

**"CERTAIN PASSIONATE FAILURES": CAMP AND THE CLOSET
IN THE AFTERLIFE OF ISHERWOOD'S "SALLY BOWLES"**

by

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(Under the Direction of Jed Rasula)

ABSTRACT

Christopher Isherwood's short story "Sally Bowles" and the four dramatic and cinematic adaptations of that text provide a useful illustration of the fluid nature of the Camp aesthetic, as the sensibility shared by the narrator and Sally Bowles incrementally vanishes from their counterparts in the adaptations, while the films and plays themselves become objects imbued with the quality of camp. In her article "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag distinguished between Camp as a sensibility possessed by individuals and Camp as an attribute perceived. The distinction between Camp as a sensibility and Camp as the quality revealed to one with that sensibility has often been blurred; in the transition from novel to stage play to film, the Camp nature of characters and situations shifts as the narrative position is altered.

INDEX WORDS: Christopher Isherwood, *Berlin Stories*, *I Am A Camera*, *Cabaret*, Susan Sontag, Homosexuality in literature, Camp.

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Richard and Marlene Westerman; for my sisters, Darcie Westerman and Trina Westerman; and for my brother, Ian Westerman.

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CHAPTER 1

"Certain Passionate Failures": Camp and the Closet in the Afterlife of Isherwood's "Sally Bowles"

Early in her foundational article "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag remarked: "Not only is there a Camp vision, a Camp way of looking at things. Camp is as well a quality discoverable in objects and the behavior of persons."¹ This distinction, between Camp as a sensibility and Camp as the quality revealed to one with that sensibility, was blurred as soon as it was made — even in Sontag's essay, the single word "Camp" is applied indiscriminately to the two very different aspects of the aesthetic. Christopher Isherwood's short story "Sally Bowles" and the four dramatic and cinematic adaptations of that text provide a useful illustration of the fluid nature of camp, as the sensibility shared by the narrator and Sally Bowles incrementally vanishes from their counterparts in the adaptations, while the films and plays themselves become objects imbued with the quality of camp. In the transition from novel to stage play to film, the Camp nature of characters and situations shifts as the narrative position is altered.

It will be useful to begin with a brief chronology of the adaptations of Isherwood's Sally Bowles story. The novelist Christopher Isherwood, having lived in the city of Berlin between the years 1929 and 1933, published a novella called *Sally Bowles* in 1936; he republished this novella with other interconnected vignettes set in Berlin as the 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin*. In 1951 a play with the title *I Am A Camera*, adapted by the playwright John van Druten from *Goodbye to Berlin* (and drawn primarily from the "Sally Bowles" chapter), was first staged in New York City. The 1955 film *I Am A Camera* was directed by Henry Cornelius from a script

1 Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp.'" *A Susan Sontag Reader*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1982. 107.

attributed to John Collier but credited as being adapted from both van Druten's play and *Berlin Stories*, the volume collecting *Goodbye to Berlin* together with Isherwood's previous Berlin novel *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*². A musical play entitled *Cabaret*, produced and directed by Harold Prince, with a script by Joe Masteroff, music by John Kander, and lyrics by Fred Ebb, opened on Broadway in 1966; this play was officially adapted from van Druten's *I Am A Camera* and unspecified "stories by Christopher Isherwood."³ A film with the title *Cabaret*, directed by Bob Fosse and with a screenplay credited to Jay Presson Allen (with credit also assigned to Masteroff, Kander, Ebb, Masteroff, van Druten, Isherwood, and Prince, in that order) reached theaters in 1972. The steady accretion of authors makes a futile task of the attempt to credit any of these works, after the first, to a single author or to untangle the source of any particular line of dialogue or plot point. If the authorship of the works cannot be definitively discerned, however, the effect of the works themselves can at least be described.

Isherwood occupies a fundamental place in the history of the Camp aesthetic. Where Oscar Wilde is the patron saint of Camp, and Susan Sontag the first cataloger and analyst of its nuances, Isherwood was the first taxonomist of Camp. Sontag reproduced his contribution to the study of Camp in her 1964 essay "Notes on 'Camp,'" but the Camp sensibility is present in his work decades before he named it in one of his novels. The constituent features of Camp (as derived from Wilde and described by Sontag) are recognizable in all the permutations of the *Sally Bowles* material; the various characters, not least "Christopher Isherwood," come to occupy every Camp position, whether object or subject, "high" or "low," "knowing" or "naïve."

2 This was the novel's original, British title. It appeared in America as *The Last of Mr. Norris*.

3 Prince produced a 1987 revival of the stage musical, with revised book and lyrics. This revision was also used in the 1999 Broadway production of the musical, directed and designed by the filmmaker Sam Mendes but with an unchanged book. The published script of the Mendes production assigns writing credit only to Masteroff, Kander, and Ebb.

Before engaging directly with the evolution of Camp in the adaptations of Isherwood's stories, it is worth establishing the boundaries and varieties of Camp, as set down in Sontag's essay. Isherwood's taxonomy appeared in his 1954 novel *The World in the Evening* and consists of only two subcategories. A character explains it to the narrator thus: "You thought it meant a swishy little boy with peroxided hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feather boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich, Yes, in queer circles, they call *that* camping. It's all very well in its place, but it's an utterly debased form—" This he describes as "Low Camp," in contrast with its elevated form.

High Camp is the whole emotional basis of the Ballet, for example, and of course of Baroque art. You see, true High Camp always has an underlying seriousness. You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance.⁴

The difference between low and high Camp in this formulation is not merely the gap in respectability between casual drag and a museum or symphony; there are issues of intention and self-recognition that separate the two.

Sontag similarly distinguished between "knowing" and "naïve" camp. Knowing Camp was intended, and could be expressed as a verb: the boy in drag camped. Naïve Camp was unintentional, an attribute possessed, and thus lent itself to an adjectival use: some ballets could be more Camp than others. A last vector described by Sontag is "failed camp," a category including works of art intended to be Camp or inadvertently resembling camp, but in some way

4 Isherwood, Christopher. "From *The World in the Evening*." *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Ed. Fabio Cleto. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999. 51.

not achieving that status. Failed Camp may be high, low, knowing, or naïve, but for Sontag it is not camp.

There is an additional binarism of Camp implicit in Sontag's essay: Camp as sensibility and Camp as quality. Sontag makes the distinction between "a quality discoverable in objects and the behavior of persons" and "a Camp vision, a Camp way of looking at things" but, regrettably for the scholars who follow her, she uses the same word for each⁵. The distinction between Camp as a sensibility and Camp as the quality revealed to one with that sensibility seems destined to be continually forgotten and rediscovered.

As a diagnostic tool, "Notes on 'Camp'" is blunt, first isolating and then conflating the Camp quality and the Camp aesthetic, without both of which the Camp aesthetic cannot operate. The Camp canon it proposes is no longer very helpful, as nearly all of the artworks Sontag nominates for inclusion have passed out of the scope of Camp. These exhibits, chosen from the margins of respectable and popular culture, are now either wholly respectable or wholly obscure. Of her examples, the art of Aubrey Beardsley, Flash Gordon comics, the original filmed *King Kong*, "women's clothes of the twenties," and Tiffany lamps are still remembered but carry no particular Camp frisson; Ronald Firbank's and Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels, "the Cuban pop singer La Lupe," and Bellini's operas are simply forgotten. (Isherwood's examples of "High" camp included Mozart, El Greco, and Dostoevsky, and excluded Beethoven, Flaubert, and Rembrandt — all respectable, none obscure.⁶) Sontag acknowledges that what now seems mundane may someday become camp, but misses the corollary that what is now clearly Camp may soon be classic, or may disappear.

