

Goodbye to Berlin



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

Christopher Isherwood was born in 1904 in the United Kingdom. His father, a member of the military, was killed in World War I. His mother was a member of the wealthy Greene family. After finishing school, Christopher attended Cambridge University to study history. However, he was asked to leave after writing only jokes on his exams. In 1925, Christopher reconnected with a prep school friend, the famous author W.H. Auden. The two become close friends. Isherwood published his first novel, *All the Conspirators*, in 1928. After a failed stint in medical school, Isherwood visited Auden in Berlin in 1929. There, he enjoyed the liberal attitudes toward homosexuality (Isherwood himself was gay). Isherwood eventually moved to Berlin in 1930, and there he published his second novel, *The Memorial*, and wrote the stories that make up *Goodbye to Berlin*. While in Berlin, Isherwood began a relationship with the 17-year-old Heinz Neddermayer. Together, they fled Nazi Germany and traveled around looking for a new citizenship for Neddermayer. Neddermayer was called back to Germany, arrested, and sentenced to serve time in a labor camp. During that period, Isherwood lived in Luxembourg and collaborated with Auden on writing. In 1939, Isherwood emigrated to the United States. He became an American citizen in 1946. In 1953, 48-year-old Isherwood met 18-year-old Don Bachardy. They stayed together until Isherwood's death in 1986. Over the course of his life, Isherwood wrote and collaborated on over 40 books, plays, and films.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Goodbye to Berlin depicts Berlin from 1930–1933, during the fall of the Weimer Republic and rise of Adolf Hitler's fascist Nazi government. Throughout the novel, Isherwood recounts rising extremism and factionalism as Berliners deal with the hyperinflation Germany experienced following World War I. This inflation resulted from the war debt that Germany owed, as well as the reparations that the Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to pay. Because of this extreme inflation, much of the German population endured poverty. This poverty led to extremism for many Germans, fueling the popularity of Hitler's Nazi party which promised to restore Germany to its former economic glory. By the end of the novel, Isherwood witnesses the Nazi's strict policies against Jews and Communists, setting the stage for the disaster of the Holocaust and World War II.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While *Goodbye to Berlin* is a fictionalized account of Isherwood's time in Germany, Isherwood's 1976 memoir *Christopher and His Kind* expounds on his life during that period of time, detailing more of his personal life as a gay man in Berlin. Isherwood also collaborated with W.H. Auden on a series of three plays, the first of which is *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. For readers interested in a history of the Weimar Republic that Isherwood depicts, *The Weimer Republic: Promise and Tragedy* by Eric Weitz offers a comprehensive view of the period. In addition, Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is one of the most famous novels to emerge from Weimer-era Berlin and is also a key work of literary modernism.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Goodbye to Berlin
- **When Written:** 1930–1933
- **Where Written:** Berlin, Germany
- **When Published:** 1939
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Semi-autobiographical Novel
- **Setting:** Berlin, Germany and Ruegen Island, Germany
- **Climax:** Hitler is elected as chancellor of Germany.
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

From Page to Stage. The famous musical *Cabaret*, later made into a movie, is loosely based on the depiction of Weimer-era nightlife culture and rising antisemitism portrayed in *Goodbye to Berlin*.

Iconic Characters. Because of the popularity of the character of Sally Bowles, many critics believe that her character inspired Truman Capote's iconic character of Holly Golightly in [Breakfast at Tiffany's](#). In fact, Capote and Isherwood were literary friends.



PLOT SUMMARY

Goodbye to Berlin consists of interconnected stories and novellas loosely based on the time author Christopher Isherwood spent in Germany between 1930 and 1933, during Hitler's rise to power.

In Autumn 1930, as Christopher, an English expat, observes the world of Berlin around him. He sees connections all around and laments his own loneliness. In Berlin, Christopher lives at a boarding house run by FrI. Schroeder. She tells Christopher

stories of her life before the Inflation, when she had money and did not have to run boardinghouse. Also living in the house are Bobby, a bartender, Frl. Kost, a prostitute, and Frl. Mayr, a middle-aged professional yodeler and Nazi. They all live together in relative peace until Frl. Kost claims that someone stole money from her room and Frl. Schroeder finds out that Frl. Kost and Bobby have been having an affair.

One day in October of 1930, Christopher's friend Fritz Wendel introduces him to Sally Bowles, an English 19-year-old aspiring actress. Christopher and Sally become fast friends, agreeing that there is nothing romantic or sexual between the two of them. They bond over their lack of funds and their dreams of being wealthy artists, as Christopher dreams of being a successful novelist.

Sally moves into Frl. Schroeder's boardinghouse, and she and Christopher continue to spend time together, often going out. Sally seeks out wealthy men to fund her lifestyle and career, and she and Christopher often spend the evening in clubs. Sally falls in love with a pianist named Klaus Linke, who eventually leaves her to take a job in England.

One evening after Klaus breaks up with Sally, Sally and Christopher meet a wealthy man named Clive. They quickly begin spending almost every day together. Clive pays for lavish outings and gifts for Christopher and Sally, and Sally hopes that Clive will help bankroll her acting career. One day, Clive begins to make plans for the three of them to travel the world together. However, the next day, Sally and Christopher arrive at his hotel to find that he has left for good, leaving them 300 marks.

The next morning, Sally finds out that she is always pregnant. She uses Clive's money to pay for an abortion. After this chaos, Christopher takes a trip to Ruegen Island for a few months. When he returns, he visits Sally to find that the energy between them has changed. They fight and agree that they have outgrown each other.

A couple weeks later, a man (George P. Sandars/Paul Rakowski) visits Christopher asking him for money. When the man acts if he knows any actresses, Christopher sends him to Sally. Sally calls Christopher a few days later asking for his help: the man has scammed her out of hundreds of marks. They go to the police together. Eventually, the police find an arrest the man, who turns out to be a 16-year-old boy. Sally and Christopher make up, but never see each other again. Christopher dedicates the chapter to her, urging her to send him a **postcard**.

Christopher recounts his time on Ruegen Island after Sally's abortion. He stays in a boarding house where he meets Otto Nowak and Peter Wilkinson. Peter, who is a neurotic Englishman, has a transactional relationship with the teenage Otto. In exchange for money, Otto spends his time with Peter and gives him advice. Peter, Otto, and Christopher spend almost all their time together. Sometimes, they go over to the

more crowded beach. Otto and Peter often fight because Otto wants to stay out late and dance with girls despite Peter's wishes. One day, Otto takes some of Peter's clothes and money and leaves for Berlin. Peter and Christopher say goodbye the next day, never to see each other again.

When Christopher returns to Berlin from Ruegen Island, he begins to spend time with the Nowak family. When he looks for a new apartment, Otto and his mother, Frau Nowak, offer to let him stay with them. Christopher moves in with the Nowaks, sharing their two-room attic apartment. He witnesses the family fight with one another. Otto continues to go out dancing every night.

Frau Nowak consults doctors about her worsening health. In order to get away from the chaos of the Nowak household, Christopher spends his evenings at the Alexander Casino. The doctors eventually prescribe Frau Nowak time at a sanatorium. Before she goes, she and Otto get into such a bad fight that Otto slashes his wrist, though he survives.

After Frau Nowak goes to the sanatorium, Christopher moves out. One weekend, he accompanies Otto to visit his mother. They spend the day with Frau Nowak and her two roommates. Otto and Christopher each kiss one of the roommates, and Christopher remarks that his time in the sanatorium feels like a dream.

Next Christopher tells the story of his friendship with the Landauer family. He writes to Frau Landauer, with whom he has a mutual friend, after witnessing a Nazi demonstration in the fall of 1930. After that, he begins a friendship with the Landauer family, who are a wealthy Jewish family. Specifically, he spends time with the 18-year-old Natalia Landauer. However, that friendship fades after he introduces her to Sally Bowles, who makes an antisemitic comment and shocks Natalia with her open discussion of her sexual exploits. Natalia moves to Paris and gets married.

Christopher also befriends Natalia's cousin, Bernhard Landauer. They embark on a strange friendship, in which the usually reclusive Bernhard subjects Christopher to interpersonal "experiments" to see if he is able to open up to anybody. Their friendship fades away. After Christopher leaves Berlin for good, he hears two men in a coffee shop in Prague mention that Bernhard has been murdered by the Nazis.

In the final chapter of the novel, Christopher recounts his final days in Berlin. He chronicles the Nazi party's strict changes to the country's laws and the violent acts of antisemitism and anticommunism. He befriends a group of young communists who resist the Nazi government. Before he leaves Berlin, Christopher and Fritz Wendel go on a "farewell tour" of Berlin's dive bars, which have lost their luster. Christopher concludes the novel by saying he cannot believe it all really happened.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Christopher Isherwood – Christopher is the semi-autobiographical main character and narrator of *Goodbye to Berlin*. In the novel, he is a young writer who hopes to be successful and famous. Much of the novel is comprised of his observations and musings about the world around him. He does not have any sexual or romantic connections in the novel. However, as he is an autobiographical insert of the author of the same name, it is fair to assume that he, like the author, is gay. Christopher tells the story of pre-World War II Berlin, narrating the declining socioeconomic conditions and relating stories of people he meets. One of these significant people is Sally Bowles. His complex friendship with her makes up much of the novel. Christopher is largely conflict-averse, preferring to act as a passive observer. However, he does engage in some conflict within his friendships, including his fight with Sally. By the end of the novel, Christopher has created a time capsule of the lead-up to World War II and the Holocaust. He ends the novel saying that, although he witnessed everything he has described in the novel, he sometimes cannot believe that it really happened.

Sally Bowles – Christopher’s relationship with Sally Bowles is one of the central relationships in *Goodbye to Berlin*. Sally is based on the real-life cabaret singer Jean Ross, whom the real-life Isherwood befriended during his time living in Berlin. When Christopher meets Sally, she is a 19-year-old aspiring actress. She, like Christopher, is from England. During her time in Berlin, Sally performs at clubs and seeks out wealthy and interesting lovers. She and Christopher often talk about their dreams about being rich and famous artists. Sally falls in love with a pianist, Klaus Linke, who eventually leaves her to take a job in England. However, Sally realizes that she is pregnant with his child, and she has an abortion, which was considered taboo in 1930s German society. Christopher pretends to be the father of the baby in order to take some of the heat off of her. Though Sally and Christopher lose touch, Christopher’s stories about her are a tribute to the power and influence of their friendship.

Frl. Schroeder – Frl. Schroeder is the owner of the boarding house where Christopher and, later, Sally live in Berlin. She was formerly a wealthy woman, but the economic inflation that Germany experienced after World War I forced her to begin taking boarders in her apartment. This fact of her character represents a larger truth about 1930s Berlin: the events of World War I greatly affected many the financial situations of many Berliners. Frl. Schroeder also takes a great interest in the personal lives of her boarders, encouraging Christopher and Sally to marry one another.

Fritz Wendel – Fritz Wendel is Christopher’s friend who

introduces him to Sally Bowles. Fritz, Christopher, and Sally often go out to dive bars together. Before Christopher leaves Berlin for the final time, he and Fritz go on a “farewell tour” of sorts of the dives of Berlin, which have deteriorated since Christopher first arrived in Berlin.

Peter Wilkinson – Peter is Christopher’s fellow boarder during his time on Ruegen Island. He is an anxious man with almost no family or friends. He begins a relationship on Ruegen Island with the teenaged Otto Nowak. In exchange for Otto’s time and love, Peter gives him money. After their time on Ruegen Island, Christopher and Peter never see each other again.

Otto Nowak – Otto is Christopher’s fellow boarder on Ruegen Island. Otto has a transactional relationship with Peter, but he also has many other admirers. He is a teenaged boy when Christopher meets him. He loves to go out dancing and meet girls. After their time on Ruegen Island, Christopher briefly boards with Otto’s family. In their two-room apartment, Christopher witnesses the family’s frequent fights.

Natalia Landauer – Natalia Landauer is the 18-year-old daughter of the wealthy Jewish Landauer family. She and Christopher strike up a friendship, often attending artistic events together and talking. After Christopher introduces Natalia to Sally, who makes antisemitic comments and generally inappropriate conversation, their friendship fades. She moves to Paris, where she studies art and marries a doctor.

Bernhard Landauer – Bernhard Landauer is Natalia’s cousin. He is an eccentric man who runs the day-to-day operations of the Landauer department store. He and Christopher become friends, and Bernhard opens up to Christopher about his difficult childhood, though he later tells Christopher that he did this as an experiment to see whether he is able to open up to anyone. After Christopher leaves Berlin for the last time, he hears the news that Bernhard has died, most likely murdered by the Nazis.

Werner – Werner is a young communist whom Christopher befriends at the communist dive bars of Berlin. Werner is committed to communist cause and often demonstrates publicly. After he gets into a physical fight with a police officer and most likely receiving years of prison time, Werner becomes a hero among his communist circles.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Frl. Mayr – Frl. Mayr is one of Frl. Schroeder’s boarders. She is a professional yodeler and a Nazi who often makes antisemitic comments.

Bobby – Bobby is one of Frl. Schroeder’s boarders. He is a bartender at the Troika club and introduces Christopher to the nightlife culture of Berlin.

Klaus Linke – Sally Bowles falls in love with German pianist Klaus Linke. He eventually leaves her to take a job scoring films

in England. However, Sally later finds out that she is pregnant with his child and proceeds to have an abortion without telling him.

