



The Axe & Quill Writing Society

Anthology Vol. I

Letter from the Editors

As two of the first writing, rhetoric & digital studies (WRDS) majors at UNC Charlotte, this department has been one of the most defining aspects of our time at Charlotte. WRDS is already a vibrant department, but we wanted a space for students to come together because of a love for writing outside of the classroom.

The Axe & Quill Writing Society is meant to do just that. We are an organization for writers of any discipline, genre, and experience united by a passion for writing.

WRDS emphasizes that writing is a practice — something that can be learned and improved — rather than an innate skill that only certain people are gifted with. The Axe & Quill is a sandbox for members to develop these skills and explore genres and concepts they may not have a space for otherwise.

We weren't sure how popular this organization would be when forming it in September. And we still can't believe how much we've been able to do in just two semesters. The first cohort of The Axe & Quill has over 40 members, with majors ranging from WRDS and English to music performance and engineering.

This anthology reflects the diversity of our writers and members. It features writing from all kinds of genres, including, but certainly not limited to, prose, poetry, rhetorical criticisms, and personal narratives. Thus, rather than confining ourselves to a single genre, these pieces are linked by a common theme: Charlotte.

Though not all of us are from Charlotte, the campus and city have certainly impacted our current and future lives. The anthology explores Charlotte in three chapters. *Histories* takes a reflective approach to the city's often tumultuous past. *Perspectives* explores what Charlotte is today and how different groups and individuals exist within it. *Fates* visualizes Charlotte's future as a constantly evolving city. Together, these 17 pieces reflect on and explore the city that we call home.

We hope this anthology helps you better understand Charlotte and writing, not as stagnant ideas but as ever-changing concepts. There is no single way to experience Charlotte, just as there is no single 'right' way to write.

This group of diverse and passionate writers is only beginning, and we cannot wait to see where it goes with and without us. So, to our members, thank you for making The Axe & Quill better than we could have imagined. To the WRDS Department, thank you for supporting us through all of our shenanigans and letting our creativity flourish. And, of course, to our reader, thank you for supporting all 17 authors featured in this anthology. It means more than you know.

AJ Siegel & Jackson Martin
Axe & Quill Writing Society co-founders

Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors

Histories

To Build the Future, You Must Acknowledge the Past by
Clare Grealey (p. 7)

From Paths to Pavement: Critique of Charlotte's Gentrification Through
The Brooklyn Neighborhood by Jackson Martin (p. 9)

Nothing Will Be the Same Ever Again by
E. Alexander Zimmerman (p. 13)

Perspectives

Tower Like Me by Elizabeth Barker (p. 19)

How Laotian Buddhism is Practiced in Charlotte by Jess Danesi (p. 20)

Clash in Southend by Brandon Farrington (p. 23)

Flail by Will Washburn (p. 24)

The Incident by Bree Johnson (p. 25)

Everybody Knows by Dekay Kelly (p. 28)

Dropping Like Flies by Monique Delagey (p. 29)

Living Memorials: A Rhetorical Analysis of "Monuments:
Charlotte's Descendants" Through Treescape Memory by
AJ Siegel (p. 33)

Expectations versus Reality by Alaunna Roberts (p. 36)

The Analysis of Music: A Look Inside the Department by
Lily Cagle (p. 38)

Pictures of a City by Trevor DelBen (p. 41)

Fates

Phthalo Green Bike by Olivia Pardo (p. 44)

Dear Queen Charlotte by Haywood Hayes (p. 47)

Dream of a Liminal City by Valentin Cannon (p. 48)

About the Authors

References



Histories

To Build the Future, You Must Acknowledge the Past: Redlining in Charlotte

by Clare Grealey

To understand Charlotte in the present and future, you must learn about the past and accept its impact. Charlotte, like other developing cities in the 1930s, was subject to “security mapping,” or a way to protect the government’s funds, to determine the rates and frequencies of mortgage lending (Wex Definitions, 2022). This was due to the governmental body known as the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, created under President Roosevelt’s New Deal in 1933. The body was meant to review the financing of mortgages in order to avoid foreclosure wherever possible following the Great Depression. The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), in partnership with the Federal Housing Administration, was given money and assistance in exchange for selling houses in ‘prosperous’ neighborhoods.

In many neighborhoods across the United States, data like race, ethnicity, local amenities, and others were collected to rate the areas on a scale with categories of “best,” “still desirable,” “definitely declining,” and “hazardous,” (Mitchell & Franco, 2018). This was done to restrict mortgage lending to the marginalized and is now known as “redlining.” The maps that were created to record these categories lined the least desirable areas with red. This legal barrier prevented many minorities from receiving mortgages and other financial support concerning housing. In other cases, physical barriers such as highways or roads were created to prevent the mixing of white and non-white neighborhoods. A prime example of this is Detroit’s Eight Mile Wall or Detroit’s “Berlin Wall” (Karoub, 2013). This six-foot wall was built in 1941 near a predominantly Black neighborhood in order for the area to receive federal funding, as the previously mentioned locality was next to a white neighborhood.

Charlotte is no exception to these practices, and maps of the city’s redlining exists today and have been digitized thanks to organizations like Mapping Inequality (Figure 1).

Due to the fact that Charlotte Center City is not zoned for residential development, redlining maps do not include it in their ratings – however, the surrounding areas and their designations are very telling. Every single bordering zone is rated either “definitely declining” or “hazardous.” (Mitchell, 2018). The detrimental influences in District D2 are described as “old community, cheap construction, type of people” (Nixon, 1937, p. 27). By using these methods, HOLC was able to segregate neighborhoods economically, ensuring its legacy would live on in housing prices and distribution, despite the practice of segregation in Charlotte ending in 1969.



Racism in the housing market is still prevalent today, with properties being undervalued simply for having a Black seller. In March 2023 (Levinson-King, 2023), a case was settled after a Black couple in California was given a decreased estimate for their home; they expected much more. So, they asked a white friend to pose as the owner, taking down all family photos and evidence of a Black family living there. The white friend was given an estimate of a nearly 50% increase. The appraisal company was sued under the Fair Housing Act and was mandated to watch documentaries about housing discrimination and attend a training session on the history of racial discrimination in housing (Levinson-King, 2023)

The history of redlining must be acknowledged and addressed because it still affects people today; redlining was put into place to restrict mortgage lending, and when you realize that the majority of an average person's wealth lies in their home value, it only exacerbates the wealth gap between Black and white Americans. We cannot change the past, but by erasing what happened, we throw away the chance to create a better future.