5 Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp.'" *A Susan Sontag Reader*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1982. 107.

6 "From *The World in the Evening*," 51-52.

The Camp sensibility is always knowing, never naïve. According to Sontag, its great virtue is that one with this sensibility may enjoy the high and the low at once, in such disparate categories as performance, visual art, architecture, and persons. It is this last category, "taste in people," which is most relevant in a discussion of Camp in *Goodbye to Berlin*, and which is least susceptible to passing out of Camp and into obscurity or respectability. It was the author Isherwood's attraction to disreputable, "low" persons which drew him to Berlin in 1929, and which was the basis of the character Isherwood's connection with the fictional Sally Bowles.

The episodic *Goodbye to Berlin* was the first and greatest success of Isherwood's literary career. This was the second volume of fictionalized autobiography that had resulted from Isherwood's four-year visit to Berlin; it shared characters and settings with his 1935 *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*. As a record of Berlin during the initial rise of Hitler, observed by a well-educated, slumming Englishman, these novels were particularly well-timed, seeing publication just as the English audience could no longer afford to ignore the precise threat that Isherwood had described in his stories.

In giving his own name to the narrator of *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood dispensed with the screen of a pseudonymous narrator that he had used in *The Last of Mr. Norris*. "William Bradshaw" (in fact, the middle names of the author, Christopher William Bradshaw Isherwood) of the first Berlin novel became "Christopher Isherwood" in his second. This partial uncloaking is the first of a series of uncoverings and recoverings of the Isherwood persona in the subsequent rewritings and multiple adaptations of the Berlin stories.

If the time and place of the Berlin stories made them relevant to contemporary and more recent audiences, their always-renewed popularity seems to lie primarily with the character of Sally Bowles. Sally's chapter, first published as a novella in its own right, is largely

disconnected from the remainder of *Goodbye to Berlin*; all the subsequent adaptations, while borrowing from other of Isherwood's Berlin stories, have been built around Sally's narrative, with Chris in the role of her accomplice and more-or-less-passive admirer.

Chris's apparent passivity, of course, is present through most of *Goodbye to Berlin*. His gradual political awakening notwithstanding, the Chris of the book is a cipher by design. His diaristic writing tells little about certain aspects of the diarist's life; he records the gossip about each flatmate's, student's, and bartender's sexual adventures and pedigree, but omits description of his own. He devotes an equal amount of ink to economic concerns — the business of paying rent and affording food in a struggling, depressed, financially unstable city — and here he describes his own alarming poverty as freely as that of his acquaintances. Chris's is not generally a self-flattering voice, and in most affairs discretion doesn't prevent his speaking freely on sensitive matters, but his own sexuality is only hinted at, guessed at by others — a coy, embarrassed narrative silence follows his landlady's attempts to play matchmaker between him and Sally.

Chris's own admission of queerness, when it finally arrives, is as deniable and unconvincing as any pretense toward straightness. Leaving a drag bar with the aspiring gigolo Fritz Wendel, Chris is accosted by a disoriented, hostile American tourist:

The little American simply couldn't believe it. "Men dressed as women? As women hey? Do you mean they're queer?"

"Eventually we're all queer," drawled Fritz solemnly, in lugubrious tones. [...]

"You queer too, hey?" demanded the little American, turning suddenly on me.

"Yes," I said, "very queer indeed."⁷

7 Isherwood, Christopher. "Goodbye to Berlin." *The Berlin Stories*. New York: New Directions, 1963. 193.

The tension of the moment evaporates (the American, apparently intrigued, decides to enter the bar). Chris's defiant admission has no consequence, and it is not a confession. Perhaps Fritz (who made the same claim out of pure provocation) knows that Chris is queer; perhaps he has always known; or else he thinks Chris is joking. Whatever Fritz knows about Chris is not part of the story.

Chris's relationship with Sally, troubled and intermittent, does seem to be rooted in an understanding on her part; attempting to make her living and her fortune by strategically allowing herself to be seduced, she quickly determines that Chris is neither a rich target nor a potential seducer. He becomes a confidant, a third partner in her affair with a wealthy, drunken American traveler, and a substitute-husband when she is hospitalized for an abortion. In return, she acts as his beard: their landlady mistakes Sally for Christopher's fiancée, as does his student Natalia Landauer. In deciding not to correct Natalia's misapprehension, he comes as close as he ever does to explaining himself, if only to the reader:

Natalia was convinced, I suppose, that Sally had become my mistress, and I didn't see why I should correct her mistake — doing so would only have involved a long heart-to-heart talk for which I simply wasn't in the mood. And, at the end of all the explanations, Natalia would probably have found herself quite as much shocked as she was at present, and a good deal more jealous.⁸

To the reader, Christopher represents Sally as "a kind of bossy elder sister" Natalia, he assumes, is upset that Christopher would choose a woman like Sally for a mistress; she would be all the more shocked to learn that he has no interest at all in mistresses or fiancées.

While Christopher avoids explicit, unambiguous mention of his own preference and proclivities, he's quite open with the details of his friends' lives. The terms of the troubled affair

⁸ *Goodbye to Berlin*, 164.

between Otto Nowak and Peter Wilkinson are made quite clear: Peter is jealous, violent, and very much in love with Otto, while Otto — whose head is turned by every girl in the street — will gladly stay with Peter as long as he's paid for his time. In his later memoir *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood reflected on this masking of the story. Otto was the fictional counterpart of a real lover Isherwood had taken in Berlin; Peter's behavior is modeled after Isherwood's own behavior in that relationship. Whereas in much of the book Isherwood closeted himself through omission, here he doubles himself, producing a homosexual Englishman to play his own part at a safe distance, and wryly observes and reports.⁹

The relationship between the book's "Christopher Isherwood" and his friend, the demimondaine Sally Bowles, presents a concise example of the Camp sensibility and quality, each possessed by both Sally and the narrator. Sally behaves campily and Christopher finds her charming; Christopher behaves campily and Sally finds him charming. The naïve or knowing artifice in each finds appreciation in the other.