Frl. Kost – Frl. Kost is one of the boarders at Frl. Schroeder’s boarding house. She is a young woman who works as a prostitute and has some wealthy clients. She also has an affair with Bobby. Frl. Kost eventually falls out with Frl. Schroeder and leaves the boarding house.

Clive – Clive is a wealthy man whom Christopher and Sally befriend. He takes them on outings and buys them gifts. After a while, he begins to plan a round-the-world trip for them all, but he ends up leaving Berlin without telling Christopher and Sally.

George P. Sandars/Paul Rakowski – George/Paul is the con man who attempted to steal money from Christopher (to whom he introduced himself as George) and later successfully steals money from Sally (to whom he introduced himself as Paul). When the police catch him, Sally and Christopher learn that he is actually a 16-year-old boy.

Frau Nowak – Frau Nowak is Otto’s mother. She often fights with Otto and the rest of her family members due to how hard she works as a homemaker. She is ill with a bad cough and goes to spend time at a sanatorium, where Otto and Christopher visit her.

Herr Nowak – Herr Nowak is Otto’s father. He is a working-class German man who tells Christopher stories of his time fighting in World War I.

Lothar Nowak – Lothar Nowak is Otto’s brother. He is older and studying to be an engineer. Otto’s parents often compare Otto to Lothar, whom they consider more industrious. He is also a member of the Nazi party and often goes to meetings while Christopher lives with the Nowak family.

Grete Nowak – Grete Nowak is Otto’s 12-year-old sister.

Pieps – Pieps is a teenage boy whom Christopher befriends during his nights at the Alexander Casino. Pieps, who ran away from his abusive father, has traveled the world by himself and now resides in Berlin with his friends Gerhardt and Kurt.

Gerhardt and Kurt – Gerhardt and Kurt are Pieps’s friends. They spend their time at the Alexander Casino and shoplift to make a living.

Erna – Erna is one of Frau Nowak’s roommates at the sanatorium. During Christopher and Otto’s visit to the sanatorium, Christopher kisses Erna in a dreamlike state. It is the only instance of Christopher having a romantic or sexual contact in the novel.

Erika – Erika is Frau Nowak’s 18-year-old roommate at the sanatorium. During Christopher and Otto’s visit, Otto kisses Erika in a dreamlike state.

Frau Landauer – Frau Landauer is Natalia Landauer’s mother. After a mutual friend connects them, she welcomes

Christopher to lunch with her family.

Herr Landauer – Herr Landauer is Natalia’s father. He is a successful Jewish businessman. Among other businesses, he owns the Landauer department store. Christopher is struck by Herr Landauer’s good-natured presence, kindness, and intelligence.

Rudi – Rudi is a young man whom Christopher befriends in the communist dive bars of Berlin. Rudi is a member of a communist pathfinder group (similar to scouts), led by Uncle Peter. Christopher visits the clubhouse of the group and finds its reverent and “erotic” nature disturbing.

Uncle Peter – Uncle Peter is the leader of Rudi’s cult-like, boys-only pathfinder group. The group’s clubhouse and cult-like, erotic nature disturbs Christopher.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



FRIENDSHIP

The intensity of the friendship between Christopher Isherwood and Sally Bowles in *Goodbye to Berlin* illustrates the idea that friendships can be just as (if not more) complicated and impactful than romantic relationships. In fact, friendships are often the defining relationships in one’s life. As Christopher navigates Berlin, he searches for social connections. When he meets Sally Bowles, the two immediately like each other and begin to spend all their time together, often making plans for their illustrious futures as artists. In a sense, they fall in love with each other, though neither wants to be together romantically. Significantly, Christopher lacks any clear romantic or sexual connections in the novel. In the absence of these connections, Sally’s massive presence in the novel demonstrates the profound impact that she has on Christopher’s life and art. The intensity of their friendship causes Christopher to experience a wide range of emotions throughout: joy, love, anger, anxiety, and even jealousy. This jealousy ends up causing the end of their friendship: after Sally asks another writer friend to do a writing assignment for her instead of Christopher, Christopher’s jealousy causes the two of them to have a fight. Acknowledging that they have grown out of each other, Sally and Christopher consciously “break up,” cementing their friendship’s parallels with a romantic relationship. Still, Christopher dedicates the story to her as a “tribute” to their friendship, and he urges her to write him a **postcard**.



STORYTELLING

The many representations of storytelling in *Goodbye to Berlin* highlight the ways that people use storytelling to define and understand themselves.

Significantly, the novel itself is a fictionalized representation of Christopher Isherwood's time living in Berlin in the 1930s. This fact highlights the importance of storytelling as a means of record-keeping and art-making. In addition, throughout the novel, characters often lie or bend the truth to make themselves appear a certain way. For example, before Christopher first meets Sally Bowles, their mutual friend Fritz Wendel tells him that Sally's mother is French. When Christopher asks her about this, she claims that Fritz must be confused. However, later on, she admits to Christopher that she had told Fritz this fact, even though both of her parents are English. Presumably, Sally wanted to appear more interesting or cultured to Fritz. Christopher vows to keep her secret, showing that he understands why she lied.

Later in the novel, when Christopher lives with the Nowak family, the reader sees another instance when a character warps the truth. When Christopher asks Otto Nowak if he is still in touch with Peter Wilkinson, Otto says that Peter hurt him very much by leaving him. However, as Christopher (and the reader) knows from earlier events, Otto is the one who left Peter. Otto's lie, which he possibly believes himself, is another example of a character's tendency to stretch the truth in order to appear a certain way. In this case, Otto absolves himself from being the villain of his relationship with Peter by effectively rewriting the events of their farewell. Both Otto and Sally bend the truth to conform to a certain narrative and shape the way others see them. In this way, then, *Goodbye to Berlin* highlights the role that storytelling plays in understanding others, oneself, and the world in which one exists.



ANTISEMITISM IN GERMANY

Christopher Isherwood's chronicles of the preexisting and rising antisemitism in Germany in the 1930s presents an example of the ways that

political and social movements develop over time. The events of the novel begin in 1930, around the time that Christopher arrives to Berlin. By the time of the novel's publication in 1939, the antisemitic actions and military actions of Hitler's Nazi party would have progressed much further than in the time of the novel's writing. As a result, any reader of *Goodbye to Berlin* will view the instances of antisemitism in the novel as a grim forewarning of the events to come. Isherwood offers many examples of the growing Nazi party's presence in society—for example, while vacationing on Ruegen Island, he sees a small child carrying a Nazi flag and singing a nationalist song. Furthermore, the struggle for power between the communist party and the Nazi party appears many times throughout the novel.

Many of the non-Jewish characters in the novel display varying degrees of antisemitism. For example, Frl. Mayr, one of Frl. Schroeder's boarders, often makes antisemitic comments. Frau Nowak, on the other hand, complains about the neighborhood's Jewish tailor but insists that none of the non-Jewish Germans would ever turn on him, though her son is a member of a Nazi youth group. Later, Christopher relates his friendship with the Landauers, a wealthy Jewish family with a prominent department store. The 18-year-old Natalia Landauer expresses her feeling that, although her family is wealthy, she understands that the antisemitism present in German politics puts this wealth at risk. This lack of security demonstrates the extent to which antisemitism pervaded German society. In a tragic turn, after he leaves Berlin, Christopher hears that his friend Bernhard Landauer (Natalia's cousin) has been taken to a labor camp and killed. This escalation demonstrates the result of the building antisemitism that Isherwood relates in the novel, revealing the devastating possibilities when prejudice meets political power.



MONEY AS SECURITY

The attitude of the characters in *Goodbye to Berlin* toward money emphasizes the insecure nature of the economy in 1930s Germany and shows the

consequences that this insecurity had on the German political landscape. These consequences manifest in the behavior of individual characters in the book, who gravitate towards political extremism as a result of this instability. From the beginning of the novel, the German characters often reference the Inflation that followed World War I in Germany. After the war, the Treaty of Versailles bound Germany to pay significant reparations to other countries. This fact combined with Germany's significant war debt meant that the German currency greatly inflated and much of the country was struck by poverty. For example, Frl. Schroeder, who used to be financially comfortable, is now forced to host boarders like Christopher. Additionally, one of Christopher's students tells him a story of when his mother would allow a butcher to pinch and slap her in order to get meat for her children. The novel shows how widespread instability leads to political extremism. In fact, the Nazi party came to power by promising to restore Germany to its former, pre-War economic glory. Lothar Nowak, for example, is drawn from his family's impoverished life to join a Nazi group. Whether it is fascist or communist, politics in the novel are extreme. This extremity spurred by poverty is mirrored on a personal level in the Nowak household. Their poor living conditions, a result of their poverty, not only make Frau Nowak physically ill but also cause the family to constantly fight. As the five of them (six, including Christopher) are confined to two rooms, they go mad living in such close proximity to one another.



DECADENCE

Christopher Isherwood's semi-autobiographical novel *Goodbye to Berlin* highlights the decadent culture of Berlin's nightlife in the late 1920s and early 1930s, juxtaposing the culture of creativity, artistry, and relaxed social norms that characterized Germany's urban scene in the years before Hitler's rise to power. During the early part of his time in Berlin, Christopher and his friends constantly go out to nightclubs, drinking and nights partying later into the night. Christopher and Sally spend their days talking about art and seeking ways to maximize this pleasure-filled life by finding wealthy patrons and, in Sally's case, lovers. In this way, they reject a conventional life of domesticity. This party culture categorized Berlin during the Weimar Republic, when Germans embraced international Jazz Age influences and relaxed social policies ushered in by the new Republic regime.

Though Christopher himself enjoys this culture, the novel takes a critical look at some of the characters' political indifference toward the rise of fascism. Eventually, after the economic instability within the era caused massive frustration and devastation for Germans, the fascism of the Nazi party came to replace the relaxed social policies of the Weimar Republic. After Hitler takes over Germany, when Christopher and his friend Fritz Wendel take a farewell tour of the Berlin dives where they spent their nights, they find the nightlife culture to be a shell of its former grandeur. The Berlin that drew artists to create has died, squashed by the antisemitic, homophobic fascism that promised to restore Germany to its former economic glory. In this way, the novel mourns the loss of a vibrant and indulgent culture to fascism. At the same time, *Goodbye to Berlin* serves as a cautionary tale, subtly critiquing how Berlin's pre-war decadence causes many of the novel's party-going, free-spirited characters to be politically indifferent. In retrospect, then, the novel seems to suggest that Berlin's decadent pre-war culture enabled many to deny or downplay the looming threat that fascism posed to their society and to the world at large.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



POSTCARDS

In the novel, postcards symbolize the human willingness to sustain connections. Christopher often appears writing letters during the novel, demonstrating his penchant for maintaining contact with loved ones through correspondence. During Christopher's time in Berlin, he and many of the people he meets live a transient lifestyle. As a result, he frequently loses contact with even his closest

connections. One of these is Sally Bowles. However, though they lose touch by the end of the novel, in the final line of Isherwood's "Sally Bowles" chapter, he urges her to write him a postcard. This urging cements the importance for Christopher of staying in touch, even through an effort as casual and unsubstantial as a postcard.



FLAGS

Flags symbolize the rampant factionalism and rising extremism that Christopher witnesses in Berlin during the early 1930s. Throughout the novel, Christopher recounts the rise of Nazism in public life. During his time on Ruegen Island, for instance, he walks on the crowded beach to see that beachgoers have marked their chairs with the flags of their city or political affiliation (including the Nazi flag). The need of these beachgoers to show their alliances to others, whether or not they are Nazi party members, speaks to the factionalism present in pre-World War II Germany, which divided the public and fueled rising extremism that led to the war.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the New Directions edition of *Goodbye to Berlin* published in 2012.

Chapter 1: A Berlin Diary, Autumn 1930 Quotes

🗨️ I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of *Goodbye to Berlin*, the autobiographical narrator of the novel Christopher Isherwood establishes himself as a writer living in and observing Berlin during the early 1930s. In this quote, Christopher identifies himself with a camera, recording the social, cultural, and political happenings of Germany during one of the most (if not the most) pivotal time in the country's history. The fact that he is "recording, not thinking" provides insight into Christopher's understanding

of his own role as an artist at the time: rather than take an active role in history, Christopher has decided that it is his job as a writer to provide a faithful recording of the lives of others. Indeed, throughout the novel Christopher takes a largely passive role. Though he interacts with people of many political creeds, he rarely takes a stance himself or participates in any political action.

Christopher's reference to the average, nameless people performing quotidian actions like shaving and washing one's hair poses the idea that history occurs through the daily actions of individuals, however casual.

☝ But soon a call is sure to sound, so piercing, so insistent, so despairingly human, that at last I have to get up and peep through the slats of the Venetian blind to make quite sure that it is not—as I know very well it could not possibly be—for me.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

As Christopher observes the movements of Berlin during the day, he also observes those of the night. He watches men come out, whistling for their girlfriends. As he hears these calls, Christopher knows that they are not for him: in fact, at no point in the novel does he have any romantic or sexual connections. His certainty that the calls could not be for him establishes his loneliness as a character. As the character of Christopher is an autobiographical insert of the author, who was openly gay and indeed loved Weimar-era Berlin because of the access to gay life, it is safe to assume that the character is gay. However, the author does not explore this identity in the novel beyond his lack of interest in women. What is more, his strong platonic friendships with women. Though the real-life Christopher Isherwood did enjoy lovers and queer spaces during his time in Berlin, this expression of loneliness highlights the idea that to live outside of the heterosexual paradigm can be lonely.

