

Wake Forest University

Poetry Portfolio

Iliana Booth
Professor Amy Catanzano
CRW 280 Poetry Workshop Spring 2025
April 30, 2025

In The Mercy of Her Golden Gaze
Iliana Booth

I am lost again,
caught in the intricate maze
of hazel in a familiar gaze.
I feel the force of the ocean's tide,
it embraces me, and I am born
once more, a child of the sea
in the intoxicating amber haze,
floating helplessly,
tainted by recklessness.

I have drowned over and over,
my body thrown toward the shore.
I have encountered the depths,
stubborn and stronger than me,
where the sun cannot reach and
the darkness is inevitable as the last breath.

The next breath I take trembles in its wake,
a heart that won't give out just yet.
I am found again,
not by the restless sea,
but by the courageous light.
Weary eyes open to the flooding of the Sun
as warmth and hope return at once
with the promise of peace.

I make myself at home here
and the scars from the brutal storm will fade
but never leave.
In the dimming rosy glow, I inquire with the Sun,
Why must you leave me at each day's end? I am left
to long for your warmth through the dreary night.

She beams back at me from the horizon,
gracing me with a smile I have seen many times before.
You can trust I will return to you each morning
as constant as the tide and as forgiving as the breeze.

My light cannot always shine, but I am with you
as you await the return of the crisp morning air.
In the mercy of her golden gaze, I am safe
to close my eyes in the rarest bliss, radiant
as I am immersed in her eternal light.

Dear Justice
Iliana Booth

Dear Justice,
Where have you gone?
Once robed in resilience, righteousness—
now you drift beyond our grasp,
while the earth splits at the seams,
ripped by those who gorge on grief
and call it governance.

I write from ground left brittle and black,
where innocence is bartered for silence,
and war tallies its sums
in the dust of the fallen.

Here, the scales tipped long ago,
weighed down by the burden of greed,
by debts never paid to the broken,
empires built atop the graves of the forgotten.

Were we fools to believe you walked among us?
Perhaps we silenced you long ago
to make way for the hunger of conquest,
for thrones carved from the labor of the weary,
for kingdoms gilded to hide the rot beneath.

And still, I wonder if you linger,
in the shadows where survival hums unheard
or in the steady grace of the woman offering bread
to the empty hands of strangers.

Or maybe in the man who kneels beside the wreckage,
collecting unspoken names scattered like ash,
refusing to let them dissolve into dust
while the rest of the world averts their eyes.

If you are anywhere,
I think you must be in the souls
that mend the ruin cruelty left behind,
and slowly steady the weight of the scales,
until the weight holds still at last,
and mercy restores the sacred balance.

The Donation

Iliana Booth

I.

I'll admit, this morning, I caught your face in the mirror—
You, who was a stranger to me until my twenty-first birthday.

I don't need your pity; I've grown into carving out my own solace,
But when I feign a smile, I see only yours to start my day.

I'll cast my wish into the vast, indifferent air,
Hoping it would all drift away.

As much as I ache for change,
I always seem to stay hopelessly the same.

I'll only ever call you by your first name—Isn't it strange?
Careless, they flung hollow apologies, yet I carried all the blame.

You dwell ever-present at the periphery of my mind,
Waiting for words I haven't sent while I wait for good news to find me.

Now and then, I graze the edges of joy, only to find
As the days drift by, I sink back into shame's quiet sea.

Memories surface like bruises beneath my skin,
Tender to the touch, yet aching deep within.

II.

Pearl-shaped stains scatter across the steel-blue train cushion,
Salty tears spill freely from the brink of my long-awaited fate.

Stepping off the train, into the city's smoky breath,
I left behind the secrets that delivered me here, just two minutes late.

The bustling station hums its restless refrain, the patter of hurried shoes,
Blind to the storm in my chest, my heart striking recklessly against my ribs.

I move swiftly toward the door, afraid to glance back or come undone,
But then—I see you.

In an instant, I know your kind face, the wild curls of hazel hair,
A vision of my future self, reflected in your stare.

My fear dissolves, slipping from my skin like morning frost,

As I fall into the arms of the most familiar stranger, no longer lost.

White-hot pain unravels from the shelter of my bones,
Releasing the ghosts I had long called my own.

The city exhales relief as the clouds drift free,
Your smile tells me I've become who I was meant to be.

Within my soul lives half of yours,
Yet hidden wounds festered in a tale I never chose.

An Ode to Maya Angelou¹
Iliana Booth

“I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.” – Maya Angelou

I once believed I was forged by ruin—
that suffering was the cost of becoming,
that the fractures defined my design.
But pain is not a maker,
it is a force;
it burns, blisters, and breaks down your soul
but it does not build who you are.

I lived clenched in the fist of my fury,
mistaking its pressure for protection.
I feared that to release it would be to vanish,
as though my anger was the only frame I could inhabit—
a treacherous trap of darkness and decay.

Rage is a room with no windows or door—
it crushes, it constricts—
until I collapse into its crooked cage.

So I chose to destroy it,
with a visceral rupture,
the rebellion of refusal.
I split the shell of my resentment wide,
dragged myself through its jagged shards,
emerging wounded but still breathing.

