



# Isherwood: A Life Revealed

*Peter Parker*

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## **Isherwood: A Life Revealed** Peter Parker

Here is the definitive biography of one of the most exciting, influential, and elusive authors of the twentieth century. Christopher Isherwood's novels and short stories, including those that inspired the musical *Cabaret*, have always been assumed to be largely autobiographical.

Based in part on Isherwood's private papers—unavailable until now—this fascinating book presents the real story of his life, a life that saw a relatively conventional boy become an acclaimed writer, mystic, and “grand old man” of the gay liberation movement. In the end, *Isherwood: A Life* portrays someone who misled as much as he revealed.

Born in 1904, the heir to a large country estate where his grandfather was squire, Isherwood had a youth filled with both privilege and loss. His father's death in World War I devastated his mother and created a “hero-father” image that would haunt both Christopher and his unstable brother for the rest of their lives.

He began to acknowledge his homosexuality at his English boarding school and subsequently formed a definition of “self” based on subterfuge, performance, and escape. With his lifelong friends W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender he emerged as one of the leading literary figures of the 1930s.

From the bars, nightclubs, and slums of Weimar Germany—where Isherwood created *The Berlin Stories* and introduced the world to Sally Bowles—to homosexual communes in Greece and Portugal, to the film studios of London (the subject of his novel *Prater Violet*) and Hollywood, his destinations became arenas for his reinventions. Isherwood's later years as an unofficial spiritual and sexual sage in Southern California only added to the abiding mystery of his life.

In addition to using Isherwood's correspondence, unpublished diaries, and other previously unavailable sources in painting this clear and definitive portrait, Peter Parker has also unearthed the author's telling early works, including parodies, school memoirs, and even part of a crucial lost novel.

Painstakingly researched and brilliantly written, *Isherwood: A Life* captures the fugitive reality of a man who has become a favorite artist and important symbol of an entire era in our life of letters. Published in the centennial of his birth, it will be read as long as Isherwood himself is.

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