part of his morning ritual and encounters, not entirely by chance, the critic’s famous quote “Taste is the only morality.” Ruskin’s words provoke both a trip to the bathroom for George and a dangerous question: if taste is the only morality, and sexual orientation is only a matter of preference, then Ruskin’s quote simultaneously supports homosexuality and allows Mr. Strunk’s disgust. The novel’s criticism of his neighbor’s tolerance at a distance exposes the menace in defending sexual orientation as personal preference. The novel indirectly calls on gay men to develop a common identity and demand acceptance together, rather than defending homosexuality as simple matter of individual choice. The reader is encouraged to avoid the trap of complacent “tolerance” and to move toward active acceptance of difference. Taste, then, is not the only morality.

To Isherwood, a humorous and unpretentious touch was one of the truest traits of an artist. It was important to laugh at all the characters—as we also laugh at George’s exaggerated misanthropy—so that he would not simply be holding one shining paragon who stands apart from all the other buffoons. As he wrote of Chaplin in his journals: “Only the self-conscious humorist, the carefully built-up bogus personality, doesn’t laugh. Chaplin inhabits the element of humor. He is enjoying himself, not just being funny for a living.” The same might be said of Isherwood himself.
In the fall of 1932, William Plomer took Christopher Isherwood to meet E. M. Forster for the first time. Isherwood had long been an admirer of Forster’s work. The two writers belonged to two different generations: Edward Morgan Forster, born in 1879, came of age during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods; Isherwood, born in 1904, was a member of the post-World War I generation. Each, too, was in a very different stage of his writing career. Forster was the author of several highly regarded novels, particularly *Howard’s End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924), and was well established within the literary circles of the time. His professional acquaintances and friends included Virginia Woolf and other members of the Bloomsbury group. Isherwood had just completed his second novel, *The Memorial*, which reveals stylistic influences from Forster. Forster had read the novel, liked it, and expressed a wish to meet the young author. Isherwood recalls his admiration for Forster and excitement at meeting him that day: “It was tremendous for Christopher. Forster was the only living writer whom he would have described as his master. In other people’s books he found examples of style which he wanted to imitate and learn from. In Forster he found a key to the whole art of writing … A Forster novel taught Christopher the mental attitude with which he must pick up the pen.”

Often looking back at that auspicious meeting and Forster’s kind words about *The Memorial*, Isherwood would say, “My literary
career is over—I don’t give a damn for the Nobel Prize or the Order of Merit—*I’ve been praised by Forster!*” Isherwood also had a great deal of respect for Forster as a person. On a visit to Forster in 1947, Isherwood reflects that he was in awe of Forster not merely as his literary master but also because “Forster demanded truth in all his relationships; underneath his charming unalarming exterior he was a stern moralist and his mild babylike eyes looked deep into you. Their glance made Christopher feel false and tricky.” While their professional relationship was one of mentor and disciple, their personal relationship was cemented by an equal caring for one another. Forster was loyal to his intimate friends and expected the same from them. Isherwood was indeed loyal throughout the thirty-eight years of their friendship.