Chapter 2: Sally Bowles Quotes

☝ Sally's German was not merely incorrect; it was all her own. She pronounced every word in a mincing, specifically "foreign" manner. You could tell that she was speaking a foreign language from her expression alone.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Sally Bowles

Related Themes:   



Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Sally Bowles is arguably the most important character in the novel aside from Christopher. Mutual friend Fritz Wendel introduces Christopher to Sally one day, and she and Christopher are inseparable from then on. Sally, like Christopher, is an English expat in Berlin pursuing her art. Throughout the novel, she seeks lovers with money to help advance her career as an actress. To do this successfully, she believes she must construct a self. As a result of this belief, though it is unspoken, Sally does things her own way: she sings distinctly and speaks German in her own way. Sally's singularity is one of the reasons that Christopher is so taken with her, and he ultimately dedicates this chapter to her. Furthermore, Sally's distinct way of speaking German reinforces her status as an expat: though she enjoys the nightlife culture of Berlin, she has no real stake in the political realities of Germany. Sally will go wherever her desires and wherever her career take her.

☝ "Somehow, when people have cash, you feel differently about them—I don't know why."

Related Characters: Sally Bowles (speaker), Christopher Isherwood, Fritz Wendel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis


After Fritz Wendel introduces Sally Bowles to Christopher, she invites Christopher to her apartment for tea. There, the two hit it off and learn about one another. Christopher, hearing of Sally's destitute financial situation, offers to help her with money if she ever needs it and she tells him that she won't take money from a friend, and furthermore that she knows that Christopher also has no money. When Christopher asks why she takes money from Fritz if he is her friend, Sally tells him that she thinks of Fritz differently because he has money.

The differences between Sally's friendship with Fritz and her friendship with Christopher, with whom she shares a

struggle to make ends meet, highlight the financial tensions that existed in Weimar-era Berlin. In a time when the financial realities of Germany forced many people into poverty, wealthy people lived a completely different life and held much more social and political power than those without wealth. Because Sally and Christopher share this financial struggle, they can develop their friendship on an even playing field of sorts.

“I’m awfully glad. I’ve wanted you to like me ever since we first met. But I’m glad you’re not in love with me, because, somehow, I couldn’t possibly be in love with you—so, if you had been, everything would have been spoilt.”

Related Characters: Sally Bowles (speaker), Christopher Isherwood

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

In the absence of any romantic or sexual connections for Christopher, his friendship with Sally is one of the central relationships in *Goodbye to Berlin*. During the early phases of their friendship, Sally and Christopher establish the fact that they do not have romantic feelings for one another. In this quote, Sally makes the point that their lack of romantic or sexual potential will allow for a deep friendship. This friendship is unique for Sally, who prides herself on having many lovers and is often searching for a man to support her financially, emotionally, and professionally. She and Christopher also share their artistic ambitions, often spending their days walking around and talking about their futures. Later in the novel, she reveals a deep distrust in men, including Christopher—however, their friendship allows them to lean on each other as they navigate the ups and downs of being a young artist in Weimar-era Berlin.

We went to the little cinema in Bülowstrasse, where they were showing a film about a girl who sacrificed her stage career for the sake of a Great Love, Home, and Children. We laughed so much that we had to leave before the end.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Sally Bowles, Klaus Linke

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

On one of Sally and Christopher’s nights out, Sally and her accompanying pianist Klaus fall in love. After he takes a job in England and ends their relationship, Sally is devastated. She and Christopher go to the cinema in an attempt to cheer her up. Their laughter at the sacrifice that the woman in the movie makes confirms their choice to live an unconventional lifestyle, separate from the heterosexual paradigm. This choice is one of the things that unites Sally and Christopher, as they both choose to enjoy an artistic and decadent life in Weimar Berlin rather than prioritize settling down into a more conventional lifestyle (although Sally does often pursue men in search of love and financial security). The capitalization of “Great Love, Home, and Children” poses those three things as abstract concepts, implying that the satisfaction they can provide is a false hope. Christopher and Sally certainly believe this, and Sally leaves feeling better about the loss of Klaus.

[Clive] had about him that sad, American air of vagueness which is always attractive; doubly attractive in one who possessed so much money. He was vague, wistful, a bit lost: dimly anxious to have a good time and uncertain how to set about getting it. He seemed never to be quite sure whether he was really enjoying himself, whether what we were doing was really fun.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Sally Bowles, Clive

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

On one of Sally and Christopher’s wild nights through Berlin’s club scene, they meet a wealthy man named Clive. The three become inseparable, and Clive begins bankrolling a more lavish lifestyle for Sally and Christopher. However, Christopher’s observation that Clive never seems sure whether the group is truly *having* a good time casts their newfound decadence in an interesting light: while Sally and Christopher dream of having complete financial abundance and stability, seeking the pleasure-filled life, Clive’s ennui suggests that that decadence is somewhat empty. Rather

than feed into the search for unlimited pleasure, Clive's wealth only seems to keep him from enjoying himself. Clive's situation poses the potential pitfalls of Weimar-era Berlin's decadent party scene: that a person *can* have too much fun. Christopher and Sally, by contrast, are not used to the power of Clive's wealth and wish to keep their access to it at all costs.

☞ We had nothing to do with those Germans down there, marching, or with the dead man in the coffin, or with the words on the banners. In a few days, I thought, we shall have forfeited all kinship with ninety-nine per cent of the population of the world, with the men and women who earn their living, who insure their lives, who are anxious about the future of their children. Perhaps in the Middle Ages people felt like this, when they believed themselves to have sold their soul to the Devil. It was a curious, exhilarating, not unpleasant sensation: but, at the same time, I felt slightly scared. Yes, I said to myself, I've done it, now. I am lost.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Sally Bowles, Clive

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

After Christopher and Sally meet Clive, they settle into a rhythm with him of spending their days drinking and enjoying Berlin's pleasures. Clive even promises to take them all traveling, an expensive trip that would change Christopher's and Sally's life. One day, on the balcony of Clive's hotel, they notice a funeral proceeding on the street. In this quote, Christopher describes the feeling of isolation from the population of Berlin. This isolation comes from their newfound access to wealth and their plan to leave the city to travel: believing that he and Sally will no longer struggle to make ends meet, Christopher immediately feels the sense of distance from the Berliners with whom he previously struggled. Christopher's feeling of isolation (and even of affiliation with the devil) serves to remind him and the reader of the stark class differences in Berlin in the 1930s, and further of the unjust nature of these class differences.

☞ A Nazi journalist reminded his readers that tomorrow, the fourteenth of July, was a day of national rejoicing in France; and doubtless, he added, the French would rejoice with especial fervour this year, at the prospect of Germany's downfall. Going into an outfitters, I bought myself a pair of ready-made flannel trousers for twelve marks fifty—a gesture of confidence by England.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

After Christopher spends the summer on Ruegen Island, he returns to Berlin. On one of the first days that he is back, a large national bank of Germany shuts down. This event is the first of many that indicate that the sheen of Christopher's early days in Berlin has faded, as Germany plunges further into economic distress. The fact that the Nazi journalist chooses to tell his readers that France will be rejoicing at Germany's struggle demonstrates the ways that Nazism thrived on nationalism: if the people believe that other nations wish for their failure (especially given lingering tensions from the outcome of World War I, in which Germany was forced to pay reparations to France and other Allied countries), then it stands to reason that they will be more drawn to a political ideology that promises to restore the political and economic power of Germany. Christopher's gesture of faith on the part of England (buying the trousers, and thus contributing to the German economy) reminds the reader of his status as a British expat, which gives him a different political perspective from the average German.

☞ "I don't know what it is... You seem to have changed, somehow..."

"How have I changed?"

"It's difficult to explain... You don't seem to have any energy or want to get anywhere. You're so diletante. It annoys me."

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood , Sally Bowles (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 64


Explanation and Analysis

After Christopher learns of the national bank shut down, he visits Sally at her new apartment. The two have not seen or spoken to each other for many months, and Christopher's visit shows a massive shift in their relationship. Their time together is awkward, with Sally spending time talking on the phone and telling Christopher how much she respects her new friends who value making money. Christopher notices a shift in Sally's energy toward him, and when he asks her about it, she identifies a lack of ambition in him. Her complaint about Christopher's "dilletante" nature is very pointed, as she and Christopher used to spend their days meandering together, with no real purpose other than the abstract pursuit of art and decadence. Sally's change in attitude toward this tendency cements the fact that the two have grown apart, and it hints at the dissolution of the decadent nightlife culture that Sally and Christopher once bonded over.

Indeed, I was so absurdly upset that I began to wonder whether I hadn't all this time, in my own particular way, been in love with Sally myself.

But no, it wasn't love ether—it was worse. It was the cheapest, most childish kind of wounded vanity.... The awful sexual flair women have for taking the stuffing out of a man!

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Sally Bowles

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 65


Explanation and Analysis

At Sally and Christopher's reunion, they do not get along and agree that they have grown apart. As Christopher leaves, he feels extremely angry. The intensity of his feelings of anger and hurt speak to the power of their friendship to hold a massively important space in Christopher's life. His passing thought that perhaps he could have been in love with Sally, and that that would explain the intensity of his feelings, cements the fact that Christopher's friendship with Sally takes on the role of a romantic relationship in the novel. This conflict of theirs is essentially a break-up. Christopher even invokes gender, saying that Sally (as a woman) enjoyed insulting Christopher because he is a man. The invocation of this heterosexual dynamic, although Sally and Christopher are not actually in a heterosexual relationship, further serves to show the narrative similarities between their friendship and a romantic

relationship.

Seen thus, alone and off his guard, he seemed rather pathetic: he looked shabbier and far younger—a mere boy. I very nearly said: "He isn't here." But what would have been the use? They'd have got him anyway. "Yes, that's him," I told the detectives. "Over there." They nodded. I turned and hurried away down the street, feeling guilty and telling myself: I'll never help the police again.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), George P. Sandars/Paul Rakowski

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 75



Explanation and Analysis


Some time after the dissolution of Sally and Christopher's friendship, a strange man comes to Christopher trying to con him out of money. In a vindictive moment, Christopher sends the man to Sally to annoy her. However, the man ends up actually stealing from Sally. She and Christopher, in a healing moment for their friendship, go to the police together. After a week the police call Christopher to identify the man. However, although the man had committed a crime that directly harmed Christopher's friend, Christopher feels sick at the idea of helping to punish him. This feeling of guilt and vow to never help the police again indicates Christopher's solidarity with the man. Christopher, struggling to make ends meet in Berlin, understands that the man—or boy, rather—was driven to his actions by desperation. The man's actions reflect the poor economic conditions of Berlin in the 1930s and show that desperation can drive people to do illegal or irrational things.

When you read this, Sally—if you ever do—please accept it as a tribute, the sincerest I can pay, to yourself and to our friendship.

And send me another postcard.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Sally Bowles

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis


After Christopher and Sally deal with the issue of the con man together, they make up from their fight. However, soon after that, Sally leaves Berlin, and she and Christopher never see each other again. She sends Christopher a few brief postcards, but that is all. In the final sentences of this chapter, Christopher dedicates his writing to her. The sincerity of this tribute shows that, despite both Sally and Christopher's flaws, Christopher's friendship with Sally was one of the most impactful relationships of his life. She is his muse, and their adventures together inspire his writing. Continuing to meditate on the ways that their friendship takes on the role of a romantic relationship in the novel, Christopher's final line to Sally identify the chapter as a love letter of sorts. Finally, his urging of Sally to write him another postcard highlights the value that connections, however brief, have in making one feel close to their loved ones. Furthermore, those brief contacts connect a person to the outside world, reminding them of their larger community.

importance of stories in defining and understanding oneself. The simple act of having another person listen to him, even if he is paying her, validates his personhood. In his encounter with the sex worker, having someone listen to him is far more important than receiving any sexual or romantic gratification (although the novel heavily implies that Peter is gay). Peter continues to enact this strategy, constantly seeing new psychiatrists in an attempt to heal his anxieties and understand his mental condition.

☞ The other morning I saw a child of about five years old, stark naked, marching along all by himself with a swastika flag over his shoulder and singing "*Deutschland über alles*."

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis


As Ruegen Island becomes more crowded during the summer months, Christopher often notices beachgoers displaying their political beliefs through flags that they put by their chairs on the beach. Because people come from all over Germany to Ruegen Island, the beach is a microcosm of the tense and varied political landscape of Germany at the time. Many beachgoers are Nazis, an ideology that becomes more and more ubiquitous throughout Christopher's time in Germany. When Christopher sees the young child marching with a swastika flag and singing a nationalist song, he realizes how deeply engrained Nazism is becoming in the fabric of German society. Though there is no way that the child fully understands what Nazism is, the ideology's symbols and nationalist promotion tactics have seeped into his five-year-old consciousness. This image is a deeply disturbing one, as it sheds light on the ways that Nazism swept Germany's political landscape, using nationalism to fuel and justify abhorrent acts.