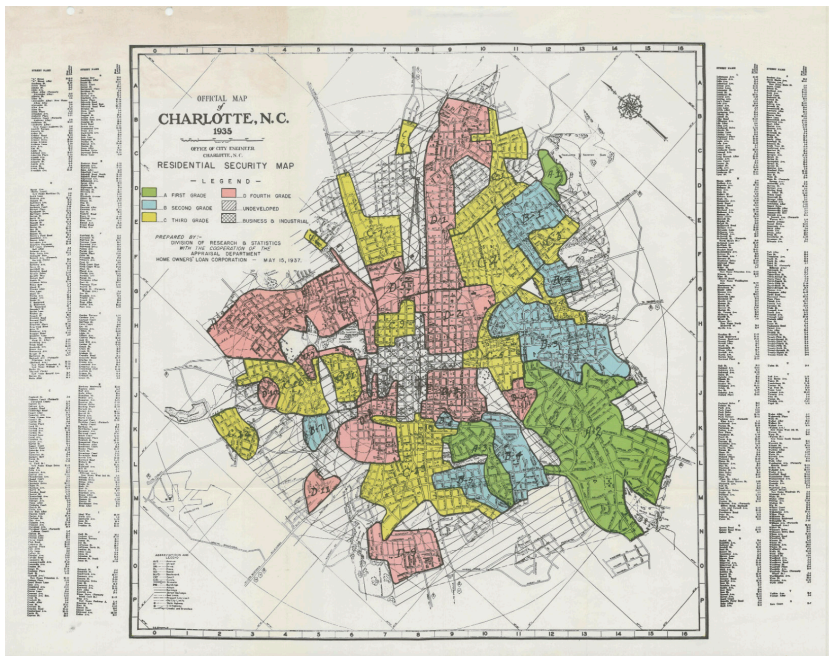


Figure 1: Map of Charlotte (Digital Scholarship Lab, 2016)

From Paths to Pavement: A Critique of Charlotte’s Gentrification Through The Brooklyn Neighborhood

by Jackson Martin

Charlotte is a Southern city that is constantly evolving, adapting, and sprouting into new shapes and forms that are almost unrecognizable from its original identity. Charlotte—previously known as the last capital of the Confederacy—is now the top-ranked city for finance workers (Lake, 2022) and the second-largest banking center in the United States (McShane, 2021). North Carolina National Bank (NCNB), which later became Bank of America, was a prominent figure in Charlotte’s development (Smith & Graves, 2005). Bank of America, acting as a locally headquartered bank in Charlotte, brought the Queen City to national recognition. However, the lack of quality housing in Uptown was the issue for migrating bankers.

Each of Charlotte’s wards faced gentrification, but none were as impacted as much as Charlotte’s Second Ward, previously known as Brooklyn. Brooklyn was a predominantly Black neighborhood in Uptown that was home to many local businesses, including movie theaters, a library, two funeral homes, two colleges, a high school, an elementary school, night clubs, restaurants, newspapers, churches, doctor’s offices, and pharmacies (Brooklyn Oral History, 2007).



Figure 1: Street in Brooklyn (Brooklyn Oral History, 2007)

Urban ‘Renewal’ in Charlotte

In 1937, The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) arrived in Charlotte to assess loan risk. HOLC contributed to Charlotte’s segregation through redlining by giving all Black Charlotte neighborhoods the lowest desirable rank: ‘D’ (Brooklyn Oral History, 2007). Following this assessment, President Truman signed The Housing Act of 1949, which allocated federal funds to purchase and demolish “slum housing.” This enabled Charlotte’s white leaders to make plans to demolish Brooklyn (Grundy, 2020). The D rank was a contributing factor to the approval of Charlotte’s Urban Renewal Project on January 16, 1960 (Grundy, 2020).

The rhetoric of Charlotte’s development shifted—Charlotte leaders could mask their racist intentions for segregation by blaming their reconstruction on the location of valuable property. Brooklyn was in Uptown Charlotte, making it valuable property that needed to be used ‘more effectively.’ Former Charlotte Mayor Stanford R. Brookshire said Brooklyn was a “disgraceful, crime-and disease-ridden slums in the shadows of the Uptown office buildings”(qtd. in Hijazi, 2014, p. ix). Mayor Brookshire began Brooklyn’s destruction and Charlotte’s greater gentrification when he personally swung a sledgehammer into a Brooklyn home in 1961 (Hijazi, 2014).



Figure 2: Mayor Stan Brookshire tearing down 310 South Davidson Street (Grundy, 2020)

Charlotte spent the next 20 years massively reconstructing its residential areas (Hijazi, 2014). Brooklyn was the first neighborhood to be demolished. By 1966, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Inter-Governmental Task Force (CITF) made additional plans to renew four more Charlotte neighborhoods: First Ward, Greenville, Dilworth, and Downtown (Hijazi, 2014). After renewing these five neighborhoods, 3,200 families were displaced, and 3000 buildings were demolished between



1961 and 1973 (Hijazi, 2014). By 1976, only 13 houses were left standing in Fourth Ward's 20-block area (Smith & Graves, 2005).

Only three buildings remained in Brooklyn (Short, 2020).

NCNB, alongside Fourth Ward's First Presbyterian Church and the Junior League, created the advocacy group Friends of Fourth Ward (Smith & Graves, 2005). Friends of Fourth Ward sought to help fund the development of Fourth Ward and establish a positive reputation for the neighborhood. While NCNB initially only loaned \$1.5 million, they were the sole provider of \$11 million by 1979 to fund the redevelopment of Charlotte (Smith & Graves, 2005).

Hijazi explains, "African Americans in Charlotte, like many other urban centers in the United States, felt exploited and deceived by having to be the ones who had to pay the price for cities' business endeavors" (2014, p. iv).



Figure 3: *Defining Luxury* (Martin, 2022)

Potholes in the Pavement

So, what's left? Where Brooklyn was once a vibrant community, Second Ward is now home to the NASCAR Hall of Fame, Whole Foods, and the Charlotte Convention Center. The town where the lively Savoy Theater once stood is now home to Savoy Apartments, a luxury high-rise apartment building. Brooklyn and its inhabitants had seemingly disappeared without a trace.

However, in recent years, Brooklyn has been resurrected in the Charlotte discourse. In 2015, Mecklenburg County released an RFQ on the grounds of beginning the Brooklyn Village project (Brooklyn Village, n.d.). This project will cover the 11.3-acre Brooklyn Village site and the five-acre Walton Plaza site (Brooklyn Village, n.d.). In 2019, BK Partners LLC signed a contract with Mecklenburg County to begin their "Master Plan," containing residential units, offices, hotels, retail space, restaurants, and Myers Passage, which derives its name from Myers Street from Brooklyn (Brooklyn Village, n.d.). Additionally, Charlotte renamed Stonewall Street to Brooklyn Village Avenue,

hoping to honor the neighborhood's history in the process (Burkarth, 2022).

How do you reinsert culture into a city where it was stolen?

Enter The Brooklyn Collective, an organization operating out of the three remaining buildings from Brooklyn: the Grace A.M.E. Zion Church, Studio 229, and the Mecklenburg Investment Company Building (Miller, 2022). The Brooklyn Collective houses nine tenants who hope to honor the spirit of Brooklyn and bring a community back together through a variety of services, such as art exhibits, photography lessons for underserved youth, and family counseling services (Miller 2022).



Figure 4: Signature High Rise Apartment Homes (Martin, 2022)

A Path Forward

The question is, is this enough? No. But is it a start?

Charlotte, day by day, continues to grow and greet new residents. Charlotte has grown exponentially since Mayor Brookshire swung that sledgehammer, and Charlotte will continue to grow for many years following this anthology.

There is no ethical way to make up for what the city did to Brooklyn.

