The Berlin Stories: The Last of Mr. Norris, Goodbye to Berlin Study Guide

The Berlin Stories: The Last of Mr. Norris, Goodbye to Berlin by Christopher Isherwood

BOOKRAGS

Contents

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 1, 2 and 3

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

This book is actually a compilation of two short novels originally published separately. Both are set in Berlin between World Wars I and II, both contain colorful characters and intriguing incidents, and both are narrated in the voice of a young man who, with apparent deliberateness, chooses to emotionally distance himself from his subjects. Both stories explore themes relating to the unknowable mystery at the heart of an individual's life, the value of live observed vs. life lived, and the blurring of the line between reality and fiction.

Chapter 1

The narrator (William Bradshaw - see "Characters") narrates his initial encounter with Mr. Norris, a fastidious older man who, the narrator writes, wears a very good wig and with whom he shares a train compartment during a journey to Berlin. At the German border, Mr. Norris is visibly nervous as his passport is examined by German immigration officials (William's passport barely receives a glance). As Mr. Norris' passport is returned to him, William theorizes that he is a smuggler, and wonders how he will be when the customs inspectors look through the luggage. Mr. Norris, somewhat to the narrator's surprise, comes through this particular ordeal much more calmly, and the rest of their journey together is quite pleasant. At its conclusion, Mr. Norris invites William to join him for tea the next Saturday. William agrees, and the men part.

Chapter 2

When William arrives at Mr. Norris' for tea, he discovers that Mr. Norris' address plate advertises him as being in the "Import/Export" business, and that Mr. Norris has an assistant, Schmidt, to whom William takes an immediate dislike. After a brief conversation in which they both acknowledge Mr. Norris' wig (and, as a result, feel their conversation becoming more relaxed), Mr. Norris shows William the rest of the apartment, pointing out a collection of books with titles such as "The Girl with the Golden Whip" and "Miss Smith's Torture Chamber." William also discovers that when Mr. Norris is pressed about what he "imports" and "exports," he becomes quite uncomfortable, saying he leaves "the sordid details" of his business to Schmidt.

Chapter 3

Here the narrator offers a detailed description of what happens on the New Year's Eve he and Mr. Norris (whom he now calls Arthur) spend together. The narrator arrives at a club called The Troika to find Arthur in the company of an attractive European man - the Baron. Narration describes how the party at The Troika becomes more and more

crowded, and how the narrator, the Baron and Arthur find themselves at an almost equally crowded house party. There, as Arthur enjoys the attentions of Anni, an attractive woman in high leather boots, the narrator becomes increasingly drunk and the Baron becomes increasingly involved in sex games with both men and women. At one point Arthur disappears, only to be discovered by the narrator being whipped by Anni and another woman. Fleeing from Arthur's strange mix of pleasure and pain, William returns to the party and passes out. The following morning, he finds that Arthur and the Baron have both disappeared. He makes his way back to his lodgings, where his landlady tells him that the "considerate" Mr. Norris has called three times to ask how he is.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

These three chapters are essentially introductory material, offering intriguing glimpses of character (the twitchy Mr. Norris), setting (the "anything goes" hedonism of Berlin between the wars), and relationship. This last is perhaps the most important, in that it sets the pattern/tone for the action of the overall narrative - in what seems like every chapter, William is repeatedly exposed to behaviors and belief systems that it seems he never even knew existed. In short, through his involvement with Mr. Norris he becomes more involved with life.

It's important to note, however, that as a whole, the writing here and throughout the novel never actually comments on that involvement - it is presented, it is described, but it is never actually analyzed in terms of how it affects the narrator. In other words, the narrator never looks inward, into himself, to discover and/or understand the effect the incidents he encounters are affecting him. His descriptions come across, in essence, as photos in an album without a context, without someone explaining why those pictures are important or what they meant. For further analysis of this narrative perspective, see "Themes - Observation vs. Experience" and "Style - Point of View."

Important narrative and/or technical elements in this section include the references to Mr. Norris' wig, which (as discussed in "Objects/Places"), can be seen as a symbol / externalization of Mr. Norris' desperation to keep certain aspects of himself hidden. Meanwhile, there are two important uses of foreshadowing - the appearance of the Baron, which foreshadows the important role he plays later in the narrative, and the ominous descriptions of Schmidt, which foreshadow the eventual violence and oppression he brings into the narrative in later chapters.

Finally, there is an element of irony in the description of Mr. Norris' import/export business. The phrase usually indicates the import/export of goods (antiques, textiles, etc). Later in the narrative, it's revealed that what Mr. Norris really imports and/or exports is information, a "business" that eventually costs him his home and security.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 4, 5 and 6

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter 4

After William offers a brief description of the teasing relationship between his landlady (Fraulein Schroeder - see "Characters") and Arthur Norris, he then describes his attempts to introduce Arthur to two of his other friends, hard-nosed journalist Helen and gossipy Fritz, who hints that Arthur had been in prison. As the narrator's friendship with Arthur deepens, he learns details about his past - that he had indeed been in prison and that the strained relationship with Schmidt had been going on for some time. Eventually, William and Arthur are invited to spend some time at the country home of the Baron, where there is also a large number of very attractive young men. As they watch the Baron playing (sometimes violently) with the young men, Arthur suggests to William that he should cultivate a friendship with him, saying he (the Baron) finds him very attractive and could therefore be useful in building a career. William tactfully refuses.

Chapter 5

Narration describes how Arthur left Berlin for a short time, how William was told that told he was in London, and how when he (Arthur) returns he confesses that he was in Paris, adding that for the moment it was "desirable that a slight uncertainty as to my whereabouts should exist in the minds of certain persons." He also tells William that he is about to become a Communist, and invites William to hear him speak at a communist rally. There, William is surprised at the size of the crowd (see "Quotes," p. 48) and to see Anni (the whip-wielding girl from the party). He also meets Otto, whom Arthur later describes as Anni's "impresario" but who, it seems, is really her pimp. Arthur's speech goes very well, leading William (at supper in Arthur's flat with Arthur, Anni and Otto) to ask whether Arthur has always been a communist. Arthur describes himself as being a communist at heart, adding (when prompted by William) that he and Schmidt tend to disagree about the value of communism.

Chapter 6

William describes how, a short time after the meeting, he's asked by a frantically nervous Arthur to accompany him to a police interview. At the police station, they catch a glimpse of Otto, being led off for interrogation. The interview lasts about an hour, after which William and Arthur first evade the watchful Nazi police and then visit a man named Bayer, to whom Arthur recounts what happened, portraying himself as cleverly giving the right answers under extreme pressure. He then tells Bayer that William has been extremely helpful, leading Bayer to question William about his interest in Communism. Later, on a visit to Bayer without Arthur, William realizes that Bayer and

other members of the communist party don't trust Arthur, but are nevertheless prepared to "make use of him" - and are also, William reasons, prepared to make use of him to keep an eye on Arthur.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Analysis

The first thing to note about this section is that it contains the book's first allusions to homosexuality (in the narrator's comments about the sometimes sadistic frolicking between the Baron and the attractive young men on his estate). Many such allusions occur in relation to the Baron, but there are very clear allusions to a sexually intimate relationship between Peter and Otto in "On Ruegen Island," and also in the life of Christopher (the author/narrator of "Goodbye to Berlin"). It's essential to note that for the most part, there is no explicit reference anywhere in the book to homosexuality - no variations of the word are used, there is no use of the word gay. The only time a clear reference is made is "A Berlin Diary, 1932-1933" (see "Goodbye to Berlin - Section 6").

There are several possible explanations for this. At the time the book was published, homosexuality wasn't as widely discussed as it is now - the author may have wanted to keep that aspect of his Berlin experiences discreetly quiet. He may also have wanted to downplay those experiences in the name of his central theme - the unfamiliarity of the individual. In other words, he hints at homosexuality but never "comes out" (pun intended) and discusses it because there are things about himself and about his possibly homosexual characters that he deliberately wants to keep hidden. The question then becomes why he explicitly brings it up when he does. For further consideration of that question, see "Goodbye to Berlin - Section 6 Analysis."

Other noteworthy elements include the introductions of important characters - Otto and Bayer both play significant roles in the action of the narrative to follow, and in the eventual revelation of the truths about Arthur Norris that he has wanted to keep hidden. As such, their introductions here also function as foreshadowing. Another important character is Fraulein Schroeder, but she is important in terms of the sense of creating atmosphere and comic relief. She plays a somewhat more substantial role in the action of the second part of the book, particularly in the story of "Sally Bowles."

A somewhat surprising element in this section is Arthur's success as a public speaker, and his professing that he is a Communist. On one level, these elements serve to draw the reader further into the narrative and specifically into the character of Mr. Norris, who up to this point has been portrayed as somewhat silly and superficial but is now apparently revealed to have a bit more depth. Upon consideration of the later narrative, however (in which Norris is revealed to be a double agent for French intelligence), it's possible to understand that Norris' actions in this section (including, by the way, his mysterious visit to Paris) are part of a larger plan to deepen his connections to the Communist party upon whom he is essentially spying. In other words, his actions here are indicative of his hidden agenda - to use his connections with the party to advance his own ends.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 7, 8 and 9

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Summary

Chapter 7

This chapter begins with William describing how Otto landed in jail (see Chapter 6) - a quarrel with Anni led him into a drunken confrontation with some Nazis, which in turn led to a spell in prison. William then describes Arthur's plans for a dinner party, how he (William) arrives late and discovers there in fact is no party - Arthur pawned the carpet to raise money for food and drinks, but Schmidt had taken it and the party had to be canceled. Discussion of Arthur's lack of funds leads to a discussion of Bayer, whom Arthur says owes him money for the missions he's undertaken for the Communist Party (including the trip to Paris).