Chapter 3: On Ruegen Island, Summer 1931

Quotes

☞ That evening Peter walked along regent street and picked up a whore. They went back together to the girl's room, and talked for hours. He told her the whole story of his life at home, gave her ten pounds and left her without even kissing her.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Peter Wilkinson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 82



Explanation and Analysis

During his time on Ruegen Island, Christopher befriends Peter Wilkinson. Peter is an anxious Englishman with a dark past, struggling to make connections with people and handle his mental health. One night, Peter and Christopher go out drinking and Peter tells Christopher his life story. This story includes this anecdote about Peter picking up a sex worker. The fact that Peter pays the woman to talk to her about his life demonstrates his extreme loneliness. Peter's act of storytelling (within another act of Peter's storytelling) to the sex worker also highlights the

Chapter 4: The Nowaks Quotes

☞ "He's going round to his Nazis, I suppose. I often wish he'd never taken up with them at all. They put all kinds of silly ideas in his head. It makes him so restless. Since he joined them he's been a different boy altogether... Not that I understand these politics myself."

Related Characters: Frau Nowak (speaker), Christopher Isherwood, Otto Nowak, Lothar Nowak

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

After Christopher returns from Ruegen Island, he struggles more financially than he had previously. As a result, he must leave Frä. Schroeder's boarding house and live with the family of Otto Nowak, a young friend he met on Ruegen Island. Christopher gets to know the inner personalities and dynamics of the Nowak family. Otto's brother, Lothar (who is Otto's opposite in every way), is involved in a youth Nazi group. His involvement is most likely a result of the desperate economic condition of his family, in the hopes that Hitler will restore Germany to economic health. In this quote, Frau Nowak laments the choice of her son Lothar to join the Nazi party. Though she does not specify what "silly ideas" he comes home with, it is safe to assume that these ideas are extremist and, presumably, hateful. Frau Nowak's lament at the way her son has been sucked into the party shows the ways that Nazism drew in much of the youth of Germany, radicalizing a younger generation to believe that they must fight for the greatness of Germany and their own economic wellbeing through fascism.

☞ "You see, Christoph... Peter hurt me very much. I thought he was my friend. And then, suddenly, he left me—all alone..."

Related Characters: Otto Nowak (speaker), Christopher Isherwood, Peter Wilkinson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 116


Explanation and Analysis

While Christopher lives with the Nowak family, he spends a lot of time with Otto Nowak. One day, Otto shows Christopher his stash of photographs, letters, and gifts from his various male and female lovers. When Christopher asks Otto if he still corresponds with Peter, with whom Otto was romantically and financially entangled on Ruegen Island, Otto says that Peter hurt him by leaving him. However, the reality of the situation is that Otto left Peter, not the other way around. Clearly, Otto has rewritten history to make

himself into the victim of the situation. This act on Otto's part, whether it is conscious or unconscious (though it is most likely unconscious), is one of many examples in the novel of characters using storytelling to change the way that they present themselves to others, and even to themselves. By absolving himself of the act of leaving Peter, Otto can continue to believe in his own goodness.

☞ The whole neighborhood owed [the Jewish tailor] money. Yet he was not unpopular: he enjoyed the status of a public character, whom people curse without real malice. "Perhaps Lothar's right," Frau Nowak would sometimes say: "When Hitler comes, he'll show these Jews a thing or two. They won't be so cheeky then." But when I suggested that Hitler, if he got his own way, would remove the tailor altogether, then Frau Nowak would immediately change her tone: "Oh, I shouldn't like that to happen. After all, he makes very good clothes. Besides, a Jew will always let you have time if you're in difficulties. You wouldn't catch a Christian giving credit like he does... You ask the people round here, Herr Christoph: they'd never turn on the Jews."

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood, Frau Nowak (speaker), Lothar Nowak

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

While living with the Nowak family, Christopher gets to know their neighborhood, which is wracked by poverty. One day, a Jewish tailor comes to the Nowak apartment. Frau Nowak explains the neighborhood's dynamic with the tailor. Many tenants of their building owe him money. Though Frau Nowak seems to resent the tailor for holding economic power over them, she denies that Germany would ever truly want to hurt the Jewish people. She values the way that the tailor freely gives credit to his customers, helping out those in need. Frau Nowak's denial of the possible reality that Germans will turn on the Jews, even though her own son is a Nazi who advocates for the persecution of Jews, is one of many examples in the novel of Germans (and non-Germans) denying the severity of antisemitism. Like so many of the book's German (Christian) characters, Frau Nowak is unable to engage with the cognitive dissonance that her own people—and even her own son—would truly commit antisemitic atrocities.

☛ My mouth pressed against Erna's hot, dry lips. I had no particular sensation of contact: all this was part of the long, rather sinister symbolic dream which I seemed to have been dreaming throughout the day. "I'm so happy, this evening..." Erna whispered.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood , Erna (speaker), Otto Nowak, Frau Nowak

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

After Christopher leaves the Nowak household, Frau Nowak goes to a sanitarium to try to improve her poor health. One day, Otto visits Christopher and asks him to accompany him on a visit to his mother. Christopher and Otto visit the sanitarium and spend time with Frau Nowak and her roommates. Christopher feels in a strange state all day, as though he is walking around in a dream. At the end of the day, Christopher and Erna kiss. This is the only moment of the novel in which Christopher has any romantic or sexual contact with another person. The fact that he feels as though it happens within a dream further cements the nonreality of this romance. He calls the dream "sinister" and "symbolic," as it shows him the possible reality of a life that is not his: having a romantic and sexual relationship with a woman. This nonreality furthers the implication that Christopher is gay, and this is partially (if not completely) the reason why all of his important relationships in the novel are friendships.

to whom Christopher was inspired to reach out after witnessing an antisemitic demonstration. In particular, Christopher develops a friendship with the 18-year-old Natalia Landauer. During one of her conversations, she expresses her adoration of her father's success but fear that that success could go away at any time. Her fear that her family will lose their money as they did during World War I, when she was a small child, demonstrates the psychological impact that the collapse of the German economy had on individuals. Though Natalia is wealthy, she does not feel secure. Furthermore, she understands her precarious place as a Jewish woman in German society. Unlike many of the non-Jewish Germans or foreigners in the novel, who are aware of antisemitism but do not seem to understand its consequences, Natalia is keenly aware of her belonging to a marginalized group. As a result, she understands the dire consequences that she and her family might face due to Nazism.

☛ "You, Christopher, with your centuries of Anglo-Saxon freedom behind you, with your Magna Carta engraved upon your heart, cannot understand that we poor barbarians need the stiffness of a uniform to keep us upright."

Related Characters: Bernhard Landauer (speaker), Christopher Isherwood , Natalia Landauer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 159



Explanation and Analysis

After Christopher meets Natalia Landauer's cousin Bernhard Landauer, the two strike up a friendship. The friendship is somewhat strange, as Christopher notices that Bernhard rarely tells Christopher any of his true inner feelings or beliefs. When Christopher asks Bernhard what he truly believes in, Bernhard says he believes in discipline for himself. Bernhard's comparison of himself as a "barbarian" against Christopher's "Anglo-Saxon freedom" highlights the vast difference between their individual social positionings. The fact that Bernhard feels he must keep himself "upright" as a Jewish person in German society, even though he is one of the more wealthy and successful people in Berlin, brings to light the ways that prejudice (in Germany's case, antisemitism) can affect the psyche of marginalized groups. Bernhard, so plagued by his fragile positioning as a Jewish man in German society, feels that he must hide his true self and keep himself strictly disciplined

Chapter 5: The Landauers Quotes

☛ "I await always that the worst will come. I know how things are in Germany today, and suddenly it can be that my father lose all. You know, that is happened once already? Before the War, my father has had a big factory in Posen. The War comes, and my father has to go. Tomorrow, it can be here the same."

Related Characters: Natalia Landauer (speaker), Christopher Isherwood , Herr Landauer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 145



Explanation and Analysis

During Christopher's early years in Berlin, he befriends the Landauer family. The Landauers are a wealthy Jewish family,

in order to protect himself. Christopher, on the other hand, raised as a white Christian man in England, will never truly understand this feeling.

“I’m getting rather tired of what you call your experiments. Tonight wasn’t the first of them by any means. The experiments fail, and then you’re angry with me. I must say, I think that’s very unjust... But what I can’t stand is that you show your resentment by adopting this mock-humble attitude... Actually, you’re the least humble person I’ve ever met.”

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Sally Bowles, Bernhard Landauer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

One day, Bernhard calls Christopher out of the blue and invites him to the Landauers’ country house. There, he tells Christopher his life story, having previously been rather secretive about his past, his thoughts, and his feelings. After he tells Christopher about the hardships of his life, Bernhard reveals that he brought Christopher to the country house as an experiment: he wished to see whether he was able to open up to another person, and he chose Christopher to be that person. However, upon hearing this, Christopher explains Bernhard that this “experiment” is unfair to him and to their friendship. Aside from Sally Bowles, Bernhard is arguably Christopher’s most significant friendship in the novel.

This scene serves to further the idea that friendship can be just as if not more complex and impactful than romantic relationships, the absence of romantic relationships for Christopher throughout the novel looming large. When Christopher calls out Bernhard’s “resentment” and “mock-humble attitude,” he calls attention to the complex and often unpleasant emotions that friendship can bring, in the search for human connection.

In May, I left Berlin for the last time. My first stop was Prague—and it was there, sitting one evening alone, in a cellular restaurant, that I heard, indirectly, my last news of the Landauer family.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Bernhard Landauer

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

As time passes, Christopher loses touch with the Landauer family. He visits his apartment to find that he has left Berlin, and Christopher never hears from him again. However, after Christopher leaves Berlin for good, he overhears news of Bernhard’s fate: the Nazis have murdered him in a labor camp and pretended that he died of a heart attack. Bernhard’s death is Christopher’s closest brush with the true consequences of the Nazi party’s violent antisemitism. Additionally, many of *Goodbye to Berlin*’s non-Jewish characters do not recognize the true threat that Nazism poses to European Jews. Even as Christopher overhears people talk about Bernhard’s death in Prague, those people express the sentiment that the rest of the Landauers will be fine, because wealthy Jewish people always land on their feet. Bernhard, however, always knew the true danger that he was in, often receiving antisemitic threats and feeling anxious about his public persona. The sentiments of the non-Jewish Germans about the fate of the Jews illustrates the deep denial that can come with living as a (relatively) privileged person in an unjust society.

Chapter 6: A Berlin Diary, Winter 1932-3 Quotes

Last night, Fritz Wendel proposed a tour of the “dives.” It was to be in the nature of a farewell visit, for the Police have begun to take a great interest in these places. They are frequently raided, and the names of their clients are written down. There is even talk of a general Berlin clean-up.

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker), Fritz Wendel

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter of *Goodbye to Berlin*, Christopher Isherwood presents a series of vignettes that describe the daily social, political, and economic life in Berlin, just as he had in the first “Berlin Diary” chapter of the novel. However, in this final chapter, Christopher’s stories and observations present a stark contrast to his early years in Berlin. Christopher’s earlier years in Berlin were marked by decadence, spending all night out at clubs and enjoying the

liberal, artistic culture of the Weimar-era city. However, the Police taking interest in these establishments shows that the government of Berlin is putting a stop to that decadence of Berlin's nightlife scene that drew so many foreigners and artists to Berlin. Though the novel doesn't abstain from criticizing certain elements of Berlin's decadent nightlife culture, the "Berlin clean-up" results from the authoritarian culture of conformity that Berlin's new political situation (the election of Adolf Hitler as chancellor of Germany) threatens.

●● I catch sight of my face in the mirror of a shop, and am horrified to see that I am smiling. You can't help smiling, in such beautiful weather. The trams are going up and down the Kleiststrasse, just as usual. They, and the people on the pavement, and the tea-cosy dome of the Nollendorfplatz station have an air of curious familiarity, of striking resemblance to something one remembers as normal and pleasant in the past—like a very good photograph. No. Even now I can't altogether believe that any of this has really happened...

Related Characters: Christopher Isherwood (speaker)

Related Themes:



Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

This quote makes up the final two paragraphs of the novel. To conclude his work, Christopher Isherwood writes an ending that mirrors the beginning of the novel: like the first scene, Isherwood describes the daily goings-on of Berlin, highlighting the experiences of average people. This technique highlights the fact that history happens within and alongside daily life. Furthermore, the "striking resemblance to something one remembers as normal and pleasant in the past" calls to mind the eeriness that political change can bring to a society, and it asks the question of what normalcy really is.

The invocation of the photograph also calls to mind the earlier passage that Christopher references, when he compares himself as a writer to a camera. The sentiment that he cannot believe that it really happened serves to legitimize Christopher's purpose as a recorder of events: without Christopher's commitment to recording political and social life in Berlin in the early 1930s, he would not believe the extraordinary events.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: A BERLIN DIARY, AUTUMN 1930

The novel's young English narrator, Christopher Isherwood, looks out his window at the Berlin streets. He observes the life around him, consciously trying to record it all in his mind for later. He anticipates the evening, during which young men will go calling for their lovers, and laments his own loneliness.

Christopher describes the boardinghouse in which he lives. The landlady, Frl. Schroeder, has decorated the living space in a Gothic style, and the room is full of antiques. Christopher wonders what will become of these antiques as time goes on. He describes Frl. Schroeder, who was wealthy before World War I and the Inflation that resulted from the war. She often tells Christopher stories about her past, before her economic situation changed and she had to let out rooms in her apartment. She also tells Christopher stories of her past lodgers, pointing out the marks that they've left on the place. Christopher wonders where they all are now, and where he will be in the future.

Christopher describes the rest of the lodgers in Frl. Schroeder's apartment. Bobby is a young man who works as a bartender in a club called the Troika. Frl. Kost is a prostitute who often brings men into her room. Frl. Mayr is a yodeler who often lays tarot cards with Frl. Schroeder to tell their fortunes. She often tells stories of her life as a performer. Frl. Mayr is also an ardent Nazi. One night, Christopher visits Bobby at the Troika. He observes the scene, which is not lively until a group of wealthy people come in and the bar workers and the band spring to life.