Sally's flamboyant and inept performance-of-herself is apparent from their first meeting. At the conclusion of a conversation in which Sally openly attempts to shock Christopher with an offhand account of her many love affairs, he laughs and she confronts him: "You're always laughing at me. Do you think I'm the most ghastly idiot?" His reply establishes amusement as the foremost criterion of his "taste in people": "No, Sally. I don't think you're an idiot at all. It's quite true, I *was* laughing. I don't know why."¹⁰

Christopher, as narrator, takes delight in describing the artificiality of Sally's persona and the many ways her attempt to construct herself falls short of success. To perceive this attitude as patronizing superiority is to discount the affectionate nature of the Camp sensibility, the "tender

9 Isherwood, Christopher. *Christopher and His Kind*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976. 41-46.

10 *Goodbye to Berlin*, 34.

feeling" described by Sontag; at any rate, Sally displays a corresponding feeling towards Christopher, gently mocking his ambitions and his obvious attempt to behave like a great writer:

[I]t must be marvelous to be a novelist. You're frightfully dreamy and unpractical and unbusinesslike, and people imagine they can fairly swindle you as much as they want — and then you sit down and write a book about them which fairly shows them what swine they all are, and it's the most terrific success and you make pots of money.¹¹

Camp as a shared secret, as a code that can be safely spoken in public, requires both parties to enact the sensibility and quality at once. When Sally and Chris break with one another, it's because that mutual understanding has vanished. He notes disapprovingly that her German has improved, and finds her "older" and "listless"; she insults his writing and declares that "perhaps we've neither of us changed. Perhaps we're just seeing each other as we really are. We're awfully different in lots of ways, you know."¹² Their differences weren't fatal to the friendship, but the dull reality of "each other as we really are" dispels the Camp quality, and the sensibility looks around for something more amusing.

Sontag cites Wilde's epigrams as pure examples of knowing camp; one she reproduces, from *Lady Windermere's Fan*, is "It's absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious."¹³ Christopher's bond with Sally is independent of any judgement of her morality. When he finds her becoming tedious (older, less ridiculous, more competent), he loses interest, and likewise fails to remain charming in her eyes. His displeasure is still aesthetic rather than moral — she's always been wicked, but now she's boring.

John van Druten's play *I Am A Camera*, first produced in 1951, had the benefit of hindsight. Twenty years after the events of Isherwood's stories and half a decade removed from

¹¹ *Goodbye to Berlin*, 44.

¹² *Ibid*, 64.

¹³ Quoted in "Notes on 'Camp,'" 112.

the fall of Nazi Germany, it trades Chris's political equivocation and moral near-paralysis for a strident righteousness. Perhaps feeling that the original work was insufficiently anti-Nazi, van Druten wrote a play which, especially in its second half, becomes a spirited (but belated) defense of the Jews.

I Am A Camera is, of course, subject to the pressures of any stage play; its small cast (of seven) and single set (Chris's room, later Sally's) exert a narrative and dramatic compression on the story that subsequent adaptations have only partially reversed. An offhand remark in Isherwood's novel seems to have inspired van Druten's most lasting addition to the Sally Bowles story: "I had long meditated the experiment of introducing Natalia to Sally Bowles. I think I knew beforehand what the result of their meeting would be. At any rate, I had the sense not to invite Fritz Wendel."¹⁴ Beginning the play with an English lesson, van Druten introduces Chris, the layabout and would-be gigolo Fritz, Sally, and Chris's wealthy Jewish pupil Natalia. Fritz and Natalia become the traditional romantic couple of the play, the mirror-opposites of Chris and Sally: she virginal, he ardent, together and married at the story's end. They serve comic-relief purposes (the prig and the clown), but Natalia and Fritz are traditionally gender-performative in most ways that Sally and Chris are not, and the pairing is functional enough to have been repeated in the two subsequent film adaptations of the story.

Readers searching the play for clues to Chris's sexuality will be unrewarded. Without the withholding but suggestive voice of a narrator with secrets to keep, the Isherwood character seems less private than sexless. He tolerates his landlady's matchmaking attentions and Natalia's idle flirtation ("Then I am not a girl friend of yours, Christopher?")¹⁵. As Chris comforts Sally after her abandonment by a lover, she preemptively rejects him romantically ("Always the duds

¹⁴ *Goodbye to Berlin*, 160.

¹⁵ Van Druten, John. *I Am a Camera*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1983. 22.

who'll do me in... I suppose that's why I haven't been interested in you that way"), which he takes as no insult. In these particulars the play's lead figure does not differ from the novel's narrator — except that one is a narrator, able to present himself, and the other is not. The off-stage lives of the characters cannot be shown, and so they are hinted at or described outright: Fritz is an avid womanizer, Natalia is a frustrated virgin, Sally is an aspiring demimondaine, and Chris simply has no erotic life.

While the play's Chris has nothing of the lover about him, he is eager to become a husband and father. Whereas the novel's Sally briefly represents Chris as her husband (without his permission, although also without his objection) in order to facilitate her abortion, here he earnestly proposes marriage in order to dissuade her from the abortion. Sally expresses some misgivings about the operation ("I can't have the baby, Chris. It's awful, because I want to. But not unless I'm married, and can look after it."); these token objections are more than the novel's Sally offered, and Chris takes them as an opportunity.¹⁶ He here seems to be attempting to construct a heterosexual family around himself without the bother of heterosexual sex.

One exchange, in Sally and Chris's last fight, seems to hint towards some life of Chris's outside of the apartment:

SALLY: My friends are a lot better than the tatty people you run around with. All your friends seem to be interested in, is just flopping into bed.

CHRISTOPHER: And since when have you had anything against bed?

SALLY: I haven't anything. So long as it leads somewhere.

CHRISTOPHER: You mean not just for the fun of it.

SALLY: That's disgusting. That's like animals.¹⁷

¹⁶ Van Druten, 32.

¹⁷ Van Druten, 67.

This suggestion of a happy, consequence-free life of hedonism (on the part of Christopher's social circle, at least), though, seems to have nothing to do with the world of the play. Sally flops into bed for economic reasons, and pays dearly; Fritz, the failed gigolo, "pounces" on Natalia in order to win her hand in marriage; Natalia holds out until she is forced. Sally's disgusted condemnation seems to attach only to the historical Isherwood's coterie in Berlin and elsewhere — it cannot have any relevance to the milquetoast writer standing before her.

Van Druten's introduction to the play script, written in 1955, contains instructions to the actors, and his notes on the character of Christopher acknowledge this blandness:

He watches Sally as an amused and no longer hungry cat would watch an impertinent mouse. He is deeply fond of her, but he is never physically attracted to her, nor does he find her romantic. It is essential to establish this in the first scene. His line of "I think you're wonderful, Sally" must be read as if it were spoken by a youngish man to a bright and impudent boy of twelve.¹⁸

The amusement and the lack of hunger are there in the novel, but the play's Chris is neutered. The playwright protects him as Isherwood protected himself as narrator, and at length the audience wonders what exactly is wrong with this young man — doesn't anyone around him see what a cold fish he is? Whereas the narrator of *Goodbye to Berlin* cloaks his sexuality in silence or misdirection, van Druten's Christopher appears to have dispensed with his own sexuality entirely. Any clues to his own preferences or desires must be divined from the subtext or performance of the play. Performance and subtext, of course, are where Camp and the closet intersect.

¹⁸ Van Druten, 7.

Sontag remarks on Camp as a marker of non-hetero sexuality: "While it's not true that Camp taste *is* homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap. ... [N]ot all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard — and the most articulate audience — of Camp."¹⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick found a similar relation of Camp and homosexuality: "the typifying gesture of Camp is really something amazingly simple: the moment at which a consumer of culture makes the wild surmise, 'What if whoever made this was gay too?'"²⁰ The Camp sensibility, detected in a work of art by one with that sensibility, is evidence if not proof of another type of kinship.

