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Book Review: The Butcher's Diamond by Anita Pulier

Aryeh Lev Stollman · Thursday, October 18th, 2018

The Butcher's Diamond

Anita Pulier

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“How did you do that?”

*There is so much about you
that is not enough
but I can not quantify
what that is
that deficit
that irregularity
that turned me around
made me dizzy
so many years ago*

Anita Pulier's poems surprise and delight us with their unexpected power even in the rendition of a long-enduring, outwardly conventional love story with the acknowledged imperfections of the love object, as she conveys its epic meaning for the participants: love as it is experienced by the most fortunate.

How does Pulier do that? Perhaps in the opening poem of *The Butcher's Diamond*, “House Poet Wanted,” she gives us a hint:

*Job requires weaving
The fibers of household matter
and daily routines into an examined life . . .*

*Applicant must . . .
be plain spoken, persistent,*

*willing to be misunderstood,
interpreted to death.*

Further, in “What a Poem Means,” Pulier wisely warns us not to place too much emphasis on “meaning.”

*It means what you think it means.
All that,
but less*

*True, the words
originate with intent.
Intent is not meaning.*

Of course, intent itself is an interesting and ambiguous concept. Do we always know what our true intentions are, where intention comes from, or what it really is? But in the end Pulier does what she does so wonderfully in a direct no-nonsense voice, finding poetry in the smallest mundane detail, where meaning and intent crouch hidden, not always knowable—*All that, but less.*

Pulier’s world is also filled with the observation of the tangled lives of others as she tries to understand their point of view even if we humans can never quite achieve full insight into others. In her title poem, “The Butcher’s Diamond,” about a disappointing love affair of her paternal Aunt Freda, Pulier tell us:

*Aunt Freda got the diamond from her lover,
the butcher who refused to marry her
because his wife was in an institution.*

The diamond is left to Pulier’s mother, Ida, a shopkeeper’s daughter, who liberates it from its ring and places it on a necklace, later passing it on to Pulier herself.

*It had so little to recommend it,
the butcher’s diamond.
And I believe*

*It carries Freda’s disappointment
and Ida’s ambivalence.
Yet, I choose to wear it daily*

*as even with its flaws
it sparkles when the light is right.*

The light in Pulier’s poetry seems to me always right, laser focused, often with humor as in “Dinner with Auden and Spender,” when she and her husband visited the two poets:

*and the two of us
so young
so dressed
for dinner*

*watched
these two legends.
so wrinkled,
so worn out,
drinking, eating
aging,*

*uttering not a word of poetry
farting and belching
passing the salt
and dribbling the wine
like mere mortals
instead of the Gods
we knew them to be.*

Throughout this impressive collection is Pulier's passion for the small things, the everyday, and for love. In "The Bottom Line" she tells us:

*Stars taunt, tides ebb
the physical world insists on recognition,
but I am no physicist, no mathematician,
cannot reliably compute the way.
Nevertheless,
Small things have made themselves known to me,
The blink of an eye, your cold night-feet pressing up against me
The way you take my hand when we cross a busy street*

In things small and large, Anita Pulier has given us some truly grand poetry.

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