When pain took hold of me,
I unraveled from the inside out,
dissolved into something nameless,
a star swallowed by its collapse,
a voice stolen before it can be heard.

But ruin is not a resting place—
it is a reckoning that rages relentless,
where I faced what tried to claim me

¹ Inspired by the work of American memoirist and poet Maya Angelou

and found all that could never be taken.

No longer bound to what broke me,
I eclipse the shadows that had consumed me,
and burn brighter for having survived.

werewolf²
iliana booth

now, i could liken you to a wicked werewolf
the way you watched me bleed
but i'll admit, i provided you a full moon.

now, i could liken you to a flame
the way you burned through my trust
but then again,
i was treading barefoot over your coals.

he circled patiently,
waiting for the shaking to quiet in my limbs.
he didn't bare his teeth,
fear had already made me still.

finally, he walked away untouched—
when it cost me everything,
the control i once had over my life.

and since then, i've carried those days with me
like a second spine, curved into my being
threaded into my nervous system.

and still,
he lies down each night unchanged—
man of a million crimes,
wearing sleep like absolution
while haunting my nightmares.

he'll mistake silence for forgetting
he'll mistake freedom for getting away
but fate has teeth, too
and what he buried will bloom in his bones.

don't worry
he will not be broken by our vengeance
he will remain whole

² Inspired by singer-songwriter Fiona Apple's song, "Werewolf"

so he can feel it all.

and when this life ends

he will meet the brutality of truth—

a flame that does not flicker.

An Ekphrastic Poem ~ Christina's World (1948) – Andrew Wyeth³
Iliana Booth



The house stands fixed in the distance
a monument of indifference
its walls harbor silence
its windows bear witness
but do not intervene.
The field stretches an infinity
offering me the illusion
of freedom.
I am the agent
of my movement.
I am a penitent in a cathedral,
each blade of grass,
a prayer unanswered.
Pain does not define me
but it has carved its name into my bones.
I don't crawl toward salvation,
but because my existence demands it.
I crawl to affirm I'm still here.
Mother—
giver of my first breath,
keeper of my suffering—
claimed to love me,
yet love does not
leave a child to suffer at the hands of another.
She knew when I sobbed into my hands,

³ Inspired by American visual artist Andrew Wyeth's work, the painting Christina's World (1948)

beep beep beep beep
a minimalist poem
iliana booth

my mother holds me—
my weary body
barely clinging to its beat
beat beat beat
beep beep beep beep—
 shaking
 sobbing.

she's holding me as if
im a child again
but yesterday i was twenty-two
and im not ready
to die.

my mortality is in her grasp
my hair
caught in my mouth
nails buried in my skin
puncture like ice picks
on glass.

beep beep beep beep beep

my body betrays itself—
the room tilts
my chest screams
it's been hours and
i still can't breathe.

i am slipping from the precipice
as she holds me tighter
as though her arms can anchor me
to the earth
and i realize that ive only lived
for one brief second
in time.

⁴ Inspired by the work of poet Ed Roberson and poet Suzanne Buffam

from your cruel claws all along.
over half my life ago, you crept in slow.
as a naïve child,
i first fell under your spell.
you laced your thread through every corner of my brain,
and struck the first match.
i never meant to fall for your affliction,
never thought i'd bend so obediently to your conviction,
but you know how to devise
the perfect demolition—
you strike me where i'm weakest,
aiming your fire at what i care about most,
leaving behind ashes,
you haunt me with their ghosts.
every day, i forget how to breathe—
as you take the reins so ruthlessly, controlling me.
but if i don't give in,
refuse to feed the flames,
what might i reclaim beneath the ash?
a skull untethered and mine alone
and the parts of me made of iron,
unharmd by your relentless fire.

The Seconds in Between

Iliana Booth

I.

The monitors shriek an even rhythm,
beep, beep, beep, beep—
each note pulling me deeper into a body I cannot trust.

My mother clutches me to her chest,
her arms the last fortress against the collapse.
She rocks me like she once did when I was five—
fevered, afraid,
and small enough to be saved.

But only yesterday,
I thought I was twenty-two
and I'm not ready to die.

II.

The hospital hums with indifference—
nurses talking, machines whirring, coughs behind a curtain.
My world has narrowed to the sound of her heart against my ear,
steady and fierce,
refusing to let go.

Beep, beep, beep, beep—
a lifeline or a countdown—
I can't tell anymore.

I tilt at the edge of something vast and final,
somewhere beyond the sterile walls,
and it would be so easy—
to surrender, to float free into the black.

III.

But she holds me tighter.
Not with force, but with something stronger:
a memory, a promise, a life not yet lived.

Time stutters, then inches forward.
A new breath stabs through my ribs.
Pain blooms like fire, but it is real; it is mine.

The hours pass in pieces
I do not fall.
I am dragged back by the stubborn thread of her hands,
by the small, defiant hammer of my heart.

When the first pale light bleeds through the window,
I know it:
I am still here.

IV.

Later, when the monitors fall silent,
when my chest rises without protest,
I will close my eyes and remember:

How death brushed past me,
love anchored me to the earth,
a single breath
that can carry the weight of an entire lifetime.

and I will never forget
the seconds in between
where I could have let go.