

But then there's also the story of how you were connected to it. And often what I'm writing about is, how this impacted me. So, my brother died, but I was the one who couldn't sleep at night. That personal view is the window into the event, but we're looking at it through this specific awareness. I love that about fiction.

Because, in particular, this book is about these things that happened. But even more, it's about meeting Rigby John.

GSW: How much of the process is writing, and how much is editing? How do you know when the book is done?

TS: Each book is different. This book pretty much stayed exactly like it came out, except for the first two chapters. My editor, who edited *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*, came back for this one. What I did was I wrote that first 40 pages and then I just started writing anecdotes of things that happened to me. So I had 150 pages of anecdotes and I thought: "Oh, I don't think he'll want these. But I'll just send them to him and tell him it's the back story." And what happened was he loved all of them. So we took out probably half of those stories, and we put a very specific arc into them. It was labor-intensive for six months, eight months.

At a certain point, it's like you look over and your book is a teen-ager. It's not right. It's not perfect. It's really acting stupid, but there he is. Send him forth. Get him out of here. He's got to go now. If you sit on it too long or beat on it too long or think about it too much or obsess about it, it's disrespectful to that work.

GSW: So what's next? Are you starting another project?

TS: I have a bunch of new projects right now. A how-to-write book. I'm thinking about that.

I'm helping to write a screenplay for *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*. I'm also involved with writing an opera for *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*. And also there's a performance of *Shy Hunters* that a children's theater is going to put on—an eight-voiced reading.

Mostly what I'm excited about is I've gathered all my African stuff all around my computer there, and that's the one I really want to get to—a book on Africa, since I spent two years there.

GSW: *Now Is the Hour* is dedicated to your mother. Was your mother a lot like Rigby John's in the book?

TS: Yeah. There's a lot of sad stuff. Like one time I was visiting from New York and it was time to go and I was hugging everybody and the car was waiting and she

said, "Come here." And she took me in the bathroom and locked the door and she said: "Tom, you have to take me with you. These men that I'm with, all I do is cook and clean for them. They never thank me. They never even look at me. So, you got to take me with you."

GSW: How old were you?

TS: Forty-five. I ended up holding my weeping mother while I sat on the toilet.

And then when she died, we were sitting around the table and my father said, "You know, someone's got to carry the ashes from the church to the interment place, and they got to lead the procession out of the church." And my brother Jerry said, "Oh, my hands shake." And my father said, "I can't with a cane."

And so I just went, "OK, I'll do it." And so when it came time, the priest nodded and said, "Tom?"

So I just went up there and grabbed the urn and turned around to start walking out. And it came to me, clear as day, "Take me out of here, Tom." It was so fucking real. So I was like, "OK, Mom, I'm going to take you out of here." But she was, "All right, let's go!" This is really true. I hadn't cried in the whole funeral, but then I just fell apart. Just the time when you don't want to cry, when you turn to the whole congregation.

GSW: So you had to close the hole in your heart literally and figuratively. Do you think the book will do it?

TS: I do. I think it has. And it was all respect to her.

GSW: There is a certain respect in telling the truth, even when it's the ugly truth.

TS: Yeah, yeah.

GSW: Do we owe our ancestors?

TS: I think so. God bless them, it seems like the ultimate respect to tell their story. Because we're all human. We're all set down here on this earth bewildered, and we all just kind of bumble through it. And what's important is how I did it and this is what's carried me. This is where I fucked up. Because we've all fucked up. We've all got this story. **10**

TOM SPANBAUER reads from *Now Is the Hour* noon April 23 during the Wordstock Book Fair at the Oregon Convention Center, 777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., and 6 p.m. May 21 at Powell's on Hawthorne, 3723 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

GLENN SCOFIELD WILLIAMS writes prose, poetry, plays, periodica and porn in Portland.



Review

It is the 1960s and Rigby John Klusener is an intelligent, sensitive kid stranded in his own overworked, overbullied, sexually curious skin. On a farm wedged between an Indian reservation, the Idaho plains and the social wasteland of Pocatello, he struggles with a family silently imploding under the dread weight of German Catholicism and with the bullies who menace him at school.

As his high school years unfold, however, Rigby John meets other locals with a similar sense of "being the outsider"—a nerdy underdog named "Puke" Price; a cheery, cigarette-chugging girlfriend named Billie Cody; two manly but big-hearted Mexican day-workers named Acho and Flaco; and George Serano, an alcoholic, outwardly queer reservation Indian. In the course of these encounters, Rigby John begins to open up to his own inner defender and to the possibilities of a positive identity.

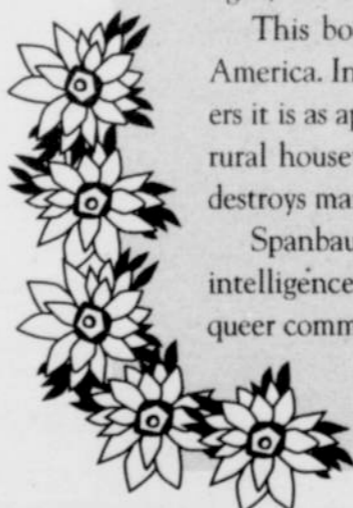
Blatantly unsentimental, yet quick with humor and pathos, Tom Spanbauer's *Now Is the Hour* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006; \$26 hardcover) rises tall. For those who loved *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon* for its exquisite characterization and its fresh voice totally lacking in artifice, *Now Is the Hour* will move and please. For those who loved *In the City of Shy Hunters* for its unflinching yet almost mythopoetic view of the birth of the AIDS crisis in New York, the stark emotion of *Now Is the Hour* will satisfy and burn in the soul. For those fans who know and love *Faraway Places*, Spanbauer's first book, *Now Is the Hour* will illuminate and drive deep some familiar themes and visions. But most of all, *Now Is the Hour* strikes into its own new territory with a toss-the-coin sense that the world might be changing for the better and with a thumbing-my-way-to-the-future kind of hopefulness.

In some ways, *Now Is the Hour* is Spanbauer's most violent book. The misunderstanding and anger in the characters are at an all-time high, the yearning is at fever pitch, and there are times when you want to slap the protagonist so hard his whole family would feel it. But in this book, the darkness burns enough light, and in time, a warm sense of optimism radiates from its pages.

This book is an anthem to male initiation (or the lack thereof) in rural America. In some sense it belongs to the time period in which it's set, but in others it is as applicable today as at any other time. It is also a poem to the stranded rural housewife, the remnants of a kind of quiet patriarchal slavery that still destroys many a soul today.

Spanbauer is a brave storyteller with an unapologetic sensitivity, a veritable intelligence and a colloquial style unlike any other American writer today. The queer community is lucky to have him. Hell, we're all lucky.

—GSW **10**



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