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## EXAMINING INSURGENCY IN CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD'S NOVEL 'A SINGLE MAN'

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### ABSTRACT

The present study deals with Christopher Isherwood's manipulation of the concept of insurgency in his most prominent novel: *A Single Man* (1964). The Isherwoodian novel depicts various stages of insurgency against the chaos of values, the middle-class conventions and against the authoritative moral standards that make certain forms of conduct appear right. There is a quest for spiritual growth and self-development in Isherwood's novel; therefore, the spirit of insurgency becomes milder as the novelist becomes older and more mature.

The aim of this research is to trace Isherwood's experimentation with the concept of insurgency. As the hypothesis of this research goes by the forms he introduces into it change the conventional understanding of insurgency from a punishable law-breaking act into an instrument to deal with the difficult problems then to raise man to the occasion. Isherwood proves that insurgency is a constructive, not destructive, act whose role necessitates the improvement of the state and the individual.

*A Single Man*, presents a single day in the life of a lonely aged man who refuses life and locks himself in a small room thinking that the smallness of the room may protect him from the outside world. The conclusions end the study with Isherwood's success in creating art works that suggest the possibility to change insurgency from a retributive act of disobedience into a positive act against tyranny, calling for the renovation of the modern society through a return to the way of God.

**KEYWORDS:** The Definition of Insurgency, The European Socio-Political Scene in the Thirties, The Political Involvement and Rebellious Tendency, Social Realism, Summary of the Novel.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Having a general view about the Isherwoodian novel, it depicts various stages of insurgency against the chaos of values, the middle-class conventions and against the authoritative moral standards that make certain forms of conduct appear right. There is a quest for spiritual growth and self-development in Isherwood's novel. Therefore, the spirit of insurgency becomes milder as the novelist becomes older and more mature.

The aim of this research, however, is to trace Isherwood's experimentation with the concept of insurgency. As for the hypotheses of this paper, the forms he introduces into his novel change the conventional understanding of insurgency from a punishable law-breaking act into an instrument to deal with the difficult problems then to raise man to the occasion. Thus, the problem of this study might be formed in terms of the following questions:

1. How does Isherwood deal with the concept of insurgency in his novel 'A Single Man'?
2. What kind of insurgency does he use in his novel?
3. Why does his novel depict various levels of insurgency?

The significance of the current paper is to analyze the novel and explore the theme of insurgency. It may also be useful for those students who have a lack of understanding of this theme to find a simple summary that will benefit them in their studies similar to this topic. As for the limits, this study is limited to deal only with Christopher Isherwood's novel 'A Single Man' (1964) to dig up deeply and find out what the theme of insurgency exactly is.

## **2. The Definition of Insurgency**

Insurgency is best defined as an armed resistance for political purposes conducted by nationalists against the government, resulting in a revolution or a civil war. In law, insurgency is considered an act of someone who engages in an act of resistance against the authority and is therefore subject to prosecution for treason, such as the Boxer Insurgency (1900) against the Western commercial and political influence in China, the French Resistance (1944-1945), the English Civil War or the Great Insurgency (1642-1649), and so on (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1966). From this definition one can deduce that whenever violence increases insurgency escalates into a civil war or a revolution. The two terms "insurgency" and "revolution" are not synonymous.

Daniel Aaron alludes to the fact that the critic Arthur Koestler differentiates insurgency from revolution, saying that insurgency is liable to change its cause, whereas revolution is directed against only one object; and that the rebel may turn his protest against injustice or against any other form of evil but the revolutionary is viewed as a "fanatic," "constant hater" who conducts all his protest against the tyrannical authority (Aaron, 1961: 218). The spirit of insurgency seems to be flexible as far as its cause concerned, while the cause of revolution is almost always inflexible. Then George

Watson affirms that revolution is usually based on the assumption that the only means to end the death—pang of the old society and the birth—pang of the new society is “revolutionary terror.”

Hence, revolution implies a radical change in the sense that it uproots the existing system and gives birth to a new system. Watson’s assumption opposes George Orwell’s remark that revolution is not a means to change the society but to keep it the same; that revolution helps dictators to seize power through anarchy; and that it starts with big hopes such as liberty then it gives a chance to the governing class to dominate and enjoy its privileges. Orwell differentiates revolution from reform saying that revolution only conserves, while reform means change and novelty (Hoggart, 1977: 43)

The researcher disapproves of Orwell’s opinion, saying that both insurgency and revolution lead to change. In the case of revolution, the change happens radically. But, in the case of insurgency the change can be viewed as a peaceful and gradual process in the sense that insurgency doesn’t necessarily eradicate the existing system but it may readjust them or reconciles the old values and the new ones.

According to these opinions, one can deduce that any revolution may lose its real purpose of reform and may turn into terrorism whenever it is combined with severe violence. Thus, the two terms “insurgency” and “terrorism” must be treated with caution. Sometimes the two terms are equated to each other because they are based on methods of violence. Nevertheless, a rebel can’t be called a terrorist because the former aims to achieve a positive change, while the latter can be viewed as an instrument for the destruction of peace and for the service of Fascism.