While the Brooklyn Village project may be well-intentioned, a predominantly white institution using nostalgia to capitalize on repairing the gap created by Urban Renewal does not sit well with me. This farce is especially true when a two-bedroom unit at Savoy Apartments costs nearly \$3,000 a month (Savoy Apartments, n.d.).

Charlotte neighborhoods will only continue to get older, and the city will need to tend to, repair, and improve our housing. The response to urban renewal is not destruction but preservation. New Charlotte neighborhoods do not need to suffer the same fate as Brooklyn. It is in our hands now, as Charlotte students, writers, and thinkers, to pioneer a new direction for the Queen City.



Nothing Will Be the Same Ever Again

by E. Alexander Zimmerman

The streets are empty. The roads, the streets, the world has never been emptier. My hands shake on the wheel.

It's unsettling, isn't it? I take a deep, shuddering breath. The wheel shudders against my hands as the road goes from jet-black pavement to cracked asphalt, lazy with worn yellow lining.

My hands shake as I open the car door. I have to be careful not to drop the pizza.

Why are people still working here?

Who the fuck still feels comfortable in their office? I'm not comfortable feeding them.

He runs out to meet me. Please man, keep your distance.

No, keep your cash. I don't want it.

"Can I Cash App you?"

Nah, all good.

Please just leave me alone.

It's a quick drive back to the shop but I turn each second over and over until I'm years older.

*I tell the boss **I'm not doing that again; I can't.***

He understands. He won't ask me again.

It's not important anyhow, the city will close down entirely in not too long.

I remember; it was only a couple of months ago. The city was still breathing in the beginning, not like now. The Wells Fargo Center, ground zero. The first place the pandemic was discovered in this city. Haven't been back since. Just janitors now.

The walk to work always feels weird. Eight blocks that, at the right time of day, had a pretty substantial amount of people, for whatever that even means here anyhow. Uptown was never particularly teeming with people without an event of some sort.

No, not everyone is dead. Some of them are still ordering food.

Everyone's gotta eat, huh?

When everything's gotta be pick-up or delivery, pizza is pretty bulletproof.

The city is drenched in orange and blue, the glow of twilight refracted endlessly through light pollution and bouncing from each glass pane across each graveyarded office. Next to people, these concrete structures are giant; standing alone they are monstrous. They tower over these deserted streets with the authority of being all that is left.

The rickety delivery car groans smoothly across uncontested roads. Normally the side mirror I smashed against the garage last month is a problem, but there's no one to watch out for on the roads. No stress without other drivers, right? My skin crawls.

I don't think people are ready.

Go ahead and chain up the outside tables, we'll bring them into storage.

No one's going to be eating-in much longer.

It's fun to take the turn from 12th onto Church Street a little fast, especially if you're coming off the highway. When no one else is around, there isn't much risk to it either. Some of the other drivers have been pulled over by the police outside of the very loose curfew, but if you're a pizza delivery driver you're fine. I always forget to put the menu in the window, but I've never been pulled over.

After getting a text and venting my frustration on the steering wheel. I read one of the single greatest text messages of my life. A real victory lap for me. But that's personal business, I don't really want to get into it.

What are you doing?

I don't know, Nick. What are we gonna do?

Well, if a lockdown comes—the bar goes down, obviously. We'll close off that whole street side door. Or make it for pickup, we're not sure yet.

What's big boss think?

You'd have to ask him.

Well, what do you think? I think shit's gonna get bad, pretty fast.

I think we'll be fine. We're a pizza shop. We can do pickup and delivery all day.

Yeah. Lotta people won't be, though.

No, they won't be.

So many doors are shuttered on Church street. My coworkers used to stop there for drinks after work. I used to go to that corner store quite a bit. They actually used to serve Korean food.

The guy there was cool.

Health department did him real dirty. They took his license without an inspection, without any questions and just kept putting him off about getting a new one.

The way he was talking about it, it's hard to imagine it's not related to him being Asian.

Fuck. This shit sucks, man.

My face is fully slack, eyes scanning the road ahead for anything. Man I'm tired of this shit. Touring ghost towns with a Bluetooth earbud and someone else's food.

What a deal. What a shitty deal. I have to walk into my apartment later with the stench and poison of the outside. And then I'll have to do it again.

My phone screams into my ear and digs into my thigh where I sipped it under my leg.



Hey boss, what's up?

You nearby?

Yeah. Pulling in soon. Got another order?

Yeah, but I want you taking care of pickups now.

Word. Be there in a minute.

You can go ahead and park too—Jules is gonna take her own car. No rush.

Got it. I'm pulling in right now.

The turn into the garage is a lot easier nowadays. The blind left turn out of the parking deck isn't nearly as busy. Some of these cars haven't moved in months at this point. Doesn't make me any better at parking, though. I never got any better than that. But all I gotta park is this piece of shit delivery car, doesn't matter too much.

After a few attempts and getting it mostly straight, I take a minute and a breath. It's a short walk to the shop, just across and out the garage.

We've all been under more pressure lately. Everything is starting to crack. Not even the back door opens the same anymore. You gotta push harder now. The cooks got into it one day when this all started. Every disagreement is a pissing contest now.

"I swear to fucking god, you wanna take this outside?"

"Nah, nah man."

"Let's fuckin go outside. Let's go."

The door slams open in the back hallway, smashing into the wall. The magnetic arm and push handle snap off their fitting.

Boss man chases them both outside, there's a lot of yelling but no one gets smacked.

One of the cooks and I swap a "what's up" in the hallway.

Nothing much with either of us, just orders.

Nothing much anywhere for the last few months.

Just a few hours till close.

Out front it's nearly silent. Nearly. Jules gives me a side-eye as some DoorDash shmuck is impatiently buzzing about an order he knows isn't ready.

You can go ahead and get outta here, take the next delivery, I'll take care of the front.

She hurries out, and I take her spot at the register. Bossman's probably in the office.

Look man, it'll be ready when it's ready. I can't make it come out any faster.

Man, this guy won't shut the fuck up.

Bro, you come in here early, no mask, and I'm not doing my job right? Either go get a mask and come back or drop the order and get outta here.

He grumbles, and he'll wait. That's what I thought. These fuckin drivers.

Alright man, 30 wings, honey barbeque, and two extra large pepperoni. Here ya go.

It's a few hours more of this and bringing orders out to the curb for the few people bothered to drive to pick it up.

Nobody fills out the form right, and they always blame me when I don't know what they're driving. The floor is so much more open now that no one can eat inside. Every time we clear the floor to clean, someone dances in the open space.

No one's dancing now.

The sun fully sets behind the glass, and the chilling pallor of night settles on the quiet city. I've been thinking about Eyes Wide Shut a lot recently. It feels like that. Sinister. Foreboding. Nasty. Something is just wrong. No other way to explain it. Some people say that movie is a dream, maybe it is. I assure myself this is not.

It feels like outside is a dangerous place to be. For all we know, it could be.

Nick sits down at the table left in the very corner for taking a break. It's right under the open sign. Day shift forgets to turn it on all the time. It's on right now. he red aura is cast over his face as he talks about how nice it is to be able to tell someone to fuck off if they're not wearing a mask. It's always a good day when you can kick out a customer. I sit down with him, my feet ache from standing all day, and my back hurts. I've started seeing a chiropractor, but he's not doing a good job. Bullshit practice, but it's the best thing I can get right now.