Chapter 8

At the beginning of this chapter, William discovers that Arthur has left Berlin, suddenly and without explanation. Eventually he receives a letter from Arthur saying that because of certain circumstances (which he doesn't describe out of evident fear his mail will be read by the Nazis) he was forced to leave without telling anyone where he was going. This leads William to track down Anni and Otto to see if they know where Arthur went. Otto tells William he and Anni dropped in on Arthur as he was preparing to leave, and heard him argue with Schmidt about the Baron. A short time later, William encounters the Baron in the bar, and is surprised to see how dismissive he is of both him and Arthur. William's narration then turns to events and attitudes in Germany in the following weeks during an election campaign in which the Nazis were the rising power (see "Quotes," p. 86). The chapter concludes with references to the Nazis winning the election, and to William's subsequent departure for a visit to England.

Chapter 9

William describes his surprise when, upon his return to Germany, he discovers that Arthur has not only returned, but is living in Fraulein Schroeder's boarding house. He describes their happy reunion, during which he learns that the now prosperous Arthur is working for Bayer, narrates (in considerable detail), the fastidious Arthur's daily household routine (which the infatuated Fraulein Schroeder seems all too happy to accommodate), and comments on how there are always letters and telegrams coming for him. When one such telegram arrives, William gives in to curiosity and opens it, discovering a strangely worded message from "Margot" - which, later in the evening, he discovers has upset the up-to-then quite happy Arthur.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Analysis

There are several interesting narrative developments in this chapter - the deepening of the mystery associated with the relationship between Arthur Norris and Schmidt, Arthur's sudden prosperity and closer ties with Bayer, complications in relationships with the Baron, and the introduction of "Margot." The last three are particularly important, in that they lay the groundwork (and therefore foreshadow) further narrative developments in the chapters to follow.

Meanwhile, a new narrative element appears here - the first overt description of the socio-political environment in which all these intrigues are taking place. Nazi presence had been hinted at before, but in Chapter 8 the author/narrator makes the first clear references to the gathering storm of oppression/repression that the Nazi rise to power brought into being. From this point onward, in this story and in "Goodbye to Berlin," Nazi violence becomes more and more pervasive, and more and more personal.

It's interesting to note the juxtaposition here between that increasing sense of oppression and Arthur Norris' increasing fastidiousness about his appearance. The extravagant violence of the one, placed next to the extravagant vanity of the other, is on first glance somewhat unlikely - destruction vs. prettification. On closer examination, however, there are parallels as well as contrasts, particularly in the sense that both the Nazis and Arthur Norris are taking control over how they're perceived. In other words, there are thematic resonances here with the book's overall focus on unfamiliarity of the individual - both Norris and the Nazis are presenting clear external images, masks that conceal true identity and agenda.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 10, 11 and 12

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Summary

Chapter 10

After inviting William to join him and the Baron for dinner, Arthur explains what happened to make the Baron so upset (see Chapter 8) - Schmidt made up lies about Arthur's financial and political situation, leading the Baron to dismiss the friendship. Arthur goes on to suggest that he and the Baron have already reconstructed their friendship, but at dinner, William discovers this is a lie. Tensions between Arthur and the Baron remain until a joke makes the Baron laugh uproariously (see "Quotes," p. 107), and the ice is broken. After Arthur makes a weak excuse and departs, the Baron invites William to visit his flat, and when William refuses, amends his offer to giving him a ride home. This William accepts, and is only a little surprised when the Baron, in the back of his limousine, takes his hand and squeezes it. Back at the boarding house, Arthur thanks William for his help. William assures him that he and the Baron parted on very good terms, and with that, the reassured Arthur goes to bed.

Chapter 11

Narration describes how another election results in gains by the Communist Party, leading to a celebration in the streets outside Bayer's office. Arthur and William make their way to Bayer's office, where they are displeased to hear Bayer suggest that the Communist victory is only temporary - that the Nazis will, in all likelihood, eventually and inevitably take power. As they leave, Arthur is given a sheaf of papers by Bayer, papers he carefully keeps track of as they walk back through the crowds. Narration then describes how the political situation remains uncertain, how Arthur's evident wealth begins to dry up, how he gets another telegram from the demanding Margot (which the narrator and Fraulein Schroeder steam open and read), and how he also receives a threatening visit from the evidently down and out Schmidt, a visit intercepted by William. Schmidt furiously spits out a threat of blackmail and leaves.

Chapter 12

When William tells Arthur of Schmidt's visit, Arthur panics, responding fearfully when William hatches a plan for Arthur to simultaneously partially pay Schmidt and disappear from Germany. Days pass while Arthur considers the plan and William becomes restless. This leads Arthur to suggest that he take a vacation in Switzerland with the Baron. William suspects Arthur has something in mind, and a few days later (after another phone call from Schmidt) he finds out what - Arthur wants him to act as the catalyst for a business transaction between the Baron and "Margot," who is revealed as

a businessman in Paris. Arthur after a couple of days of planning and consideration, William reports that the Baron has agreed to the trip, but adds that he (William) is curious whether Arthur and "Margot" are in fact planning to swindle him (the Baron). William doesn't believe Arthur's weak denials, and searches his face for some sign of the truth (see "Quotes," p.138), doesn't find it, and is forced to agree to the plan.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

There are several noteworthy elements in this section. First is the development of the narrative's main plot - Arthur Norris' quest to involve the Baron in the passing of information to French Intelligence. Here the main points of interest are Norris' attempts at reconciliation, the revelation of "Margot's" identity (or at least of "her" true intentions), and the development of Norris' plans for the Baron. A second, and not unrelated, element to note is the inclusion of homosexuality as a motivating factor. Norris clearly brings William to dinner with the Baron in the hopes that he (William) will succumb to the Baron's seduction and therefore earn him (Norris) at least a degree of forgiveness. Norris also recruits William into his plan to "seduce" the Baron into working with the French, clearly hoping that the Baron's attraction to William will make him (the Baron) more susceptible to his (Norris') and/or "Margot's" own seduction.

Seduction, albeit of a somewhat different sort, is also at work in the relationship between Norris and Bayer. The packet of papers given to Norris by Bayer is in fact a manifestation of Bayer's intent to seduce Norris into believing that his work is both good and valued. In other words, seducing Norris into believing he is both important and safe means that he is less likely to do risky, dangerous things like looking into the true nature of his fundamentally useless information and eventually discovering that he is in actuality a dupe. On another level, the appearance of the papers here foreshadows Bayer's reference to them in Chapter 14 as a means of maintaining control over the information that gets passed to French Intelligence about the Communist Party.

It might be useful, at this point, to revisit briefly the question of the author/narrator's perspective on the story being told. Here, at the point at which the other characters' manipulations of them are at their peak, his awareness of those manipulations is also at its highest - in other words, he knows he's being used, but makes no protest, no complaint, and doesn't get angry. Is he so hungry for life/experience that he's willing to participate in potentially very dangerous activities in order to gain experience? The answer, even though the question is never overtly discussed anywhere in this story or in "Goodbye to Berlin," would appear to be yes.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 13 and 14

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Chapter 13

William describes the first few days of his time in Switzerland with the Baron as being careful, polite, and over-courteous. One day, William attempts to get out of his boring ski lessons by deliberately colliding with an attractive young man, Piet van Hoorn. After profuse apologies, Piet introduces him to his uncle, Mr. van Hoorn, and the four men - William, the Baron, the van Hoorns - spend the day together. In the following days, the Baron makes attempts (obvious to William) to seduce Piet, van Hoorn chatters happily about his home in Paris, and William attempts to figure out which of the many businessmen in the chalet is "Margot." As the days go by, van Hoorn and the Baron spend more time together, leaving William with Piet, who at one point reveals himself as a Nazi. One day, after spending several hours skiing, William and Piet come into the lodge to find van Hoorn and the Baron deep in intense conversation. As he's wondering what they're talking about, William receives a telegram with a message of only three words - "Please return immediately." It's signed "Ludwig" - in other words, Bayer.

Chapter 14

After a sleepless night on the train back to Berlin, William arrives at his lodgings. Fraulein Schroeder welcomes him, telling him Arthur is out and that she'll get hot water ready for a bath. William then goes to Bayer, who tells him Arthur is an agent for the French Secret Service, that he has been paid for passing information about the German Communist Party to van Hoorn, and that Bayer has made sure to give him only unimportant material (see "Chapter 11"). Bayer also tells William that the Baron is not so much an industrialist as he is an official in the German government, whom van Hoorn is interested in for the information he can provide. Finally, he tells William to warn Arthur that the police are closing in, and to urge him to leave the country as soon as he can. William hurries back to the rooming house, where he confronts the suddenly deflated Arthur with what he knows. Arthur pleads for sympathy (see "Quotes," p. 161), and reacts with terror when William points out the man in the dark hat and overcoat out in the street as a police officer. Arthur is on the verge of panic when Fraulein Schroeder pounds on the door, asking for help - pressure is building in the hot water system and unless William helps her turn on the tap, there will be an explosion.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

The writing in this section, particularly in Chapter 13, is more essentially comic than anywhere else in this story or in "Goodbye to Berlin." The sections describing the

narrator's essential inability (and lack of desire) to ski, and above all his completely mistaken quest to identify "Margot" are particularly amusing, in part because the truth is probably going to be far more obvious to the reader than to the narrator. In other words, it's perfectly clear from the first appearance of the van Hoorns that William has got the wrong end of the stick, and that van Hoorn is Margot. Comic suspense is generated in the reader, who can't help but wonder when the hapless William is going to get it. Meanwhile, subtle references to homosexuality reappear in this section, specifically in the descriptions of the Baron's attraction to Piet van Hoorn - who, being a Nazi, is more than likely completely oblivious to them.