Insurgency is also defined as an attempt within the society to redistribute its powers and resources by using force, by showing disagreement with the existing system, and by behaving differently from the normal ways of behavior. Its synonyms include: revolt, insurgency, mutiny, insurrection, uprising, resistance, subversion and counter-culture (Brainy Encyclopedia, 2005).

Besides, insurgency is described as a counter-cultural act that encompasses a range of behaviors, extending from a mild flouting of the social norms to a severely violent act (Wikipedia). Alan Swingewood refers to what Albert Camus says that insurgency “in its exalted tragic forms is only, and only can be a prolonged protest against death, a violent accusation against the universal death penalty” (Swingewood, 1975: 176)

Whatever forms insurgency shapes itself with, it remains a protest against death and injustice. Swingewood believes that contradiction is an important factor to reinforce the authenticity of insurgency because there is no insurgency without disinterestedness (ibid). On this basis, insurgency conveys an attempt to get rid of the state of disinterestedness in the hope of improving the imperfect conditions.

In addition to the factor of contradiction, D. W. Brogan remarks that to carry out a insurgency there is no need for a certain social class. This means that insurgency is not associated with the proletariat only or with the bourgeoisie only (Brogan, 1968: 71). The novel in hand sees that the intellectuals represent the most suitable social stratum to conduct insurgency because they possess good understanding and constructive maneuverability.

All Isherwood's rebels are intellectual characters; that is, they are private tutors, novelists and professors. William Bradshaw is a tutor, Chris or 'Christopher' is a novelist and George is a college professor. Their revolt is not always seen as an angry outburst conducted against politics. Insurgency, thus, will be studied in the following sections from psychological, moral, social and spiritual perspectives.

### **3. The European Socio-Political Scene in the Thirties**

The decline of the Western civilisation in the thirties became an aspiring vision for the young writers, providing them with suitable subjects for their works of art. The thirties was called the "red decade" or the "pink decade". This term might be derived from the widespread revolutionary enthusiasm among the anti-Fascist intellectuals. Such a revolutionary zeal was promoted by the Russian Red Army and its inclination to Communism. The thirties was the time of the flourished left wing and the Communist ideologies among the young intellectuals who complained angrily against the Fascist terror. It was a time of mass unemployment, desolation, war, and of the defeat of democracy at the hands of Fascism.

G. S. Fraser alluded to what T. S. Eliot remarked that the interwar period could be described as a "no man's years between the wars" (Fraser, 1953: 267). During the red decade, Europe witnessed a preparation for the outbreak of another war which was renewed with the ruinous violence of Adolf Hitler, General Franco and Benito Mussolini. The thirties became a period of political polarisation and of moral crises. A dangerous social cleavage occurred because of the overlapping international events: the ascendancy of Fascism which was considered, as Jean Edward Smith put it, the highest degree of the disintegration of man (Smith, 1966: 349-50).

As for André Malraux, he regarded Fascism as the politics of assassination and associated it with the myth of the destructive leader. Fascism was an international threat in the sense that it made a counter-revolutionary alliance with the state, the church and the army in order to carry out a permanent war. It exalted inequality through the instigation of racism and nationalism. As a reaction against Fascism, anti-Fascism emerged in an attempt to create a revolutionary civilisation. The young writers were inclined to anti-Fascism so as to eliminate the class or racial antagonism, and to restore man to his human wholeness (Fisher, 1978: 291).

In 1939 Auden and Isherwood departed to America. Cyril Connolly stated that "the departure of Auden and Isherwood to America ... is the most important literary event of the decade" (Connolly,

1973: 52). With their departure, the decade of the revolutionary writers came to its end. The miserable conditions of life in the thirties encouraged the young writers to adopt a social revolt in order to carry out radical reform of the individual as well as of the society. Instead of lamenting the calamities of life, the Isherwood generation proved their literary genius by changing their deadly catastrophes to revolutionary art.

#### **4. The Political Involvement and Rebellious Tendency**

It is of great significance to give an idea about the political attitudes and the rebellious mood of the young writers in the thirties. Literature, as Walter Allen puts it, can't be studied as a literary accumulation of "self-contained blocks of ten years' duration" (Allen, 1974: 245); that is to say, the literary productions of the thirties exist harmoniously with the literary productions of the other decades.

In the broad sense, the literature of the thirties is socially and politically oriented. The Auden-Isherwood generation can't be thought of as a literary movement because of the limited number of this group members. They are: Christopher Isherwood, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, George Orwell, John Lehmann, Rex Warner, Louis MacNeice, Gabriel Garritt, Geoffrey Throp, and others.

Any literary movement holds its own meetings and has its well – known principles, while the Auden-Isherwood group don't have any special meeting (Knorr, 1997: 2). Europe becomes a place of political contradictions swinging between two extremes. It is divided into two political camps: Communism and Fascism. Writers like Isherwood find themselves trapped between the two large political powers of Communism and Fascism; therefore, they adopt a neutral position or mediocrity. They are called fellow travellers because they sympathise with the Communists without being involved in the party line (Kurzweil, 1983: 150).