The letters are a personal record of these two writers’ lives, both professionally and personally, over a period of more than thirty years. The substantial number of letters exchanged during the increasingly turbulent years of the 1930s reveal how Forster and Isherwood each came to grips with the rise of fascism in Europe and the threat of war as both writers and human beings helplessly caught in the midst of a world on the brink of disaster. On a more subtle level, the letters tell two parallel but very different stories of love and devotion between each writer and his respective male partner. The letters of the war years juxtapose the strikingly different worlds in which Forster and Isherwood were living: London and its environs during the Blitz, and the southern California community of exiled writers and artists, respectively. Each friend informs the other how his life—and view of life—is being shaped by events, whether unfolding within his midst or thousands of miles away. The postwar letters, although sparse, particularly after the early 1950s, record moments in the later careers of the two writers, such as Isherwood struggling to find a new voice in his novels, one that treats homosexual characters more openly and Forster embarking on new projects and fitting himself into the role of elder statesman. In these later letters, the two friends also continue their ongoing conversation to find a suitable ending for Forster’s ground-breaking but yet unpublished novel, *Maurice.*
Although there are very few letters after 1952, Forster and Isherwood maintained their friendship. Isherwood regularly paid visits to Forster in England. Their last written correspondence dates from 1966 (four years before Forster’s death at the age of 91). Suffering the effects of several strokes, Forster dictates a brief letter to Isherwood: “Much love to you, naturally & to your work though I am sorry it is not bringing you to England.” P. N. Furbank, Forster’s biographer, remarks that “[t]he central preoccupation of his life, it was plain to see, was friendship, and he had a rather special attitude towards friendship. He never casually dropped friends, as most people do, out of forgetfulness or through change of circumstance….If someone became a friend of his, he might expect to remain so for life.” This observation is echoed by Don Bachardy, Isherwood’s companion for more than thirty years and who had visited Forster together with Isherwood in the 1950s and 1960s. Bachardy remarked that when Forster admitted someone into his inner circle, he was a friend for life. Obviously, Isherwood was one such intimate friend. The letters trace this mutually intimate, long-lasting friendship within the contexts of the extraordinary—and everyday—social, cultural, and political events of the mid-twentieth century.

Isherwood on Writing

Early in 2008, James J. Berg published *Isherwood on Writing* through the University of Minnesota Press. Drawn from the Isherwood Papers at the Huntington Library, the book collects a series of lectures Isherwood gave in 1960 at California universities on the theme of “A Writer and His World.” The lectures cover writing for a variety of media—print, film, and theater—and paint a portrait of Isherwood as a comfortably gay American writer who has firmly settled in his new home. Following are some excerpts:

The other sort of literary work in which I’ve been engaged is something which is fundamentally a portrait … In this sort of work you take a character and you show him or her to the audience as a magician shows a card, rather quickly, which
allows the audience to get a superficial view of that character … It’s not so much that at the end you express the truth about the person—you don’t dig out a little shining nut of wisdom at the end—but by placing all these different people in a kind of order, a relation in perspective as well, you create a composite portrait. This is the real object of such writing. (55)

Of course, novel writing, or indeed any kind of artistic creation whatsoever, is such a strange mixture of conscious intention and subconscious evolution that many, many symbols are projected into the novel that aren’t conscious intentions. This happens again and again—it’s only other people who then find them and show them to you, and you’re amazed at your own subtlety at having put them there. (61)

There is, however, another method which I’ve discovered was practiced by Henry James, and which I’ve found very helpful. That is, to turn the whole thing into a lecture. One may not be able to write, but one can always talk. (62)

Every writer who really has any kind of vitality has some sort of moral code. Whether this code of morals is a good one is to my mind absolutely immaterial … What matters is the intensity with which this struggle on the human level is realized. (66)

When I say compassion (and this is why I don’t like the word), I don’t just mean a kind of sentiment, or even a sense of pity in the emotional meaning of the word. No, the compassion of great writers seems to be quite dry—as, for example, in Flaubert. Nevertheless, you feel the compassion. (67)

The great vice of the professional (one might almost say the representational) theater is neatness: the danger that you tie up the whole thing too neatly, that it adds up like a sum and is balanced, and there’s something about it, a kind of coldness and artificiality in consequence. What rescues this is character. If you can put a character on stage, if the
character having been put on stage is marvelously acted out, then you have something which takes a great deal of destroying. Once an audience is really interested in the character, the audience will forget about the weakness of the structure of the play. (90)
We were often accused … of not taking the theater seriously. I think this was both good and bad insofar as it was true. I think that a certain irresponsibility in the theater is very exciting and desirable. The only trouble is that one is so apt to get carried away by it. (93)
It’s not just that on the screen, you have to have less dialogue than you can afford to have in the theater. It’s that the words spoken on the screen should have an entirely different relation to the image. The sound in the film should always be, as it were, balanced against the image and not go with it. (106)
Isherwood Panel at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