It feels strange out there, dreamy. I don't like it.

It's different. Everyone's stuck inside. Everything's harder to get. Oh, we're gonna have to raise the price on wings.

Yeah, they were pretty damn expensive last time I went to the Chef Store. Everything was.

Yeah, things are breaking up with this kind of stress. Stuff isn't getting shipped anymore, no truck drivers. Lot less people working everywhere.

Driving around felt so alien. It feels wrong.

And it's only going to get worse.

Things were already pretty shit. I don't blame anyone for taking unemployment though.

Yeah.

I'm not getting hazard pay, but I did get a raise when this whole thing started.

I offer to take a pay cut.

It's not necessary, but kept in mind.

I don't know why I did that. I loved that job until I didn't anymore.

It's crazy that the Democrats are gonna blow this politically. They're just gonna let Trump be the only person who signs checks.

What do you expect from them?

Nothing I guess, it's just stupid to watch.

Yeah well, they'll get the presidency.

I'm not so sure about that.

Bro, all of Trump's old-ass voters are dying out here.

Yeah, I guess that's true. But that second check isn't going out either.

No chance. It's gonna be your boy Joe Biden against Trump later though.

Nah, I still think Bernie is gonna take it.

Absolutely not. They're gonna go with Biden, he's the safe pick.

This is Bernie's moment though! Perfect opportunity if he can get enough non-voters on board.

It's not happening.

I guess we'll see.

It's not gonna be Bernie.

You think we'll get anything long term out of this?

Maybe some sort of debt thing, payroll loans are really good for us. Probably not though.

So what do you think comes next?

I have no idea, but it's not going back to normal.

This is the new normal. A lot of people are kidding themselves.

A lot just can't recover from this. Things weren't great before.

He grumbles and turns off the open sign. 10 o'clock. We're done for the night. Jules pulls back in with the bag a few minutes later, and he unlocks the barside door for her. She goes to close the counter. He tells me to sweep or something.

The orange glow of street lights refracted through the fog glazed over the floor-to-ceiling windows. There was the sound of the kitchen floor being scrubbed, the pizza ovens shuttering down and the scuff of a heel as the bossman turned and said,

Whatever does happen, nothing will be the same ever again.



Perspectives

Tower Like Me

by Elizabeth Barker

On the corner of every Uptown
street, there's a tower like me.
Cold, cruel, and crafted by
cunning hands,
I have to wonder if the sharpness of their edges
ever shocks them too.
Blueprints I never got to see are written
in my veins / and
there is dried blood on my knees
from tripping over uneven emotional concrete.
In every metal facade I find my reflection / but
somehow she is older than I remember. There
is a familiarity in the way we both stand alone
pressed against a midnight sky.
Steel, silver, and shamelessly serene,
on the corner of every Uptown street
there's a tower like me.



How Laotian Buddhism is Practiced in Charlotte

by Jess Danesi

When immigrants and refugees make their homes in a new country, they experience a lot of major changes in their lives. These changes can impact several aspects of their livelihoods, one of them being religion. Immigrating to the United States changes how Laotian Buddhists practice their faith.

My mother and her family immigrated to the U.S. in 1974 to escape the Vietnam War. After they relocated, they found a community among other Laotian people. They maintained their traditions, language, and faith through this community.

Main Ideas in Buddhism

The philosophy of Buddhism centers around being enlightened and awakened. The main teachings of the Buddha focus on the Four Noble Truths. The Noble Truths all revolve around suffering. The First, Second, and Third Noble Truths state, respectively, that life is suffering, all suffering is caused by craving, and suffering can be overcome. The Fourth is about the path to attaining enlightenment by overcoming suffering, which is achieved through good deeds and peace of mind. Thus, Buddhism does not center around believing in a god, but rather believing in oneself and the ability to overcome pain and hardship by not having materialistic values.

Buddhists believe that both psychological and physical suffering are inevitable parts of life but that one can surpass this suffering by not being overwhelmed by cravings. The desire to have something that is unattainable is frustrating and can cause disappointment, which can lead to further hurt. Once Buddhists are able to reach a state of being “no longer obsessed with satisfying our own selfish wants,” they have reached nirvana. Nirvana is an infinite state of happiness without the boundaries of space or time. Through this state of being, Buddhists become liberated and not bound to positive or negative emotions.

Overall, Buddhism centers on the principles of helping others by sharing knowledge and love as well as helping yourself by letting go of unnecessary cravings and jealousy. Being a good person and having a peaceful, generally carefree mind will lead to nirvana and enlightenment. In order to achieve these states, practitioners follow the Four Noble Truths and the Five Precepts to guide them on the path of being kind, generous, and untroubled.

Traditional Buddhist Teachings in Laos

During the mid-fourteenth century, Laos was founded as the kingdom of Lanxang. Since then, Buddhism has been the dominant belief system in the country. Buddhism is a large part of Lao culture and greatly influences their way of life. Since this religion is such a major

part of their day-to-day lives, it is specifically mentioned in the Lao Constitution. This shows that not only does the federal government approve of the popularity of Buddhism, but that they also encourage the practice of it due to the positive enjoyment that their citizens gather from following it.

Due to the Lao government recognizing the crucial role of Buddhism in the country, the popularity of the religion has only increased. Over time, the belief system became more integrated into Lao traditions and routine practices. Ven Thonglith Thammarangsy in an interview explained some of the teachings that were commonly taught in Laos and what is demonstrated in the United States. For example, in certain Lao communities, Buddhist monks wake up at dawn and travel on foot through communities to give blessings and receive offerings. In exchange for the monks' blessings, people would give them gifts of food, drinks, and clothing. These offerings would be the only way the monks could eat, as they only have what they are given.

In Laos, most communities are very close-knit, and places of interest are close enough together to be traveled to and from by foot. There is not a large variety of religious domains in Laos, creating a greater focus on Buddhism. This enables Buddhism to be a larger part of these communities as it is incorporated into their daily lives. They attend chantings and services at monasteries, leave tributes for deceased loved ones, and perform intricate rituals and ceremonies for important events or milestones (such as funerals, weddings, or births). All of these traditions are organized with the monks and elders of the community. Buddhism has been an integral part of Laotian society for centuries.

Buddhist Practices in Charlotte

Christianity is considered the most popular religious domain in the United States. Around 70.6% of Americans identified as Christian (Pariona, 2018). In contrast, only 0.7% of Americans reported that they were Buddhist. Because Buddhism is not one of the more popular religions in the U.S., it is often misinterpreted by non-practicing American citizens as simply being a philosophy that teaches peace of mind, when in reality, it is much more complex. Perhaps the most popular Buddhist custom practiced in the United States is meditation, a conscious process that calms the mind for an extended period of time.

According to Thammarangsy, he teaches Buddhism in Charlotte similarly to how he taught it back in Laos. He shares the codes of Buddhism like the Five Precepts, the Four Noble Truths, and other basic Buddhist concepts. These include the ideas of sharing wisdom and love, resisting materialistic goals and greed, as well as showing compassion to others.