In order to make money, Christopher works as an English tutor. One of his students, a 19-year-old girl named Frl. Hippie Bernstein, comes from a wealthy family. She prefers to gossip during their lessons rather than perfect her English. She also spends their lessons talking to her family on the phone that connects the rooms in their house. One day, the Bernstein family invites Christopher to lunch, and they joke about money.

This first scene cements the novel as a series of observations from Christopher's point of view. He is a storyteller, relaying the specifics of an historically important time and place. It also cements Christopher as a character without romantic or sexual connections, which will become important when understanding his relationships throughout the novel.



Frl. Schroeder's boarding house and financial situation tells the reader a lot about Berlin culture during the 1930s. She is the first character the novel describes whose life has been deeply affected by the economic inflation Germany experienced after World War I. Christopher's musings about what will become of her antiques mirrors the larger theme of the novel: how will history live on?



The rest of the lodgers in Frl. Schroeder's boarding house also provide a view of Berlin at the time of Christopher's writing. Frl. Mayr, specifically, highlights the quotidian nature of antisemitic beliefs in Berlin society. Bobby, on another note, serves as Christopher's entry point into the decadent club culture of Berlin. In the nightclub, Christopher's observation that the place comes to life when wealthy people enter hints at the power that wealth held in Berlin at the time, when many Berliners struggled financially.



Christopher's life as an English tutor allows him to enter the world of wealthy Berliners. Hippie's disinterest in learning and her habit of spending her lessons talking on the phone with her family highlights the indifference to important matters that existed among wealthy Berliners.



Sometime after Christopher's lunch with the Bernstein family, Frl. Kost and Frl. Schroeder, get into a fight. Frl. Kost accuses someone in the house of stealing money from her. Around the same time, Christopher discovers that Frl. Kost is having an affair with Bobby Christopher chalks Frl. Schroeder's anger up to her jealousy over this affair. After a fight with Frl. Kost, Frl. Schroeder breaks down over the betrayal of the affair.

The chaos within Frl. Schroeder's boarding house underscores the volatile nature of the tension in Berlin society at the time. Though the boarders usually live in harmony, it only takes one conflict for bubbling resentments to explode. The fact that the fight is about money also reminds the reader of the sensitivity of the issue of money in Berlin at the time due to widespread poverty.



CHAPTER 2: SALLY BOWLES

One afternoon that October, Christopher's friend Fritz Wendel invites him over for coffee. Fritz takes pride in his coffee and makes it very strong. Fritz also invites Sally Bowles, another English expat, to coffee. Sally arrives and almost immediately makes a call to a lover of hers. Afterward, the three talk about love and why Fritz has not settled down. At the end of the afternoon, Sally invites Christopher to have tea with her sometime. After Sally leaves, Fritz tells Christopher that he's crazy about Sally.

The introduction of Sally Bowles is a turning point in the novel, as her friendship with Christopher is one of the central relationships of the novel. She also comes to represent the decadent culture of Weimar Berlin. Her first scene introduces this decadent nature of hers, as she immediately calls one of her many lovers upon arriving at Fritz's apartment.



A few days after their coffee, Fritz and Christopher go to see Sally sing at a club called the Lady Windermere. Christopher describes her performance as striking and effective, if not technically good. The crowd reacts favorably to Sally, and she spends the evening trying to chat with potentially wealthy men. Christopher doesn't enjoy the club and vows to himself to never visit that type of place again.

Sally's performance at the club underscores her decadent lifestyle. Though she is not technically "good," Christopher notes that her performance has the power to hold a crowd. Sally uses the power to attempt to find wealthy lovers, using her charm to seek survival. Christopher's distaste with the club foreshadows his general disapproval of the decadence of Berlin's nightlife culture.



After Christopher sees Sally perform, she calls to invite him for tea. She mixes a "prairie oyster," which is egg and Worcestershire sauce, her strategy of eating cheaply. She tells him her story of coming to Berlin. She had come with an older actress friend, but that friend left with a banker. Christopher learns that she is only 19 years old—he'd assumed that she is in her 20s. She tells him about her family. Both of her parents are English, though she told Fritz that her mother is French. Sally's future after her job at the Lady Windermere ends is uncertain, and Christopher offers to help her out if she ever needs money. Sally laughs, saying that she could immediately tell that Christopher has no money either.

Sally's poverty underscores the lack of economic security for the novel's characters, partially as a result of Germany's poor economic conditions at the time and partially as a result of the characters' commitment to leading a decadent, dramatic, and glamorous life. Sally and Christopher's solidarity within that poverty contributes to the intensity of their friendship. On another note, the fact that Sally lied about her family history is one example of the novel's characters attempting to construct a self that is different from their upbringing in order to seem more interesting.



Later on, when Christopher invites Sally to tea at his boardinghouse, Frl. Schroeder is very excited about a possible romance between the two of them. She takes great care in setting the tea. Sally arrives and begins telling Christopher about her new lover. When Sally presses Christopher for his opinion, he tells her that talking about sex and lovers bores him. He tells her that no number of men she has sex with can change who she really is. As they talk, Christopher starts laughing and tells her that he always laughs when he is with people he likes. Sally expresses that she is glad that Christopher is not in love with her, as that would ruin everything.

On New Year's Eve, Sally comes to live in Frl. Kost's old room in Frl. Schroeder's boardinghouse. The boarders all have dinner together. Afterward, Sally and Christopher accompany Bobby to the Troika. There, they meet up with Fritz, who introduces Christopher to Klaus Linke (Sally's former accompanying pianist). They all have a wild night. Sally returns to the boardinghouse the next afternoon, having spent the night with Klaus. She tells Christopher that she and Klaus have fallen in love, and they begin seeing each other every day.

A couple of weeks later, Klaus suddenly leaves Berlin to go to England for a job synchronizing music for films. Sally spends the next day writing poems. She tells Christopher that she will never marry Klaus, as it would ruin their careers. When Klaus's first letter arrives, detailing his misery in England and expressing his love for Sally, Sally is delighted, but Christopher suspects it is not genuine. A week later, Sally receives another letter from Klaus: he tells her that he has fallen in love with someone else, and he urges her to focus on her work. Christopher and Sally go to the cinema and laugh at a film about a woman who sacrifices her career to become a wife and mother.

After Sally and Klaus's breakup, Sally and Christopher spend all day every day together talking about the future. Sally has wild mood swings and suspects she may be pregnant, but she does not go see a doctor. One night, Sally's mood improves, and they decide to go out. At the Troika that evening, they meet Clive, a rich American who is constantly drunk.

Frl. Schroeder's excitement over the possibility of a relationship between Christopher and Sally serves to remind the reader that Christopher defies cultural conventions by not having a romantic or sexual relationship with Sally and his other woman friends. He and Sally laugh easily together and create a closeness that Christopher does not have with any other character in the novel. Their agreement that being in love would ruin everything is a testament to the power and uniqueness of strong friendship.



In the novel, characters' pursuit of a decadent lifestyle drives much of the plot. The characters desire to make the most of Berlin's club culture, choosing to spend their time drinking the night away and meeting new people. Sally especially enjoys meeting new lovers, who constitute a part of her search for love, success, and pleasure.



Like Christopher, Sally is committed to the life of an artist, though this may conflict with her desire to pursue true love. Klaus's rather quick dismissal of his relationship with Sally further encourages her to pursue her career over love, as he has broken her trust. When Sally and Christopher see an example of the typical heterosexual, domestic life in the film, it reminds them that they want something different—to pursue art and meaning, and to do so on their own terms. This desire is a crucial tenet of their friendship.



The intensity of Sally and Christopher's friendship in the wake of Sally's breakup with Klaus highlights the way their friendship mirrors a romantic relationship. Their meeting Clive at the Troika club shows the ways that their lifestyle aligns with what they seek—if they spend their nights in the Berlin club scene, they will meet the rich benefactors that they hope to meet.



Sally and Christopher start seeing Clive almost every day, either separately or together. Clive is very generous, sending cars to pick the other two up, paying for meals and drinks, and buying them gifts. One day, Christopher arrives to plans with Sally and Clive to find that they had spontaneously flown to Dresden to shop. They return with beautiful shirts for Christopher. Sally says she chose the shirts for Christopher rather than something more expensive because she does not want Clive to think that they are gold-diggers. Sally hopes to have Clive bankroll her acting career, and she is often frustrated when he does not want to talk business.

One day, Clive begins to make plans for the three of them to travel the world together. Christopher reflects on the power of Clive's wealth: these experiences are so banal to Clive himself, but they would be life changing for Christopher and Sally. However, the next day, Sally and Christopher arrive at Clive's hotel to find that he had checked out that morning to travel to Budapest, leaving Sally and Christopher 300 marks. Though Sally and Christopher are angry, they manage to laugh about the incident.

The next morning, Sally feels ill. Christopher and Frl. Schroeder call in the doctor to examine her, and the doctor determines that she is pregnant. Sally tells Christopher that the father of the baby is Klaus, and that she plans to have an abortion (although the doctor who examined her refused to perform it). Sally uses the money from Clive to pay for a reputable doctor and nursing home. Christopher, Frl. Schroeder, Bobby, Frl. Mayr, and Fritz all visit her, though they do not tell Fritz the true reason that Sally is there. In order to protect Sally's reputation, Christopher pretends to be the father of the baby who is forcing her to abort the child. At first, Sally seems dazed during her stay. However, she begins to feel better. On her final day in the nursing home, she expresses a longing to be a mother but a lack of trust in men, including Christopher.

After the chaos of Sally's pregnancy, Christopher decides to take a trip to the Baltics to work on his writing. He reflects that he has hardly written since becoming close with Sally. Sally is happy for him, and, as Christopher suspects, a little bit relieved to have space. She says she might join him, but Christopher suspects, correctly, that she will not.

The vast difference between Clive's lifestyle and the lifestyle of Christopher and Sally highlights the extremities of the German economy at the time. While Berlin is plagued with poverty, Clive, a rich foreigner, is able to fund a lavish lifestyle. Christopher and Sally's economic situation causes them to rely on Clive, and it especially causes Sally to place her hopes for her career in Clive's hands.



Clive's flight from Berlin with no warning is just one of many examples of Sally's disappointment with men. Though Christopher will also lose out on the incredible travel experiences that Clive promised, he did not rely on Clive for his career in the way that Sally does. Still, their ability to laugh about the incident reinforces their easygoing and unambitious nature.



Sally's pregnancy is a physical manifestation of the impact that the relationship with Klaus has had on her life. The fact that the doctor refuses to perform an abortion highlights the unconventional nature of Sally and Christopher's lifestyle and beliefs compared to the typical heterosexual paradigm. Though Christopher helps Sally greatly by pretending to be the father of her baby, her continued distrust in men (including Christopher) highlights the deep sexism built into the fabric of 1930s society.



In the same way that love may get in the way of a career, Christopher's obsessive and time-consuming friendship with Sally has hindered him from spending time on his writing. His decision to take space to write shows his commitment to the life of the artist.



Christopher returns to Berlin in July. He and Sally have not had much contact—they only sent each other few **postcards** throughout the first month of his trip. When he comes back, he finds out that Sally has moved away from Frl. Schroeder's boardinghouse, much to Frl. Schroeder's disappointment. She tells Christopher that she always hoped that he and Sally would get married. The next morning, Frl. Schroeder wakes Christopher to tell him that a major German bank has shut down. He goes outside into the angry crowd and reads alarmist headlines about the economy, though Christopher does not believe the economy will truly go into crisis.

That evening, Christopher goes to visit Sally at the Artists' Colony where she lives. Their visit is awkward—Christopher notices that Sally seems to avoid his eyes. She tells him that she left Frl. Schroeder's boardinghouse out of boredom. During their visit, she picks up a phone call and begins to leave for an appointment, ignoring Christopher's teasing about her new boyfriends. Christopher asks when they will see each other again, and Sally tells him that she is busy and will have to see. As they leave her apartment, Christopher mentions the bank shut down, and Sally briefly panics. They part ways.

A week after their reunion, Sally calls Christopher and asks him to do a favor for her, for which he will earn money. When he arrives at her apartment, she asks him to write an article about "the English girl" for a friend's magazine, due that day. After he writes the article, Sally tells him it isn't "snappy" enough and calls a screenwriter she knows, Kurt, to do it for her. She sings Kurt's praises to Christopher, and then she disparages young men who call themselves authors but are not prolific or wealthy. Christopher takes issue with this, and the two have an argument. She tells Christopher that his lack of ambition annoys her, and he insults her new financier friends. They agree that they have outgrown each other, and then Christopher leaves.

As Christopher leaves Sally's apartment, he feels angry and embarrassed. He wishes to hurt Sally, as he believes Sally took pleasure in hurting him. Christopher offhandedly wonders whether this extreme anger is a result of actually having been in love with Sally, but he concludes that it is a result of his wounded vanity. He is angry at himself for mismanaging the interaction, showing her vulnerability rather than impressing her. He decides he will never see Sally again.

When Sally moves out of Frl. Schroeder's boarding house, she signals that there has been a shift in her relationship with Christopher. In a larger sense, the structure of Christopher's life in Berlin will change upon his return. The shutdown of the major bank indicates the truly dire conditions of the German economy and emphasizes Christopher's status as a recorder of historical events.