Victor Marsh, whose PhD thesis on Isherwood’s religious life will be published by Clouds of Magellan press, organized a panel discussion on Isherwood’s religious writing at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago, from November 1-3. The panel featured other noted Isherwood scholars, including James J. Berg, who chaired, and Katherine Bucknell, Dr. Jamie Carr, and Dr. Mario Faraone, as well as Pr. Vrajapraana, a nun from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society who knew Isherwood. Information is available on the AAR website: http://www.aarweb.org/Meetings/Annual_Meeting/Current_Meeting/Program_Book/

Special Thanks

Angelina Jolie
Lee Walcott and The Ahmanson Foundation
The Huntington Foundation
Doris Roberts
Barbara McCormick
Gloria Stuart
Brenda Vaccaro
Jacqueline Bisset
Leslie Caron

Katherine Bucknell Maguire
Nancy Platt Jacoby
Lilly Gray Rubin
Yuji Hasegawa
Don Cribb
Gary H. Hunt, Ttee
Joanne J. Hunt, Ttee
Tom Backer
Mashey M. Bernstein
Ronda Gómez-Quiñones
Gail Mutrux
Charles Lange
Helene Cardona
Dennis Christopher
Joe Regan, Jr.
Andrew W. Solt Ttee
Claudia G. Falkenburg
Russel Kully
Howard Bragman
John and Connie Wallace
John J. and Joan Quinn
Greg Fant
Rainer Schulte
Michelle Phillips
Ronald Christ
Dennis L. Dollens
Gene Oppenheim and Patricia Hoffman
Michael Shugrue
James O. Tibbs
Robert Phillips
Christian J. Matuschek
Frances Kroll Ring
Eric Miles Williamson
David Scott Milton
Lee S. Reem Ttee
Irene A. Reem Ttee
Tom Baker
Kay WalkingStick
Paul Wonner
Tess Gallagher
Dean Hansell
Helene Cardona
Aida Davis
James J. Berg
Laddie John Dill
Offi cers and Staff

The Christopher Isherwood Foundation
President, Don Bachardy
Vice President, David Hockney
Vice President and Executive Director, James White
Director of Technology and Design, Dr. Jules White
Technical Specialist, Derek Riley
Newsletter Editors: James White and David Shepard

The mission of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation is to contribute significantly to the flourishing of American letters by awarding grants to published novelists and to scholars. The Isherwood Foundation is a 501(c)3 Charitable Foundation (ID #31431). Gifts are tax deductible.

Visit our Website: www.isherwoodfoundation.org

The Foundation welcomes these new Advisory Board Members:

**Dirk Bach** is an artist, teacher, and scholar who has studied and taught at the University of New Hampshire and is a former chair of Art History at the Rhode Island School of Design.

**Neal Baer** is a producer, writer, and director who has seven Emmy nominations and three Writer’s Guild of America Awards for his work on *ER*. He has also written for *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and *China Beach*.

**Robert Coleman** is acting Chair of English at the University of South Alabama. His books include *Everyday Theory: A Contemporary Reader* and *Making Sense: Constructing Knowledge in the Arts and Sciences*.

**Frank Daugherty**, Director of the English Language Center at the University of South Alabama, is author of the novel of *Isle of Joy*.