The Camp sensibility and quality in van Druten's play can, first, be discerned in the performance notes for the play's characters which precedes the playscript. Van Druten quotes Isherwood in correspondence: "Sally is not an obvious tart. She is a little girl who has listened to what the grown-ups had said about tarts, and who was trying to copy those things."²¹ Sally's status as possessor of the (naïve) Camp quality is intact (van Druten further notes that Sally's "capacity for instantaneous self-dramatization is the essential thing"), as is Christopher's Camp perception of her, "as an amused and no longer hungry cat would watch an impertinent mouse." Some of the story's original narration remains in the form of monologue, leaving Christopher free to express his sensibility epigrammatically and out loud, at least when the other characters have left the stage: "People who talk like that about themselves *ought* to be lying."²²

Christopher's Camp sensibility is not paired with the Camp quality; he is a man with few qualities and few actions. The comic-relief character Fritz Wendel (a figure of naïve camp, without the sensibility that allows Chris to appreciate Sally for her artifice, Fritz accepts and admires Sally as what she pretends to be) enacts his own coming-out scene: not as a homosexual,

19 "Notes on 'Camp,'" 117.

20 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology and the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 156.

21 Van Druten, 6.

22 Van Druten., 26.

but as a Jew. This event survives and is elaborated upon in the filmed version of *I Am a Camera*; here it serves the plot by allowing a happy union between Fritz and Natalia.²³

The performers of a stage play have an opportunity to camp any material they're given, to exaggerate their performances in order to dethrone the seriousness of the text. In order for this to occur, for actors to hijack a playwright's sincere and well-intentioned (or cynically intended) work of art, the play must be serious; van Druten's text is serious. In the third act, Christopher high-mindedly denounces his German landlady, suddenly revealed as an anti-Semite: "I've always been fond of you. Now I'm ashamed of you. And everything you say is horrible and dangerous and abominable. And now please go away."²⁴ A mocking inflection on the part of an actor could undermine this scene and tease the improbable hindsight the playwright has imparted to his lead. The Isherwood character of *Goodbye to Berlin* and the postwar Isherwood were united in their sympathy for "Fräulein Schroeder," an impoverished, elderly woman in an impossible situation. In a 1954 introduction to *The Berlin Stories*, he praised her ability to survive in Hitler's Germany, a feat which required her to join the Nazi party during Hitler's rise and to cooperate with Russian soldiers after his fall. Worried that she would be offended at her transformation, in the play, into a dim-witted anti-Semite, Isherwood asked van Druten to change the character's name from Schroeder to Schneider, to signal that this was a *new* character, distinct from the one in the novel.²⁵

Van Druten's *I Am a Camera* was, in fact, the second play to be adapted from the Sally Bowles material at Isherwood's request. In 1950, he'd first given this assignment to the writing

23 This is an ominously hanging plot thread in van Druten's play: Fritz and Natalia's marriage is reported in Christopher's dialogue, but the fate of the couple in Hitler's Germany is not addressed. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Natalia escapes with her family to Switzerland.

24 Van Druten, 77.

25 The alternative would have been a version of the Sally Bowles story without any Nazi characters. In the novel it's Sally who's casually, conversationally anti-Semitic; but this aspect of her character does not resurface in any subsequent iteration of the story, even in the Broadway *Cabaret*, in which Sally is both callous and apolitical.

team of Speed Lamkin and Gus Field. In his memoir *Lost Years* Isherwood briefly describes the conception of the Lamkin/Field play, including their "minor but amusing" idea for addressing Christopher's sexual situation:

The minor idea was that at some point well along in the first act ... there is a knock on the door. Christopher crosses to it and opens it. A girl stands there. We haven't seen her before. Christopher looks embarrassed. ... "Who was that?" Sally asks. "Oh — that's my girlfriend." "But, Chris, I never knew you had a girlfriend! Why didn't you tell me? You're so mysterious. You never tell me anything about yourself!" ...

Throughout the rest of the play, the girl never reappears. She isn't even referred to.²⁶

The solution is perhaps an inelegant one. Lamkin and Field provide a beard for Christopher, a blatantly perfunctory explanation for the absence of a romance between the play's two leads. Van Druten left his explanation for that absence to his performance notes (thereby relying on the actors to express, or the audience to already understand, what was implicit in Isherwood's text); the subsequent adaptations attempted to replace that absence with some gesture towards a romantic coupling.

Where van Druten's play is compressed and confined, in its depiction of the author-character, to the text of Isherwood's novel, Henry Cornelius's 1955 film (from a script by John Collier, adapted from van Druten and Isherwood) begins with an clear contradiction of knowledge then public about the living Christopher Isherwood. The film opens on a white-haired, bespectacled Laurence Harvey, walking the streets of London, accompanied by this voiceover:

My name is Christopher Isherwood. I'd like to think that I need say no more, but perhaps I'd better add - I am a novelist, comfortably off, set in my ways, a confirmed bachelor.

26 Isherwood, Christopher. *Lost Years: A Memoir, 1945-1951*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000. 266-267.

Sentimental melodies have a profound and moving effect on me. They seem to go to my stomach. They make me feel that maybe I have missed something in my life.²⁷

It becomes apparent that this is part of a framing device: a contemporary (mid-nineteen-fifties) Isherwood arrives at a cocktail party thrown by his publisher, which he suddenly realizes is held in celebration of the publication of Sally Bowles's own memoir, "The Lady Goes On Hoping." Isherwood then proceeds to tell the Sally Bowles story — that is, the "something" that he has missed.

This short scene implies an entertainingly large divide between the literary world understood by the movie's audience and the literary world within the film. The film's Isherwood, in the framing device, must be roughly the age of the living Isherwood, and he introduces himself as though the movie audience will recognize his name; but as the film's cocktail-party literati are unfamiliar with the name of Sally Bowles (and it is not suggested that her book was published on his literary coattails), this is apparently a world in which Christopher Isherwood has become a successful author but the Berlin stories are not well-known. Furthermore, we're given an Isherwood who never left England for America. Isherwood's minor celebrity was predicated on two things: his stories of Berlin in the early thirties, and his departure to America from England, in the company of W.H. Auden, in 1939. This brought both some notoriety, at least in England, which this English film declines to acknowledge.

Isherwood's confirmed bachelorhood seems to promise a frankness missing from either prior presentation of this material; while his precise orientation is never settled by the film, it is incessantly teased. His landlady (here, as in van Druten's script, called Frl. Schneider) urges him to find "a nice young lady" (to which he scoffs: "you and your young ladies!"). By the time of Sally's first appearance, his sexual disinclination is already a running joke. As Chris invites the

²⁷ *I Am a Camera*. Screenplay by John Collier. Dir. Henry Cornelius. Julie Harris, Laurence Harvey. 1955.

newly-evicted Sally to spend the night at his flat, she is initially guarded, but he reassures her: "You needn't be afraid of me. You see, there's no room for that sort of thing in my life. I have work to do, very important work." Her astonished reply: "Must be!" At the flat, she strips, trying to provoke Chris into making a pass, and asks "do we just go to bed, or do we have a drink first?" When Chris declines the drink and goes off to sleep on the couch, she grouses "I bet you're afraid!"