Moreover, Stephen Spender admits that there are several reasons which encourage the members of the Auden-Isherwood generation to be inclined to an ultra-leftist orientation towards the Communist Party, or at least to sympathise with its cause. The Communist Party promises to solve the racial, the economic and the political anxieties; to satisfy the spiritual yearnings of the society; to break the bondage of Capitalism; and to give a remedial diagnosis for the social sickness. Nevertheless, the Communist Party proves itself to be not very different from Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany.

All these parties fail because of the contradictions between the parties' ideal ends and the practical means employed to attain them. Most of the left-wing writers are disillusioned by Communism. Graham Greene and Malcolm Lowry renounce their Communist membership after the Hitler-Stalin Pact which Lowry describes as a "bill of divorcement between Russia and the men of Good Will in the West" (Spender, 1951: 290).

#### **5. Social Realism**

Social realism is best defined as a perennial aesthetic mode employed in literature, painting, architecture and in other forms of art. It becomes a distinctive literary current throughout the thirties up to the fifties when it begins gradually to dissolve. It is also defined as a literary genre which describes a specific contemporary injustice, then tries to propose some cure which is, usually a form of socialism, neither so deterministic nor so pessimistic (Evans, 1949: 23). Rene Wellek describes social realism as an objective representation of the contemporary reality, or it is a presentation of the human values and meanings which reside in an unending and indissoluble tension between the self and society (Spender, 1978: 15). Alan Kennedy refers to Ian Watt's opinion that social realism means the opposite of what is particular or individual. "Only the universals were true since they were the only reality," comments Watt (Kennedy, 1974: 72). Besides, George Lukács says that social realism represents the epic of the modern world whose god is the industrial machine (Post, 1981: 367).

Social realism is usually bound to the upper-class perspective, finding a great favour among the Auden-Isherwood group. They are fellow-travellers who share a similar social background. Most of them are of bourgeois origin, having received their education in public schools and universities. That they apparently abandon their upper-class conventions for the proletariat, makes the Auden-Isherwood group romantic rebels and stubborn objectors to their class. Guilt feelings instigate them to advocate the proletarian cause. The hard conditions in which the proletariat live and the dexterous life which the bourgeoisie enjoy haunt every decent artist by a feeling of unease since his comfortable life costs the poor workers their lives. Isherwood shares the excitement that the German audience of workers feel when they watch Mr. Norris acted on the stage. Isherwood represents the collective voice of the workers' protest:

They were listening to their own collective voice. At intervals they applauded it, with sudden, spontaneous violence. Their passion, their strength of purpose elated me. I stood outside it. One day, perhaps, I should be with it, but never of it.

*(Mr. Norris, 152)*

As a result, social realism implies a sort of interdependence of the personal and the political levels of the artist's life. The few lines above show that Isherwood does sympathise with the working-class and its cause of Communism, but he can't deny his upper-class upbringing.

## 6. Summary of the Novel

A Single Man (Post, 1981: 367) is about a single day in the life of George who teaches at St. Tomas College. He is a middle-aged English refugee, at the age of fifty-nine; the same age of Isherwood when he writes the novel. His homosexuality is an allegory of the oppressed minorities. Jim, George's intimate friend, dies in a car accident while he is taking his girlfriend Doris to Mexico. On his way to the college, George's mind is fully absorbed in prospective daydreams. He imagines himself as a

chauffeur-figure, a criminal and a college professor. In the class, he discusses Aldous Huxley's novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. After having dinner with the English expatriate Charlotte, George visits the Starboard bar where he recalls his life with Jim in 1945. Kenny Potter is a college student and an admirer of the professor. Both characters establish a teacher-disciple or a father-son relationship. A spiritual transformation happens to them. The novel ends with the hypothetical death of the single man.

### **7. Analysis and Results: A Single Man**

The difficulties of analyzing the novel springs from the combination of metaphysical and spiritual elements in the novel to reflect the insurgency of a mystical devotee against the failure of the Western civilization. Such a novel is the most complicated novel among Isherwood's art works, as Brian Finney puts it, reveals the author's susceptibility to Vedanta which stems from his rejection of the efficacy of the political action, and from his dissatisfaction with scepticism as an alternative. Following the "mystical philosophy," the novel embraces double visions: (1), it is ultimately subsumed in the mystical idea of oneness with God or with the Ultimate Reality; (2), the assertion of the individual uniqueness which is an indispensable worldly goal (Finney, 1979: 249). The protagonist has to prove the uniqueness of his existence as a separate individual; yet, he is pouring in one oceanic continuous stream which will be discussed in the rock-pool image in this section. The novel investigates the mystical insurgency to lessen the disparity between the body and the spirit. In addition to the mystical depth, the novel includes psychological implications relevant to the Butner Corrections (Izzo, 2001: 2). Terence Dewsnap states that in the Butner institution Isherwood and David Garrett Izzo have to lecture the student-inmates, helping them to mock the stultifying routine of life. Izzo asserts the unimaginative influence that Isherwood practises on the Butner community in the sense that the metaphysical and the spiritual aspects of the novel turn the prison into a spiritual place or a monastery where the students upraise their spirituality. Subliminally, Isherwood assists the children of the institution, among them Kevin Martinelli, to recover their normal nature and become creative members in the society (ibid). Psychologically speaking, *A Single Man* proves that greed is not the primary motivation for the young to commit crimes, but their compulsive need for approval sometimes clashes with the social conventions.