Meanwhile, Chapter 14 is, in some ways, climactic in nature. Specifically, the conversation between William and Bayer is the high point (to this stage in the narrative) of the main plot charting the involvement of Norris with the scheme of passing intelligence to the French. In other words, it is a revelation of truth, and such revelations are often important components of narrative climax. However, this scene is, in fact, a preliminary climax, a kind of prologue to the primary climax (Norris' confrontation with Schmidt and eventual departure) that takes place in the following chapter.

The other noteworthy element in this section is Fraulein Schroeder's reference to the overheated pipes. This is the only overt metaphor in the entire book, with the pressure building inside the pipes symbolizing not only the pressure building within Norris' life, but also the pressure within Germany. The implication of this image is that if Norris doesn't take action to release that pressure there will be a potentially dangerous explosion in his life, in the same way that if William doesn't relieve the pressure on the pipes, there will be a potentially dangerous explosion in the plumbing.

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 15 and 16

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Chapter 15

After his bath, William returns to Arthur's room, where they pretend that nothing unusual is going on (see "Quotes," p. 165). William persuades Arthur to go out for dinner, where they make jokes about the detective who's followed them. The next day, Arthur reveals his plans to go to Mexico. After a period of frantic packing, and of Arthur pleading with William to not think badly of him, William and Arthur prepare to leave for the train station. They are interrupted by a drunken Schmidt, who speaks threateningly to Arthur but is shoved into silence by the devoted Fraulein Schroeder, whose diversion of Schmidt enables Arthur and William to get out. At the train station they say their farewells - Arthur sentimentally, William with restrained resentment, commenting that as far back as the day they first met, the police must have been after Arthur (see "Chapter 1").

Chapter 16

William sums up his last few months in Germany - how the Nazis took over, how they instituted a reign of fear and control, how he and Fraulein Schroeder helped Otto (still a Communist, on the run from the authorities) to escape. He then narrates his own return to England, where he is discovered by Helen (the journalist from Chapter 4), who tells him that the Baron had been caught preparing to pass government secrets to France and had shot himself. Finally, he tells of receiving a series of postcards from Arthur, describing his unhappiness in Mexico, his new opportunities in California, his sense of freedom - and his despair when he is found by Schmidt, who always seems able to track him down. In his (Arthur's) last postcard, he indicates that he and Schmidt are now traveling together. "What," he asks William, "have I done to deserve all this?"

The Last of Mr. Norris, Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

On a structural level, Chapter 15 can be regarded as the narrative's official climax. Norris' desperate flight from Berlin, the last minute confrontation with Schmidt (complete with comic intervention from Fraulein Schroeder), and his eventual successful departure all combine to define the high points of emotion, plot, and theme - Norris' departure is the ultimate, most desperate attempt to keep his identity secret and private. This theme is developed further in the final moments of Chapter 16, in which his plaintive postcard can be seen as ironic to the point of being comic. The reader (and perhaps even the narrator, although the point is never explicitly made) has a perfectly clear idea of what Norris has done to deserve what he's getting (lied, manipulated, attempted to betray his

friends, etc), making his question the ultimate in self-delusion, in the self being unaware of individual identity.

Meanwhile, the atmospherically looming presence of the Nazis comes closer to the forefront of the action, with its bluntly narrated effects on the lives of Otto and the Baron making it clear, to both the narrator and the reader, that very dark times for Berlin are closer than ever. It's important to note, at this point, that even in the presence of this darkness, and after the loss of his friend and ally (not to mention instructor in the broader ways and means of life), William still doesn't react. He describes, he implies, and he evokes (to a point), but he never openly explores and/or indicates what effect all these incidents and all this atmosphere is having. In other words, the reader turns the page at the end of the book in the same way as s/he turns the page on an unexplained photo album, having caught some glimpses of a different world but without any evident understanding of what that world meant, or continues to mean, to the individual who created the snapshots.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 1

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 1 Summary

"A Berlin Diary (Autumn 1930)"

The author begins this section of the book with a description of the street life outside the rooming house where he lives (similar, if not identical, to the boarding house William lives in "The Last of Mr. Norris - the landlady, Fraulein Schroeder, is the same). He describes himself as "a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking..." He also describes the characters, routines and relationships of the other inhabitants of the boarding house - Fraulein Kost (a friendly prostitute), Fraulein Mayr (a large boned, Nazi vaudeville entertainer), and Bobby (the enigmatic bouncer / bartender at a bar called The Troika, which is also referred to in "...Mr. Norris").

The author then describes, at some length, the atmosphere and activities at The Troika on a night when he visits Bobby - how members of the staff are essentially lazy, but spring into action the moment a visitor with money arrives. He also describes, at greater length, his relationship with one of his students (he is a tutor of English), Hippi Bernstein, a rich, spoiled, lazy young woman and her family (see "Quotes, Goodbye to Berlin," p. 17), all of whom seem oblivious, to varying degrees, of real life.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 1 Analysis

"Goodbye to Berlin" is a collection of vignettes, essentially self-contained short stories that are snapshot-like in their evocation of specific moments, characters, incidents and/or relationships experienced by the author/narrator. Within each snapshot, there are several smaller snapshots - in the case of this first entry in his "Berlin Diary" (Section 6 is the second entry), these smaller snapshots include the references to the other tenants of the boarding house and of Hippi Bernstein. For further commentary on this particular mini-snapshot see "Characters - Hippi Bernstein."

Aside from establishing the central narrative structure and/or motif for this section of the book, the most noteworthy element of this section is the author/narrator's reference to himself as "a camera." This establishes both the overall tone of "Goodbye to Berlin," but also defines its essential narrative perspective - distant, detailed, somewhat impersonal, and coolly evocative. For further consideration of this perspective, especially how it relates to "...Mr. Norris," see "Themes - Observation vs. Experience."

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 2

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 2 Summary

"Sally Bowles" The author describes his first encounter with Sally Bowles - young, English, impulsive, and talkative (see "Quotes," Goodbye to Berlin, p. 22). He narrates their rapidly deepening friendship - his visits to the nightclub where she sings (not very well), his shock when he discovers she's only nineteen, and his distaste at her eccentric diet (which is based on The Prairie Oyster, a cocktail of raw egg and Worcestershire sauce). Above all, he hints at his amusement at her flightiness and self-consciousness (see "Quotes," Goodbye to Berlin, p. 27). He describes how, after a quarrel with her landlady, Sally moves into the room once occupied by Fraulein Kost, and how Sally continues to fulfill her ambitions to be a great actress by dating (and apparently having sex with) a string of wealthy older men. He also describes the affair she has with Klaus, the man who used to accompany her at the nightclub (a job she eventually left), and how it ended painfully. Eventually, the author writes, he was able to take her out again, adding that on one such excursion they first encounter Clive.

Clive, in the author's narration, is a wealthy, indulgent American who takes both Christopher and Sally under his wing. As he narrates the development of their rapidly deepening friendship, Christopher describes his guilt about accepting Clive's generosity (see "Quotes," Goodbye to Berlin, p. 49). Meanwhile, Sally tries to manipulate Clive into financing her film career. Clive turns out to be all promise and no delivery - he tells Christopher and Sally he's going to take them on a world tour, but then disappears. The two friends try to laugh it off, but both are actually quite hurt. Shortly afterwards, Sally discovers that she's pregnant, is sure it's Klaus's baby, and resolves to have an abortion. Fraulein Schroeder is consulted, and helps to make the necessary (and very expensive) arrangements. In the rest home where the abortion is performed, Sally has a few contemplative moments (see "Quotes," Goodbye to Berlin, p. 50), but is soon her impulsive self again.

Christopher then describes his need to get away from Berlin for a while to do some actual writing (as opposed to just teaching - see "On Ruegen Island, Summary / Analysis"), and then tells how, upon his return, he discovers that Sally has moved into the home of a well-off German friend. Their reunion is uncomfortable - Sally is clearly pursuing more relationships with other wealthy men, and is completely oblivious to the politically troubling goings on in the world around her. On another visit, Sally alienates Christopher by first begging him to do a piece of writing for her, and then refusing to hand it to the employer who wants it by saying it's not good enough. Christopher becomes furious with both her (for being so shallow) and himself (for not standing up for himself).

A few days later, Christopher writes, he receives a visit from a young man who had seen his poster advertising English lessons and who, after awkward conversation full of name dropping, asks for a loan for investment in a new beauty product. Christopher refuses,

but gives him Sally's name - the young man is looking for actresses to test and promote the product. A short time later, Sally tells Christopher how she met the young man, believed his stories about Hollywood, went to dinner and a hotel with him, and woke up the next morning to find him gone (along with a substantial sum of her money). Christopher tells her the young man found her because of him, afraid that Sally will turn on him. Sally forgives him, and together they go to the police, who are eventually convinced by Sally's earnestness. The police track down the young man and arrest him, and Sally and Christopher are both surprised to learn he is only a teenager.

After the young man's capture, Christopher and Sally apologize to each other for the misunderstanding about the article, and go their separate ways. Christopher writes in narration that they never saw each other again, and that he has written this memoir in the hopes she'll accept it as a tribute to their friendship, and get in touch.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 2 Analysis

This is the most lengthy, and arguably the most engaging, of the short stories in "Goodbye to Berlin." It contains the character who is easily the most vividly defined of all the characters in the entire book - the charming, exasperating, enigmatic, highly theatrical Sally Bowles. In some ways, the story of the relationship between Sally and Christopher is similar to that of the relationship between William and Arthur Norris in "The Last of Mr. Norris." In both cases, the central narrative figure (Christopher here, William in "...Mr. Norris") are essentially drawn into the whirlwind lives of characters who are more deeply involved in life than they are. Granted, the degree and quality of that involvement at first seems very different for those two characters - Sally comes across as being in it for the thoughtless fun of it all, while Mr. Norris seems incapable of keeping himself out of danger (perhaps he too, in his way, is thoughtless). Ultimately, however they are essentially the same - both are struggling desperately to make a notable place for themselves in a world that, for whatever reasons, doesn't seem to want them.