**Robin French** has a long and distinguished career in television production and the motion picture industry. He was Vice Chairman of Hal Roach Studios Inc., and has a successful background in
syndication and licensing. He co-promoted the “World Heavy Weight Championship” between Mohammed Ali and Joe Frazier. Thomas C. Hayes is former CEO of Fortune Brands. He is a member of the Ambassadors’ Roundtable, The Forum for World Affairs, The Business Roundtable and its Corporate Governance Task Force, The Conference Board, and The Economic Club. He has recently received an honorary doctorate from Pace University. James Ivory is a screenwriter and director. His films include Le Divorce, A Room With a View, A Passage to India, The Golden Bowl, Maurice, Howard’s End, The Remains of the Day, and The City of Your Final Destination. He is a three-time Oscar nominee for Best Director. Kirsten Kiser is an art editor and curator. She lives in Denmark. She is publisher of arcspace. Prior to arcspace, she was European Editor-in-Chief of Design Architecture. Jim Kunetka is the Associate Vice President for Development at the University of Texas at Austin and a novelist. His books include Warday, Nature’s End, and Oppenheimer: The Years of Risk. Marcia Reed is Chief Curator and Head, Collection Development and the Getty Research Institute. She has edited China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century. Daniel Rogers is Professor of History at the University of South Alabama. He is a specialist on Weimar Germany. Bruce Smith teaches at Syracuse. His poetry has appeared in Poetry, The Nation, The New Republic, and The Paris Review. His most recent book is Songs for Two Voices. Michael Van Horn is a fashion illustrator. He has created images for numerous clients like Bill Blass, Elizabeth Arden, Revlon, Clairol, Jockey, L’Oreal, and Cunard, to mention only a few. He has work represented in Outstanding American Illustrators Today II, Fashion Illustration in New York, Step By Step Graphics, and Art Direction Magazine. Susanna White, BAFTA Award-winning director, most recently lead directed HBO’s upcoming Generation Kill, the seven-part miniseries that tells the intimate tale of young Marines whose unit is part of the first wave of the American military assault on
Baghdad.

**Edmund White** is a writer whose books include *Forgetting Elena, Nocturnes for the King of Naples, A Boy’s Own Story*, and *The Unfinished Symphony*. He has also written significantly about the American gay experience.

**Christine Zinnemann** is a jewelry designer in Los Angeles.
Advisory Board Directory, 2008

Clytie Alexander lives in New York. She has had exhibitions at the Galleria de architettura arte moderna in Milan and at the Ben Shahn Galleries.

Peter Alexander is a painter and sculptor living in Santa Monica. His work is in the collections of the L.A. County Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Winni Allard is the former Director of the Santa Monica Libraries.

Thomas Backer, a psychologist, is President of the Human Interaction Research Institute in Los Angeles.

Tom Baker is a former executive with Reader’s Digest magazine.

Juan Bastos is a portrait artist who lives in Los Angeles.

Billy Al Bengston is a painter living in Victoria, Canada.

James Berg is co-editor, with Chris Freeman, of *Conversations with Christopher Isherwood* and of *The Isherwood Century*, which won a Lambda Literary Award.

Jacqueline Bisset starred in *The Deep*, *The Detective*, *Bullitt*, *Rich and Famous*, and many other films. She was born in Weybridge, Surrey, and lives in Los Angeles.

Tom Blount is a businessman and philanthropist from Alabama who lives in Los Angeles and Italy.

John Boorman, director and writer, lives in Ireland. His films include *Deliverance*, *Emerald Forest*, *Hope and Glory*, *Zardoz*, *Excalibur*, and *The Tailor of Panama*.

W. Theophilus Brown is a painter who lives in San Francisco.

Katherine Bucknell lives in London and is editor of *The Isherwood Diaries*.

Artist Rebecca Campbell currently has a solo exhibition, Poltergeist, at L.A. Louvre in Los Angeles. She holds an M.F.A. from UCLA.

Leslie Caron, Oscar and Emmy Award winner, starred in *An American in Paris*, *Gigi*, *Lili*, *The L-Shaped Room*, *Father Goose*, *Fanny*, and *Daddy Long Legs*.

Stockard Channing has won two Emmy Awards, two SAG Awards, and a Tony, and received an Oscar nomination for the film
Six Degrees of Separation.

Michael Childers is a photographer who lives in Los Angeles.