Unlike the two previous presentations of this material, the film of *I Am a Camera* is predominantly a comedy. The blue humor and slapstick mix uneasily with the political material (taken from the play, and softened somewhat), but in making a joke of Chris's sexlessness, the movie at least acknowledges that something is missing. Sally in particular needles him endlessly: "Never get married, Chris. You're the sort of man who kills the soul of a woman," and later, "For one thing, you don't understand women."

The morning after her failed pass, Sally cheerfully informs Chris that they're going to be great friends, and goes on to say "I don't think I've had a real friend before. One or two girls, maybe. Girls are so effeminate." Fritz Wendel, jealous, finds them together in Chris's room the morning after, and Sally protests that nothing unchaste has happened between them:

SALLY: We were just like two little white rabbits.

FRITZ: (hurt) When I was younger, miss, I also kept those pets!

After these repeated affronts to his masculinity, Chris belatedly responds. At one desperate point, when the flatmates are both unemployed, cold, and living on boiled sausages, he calls Sally's bluff — kissing her forcefully, chasing her across the room with a leer — to which she responds with horror. She retreats and disarms Chris, saying "You'd hate me, Chris. That's

why it was ugly. We'd never be able to talk to each other again." Chris grudgingly accepts this and the incident is not referred to again; nonetheless the boundary lines are clearly drawn.

Julie Harris, born in 1925, was twenty-six years old when she originated the role of Sally Bowles in John van Druten's play; in 1955, when the film was released, she was thirty. She is magnetic in the role, but she is not the very young English girl of the novel, naïve despite herself. Two years older than Laurence Harvey, she is convincing as the "slightly bossy older sister" described in Isherwood's novella. Sally's pout is replaced here with a dazzling, fixed smile, worn like armor and rarely dropped.

The dynamic between the two leads here follows the pattern of Hepburn and Grant in *Bringing Up Baby*: Chris is clumsy, flustered, and overwhelmed by Sally, who is flighty, free-spirited, and imperturbable. The particular details of the demimondaine's life are softened here, to the point that Sally is merely an inept gold-digger; her attempts to shock read as endearing, friendly provocations. Chris, however, is shocked. This demonstrates a clear rearrangement of the Camp position of the film: Sally camps knowingly, and Chris fails to recognize this.

The possessor of the Camp sensibility is obviously not overwhelmed by the Camp object. The sensibility is prophylactic, allowing amusement to take the place of surprise or imbalance. Harris's Sally clearly self-dramatizes, but the artifice is successful; it's the actor who's in on the joke. The Isherwood character, squeamish and effete (as written, and as Laurence Harvey performs him), may be taken as a naïve Camp figure, and Sally regards him as preposterous and amusing. This is a neat reversal of the dynamic between the two in the original novella, in which (as the narrator) Chris is the predominate ironic observer and Sally a somewhat ridiculous other.

Sally's affair with the crass American traveler Clive forms the middle section of the film. At their first meeting, she introduces Chris to Clive as her adopted brother. This is a deft

solution to a narrative problem not addressed in the material's previous tellings: why isn't Clive jealous of Chris? Why does he take Sally's flatmate, countryman, and constant companion as no threat or possible rival? By once again asserting a familial relationship between the two, she explains him away without excluding him from her liason with Clive.

The incident of Sally's pregnancy gains in prominence here. It's revealed immediately after her climactic break with Chris, and it immediately fixes the rift. Fräulein Schneider is initially angry with Chris (as Sally suggests, "Maybe she thinks somehow that you're the father" — that "somehow" is telling); after she's explained the procedure necessary to obtain a legal abortion, Chris is the one with cold feet. Speaking euphemistically in defense of the fetus ("I don't like the idea"), he proposes marriage to Sally, which she (as in the play) immediately declines. He then sets out to procure the money to pay for the never-named "procedure."

In one of the film's stranger plot developments, Chris manages to sell his Berlin manuscript for a tidy sum, whereupon his publisher proposes that he should become a traveling diarist, producing a work similar to *Goodbye to Berlin* for a whole series of European cities, a prospect that he happily welcomes. On his return to the flat, though, he finds that Sally has changed her mind and decided to keep the child and accept his proposal of marriage — she is busily choosing a name for their "first" child, of many to follow. Distressed, Chris takes to bed, tormented by visions of "a boy like Clive, followed by a whole series of little girls exactly like Sally" — even in his nightmares he can't imagine fathering any children resembling himself. The neat resolution to the crisis, it turns out, is that Sally was never really pregnant after all ("I was never much good with arithmetic"), and no abortion is necessary to free them both from their obligation. Sally heads off to a film career in France, while Chris becomes some sort of globetrotting reflective journalist. This compounds the counterfactual elements of the film's

opening, transforming the memoiristic novelist into a travel reporter with assignments, deadlines, and an editor.

As the middle-aged Chris emerges from his reverie, he prepares with some apprehension to go renew his acquaintance with Sally, remarking to another writer:

CHRIS: I must admit when I saw her name I felt as if someone was walking over my grave.

WRITER: The grave of your youth?

CHRIS: Youth? (pause) We can thank heaven on bended knees we've managed to reach years of... discretion.

The confirmed bachelor, whether queer or sexless, is here remembering his last and perhaps only straight love affair — or his last opportunity for one; at any rate, it's not youth he's left behind but the indignity and indiscretion of his time with Sally. Their reunion, however, is a complete return to form. Recently kicked out of her hotel room, she leaves the party with Chris, remarking that he seems far less "repressed and adolescent" than he was as a young man.

The subplot of Fritz and Natalia's romance, invented by van Druten but given more attention in Collier's screenplay, makes explicit the theme of repression. Having demonstrated his sincerity to Natalia (by "pouncing"), Fritz is able to marry her and escape with her family to the safety of Switzerland only by acknowledging his own Jewish origin. For all the good that the admission brings him — a rich wife, and the possibility of emigration — the admission is painful and dangerous for Fritz to make, after his own reinvention as a Gentile. He makes his confession to the Landauers only after strongly worded encouragement from Chris, who suggests that it is an act of cowardice to stay a closeted Jew.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick delineates the various analogues of the metaphorical homosexual closet, noting that the pressures of anti-Semitism resemble those of homophobia in ways that racism and sexism do not:

Ethnic/cultural/religious oppressions such as anti-Semitism are more analogous in that the stigmatized individual has at least notionally some discretion — although, importantly, it is never to be taken for granted how much — over other people's knowledge of her or his membership in the group: one could "come out as" a Jew or Gypsy, in a heterogeneous urbanized society, much more intelligibly than one could typically "come out as," say, female, Black, old, a wheelchair user, or fat.²⁸

If Chris feels pressures similar to the ones Fritz feels, he may be intimately familiar with the cowardice he attributes to his friend. His own difference from the norm, which Sally at different times seems to acknowledge tacitly or choose to disregard (it makes him unacceptable as a lover, but not as a husband), is never spoken aloud. Discretion, reticence, and careful elision are the forms his closet takes; he becomes a hypocrite only when he urges courage, honesty and disclosure from the safety of his own concealment.