There are also parallels between the two narrators. As discussed above, and indeed throughout this analysis, William and Christopher are both essentially observers of life who, by not injecting much of themselves, their perspectives and reactions into the narrative, come across as hangers on, easily manipulated, taken advantage of, and ultimately dominated. Whether this was the author's intention in portraying both these narrators in this way is debatable. Yes, a certain degree of the author/narrator's emotional reaction to the Sally Bowles whirlwind does occasionally make its presence felt, particularly in relation to the article incident - and this, upon further consideration, is very telling. Why does he portray himself as not upset about any of the other things she does, either to him or to herself, but DOES make a point of portraying himself as upset by the slight to his writing? The clear implication of this circumstance is that for him, the writing, HIS writing is what triggers more emotional response in him than anything. Ultimately, however, there is the very clear sense throughout the book that in the case of the particularly vivid Sally Bowles and Arthur Norris but also in the case of all the other characters, there seems to have been relatively little meaning to their relationships

with their respective narrators, who are both apparently unchanged by whatever and whoever they encounter. The question, of course, is whether the same is ultimately true of the reader.

There is an important piece of foreshadowing in this section. The author/narrator's reference to his time away to work on his novel foreshadows the next section of the book, the events of which seem to have taken place during that time.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 3

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 3 Summary

"On Ruegen Island (Summer 1931)"

This narrative seems to be set in a period referred to in "Sally Bowles" (see "Goodbye to Berlin, Section 2) - the point at which Christopher goes away for a few weeks to work on his novel. The narrative focuses on Christopher's involvement with neurotic, British Peter and selfish, animalistic, German Otto (see "Characters"). In episodic detail, Christopher describes Peter's history (as the aimless, troubled son of British aristocracy), Peter's meeting Otto (who, in a somewhat bullying way, tries to cheer Peter out of his frequent turns of depression), and how the "friendship" between the two men becomes volatile, testy, and somewhat sado-masochistic. The narrative also includes brief descriptions of fleeting relationships the trio of friends has with a nosy doctor and a flirtatious school teacher, both of which lead essentially nowhere but cause increased tension in the relationship between Otto and Peter (who, narration reveals, has gone through a series of psycho-therapists).

At one point late in the summer, after Otto has taken to spending most of his time away from the guest house, Peter and Christopher discuss the relationship. Christopher tells Peter to end it, but Peter claims he has to wait for something else to end the relationship. That "something" turns out to be Otto's departure - one day Christopher and Peter discover that Otto has taken some of Peter's clothes, along with a substantial amount of money, and left for Berlin. Peter immediately makes plans to return to England, where he hints that he'll go back into analysis and therapy. After Peter leaves, Christopher discovers a note from Otto, asking Christopher to not think too harshly of him and promising to look him up when he (Otto) returns to Berlin. Christopher comments that he had thought to stay longer, but that the guest house now seems too lonely.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 3 Analysis

There are several elements to note in this short vignette. The first is another manifestation of sub-textual, hinted at, homosexuality - specifically, in the relationship between Peter and Otto (who, the narrator carefully points out, share a bedroom) which is never defined as sexual in any way but certainly in the writing has over/under tones of several kinds of intimacy. The second is the way the characters are portrayed. There is a certain, albeit undefined, similarity between Peter and the author/narrator that extends beyond their mutual British nationality - they are both somewhat withdrawn, both reactive rather than active, and both somewhat childish (Peter more so, but recall the author/narrator's reaction to Sally's comments about his writing in "Sally Bowles"). Also in terms of character, it's important to note that Otto also appears in the following story, "The Nowaks." There is little or no indication of sub-textual homosexuality in that story,

but there is the same sense of animalistic self-indulgence and impulsiveness that colors Otto's behavior here.

The third noteworthy element of this story is its setting - specifically, the fact that it takes place on an island. For consideration of this aspect of the story see "Objects/Places - The Guest House on Ruegen Island".

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 4

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 4 Summary

"The Nowaks"

Christopher visits Otto (see "Goodbye to Berlin - Section 3"), whose home is in an inexpensive, run-down part of Berlin, in hopes of finding a less expensive place to live. Frau Nowak, Otto's mother, welcomes him happily, and through Otto suggests that he (Christopher) move in with them. Christopher agrees, and finds himself living with a family in which bad food, bickering, and heavy drinking are the mainstays of life. He quickly becomes tired and worn down by the atmosphere, both in the flat and in the building - "It was alien and mysterious and uncanny," he writes, "like sleeping out in the jungle alone." He starts spending more and more time away - teaching lessons during the day, going out to clubs in the evening. Eventually, the very ill Frau Nowak agrees to move into a sanitarium for treatment of what appears to be tuberculosis. At the same time, Christopher realizes he can no longer stay, and prepares to move out. On the night of the farewell party, an argument erupts between Frau Nowak and Otto, the most vicious they've ever had. As a result, Otto makes a gesture of suicide - not enough to actually cause death, but enough to cause significant bleeding.

A few weeks later, after finding a new place to live, Christopher comes back to the apartment in search of Otto so they can pay a visit to Frau Nowak together. He finds that Otto has moved out, and the remaining members of the Nowak family seem quite content to live in their apartment without power or very much food. When Christopher finally tracks down Otto, he discovers that Otto has moved in with a wealthy young woman and is dressed expensively (if in very bad taste). Together they ride a ramshackle bus to the sanitarium, where they find Frau Nowak rested and happy, living in the company of three other ill women (see "Quotes," p. 135), two of whom make advances towards Otto and Christopher. At the end of the visit, the women are all reluctant to say farewell, with Frau Nowak in particular working herself into a tearful, coughing frenzy. Christopher and Otto climb on the bus and are driven away. "I had an absurd pang of fear," Christopher writes, "that they were going to attack us - a gang of terrifyingly soft muffled shapes - clawing us from our seats, dragging us hungrily down, in dead silence. But ... they drew back," he adds, "harmless, after all, as mere ghosts."

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 4 Analysis

This story stands apart from all he others in this collection, including "...Mr. Norris." There are several reasons for this. First, the writing has an almost surreal, otherworldly, somewhat nightmarish quality. This applies particularly to the individual members of the Nowak family, who are each portrayed with a clear and vivid sense of the grotesque, the exaggerated, and/or the ugly. At the same time, the environments in which the author/narrator encounters the Nowaks (both the apartment and the nursing home) are

themselves defined in phrases and images that are subtly evocative of madness, perhaps even of a kind of hell. Finally, this story contains the most vivid evocation of the author's inner life in the entire book (with the exception of the confrontation over the article in "Sally Bowles"). There are no rants, no explosions of feeling, no despairing cries - but there is the overwhelming sense, subtly conveyed (if something can be both overwhelming and subtle) that the author/narrator is himself brought to the brink of madness by his brief stay in the insane world of the Nowaks. It's possible to see this madness as a metaphor for the Nazi-inspired madness of Germany at the time - in other words, the author/narrator's growing discomfort with life in the apartment is a metaphoric echo of his growing discomfort with life under looming Nazi oppression.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 5

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 5 Summary

"The Landauers"

This story is set in October of 1930, "about a month after the Elections..." It narrates the relationship between Christopher and a wealthy Jewish mercantile family, the Landauers, a relationship centered around the spoiled and imperious eighteen year old daughter, Natalia (it's unclear what brings Christopher and Natalia together, but it would be reasonable to assume that Christopher is ostensibly with the family to help Natalia learn English). Natalia is naïve and prudish, reacting negatively when Christopher introduces her to Sally Bowles (see "Goodbye to Berlin) and thereafter neglecting their friendship for months. Eventually Natalia leaves to study art in Paris.

The other Landauer with whom Christopher becomes closely involved is Bernhard, Natalia's cousin and the manager of the Landauers' store in Berlin. Bernhard, who speaks perfect English, is quiet and reserved, and like Natalia somewhat naïve - he finds descriptions of life with the Nowaks (with whom Christopher is living during part of this story - see "Goodbye to Berlin, Section 4") amusing. Unlike Natalia, however, Bernhard has a sense of humor - he invites Christopher to go with him to a cottage in the country which he (Bernhard) hints is somewhat decrepit, but when they arrive, is revealed to be quite luxurious. During that visit, Bernard speaks intimately about his troubled childhood and misgivings about his adulthood, adding (when Christopher becomes uncomfortable) that the visit and the conversation were part of an experiment to see if he (Bernhard) could lessen his sense of suffering. On a second visit to the cottage, Christopher is reunited with Natalia, who seems much happier and playfully contented. Bernhard tells Christopher that she is now married, to a French doctor.

Some time after the second visit to "the cottage," Christopher discovers that Bernhard and other managers of the Landauer store have been receiving threatening anti-Jewish letters. Bernhard playfully asks Christopher to leave Berlin with him that night, in spite of the lightness of the atmosphere making a perceptive comment about Christopher's character (see "Quotes," p. 181). Christopher jokingly goes along with what he sees as a game, but doesn't leave. Soon afterwards, he leaves Berlin permanently, and on his return journey to England, overhears a conversation between two traveling businessmen in which they discuss Bernhard's "death" from "heart failure" - which, the conversation implies, is a euphemism for execution by the Nazis. The businessmen comment that Herr Landauer has moved to France and has no reason to worry about money - "they're smart," the men comment, "those Jews," and then tell a crude Jewish joke.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 5 Analysis

If there is a sense of narrative movement linking these essentially diverse short narratives into a kind of whole, it is connected to Christopher's growing awareness of increasing Nazi presence and power in the Germany he once knew as essentially playful, free, and populated with colorful characters. In that context, "The Landauers" might be seen as something of a climax - for the first time, the Nazi threat becomes both overt and as close to personal to Christopher as it ever gets. If the story of his relationship with the Landauers is not a climax, it is certainly a turning point - the discoveries Christopher makes about the world in which he's living cause him to take a course of action that definitely changes his life.

