



Amateur: A True Story About What Makes a Man

Thomas Page McBee

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From an award-winning writer whose work bristles with “hard-won strength, insight, agility, and love” (Maggie Nelson), an exquisite and troubling narrative of masculinity, violence, and society.

In this groundbreaking new book, the author, a trans man, trains to fight in a charity match at Madison Square Garden while struggling to untangle the vexed relationship between masculinity and violence. Through his experience boxing—learning to get hit, and to hit back; wrestling with the camaraderie of the gym; confronting the betrayals and strength of his own body—McBee examines the weight of male violence, the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes, and the limitations of conventional masculinity. A wide-ranging exploration of gender in our society, *Amateur* is ultimately a story of hope, as McBee traces a new way forward, a new kind of masculinity, inside the ring and outside of it.

In this graceful, stunning, and uncompromising exploration of living, fighting, and healing, we gain insight into the stereotypes and shifting realities of masculinity today through the eyes of a new man.

Amateur: A True Story About What Makes a Man Details

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From Reader Review Amateur: A True Story About What Makes a Man for online ebook

Rebecca Foster says

Thomas Page McBee was the first transgender man to box at Madison Square Garden. In his second memoir, which arose from a *Quartz* article entitled “Why Men Fight,” he recounts the training leading up to his charity match and ponders whether aggression is a natural male trait. McBee grew up in a small town outside Pittsburgh with a stepfather who sexually abused him from age four. In 2011 he started the testosterone injections that would begin his gender transformation. During the years that followed, other men seemed to pick fights with him fairly often, and he was unsure what to do about it. Finally, in 2015, the Manhattan editor decided to confront the belligerent male stereotype by starting boxing training.

What I most appreciated were the author’s observations of how others have related to him since his transition. He notices that he’s taken more seriously at work as a man, and that he can be an object of fear – when jogging behind a woman at night, for instance. One of the most eye-opening moments of the book is when he realizes that he’s been talking over his own sister. Thankfully, McBee is sensitive enough to stop and change, recognizing that kindness and vulnerability are not faults but attributes any person should be proud of.

I have a feeling I would have preferred his previous memoir, *Man Alive*, which sounds like it has more about the transition itself. Jonathan Eig’s biography of Muhammad Ali is one of the best books I’ve read this year, and in comparison I didn’t find the boxing writing here very interesting. Likewise, this pales beside two similar but more perceptive books I’ve read that have been hugely influential on my own understanding of gender identity: *Conundrum* by Jan Morris and *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson.

Originally published on my blog, Bookish Beck.

Rebecca says

Maggie Nelson said that this book was like "sitting with someone uncurling his hands, than holding them out to you, open, so that you can behold all the hard-won strength, insight, agility and love to be found there" and I think that's true. This is a vital trans narrative about becoming and fighting and masculinity. There's bloodiness and tenacity in it, but also gentleness.

Courtney Gillette says

If I’m honest, I have little interest in boxing (and perhaps less so in masculinity as a concept), but Thomas Page McBee is such a talent, I’d follow him anywhere. This is a generous and tender story, beautifully rendered. I’m grateful this book is in the world.

Julie Giehl says

This one is going to sit with me for awhile. Ann Friedman's back of the book review calls it a warm hug, and it is. I loved his writing style, his ability to see everything, to face hard truths and lead with a beginner's mind. There's a lot to say about masculinity in America and McBee does a beautiful job giving this topic justice, in a very warm and vulnerable way. I'll second Friedman's review, I want the world to read this book.

Taylor Clarke says

The 'after' of transition is handled here kindly and deftly, but I wanted more - I feel like the entire narrative could have been pushed just a step more.

Simon says

Thanks to NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review, but honestly I had this book pre-ordered already.

Thomas's work means a lot to me, I can't tell you how many times I read his first book (*Man Alive*), so I might be biased when I say this book is fucking incredible and required reading for anyone affected by contemporary masculinity (...so, everyone)

Eleanor says

Thomas Page McBee wrote an earlier book, *Man Alive*, about his transition; this one, *Amateur*, is about his attempts to learn to box in order to fight in a charity match at Madison Square Garden. (He did it, becoming the first trans man to box there in the process.) As its subtitle would suggest, this is fertile ground in terms of seeing questions about manhood through the lens of violence, aggression, love, and the moments where those three things can be synonymous, and the moments where they are not. It is, as I said on Instagram, a book about being a good man, and a book about punching someone in the face. McBee is especially good on moments of disorientation, where he sees himself from the outside: not just flashbacks to his changing physique, but also quieter moments when he realises he's failed to be the ally to women that he thought he was. (There's a particularly painful moment when he and his brother both talk over his sister despite her knowing more about the topic of discussion. There's also a thought-provoking incident at the start of the book, where another man tries to start a fight with him on the street. He's not targeted for being trans; the other man doesn't register that at all. Rather, McBee sees it as emblematic of a particular kind of male anger, one that lacks the vocabulary to ask to be loved. It acts as something of a catalyst for him in his attempts to discover what kind of man he wants, or needs, to be.) For me, as a woman who has never been either sporty or masculine-presenting, the scenes in McBee's training gym were like secret dispatches from an alien culture: the men who teach him to hit are also the men who wrap his hands and treat his cuts and pour water into his mouth. At the very end of the book, when he finally comes out to his training coach, he discovers that the coach already knows, and has only been wondering when McBee will trust him enough to say it. The technical stuff about fighting and the more personal, psychological content is beautifully intertwined (and it's especially nice to know that McBee's girlfriend Jess, who makes several appearances in the book, usually with a tarot deck nearby, is now his wife). A must-read, and not just for folks interested in LGBTQ writing/issues.

Originally published on my blog,