Joel Conarroe is the former President of The John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and currently is President of PEN.

Charles Connell is a former Academic Vice President of the University of Northern Arizona.

Dagny Janss Corcoran is a specialist in art catalogues. She lives in Los Angeles.

Patsy Covey is a former Academic Vice President of the University of South Alabama.

Ronald Christ is publisher of Lumen Books and former Professor of English at Rutgers University.

Terry DeCrescenzo is the founder and Executive Director of GLASS (Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services), which operates five homes for sexual minority and HIV-infected youth in Southern California.

Richard Dellamora is Professor of English and Cultural Studies at Trent University and author of Friendship’s Bonds and other works.

Guy Dill is an artist who lives in Los Angeles.

Laddie Dill is an artist who lives in Los Angeles.

David C. England is former President of North Lake College and former President of the Chamber of Commerce of Las Colinas.

Robert Flynn has published several novels and story collections. He recently retired from Trinity University.

Connie May Fowler is the author of Before Women Had Wings (an Oprah Book Club selection) and other novels.

Donna Frazier is a poet and author. She is Deputy Editor of the Sunday Calendar section of the Los Angeles Times.

Richard Fredricks lives in Los Angeles. He was a leading baritone at the New York City Opera and performed at the New York Metropolitan Opera as well.

Chris Freeman is the co-editor, with James Berg, of Conversations with Christopher Isherwood and of The Isherwood Century.

Amy French acts, directs, and produces films in Los Angeles.

John Friedl is the former Provost at the University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga.

**Lynn Gardner** is a psychologist and a professor in Flagstaff, Arizona.

**Tess Gallagher** has published several books of poems and is the widow of Raymond Carver.

**Constance Gee** is an authority on art and public policy and a professor at Vanderbilt University.

**E. Gordon Gee** is former Chancellor of Vanderbilt University and current President of Ohio State University.

**Peter Gowland** of Los Angeles has had photographs on over one thousand magazine covers.

**Fred Granade** is a lawyer in Bay Minette, Alabama.

**Phyllis Green** is a sculptor living in Santa Monica.

**Donald E. Hall** is the Jackson Distinguished Professor at West Virginia University.

**Dean Hansell** is a lawyer and former Police Commissioner for Los Angeles. His work in philanthropy has produced significant changes.

**N. Katherine Hayles** is a professor of English at Duke University.

**Guy Hector** is a former model who works in film.

**Hildegarde Heidt** lives in Pacific Palisades and is a foundation supporter.

**Andrew Herwitz** is President of The Film Sales Company. The films he managed include *Fahrenheit 9-11, Born into Brothels* and *My Architect*.

**Edwin Honig** is a poet and translator. A professor emeritus at Brown, he has been knighted by the Presidents of both Spain and Portugal.

**Bill Imhoff** lives in Pacific Palisades and is a foundation supporter.

**J. David Johnson** is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of South Alabama.

**Carola Kaplan**, an Isherwood scholar, is Professor of English at Cal State Poly Pomona.

**David Koslow** is a lawyer and businessman in Los Angeles.

**John Ladner** is a lawyer and former judge in Los Angeles.

**A.J. Langguth**’s latest book is *Union 1812: The Americans Who Fought the Second War of Independence*. He is a retired professor
from USC.

**Jack Larson** has written librettos for music by Virgil Thompson and others and has produced films, including *Urban Cowboy*, as well. He acted in the original *Superman* television series.

**Joanna Leake** directs the creative writing program at the University of New Orleans. Her novel *A Day at Weasel Creek* was made into a film.