Although these are the same teachings, they are not practiced as often due to work and other demands. Many practitioners in America have obligations within their jobs or schools and cannot attend a monastery or temple on a regular basis. Even if they do have the time, these monasteries are usually a fair distance away from where they

live. However, those living in Charlotte attend the Wat Buddharam Temple for Buddhist services. Here at this temple, Buddhist and Laotian culture flourishes.

Comparing Laos and Charlotte

In Laotian communities, the citizens live off of the land and what they can grow and cultivate. Life in Laos can be viewed as “simpler” than life in the United States, which constantly revolves around ambition. A popular American mentality is to want more than is needed, such as money, power, and status. These types of over-ambition and greed go against the teachings of Buddhism. Since this is a common way of life in the U.S., many Buddhists struggle to maintain both a typical American life and a typical Buddhist life. This is why they seek the advice and guidance of the monks to help them navigate their lives in a changing environment and culture so that they can still practice the values of Buddhism.

Therefore, a large role that Buddhist monks in the United States adopt is to counsel followers of the religion who feel overwhelmed in an ever-changing country. In the United States, practitioners also follow the beliefs and codes to a less firm extent. This could be because Buddhism is significantly less popular in the U.S. than Laos. Because of geographical limitations and the sparse number of monasteries, Buddhist communities are more disconnected and less involved with one another. Despite this obstacle, Laotian immigrants make their way to the Wat Buddharam Temple or even invite the monks who practice there to do services within their homes.

Conclusion

The way that Buddhism is taught in Charlotte is very similar to how it is in Laos. However, it is more difficult to share the religion due to a lack of interest and conflicting cultures. Regardless, Laotian Buddhists living in Charlotte are very passionate about their culture and values, and the Charlotte area provides a diverse, welcoming community for them to practice their faith.



Figure 1: Five Laotian women at the Wat Lao Buddharam Community Center for a funeral service (Danesi, 2017)



Clash in Southend

by Brandon Farrington

So I saw a fight on the way back home in South Charlotte today. I was on my way back from buying an anger management book from Goodwill when I approached a left turn light. A man wearing a beanie, beard, and coat paced down the median carrying a sign saying how hungry he was. I looked to my right and saw another better-kempt man proudly selling bouquets of flowers. A third man sat in the comfort of his car in front of me at the light. He rolled down his window to talk to the disparaged guy. My first thought was that he was going to pass money to the man on the median.

It turned out, apparently, to be an attempt to disparage him further.

I saw this go on, back and forth, for several minutes. The light turned green, and we didn't move. At some point, something in the grizzled beanie and beard guy snapped, and he lunged, throwing punches into the aggressor's car. My inner eye rolled in its socket; I had to get home. But my two real eyes were straight ahead, waiting for it to just end. I let out a long honk; the woman behind me started recording it with her phone, but too late, perfectly missing that the driver had started the fight verbally.

This went on for another full traffic light cycle.

By the time it was over, somehow, the man's jacket got caught in the car, and he was dragged partway out into the intersection. Several other guys came from across the road at the gas station to check on the guy and pull him up, talk to him. He started shaking and bending over. I assumed he had a concussion—maybe he was just stressed. I was still in my car, so I couldn't tell.

The light changed, and no fight was stopping me from escaping.

I'm glad I bought that anger management book.

Flail

by Will Washburn

High-noon, mid-September:
On sun-bleached asphalt, a bloated SUV slides by
Leaving ripples in the yellowing suburban air.

Out in the back,
He crashed through the tangle of thorns, trees, and thickets. His horns
marked
A spooked young buck.

He leapt into the yard,
Gathering distance in a galloping bound with his spring-loaded hind
legs.
One of which snagged on the fence.

The black spike broke the skin
Piercing one side of his knee and exiting the other. His barrel frame
Heaved forward and ceased.

The staked young stag tried to yank free
But soon he'd fatigue, exposed to the heat.
As his leg slid down the wrought-iron fence
Taking gore, and bone, and a bit of blood up with it.

I bet you've never heard a deer bark before.
The buck takes a glance at its gruesome exit wound.
Thrashing and gnashing, tearing the ground up from
Beneath his pulsing frame, now a dense vessel of panic and pain.

He's undeniable in his tragedy,
In his pitiful pleas for freedom.
He's stunning in his spectacle, one last
Shining moment in a blinding scarlet spotlight.

Alarmed and intrigued, the fence's owner threw open her door
Rushing out, phone-first, to the cutting room floor.

Dripping with horror, life drained from her face
She made a shaky call and pressed one for police.

She couldn't bear to look,
As the harbinger of mercy
And stay-at-home neighbors
And nearby laborers,

Said a prayer to the poor deer
And plugged their soft ears
As mercy burned true through his skull.

The Incident

by Bree Johnson

“Yo, I haven’t seen you in so long!”

“It was only a day, man...”

“But still! I can’t believe he—”

“How are you doing after—”

“I hope we don’t have to—“

“I still don’t feel safe—”

It’s all the bustle in class today. Well, it’ll be the bustle in the entire school for the rest of the week. I would rather not be here in the first place, but my parents said I shouldn’t miss any more school, and I should hear what they have to say after everything, which is fair. But I’ll agree with one thing everyone else is saying: I definitely don’t feel safe today.

Half the class sits scattered in frightened clusters while the rest of us in the back row stay quiet. I scroll through Instagram to keep myself from conversation, but I can’t really escape that today. Hashtags, stories, posts. All talking about what happened. It’s just a way to cope, a way to get through. A Band-Aid on an infection.

I glance up from my phone to notice the front row is barren. Not surprised we wanna shy away from authority. I look back down, waiting for the inevitable—

There it is.

The bell, a grim reminder of our sentence. I pocket my phone while everyone else follows suit, shifting in their seats. The door clicks shut, and the outside world is banished. And the hand locking us in is Mrs. Bell.

She glares at us as if nothing happened. Like we all forgot to do the reading or she was scheming a pop quiz. She prowls to the front of the class, freshly manicured hands folded in front of her. It’s like she got them ready for the occasion. She snuffles a bit as she stands in front of the projector. Then, she clears her throat.

“So... class, welcome ba—“

A hand darts up.

She points to it with the tip of her nail. “Yes, Justin?”

“Are we doing anything in class today?”

The air stills. The prospect of not doing work after what happened is always promising, something we wanna hear. There are plenty of cards we could pull too, if she refuses. It did affect all of us in a way, even the kids who weren’t directly involved, like me. I didn’t even know of him until yesterday.

Mrs. Bell shifts where she stands. “Well... after the events of Monday, we are being required to spend at least a little time talking about it.”

I take a deep breath, propping my elbow on the desk to rest my cheek on my hand. A time waster, this should be fun.

Everyone stays quiet as Mrs. Bell marches to her desk, pulling out... a piece of paper. She stays in her spot and looks down to read.

“Dear students, faculty, and staff, thank you for returning back to school in these trying times. While we will never forget what happened earlier this week, we want to make it clear that we are here to support you, especially our students. If you need anyone to talk to, please visit Ms. Harris, our school psychologist. Her door will be open for the rest of the week.”