In fact, it might not be going too far to suggest that Christopher's decision to leave (after seeing what's happening to the Landauers and to other Jews) is one of the few times in the book that he allows himself to be affected by the life he seems so dedicated to observing (i.e., "I am a camera). Yes, throughout the book there are instances in which he takes action in reaction to circumstances around him (his involvement in the Communist Party, in Norris' schemes, in the lives of Sally and Peter/Otto and the Nowaks). Those choices don't really affect his life, however; they're more about getting him involved in the lives of others (and presumably creating more opportunities for observe and gather more material for his written "photo album"). His choice to leave Germany is actually about his life, he's making a decision for himself, about himself, and because of himself. In that context, therefore, it's possible to see "The Landauers" as not only the climax of the book, but a climax in the author/narrator's life to that point.

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 6

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 6 Summary

"A Berlin Diary (Winter, 1932-33)"

This final section of the book consists mostly of a series of vignettes, narrative snapshots of incidents observed by the author on his last days in Berlin, days which coincide with the increasing power of the Nazi movement. Images include the complaints of the bitterly cold Fraulein Schroeder (not to mention the ease with which she slips into support of the Nazi cause), the manipulations and false competitions of popularly attended wrestling matches, confrontations between Nazis and Jews (some relatively conversational, most violent), and a visit paid by Christopher and Fritz to a sexually ambiguous nightclub. It is during his narration of this particular vignette that Christopher admits, albeit perhaps sarcastically, that he is "queer." Other vignettes include Christopher's visits to one of the last operating gathering places for Communists, a visit to a young men's reformatory, and illustrations of how the Nazis consolidated, and promoted, their power. Christopher also describes how Fraulein Schroeder has started supporting the Nazis, an action which he views with a kind of resignedly realistic compassion (see "Quotes," p. 207). Finally, he describes his last walk through the streets of the city he has come to love, commenting on how familiar and pleasant everything seems. This section, and the book, concludes with the comment that even now, Christopher "can't altogether believe that any of this has really happened ..."

Goodbye to Berlin, Section 6 Analysis

More than any other short story in "Goodbye to Berlin", this section is a series of vignettes within a vignette, a collection of snap-shot like impressions that ultimately add up to a subtly conveyed sense of moral, social, and political decay. There are a couple of particularly interesting elements here - the repeated motif of moral flexibility in the name of self preservation (Fraulein Schroeder's sudden Nazi sympathies, the visit to the reformatory) which have clear echoes in the morally corrupt operations of the wrestling matches. Another interesting element is the re-emergence of the homosexual motif, which becomes substantially less sub-textual here than in the other sections of the book. The point must be made that the writing of that particular moment comes across as very careful, in that it's not entirely clear whether the author/narrator is truly admitting that he is "queer" (homosexual), or whether he's merely doing so in support of those he sees being oppressed. In any case, the moment is clear foreshadowing of the historical fact that homosexuals (specifically male homosexuals) were a target of Nazi cleansing policies in the same way as Jews, Gypsies, and intellectuals.

Finally, there are the author/narrator's references to the world he has come "to love" but to regard as almost unreal. There is a powerful sense melancholy here, of loss and of

bewilderment. This last is apparent in the writing, but might also apply to the reader, for this is the first overt indication that the author has loved, or even cared for in any way, the world he's been observing and recording. Yes, there is the sense throughout the book that he was on some level enjoying what was going on, unless his determination to observe lives different from his own was so strong that it kept him in a place and living a life that he DIDN"T enjoy (which is always possible). However, there is little or no sense that he had fallen "in love," as it were, with Germany, the people there, and the kind of lives they're living. It might not be going too far to suggest that for the most part, the novel gives the sense that the author simply inhabited Berlin - but when it comes time to leave, suddenly gives the sense that he actually LIVED there. It may be that this could be proof of the old saying that one doesn't know what one had until it's gone.

Characters

William Bradshaw / Christopher Isherwoodappears in The Last of Mr. Norris / Goodbye to Berlin

William is the narrator of "...Mr. Norris" - events, characters and circumstances are described from his point of view. It could be argued that he is also something of a protagonist, in that his experiences are central to the narrative line - he plays an active role a number of key events (i.e., Mr. Norris' scheme to involve the Baron in the passing of political intelligence), and is also active in encouraging actions taken by Mr. Norris. It's important to note, however, that many of these actions are taken in response to circumstances generated by Mr. Norris. In other words, William is more of a reactor to events rather than an initiator of them. Also, if the term "protagonist" is interpreted to mean a central character who undergoes a process of transformation, William is NOT a protagonist, since there is little or no indication of his experiencing any kind of transformation. It's possible to infer that he has in fact changed, perhaps in the direction of becoming more worldly, but this is by no means explained in the narration or pointed up by events. A not unrelated point is that William is also a very objective narrator, in that descriptions of his emotional reactions to the events he experiences are few and far between. There are exceptions - his visceral and instinctive dislike of Schmidt, for example, or his affection for Fraulein Schroeder. For the most part, though, the story he tells is about Mr. Norris - William's own attitudes and feelings are secondary.

In this context, it's interesting to consider William's essential character and purpose in this story in relation to the narrator's comments at the beginning of "Goodbye to Berlin," in which he (the author) describes himself as "a camera," simply recording and observing events. When juxtaposed with the narrative perspective of "... Mr. Norris," there is the strong sense that as a character and/or presence William is, on some level, simply a pseudonym, a stand-in for the author - Christopher Isherwood, who is referred to by name throughout "Goodbye to Berlin" and who shares a landlady, several friends, and time spent in Berlin with William. For further consideration of the relationship between William and Christopher, see "Topics for Discussion - Why do you think ..."

Mr. (Arthur) Norrisappears in The Last of Mr. Norris

Arthur Norris is the true central character of the story (almost a novella) that bears his name - the action revolves around him, narration focuses on him, and the narrative begins and ends with his presence. In other words, he is in many ways the story's protagonist, but in one particular way he is not - the narrative never explores his inner world, his emotional life, his motivations, his psycho-spiritual context. In other words, the reader never truly gets to know him, or for that matter really care about him. He is a large personality, to be sure, intriguing and complex and quirky. The story presents him, rather than explores him or defines him. It could be argued that this is something of a cheat - why tell a story about such an intriguing character if the ultimate truth at the core

of his actions is never revealed? Is not the purpose of art to reveal hidden truth, as opposed to merely presenting experience? It could also be argued, however, that this approach is not necessarily a problem at all, in that Mr. Norris' mysteriousness, combined with the narrator's objectivity in presenting him (see "William Bradshaw" above), creates a very realistic experience (since it's difficult for an individual to truly know and/or understand another). In other words, the story is simply a portrait, and the author is leaving any judgments and/or interpretations up to the reader, and is therefore a manifestation of one of the central themes of this collection of writings - that the true individual lives of other human beings are essentially unknowable.

Fraulein Schroederappears in The Last of Mr. Norris / Goodbye to Berlin

This character, the affectionate, morally flexible landlady of a boarding house in Berlin, appears throughout the book. In "Goodbye to Berlin" she is a figure in what is evidently a memoir, while in "...Mr. Norris" she seems to be a fictionalized version of herself. There is the strong sense that she is a clear manifestation of the author's thematic intent, spread throughout all the stories, to base his writings closely and thoroughly on observed, lived experience (see "Themes - The Line between Fiction and Reality").

Fritzappears in The Last of Mr. Norris / Goodbye to Berlin

Fritz, like Fraulein Schroeder, appears throughout the book, but for the most part in a much less substantial role. He is a friend of William (in "...Mr. Norris") and Christopher (in "Goodbye to Berlin"), a man who enjoys good times and knows where/how to find them. His presence in both narratives, like that of Fraulein Schroeder, suggests that William and Christopher are essentially the same person.

The Nazisappears in The Last of Mr. Norris / Goodbye to Berlin

Like Fraulein Schroeder, and Fritz, the Nazis are a presence throughout the book. Unlike those two other individuals, however, the Nazis are less immediately present and more of a distant threat, hovering on the fringes of the book's socio-political-cultural setting. Like Fraulein Schroeder, however, they do occasionally (and briefly) take on active roles in defining the action, principally through their persecution of those who oppose them and their aims of social, racial, and political purity.

Schmidtappears in The Last of Mr. Norris

Schmidt is first seen as Mr. Norris' unfriendly personal assistant, but after being apparently fired by him, he becomes an even more threatening presence, resorting to violence and threats of blackmail in order to re-establish their relationship (which, at the end of the story, he does). The core of his relationship with Norris - that is, the reason for the blackmail - is never explicitly defined, but there are two possibilities ... that Schmidt knows about Norris' unusual sexual tastes (and threatens to make them public and therefore ruin Norris' reputation), or that Schmidt knows that Norris is essentially untrustworthy (and threatens to make life difficult for him).

The Baronappears in The Last of Mr. Norris

In spite of his playing a key role in several episodes and/or relationships in "...Mr. Norris," the Baron is a highly enigmatic figure - sexually ambiguous (although clearly leaning towards the homosexual), emotionally both distant and childlike, financially discreet, and politically ambivalent (in that it's never clear whether he supports the Communists, the Nazis, or the status quo). There is the strong sense that he, like Mr. Norris, is a manifestation of the author's central thematic exploration of the ultimate un-knowability of the human individual.