The protagonist leads a mystical insurgency to achieve a fluid and tenuous balance between the spiritual and the worldly sides of life. George plays the teacher-disciple roles together by himself; his experience provides him with a deep insight to guide him up until the end of the novel. The mystical insurgency will be seen through three stages: (1), split identity; (2), the flesh-spirit balance; (3), and the split spirit.

According to the mystical philosophy, spirituality can be gained by means of a threefold path: purification, illumination and unification (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1974). Fascinated with the portrait of the self, Isherwood seems unable to throw off the role of the rebel in his fiction. Isherwood believes that identity is always about who; and that identity is every American's problem. That a

search for the self which can gradually approach the divine in man, becomes a more important issue in Isherwood's late novels than the conflict of Fascism and Socialism in *The Berlin Stories*. George has to face an empty life in an empty society. Though he thinks of committing suicide, George resists these thoughts because he will no longer be himself. Therefore, he prefers to live in loneliness to committing suicide.

The literary significance of *A Single Man* lies in the author's focus on the problem of identity which is tackled metaphysically in relation to the question of appearance and reality; and on finding a solution to the disintegration of identity by conducting a mystical insurgency against materialism. Carolyn G. Heilbrun remarks that *A Single Man* offers a glimpse of an inhabited body and the possibility that the spirit makes at being freed from the imprisoning body. The critic adds that George articulates a loud cry of protest in a world in which the social interaction among human beings seems to be approximately absent (Heilbrun, 1970: 44). Terence Dewsnap proclaims that there is no tension between George and Jim not because they don't encounter each other but the diminution of tension among them implies that the modern world is no longer worth the struggle (Dewsnap, 1970: 87). Then George undertakes an internal tension, since the spirit looks for a union with the universal consciousness. All the external conflicts in the world of automation create an inner tension in the character to the extent that the bodily joys seem dead-like illness. "What was terrible was the fear of annihilation. Now we have with us a far more terrible fear, the fear of survival." (*A Single Man*, 73). The mystical insurgency renounces the bodily energy if it is tied to the service of the war annihilation. George fulminates against the desert of spiritual sterility because without the slightest consciousness of the Absolute, he will never transform from a "seeker for happiness" into a "seeker for knowledge." He admits that life energy doesn't mature him but "I personally have gotten steadily sillier and sillier and sillier and that is a fact." (*A Single Man*, 135). The novel begins with a metaphysical description of the protagonist's body so as to exteriorise the gradual development of insurgency from the position of bodily imprisonment to that of universal oneness. George is viewed at the very beginning of the novel as definitely deadpan; confined in a senseless identity in a time-spaced world:

Waking up begins with saying am and now. That which has awakened ... has recognized I, and there from deduced I am, I am now. Here comes next, and is at least negatively reassuring; because here, this morning, is where it had expected to find itself; what is called at home.

Obediently, it washes, shaves, brushes its hair; for it accepts its responsibilities to the others. It is even glad that it has its place among them. It knows what is expected of it.

It knows its name. It is called George.

(*A Single Man*, 7-8)



Hence the body starts as an automation; there is no distinction between “it” and “he.” After becoming part of the flux of time and space, George seems to be a “three quarters human thing.” (A Single Man, 9) The “it” acquires a specific gender to become “he” and a name to be called George.

The wake-up scene has a literary significance. Philip E. Agre points out that George’s ceremony of the morning toilet cultivates a partition between the character’s action and thought. The wake-up scene also launches a sort of ambiguity between the character’s activities: George’s prospective and retrospective visualisation of actions actually work out in reality. Agre adds another important fact about the wake-up scene which is that the habitual morning rituals convey the exultation of the body over the soul at least at the beginning of the novel ([www.polaris.gseis.ucla.edu](http://www.polaris.gseis.ucla.edu), 2022). Being time-bound, George falls a prey to four types of alienation. According to Rollo May there are four types of alienation: (1) alienation from the body; (2) alienation from one’s existence; (3) alienation from society; (4) and alienation from the meaning of life (Raab, 1961: 562). The four types of alienation can be observed in the case of George. At the beginning of the novel, George suffers a sort of alienation from the body. But instead of regarding the body as a foe or an outlaw, the protagonist gives a little room for expressing his repressed feelings. The bodily alienation is reduced whenever the spirit fulminates against the non-entity by forcing the body to be a “separate, unique individual” (ibid). George is going to play multiple roles: a chauffeur; an assassin, and a college professor. Through the mirror image, George conceives the multiplicity of his personality:

Staring and staring into the mirror, it sees many faces within its face—the face of the child, the boy, the young man, the not-so-young man—all present still, preserved like fossils on superimposed layers, and, like fossils, dead.