The filmed version of *I Am a Camera* admits complications to the Isherwood character that were concealed both by the novel's narrator and van Druten's dramatic circumspection. Isherwood, a friend of the playwright, kept the play at arm's length — he wrote in his diary, before the premiere of the play: "I'm not particularly excited by the event itself. This isn't my own child."²⁹ — but he spoke of it as a pleasing work with a life of its own. His praise for the play in his *Berlin Stories* introduction was markedly faint (remarking only that van Druten's adaptation "was written with his usual skilled speed"), but he acknowledged and accepted that

²⁸ *Epistemology of the Closet*. 75.

²⁹ Isherwood, Christopher. *Diaries Volume One: 1939-1960*. New York: Harper Flamingo, 1996. 441.

the Sally and Chris characters had evolved beyond their historical models and his own fictional representations of them: "gradually, the real past had disappeared, along with the real Christopher Isherwood of twenty years ago. Only the Christopher Isherwood of the stories remained."³⁰ This relaxed acceptance had its limits, however — the response to the film recorded in his diary was sharp and almost insulted: "Last night we went to a preview of *I Am a Camera* — a truly shocking and disgraceful mess. I must admit that John Collier is largely to blame — for a sloppy, confused script. But everything is awful — except for Julie, who was misdirected."³¹ Collier and Cornelius, the writer and director, might perhaps have taken an obscure pride that they had managed to shock Isherwood as Sally Bowles had never managed to do.

The attribution of authorship for the stage musical *Cabaret* is intricate and multi-layered. The text of *Cabaret* was written by Joe Masteroff, with the exception of Fred Ebb's lyrics, set to music by John Kander. This script is putatively "Based on the play by John van Druten and stories by Christopher Isherwood," although the plot elements, setting, and characters are drawn from *The Berlin Stories* (with elements from *The Last of Mr. Norris* as well as *Goodbye to Berlin*), or original to the musical — van Druten's contributions to the story cannot be found. Masteroff and the songwriting team of Kander and Ebb were writing to the orders of producer Harold Prince, who shaped the material to fit the cast he had assembled. Most notably, while the Natalia/Fritz subplot of *I Am A Camera* was removed, Prince's casting of Lotte Lenya mandated the elevation of the landlady character to a leading part. Ernst Ludwig, a young Nazi traveler engaged in money-smuggling, is assembled from aspects of Mr. Norris, the opportunistic Socialist of the first novel; Fritz Wendel, who introduces Sally and the author-surrogate; and the

30 Isherwood, Christopher. *The Berlin Stories*. New York: New Directions, 1963. ix.

31 *Diaries*, 509.

bad-German villain, the part fulfilled by the landlady of van Druten's and Collier's scripts. Fritz and Natalia's roles are filled by Fraülein Schneider and her elderly Jewish lodger Herr Schultz, a character invented for *Cabaret*.

The greatest departure is the near-complete erasure of the Isherwood character: here he is Clifford Bradshaw, an American, and unambiguously heterosexual. On their first meeting, Cliff pursues Sally without hesitation; when she moves in with him, it's out of romance, not convenience; when she quickly becomes pregnant, it's by Cliff, and he happily offers to marry her and work to support their child, even if this means the end of his writing career. The normalization of Chris reaches a ludicrous extreme here, and with all his diffidence, discretion, and amused detachment gone, Cliff overpowers Sally almost entirely (her personality primarily finds expression in the play's songs, not in their conversations). The only clear connection between Cliff and the Chris of any previous version of the story is in his profession: a writer surviving by giving English lessons.

The plot displaces all of the novels' queerness to the nightclub setting, the Kit Kat Klub, which might be a more successful version of *Goodbye to Berlin*'s Salome, which Isherwood described as follows:

A few stage lesbians and some young men with plucked eyebrows lounged at the bar, uttering occasional raucous guffaws or treble hoots — supposed, apparently, to represent the laughter of the damned. [...] The audience consisted chiefly of respectable middle-aged tradesmen and their families, exclaiming in good-humoured amusement: "Do they really?" and "Well, I never!"³²

Kander takes that laughter of the damned quite seriously, embodying it in the figure of the Emcee, "a bizarre little figure — much lipstick, much rouge, patent-leather hair parted in the

³² *Goodbye to Berlin*, 192.

middle."³³ The meaning-to-be-scandalous titillation of the Kit Kat Klub, explicitly linked with and even implicitly blamed for the rise of Hitler, might be aimed squarely at the respectable middle-aged tradesmen of the (musical's) audience, happy to have their own preconceptions of the dangers of naughtiness acted out for their benefit. None of Isherwood's sympathetic fascination with the demimonde survives. The happy decadence of early-Thirties Berlin, which for Isherwood was an early victim of the Nazi movement, is treated here as merely the first step in Germany's Nazification, and Sally is ultimately as guilty as the Nazi Party member Ernst.

Cliff, the play's only American, is also the only clear-eyed observer — not the "quite passive" recording camera of Isherwood's narrator, but an infallible moral judge, the only one able to foresee the coming disaster, the only champion of the Jews. Neither the play's sole Jew nor the woman who loves and forsakes him recognizes the real threat of anti-Semitism. Only Cliff has the sense to leave Berlin while the getting is good; he's entirely convinced that the American depression is safer and more welcoming than the German one. The historical knowledge of *Cabaret*'s audience is linked to Cliff's foresight, with the flattering suggestion that any American would recognize the danger as easily. Sally betrays Chris by aborting their child, and spurns his last gift of a train ticket to Paris, unwilling to give up her life as a Kit Kat singer; the ineptly calculating gold-digger of the previous versions of the story now prefers decadence for its own sake, a singing job in a disreputable cafe, over prosperity, travel, and escape. Cliff departs the ugly scene with a conscience as clean as Pilate's — if only those foolish Jews had known what was best for them.

The Broadway *Cabaret* is the first iteration of the Sally Bowles material to postdate Sontag's essay on Camp. "Notes on 'Camp'" admits that, as Camp was once "something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques... [t]o talk about Camp is

33 Masteroff, Joe and Fred Ebb. *Harold Prince's Cabaret*. New York: Random House, 1967.

therefore to betray it."³⁴ Once the secret was out, the landscape changed; if Camp became a popular taste, it no longer signified (or no longer only signified) what it had signaled before. Camp split here in two directions: the Cliff-Sally romance became a traditional melodramatic straight tragic romance, ripe for Camp dethroning, and all the story's knowing, active Camp attached to the new character of "The Emcee."

Cliff, as written, is stolid, virtuous, and humorless, and his climactic line "Sally, don't you understand? If you're not against all this, you're for it! Or you might as well be" could certainly be camped by a self-aware actor, but the self-awareness is not to be found in Masteroff's script.³⁵ Sally's status as a knowing camper or a Camp object, less evident here than in the other renditions of the character, is complicated by her placement in the musical. In Hal Prince's staging of the musical, as the couple serenade one another, the decadent, grotesque denizens of the cabaret stand at either side of the stage and silently observe. The sensibility of the nightclub singers having been made clear from their own musical numbers — hedonistic, nihilistic — their derisive response may be assumed; the paying members of *Cabaret*'s audience are free to identify with the lovers or with the sardonic onlookers, in keeping with their own aesthetic preferences.

