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Bycatch

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

BYCATCH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Terin Weinberg

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Terin Weinberg, and entitled *Bycatch*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Julie Marie Wade

Donna Aza Weir-Soley

Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 4, 2021

The thesis of Terin Weinberg is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, & Education

Andrès G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
And Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

DEDICATION

For Oma

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the journals in which some of these poems first appeared. Thank you to my mentors and teachers Denise Duhamel, Richard Blanco, Campbell McGrath, and special thanks to John A. Nieves for his encouragement and unwavering support over the years.

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And the biggest thank you of all to my partner, Matthew, who inspired me throughout this journey.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

BYCATCH

by

Terin Weinberg

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

BYCATCH is a collection of poems that explore the speaker's relationship with the natural world. The poems utilize a variety of forms, from traditional sestinas and sonnets driven by image, to puzzle-pieced stereoscopes that can be read grammatically in three different ways—left to right, or down one of either columns. Though the collection is rooted in nature, the emotional drive is rooted in the construction and deconstruction of the family and the body. Each section of the book will function as explorations through different environments and their associations to the speaker's family, birthplace and overarching narrative content.

BYCATCH is divided into three sections. The sections of poems focus on the speaker's relationship with family and the land on which the speaker was raised—mountainous farmland in New Jersey, swamp and ocean in Florida. From the barn to the sea, creatures she observes serve as early lessons on morality.

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ELEGY FOR BUR YING

At eighteen, I buried bodies for quick paychecks.

A friend of my mom who lived off the main road

of my town offered me the job. On my first day

I wore an emerald wool sweater, the sleeves wrapped

tight around my palms. My hands felt foreign, I held them

like a set of temporary tools. I slide into the passenger side

of the old Ford pickup, the tattered leather exposed

its yellow-bellied foam. My gardening gloves lay in my lap

and I regretted bringing them, pastel-pink, covered in ladybugs,

there would be no light-hearted luck found from them today.

The tires of the truck rolled through the wet graveled graveyard

each press of the gas pebbles sunk deeper into the humid rubber.

From the bed of the truck I pulled wooden boards for coffin

supports, velvet shags to mask the cold metal of the foldable

chairs I would line in rows. I pulled turf rugs from the bed to cover the winter's true ground, barren and waiting for sunlight. I found

the metal straps and crankshaft to lower the casket into the ground, into the hole in the New Jersey topsoil. My ladybug gloves gripped

the crankshaft tight when the body began to lower. The weight of the wooden casket made this first body the easiest that year.

WHERE THE GROUND OPENED

Every morning there was a river I wanted

to remember. Soaking

ivory cloth clinging to thigh, last

rib, and breast. You'll find

her face up and benthic. The dew

gave birth to her in the field

here. Sticky swamp sucks

her. Magenta ribbon trails

in her fresh-platted

locks. You want

to pull at her— to take her

home to your grave. Seaweed

braids into her. Spadderdock

sprouts from cuticles, lacing their

way to the blue gaps

between the fluff. You itch
the cracks in your palm. She
wants your touch. She wants

the flow of dorsal fins to slice
into her cheeks
as every drift goes.

OUT OF MOUTH

In the morning, we are elk

flesh. We are bones and
cigarette burns with coffee kisses

decorating our corpses. I hold
you—globed. Dropping you to turn
tattered books over

twelve times. We are nothing

if we stay here. I will be names
rolling off of your tenderized

tongue when the first

sika deer calls
to you through the fog.

At lunch, we are rabbit

fur. We are tiny hairs, the peach
fuzz on baby skin. We are still

decorating our bodies. I don't

hold you anymore. You stand

in the sand, toes curled under

sewing your fingers

into your corduroys. Your teeth

scrape the corners.

At sunset, we stay.

 Nothings on the tongue

fed me at lunch. The clamshell

I ash in is full. The globe

 I held you in spins

on the shelf. I make room for another,

glycerin-filled, and shaken

 first. Let me decorate

our bodies—this time.

STEREOSCOPE FOR LONGING

Trout Town, USA

As the mulberries grew
I re-learned the rough trace
of his jawline—the clean bite
of flesh. I followed him
into the woods, carrying
half-drunken raspberry wine
and the urge for the edge
holding
of water. The cicadas *ricketing*
in the mooning nightlight
soundtracked his vanishing
outline. The woods gave
way to stream, we slid
across glassed rocks, cast

I began the ritual of loving,
of the chest-cavity's longing,
for the meal to fill the body
with the longing stowed away—
the knowledge of knowing
what could fill the body
was deep in my lungs. Breath-
provided the silencing of myself—
I held my hand to my heartbeat,
felt it in my palm, felt it
and gave way to its pull,
to the beat of the ritual,
deeper into the longing on the

line and waited for what bites.