The tense interaction between Sally and Christopher cements their schism as friends. Their dynamic has changed and Sally no longer chooses to live the life she lived with Christopher. Her panic at the bank shutdown reminds the reader that she desperately needs money and is as affected by the poverty in the German economy as anyone else. This rising economic stress mirrors the breakdown of Christopher and Sally's friendship.



Sally's disapproval at Christopher's writing hints at a change in her philosophy about the value of art. Whereas before Sally and Christopher wandered the day and night away talking about being artists, now she seems to not respect this type of wandering and has adopted more practical outlook on life. Now, she values the pursuit of wealth over the abstract pursuit of art. Christopher and Sally's conscious split imitates a romantic breakup, further underscoring the fact that their friendship takes on the role of a central romantic relationship in the novel.



Christopher feels his "breakup" with Sally with the intensity that he would a romantic breakup. She is, in many ways, the most important person in his life. As a result of their intense closeness, all his most intense and vulnerable emotions show themselves when she hurts his feelings.



A couple of weeks later, Christopher gets a visit from a man who calls himself George P. Sandars. Though George found Christopher's address through his advertisement for English lessons, he does not want to learn English. Instead, he asks Christopher to loan him 200 marks, telling him about a rich man who would vouch for his ability to return the money. When Christopher does not lend him the money, George asks if he knows any actresses who may be looking for a business opportunity. Christopher vindictively gives him Sally's address, wanting to subject Sally to this annoyance.

A few days later, Sally calls Christopher asking for help. Though he is hesitant, he tells her to come see him. When she arrives, she tells him that a man who called himself Paul Rakowski had come to her apartment to tell her about an acting opportunity. He told her that he was a successful agent, relaying Hollywood stories. They had sex together and went for a fancy dinner. However, when the bill arrived, he asked Sally to lend him the money. She did, and they spent the night together at a shabby hotel. In the morning, after faking a conversation on the hotel phone, he stole the rest of Sally's money, left her in the room, and did not come back. Christopher and Sally determine that Paul Rakowski is George P. Sandars, and Christopher confesses to Sally that the incident is partially his fault.

Christopher and Sally go to the police station to report the incident. When the police officers question Sally about why she went to the hotel with Paul/George after their dinner, she tells them that he was her fiancé—she claims they'd gotten engaged over the course of the evening. The officers burst out laughing and tell Sally they'll help her. As they leave the station, Christopher compliments Sally on her lie that the man was her fiancé. She tells him that it was not a lie, and she really had gotten swept up in the passion of the day. They laugh together.

Over a week later, the police call Christopher to identify the man. They find him in a café. Christopher, seeing how young, shabby, and frazzled the man looks, nearly does not identify him. Still, he points him out to the police, vowing to himself never to help the police again. A few days later, Sally goes to see the man in the police station. She tells Christopher that the police have sentenced him to a mental institution. She also tells him that the man is really a boy of 16 years old.

Christopher's choice to send George to Sally reveals a vindictive and petty side of him. While readers know that he is in his early- to mid-20s and Sally is only 19, Christopher's behavior in this moment demonstrates that he can be immature for his age, particularly when his feelings have been hurt. This passage arguably paints Christopher in a negative light, but it also serves to illustrate the complexity of his friendship with Sally.



Despite Sally's ambition, her experience with George/Paul reminds the reader how naïve she is. Her desperation for success, freedom, and love causes her to overlook the obvious issues with George/Paul's story. In a similar vein, it follows that the devastating economic conditions of Berlin have driven George/Paul to pull elaborate scams in order to acquire money.



Christopher and Sally's visit to the police station calls to mind another moment of solidarity: when Christopher accompanies Sally to schedule her abortion. Though their friendship may have faded, they remain allies in navigating life in Berlin. Their laughter reminds the reader of their natural connection as friends.



The reveal that George/Paul is actually 16 years old underscores the desperation that afflicted young people in a poverty-stricken Berlin. The incident reminds the reader of the darkness that lurks beneath Berlin's decadent nightlife.



Sally and Christopher make up, though they never see each other again. Two weeks later, Christopher receives a **postcard** from Sally in Paris saying she will write later. A month later, he receives a similar postcard from Rome. That postcard was the last time Christopher heard from Sally, six years before his writing of the story. He concludes the story urging Sally to accept it as a tribute to her and to their friendship and asking her to send another postcard.

In the end, the “Sally Bowles” chapter is Christopher’s heartfelt tribute to his and Sally’s complex and impactful friendship. Sally’s final postcards to him suggest the fleeting nature of connection in a tumultuous moment in history. His urging to send her another postcard expresses the value that Christopher places on this connection, however fleeting it may be.



CHAPTER 3: ON RUEGEN ISLAND, SUMMER 1931

Christopher takes his trip to Ruegen Island, an island off the coast of Germany. He describes the surroundings of the boarding house where he stays. Much like his introduction to Berlin, he observes the activity of the village from his boarding house. The house is in a wooded area a short walk from the Baltic sea. Aside from Christopher, there are two others staying in the boarding house: Peter Wilkinson, a nervous Englishman about Christopher’s age, and Otto Nowak, a teenaged, working-class German boy from Berlin.

Christopher’s time on Ruegen Island shows him immersing himself in another side of German culture after immersing himself in the chaos of Berlin’s nightlife scene. This new environment is presumably more conducive to his writing than the chaos and decadence of Berlin. His introduction of Otto and Peter foreshadows the fact that, as Sally had in the previous chapter, they will inspire his work.



One night, Peter and Christopher go out, and Peter tells Christopher his life story. The youngest in an aristocratic family of four, Peter has no contact with most of his family and is the least successful out of all of his siblings. He struggled socially and in his home life, and then he struggled to build a life at university. He then went to Paris to study music, only for his professor to tell him he has no talent. After a particular nervous attack while visiting his family in London, Peter began to see an array of psychiatrists all around Europe. While traveling, he met Otto.

Like Christopher, Peter is an Englishman who has chosen to continue his life abroad. His past struggle to find his place in his community has led him to seek happiness elsewhere, much like many other characters in the novel. The novel seems to portray Peter’s desire to pathologize his difference by seeing psychiatrists as an excuse to escape the world he does not fit in.



Peter, Otto, and Christopher spend a lot of time together, with Peter and Otto having a transactional relationship. Peter buys Otto gifts and pays him daily, and Otto in return spends time with Peter and talks to him about his problems as a replacement for a psychiatrist. One night, Otto decides to go dancing. Peter is upset, believing that Otto will leave him. Christopher tells him not to be so possessive.

Christopher’s friendship with Peter and Otto somewhat replaces Christopher’s friendship with Sally: he spends all his time with them, and they also serve as his muses. Peter and Otto’s relationship, whether it is truly physical or not, is a queer relationship that stands outside of Germany’s heterosexual paradigm, and especially outside of the rise of Nazism.



By the time summer comes around, the village becomes more crowded. Christopher describes the crowded beach, on which families fly the **flags** of their German cities and political affiliation. He notes a child marching with a Nazi flag and singing a nationalist song. A doctor that Otto has befriended urges Otto, Christopher, and Peter to spend more time at the more crowded beach rather than their quiet portion. The doctor expresses his gratitude that there are no Jews on the beach. The doctor often speaks to the group about his appreciation for Hitler. Though Otto wants to go to the crowded beach, Peter and Christopher prefer to stay on the quiet one.

One day, as Christopher, Peter, and Otto prepare to go to the beach, Peter and Otto get into a physical fight. Christopher leaves, feelings frustrated with the two of them. He reflects on the toxicity of their relationship. One of the most destructive factors, he identifies, is how bored each is of the other, for Peter and Otto have nothing in common. On the way back from the boardinghouse, Christopher runs into the doctor. The doctor says that Otto has a “criminal head” and that people like him should be put into labor camps to learn discipline.

Peter and Otto continue to fight frequently. Christopher does not mind much, as he is preoccupied with his novel and often goes on long walks alone to reflect on it. Peter resents Christopher’s chosen solitude. When the three of them spend time together, Otto often tries to rile Peter up. Nightly, Otto goes dancing, and Peter and Christopher go out together. When they return home, Peter runs up the stairs to see if Otto is home yet. He rarely is. Otto has begun to see a girl from town, much to Peter’s anger.

One night, Otto promises Peter that he will be home by a quarter to one. He is late, and Peter hits him out of anger. Otto shouts that he will return to Berlin the next day. However, the next morning, they have both calmed down and Otto persuades Peter to send Otto’s mother some money and buy him a new suit. In exchange, Otto agrees to stop seeing his girlfriend. He breaks up with her cruelly, humiliating her by making mocking faces at her rather than saying goodbye. When Peter criticizes him for this behavior, Otto says that girls are always pestering him to dance, and it’s their fault that Otto is always late to be home.

As the village becomes more crowded, the beach shows a microcosm of German society at the time. The deep factionalism is clear from the many flags on the beach. The doctor that the group befriends acts as a representative for the rising Nazism in Germany and presents a contrast to Peter and Otto’s unconventional relationship. Otto’s desire to spend time on the crowded beach shows his drive to be a part of German society, unlike Peter or Christopher.



That Peter and Otto continue their relationship in despite its obvious toxicity highlights each of their needs: it gives Peter the type of queer connection and love that he cannot get in mainstream society, and it gives Otto, economic security. The doctor’s comment that Otto should be put into a labor camp highlights the violent conformity that fascism requires.



Just as Christopher is not distracted from his purpose by a romantic relationship, he is not distracted by the chaos within Peter and Otto’s relationship. By contrast, Peter is completely consumed with his relationship with Otto, who does not care about Peter nearly as much as Peter cares about him.



Otto’s cruel behavior toward his girlfriend in order to maintain his relationship with Peter shows how Otto’s need for money overshadows his true desire for connections with women. Furthermore, Otto shirks responsibility for his actions toward Peter, choosing instead to change the narrative about himself and his actions in order to keep Peter’s favor.



Despite Otto's resolution to change, he still spends his days flirting on the beach and his nights out dancing. Christopher and Peter continue to go out together at night. One particular night, they have an encounter with some Nazi boys, who claim that Hitler does not want war. The next day, Peter tells Christopher that he wants to leave Otto, as the only thing left between them is his money. However, when they get back to the boarding house, they find an apologetic note from Otto: he has left for Berlin. With him, he took some of Peter's clothes and some money. Christopher reflects that the act of leaving is the first act of Otto's that he respects.

The same day that Otto leaves, Peter packs up to return to London. Peter and Christopher joke about him going to find another analyst. The two men bid each other goodbye with seemingly no intention of keeping in touch. Later, Christopher finds a note in one of his books from Otto: Otto wrote that he would like to see Christopher back in Berlin. Soon after, Christopher decides to go back to Berlin too.

CHAPTER 4: THE NOWAKS

Sometime after he returns to Berlin, Christopher goes to visit Otto's family, the Nowaks. Frau Nowak, Otto's mother, answers the door. Christopher asks after her lungs, as she has been unwell. The purpose of Christopher's visit was to ask if Frau Nowak knows of any cheap rooms. Otto comes into the room asking about dinner. His mother criticizes his laziness. When Otto sees Christopher, he greets him warmly. Christopher asks Otto to come look for a room with him. After speaking privately with his mother, Otto asks Christopher if he would like to board with his family.

Christopher moves in with the Nowaks. Aside from Otto and Frau Nowak, the family consists of Otto's father, Herr Nowak; his 12-year-old sister, Grete; and his 20-year-old brother, Lothar. They have dinner to celebrate Christopher's moving in. The Nowak household is a chaotic environment, full of fighting. Much of this conflict comes from the Nowak parents comparing Otto to Lothar, whom they view as more hardworking and a better son. Herr Nowak, often drunk, enjoys talking to Christopher about his beliefs and time in the army. When Lothar joins them for dinner, he is quiet and businesslike. Christopher learns that he is involved in a Nazi group.

Otto is unwilling to give up his decadent nights out dancing, not unlike many of the characters that Christopher encounters during his time in Berlin. Though Peter claims that he wants to leave Otto, Otto leaves Peter before Peter has the chance. This further highlights the complex power dynamics of their relationship: though Peter has the money that Otto requires, Otto keeps his power in the relationship one last time by leaving Peter first.



Unlike Christopher's final urge to Sally to send him a postcard, his farewell with Peter confirms the fact that he and Peter were only connected by circumstances and not by real emotional connections.



In the first scene featuring the Nowaks, Christopher establishes the central struggles and conflicts within their family: Frau Nowak's declining health, and Otto's argument with his mother over his life choices. The Nowaks live in poverty, and Christopher's choice to move into their two-room attic apartment demonstrates his financial desperation, too.



Though Otto and Peter could not be more different in personality, Otto's conflict with his family reveals a similar alienation from his upbringing that Peter also experienced in his own life. Otto's contrast in personality and lifestyle from his brother Lothar hints at the fact that Nazism had the power to divide families. Furthermore, Lothar's serious and hardworking personality found a home in Nazism, which promoted rigid social and labor structures.



Christopher spends his afternoons giving English lessons and his mornings with Otto. Otto tells him about his struggles within his family. He feels that his family does not understand him and does not want him around. He shows Christopher his collection of photographs and letters from his suitors, both women and men. Christopher asks him if he is in touch with Peter. In response, Otto asks him to never mention Peter's name again. He says that Peter hurt him very much by leaving him.

