

*The Butcher's Tale and Other Stories*, by Derek Updegraff (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2016)

review by Madison Maler

*The Butcher's Tale and Other Stories* is the first full-length collection of Derek Updegraff. He has an MFA from Cal State Long Beach as well as a PhD from the University of Missouri. Some of his prior publications include *Bayou Magazine*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Classical Outlook*, *Chiron Review*, and other journals. *The Butcher's Tale and Other Stories* was published in June 2016.

The twelve stories in this collection offer readers a glimpse into the lives of characters dealing the sorrow, hope, love, and life presented in Updegraff's personable—and highly enjoyable—storytelling style. The stories contained within *The Butcher's Tale* focus on scenarios from life. He offers a detailed insight into the minds of his characters; this is most prominent when the story is in first person. In the title story, *A Butcher's Tale*, the narrator is a multidimensional individual with strong personality. Reader's are offered a look into his thoughts as he struggles with wanting to prove a man wrong and taking a life. "‘It's dead' or ‘It's alive.' I can't think beyond those two phrases...and all of the sudden I want him to say, ‘It's dead.' I want him to say it so badly because I want this bird to live all of the sudden" (41-42). Updegraff's characterization of his narrators and other characters really brings each story to life. Crafting unique experiences to act in contrast to each character allows them to learn something about themselves, and he does this expertly. All of his stories contain a strong voice and potent authenticity.

The impact of these stories doesn't end with the characters. Updegraff's stories stay with readers long after the final page and ask us all to lead more thoughtful lives.