

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

b. August 26, 1904

d. January 4, 1986

TRAILBLAZING WRITER

“One should never write down or up to people, but out of yourself.”

His best-known works include the novel that inspired “Cabaret.”

Christopher Isherwood is an Anglo-American writer who was among the first to bring gay themes to mainstream literary audiences. Much of his work is semi-autobiographical, including “Goodbye to Berlin,” the novel that inspired the Tony Award-winning musical and Academy Award-winning film “Cabaret.”

Isherwood was born in 1904 near Manchester, England. From an early age, he formed friendships with people from all walks of life, some of whom later became his creative collaborators. In 1924, after submitting joke answers on his second-year exams, Isherwood was asked to leave Cambridge University. Embracing his newfound freedom, he took part-time jobs as the secretary of a string quartet and as a private tutor. He worked on his first novels and briefly attended medical school.

In 1929 Isherwood visited his friend, the poet W.H. Auden, in Berlin. The trip changed his life, bringing him “face to face with his tribe” and beginning his liberation as a gay man. Isherwood moved to Berlin later that year. His experiences and friendships there provided material for his novels “Mr. Norris Changes Trains” and “Goodbye to Berlin.” The latter, which depicts Germany’s pre-Nazi decadence, became Isherwood’s most famous work and cemented his legacy. The book was adapted into the play “I Am a Camera” and the musical “Cabaret,” which earned eight Tony Awards. The film version of “Cabaret,” starring Liza Minnelli, won eight Academy Awards.

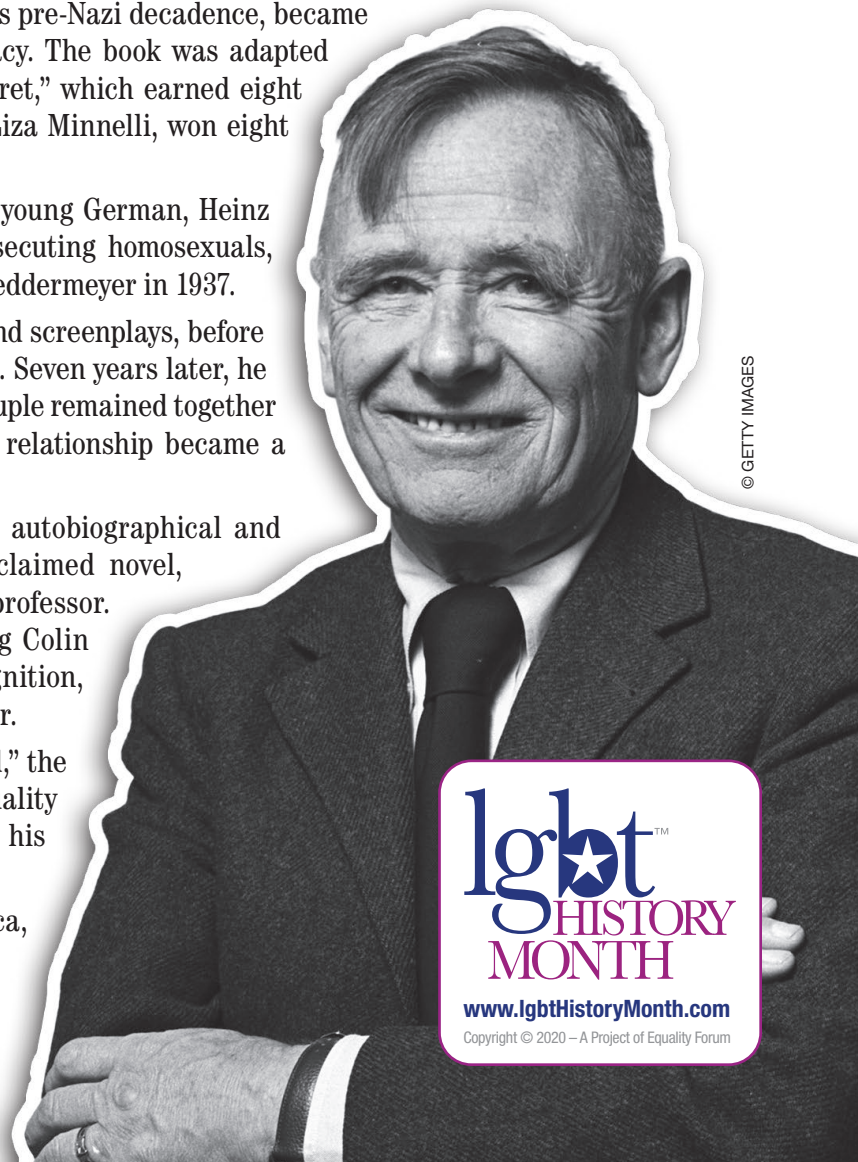
In Berlin, Isherwood also began a relationship with a young German, Heinz Neddermeyer. The pair fled the Nazis, who were persecuting homosexuals, and moved across Europe until the Gestapo arrested Neddermeyer in 1937.

Isherwood returned to London, where he wrote plays and screenplays, before settling in Hollywood. He became a U.S. citizen in 1946. Seven years later, he fell in love with a college student, Don Bachardy. The couple remained together for more than 30 years, until Isherwood’s death. The relationship became a model for many gay men.

In his later years, Isherwood turned increasingly to autobiographical and gay themes. In 1964 he published the critically acclaimed novel, “A Single Man,” about a gay middle-aged English professor. A film adaptation, directed by Tom Ford and starring Colin Firth, premiered in 2009. It earned international recognition, including an Academy Award nomination for best actor.

In Isherwood’s 1976 memoir, “Christopher and His Kind,” the author renounced his reticence to admit his homosexuality in his earlier work. The memoir speaks candidly about his life in Berlin as a young gay man.

Isherwood died of prostate cancer in Santa Monica, California. He was 81.



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