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. Like we didn’t know who she is... So her door wasn’t open before? Sounds like a load shit.

“During your first block, your teacher will hand you a worksheet asking about your mood and any support you might need. This activity should take no more than five minutes. These answers will remain confidential.”

Wait, how are they confidential if they also wanna know our support? That’s weird...

“Our goal for the rest of the week is to slowly return back to normal. While this event is unprecedented, we hope to prevent further events like this from happening. We would like to continue to keep our campus safe and our students happy. Thank you.”

I don’t think our “campus” is safe anymore.

She looks up at us. We all meet her with dead eyes.

“Well... I’ll pass out this worksheet. This shouldn’t take too long...”

Silence. She reaches for a small stack of papers on her desk and begins to count off the rows. One by one, the papers trickle down to the back.

They’re planning to solve this by making us do more work? Like that’s gonna do anything. They should’ve given us a week off or something; made the security higher? But instead, they’re making us fill out some kind of... form?

The girl in front of me, Becca, nudges the last slip of paper behind them. I take it and rest it on my desk. It reads:

On a scale of 1 to 5, how is your mood today?

Is there anything we can do to support you during these trying times?

You’ve got to be kidding me. What’s this gonna solve? What do they actually think they’re doing—

“Yes, Becca?”

I look up at the mass of brown hair ahead of me. She shifts in her seat.

“Ms. Bell, can we... talk about what happened?”

She looks up from her desk, just about to settle in her uncomfortable throne. “Well, we are talking about it. If you have any concerns, then write them down.”

“But...” A new voice from the other side of the room. “Some of us knew him. My sister did, and she—”

“Well, your sister is not in this class. Her concerns will be addressed.”

“But I knew him too, a bit. I—”

“I said her concerns will be addressed, and yours will be too.” Ms. Bell’s tone grows sharper.

More silence. I can feel my shoulders having tensed up already. I just wanna get this over with. We already know this is a load of shit, so we should just get it over with. I’m starting to think the school really isn’t gonna do anything for us.

“Ms. Bell...” Becca pipes up. “Why can’t we just talk? It’s only been two days since—”

“Becca.” Ms. Bell stands up, gripping the ends of her desk. “If you have any concerns, go to the guidance counselor. Do you need to go see her?”

Becca’s hair shakes no.

Ms. Bell sits down, moving her clawed hand to turn on her computer. “Bring the sheets to me when you’re done. Then, pull out your books for the book quiz. We’ve already gotten behind.”

The air is cold amongst the zippers of pencil pouches and the scribbles of pens. I reach for my own pencil on my desk, taking a deep breath to force my shoulders to relax. This is all just a necessity then, a requirement they have to fill out. Why would they actually care about us?

It’s all bullshit. All of this is bullshit.

I answer their questions:

O

Tell us how we’ll feel safe.

Everybody Knows

by Dekay Kelly

What do we have left? Only an Infinite lesson it seems.
I sit in on a lecture hall with a million Black souls
or better yet a legion of charred corpses stuck in chairs.
I look down on a test with no answers.
It's not hard, everybody knows the solutions,
But everybody knows they're not going to write it down.

1. "The Queen shows you where hell is.
When she points, where will it be?"

It will be where East Coast luxuries meet the scar of the Old South,
in between the two Universities.
One could take your mind. The other could take your life.
Everybody knows which one is which because it is where the Black
kids are at.

2. "Beneath you is a Black body.
Split wrist on his arms, gunshot in his head, rope around his neck.
Kids with their phones orbiting him like Saturn's rings.
Why did no one save him?"

Blood ain't nothin but likes and views,
Money talks but that boy better not.
Everybody knows only white kids care about Black bodies.

Before you worry about Schrödinger's cat,
the corpse next to me is busy scrolling on two phones both at full
volume,
don't worry, nothing is being said.
Our Black professor looks at him with disappointment.
With every fist in the air, there is another head in Apathy's legs.
Keep those passionate lectures to yourself, Sir.
Everybody knows only white kids take notes on Black history.



Dropping Like Flies

by Monique Delagey

Liza stares at the fly drowning in red wine sauce. Its thin legs reach for the white of the plate. She wonders if she should stick her fingers in the man's dinner to drag it out or let it struggle. If she takes the plate to the kitchen, she could dump it in the back. Maybe the fly will be crushed by the weight of half-eaten hundred-dollar steaks. Wings glued together, it jumps, only to fall onto its back.

Two finger snaps sound in her ears. Liza looks up to see the man with the tie squeezed tightly around his neck. Across the table, his wife looks to the ceiling impatiently.

"I'm talking to you," the man says.

The lights are dim but bright enough to see the contorted frown above his brow. His lips purse like he is about to spit.

"Do you see it?"

"Yup, I see it," Liza looks back at the drowning fly. "I'm so sorry about that, sir."

"So do your job and bring me a new plate... and your manager." His eyes move to the nametag. "Elizabeth."

The plate is still warm as she carries it away, only to see her boss with crossed arms by the kitchen door. He tilts his head forward in a question.

"Table 131 had a fly in their food." Liza won't meet his eyes.

"Seriously?" he lets out a breath. "Remind me what I said last week."

Liza knows exactly what he said last week, but the plate is heavy in her hand, and the fly has fully submerged in the sauce.

"Look at me." Her eyes travel around the kitchen before meeting his. "I told you the next time you made a mistake, it would be your last." He bends down to put a warm hand on her shoulder.

"Jimmy, please—" her chest tightens. "I swear I'll do better, I swear it. No more mistakes."

She hates how her voice shakes—so much that she wants to rip it from her own throat and be done with it.

"I don't know, Liza."

He looks to Table 131 behind her.

"Please," she says, putting her cold hand on his own. She lets it rest there, even as she wants to pull away.

"I'll see you later."

He strides past her toward the table.



Liza doesn't move until another server swings by. She stands over a large plastic trash bin, plate still in hand. The fly is dead. It's a small speck in a dish of red, legs shriveled close to its body. She tilts the dish and watches the food fall; a fury of chaos and running feet sound behind her. Tossing the plate onto a tray of others, Liza peers out the kitchen door's casement, the size of an airplane window.

There they all sit. They sit under the glorified orange light, in their pearls and a plethora of one-shaded suits and dresses. They sip their wine and peer over their thin-framed glasses at the menu. If they speak to each other, it is in hushed tones. She wonders if she could have ever been the one to sit at a table. If only her mother never became sick.

"Go home." Jimmy opens the swinging door from the other side.

"What do you mean? I have two more tables," Liza says in disbelief.

"I'll take care of them myself." Three lines appear on his forehead, reminding Liza of her father when he would come home angry. He is gone now.

"Don't cry. Just go home," Jimmy says.

She almost slips on the floor's brown kitchen water untying her apron to leave. She counts the thin stack of cash before opening the back door.

The air is cold and stings her face, making her feel hollow. At the light rail stop, she crosses her arms against the wind that whistles over the desolate street. The lights flicker over the pole as she leans against it. The train comes to a screeching stop, its gears ringing on the tracks. She steps into the open corridor with only one man sitting there, so she sits on the other side. As the doors close, Liza looks up to see the man holding an intense gaze, a sea of white around his gray eyes. She doesn't look again but can feel his stare the entire twenty-minute ride home.

