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Catholicism has been around a long time, and people are wanting to bring it back—you know, the old medieval stuff. It's like anything else, I guess. There's this return to fundamentals, I think, that happens to a society when it's filled with so much fear. They don't know how else to handle it but to throw a bunch of rules at it.

But there's all kinds of Catholic Churches. The Catholic Church in South America works. Really a lot of people are doing some good for people, working in villages and with poor people. But the Catholic Church that I knew in Pocatello, Idaho—that medieval kind of weird German thing.... [Grimaces]

**GSW:** Should queers care about the future of Catholicism?

**TS:** It's so personal. There are people who need that verification from their past. And I say, "OK, for you." But for me, I really want to say: "Just fuck it. These people are not your friends. Don't go up to the Big Guy and say, 'Please accept us,' because it's in his nature to say, 'No, you're not in the book.'"

So why not just go to your own heart, make up your own rules and get rid of this stuff. That's what I think. I still respect people who want to do that, but I just think, "Why waste your time?"

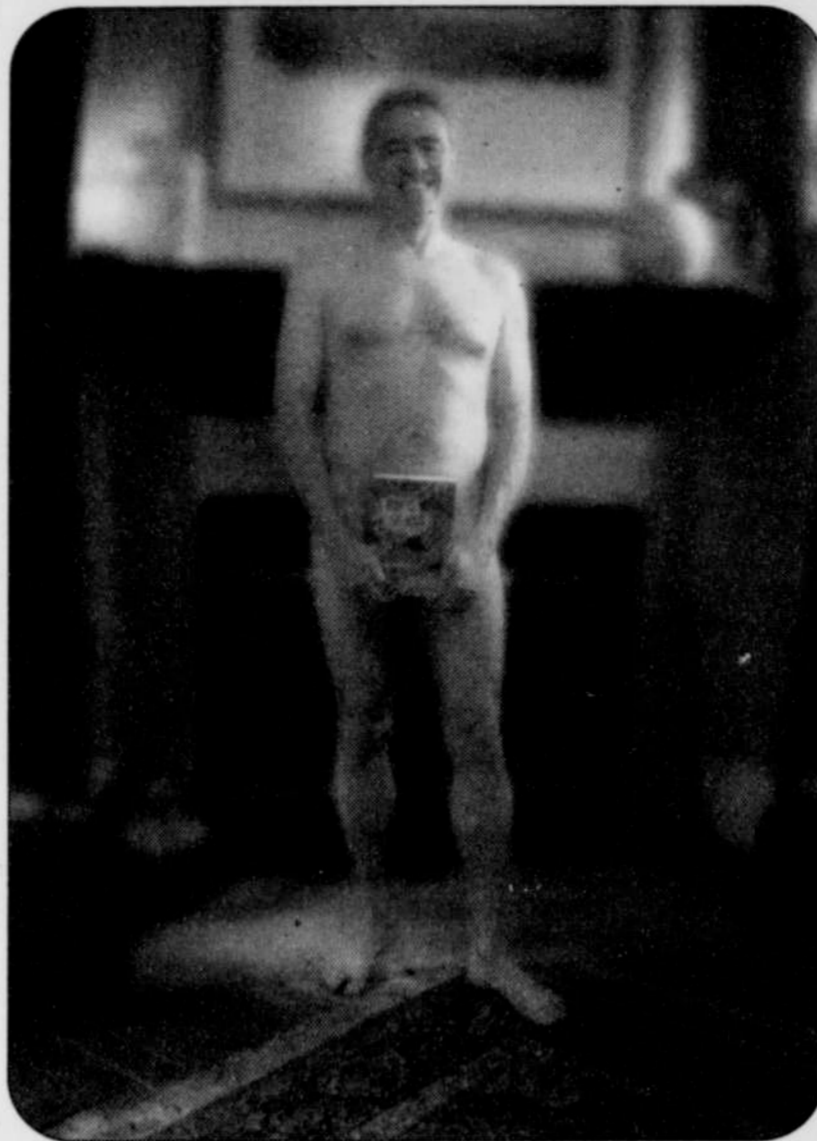
**GSW:** Do you think that "what male is" is changing?

