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Spring 2011

Tales from the Closet: A New Book Celebrates Another Sexual Outlaw & Kinsey Collaborator

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Tales from the Closet: A New Book Celebrates Another Sexual Outlaw & Kinsey Collaborator

by Judith Reisman

On July 25, 2010, *New York Times* book reviewer Patricia Cohen announced an electrifying book soon to be released: *Secret Historian: The Life and Times of Samuel Steward, Professor, Tattoo Artist and Sexual Renegade*. This biography by Justin Spring contains the long-hidden tales of Steward, a "Sexual Outlaw on the Gay Frontier," as Cohen titled her review. Such a revelation of the "secret history" of "gay life in the middle decades of the 20th century," as she describes Spring's book, has, not surprisingly, excited the liberal and homosexualist press.

This is not a fringe book. Not only is the publisher mainstream (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), but the author, according to his Amazon page, "has been the recipient of a number of grants, fellowships, and awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship. . . . He has also held research fellowships from Yale University, Brown University, Radcliffe University and Amherst College." Of his new biography of Stewart *Publishers Weekly* said, "Spring's sympathetic and entertaining story of a life registers the limitations imposed on homosexuals by a repressive society, but also celebrates the creativity and daring with which Steward tested them."

In addition to being a tattoo artist and gay "pioneer," Sam Steward was also a professor of English for twenty years, first at Chicago's Loyola University, then at DePaul. While at DePaul, he also operated, as "Phil Sparrow," a tattoo parlor on south State Street. But when the university administrators discovered this, they sacked him, and he went into his tattoo business full time.

Steward is famous for tattooing members of the Hells Angels in Oakland, California, and for tattooing LUCIFER on the chest of Kenneth Anger, a gay filmmaker and Alfred Kinsey collaborator. Steward was also friends with Kinsey, as well as with such literary figures as Thornton Wilder, Thomas Mann, Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and Christopher Isherwood, among others. Under the name Phil Andros, he wrote homosexual pulp fiction.

The XXX Files

The title *Secret Historian* is a nod to Steward's archival habits. In her review, Cohen describes how Spring tracked down the executor of Steward's estate, who had saved the gay paraphernalia and records Steward left behind after his death in 1993. Spring thus uncovered, writes Cohen,

80 boxes full of drawings, letters, photographs, sexual paraphernalia, manuscripts and other items, including . . . pubic hair from Rudolph Valentino, a thousand-page confessional journal Steward created at the request of the sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, and a green metal card catalog labeled "Stud File," which contained a meticulously documented record on index cards of every sexual experience and partner . . . that Steward said he had had over 50 years.

Apparently he was waiting for someone like Spring to come along and tell all.

Steward is already familiar to Kinsey aficionados, appearing often in biographies of Kinsey. According to Spring, Kinsey's 1948 book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, "inspired Steward to see himself as a sex researcher." Cohen writes that Kinsey "quickly enlisted him" as one of his many "unofficial collaborators," apparently unaware that the Kinsey Institute claims that Kinsey never had such collaborators.

In his book, Spring says that Steward sent data on 746 "partners" (both boys and men) to the Kinsey Institute regularly until 1974 (p. xiii). Yet he was still apparently not meticulous enough for Kinsey, who, in a letter Spring quotes, berated Steward "for his lax record keeping at the YMCA":

Why on earth haven't you kept a day-by-day record for us which would be something permanent instead of mere memory . . . which cannot be utilized in a specific record until we get it down in black and white. If you do not have the record, I should like to get some hours of your time to get the specific data when you get home. (p. 176)

Spring says that Kinsey instructed Steward to include not only names, dates, and places in his sexual records, but also such details as penis size and specific sex acts performed. Kinsey's standard data included the ages of all "partners," but while noting that Steward claimed to have had sex often with "straight young men," Spring does not reveal the ages of any of the minor boys included in Steward's "Stud File." Perhaps he feared that doing so would tarnish Steward's image as a free-spirited "gay icon."

