

Script

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BOOKS

Elliott Marshall Pin

"The Memorial," by Christopher Isherwood. James Laughlin (New Directions), Norfolk, Conn., \$2.75.

I PICKED A DANDY time to call on Mr. Isherwood. He was leaving the same afternoon to spend Christmas in Mexico. He kindly found time to talk to me however. This was the kinder of him, because he is anything but a publicity hound.

There were several things I wanted to know about him, and about "The Memorial" which will perhaps interest you, too. He "wrote at it," for several years, both in Germany and in Britain, and it was first published in Britain in 1932. This is the first time it has been issued in America.

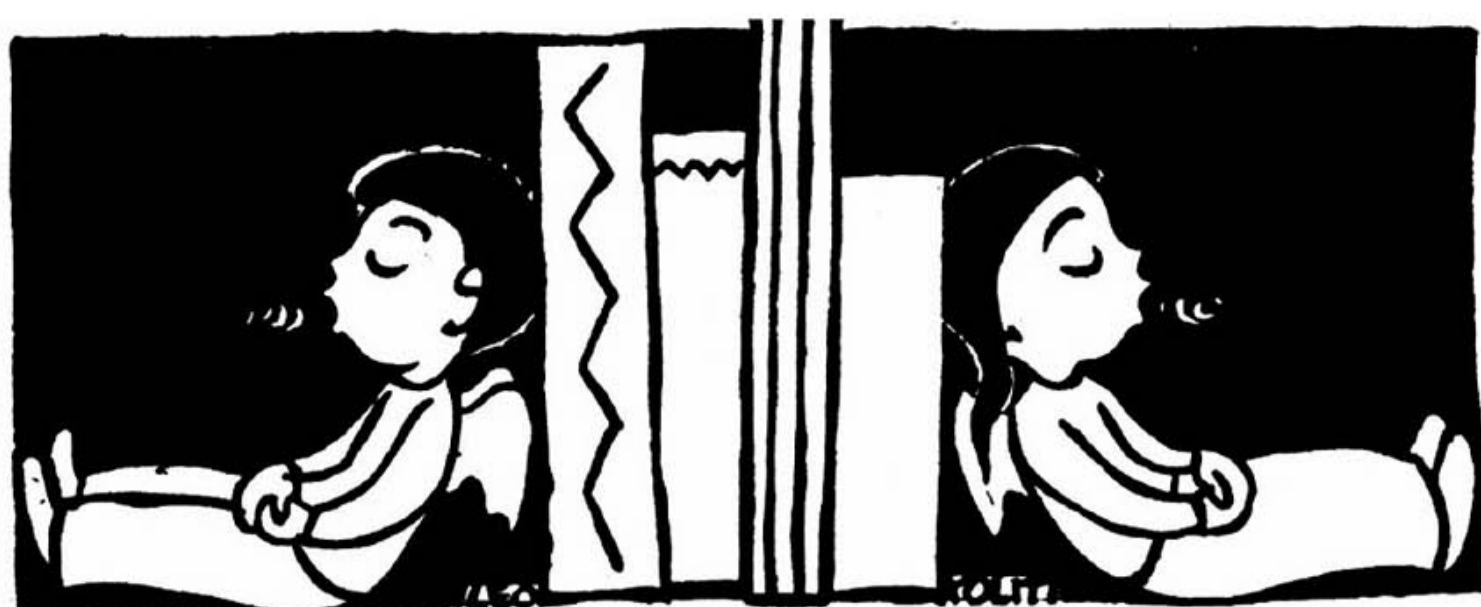
It was the second book of his to be published. The first was "All the Conspirators." This has never been issued in America, "and never will be, if I can prevent it," says Isherwood.

Another work of his which is practically unknown in this country is what he describes as "An autobiographical sort of thing called 'Lions and Shadows'." My impression is that New Directions plans to issue it in 1947.

Both in "The Berlin Stories" and in "The Memorial," Isherwood is occupied with what war does to people. To be a little more specific, with what the development of machine civilization, culminating in the first war, did to certain people . . . People have their integration in their society. When the conditions of society change more rapidly than they are able to adapt, their integrations are destroyed. Their lives lack meaning and effect.

In "The Berlin Stories" we are shown a sad, unmotivated people ripening for the hysterical atonement of Nazism. In "The Memorial" he draws a portrait of a British family during the twenties. In both books the problem is pretty much the same. *What is a man to believe in? What is worth doing?* These are basic philosophical

Isherwood



problems, but we are usually aware of them acutely during times of upheaval.

Unfortunately, we have to stack books together in our minds just as we do in bookshelves. The associations so created are not always either apt or meaningful. For one thing, they depend on what else we have. The dust-jacket suggests stacking it with Waugh's "Brideshead" and Virginia Woolf's "The Years." I feel certain that somebody will want to stack it with Galsworthy. I am not happy about any of these assortments, for you see, I want to put it next to "The Sun Also Rises." Not for stylistic reasons, certainly. Perhaps it makes the same point to me.

The book proceeds, not forward in time, but inward by layers. Isherwood has a wonderful gift of getting inside people. Even when, as in "The Berlin Stories," he writes in the first person, he is marvelously unobtrusive.

The plot of "The Memorial" can be discussed very briefly: it doesn't have one. It doesn't need one. It is entirely fascinating as, not a dramatic sequence of events, but an increasingly intimate understanding of a state of affairs.

As you may have gathered, I like it very much. It is an adult book. Don't buy it for your little niece. (You want her to grow up stupid, don't you?)

