ABSTRACT

KELSEY VIRGINIA DUFRESNE. Follow the Bees: Sylvia Plath and Dorothea Dix Park
A Study on the Economics and Landscapes of Madness.
(Under the direction of Professor Jason Miller)

This research considers the implications and consequences of situating Sylvia Plath in our own community through the Dorothea Dix Mental Hospital Cemetery in Raleigh, North Carolina. In holding these seemingly adverse parties in conversation with each other and employing ethnographic studies of place to trace discourses of power over madness and spaces, I explore how a mental health hospital and institution, much like one that Plath herself would have been contained in during her lifetime, and its corresponding cemetery reveal numerous parallels that exist between Plath and her journey with madness, and that which happened (and is still happening) at Dorothea Dix Hospital Cemetery and the greater park. At the intersection of Sylvia Plath and Dorothea Dix Hospital-turned-Park, we find the commodification of madness, flowers, and bees. In further exploring this intersectionality, I have found that the abject of our society have been ignored at the expense of focusing attention on how flowers, that which is natural, are doing the work of cleaning the earth of lasting consequences of the municipal landfill that the City of Raleigh placed to encompass the cemetery and the at least 900 bodies buried there. The flowers seem to displace attention, and thus also blame. Therefore, the message the city and state are thus making is that this population, predominantly made up of unwell madwomen, much like Plath herself, were and still are equated to trash.