Anni and Ottoappears in The Last of Mr. Norris

While it's never explicitly stated, there is the very strong sense that Anni is a prostitute and Otto is her pimp. Also, Anni is portrayed as being more morally and/or ideologically flexible than Otto - she does what she has to (including switch allegiances between political parties) in order to survive. Otto, however, is a passionate, committed Communist. While narration describes them both as disappearing from the narrator's life, there is the strong sense that Anni will survive whatever comes (including the reign of the Nazis), but that Otto will not - she's tough enough, but he's too vulnerable.

Ludwig Bayerappears in The Last of Mr. Norris

Again, the essential nature of this character is never explicitly defined, but there are clear implications that Bayer is the head of the Communist Party of Berlin. Watchful, wise, and politically astute, he is revealed to be far more knowledgeable than he lets on - again, another manifestation of the book's central thematic premise that ultimately, human beings are unknowable.

The van Hoornsappears in The Last of Mr. Norris

The narrator and the Baron encounter the mysterious van Hoorns (attractive young Nazi Piet and his talkative business man uncle) while on a ski holiday in Switzerland. First

impressions are that the encounter is a purely chance one, but narration eventually reveals otherwise. The elder van Hoorn is in fact the mysterious, code-named "Margot," the agent of French Intelligence for whom Mr. Norris is a double agent and to whom Mr. Norris wants to introduce the Baron, in the hopes that the Baron will himself become an agent.

Fraulein Kost, Fraulein Mayr, Bobbyappears in Goodbye to Berlin - A Berlin Diary (1930)

These three characters are tenants in the boarding house run by Fraulein Schroeder. Fraulein Kost is a good-hearted but fiery prostitute, Fraulein Mayr is a traveling vaudeville artist and staunch Nazi, and Bobby is a good hearted, affable bartender and bouncer. All three appear as peripheral characters in the narratives that follow.

Hippi Bernsteinappears in Goodbye to Berlin - A Berlin Diary (1930)

Hippi is one of Christopher's students. Her evident disregard for the world and events around her is evocative of the attitude of Germans in general, and of German Jews in particular, to the changes being brought in by Hitler and the Nazis.

Sally Bowlesappears in Goodbye to Berlin - Sally Bowles

Sally is easily one of the most vivid characters in the entire book. There are several reasons for this - she speaks differently, has a more impulsive nature, and is generally more emotionally open than almost anyone else in either narrative ("...Mr. Norris" or "Goodbye to Berlin"). This last characteristic is particularly important - because her emotions are so passionately experienced and easily expressed, she is a powerfully defining contrast to Christopher whose emotions, both in action and narration, are so carefully and thoroughly controlled. In other words, while Christopher describes himself as a camera, Sally lives her life as though she's in front of a camera all the time. She lives life, while Christopher seems to be merely observing it.

Klaus, Clive, the Young Man in the Moviesappears in Goodbye to Berlin - Sally Bowles

These three characters, while different in certain superficial aspects (age, nationality, wealth, appearance) are all essentially the same - they enter the lives of Sally and Christopher, play important roles in those lives, and then suddenly (and somewhat traumatically) leave. All three have a greater effect on Sally than they do on Christopher (at least that's what Christopher's narration leads the reader to believe), all three are

essentially users, and all three are manifestations of the book's thematic exploration of how people are essentially unknowable.

Peter and Ottoappears in Goodbye to Berlin - On Ruegen Island

Peter and Otto are fellow visitors at the guest house where Christopher stays in "On Ruegen Island," and essentially function in the narrative (in Christopher's life?) in the same way as Sally Bowles - their vivid personalities and conflicts are observed and described by Christopher as manifestations of his essential camera-like nature. They are, perhaps, somewhat more knowable than Sally, in that their essential characters are revealed to a somewhat greater degree - Otto is an opportunistic user, Peter is a troubled and vulnerable neurotic. Their relationship is one of several in the book built upon a subtext of homosexuality - they share a room and a bed in the guest house, but a sexual relationship is never overtly or even covertly discussed.

The Nowak Familyappears in Goodbye to Berlin - The Nowaks

This family with whom Christopher briefly lives (including opportunistic, manipulative Otto from "On Ruegen Island") consists of Frau Nowak (angry, volatile, apparently suffering from tuberculosis), Herr Nowak (cheery, alcoholic, a spendthrift), brother Lothar (sullen and hardworking), and sister Grete (spoiled, manipulative and whiny). As is the case throughout the book, Christopher observes and records their relationships and confrontations, occasionally playing a peripheral role in the action but for the most part living on the outside even when he's on the inside (i.e., in the apartment as part of their lives).

The Landauersappears in Goodbye to Berlin - The Landauers

The Landauers are a wealthy Jewish merchant family in Berlin. Christopher's involvement is principally with Natalia, the imperious daughter, and Bernhard, the successful manager of the family's main store and a sexually ambiguous practical joker. The most obviously Jewish of all the characters in the book, Christopher's peripheral involvement in their lives contains brief but telling glimpses of the relationship between victimized Jews and viciously controlling Nazis in the Germany of the mid-1930s. In other words, the experiences of the Landauers personalize (to the degree that it's possible for such an impersonal narrator) the nation/society-wide racism that has, throughout the book, been little more than a looming darkness occasionally erupting in horror. The placement of the story of the Landauers at the end of the book can be no coincidence - it is, essentially, the end of Christopher's experiences in Germany. In telling their story, albeit briefly, he is truly bidding "Goodbye to Berlin."

Objects/Places

Berlinappears in The Last of Mr. Norris / Goodbye to Berlin

This city in Germany is, for the most part, the setting for both narratives ("The Last of Mr. Norris" and "Goodbye to Berlin"). It's important to note that this is the Berlin between World Wars I and II, a city of complicated, contradictory energies and intentions, indulgent and oppressive, hopeful and despairing, productive and poverty stricken. For further consideration of the value of Berlin as setting for the book, see "Style - Setting."

The Boarding Houseappears in The Last of Mr. Norris / Goodbye to Berlin

Both William (the narrator of "...Mr. Norris") and Christopher (the author/narrator of "Goodbye to Berlin") stay in a boarding house run by Fraulein Schroeder. In the former story, there is relatively little physical description, but what is there is enough to suggest that the boarding house is the same in both stories - a bit seedy, a bit run-down, but secure enough to be a kind of home for the people living there.

The Troikaappears in The Last of Mr. Norris / Goodbye to Berlin

This is a nightclub frequented by characters in both sets of narratives. Popular and often crowded, it is the setting for several significant encounters, particularly between William, Mr. Norris and the Baron (in "...Mr. Norris"), and between Sally, Charles, and the men in their lives (Klaus, Clive and Bernhard) in "Goodbye to Berlin."

"Troika" is the name of a Russian, horse-drawn, passenger carriage. The implication of the name is that those who go to the club are "along for the ride," so to speak, of life.

Mr. Norris' Wigsappears in The Last of Mr. Norris

William, the narrator of "...Mr. Norris", goes to significant pains at various points in the narrative to describe the various wigs (or, perhaps more accurately the toupees) worn by Mr. Norris. During the early stages of their relationship, the wig is fairly plain and not particularly well fitted. Later in the relationship, when Mr. Norris is more successful, the wig becomes more elaborately styled and better fitted - in short, more expensive. The wigs can be seen as a metaphor for Mr. Norris' essential character - constantly covering up that which he doesn't want to be known, in the same way as his wig covers up the hairlessness he doesn't want to be seen.

Sally's Nail Polishappears in Goodbye to Berlin - Sally Bowles

In "Goodbye to Berlin - Sally Bowles," Christopher makes a particular point of describing Sally's emerald green nail polish, which he suggests is as outrageous, unexpected, and hard to miss as Sally herself. The polish can therefore be seen as an effective externalization of Sally's essential personality.

Charles' Writingappears in Goodbye to Berlin

Throughout the various stories in "Goodbye to Berlin," Charles refers to his creative writing - specifically, the novel he continually works on. There is relatively little description of what that novel is actually about, or the characters and/or narrative it describes - it is, however, clear that on a fundamental level, he defines himself as a novelist. The fact that William (the narrator of "...Mr. Norris") is also a writer and is also working on a novel is another link suggesting that the two individuals are in fact the same - that William is a fictionalization of Christopher (see "Characters - William Bradshaw/Christopher Isherwood").

The Guest House on Ruegen Islandappears in Goodbye to Berlin - On Ruegen Island

This is the setting for the narrative in "Goodbye to Berlin" subtitled "On Ruegen Island (Summer 1931)." The narrative contains relatively little description of the island and/or the guest house where Christopher is staying, but there is a certain sense of isolation, necessary for him to work on his novel, and also a sense of entrapment. This last is less important for Christopher than it is for the characters (Peter and Otto) whose story he is telling - trapped with themselves and with each other, they have no choice but to confront the aspects of their relationship that make them uncomfortable.

The Nowaks' Apartmentappears in Goodbye to Berlin - The Nowaks

The apartment is the setting for the narrative in "Goodbye to Berlin" subtitled "The Nowaks." It's small, crowded, dirty, noisy, and not at all a comfortable place for Christopher to live and/or work, or for three of the Nowaks (Otto, his mother Frau Nowak and his brother Lothar). The other Nowaks (Herr Nowak, baby sister Grete) are perfectly happy there. There is also a sense of entrapment about this setting, a sense even stronger in Christopher's case than Ruegen Island in the previous narrative. It's interesting to note that Otto, who evidently feels trapped by both geography and his relationship in "On Ruegen Island" feels the same in this story.