Though the reader does not know much about Christopher's upbringing, it would not be far off to assume (based on his friendships with outsiders and decision to live his life in Berlin) that he himself feels like an outsider from his family and upbringing. Furthermore, Otto's collection of admirers mirrors Sally's, with both characters constantly seeking validation, financial security, and pleasure from lovers. Also similarly to Sally, Otto stretches the truth (both to Christopher and to himself) about his history: though Otto was the one who left Peter, he has clearly rewritten the events in his own mind to believe that Peter is the one who left him.



Once in a while, a nurse comes to see Frau Nowak. She disapproves of the Nowaks' living conditions: the entire family is crowded into a couple of attic rooms. The housing inspector also tells Frau Nowak that the living conditions are unacceptable, though the Nowaks are unable to do anything to change them. Another frequent visitor is a Jewish tailor, to whom the whole neighborhood owes money. Christopher notes that he allows people to buy more clothes on credit, even when they have not paid their outstanding views. When discussing Hitler, Frau Nowak insists that their neighborhood would never turn on the Jews.

Though the Nowaks' living conditions are actively harming Frau Nowak's health, they are unable to afford anything better. Their poverty reminds the reader of the economic devastation that hyperinflation inflicted on Germans in the 1930s. Frau Nowak's denial of the rising antisemitism in Germany provides the knowledge that many average Berliners at the time disregarded or did not recognize the signs of what was to come in German history, underestimating the historical impact of antisemitism.



Every night, Otto goes out dancing. He spends hours getting ready, picking out just the right outfit. Christopher also goes out. He often spends his time at the Alexander Casino, a dive bar where he meets interesting characters. One of these characters is Pieps, a teenage boy who has travelled Europe by himself after fleeing his abusive father. Pieps lives with his two friends Gerhardt and Kurt, who often fight with each other. Upon returning to the Nowaks' apartment, Christopher reflects on the poor conditions and says that sleeping at the Nowaks is like "sleeping out in the jungle alone."

Otto continues to chase the decadent nightlife culture of Berlin. Meanwhile Christopher continues to spend his time meeting Berliners and observing the culture around him. His comparison of the Nowaks' apartment to the jungle hints at the idea that poverty creates an uncivilized, difficult environment to live within, and thus affects human behavior.



Christopher describes one specific Sunday at the Nowak apartment. On that day, everyone is stuck inside due to inclement weather. As Christopher tries to work on his novel, the Nowak family fights around him. As per usual, Frau Nowak criticizes Otto for not being like his more industrious brother, and they get into a massive fight. By dinnertime, though, all is well, and the family laughs together.

As Christopher writes through the conflict all around him in the Nowak household, he mirrors his mission to write through the fraught political and economic conditions of Berlin. The Nowaks' constant fighting shows that strife is the norm for a family struggling with poverty.



Frau Nowak's health worsens, and she consults doctors. As she and Otto continue to fight, he tells Christopher that he fears he will have a nervous breakdown. Christopher's patience with the Nowak household wears thin, and he spends his evenings at the Alexander Casino with Pieps, Kurt, and Gerhardt, who amuse themselves by imitating the pretentious foreigners that come in on the weekends. Eventually, the doctors decide that Frau Nowak must spend time at a sanatorium to heal.

After the doctors prescribe time in the sanatorium to Frau Nowak, Christopher leaves the Nowak household. Otto begs Christopher to take him with him as his servant. Frau Nowak begins cooking Christopher's farewell meal. She fights with Otto, who storms out of the room. When Christopher goes to check on him, he finds that Otto has slashed his wrist with a razor blade. Christopher is frustrated with him, but he comforts him.

One day, after Frau Nowak goes to the sanatorium, Christopher drops in on the Nowak apartment. He reflects to himself that he cannot believe he ever lived in such poor conditions. There, he finds only Herr Nowak and Grete about to light the Christmas tree. They are giddy in a way that seems unstable to Christopher, singing and laughing uncontrollably. A little while later, Otto calls on Christopher. Otto asks him to accompany him on a visit to Frau Nowak. Otto is wearing a fancy new suit, which one of his girlfriends bought him.

When Christopher and Otto arrive at the sanatorium, Otto and Frau Nowak greet each other excitedly. Christopher notices that she looks years younger. Frau Nowak introduces Otto and Christopher to her roommates, 35-year-old Erna and 18-year-old Erika. Christopher notes the dynamic of the women, whom he thinks act like overgrown schoolgirls. While Frau Nowak rests after lunch, Erna and Erika show Otto and Christopher around the facility. They have a snowball fight and laugh. Erna tells Christopher that she's not really a consumptive, like Frau Nowak—she just needed a bit of looking after. She also tells him that as soon as she leaves the sanatorium, she will divorce her abusive husband and marry a new one.

As Frau Nowak's physical health worsens as a result of their poor living conditions, Otto's mental health follows suit. Though Christopher has tolerated the chaos thus far, his frustration shows that the conditions of the Nowak household are unsustainable for himself and the members of the Nowak family.



As Frau Nowak leaves the apartment for the sanatorium, she marks the final moment of the dissolution of the Nowak family at the hands of poverty. Otto's self-harm is a physical expression of his frustration at his lack of mobility and poor living conditions. It also calls Peter's struggle with mental health to mind, suggesting that maybe Peter and Otto have more in common than was obviously apparent.



With the loss of Frau Nowak as a homemaker to the sanatorium, Grete and Herr Nowak succumb to the madness that poor conditions can bring unto those living within them. By contrast, Otto seems to have improved mentally and financially with the dissolution of his family, continuing to seek out wealth through his lovers with some success.



Christopher's observation that the dynamic of the women is similar to that of overgrown schoolgirls speaks to the idea that institutions can infantilize women. Erna's history with her abusive husband calls to attention the violence that many women experience in a patriarchal society. Even though Erna has the power to divorce her husband, her plan after that is to find a new husband: in this way, she depends on men for her livelihood.



After tea, they all dance in the ward. As Frau Nowak talks about her childhood, Erna kisses Christopher. Christopher has the sensation that he is living in a dream. He hears Otto and Erika scuffling and giggling on the other bed. A few minutes later, the bus arrives to take Otto and Christopher back into the city. Frau Nowak and Otto have a tearful goodbye during which Frau Nowak struggles against the arms of the nuns. Frau Nowak tells Christopher to write to her, even if it's only a **postcard**. As the bus pulls away, Christopher has the sudden fear that the patients will attack the bus. However, the bus drives peacefully back to the city.

Christopher's kiss with Erna is the only moment in the novel in which he experiences sexual or romantic contact with anybody. However, the fact that Christopher feels as though the kiss is part of a dream separates it from his true self and desires, signaling that it is not what Christopher (who is assumedly gay) really wants. Christopher's fear as the bus pulls away speaks to the lack of stability of the patients in the sanatorium.



CHAPTER 5: THE LANDAUERS

Christopher recalls watching a Nazi demonstration one night in October of 1930. The Nazis carried out a violent demonstration in front of Jewish-owned department stores. Christopher remembers this as his introduction to Berlin politics. One of the stores belongs to the Landauers, a Jewish family with whom Christopher has mutual friends. Inspired by this incident, Christopher writes to Frau Landauer.

When Christopher witnesses the antisemitic demonstration so soon after he arrives in Berlin, he becomes aware of the rampant antisemitism present in German society. His choice to write to the Jewish Frau Landauer demonstrates his solidarity against antisemitism, though he tends to be merely a political observer.



Frau Landauer invites Christopher to supper, where he meets the 18-year-old Natalia Landauer. The two strike up a friendship, and she lends him books to read. He eats with Frau Landauer and Natalia. Afterward, he spends more time with Natalia, who asks about his writing. He reluctantly tells her about one of his stories, and she insists he bring it the next time.

Natalia Landauer is clearly a bright young woman who Christopher connects with on an intellectual level. His reluctance to talk about his writing hints at an insecurity about himself as an artist.



Two weeks later, Christopher visits the Landauers again for dinner. Afterward, he and Natalia go to the cinema and see a comedy film. Natalia gets angry with him because he does not laugh during the film—she accuses him of only enjoying “clever” films. However, he tells her that he never laughs, even when he finds something funny. As they sit in a café after the movie, Natalia tells Christopher how much she respects and adores her parents. However, though her parents are rich, she feels that, given the political situation in Germany, this money could disappear at any time. In light of this, she wishes to move to France to find a husband and make her own way in life.

Though Christopher claims he never laughs, Natalia perceives his stoic observation as pretension. His lack of laughter in the movie theater contrasts with his relationship with Sally, when the two would laugh and laugh together. Natalia's anxieties about her parents' finances despite her father's obvious business capability illustrates how deeply antisemitism was ingrained in German society: though the Landauers are very wealthy, Natalia can never feel certain that that wealth will remain.



Christopher and Natalia continue to spend time together. He notices that she avoids physical contact with him, even when indirect. For example, when he offers her a spoon with which he stirred coffee he already sipped, she is disgusted. One night, Natalia invites Christopher to a classical music concert. Feeling frustrated with the stuffiness of the concert's environment, he picks a fight with her on the way home. He says that as he likes the sound of her voice but doesn't care about the things she says, they would be better off conversing in animal sounds.

Natalia's apparent disgust with Christopher is a resistance to society's prejudices: while much of German society at the time would look down on (or worse) Natalia, a Jewish woman, she looks down on Christopher, a white Englishman. Similarly to his friendship with Sally, when Christopher gets frustrated with Natalia, he shows a petty side of himself. His frustration indicates that he is comfortable with Natalia and acts out within that comfortable space of their friendship.



A few days later, Natalia asks Christopher to lunch. All is forgiven. Natalia is ecstatic because her father, Herr Landauer, will be returning from his travels. Christopher eats lunch with Frau Landauer, Herr Landauer, Natalia, and Bernhard Landauer, Natalia's cousin. Herr Landauer's kindness, intelligence, and good nature impress Christopher. During lunch, Natalia presses Christopher to talk about his writing, during which the Landauers (and the reader) learn that his first novel only sold five copies. After lunch, Bernhard invites Christopher to call on him sometime. Natalia tells Christopher that this is unusual, as Bernhard enjoys his solitude. She warns him about Bernhard's sarcasm.

Christopher's respect for Herr Landauer's good qualities reflect the idea that, in order to succeed and be respected in a prejudiced society, minorities must project excellence. While the other older characters in the novel tend to be bumbling and prejudiced, Herr Landauer is kind and intelligent. The reveal that Christopher's first novel had only sold five copies sheds light on his history as an artist, especially driven to succeed due to his lack of previous success.



A little while later, Christopher calls on Bernhard. He notes the quietness of Bernhard's apartment. Bernhard welcomes Christopher and shows him his possessions from his travels abroad. They dine together and get to know each other, though Christopher heeds Natalia's warning and does not go into detail about his own life.

Bernhard's fascination with travel abroad underscores his lack of security as a Jewish man in Germany, despite his wealth. His solitude also hints at this lack of security, betraying a desire to remove himself from a dangerous society.



One day, Christopher visits Bernhard at the Landauer department store, which he runs. After Christopher waits in a luxurious waiting room, Bernhard shows him around the various departments (including the toy department, where Herr Landauer will not allow war-related toys to be sold) and explains some of their sale tactics. When Christopher asks why the store does not have a book department, Bernhard tells him that he would remain there all day, reading.

Christopher's visit to the Landauer department store further enlightens the reader to the Landauers' wealth and business prowess. Furthermore, the fact that Herr Landauer will not allow war-related toys in the store presents his strong political stance, no doubt influenced by a contempt for the war-like nature of the antisemitic Nazi party in Germany.



Bernhard and Christopher continue to spend time together. Christopher becomes frustrated with the feeling that Bernhard does not seem to tell him his true thoughts and feelings. One day, when Christopher asks Bernhard what he truly believes in, he says he believes in discipline (for himself, not others). He says that Christopher, having been raised as a Christian in England, cannot understand what it is like to be a Jew in Germany.

From the little emotion and truth that Bernhard does show to Christopher, it is clear that the experience of growing up Jewish in Germany has caused him to hide parts of himself away. His belief in discipline reflects that, as he finds comfort in self-imposed limits that also keep him safe. This belief in discipline stands in sharp contrast to the nearly apolitical reverence for decadence that other, non-Jewish characters show throughout the novel.



Having developed their friendship, Christopher decides to introduce Natalia to Sally Bowles at a café. However, the interaction goes awry when Sally makes an antisemitic comment—presumably, she does not know that Natalia is Jewish—and talks on and on about her lovers. Natalia becomes frustrated and leaves. After they leave the café, Christopher is upset with Sally. He asks her if she always has to talk about adultery, and she responds that she must be her authentic self.

After their coffee with Sally, Christopher feels his relationship with Natalia begin to fade. Natalia assumes that Sally is his lover, and he does not correct her. Christopher suspects that, aside from Natalia's general dislike of Sally, Natalia is jealous of Sally's importance in his life. One day, in February, Christopher calls on Natalia to hear that she had moved abroad.

One day, out of the blue, Bernhard calls Christopher to ask if he would like to spend the night in the country. He picks Christopher up in a chauffeur and they stop to pick up Bernhard's dog. Bernhard will not tell Christopher where they are going, as he says it will take the pleasure out of it for Christopher. After the drive, they arrive at a luxurious mansion designed to resemble an English country house. They have dinner and walk around the grounds. Bernhard tells Christopher about his childhood. His older brother died in World War I, and he struggled to make friends growing up. As a result of his brother's death, his mother threw herself into studying Judaism in an attempt to distance herself from Germany. Eventually, she killed herself.