**Tod Lippy** lives in New York and edits *Esopus*.

**Mark Lipscomb** is a painter in Los Angeles.

**Robert Loftus** owns a printing firm in Dallas.

**M.G. Lord**, author of *Barbie* and *Astro Turf* is a frequent contributor to the New York Times Book Review.

**Dan Luckenbill** works in Special Collections at UCLA.

**Michael MacLennan**, producer and writer, wrote teleplays for *Queer as Folk*, and also is well known for his plays.

**J. T. Martin** is owner of the Upstairs Gallery in Arlington, Texas.

**Ron Martin** lives in New York. He is Past Chairman and Fellow, International Association of Business Communicators.

**Tina Mascara** is a filmmaker in Los Angeles. She recently produced and directed *Chris and Don: A Love Story*.

**Armistead Maupin** is the author of *Tales of the City* and, most recently, *The Night Listener*, and *Michael Tolliver Lives*. He lives in San Francisco.

British-born **Stephen McCabe** was art director for *My Dinner with Andre* and for *Under the Tuscan Sun*. He lives in Los Angeles.

**Jean McIver** edited *Black Alabama*. She has served on numerous boards for writers and the humanities.

**Rod McKuen**, poet and composer, has 63 gold and platinum records worldwide as well as over thirty collections of poetry.

**T. K. Meier**, President of Elmira College, is a Defoe scholar.

**David Scott Milton**’s latest novel is *The Fat Lady Sings*. He teaches at the University of Southern California.

**Greg Mullen** is the Director of Library Systems-City Librarian of the City of Santa Monica.

**Vance Muse**, a former staff writer for *Life* magazine, is Public Affairs Director for the Menil Collection in Houston.

**Robert Nelsen** is a writer and associate professor at the University
of Texas at Dallas.  

**Rick Noguchi**, poet and winner of the AWP poetry series, works for the James Irvine Foundation.  

**James Olsen** is former Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Texas Permian Basin.  

**Arnold Orgolini** is a film and television producer in Los Angeles.  

**Chris Pasles** writes for the *Los Angeles Times*. He formerly directed the Performing Arts Program at USC and was acting music critic at the *Los Angeles Times*.  

**Richard Pate** is a lawyer in Point Clear, Alabama.  

**Robert Phillips** held a distinguished chair at the University of Houston and directed their creative writing program. He has published twenty-five books, including his latest book of poems, *Spinach Days*.  

**Felice Picano** is a novelist who lives in Los Angeles.  

**Joan Agajanian Quinn** writes for *Art Review* and other publications and hosts her own television program on the arts in Los Angeles.  

**Joan Raines** is a partner in the New York literary agency Raines & Raines.  

**Michelle Richmond** of San Francisco has followed her AWP Award story collection with a new novel, *Dream of the Blue Room*.  

**Frances Kroll Ring’s** book *Against the Current: As I Remember F. Scott Fitzgerald*, has been made into a film.  

**Doris Roberts** has won five Emmys and was chosen as *TV Guide’s* Supporting Actress of the Year in a Comedy Series (2001). She is featured in “Everybody Loves Raymond.” Her latest film is *They Came From Upstairs* (2009). She is the widow of the distinguished novelist William Goyen.  

**Vernon Rosario** is a Harvard-educated psychiatrist whose latest book is *Science and Homosexuality*. He works at UCLA.  

**Terry Sanders** is an Academy-Award-winning filmmaker. His many films include *The Eyes of Don Bachardy*.  

**Guido Santi** is a filmmaker in Los Angeles. His most recent work is *Chris and Don: A Love Story*.  

**James Schevill** has published books of poems, plays, and a novel.
He formerly directed the creative writing program at Brown University.

Rainer Schulte is founding president of the American Literary Translators Association. He has published numerous books of poetry as well as collections of world literature. He is Professor of Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Carolyn See is the author of five novels and the autobiography _Dreaming: Hard Luck and Good Times in America._

Ken Sherman heads the Ken Sherman Literary Agency in Beverly Hills.

Michael F. Shugrue is a former president of The College English Association. His edited books include the widely used text _The Conscious Reader._

John Sledge is the Book Editor of the _Mobile Register._

Glenn Allen Smith of Dallas has had plays produced nationwide for many years. His works include _Sister, Curious in L.A., and Manny._

Stephen Smith writes fiction and recently worked for the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. He works at Brown University.