Landauer's Department Storeappears in Goodbye to Berlin - The Landauers

In "The Landauers," the family's department store is a substantial symbol of their success and status. It's also a symbol of what is, for the Nazis, a key motivator behind the persecution of Jews in general and, by implication, the Landauers in particular - success that, the Nazis feel, is the right of pure blood, Aryan Germans.

Bernhard's Cottageappears in Goodbye to Berlin - The Landauers

Also in "The Landauers," the "cottage" is the focus of one of Bernhard's practical jokes on Christopher - he (Bernhard) describes it in terms that make Christopher think it's rustic, small and dirty, but when he actually sees it he discovers it's large, well furnished, and even opulent. As such, it can be seen as a physical manifestation of the book's thematic focus on the ultimate un-knowability of truth - in the same way as the cottage's true identity comes as a surprise, so too does the true identity of people (like Mr. Norris, the van Hoorns, Clive, Sally Bowles, etc.)

Themes

The Mysteriousness of the Individual

There are several instances, throughout both "The Last of Mr. Norris" and "Goodbye to Berlin," in which an individual's true identity (feelings, motivations, perspectives, beliefs, etc.) are kept hidden from the individuals around him/her. A primary example is the title character of "... Mr. Norris," who keeps the narrator (William) guessing about who he truly is and what he's really about for the entire narrative. Even at its conclusion, when William knows some of the specifics about what Mr. Norris has been up to while in Germany, it becomes clear that he (William) still doesn't understand the true nature of Mr. Norris' relationship with the aggressive, blackmailing Schmidt. Also in "...Mr. Norris," the true character of the Baron remains hidden from William as well, with the eventual revelation that the Baron is well connected with the German government coming as a significant surprise.

This motif (pattern) repeats itself several times in the various stories contained in "Goodbye to Berlin," most notably in the character of Sally Bowles ("Sally Bowles"), who keeps her true, deepest self hidden beneath affectation, giddiness, and impulsiveness. There is some possibility that she truly is as shallow as she portrays herself, but the fact that she comes out with nuggets of clear wisdom on more than one occasion clearly suggests that there is something more to her than what she clearly intends to meet the spectator's eye. Other characters who keep themselves secret include Klaus, Clive and the Young Man from the Movies, all of whom keep their agendas and/or feelings secret from Charles, Sally or both.

By far the most important manifestation of this sense of secrecy in the narratives' characters is in the narrators of those narratives - William in "...Mr. Norris" and Christopher (the author) in "Goodbye to Berlin" (see "Characters - William Bradshaw/Christopher Isherwood" for a discussion of the relationship between these two individuals). Both William and Christopher seem to keep themselves, their inner lives, goals, dreams and intentions secret from the reader, from the people around them, and perhaps even from themselves. There is the very clear sense that a key component in their individual (common?) characters is a secondary theme throughout the narratives they're recounting - the valuing of observation over experience.

Observation vs. Experience

At the beginning of "Goodbye to Berlin," the narrator/author (Christopher Isherwood) makes a very telling comment about his perspective on the life he's describing, and perhaps on life in general. "I am a camera," he writes, "with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking..." (see "Goodbye to Berlin," Section 1). In other words, he sees himself as eternally watching, from varying distances but always some distance away, not engaging in what he's seeing, living life as a spectator. This narrative

(experiential?) perspective is also true of William, who is less direct but no less clear as he describes his relationship with Mr. Norris and the characters they encounter in an extremely objective fashion that's almost clinical in its distance from any kind of personal opinion and/or commentary. Aside from being another piece of evidence that William and Christopher are ultimately the same person, this similarity of perspective between the two narrators creates an overall stylistic and/or thematic commentary on the experience of life - that for some, observation is more fulfilling and/or relevant than active participation. It could argued that for the narrators, it's also safer. Keeping himself at a degree of emotional and/or experiential distance from life keeps William free from the potentially violent encounters with the likes of Schmidt and the Nazis experienced by Mr. Norris and the Baron. In Christopher's case, detachment keeps him free from the emotional devastation that individuals like Fraulein Schroeder, Sally Bowles, the Nowaks and the Landauers experience ... or perhaps that's what he would like his readers to believe. This, in turn, leads into the book's other secondary theme - the blurring of the line between reality and fiction.

The Line between Fiction and Reality

The boundary between reality and fiction becomes blurred in several obvious ways in these stories. To begin with, both "The Last of Mr. Norris" and "Goodbye to Berlin" include several reality-based details of the city of Berlin (street names, etc.), as well as perhaps less detailed but equally specific historical background (such as incidents along the way of the Nazis' rise to power). While many fictional works do this same kind of real-life contextualizing, the author of these stories goes one step further. In "Goodbye to Berlin," he includes himself as a character, giving that story a strong sense of memoir. And because that sense is so strong, the fact that several characters who appear in "Goodbye to Berlin" appear in "...Mr. Norris" (the landlady Fraulein Schroeder and Charles' friend Fritz in particular) suggests that "...Mr. Norris" is also more than slightly memoir-like in its essence. It also suggests that the narrator of that story, William Bradshaw, is in fact a thinly disguised portrait of the author - which in turn suggests that the characters and experiences of "...Mr. Norris" are, at least to some degree, closely based on reality. The obvious question, of course, in a situation such as this is how much is real and how much has been heightened and/or shaped in the name of creating effective narrative. Without discussing both narratives line by line and incident by incident with the author, it's virtually impossible to say. What is possible, however, is to suggest that as with most (all?) art, reality/history is a valuable if not inevitable source of subject material, and the reader might ultimately be doing him/her self a disservice by expending too much energy on what is/isn't "real." This is because ultimately, effective art (literary, visual, performing, abstract) isn't about the creator - it's about what the created brings to the life and understanding of the viewer.

Style

Point of View

Point of View

The two stories in this collection are both narrated from the first person point of view of a young British expatriate, an aspiring novelist, living in Berlin and collecting experiences of life in the same way as some people collect photographs and put them in an album. Indeed, at the beginning of "Goodbye to Berlin," the narrator/author describes himself in exactly those terms - "I am a camera," he writes. Also in both stories, there is the very clear sense that the young narrator doesn't have a great deal of experience of his own. There are few (if any) exclamations of surprise at the events and/or characters he describes, but there is a certain sense of genteel disbelief about the narration, and about how he gets involved with the individuals and incidents he's describing. The key component of this book's point of view is the fact that in "Goodbye to Berlin," the author uses his own name and, presumably to some degree, his own sense of self as context for his narration. In "...Mr. Norris," however, the narrator is named William Bradshaw, in spite of the fact that he shares so many characteristics (a landlady and friends as well as those defined above) with the real life author/narrator of "Goodbye to Berlin." In short, there are strong indications that the point of view of the two stories is not merely similar, but identical. If this is the case, and the author is in "...Mr. Norris" describing close-to-real events in the same way as he seems to be doing in "Goodbye to Berlin," the question then becomes why did he fictionalize his identity in the former? A perhaps logical answer might be that the events in "...Mr. Norris" are, at least to some degree, more fictionalized than those of "Goodbye to Berlin" and therefore the author decided it was appropriate to fictionalize himself as well.

Setting

There are several important levels of setting in these two stories. The main ones have to do with place and time - specifically, the city of Berlin, in Germany, between World Wars I and II. This was a period when Germany was recovering from the financial, military and social hardships resulting from their defeat in the first, and struggling with socio-political upheaval (i.e., the rise of both the Communists and the Nazis) prior to the second. In other words, Berlin in this period was a city of upheaval and transition, a set of circumstances which gives the book a context of instability within which the characters are struggling not only to retain some degree of normality but also to simply survive.

Within that larger socio-political context, it's worthwhile considering the metaphoric resonances of how much of the action in both stories is set in a boarding house. By definition, such an environment isn't really a home - it's temporary and transitory, offering a bare minimum of amenities. The individuals who live there live lives that will

eventually change, either sooner or later, much like the lives of any/everyone in the Berlin of the time. They're on their way down, on their way up, or at the very least on their way someplace else ... or they want to be. On this level, setting is evocative and/or illuminative of character - all the characters in the boarding house, albeit to varying degrees of consciousness and/or action, are aware that they want to be something other than what they are.

On another level, setting is also evocative of theme - specifically, the book's central theme relating to the ultimate unknowability of identity. Yes, some of the characters in the boarding house have a clear idea of who they are becoming, and as such are manifestations of the possibility for an individual to have at least some idea of his/her identity. Most of the characters, however, don't have a solid and/or realistic idea of who they are - in their struggle to survive, they have no clearly developed sense of self-identity. In other words, in the same way as they inhabit the transitory rooms of the boarding house, characters like William/Christopher, Mr. Norris and Sally Bowles inhabit transitory stages of ultimately unknowable identity.

Language and Meaning

The most noteworthy use of language in this pairing of stories is the creation of a certain sense of objectivity, of distance between the observations of the narrator(s) and himself. Events are described in language that contains little or no opinion and/or explanation - things happened as they happened, are shown as they happened, and are to be interpreted and/or understood on their own terms, rather than those of the author/narrator. Literary devices (parallels, metaphors, etc) are used sparingly, and appear more in "Goodbye to Berlin" which has a slightly more poetic sensibility in its writing (for an example of one of the very few instances of metaphoric writing in "...Mr. Norris" see "The Last of Mr. Norris" - Chapter 14). This results in a similar sense of distance between the reader and the events being described - the language of the narration is for the most part presentational, rather than evocative. There isn't a sense of genuine, deep feeling anywhere in the book - the reader isn't brought into the experiences of the characters so much as s/he is shown them. As previously discussed, the overall sense is that the reader is being invited to look into a photo album, with the content of the pictures being described but the feelings associated with that content being left in silence. Meaning is therefore as unknowable as many of the characters, and is therefore yet another manifestation of the book's central thematic contention that life is perhaps more usually observable than it is ever knowable.