Christopher and Bernhard go back inside. After an exchange about which lights to turn on, Bernhard tells Christopher that he brought him to the cottage as an experiment: Bernhard wished to find out whether he is able to open up emotionally to people. Christopher tells Bernhard that, though he is glad to know more about him, he finds his experiments unfair as they put him in a position to make Bernhard angry if they fail. After their discussion, they listen to the radio and go to bed. The next day, Bernhard drops Christopher off in Berlin and says he will call soon.

Sally's insensitive antisemitic comment highlights an unflattering aspect of her personality: while Sally largely lives outside of conventional, conservative life, her lack of a political stance shows the decadence of the Berlin art and nightlife scene in a harsh light. So focused on her own search for pleasure and success, she does not consider how her privileged words and actions may affect those around her.



Though Sally acted inappropriately and (unknowingly) showed prejudice toward Natalia, Christopher does not do anything to rectify this. His refusal to stand up against antisemitism and act as an active ally to Natalia, beyond simply being her friend, results in the dissolution of their friendship. Thus, Christopher's largely apolitical stance has consequences for himself and those around him.



In being able to pick up Christopher in a chauffeur and take him to a luxurious location, Bernhard exercises the power over Christopher that their financial imbalance affords him. The fact that the house is designed to resemble an English mansion highlights money's power to help its wielders assimilate into the dominant, possibly oppressive, culture. Bernhard's tragic past, and its connection to Judaism, provides insight into his character's desire to recede into himself.



Rather than simply carry out a friendship, Bernhard feels that he must isolate Christopher to conduct an "experiment" to see if he is capable of being vulnerable with another person. This speaks to Bernhard's trauma, but it also highlights the novel's broader examination of the complexity of all relationships, not just romantic ones.



The next time Bernhard calls is six months later. He invites Christopher to visit the country house again. As Christopher has an infected toe, he wears a brace. When he arrives, Christopher is surprised to find the lawn full of people. As Christopher did not know there would be a party, he is underdressed. Despite his annoyance, Christopher resolves to enjoy himself. He sees Natalia, looking more beautiful and acting more relaxed. She asks why he did not write, and he says that he never received a letter from her with her address, though she sent one. She tells him that she lives in a flat with her mother in Paris and is studying art. Christopher can tell from her demeanor that she must be in love.

The party continues, though Christopher notes that it never really came together. That day, the German government was voting on a referendum to decide which party will be in power, and Christopher notices many people whispering about politics. Christopher remarks that the party could be the last night of life as they know it. Eventually, toward the end of the night, someone calls Berlin and gets the news that the Communist party will not take over.

Eight months later, after his time living with the Nowaks, Christopher goes to see Bernhard. He tells him about life with the Nowaks. Bernhard shows him an antisemitic threat letter that he received. Though Christopher is astonished, Bernhard tells him that it happens all the time. Bernhard also tells him that Natalia is married to a French doctor. When Christopher tries to talk with Bernhard about politics, Bernhard tells him that he does not care—he feels out of touch with his own existence. Christopher tells Bernhard that he will be going back to England for the summer but will return to Berlin. Bernhard offers to take them both on a travel around the world, and Christopher goes along with it, believing it to be a joke. However, months later, after he has said his final goodbye to Bernhard, Christopher realizes that Bernhard's offer was serious.

When Christopher returns to Berlin in the fall of 1932, he learns that Bernhard is away on business. He is not persistent with trying to contact him. After Hitler becomes chancellor in 1933, Christopher tries to contact Bernhard but has no luck. One day, he goes to Bernhard's apartment. The caretaker tells him only that Bernhard has gone away. On a day when Germans boycotted Jewish businesses, Christopher goes into the Landauer store and buys something in defiance.

The elaborate party at the Landauer country house reminds the reader how well connected and wealthy they are in spite of the antisemitism that plagued Germany. Still, it is significant that Natalia has developed a newfound easygoing nature outside of the confines of German society. Whereas she was previously anxious, now, having left the tension of Berlin and presumed to find love in France, she seems like a more relaxed and happier version of herself.



The threat of communism in Germany brings to light the complexities of German politics. While the Nazi party was violently antisemitic, they were also anticommunist. For the Landauers, who are Jewish and business titans, the most radical opposition to the Nazi party, the communist party, would also not be ideal.



Christopher's shock at the antisemitic threat letter hints at the fact that, though he may be aware of the political landscape of Germany, he does not truly understand the extent and danger of antisemitism at the time. Bernhard, by contrast, has become completely desensitized to it and, further, depressed and detached from politics itself. Bernhard's offer to take Christopher travelling calls back to Clive's similar offer. However, Christopher's realization that Bernhard was serious about traveling indicates that Bernhard, however strange, was more of a true friend than Clive ever was.



As time passes, the antisemitism in Germany becomes more intense and overt. Bernhard's absence after the election of Hitler highlights the danger that Hitler's regime poses to him.



A few months later, in May, Christopher leaves Berlin for good. At a restaurant in Prague, he hears two men talking about the Landauer family. Christopher learns that Bernhard is dead. Though the papers say that he died of heart failure, the men believe he was murdered by the Nazis in a labor camp. The men express their dislike for Hitler's policy, saying it's bad for business. They predict that Herr Landauer will be fine, as they believe that he has money hidden away somewhere. "You can't keep a Jew down," one of the men says.

As the rising extremism in Berlin causes many Jewish people to leave, it also marks the end of an era for Christopher and his fellow artist expats. Even after the tragic news of Bernhard's death, the men Christopher overhears in the coffee shop do not truly believe that Hitler's antisemitic policy will affect the Jews on a large scale. This speaks to the denial of society about the reality of Hitler's antisemitic policies.



CHAPTER 6: A BERLIN DIARY, WINTER 1932-3

Christopher notes that Berlin has two centers: the first is the commercial, artistic, and religious center, which features many illustrious buildings. The second is the woods of Tiergarten (a large park in Berlin), where homeless peasant boys starve and freeze.

Christopher's acknowledgement of the shadow side of Berlin, wracked by poverty, speaks to the income inequality that resulted from inflation in Germany.



Having returned to Berlin, Christopher once again lives in Frl. Schroeder's boarding house. Bobby is still there, though his appearance and demeanor have suffered because he has been out of work for months. Christopher notes that the lively energy of the boarding house, and between Bobby and Frl. Schroeder, no longer exists. One day, Frl. Kost comes to visit. Though Christopher does not see her, Frl. Schroeder tells him that she looked very elegant in a fur coat and that she believes Frl. Kost will go far in life.

Christopher's time in Frl. Schroeder's boarding house at the end of the novel poses a sharp contrast to his time living there when he first arrived in Berlin, in 1930. The decadence of the Weimar party era, which Bobby represents, has faded.



Christopher continues to tutor students in English. One of his students, Herr Krampf, tells Christopher about the hardship that many Germans experienced during World War I and the Inflation. Everyone stole goods to sell, including children. He describes one incident in which his mother allowed a butcher to slap and pinch her cheeks in order to get some meat for her children.

Herr Krampf's story, representing the average German's experience after World War I, sheds light on the reason why many Germans may have been drawn to Hitler's fascist policies that promised to restore Germany to economic glory.



Christopher describes a series of boxing matches that occur on a fairground. To Christopher, the matches are obviously fixed. Yet, the spectators believe in them, even betting money on them. Christopher is struck by their ability to believe anything.

The gullibility of the spectators speaks to the desperation of the average German to change their circumstances of poverty, no matter how illogical.



One night, Christopher witnesses an altercation between two Jewish men and two Nazis. The Jewish men had offered two German women a ride in their car, and the Nazis intervened. A scuffle occurs, and the Jewish men get away. Three hours later, Christopher finds the Nazis patrolling in the same spot.

Not only do the Nazis suppress Jews politically, but they also engage in fear and surveillance tactics to attempt to exclude Jews from public life.



Another night, Fritz Wendel proposes a sort of farewell tour to the dive bars around Berlin, as the police have begun to take an interest in them. They go to a drag bar, which Christopher finds expensive and depressing. Afterward, they go to a dive known to be a gathering place for communists. There, Fritz introduces Christopher to student communists whom he knows, Martin, Werner, and Inge. They also meet Rudi, a handsome teenage boy.

Christopher begins to frequent the communist bar. He gets to know Martin, Werner, and Inge, who have varying levels of mistrust in one another. They all mistrust Rudi. Christopher becomes acquainted with Rudi, who tells him about his communist scout group, led by the misogynistic Uncle Peter. At first, Christopher suspects that "Uncle Peter" is his old friend Peter Wilkinson but later learns that he is not.

Christopher goes to visit one of his students who is a teacher at a reformatory school. As his pupil shows him around the school, he feels ashamed and guilty. When Christopher asks about the future of the boys, he learns that, aside from teaching them a trade, there is nothing the school can do for them.

Christopher goes to visit Rudi's clubhouse, where he meets Uncle Peter. The clubhouse is also the headquarters of an outdoors-oriented magazine. The clubhouse is full of scantily-clad boys, though the weather is cold. Christopher feels uncomfortable and leaves.

At the "Silver Sunday" festival (the Sunday two weeks before Christmas), Christopher runs into Werner. Werner proudly tells him about a demonstration that he and his comrades had made at the Labor Exchange. Werner tells him that the capitalist system will not last much longer. One night, as Christopher walks along, he sees a group of S.A. men (Nazi secret police) attack a young man, brutally maiming him.

Right after Christmas, Werner gets into a physical fight with a police officer. Christopher visits him in the hospital and sees that Werner has become somewhat of a hero in communist circles. Werner is proud of the fact that he will most likely be prosecuted.

The increased surveillance on the dive bars around Berlin signals the newly fascist German government's desire to suppress hotbeds of creativity, decadence, and alternative lifestyles. Still, many pose a resistance, including the young student communists who continue to gather despite the danger.



Though Christopher is only passively a communist throughout the novel (he never takes any political action), he finds solace in the communist spaces of Berlin in the same way he once felt solace in the decadent, artist-centric bars. The young communists are emotionally affected by the surveillance culture of Nazi Germany, as they begin to mistrust one another.



Christopher's visit to the reformatory school, the pupils of which will have a very limited future after graduation, highlights the desperation that plagued the German economy.



Though the communist scout group has the potential to be an effective resistance against the Nazi party, its semi-exploitative and disturbing practices (according to Christopher) presents the pessimistic view that political resistance initiatives often come with their own toxicities and issues, and their leaders often have their own agendas.



Werner's optimism is a touching expression of resistance, although readers today will know that communism did not prevail against Nazism. This fact plays out symbolically as the secret police overpower and attack a young man in public, illustrating to oppressive power of the Nazi party.



Though Werner will almost certainly face dire consequences for attacking a police officer, he finds solace and even happiness in actively challenging the Nazi party. Werner represents the anti-fascists who, unlike Christopher, actively resisted a fascist regime.



On January 22, 1933, Christopher watches a Nazi demonstration. He notices that there are more police in the crowd than Nazis and assumes that the general wants to assert the military's power. At the demonstration, Christopher is struck by the collective power of the German workers. Though the communists are relatively few in number at the demonstration, Christopher feels their power.

A week later, the general and head of police resigns. Hitler forms a new cabinet. Christopher remarks that the newspapers seem to be just full of new rules and regulations. Christopher spends his evening at a café where Jews and communists, knowing that they will soon be arrested, speak in hushed tones. The S.A. officers come in nightly and ask for money. One night, seeing that one of the men tried to call the police, they take him outside never to be seen again. Christopher continues to hear stories of Nazi violence and to witness disturbing scenes.

One of Christopher's students is the former police chief under the Weimar republic. They conduct their lessons while driving around in Herr N.'s car. Herr N., who is presumably an enemy of the Nazis, has received a job in America and worries about his wife making the journey and about leaving his son behind.

Christopher plans his final exit from Berlin. Frl. Schroeder is very upset about this and does not understand why he wants to leave. He overhears her talking reverently about Hitler, though she voted communist in the last election.

On Christopher's final day in Berlin, he thinks of Rudi and his innocence. The weather is beautiful, and Christopher is horrified to see himself smiling in his reflection in a shop window. He observes the everyday normalcy of the Berlin street, despite the chaos. He writes, "Even now I can't altogether believe that any of this really happened."

Although modern readers know that the communist resistance will not prevail over the Nazi party, Christopher's brief ode to the power of the collective action of workers reminds readers that active resistance has the potential to make real and tangible social change.



Not only is Hitler's regime fascist and authoritarian, but it is also corrupt. When the S.A. officers come into the Jewish and communist café to get money from its clientele, they exercise their power to disenfranchise political dissidents or oppressed groups by force. This corruption faces no consequences, as fascist regimes silence dissidence.



Herr N.'s anxiety about leaving his son behind demonstrates the fear that the Nazis sparked in their political opponents.



Frl. Schroeder's reverence for Hitler presents an interesting psychological phenomenon of a fascist regime. Though she voted communist (the opposing party of Hitler's regime) in the previous election, it stands to reason that her reverence for Hitler is a way of coping with the harsh realities of fascism and the economic devastation of 1930s Germany.



At the end of the novel, Christopher comes full circle. He has recorded what it was like in Berlin from 1930-1933. His disbelief at the political and economic chaos set against a backdrop of normalcy illustrates the mundane nature of life as it unfolds in the moment, before it becomes history, just as his initial observations of the quotidian lives of Berliners did.





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