**TS:** I think so. At least, it's growing. We still have that old prototype there—I mean, look at our president and all those cowboys. So it's still around, but it seems like the feminist movement and the queer movement have had such an effect on it that I think a lot of men who wouldn't have had this awareness before, now do. And the feeling that they're culpable, they can't just make decisions, that they're a part of the larger community. Maybe it's just recognizing the female part of themselves.

**GSW:** You refer again and again in the book to the moment in the film version of *The Wizard of Oz* when black and white becomes color. So, are you a good witch or a bad witch?

**TS:** Well, you know, I spent a lot of time on that because this book is about bullies. And I've since come to realize just how much I have become programmed to be bullied. I kind of let shit happen and I just step up and think: "Well, I can get through this. I can withstand this. I can let these people bully me and I'll get through it."

Since then I have come to realize that I have a bully, too. So, I think this book is the bad witch getting born.



Finally! That masochistic part of me: "Stop stepping on me! Fuck you!"

It's pretty interesting to realize just how programmed you are to be a chump, and I really learned a lot about that doing this book—by looking at the father, by looking at the bully, by looking at the standards of what being male is, especially in the '50s and '60s.

**GSW:** Are the warriors of love in the world always by nature solitary?

**TS:** Oh, I'm afraid so. I think so.

**GSW:** Is loneliness an immutable queer attribute?

**TS:** No. There's as many ways to be queer as there are people. You know, there's queer Republicans! There's just all kinds of ways. If we try to say, "Queer is this," we've lost something there.

There is a certain "otherness" that comes from being queer in this society and in most societies. And I think that otherness does have a definite psychological component that each individual has to deal with. Whether they want to be locked in the Catholic Church so they're not different or they strike out by wearing purple robes to prove they're different. Whatever it is, there is something different about us, and I think that's inherent, pretty much.

**GSW:** There are some cultures that celebrate the otherness rather than ostracize it. Just not here, now.

**TS:** Just not here, now. But the old way has got to pass. We've got somehow to change the world.

**GSW:** Do you believe that? Are you optimistic?

**TS:** No, no. I believe we've got to make a new world, but I'm not optimistic. Not anymore.

**GSW:** And yet, there's a real optimism at the end of *Now Is the Hour*. Is this a personal trend in your life, or is it just the way the novel needed to be?

**TS:** Well, it was a decision. [The character] George is based on a real person. And what happened to the real person is really a sad story: suicide. In a way, it was a choice to maybe regain this person's character, somehow, in my book. I was always afraid of a kind of miseries end. And my books always end so dark. I thought I purposely want to decide a new ending for this guy in my story.

Plus, how happy is it really? What are they doing? Driving to the Summer of Love in San Francisco. He's 35 years old and one of the most beautiful men you've ever seen in your life. He's queer and he's out. Here's [the protagonist Rigby John] a 16-year-old, 17-year-old. How long are they going to last? I guess as long as Thunderbird wants to keep them together. The odds aren't good, though.

**GSW:** [Laughs] This is why I called it an optimistic ending as opposed to a happy ending.

**TS:** Maybe it's I'm getting older, too, I don't know. Maybe I don't have such an imagination for violence as I used to. Certainly after *Shy Hunters*. *Shy Hunters* was so dark and I got such a reaction to the darkness that I thought maybe I want to let myself be more accessible.

**GSW:** Is making fiction with firm connections to true events all about the perspective of the writer, or is there an obligation to "the truth," whatever that is?

**TS:** What is this big thing about "based on a true story"? I want to see "based on a big fat lie." There's probably more truth in this book [*Now Is the Hour*] than there is fiction. But me telling it gives it its emotional truth. I think, as far as fiction is concerned, lie your ass off. "Fiction is the lie that tells the truth."

**GSW:** Tell me about emotional truth.

**TS:** This [writing] is an investigation of myself. So let's say my brother Russell died when I was 5. My sister tells a totally different story about that day. She says it wasn't raining; it was a sunny day. There's a story out there about what happened to your family. And we can all look at it like it's a story.



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