Liza gets off at the same stop she does every night. She walks up the same stairs, with the echo of shouting neighbors behind the same doors. She pinches her fingers on the same key with the jammed lock. She is met with the darkness of the apartment. The only light that leaks into the room is from the red neon sign outside that reads "OPEN BAR" in big, bold letters. Right as she throws her key on the table of eviction notices, a voice erupts from the back room.

"Is that you?" the broken voice asks.

"Yeah, mom, it's me." She takes a glass from the table and fills it with tap water. Liza opens the creaking door to her mother's room.

The dusty table light barely shines below the dripping IV and heart monitor. It beeps slowly to the heart of her mother who is so thin that her cheekbones poke out from under her skin.

Drowning in the bed sheets around her, she looks Liza up and down.

"You look horrible," she says to her daughter. Liza sets the glass of



water to her lips as her mother tries to hold it with shaking hands. She shakes her head when she's had enough. "Of course, I've seen better days, haven't I?"

Liza says nothing.

"Do you mind opening the window? I can't breathe in here."

"You know it hasn't opened since we moved in." She sits on the bed her mother barely takes space in.

"Today is my last day on this godforsaken earth, Liza. Open the damn window."

Liza stares into her eyes which look buried in her skull. She walks around the bed and opens the blinds to reveal the metal bars on the other side, facing an alley. Liza tries to pull the window upward, but it won't move. As she tries again and again, a rage boils inside her chest as her vision blurs. She thinks of her father's forceful and callused hands on her shoulder. She thinks of Jimmy's hand and the man on the train. Liza thinks of her mother and how she did nothing. Her throat stings like the feeling of alcohol on an open wound, and she thinks that is weak.

Liza leaves the room to find the crowbar on the kitchen counter, the one she used to open the room with no latch. With all her force she swings the crowbar at the window. The glass explodes in dire efficacy, dropping to her arms, on the floor, and in her hair. She strikes it four or five times until she can feel the breeze from the sharp-edged hole in the window. Her tears drop as quickly as she pushes them away.

"Good," her mother says.

Liza drops the crowbar to the floor. She falls to the edge of the bed by the window. The cold air is so close, she could touch her mother and the window at once.

"I haven't done a lotta' things right. You, being one of them." Her hands shake as she picks pieces of glass from Liza's arm. She looks up to see her daughter biting the inside of her cheeks. Liza lets out a small chuckle to herself.

"Why are you laughing, girl? I've never lied to you."

She eyes her mother with the same stare she used as a little girl. Only her mother knew this. She would tilt her head downward, a sliver of white under her big hazel eyes. Lines of black run under the whiteness of those eyes now. Liza stares at her mother before looking away.

They sit in silence, the sirens sounding from outside the window, the red and blue lights reflecting on the wall.

"There's a pack ah' cigarettes in the drawer, with a lighter."

Liza eyes the table filled with dozens of empty pill bottles before opening the drawer underneath. She takes a cigarette and holds it in front of her as Mom's lips stretch out to hold it. Liza turns on the lighter, a small explosion of glowing orange erupting before them. It flickers from the cold air by the window. Her hand cups over the flame,

feeling the warmth in her palm. The fire reflects in her mother's dark eyes, like a shining torch in a tunnel. The breeze rolls in and blows on the thinness of her mother's hair along with the cigarette smoke.

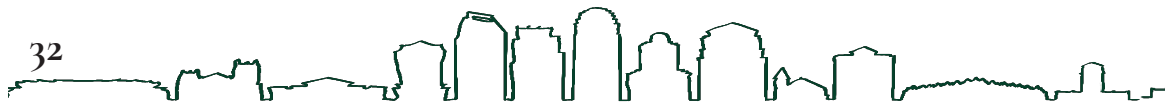
"I've had enough," she says after drawing out a few inhaled breaths.

Liza taps the cigarette out and looks to her mother's hand, which has now grabbed her own.

Her rasping breath grows long and heavy before it stops.



Figure 1: Drowning Fly (Zalevskiy, 2023)



Living Memorials: A Rhetorical Analysis of “Monuments: Charlotte’s Descendants” Through Treescape Memory

by AJ Siegel

On June 9, 2020, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, the city of Charlotte closed South Tryon Street in Uptown so that local artists and activists could paint a mural that would become a template for cities like Seattle and Paolo Alto: the words “Black Lives Matter” painted so large that they are visible from the sky (de la Canal, 2021).

Only two blocks away is another historic Charlotte location — Old Settler’s Cemetery — a graveyard containing the unmarked graves of enslaved people. During 2022’s Charlotte SHOUT! Festival, artist and activist Craig Walsh attempted to, if not name, give faces to those buried there. Walsh recorded videos of local Black artists to represent the unnamed slaves and projected the images onto the trees in the cemetery (Charlotte SHOUT!, n.d.). Creating a memorial with trees as the canvas.

Walsh’s exhibit, “Monuments: Charlotte’s Descendants,” is a treescape memorial. Unlike traditional memorials and other treescapes, Walsh combines monument and digital art to create a “haunting synergy between the human form, nature, and the act of viewing,” at least until the projector was turned off later that month (Charlotte SHOUT!, n.d.).

Walsh’s “Charlotte’s Descendants” exhibit can help us explore how the addition of digital media complicates temporality and privilege in treescape memory. Jason Black’s (2019) analysis of the Emmett Till memorial tree provides an analogous exploration of treescape memory. Black explains that trees are commonly used in memorials because they represent life, regeneration, and growth (2019, p. 28). In 1955, Emmett Till was tortured and murdered in a racist hate crime. While Till’s story helped catalyze the Civil Rights movement, Till himself was not memorialized by our government until 2014 when a sycamore tree was planted in his name on the grounds of the US Capitol (Black, 2019).

Walsh honors Black individuals through treescape as well. But instead of Till, a name that has come to symbolize the collective horrors of racism, Walsh honors those whose names were deliberately left unknown, instead allowing the images of local Black men and women to stand in their place.

We use trees in memorials because we see ourselves symbolically reflected. Black contends that trees are often used in memorials not just because their natural cycles reflect the human lifespan but also because trees “are rooted in us as we are rooted symbolically in them...



Wood and trunks and limbs are said to be bones and torsos and arms” (2019, p. 27).

Trees themselves are non-enduring memorials. Black explains that trees “elicit an impermanence that brick-and-mortar architecture manages to avoid” largely because they can live, grow, or die (2019, p. 25). Trees’ symbolic significance only remains if humans leave some indication of it; otherwise, a memorial tree is just a tree.

Treescape memorials can also decontextualize violence. The Till memorial tree was a sapling that government officials said would give Till a chance to grow up and live the life he never had (Black, 2019). Black argues that this presents an “antiseptically” told story and that “icons emerging from trauma should confront viewers transparently and explicitly” (2019, p. 36). In other words, this treescape ‘rebirth’ detracts from, rather than honors, Till’s legacy.