Structure

Each of the two narratives in this book ("The Last of Mr. Norris" and "Goodbye to Berlin") are essentially self-contained - there are certain elements (themes, settings, historical context, a character or two) that cross between one and the other, but for the most part the stories in themselves are separate and autonomous. "...Mr. Norris" is essentially linear in structure, with events progressing from A to B to C on the traditional

narrative journey from innocence (the narrator's lack of knowledge about Mr. Norris) to awareness (the narrator's awareness of at least some of Mr. Norris' true identity).

"Goodbye to Berlin," by contrast, is substantially less linear, consisting as it does of a collection of vignettes, narrations (in the form of short stories) of the author/narrator's memorable encounters with colorful citizens of between-the-wars Berlin. Within each vignette there is a certain sense of narrative structure, of movement from A to B, from innocence to knowledge, but for the most part these vignettes/short stories are themselves autonomous and don't necessarily add up to a narrative whole. It's interesting to note, however, that there is a certain sense of inter-relationship between the stories - events in "The Landauers," for example, are linked to events in "Sally Bowles" by the appearance of Sally at a tea party for Natalia Landauer. Likewise, events in "On Ruegen Island" are also linked to events in "Sally Bowles" by the author/narrator's reference in the latter story to going away for a period of time to write - that period of time is his time on Ruegen Island.

In short, "...Mr. Norris" is, mostly because of its structure, a "story" with sense and meaning emerging from the relationship between beginning, middle and end. "Goodbye to Berlin" might most effectively be termed a "collage" - no beginning, middle or end, but a collection of incidents whose meaning emerges from juxtaposition rather than structural, linear construction.

Quotes

"In another moment, when I had drunk exactly the right amount of champagne, I should have a vision. I took a sip. And now, with extreme clarity, without passion or malice, I saw what Life really is. It had something, I remember, to do with the revolving sunshade. Yes, I murmured to myself, let them dance. They are dancing. I am glad." "The Last of Mr. Norris", p. 23

"'I always say that I only wish to have three sorts of people as my friends, those who are very rich, those who are very witty, and those who are very beautiful.'" Ibid, Mr. Norris to William, p. 29

"I had never been to a communist meeting before, and what struck me most was the fixed attention of the upturned rows of faces; faces of the Berlin working class, pale and prematurely lined, often haggard and ascetic, like the heads of scholars, with thin, fair hair brushed back from their broad foreheads. They had not come here to see each other or to be seen, or even to fulfill a social duty ... they were listening to their own collective voice." Ibid, p. 48.

"Berlin was in a state of civil war. Hate exploded suddenly, without warning, out of nowhere ... in the middle of a crowded street a young man would be attacked, stripped, thrashed and left bleeding on the pavement; in fifteen seconds it was all over and the assailants had disappeared." Ibid, p. 86

"[The Baron's] laugh was a curiosity, an heirloom; something handed down from the dinner-tables of the last century; aristocratic, manly and sham, scarcely to be heard nowadays except on the legitimate stage." Ibid, p. 107

"...I tried to look Arthur in the eyes ... here were no windows to the soul. They were merely part of his face, light blue jellies, like naked shell-fish in the crevices of a rock ... no sparkle, no inward gleam." Ibid, p.138

"[The Baron's] eyes ... were fixed in a short-sighted, visionary stare which suggested that he was engaged in a private religious rite. To speak to him would have been as intrusive as to disturb a man at his prayers." Ibid, p. 140

"We were like two unimportant characters in the first act of a play, put there to make conversation until it is time for the chief actor to appear." Ibid, p. 141

"'... don't judge me too harshly. You're young. Your standards are so severe. When you get to my age, you'll see things differently, perhaps. It's very easy to condemn when one isn't tempted.'" Ibid, Mr. Norris to William, p. 161.

"Arthur's orientally sensitive spirit shrank from the rough, healthy, modern, catch-as-catch-can of home truths and confessions; he offered me a compliment instead." Ibid, p. 165

"Remorse is not for the elderly. When it comes to them, it is not purging or uplifting, but merely degrading and wretched, like a bladder disease." Ibid, p. 166

"Most rich people, once they have decided to trust you at all, can be imposed upon to almost any extent." "Goodbye to Berlin", p. 17

"Like everyone else in Berlin, she refers continually to the political situation, but only briefly, with a conventional melancholy, as when one speaks of religion." Ibid, p. 17

"As [Sally] dialed the number, I noticed that her fingernails were painted emerald green, a color unfortunately chose, for it called attention to her hands, which were much stained by cigarette smoking and as dirty as a little girl's." Ibid, p. 22

"[Sally] was really beautiful, with her little dark head, big eyes and finely arched nose - and so absurdly conscious of all these features. There she lay, as complacently feminine as a turtle-dove, with her poised self conscious head and daintily arranged hands." Ibid, p. 27

"It is a very solemn undertaking to adore a millionaire. Sally's features began to assume, with increasing frequency, the rapt expression of the theatrical nun." Ibid, p. 47

"In a few days, I thought, we shall have forfeited all kinship with ninety-nine percent of the population of the world, with the men and women who earn their living ... perhaps in the Middle Ages people felt like this, when they believed themselves to have sold their souls to the Devil ... I said to myself, I've done it, now. I am lost." Ibid, p. 49

"'I'm the sort of woman who can take men away from their wives, but I could never keep anybody for long. And that's because I'm the type which every man imagines he wants, until he gets me; and then he finds he doesn't really, after all.'" Ibid, Sally to Christopher, p. 50

"...Frau Nowak would sometimes say: 'When Hitler comes, he'll show these Jews a thing or two...' But when I suggested that Hitler, if he got his own way, would remove the [Jews] altogether, then Frau Nowak would immediately change her tone: 'Oh, I shouldn't like that to happen ... a Jew will always let you have time if you're in difficulties. You wouldn't catch a Christian giving credit ... you ask the people round here, Herr Christoph: they'd never turn out the Jews." Ibid, p. 117

"Women being shut up together in this room had bred an atmosphere which w as faintly nauseating, like soiled linen locked in a cupboard without air." Ibid, p. 135

"'Shall we allow that the man of genius is an exceptional person who may do exceptional things? Or shall we say: No - you may write a beautiful poem or paint a beautiful picture, but in your daily life you must behave like an ordinary person and you must obey these laws which we have made for ordinary persons? We will not allow you to be extra-ordinary.'" Ibid, Herr Landauer to Christopher, p. 151

"[Bernhard said] 'I believe that you will always come back to Berlin, Christopher. You seem to belong here ... it is strange how people seem to belong to places - especially to places where they were not born ... when I first went to China, it seemed to me that I was at home there, for the first time in my life ...'" Ibid, Bernhard to Christopher, p. 181.

"Berlin is a skeleton which aches in the cold: it is my own skeleton aching. I feel in my bones the sharp ache of the frost in the girders of the overhead railway, in the ironwork of balconies, in bridges, tramlines, lamp-standards, latrines. The iron throbs and shrinks, the stone and the bricks ache dully, the plaster is numb." Ibid, p. 186

"If anybody were to remind [Fraulein Schroeder] that, at the elections last November, she voted communist, she would probably deny it hotly, and in perfect good faith. She is merely acclimatizing herself, in accordance with a natural law, like an animal which changes its coat for the winter. Thousands of people, like Fraulein Schroeder, are acclimatizing themselves. After all, whatever government is in power, they are doomed to live in this town." Ibid, p. 207

Topics for Discussion

Evidence in the two sections of this book ("The Last of Mr. Norris" and "Goodbye to Berlin" suggests that William (narrator of the former) and Christopher (author/narrator of the latter) are essentially the same individual. Do you think this is an accurate representation? Why or why not? If this is in fact the case, why do you think the author made the choice to create a second narrative personality for himself in "...Mr. Norris?"

Obtain and study a copy of the script for "I am a Camera" by John van Druten (a play based on the stories in this collection and others of Isherwood's Berlin stories). What are the similarities in character, story and theme? What are the differences? Do you think the play is an effective telling of the story? Why or why not?

Obtain and study a copy of the film "Cabaret" directed by Bob Fosse (a film based in part on the stories in this collection and others of Isherwood's Berlin stories). What are the similarities in character, story and theme? What are the differences? Do you think the play is an effective telling of the story? Why or why not?

Make a practice for a week or so of behaving "like a camera" - observing, noting, and describing incidents in your life and experience without emotional and/or intellectual commentary. Create word pictures ... be specific and clear ... allow for meaning to enter into what you create through the mind and experience of the reader, not through your own interpretations.

Of all the characters in both stories, Sally Bowles has the most vividly portrayed personality. Would you be friends with someone like her? Why or why not? Why do you think she would/could be seen as attractive?

Imagine the life of Sally Bowles following her departure from Berlin. Keep in mind the time and place in which she existed - Europe in the mid-1930's. Where might she have gone? What might she have done?

Create a dialogue and/or a narrative of an encounter between Sally and Christopher after the war. Where might such an encounter have taken place? What might have been said? How long might their renewed friendship have lasted? Take into account the essential character and philosophy of both individuals as defined in the writings here. How might they have changed? How might they have stayed the same? Would they have anything to say to each other at all?

Consider the implications of the quote from p. 151. Do you think that individuals with extraordinary gifts (artistic, creative, mathematical, scientific, etc) should, or should not, be required to live according to laws and rules established for so-called "ordinary" people? Why or why not? Who defines what is extraordinary? What is ordinary? How would you define ordinary and/or extraordinary? Who in your mind/experience is extra-ordinary?