



## Steward, Samuel (1909-1993)

by Craig Kaczorowski

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Samuel Steward was a college professor, tattoo artist, and author. While he published extensively under his given name, he is perhaps best remembered for the extraordinarily literate and explicit gay male erotica he published under the pseudonym Phil Andros. In the words of Terence Kissack, the executive director of the GLBT Historical Society, "Steward is among the most fascinating figures of post-World War II queer culture."

Born Samuel Morris Steward on July 23, 1909, in Woodsfield, Ohio, he was the only son of an auditor and an elementary school teacher. His mother died when he was a boy and he was effectively raised by two of his aunts, who owned a boarding house.

Steward lived in Woodsfield until the age of 18, when he (along with his aunts) moved to Columbus, Ohio in 1927 to attend Ohio State University. After earning bachelor's (cum laude; 1931), master's (1932), and doctoral (1934) degrees from Ohio State University, he spent the next twenty years in academia.

Steward was a professor of English at Carroll College, Helena, Montana from 1934 to 1935 and from 1935 to 1936 assistant professor of English at State College of Washington (now Washington State University) in Pullman, Washington. He was dismissed from that position in 1936, however, due to the portrayal of prostitution in his novel *Angels on the Bough*, published that same year.

Steward subsequently moved to Chicago, where he taught as an associate professor of English at Loyola University from 1936 to 1946 and at DePaul University from 1948 to 1954.

From 1946 to 1948 he was an editor in the departments of religion, fine arts, and education of the *World Book Encyclopedia*.

In the course of his lifetime, Steward became acquainted with some of the greatest, and most notorious, names in twentieth-century art and culture, including Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, André Gide, Thomas Mann, Lord Alfred Douglas, and Alfred Kinsey. For a brief time, he was the lover of the playwright and novelist Thornton Wilder.

In 1932, while still a student at Ohio State University, Steward began corresponding with Stein and Toklas. He finally met them in person some five years later in France. In a 1993 interview with Owen Keehnen, Steward remembered Stein fondly, saying: "I found her very warm and almost maternal towards me. My impression was she was not quite sure of herself and wanted to have the admiration of even a young squirt like myself."

After Stein's death in 1946, Steward continued to visit Toklas almost annually in Paris, until Toklas's own death in 1967. His friendship with both of them resulted in the memoir, *Dear Sammy: Letters from Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas*, which Steward published in 1977, and two mysteries that cast Stein and Toklas as detectives, *Murder Is Murder Is Murder* (1985) and *The Caravaggio Shawl* (1989).

While on a European tour in 1937, Steward apparently began a furtive sexual fling with Thornton Wilder in Zurich. After several awkward encounters, however, their relationship cooled. In the Keehnen interview, Steward reminisced about Wilder: "Thornton always went about having sex as though it were something going on behind his back and he didn't know anything about it. He was more than a little afraid of it I think."

In 1949, Steward met Alfred Kinsey and became an "unofficial collaborator" in his research on human sexuality; the two remained friends until Kinsey's death in 1956. Steward participated in a bondage and S/M scene in 1949 for Kinsey to film, with a sadist that Kinsey flew in from New York.

Steward left the academic world in the mid-1950s to make a living as a tattoo artist under the name Phil Sparrow. As he explained in an interview, Steward invented the trade name for his own protection. "I overlapped my last two years of university teaching with my first two years of tattooing. I used Phil Sparrow to keep that life hidden from my academic life. The [administrators at DePaul] would not have looked very favorably on that method of moonlighting."

As an advocate of the theories of Albert Parry, author of the landmark 1933 book *Tattoo, Secrets of a Strange Art as Practiced by the Natives of the United States* and a neo-Freudian who looked upon tattooing as a sexual act because of the insertion of fluid, Steward described tattooing as a "sensual experience."

He worked as a tattoo artist in Chicago and Oakland, California until 1970.

In the 1960s, Steward began writing gay male erotica under the name Phil Andros. As he explained: "I didn't use the pseudonym to hide anything. It's a joke. In Greek 'Philos' is 'To Love' and 'Andros' means 'Man.'"

In an interview given to *Contemporary Authors*, Steward commented: "I consider erotica to be the purest form of entertainment, making the most direct connection between reader and writer and material."

Beginning with *\$tud*, published in 1966, the Andros books are a series of graphic and witty accounts in the first person of a fictional hustler. As Steward explained, he made the narrator of his stories a male hustler because of a prostitute's "easy entry into any level of society." "He can go see a judge as easily as he could see a surfer," Steward noted.

While most of the Andros books were originally published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were revised a decade later to considerable critical and commercial success.

Other Andros titles include *The Joy Spot* (1969); *My Brother, the Hustler* (1970, revised as *My Brother, My Self*, 1983); *Renegade Hustler* (1970, revised as *Shuttlecock*, 1984); *When in Rome, Do ...* (1971, revised as *Roman Conquests*, 1983); *San Francisco Hustler* (1971, revised as *The Boys in Blue*, 1984); *The Greek Way* (1971, revised as *Greek Ways*, 1984); *Below the Belt and Other Stories* (1981); and *Different Strokes* (1984).

In an introduction to the 1990 abridged edition of *\$tud* published by Alyson Press, John Preston, the author of such gay erotic landmarks as *Mr. Benson* and *I Once Had a Master and Other Tales of Erotic Love*, wrote that Andros's works are "true-to-life travelogues of gay life in America during the Fifties and early Sixties. While some other writers of 'porn' were content with one-dimensional characters and nuts-and-bolts sex, Phil Andros was a pilgrim reporting on the multi-faceted mysteries and fantasies of a sensual experience that contradicted the mass-market concepts of the unhappy, guilt-ridden, tragicomic homosexual."

Under his given name, Steward also published, in addition to his well-received early novel *Angels on the*

*Bough*, such books as *Pan and the Firebird* (1930), a collection of short stories; the memoir, *Chapters from an Autobiography* (1981); a historical novel, *Parisian Lives* (1984); *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with Gangs, Sailors, and Street-Corner Punks, 1950-1965* (1990); *Understanding the Male Hustler* (1991); and *A Pair of Roses* (1993).

Throughout his career, Steward also contributed several hundred stories to European magazines under various pseudonyms, including Donald Bishop, Thomas Cave, Ted Kramer, John McAndrews, Joe Reynolds, Ward Stames, and Philip Young.

Steward died on December 31, 1993, at age 84, of chronic pulmonary disease in Berkeley, California.

[In 2010, Justin Spring published *Secret Historian: The Life of Times of Samuel Steward, Professor, Tattoo Artist, and Sexual Renegade*. Nominated for a National Book Award, Spring's excellent biography brought new attention to Steward's life and literary and cultural contributions. Later in 2010, Spring brought out *An Obscene Diary: The Visual World of Samuel Steward*, a compilation of Steward's artwork and photography, as well as entries from his "stud file" that describe his erotic encounters.]

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### **About the Author**

**Craig Kaczorowski** writes extensively on media, culture, and the arts. He holds an M.A. in English Language and Literature, with a focus on contemporary critical theory, from the University of Chicago. He comments on national media trends for two newspaper industry magazines.