(A Single Man, 8)

Edmund White considers George a multiple self, demonstrated as an arbitrary or a chemical compound of separate ingredients. The multi-portrait of the protagonist indicates his disbelief in any philosophical ideology. Hence, George can’t believe in the existence of what is beyond the reasonable world. The more he thinks of himself, the more persuaded he becomes that he does not exist (White, 2002: 5). Moreover, Claude J. Summers disavows the loneliness and injustice done to George, saying that the protagonist has to militate against the sense of being an estranged English refugee by adjusting the circumstances in his own way. Nevertheless, he can’t exult at estrangement unless he possesses self-control. George’s spiritual insurgency implies mature canonical values. To achieve oneness with the universal consciousness, there ought to be self-determination to “be mature in our culture means to have reached a developmental point of self-possession” (Summers, 1980: 1). As the body begins to actualise itself as a specific personage, George plays the role of the impassive anonymous chauffeur-figure. On his way to the college, George seems no longer conscious of the outside world. Then, his body begins to react automatically to the road. However, the spiritual insurgency supports George to preserve his humane integrity in order not to be a “mere numerical entity” as if the chauffeur-figure were existing not for himself but for the most terrifying system.

Moreover, Walter Allen refers to Alberto Moravia who rejects the consumption of man's identity. Man ought to contact with the society without losing the personal integrity (Allen, 1964: 71). A Single Man shows a great assault on the disintegrated self. George is reduced into a heap of bones because the chauffeur-figure has no will of its own. It has to obey the will of its master. Such a depersonal reduction of the chauffeur character leads George to question the meaning of life and the importance of oneness at the end of the novel. A gradual inner tension occurs when the chauffeur-figure starts thinking of the traffic signs as emblematic of the regulations of the society. Though society always appears as an enemy in Isherwood's fiction, it is not a question of how to be separated from it. Since action necessitates the existence of the self within the society, the chauffeur has to activate its role in the society. Although the chauffeur-figure owns a driving license as evidence of its identity, it does not exist. Its hyperconsciousness of all "bylaws, city ordinances, rules and petty regulations" (A Single Man, 25) develops into an acute criminal complex in its personality. As a result of the split identity, the chauffeur-figure transforms into an assassin, called Uncle George. Both the chauffeur and the assassin exist only in the protagonist's prospective mind. Terence Dewsnap affirms such an assumption, saying that a kind of discrepancy segregates the character's private self from the public identity as a British emigré. The split identity makes George waver between reality and illusion (Dewsnap, 1970: 11).

Another daydream in which George's mind is absorbed is the dream of the principal criminal Uncle George who works according to the theory of guilt by association. He is a member in a secret organisation—the Mafia. Uncle George is more effective than the chauffeur because he has his own personal will to be functional in the Mafia. Since the spiritual insurgency against the body is at its climax, a schizophrenic schism occurs between the body and the mind. Then the delinquent paranoiac fantasies haunt the character's mind. Saturated with aggression and plots of sadomasochistic vengeance against the bureaucrats, the assassin Uncle George wishes to see the journalists and politicians performing sexual acts in pairs and in groups with a display of the utmost enjoyment. Then, the film will be developed and printed to all the theatres. Moreover, he imagines the possibility of a kind of virus which will exterminate the Western civilisation, turning people into a "heap of spaghetti." (A Single Man, 29) Such fantasies have a political significance. The novelist assumes that to evacuate one's mind from a recognition of the existence of other human beings, is an image of Nazism. Uncle George understands only the language of brute force: "We must launch a campaign of systematic terror. ... this will require an organization of at least five hundred highly skilled killers and torturers, all dedicated individuals." (A Single Man, 30).

Nevertheless, the assassin's consciousness is not motivated by self-love but by self-loathing and vengeance. According to Rollo May, self-loathing represents the second form of alienation. Uncle George does not accept himself, nor does he try to live up to the expectation of the society; therefore, he does not seek proofs of his worthiness. André Gide remarks that "people are so afraid of finding themselves alone that they never find themselves at all" (Raab, 1961: 562). The split identity turns

George into a criminal: “Among many other kinds of monsters, George says, they are afraid of little me.” (A Single Man, 21) To be an old monster encapsulates the increase of hatred which the protagonist feels for himself. “It releases a part of his nature which he hated to let Jim see.” (A Single Man, 15) Self-love is a prerequisite to love the others, and self-esteem is a prerequisite to having esteem for the others. Whenever George decides to forget revenge, for the death of his friend, he approaches the state of self-love or the flesh-spirit balance.

After the role of the assassin, George restores his actual social role as a college professor. He transforms from the state of illusion to the state of reality. He is not yet ready to have a complete contact with the society, because “people are not amusing. They should never be dealt with amusingly.” (A Single Man, 30) The professor endeavours a counter-rebellious schizophrenic state as a result of the role assigned for him as a teacher or the “talking head.” The professor suffers the third type of alienation in the sense that he estranges himself from the society, losing the sense of belonging to the Los Angeles community. Since the college community is considered a simulacrum of the society, the professor’s refusal of any personal involvement with the students reveal the alienation from the large society. George questions: “Does he know about me, George wonders; does any of them? Oh yes, probably. It wouldn’t interest them. They don’t want to know about my feelings ... or anything below my neck.” (A Single Man, 41) To break the shackles of alienation, George succeeds to contact a college student through a “wonderful provocative melodramatic silence.” (A Single Man, 49). Through his relationship with Kenney Potter, George bridges the barrier between himself and the society. The closer he approaches the college, the more poise he achieves between the body and the spirit. Alan Kennedy says that the great mechanism of the body is not dangerous in itself; that the source of evil is the split of the spirit and the body; and that the body is evil while the spirit is good. George’s temperament is neither mechanical nor chemical, but it is sort of psychological adjustment. To put it in another way, the spirit adorns the body as if George is going to present a dramatic performance.