However, Spring does quote another of Kinsey's lovers, the writer Glenway Wescott, as saying that Steward "had pictures of himself making love to . . . young boys. He had their names and their addresses. . . . I said, 'I can't remember such a courageous man as you. It doesn't shock me a bit, and it gives me great pleasure to look at it all.'" No doubt.

Although Wescott worried about getting arrested, Steward said he looked forward to going to prison, where he was sure to be beaten and sodomized. But in the end, there was no jail time for Sam Steward.

Against the Law

In *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey solicited "[p]ersons who . . . are willing to begin keeping day by day calendars showing the frequencies and the sources of their sexual outlet" (p. 74). Steward was more than willing. At one point, he wrote to Kinsey that his sado-sexual "contacts still keep apace with my periodicity, and I'll be sending you the 1951 statistics very soon."

Kinsey had no lower age boundary for the "day by day records" of his collaborators. His *Male* book contains tables listing supposed orgasms in very young children, even babies under a year old. His team often recorded illegal sex acts, but as I report in *Sexual*

Sabotage (WND Books), Kinsey would never report child rapists, not even those who murdered their victims, to the police. In his book he claimed that this was because he and his team refused to make "social or moral interpretations of the facts" (p. 5).

Yet the Kinsey Institute continues to claim on its website: "Kinsey did not carry out experiments on children; he did not hire, collaborate, or persuade people to carry out experiments on children," nor did he "ask people to fill out questionnaires" (www.kinseyinstitute.org/about/contro-03.html). Somehow pedophiles just *forced* him to include such data?

In truth, Kinsey eagerly received any information about any kind of sexual activity. As Steward's case demonstrates, he actively solicited, recorded, and reported this activity—including sex crimes—as objective science.

The crimes did not always involve children. For example, Steward recounted how Kinsey once "proposed an 'arrangement' to me": Steward would fly to the institute to be filmed while being sexually tortured—for Kinsey. He agreed. The experience is vividly described in Spring's book and is discussed in *Sexual Sabotage* and in *Kinsey, Crimes and Consequences* as well. When Kinsey made this proposition, pornography and sadomasochistic sex acts were still crimes in the United States.

Cover Up & Exposure

In his biography, however, Spring covers up not only Steward's pederasty but also Kinsey's sadism. For example, he selectively quotes from an article in the gay monthly *The Advocate* (November 13, 1980), in which Steward describes his sessions with the sadist Mike Miksche:

I was marked and marred, all muscles weakened . . . my jaws were so tired and unhinged . . . Mike slapped me hard and [unprintable]. . . . During the sessions I was vaguely conscious of people dropping in now and then to observe, while Mrs. Kinsey, a true scientist to the end . . . sat by, and once in a while calmly changed the sheets upon the workbench.

But Spring omits the very revealing quotes from Steward's article that expose a clearly unscientific Kinsey getting Miksche "half-drunk on gin" *before* filming him in sadistic sex with Steward. Was the film made for Kinsey's personal pleasure or for "science"? Such is Kinsey's brand of "science" as recorded by the "historian" Sam Steward.

Early on in Spring's telling of Steward's personal history, we meet a motherless boy's opium-addicted, alcoholic father. We learn of Sam's own sexual victimization as a child, when he was sodomized by a "big guy football player," and of his youthful alcoholism, prostitution, and thievery. What emerges is a picture of a loveless, fear-filled life of obvious pain. Is this the sort of life that any mother or father would envision for their son?

Yet Spring exposes the moral bankruptcy of our cultural elite by exhibiting his own inability to acknowledge the moral and personal tragedy of Steward's life. In summing up Steward's loveless, lonely, and sexually psychotic life, whose only legacy was a "Stud File" and an actor's pubic hair, Spring can only say, "He paid the price for being himself, but at least he got to be himself." •

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From [Salvo 16](#) (Spring 2011)

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