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A Single Man by Christopher Isherwood,
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001

Ulf Goebel

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Recommended Readings



A Single Man

by Christopher Isherwood, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001

Reviewed by Ulf Goebel

With thorough pleasure and an uncanny sense of recognition I read this novel, perhaps Isherwood's finest, for the first time at a friend's mention of the remarkable passage on which it ends, a mystic "wordflight" through a supposed heart attack in sleep. "For a few minutes, maybe, life lingers in the tissues of some outlying regions of the body. Then, one by one, the lights go out." It's 1962. George, the protagonist, is teaching at a small college on the outskirts of Los Angeles, living alone in a dark and secretive old house "shaggy with ivy," the last of a colony of escapists who could "paint a bit, write a bit, and drink lots." Portrayed in wry, playful, mischievous prose, we see the America of the day through the eyes of an outsider whose partner, Jim, recently dead in a car crash, had once gone off with Doris, herself now dying, but come back to George. The Strunks across the street with their litter of tots had arrived with the vets and their just-married wives, the "occupying army of Coke-drinking television watchers," whose suburban "homes" replaced the old "cottages which used to reek of bathtub gin and reverberate with the poetry of Hart Crane." The Girls might find "understanding" for George, but their husbands knew differently. Many of us then came to feel like him. The lights were going out all over America. We joined SDS and marched against the Pentagon. Isherwood's lightly mocking tone quite matches what I felt.

Reviewed by Ulf Goebel, Adjunct Instructor, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Ulf Goebel is a German instructor at Butler University.