Besides, Kennedy asserts that A Single Man employs the myth of polarity or the dualism of body and spirit, and of man and society (Kennedy, 1974: 221). On his way to the class, George catches sight of two boys playing tennis. The physical attractiveness of the two players challenges George’s enslavement by the system of automation, already dealt with in the wake-up scene. The game stimulates George because it reveals the meaning of life for him: “From his heart, he thanks these young animals ... they will never know what they have done to make this moment marvellous to him, and life itself less hateful.” (A Single Man, 43). The tennis players inspire George to reduce the sexual pleasures into “symbolic conveniences” to free the soul.

As far as mysticism is concerned, all mystical visions are described in Encyclopedia Britannica as “ineffable” and “vast, vague and sentimental (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1974). The spiritual insurgency is the first step to prepare the protagonist to join the universal consciousness after getting rid of the material world. Even though George lives in a voluntary exile, he has to belong to a certain

community; thus, he succeeds to fulfill a social interaction notably at the college. For Isherwood, George is a mystical rebel who bases his insurgency on sheer agnostic courage without the support of any religious belief. The novelist adds that “if I were in George’s place, I would think about killing myself, because I am less than George. George is heroic (Isherwood, 1972: 157-58). Hence, the characters can hardly believe in George’s resistance of hardships without complaint. The narrator comments: “Because, absurdly, inadequately, in spite of himself almost, he is a representative of the hope. And the hope is not false.” (A Single Man, 38)

To resist catastrophes and handicaps without complaining can’t happen unless the character reaches a great degree of spiritual maturity. George endures the loss of his only family, Jim, whose character remains shadowy in the narrative. In mystical theology, the hardships that George confronts don’t make him live in spiritual bereavement but it is a “way of negation” of the material world (Vinson, 1972: 666). He has to divorce the secular pleasures to unite with God; therefore, the tone of the novel changes from pessimism to optimism. As a college professor, George resists the fourth type of alienation—the failure to have any meaning for one’s existence. George acquires a new interpretation for the meaning of life after his experience with the college student Kenny Potter. Without his mystical recalcitrancy, George will never learn from the austere circumstances: “Because, don’t you see, what I know is what I am? And I can’t tell you that you have to find it out for yourself. I am like a book you have to read.” (A Single Man, 149). Kenny supports George to turn the memory of the dead Jim into a hope to embrace the future. Self-acceptance leads him to accept the Los Angeles society. George admits that he looks for a community which reconciles the need for a tribal acceptance and the need for the individual self-assertion. Since George is a rebel, he can’t live in utter loneliness because the cause of his insurgency concerns his existence as well as the society. Then, his friendship with Kenny is a declaration of accepting the society and of finding a meaning to his existence. Both characters achieve a state of flesh-spirit equilibrium. The swimming scene represents the first stage to achieve spiritual purification. Kenny conceives the presence of a “George transformed.” (A Single Man, 147). Then, Kenny is symbolically transformed into “rainbows of light.” (A Single Man, 150). The two characters seem as if they were creatures distinct from the transient world. The metamorphosis of George with Kenny give way to the harmonious oneness or unification. The swimming experience leads their symbolic relationship to evolve, in the sense that the symbolic teacher-disciple relationship in which polarity plays a significant role stands for the rebel’s mystical rituals of purification:

Giving himself to it utterly, he washes away thought, speech, mood, desire, whole selves, entire lifetime; again and again he returns, becoming always cleaner, freer, less. ... [They] are the sole sharers of the element. The waves and the night and the noise exist only for their play.

(A Single Man, 138)

George stands naked and unafraid in the vast ocean. He becomes a purified innocent child. Kenny protectively admits: “You know something, sir? They ought not to let you out on your own ever. You

are liable to go into real trouble.” (A Single Man, 139). W. I. Scobie states that the novelist Isherwood advocates a private belief in decency and a common sense out of Vedantism (Isherwood, 1972: 158). Such an idea is applicable to George who fulminates against miseries by decency which is an aspect of mysticism. The integrity of the new George is born of hope. Kenny helps George to tolerate the death of Jim as an inevitable fact: “Jim is my life, he says. But he will have to forget, if he wants to go on living. Jim is Death.” (A Single Man, 154). Instead of being stuck to the past George “clings only to the Now. It is now that he must find another Jim. Now that he must love. Now that he must live—“ (A Single Man, 155). James Vinson points out that George attempts to bridge the gap between the young and the aged, and between the past and the future (Vinson, 1972: 664).