Gary Stephens is a film writer who lives in Chicago.

Geoffrey Strachan is a translator and former publisher of Methuen London Ltd.

Gloria Stuart was nominated for an Academy Award and won a Golden Globe for her role as Rose in _Titanic._ Her other films include _The Invisible Man, The Old Dark House, and Back Street._ She has published her autobiography _I Never Stopped Hoping._

Jeanie Thompson is a poet and heads the Alabama Writers Forum.

Sylvia Thompson has published several cookbooks. She is working on a novel and lives in Los Angeles.

Ryan Tranquilla, a poet and arts consultant, is the past director of the California office of _Poets & Writers._

Brenda Vaccaro won a Golden Globe Award and was nominated for an Academy Award for her work in _Once is Not Enough._ Her other films include _Midnight Cowboy, The First Deadly Sin, and The Boynton Beach Bereavement Club._

Kay WalkingStick is former Professor of Art at Cornell University
and recently exhibited at the June Kelly Gallery in New York and the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts. 

**Thomas Wortham**, a professor of English at UCLA, is the editor of *Nineteenth-Century Literature.*

**Michael York** has starred in *Romeo and Juliet, Cabaret,* and the *Austin Powers* series.

**Richard Zeikowitz** lives and studies at Nalanda Buddhist Monastery in France. A former associate professor of English, he is the editor of *Letters between Forster and Isherwood on Homosexuality and Literature.*
In Memoriam
Elaine Dundy and Paul Wonner

Elaine Dundy, author, was born on August 2, 1921. She died on May 1, 2008, aged 86.

She was a novelist, biographer, playwright, and journalist. Her first novel, *The Dud Avocado*, was reprinted last year by New York Review Books Classics. Her later books include *Elvis and Gladys*, about Elvis Presley and his mother, *Ferriday, Louisiana*, about a small town where Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Howard K. Smith grew up, and her remarkable autobiography *Life Itself!* She wrote a biography of Peter Finch, *Finch, Bloody Finch*, and two other novels.

Elaine will be remembered by the Isherwood Foundation as a close friend and an admired writer.

Paul John Wonner, painter, was born in 1920 and died in 2008.

He was born in Tuscon, Arizona and received a B.A. and M.A. from the University of California, Berkeley. In the 1950s, he became prominent as an abstract expressionist associated with the Bay Area Figurative Movement. He taught at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is known for a dreamlike series of male bathers, richly executed landscapes, crystalline-clear still lives, and his particular brand of magic realism. His work is in the Guggenheim Museum, Smithsonian Museum, and others. A memorial exhibition of his work was held at the John Berggruen Gallery in San Francisco. He is survived by his partner, distinguished artist W. Theophilus Brown.

Paul also was a close friend of the Foundation. He painted in his San Francisco studio nearly every day up to his death. His creativity will be missed.
Thank you for reading about the Isherwood Foundation.
We hope you will tell others about us.
The 2008-2009 Isherwood Fellows are:

**Gregory Belliveau** from Cedarville, Ohio. His books include *Go Down to Silence*. He teaches at Cedarville University. Isherwood Fellowship (R.V. Cassill named grant)

**Larry Fondation** from Los Angeles, CA. His books include *Angry Nights* and *Fish, Soap, and Bonds*. Isherwood Fellowship (Thomas Williams named grant)

**David Roy Lincoln** from San Francisco, California. His books include the novel *Mobility Lounge* and *Liberty Boys*. Isherwood Fellowship (with James C. McCormick support)

**Thomas J. Phelan** from Freeport, New York. His books include the novel *The Canal Bridge*. Isherwood Fellowship (with Ahmanson support)

**Emily Raboteau** from New York, New York. Her books include *The Professor’s Daughter*. She teaches at City College of New York. Isherwood Fellowship (William Goyen/Doris Roberts support)