Bycatch

Terin Weinberg
*Florida International University, tweinber@fiu.edu*

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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.

Thank you to my mother and father for always being there for me.

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 BURYING

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. Spatterdock 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 began the ritual of loving,
I re-learned the rough trace of the chest-cavity’s longing,
of his jawline—the clean bite for the meal to fill the body
of flesh. I followed him with the longing stowed away—
into the woods, carrying the knowledge of knowing
half-drunken raspberry wine what could fill the body
and the urge for the edge was deep in my lungs. Breath-
holding
of water. The cicadas ricketing provided the silencing of myself—
in the mooning nightlight I held my hand to my heartbeat,
soundtracked his vanishing felt it in my palm, felt it
outline. The woods gave and gave way to its pull,
way to stream, we slid to the beat of the ritual,
across glassed rocks, cast deeper into the longing on the
line and waited for what bites.