Therefore, George turns from the state of prospection to that of retrospection. Both George and Kenny exchange a dialogue which must be interpreted in terms of symbolism. George states that a dialogue between two persons does not matter; and that “what really matters is not what you talk about but the being together in this particular relationship. ... Because you have to be symbolic figures-like, in this case, Youth and Age.” (A Single Man, 130). From the researcher’s viewpoint, the literary significance of the dialogue between the two characters can be interpreted according to the transcendental assumption that the fundamental nature of things is empty by itself and does not gain significance unless it bears concrete or empirical data (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1966). Hence, the essence of the dialogue is symbolic since it bears no significance unless it wraps itself by a touchable form just like a dialogue. Togetherness is what matters in the symbolic relationship between the teacher and the college student.

Both George and Kenny consume the homosexual lustful desires to the mystical rebellious spirit. In a letter to John Lehmann, Isherwood expresses the meaninglessness of the confinements of the sensuous body and of the love of money and power (Lehmann, 1987: 55). The George-Kenny relationship cannot exist unless there is a respect for each other’s integrity; that is why George does not allow homosexuality to spoil his friendship with Kenny. He protects the integrity of his existence against losing its privacy in Kenny’s personality: “Kenny seems farther away, not closer, he has receded far beyond the possible limits of an electric field” (A Single Man, 145).

Isherwood uses homosexuality symbolically to assert the possibility of reconciling the mystical and the secular sides en masse. Indeed, George is a revelation of the author’s paternity. In an interview, Isherwood states: “I don’t feel myself at all far from being a father” (Isherwood, 1972: 158). The paternal-filial relationship between George and Kenny is a celebration of the human society in which the personal inculpable relations have to be overrated and to be imperishable by the advanced materialism. Joseph Cody refers to what E. M. Forster remarks that friendship represents the true human condition and the one “permanent victory” over cruelty and chaos (Cody, 2002: 3). Then, the critic Donald Salter affirms the Forsterian opinion that whenever friendship and honesty are abandoned, the society will suffer the chaos of the class, racial and religious conflict; and that people may be destroyed whenever they substitute the mutual trust with selfishness. As an admirer of the

Forsterian mind, Isherwood glorifies friendship in his novels. Most of his characters depend upon honest friendship as a weapon to rebel against all forms of antagonism (Salter, 1975: 7).

A Single Man concludes with mystical queries to presage the protagonist's emergence into mystical maturity. George finds difficulties to evaluate the meaning of life; however, he discovers the meaning of his existence in the love of humanity which ought to be so constant that even death will reaffirm its power. The question-and-answer session creates a peaceful atmosphere tinged with tragedy as a perfect ending for the novel. It adds a valedictory to the narrative because the protagonist decides not to yield to failure. He will not be defeated even if life seems a long troublesome journey of loneliness. He is thus leading an optimistic mystical insurgency which can get rid of even the power of death, accomplished not by violence but by tolerance and spirituality. The more poignant insurgency George undergoes, the closer he approaches happiness. But happiness can't be gained without an attachment with the Absolute. Aldous Huxley argues that it seems increasingly clear that unless man rediscovers the Absolute, he may be destroyed by his own technology (Grant, 1979: 17). Although George, pretends not to consider the possibility of seeing God, it almost seems like an evasion; that is why Kenny asks George whether he takes mescaline to see God. "You know something, sir? I bet, even if you had seen God, you wouldn't tell us," Comments Kenny (A Single Man, 65).

Nevertheless, George does achieve an attachment with the "Ultimate Reality" after realising the meaninglessness of the world of appearance. The death of the protagonist demonstrates the split spirit or the segregation of the spirit from the "soul-destroying commercialism of the city." (A Single Man, 13). The spirit becomes an ethereal element of the universal consciousness. In Down There, Chris admits that "this thing that is inside us and yet is not us—is not our individual personality. He believes it is there and that we can get in touch with it." (Down There, 175). Malcolm Bradbury concedes that what makes Isherwood compose A Single Man is to explore the inmost depths of the protagonist or what is called the "modern self" which must be examined inwardly (Bradbury, 1973: 151). George is a prototype for the modern self whose inmost depth is examined so as not to debunk the idea that one can scarcely continue in the modern self which is best seen in the rock-pool image. Isherwood claims that one of the Vedantic glimpses in A Single Man is the image of the rock-pool in which separate entities float by the tide of water to constitute one flood of consciousness. For Isherwood, George is a stoic character who has nothing to support him except his bodily energy. But he gradually evolves from the state of bodily sensation to that of spiritual faith, revolting for the sake of the spiritual solace (Isherwood, 1972: 159). The image of the rock-pool is best expressed in the following quotation:

Up the coast ... there are a lot of rock pools. You can visit them when the tide is out. Each pool is *separate* and *different*...—such as George, Charlotte, Kenny, Mrs. Strunk. Just as George and the others are thought of, for convenience, as *individual entities*, so you may think of a *rock pool* as an *entity*. ... And just as the waters of the ocean come flooding, darkening over the pools, so over George and the others in sleep come the

waters of that other ocean; that *consciousness* which is no one in particular but which contains *everyone* and *everything*, past, present and future, and extends unbroken beyond the uttermost stars. [*italics mine*] (*A Single Man*, 155-56)

