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Melanie Reyes

sam sax Literary Event

Attending the sam sax literary event sparked a feeling of awe inside me.

Not only did I admire the audacious take on the subjects in his work, but I also liked his personality. Bubbly, easy going, sassy, exuberant—he had me leaving the auditorium wanting to be his friend! I realistically assumed only about twelve people would show up to this poetry reading, perhaps even half just being older folks. I never expected for the entire Shelton Auditorium, which holds 400 people, to be mostly full. Despite the large crowd, sam sax succeeded in touching my heart with his work. Writers have the power to move the hearts and expand the minds of readers to a point where individuals alone are shifted to understand themselves and the world.

After a brief introduction, sam sax took the stage. He approached his audience differently than what I had imagined. I had a predetermined judgement that poets and writers usually have a formal, scholarly, pretentious approach in discussing their work. This was not the case with sam sax. He approached his work as a presentation in a direct manner, similar to that in his writing. sax encourages his audience to connect to typical taboo emotions, thoughts, and experiences from explicit sexual experiences to moments of morbid anticipation of reality. In effect, he expresses that it is natural for humanity to explore these kinds of moments.

Throughout the presentation, sam sax invited his audience to partake in telling several poems through the use of a repetition in body movement and sounds. Each piece that involved audience engagement throughout the poem incorporated a specific sound such as saying “Whoop!” or tapping the top of the seats in front of us to make a *thump* sound. At first I was

caught off guard by this tactic. Pondering for a while, as well as paying closer attention to the words said in the poem, I figured that these sounds were essential to give a mental image of a break in stanza so that the poem may be interpreted in the way sam sax had imagined. This gives each stanza a more tangible meaning, which allows the audience to have a stronger connection with the poem's theme.

For instance, his not yet published poem "A Boy I Don't Know Sends Me A Video Reading A Poem He Wrote Sobbing Alone In His Car" follows a morbid theme in which the use of the "Whoop!" sound is required. Generally, breaks in poem stanzas consist of silence. In this poem, though, I realized that that silence is filled by the speaker as a way to convey a dislike for silence in their moment of aching heartbreak. In another poem, "Never Again is Now," a *thump* sound is used. For this case, I infer that sam sax intended to use his sound tactic differently to display the sound of people marching for their rights and beliefs. Regardless of whether he decides to use specific sounds in place of silence or to create a vivid scenery, it adds a whole different meaning to the poem he writes. sax had me wondering: why did he choose these specific sounds? What meaning was he exactly trying to convey in addition to these sounds? Would it be appropriate to use another sound? What other intentional, significant meanings could be conveyed then?

While sax's writing style inherently adds deeper meaning, it is the poems themselves that are truly profound. Some poems contain topics relating back to in-class subjects presented in previous literary works we have read. Such subjects are: losing part of one's identity to abide to social norms; embracing one's ability and pride to take on their sexuality; experiencing the emotional effects of death; finding an escape from social oppression; experiencing issues in

mental health; facing the challenges of cultural and language barriers; and examining the inhumane reality of a diasporic community. From the range of topics his poems focused on, a couple particularly stuck out to me, which involved conformity to social norms and joy in approaching sexuality.

One presented topic is complying with social norms. In sam sax's poem "Lisp," he acknowledges that at a young age he was different from normal kids because he had a lisp. He did everything to get rid of it, including involving his parents to help. He found it "embarrassing," as he figured himself cast different by others' normal ways of speaking. Once he fixed his lisp, he lost part of what made him unique as an individual. This is similar to that of Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* when she decides to dismiss her personal needs and dreams in order to conform to the ideal mother figure so she could provide for her children's needs (Emecheta). In the process, she, too, had to lose part of her individuality which made her unconventional. The aspects that made both individuals unique were ultimately their foils to society. Being different hindered them from thriving in a society based on social norms. Instead of bearing the image of an outcast, they chose to sacrifice part of their individuality for social acceptance.

Another topic is embracing one's freedom in expressing their sexuality. sam sax uses his taboo sexual experiences as a queer man to illustrate his pride in being able to love against social norms and feel free in exploring himself shamelessly. His writing gives liberation to whomever falls into this social oppression, and thus encourages readers to find what drives them and to proudly explore it. In sam sax's poem "Miss. Piggy," he manifests that same pride in the famously known character Miss Piggy. He praises her on how she has "shown us how to love

across identities arbitrary as phylum and species,” taken an “entire frog inside you and remained the same bad pig,” and “who’d karate chopped anyone dumb enough to disrespect” (sam sax). Just like sam sax, Miss Piggy does not hold back on living her life the way she wants. Similarly, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, the character Adaku possesses that shameless ability and only truly exhibits it after she stood her ground to be her own independent woman (Emecheta). She chose to work as a prostitute, not to exploit her body for money, but by owning her body and freely allowing her sexual passion to be a driving force in fulfilling her own desires. She discovers her self worth and embraces it where others find it selfish and dangerous. Both women challenge the norms of the women’s sphere and strike fear into a conventional society with their acknowledgement of being their own boss.

I never knew of sam sax before his literary event, so I am grateful to have had the opportunity to attend. Out of the listed writers, his description was the only one that piqued interest in me. I could only imagine of the numerous topics and discussions possible that could come from a queer man’s poetry. I only found it unfortunate that more poetry was being read than questions and the poems being discussed. I believe it may be due to there being a Q&A meeting before the event. The only thing I would have changed was to have a complete Q&A after the event so that I could have heard other people’s questions and more of sax’s responses, further enlightening me on his work. Other than that, I personally feel like sam sax’s literary event was outstanding! It succeeded in keeping the audience attentive and engaged with the poet. There were even times where my jaw dropped in astonishment because of how his poetic structure and play on words were completely genius. I look forward to reading more of sam sax’s poetry to see how it can further enlighten my mind.

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