The lovers' duets take place "offstage"; the explicitly camped elements of the play are set on the stage-within-the-stage, in *Cabaret*'s cabaret. Sally's self-dramatization is more pronounced during her diegetic solo songs, in which the character performs a performance, but in this she is overshadowed by the Emcee, a character who only appears onstage. The Emcee is a Camp trifecta: he voices the Camp sensibility by mocking the audience and his fellow performers, camps outrageously with openly insincere flattery of the audience, and is visibly a

34 "Notes on 'Camp,'" 105.

35 Masteroff and Ebb, 95.

Camp object of the so-awful-it's-good type. The stage show within the play, non-narrative and discontinuous, is a work of the lowest, most deliberate camp.

When Sontag wrote "Probably, intending to be campy is always harmful," she was speaking of the risk of producing failed Camp run by any knowing artist of camp.³⁶ The Emcee of *Cabaret* literalizes this statement, embodying not a campy imitation of evil, but Camp *as evil*; he's in on the joke, and the joke is what the audience knows and the lovers don't. The Emcee's songs make jokes of poverty ("Money") and anti-Jewish feeling ("If You Could See Her"). If he knows what we know, and laughs at it, then he laughs at death. Further complicating the implications of his performance is the gleeful song "Two Ladies," which celebrates and mocks promiscuity and bisexuality; in this way, the play appears to suggest that sexual decadence in the Weimar period played a role in the run-up to the war, comparable to the effect of the economic depression or anti-Semitism. The Emcee is the Camp villain of the play, using the cover of satire to speak the unspeakable.

The Emcee is the strongest link between the stage *Cabaret* and the very different filmed *Cabaret*. As the latest complete version of the Sally Bowles story to be written, the film has the longest list of credited writers; even that list is incomplete. The complete writing credits were as follows: "based on the musical play *Cabaret*, book by Joe Masteroff, music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, based on the play by John van Druten and stories by Christopher Isherwood, produced for the New York stage by Harold Prince; dances and musical numbers staged by Bob Fosse, screenplay by Jay Presson Allen, produced by Cy Feuer, directed by Bob Fosse."³⁷ Feuer, who initiated the project, first cast Joel Grey as the Emcee and Liza Minnelli as Sally, thus determining that the Emcee's songs would appear in the film and that Sally Bowles would be an

36 Notes on 'Camp,'" 111.

37 *Cabaret*. Screenplay by Jay Presson Allen. Dir. Bob Fosse. Liza Minnelli, Michael York. Warner Bros., 1972.

American. He then commissioned a script from Allen, with the understanding that the new film would hew more closely to Isherwood's fiction than to the stage musical. In an interview thirty years after the film's premiere, Jay Presson Allen reflected that, from the start, the intention was to jettison the plot of the stage musical:

Well, I was told going in that we were not going to do the play, that we were going back to the Isherwood stories, and that the guy would be homosexual, or in the movie, bisexual. Because, my God, what year was that, 1972? It was a little late in the day for all that prissy business.

This suggests that many of the structural choices about the film were set down before Allen's involvement with the project. None of Masteroff's dialogue survives in the final product, and the romance of the landlady and the Jewish fruit peddler is jettisoned; the Fritz/Natalia romance, van Druten's innovation, is restored. Fosse was brought on as director only after Allen had completed the script, and their collaboration was short-lived. Fosse disliked Allen's script, and with Feuer's approval he arranged for Hugh Wheeler to rewrite the screenplay.³⁸ Wheeler appears in the film's credits as a "research consultant."

The Emcee of Harold Prince's *Cabaret* survives in the person of the actor Joel Grey and the words of Kander and Ebb's songs. The film retains several of the stage play's nightclub numbers ("Wilkommen," "Two Ladies," "The Money Song," "If You Could See Her," and "Cabaret") but discards eight "offstage" songs; a ninth, "Tomorrow Belongs To Me," is retained but sung in a context of performance. Kander and Ebb contributed two new songs, both performed by Liza Minnelli in the nightclub setting. In contemporary reviews, two aspects of the film were recognized and praised as high camp: Grey's hypersexualized performance and Minnelli's self-aware, striving American Sally Bowles. Pauline Kael, in the pages of *The New*

38 Gottfried, Martin. *All His Jazz: The Life and Death of Bob Fosse*. New York: Bantam, 1990.

Yorker, concluded of the film: "Though it uses Camp material, it carries Camp to its ultimate vileness — in the m.c.'s mockery of all things human, including himself."³⁹ These were words of praise. This reading, of Camp used to demonstrate the "ultimate vileness" of the aesthetic, echoes Sontag's own deep ambivalence: "I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it. ... To name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires a deep sympathy modified by revulsion."⁴⁰

The reversal in nationalities of the two leads ("Brian Roberts" from Cambridge, Sally Bowles as an American) seems to have resulted from the producer's fiat: Liza Minnelli's participation was a condition of financing. The part had been played on the stage by the English actress Jill Haworth, but as the daughter of Hollywood royalty, Minnelli was enough of a box office draw to justify an adjustment to the script, and she'd already worked with the stage musical's Kander and Ebb⁴¹. Minnelli, 26 in 1972, mimics Harris's walk and gestures but looks much younger and crueller, with large dark eyes and black hair in a Louise Brooks bob. Michael York, in the role of Brian, wears the haircut that Christopher Isherwood had sported in the early 1930s photographs of Stephen Spender.⁴²

The film's script performs the neat trick of reconciling Masteroff's Cliff/Sally romance and the historical Isherwood's own unconcealed homosexuality, and it does so by the simple expedient of letting the characters speak frankly, if in somewhat anachronistic language. Early in the film Sally makes a characteristically direct pass at Brian, to which he responds with nervous paralysis; piqued, she responds:

39 Kael, Pauline. "Grinning." *Deeper Into Movies*. New York: Little, Brown, 1973.

40 "Notes on 'Camp,'" 105.

41 Minnelli had auditioned for the Broadway *Cabaret*, but Harold Prince insisted on an English Sally and didn't trust Minnelli to be able to play a British accent.

42 In an interview included in the 30th anniversary DVD rerelease of the film, York revealed that he'd been the last actor to read for the role. The producers had initially been looking for "a Michael York type," for his physical resemblance to the young Isherwood, but hadn't considered actually casting Michael York until he requested an audition.

SALLY: Maybe you just don't sleep with girls! Oh. You don't. [...] If you only like boys I wouldn't dream of pestering you! [...]

BRIAN: I've gone through the motions of sleeping with girls exactly three times, all of them disastrous. The word for my sex life now is "nil," or as you Americans would say, plenty of nothin'.

Relieved not to have to take Brian's rejection personally, Sally instantly declares him a great friend. Some scenes later she is disconsolate over abandonment by her father. In van Druten's psychological reading of the character, blame was attached to her overbearing, intrusive mother; in Allen's explanation, instead of fleeing meddling parents, Sally is forever seeking the approval of her absent father. Brian's consoling embrace turns into a kiss, and the two successfully make love.

