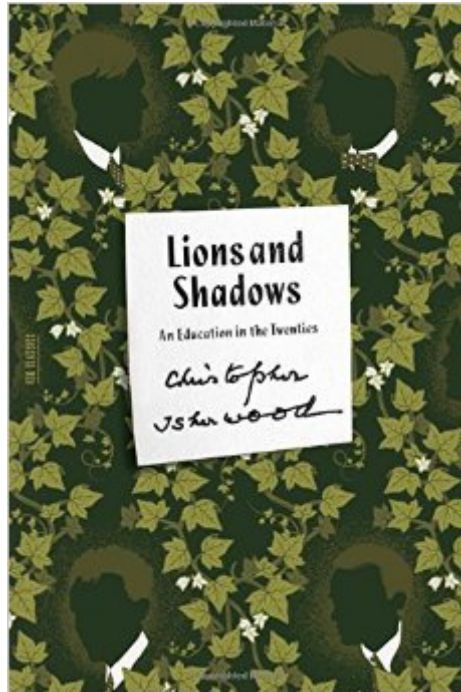


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Lions And Shadows: An Education In The Twenties (FSG Classics)



Synopsis

Lions and Shadows blends autobiography and fiction to describe the true education of a writer evolving from precocious schoolboy to dropout at large in London's bohemia of the 1920s. Forced to withdraw from Cambridge University, Christopher Isherwood works as a tutor to the privileged, serves as the secretary to a busy string quartet, ill-fatedly attends medical school. Licensed by names he invents, he works up extravagant portraits of his brilliant contemporaries W. H. Auden, Edward Upward, and Stephen Spender, whose intimate friendships and cult of rebellion changed the literary identity of England in the 1930s. Although the story is Isherwood's own life story, carrying him up to the age of twenty-five, he gives free rein to his remarkable powers of dramatization, improving on the facts here and there, to make a highly entertaining, sometimes hilarious book. "Read it as a novel," says Isherwood. There is no difficulty taking his advice. But his characters were real people, and when *Lions and Shadows* was first published, in 1938, it transformed their lives into legend.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In remarks at the beginning, Isherwood says that his book "is not, in the ordinary journalistic sense of the word, an autobiography; it contains no 'revelations'; it is never 'indiscreet'; it is not even entirely 'true'." (7). He goes on to state that the book is a record of a man, him, in his twenties, as he forges ahead in his life as a young novelist. This young artist makes a short trip to France. He attends university in England. "I had not been in Cambridge a fortnight before I

began to feel with alarm that I was badly out of my depth. The truth, as I now discovered for the first time, was that I was a hopelessly inefficient lecturee. I couldn't attend, couldn't concentrate, couldn't take proper notes • (62). He records the meaning that relationships there give him, including Mr. Holmes, a benefactor of sorts. "Isherwood the artist was an austere ascetic, cut off from the outside world, in voluntary exile, a recluse" • (97). He co-writes narratives with a close friend. One book in particular, a "Hynd and Starn" story, would be accompanied with fireworks, gramophone, and dialogue would be spoken. Copies would be free. "Our friends would find, attached to the last page, a pocket containing banknotes and jewels; our enemies, on reaching the end of the book, would be shot dead by a revolver concealed in the binding" • (114). Isherwood simply doesn't live long enough; today's technology might have afforded him at least a few of these book innovations! At the end of his second year Isherwood deliberately fails his exams by giving nonsensical answers. At the time, because the professors and administration act as if he has simply chosen to leave Cambridge, no one knows what he has done. Failure is painful, but he believes he is right to strike out on his own.

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