The rock-pool image comprises the union of the human spirit with the universal consciousness. The basic idea on which the pool image is based is that man is not a constant creature but a complex dynamic amalgam of disharmonious elements batched together. George is both an individual and an archetype character whose existence does not oppose the universal consciousness; rather, it is the very instrument for universal connection. Isherwood investigates the possibility of reforming the self through mystical insurgency against worldliness by acquiring a “consciousness which is no one in particular but which contains everyone and everything.” (*Down There*, 176). The new George validates the conception that a transformation of the self never stops. Even for an aged man like George there is a hope for perpetual reconstructions; hence, the mystical insurgency is not unavailing. Charles Higham says that the author’s career in Hollywood sharpens the visual quality of his novels offering them a precision of outline. The modern artists tend to visualise their art works and stop relying on words, thinking of the possible silent sequences where words play against images (Higham, 1968: 34). The protagonist’s death differs from the ordinary painful biological death in the sense that the character’s experience is described in a drowsy manner. According to Aldous Huxley, the degree to which one discovers the intuitive knowledge of the ultimate reality determines the degree to which it will be enjoyed in the posthumous state (Woodcock, 1972: 23). The suppositional death makes George no longer a single man because he transcends the confines of the materialistic rocks to join the deep water of the ocean.

Moreover, the death scene that sums up the novel is based on Isherwood’s reading’s of Doctor A. T. W. Simon’s description of a coronary occlusion in *Man’s Presumptuous Brain*. He also makes use of the medical knowledge to disassemble his prototype. Anthony Burgess assumes that there might be a trilogy of death: the sham death of sleep; the metaphorical or the hypothetical death, and the biological death of the body (Burgess, 1971: 116). The death scene suggests the impermanence of life and recommends a respect for the timelessness of consciousness which is no one in particular. Isherwood deals with death as a transcendental idea which is beyond the reasonable world. Brian Finney refers to E. M. Forster’s description of death as an immense security to man from the life struggle. It strengthens the “*thews of Love*” and saves man from the deadstone face of life (Finney, 1979: 254).

Claude J. Summers perceives that George’s death is not a punishment for sin even though the biological death is an inevitability to which all the mortal creatures must yield. Regardless of the physical consumption, death makes George approach the power of “*Love*”; painless death is granted only to the virtuous. Summers adds that death is required for the ending of the serious sexual novels; and that *A Single Man* offers the readers the required tragic ending while undercutting it with humorous hypothetical language (Summers, 1980: 120). If death is a punishment, George will never die in a “*relaxed happy mood*.” (*A Single Man*, 91). George dies while he is at the full brim of happiness. His mind is in a drowsy state, and the whole body is in complete quietude. The relaxation

of the spirit puts the body in a state of easy-going physical democracy. The hypothetical death of George is a necessity to the triumph of the rebellious self to achieve unification with the universal consciousness.

To conclude, *A Single Man* presents the best portrayal of the antiheroic rebel as an archetype of man who exists in the modern age. The novel instigates the readers to ask themselves what is life all about, reminding them that God exists. A spiritual conversion is a crucial demand to the evolution of man, without it he will be confined in a world of automation. With the mystical attitudes, the concept of insurgency reaches its apogee of development in Isherwood's novels.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Rounding off this study, it has reached to the following conclusions:

1. Isherwood is a rebellious novelist in more than one way. His novels are the novels of revolt. Indeed, he creates an impression of himself as a rebel whose line of insurgency is not entirely political. The concept of insurgency belongs to no time and no place. It has its peculiar relevance to the twentieth century. In the modern age insurgency becomes a necessity for man to regain the missing human nature and to achieve self-assertion. So, insurgency in '*A Single Man*' has been created as an influential instrument for self-protection, by means of which man tries to preserve his existence from the infectious society.
2. In an attempt to answer the second question, insurgency is not a simple negation of the existing circumstances. Rather, it is a matter of valuable judgement in the light of which the rebel refuses the conditions in which a man lives and suggests either a new condition or makes a readjustment of the unacceptable condition so that it would be acceptable to live in. The readjustment of the old conditions means that the rebel has to rely on the traditional values in order to create the new ones. One can simply readjust the old unpreferable conditions in such a way as to fulfil the requirements of the humanitarian society. So, the Isherwoodian insurgency does not mean the death of the old life and the birth of the new life; it simply involves a reconciliation between the old and the new. In other words, Isherwood in his novel attempts to prove that insurgency is a constructive, not destructive, act whose role necessitates the improvement of the state and the individual.
3. As for rolling around the third question, insurgency is no longer a violent political uprising, led by a large number of people, but a gradual peaceful process conducted by few individuals to achieve the desirable change after controlling the outdated standards. In addition to the valuable judgement, novelty or renovation become a necessity for the constructive subversion to abolish the undesirable state. It is not a matter of personal disagreement or a sudden change accompanied by violence to substitute the objectionable social surroundings. This indicated that Isherwood's rebels rely highly on the past to create the future; that is why '*A Single Man*' depicts various levels of insurgency.

Lastly but not least, one can deduce that insurgency is a means to an end. It is not a thing by itself. Its aim is to fulfil social change and renovation. Once it becomes an end by itself, it turns into a terroristic



action which is destructive to the individual and society as well. Insurgency is not a punishable outlaw act, but it is reformatory or restorative. To be reformatory, insurgency has to take into consideration the evolution of the individual as a starting-point to the universal evolution of the society.

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