The ground rules thus established (Brian is more or less queer, and he and Sally are a couple), the script then introduces Maximilian, a pragmatic, apolitical German baron, well-mannered, suave, and comfortably settled in an open marriage. He pursues Sally quite freely, bringing her Champagne as she sleeps in her rooming-house bed with Brian, and he finds room in the affair for Brian as well. The scene in which the mutually jealous Sally and Brian reveal their mutual betrayal is a deft work of dark comedy:

BRIAN: Oh, *screw* Maximilian!

SALLY: I do!

BRIAN: So do I.

Maximilian's 300-mark payoff to the two prompts Sally's wry acknowledgment of their mutual gold-digging failure: "On an hour-to-hour basis, that puts about on a par with [the streetwalker] Fräulein Kost." This shortly precedes the incident of Sally's pregnancy; the child is

either Brian's or Maximilian's. As in every telling of the story after Isherwood's, the author-character proposes marriage; as in the stage musical, Sally accepts at once. That this incident comes after their double infidelity makes clear the sort of closet Brian hopes to construct for himself.

If before he was relieved to have proof of his own heterosexuality, now he is positively ecstatic at the possibility of a normal nuclear family. Van Druten's Chris proposes out of politeness; Collier's Chris proposes out of concern, but is displeased when he's expected to follow through on it; Cliff proposes because it's his child and he wants to rescue Sally from the Kit Kat Klub; but Brian Roberts has a well-developed fantasy of family life in Cambridge, with a house, a yard, a wife, and a child, and all the darker corners of his past safely extracted and left behind in Berlin. Sally, for her part, sees in the child the unconditional love she's never had from her family before ("Babies love you automatically, don't they?"). Each welcomes the sham marriage as the fulfillment of a lifetime of hopes.

As in each *I Am a Camera*, Fritz and Natalia are the other couple, the true romantic match; here Fritz outs himself as a Jew without any urging from Brian. He recognizes the bind he is in — to reveal himself as a Jew means a possible, final rejection from Natalia, as well as a certain banishment from his own social circle. He declares himself to have been a coward, to have become a Protestant merely by calling himself one, and to have passed without consequence. Fritz's courage is partially rewarded: he marries Natalia in a solemn Jewish ceremony, but the movie doesn't grant them an easy Swiss escape ahead of the tide of anti-Semitism.

The Sally/Brian couple breaks apart as a result of Sally's abortion. In a tearful confrontation with Brian, she explains her reasons — that a baby would make impossible her own ambitions, and that neither she nor Brian would survive in a dull academic marriage:

SALLY: How soon would it be before we started hating each other? How soon would it be before I started dashing out and disgracing myself at the nearest pub? And how soon would it be before you —

BRIAN: Before I — ? Say it. Go on. You might as well, now.

SALLY: Forget it. Just forget it.

The specter of the love whose name Sally dares not speak hangs over their conversation like the allusions to Oscar Wilde sprinkled through Isherwood's, van Druten's, and Collier's renditions of the story. The film and its leads being recognizably camp, and Sontag having let the Camp out of the aesthetic bag eight years before the film's 1972 release, the audience may find the Camp quality distributed unevenly but widely among the characters and situations. Brian's queerness doesn't prevent his disastrous affair with Sally; on the contrary, it informs his "taste in persons" enough to bring them together.

Several of Sontag's numbered notes on Camp discuss the association of Camp and "homosexual taste." She posits that homosexuals hold the position of "the vanguard" of camp, but they do not have exclusive possession of the aesthetic: "Camp taste is much more than homosexual taste. ...[O]ne feels that if homosexuals hadn't more or less invented Camp, someone else would." Her assertion that "Homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense" is relevant to the connection between Brian and Sally: Brian has pinned his hopes of social normalization on their shared aesthetic ground, although their common cultural preferences are eventually not enough to sustain the romance.

The filmed *Cabaret*'s "Do I shock you, darling?" sequence, present in every version of the material since Isherwood's original, demonstrates the limits of Camp as a shared language. Brian wears a bemused smile as he admits to the disappointed Sally that he's not scandalized by her verbal performance of promiscuity. That smile, and the sweet cynicism of the Camp sensibility, vanish in the following scene of attempted seduction. Liza Minnelli's absurd dance for the reclining, passive Brian is as performative as anything; the audience may smirk or gasp in wonder, but Brian freezes and then recoils. Instead of van Druten's sated cat amused by an impertinent mouse, Brian acts as the endangered party, unable to summon the ironic distance necessary for the Camp sensibility. The disappearance of Camp in *Goodbye to Berlin* signaled the end of the friendship between Isherwood's narrator and his Sally. Here it prefigures the eventual doomed affair between the two.

Brian's and Sally's mutual attraction, their easy compatibility, grows out of camp; the sexual affair between the two is an attempt on Brian's part to assume the privileges of heterosexuality. Sally's androgyny, her performativity, and the sensibility that they share make her a plausible object for his efforts toward assimilation. The collapse of their affair results in a seriousness that can't be dethroned, and their break is more traumatic than the dissolved friendship of the novel.

If, as Sontag said, to talk about Camp is harmful to the aesthetic, Camp can survive exposure by changing. "Knowing" Camp, of the low form Isherwood named in 1954, was already a response to the higher, naïve form: a drag impersonation of Marlene Dietrich is built on the concept of Dietrich as a Camp object. Low Camp follows high, knowing Camp follows naïve, and new forms (some of which Sontag disparaged as "failed Camp") followed those. Sontag, Isherwood, and Wilde — no less than Fosse, Minnelli, and Grey, or Allen, van Druten,

Kander and Ebb — each betrayed Camp by exposing it, and by exposing it forced its evolution. By the 1980s the form of irony Sontag had described as Camp had metastasized, and new forms that Camp's original defining triumvirate would hardly have recognized have since proliferated and flourished.⁴³

Failure is key to Sontag's formulation of camp. Just as Camp may fail by succeeding, it succeeds only by failing: the sensibility finds "the success in certain passionate failures." The loophole here, through which generations of campers have since slipped, is that once the standards of Camp are generally understood, and then taken for granted, one may *succeed at Camp by failing at Camp*. If Joel Grey's Emcee is too political, too engaged, too cruel to qualify, no one is disappointed. The development of an audience that finds successful Camp a conventional and unremarkable achievement necessitates Camp that isn't confined by its own established standards.

Sontag declined to write on Camp more than once. Isherwood illustrated Camp and then moved on. He did not take a detached, bemused view of the works of art that reframed and rearranged the art that he'd made of his own life in Berlin. Camp evolution leaves its pioneers behind. The stories derived from the Sally Bowles material mark an uneven progression in a development that did not begin with Oscar Wilde and has not ended yet. As the narrative closet that protected Christopher Isherwood's "Christopher" becomes less narratively necessary, Camp ceases to be a marker of "homosexual taste," and works of art that once expressed the Camp sensibility come to carry the Camp quality.

43 Sontag's examples of Camp taste in movies included "lists of 'The 10 Best Bad Movies I Have Seen'"; consider the evolution from this sort of quiet Camp appreciation to the open, flamboyant Camp of 1975's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, followed by the audience participation, which mocks the knowing Camp object as being simultaneously naïve and failed Camp. Or think of the phenomenon of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, a long-running television show in which puppets insult low-budget science fiction films for the entire running time of the original movie.

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