



Fall 2019

FYS 101 Women Writing the World

Fall 2019

sam sax Writers Series

Amanda Meier
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/fys_ww_f2019

Recommended Citation

Meier, Amanda, "sam sax Writers Series" (2019). *Fall 2019*. 4.
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/fys_ww_f2019/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the FYS 101 Women Writing the World at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2019 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Amanda Meier

sam sax Writers Series

sam sax is a renowned poet that has been nationally recognized for his direct and evocative poetry that is often based around his demographic identification as being a gay man who is devoted to his Jewish beliefs. In today's society, religion and sexual orientation have been categorized as two separate pieces of someone's identity. sax, however, exposes his audience to the rare perspective of someone who incorporates his social experiences into his work. He specifically caught my attention because he not only represents two heavily discriminated-against groups in the United States, but he also has chosen to devote himself to an art form that I struggle with. I think poetry is a beautifully powerful way to communicate viewpoints on a variety of topics. It's often left open for the reader's interpretation which allows them to apply the message behind the poem to a personal aspect that they can relate to. I enjoy attending poetry readings as it adds to my appreciation of how beautiful arrangements of words come so naturally to some people. sam sax, especially, seemed very passionate about the work that he has generously decided to share with the public.

This event began with a sophomore, Andie Klarin, sharing a short anecdote on how sax's poetry helped her discover and realize her own identity. It was fairly obvious that she wasn't fully comfortable with public speaking as she got fairly flustered when she tripped over her words, which slightly took away from the professionalism of the event. On the other hand, her timidness conveyed a very genuine appeal as it was not a stiff and robotic performance. It showed that she had prior knowledge of him as well as a personal connection—it wasn't just an assignment. An interesting component of the whole experience was the realization that sam sax

was nervous, as well. He began his presentation by saying that he was going to keep his sunglasses on until his nerves calmed down slightly. By sharing this personal but relevant statement, he set the tone for his whole performance as more of a relaxed reading rather than a rehearsed performance. I think that this may have not been on purpose, but it was influential on his audience. It made me think about the idea that he is a poet, not a professional speaker. These readings were not the reason why he went into poetry, and that made all twelve poems that he shared significantly more enticing.

Throughout the whole reading, he incorporated small aspects that continued the personal connection that he had formulated from the start. He began the first poem with a short anecdote on his childhood growing up with a lisp. He described how his speech therapist would have him take part in various exercises to re-train his tongue. Promptly afterwards, he began his reading. Intertwined in the various stanzas were examples of these exercises along with his continuous themes of homosexuality and jewish beliefs. As I listened to the poem, it was evident that he didn't just tell the story as an introduction to a small part of his childhood, but he also gave the majority of the audience prior knowledge about the subject so they had a piece of information to help process the meaning of the poem. He managed to form a personal connection with all the audience members just by putting a little piece of knowledge in their minds that they didn't have when they first entered the room. He continued using these methods in order to maintain the audience's attention. Periodically, he would ask the audience to clap or slap something when we heard him say a particular word. This technique relaxed the atmosphere to a further extent as some would laugh if they missed a signal or caught on too late. Some may say that these encouraged actions diverted some of the attention from the poems that he was presenting;

however, I viewed the audience interactions as an intelligent way of acknowledging that his audience is mainly made up of college students and modifying his performance in order to comply with their attention spans.

I found that there was a single theme that was incorporated into many of the works that he decided to read to us. Discrimination is still blatantly present in our society. In his poem, "Lens of Sorrow," which he wrote that same day, he specifically narrows his lens into a personal perspective of living in a world with a large homophobic population. The line "thrown out of a bar in a dress" directly describes an event where a human being was deemed unfit to be in the same area as other people who are accepted as being "normal". In our class, we witness multiple occasions where lower class people are not treated with the same respect that higher class people learn to expect. Even women are looked down upon if they don't fulfill the expectations set for them by their male counterparts in their culture. All of these are examples of a group of individuals deciding that they are worth more than another group of people based on social constructs and personal beliefs. Our class discussions often revolve around understanding how groups of people are put at a disadvantage in life because of a predetermined aspect about themselves. In *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, it is stated that "across India, Muslims were overrepresented in the criminal justice system" (Boo 127). Again, a group that practices a different religion is treated unfairly due to a slight difference in the way that they choose to live their lives. It is a very relevant issue that is essential to identify in our society as well. Even though most of our novels are based in foreign countries, attending the sam sax event was a reminder that the United States has work to be done when it comes to the harsh discrimination against our own minorities.

Overall, sax had a noticeable balance of quirkiness and straightforwardness. He was able to understand what audience he was reading to and made conscious choices accordingly. By choosing to make jokes about being an awkward public speaker and telling us what he had eaten for dinner that day, he not only relaxed the audience, but also reinforced that he is just a poet that is passionate about sharing his craft. Countering his frivolity, he also was able to convey the very serious undertones that are included in many of his poems. He gave his audience a look into what life is like as a gay man in the Jewish community in the United States and all the hardships that people like him are set up for by just being themselves. His poems are also reflections of himself: on the surface level, he could be seen as a somewhat awkward, occasionally extravagant poet, much like how his poems have unique names such as “Mrs. Piggy” and “Ode to the Belt.” Nevertheless, Sam Sax stated that he still feels certain types of discrimination that can draw parallels to the Holocaust and how society has made him crave a heterosexuality that he knows inside is not for him. He uses his poems to not only express his frustrations and struggles that he has faced throughout his life, but also to provide other people who are going through similar issues with pieces of writing that can help guide them through whatever hardships they face.

Works Cited

Boo, Katherine. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014.

Brock Contributor, Tyler, and Contributor. "Poet Sam Sax Continues Visiting Writers Series."

The Butler Collegian, WordPress, 3 Oct. 2019, thebutlercollegian.com/2019/10/poet-sam-sax-continues-visiting-writers-series/.

sax, sam. "sam sax Writers Series." sam sax Writers Series. 3 Oct. 2019, Indianapolis.