Black (2019) argues that although a memorial for Emmett Till was long overdue, a treescape memorial may not be enough. It does little to reference the violence that prompted it, let alone catalyze change. “Charlotte’s Descendants” is an innovation of treescape memorialization, which makes Black’s analytical framework a proper analytical lens for this exhibit.

The use of digital media in Walsh’s exhibit reframes how trees can reflect the human form. Black claims “the sycamore’s peculiar shapes ... might seem analogous to Emmett’s body: misshapen, bloated, gouged, broken” (2019, p. 31). Instead of a broken body, Walsh shows us faces. His larger-than-life projections blink and move, bringing life to individuals that time has forgotten (Segran, 2022).

Walsh’s projections also heighten the treescape’s non-endurance. Black (2019) helps us see how trees can die or fade into the background, but in the case of “Charlotte’s Descendants,” the tree is only worth acknowledging when it’s being projected on. Kesley Ables (2020) explains, “If you don’t stand in the precise right viewing spot, the face becomes indiscernible. As you walk away, the form is lost as



Figure 1: Craig Walsh’s “Monuments: Charlotte’s Descendants”
(Charlotte SHOUT!, n.d.)



quickly as it appeared.” “Charlotte’s Descendants” was a temporary exhibit in which the projections were, after just 17 days, turned off (Charlotte SHOUT!, n.d.).

Finally, the temporal disruptions of Walsh’s exhibit present new ways to contextualize violence. Rather than planting a sapling that was going to grow up or symbolize a ‘rebirth,’ Walsh projects the faces of the living onto trees that have been standing among the graves for decades. It is not a rebirth or retelling. It is a recognition of the lives that were already lost and the ones still living. Moving and smiling faces contextualize the memorial not as sterile but as one that honors the legacy that lives on beyond the memorialized.

We have long struggled to find a meaningful way to honor and memorialize Black and indigenous victims of America’s violent past. And although traditional treescape memorials are an increasingly popular means of memorializing victims of oppression, they are far from perfect.

Digital media expands the symbolic possibilities of treescape memorials. Walsh’s projections of living faces onto living trees force the viewer to connect and bear witness in a way that stones, plaques, or stand-alone trees do not. In Old Settlers Cemetery, the unmarked gravestones were an intentional memorialization failure. We do not know the names of those buried; we cannot correct the stone memorials. Instead, Walsh unearths and honors the dead through the combination of living trees and digital images. By extension, he reveals the possibilities of memorialization that are not brick-and-mortar or decontextualized treescape. Walsh’s work shows that in the digital age, we do not need to be confined to stagnant memorials. Life and grief are not permanent, so why should memorials be?

Memorial discourse itself is also changing. Over 230 Confederate monuments have been destroyed since George Floyd’s death (Burch, 2022). Like many of the temporary or makeshift memorials that have taken their place, Walsh’s exhibit combines the tragedy of a collective loss with the individual faces of the legacy of that loss. Post-BLM memorials occupy new roles and spaces, forcing confrontations of past and present injustices and challenging expectations of what a memorial should be. By projecting living faces onto the trees that have held vigil over the cemetery for decades, “Charlotte’s Descendants” highlights Charlotte’s descendants, who carry on despite the systematic racism they continue to face.

“Charlotte’s Descendants” shows that we are still grappling with how to memorialize victims of racial oppression and what role digital media can play. The iconic Black Lives Matter mural in Uptown has faded, and the artists have no plans to repaint it (de la Canal, 2021). Last fall, I visited the Old Settler’s Cemetery, where Walsh’s exhibit was held, and the graves still are. The graves are still unmarked, and so are the trees. Walsh created a moving, novel version of treescape memory, but all physical evidence of it is now gone — leaving the trees and the graves unmarked again.

Expectations versus Reality

by Alaunna Roberts

My favorite thing I have learned is that hardly anything is as it seems. Really – Our first impressions will almost always be wrong. Trust me; I am horrible at making good first impressions.

So, it comes as no surprise that I had a wrong idea of what college is. I came to college thinking I would be studying for my degree and preparing for my career. Lo and behold, I was wrong. Just as I am wrong on most first impressions, college is not about completing assignments and earning degrees. Well, it is... but... it isn't what college is really about.

College is about learning and knowledge.
College is about creativity and self-expression.
College is about many things.

College is about holding an umbrella over another without a jacket in freezing rain.

Thank you, stranger.

College is about watching your step as the bricks become slippery with ice or puddled with water.

My shoes are always soaked. I need a pair of rain boots.

College is about stressing over assignments and exams, alone but together with others.

College is about holding a funeral for a classroom. It isn't destroyed. It just moved departments.

Rest in peace, Cameron 180. You will be missed.

College is about checking your campus bus app every 20 seconds because you're running late.

College is about being an honorary member of Purple Table.
It's truly an honor.

College is about having a group of engineering students sing songs in other languages.

We had a month to learn to sing. It was a mess, but we got through it alright.

College is about practicing the same presentation eight times before presenting it to the class.

It was voted the best in the class, even as my legs and voice shook the entire time.

College is about spilling chemicals on my hands because I am clumsy and accident-prone.

Yes, I trip both up and down the stairs. On flat ground too.

College is about finding a passion for writing and overcoming the pressure of perfection.



I hated writing in high school but came to love it with my first college writing class.

College is about having your own experiences.

If you thought that college was only about completing assignments and earning degrees, you are sorely mistaken. College is not about one thing or another thing. It is not simply a place. It is a bundle of experiences you gather as you interact with the people around you.

So what is college? Well, college is the place that has everything so a person can choose who they want to be.



Figure 1: UNC Charlotte campus (Siegel, 2023)

The Analysis of Music: A Look Inside the Department

by Lily Cagle

Students who are not involved in music usually give me a puzzled look when I tell them that anyone can be involved in any ensemble that is in the music department because they do not know.

Music on UNC Charlotte's campus is often overlooked, but there are quite a few groups involved with music on campus. These consist of musicians that jam together around spots on campus, non-music majors, music majors within the athletic bands and concert bands, Sigma Alpha Iota, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, and of course, the department itself. All of these groups have the same focus on music, but who actually knows about these groups? As a music major, I am more apt to seeing, knowing, and participating in these organizations. Comparatively, folks coming to the main campus as well as other current students do not know of the musical opportunities that are available unless they seek them out.

Main Campus Advertising

The athletic bands and their presence supposedly allow people to know about the music department, but it only allows football and basketball fans to know about the existence of one type of musical opportunity on campus. On top of that, it only shows the general student population and public one genre of musical involvement on the main campus, which does not encapsulate the full color palette of music represented on the campus.

I spoke to three general demographics of students on campus: those involved with music opportunities offered by the music department, those who are only involved in music fraternities or jam sessions on campus, and those that are not involved with music at all. From this, I have concluded that the offerings of the music department, music fraternities, and jam sessions are only known to those that are in these groups or know people in the groups.

This leads to the next question I proposed: Is this to blame on the music department or the culture of music itself? From looking at the department website, proposing questions to peers, and my own experience, I built my argument.

On the music department website, a section lists the ensembles offered at Charlotte. Under the description for each of them, there is a section that says it is open for any student on campus to be a part of the ensemble—just an audition is required. If you need to loan an instrument from the department, you can. The problem is that it is not advertised well. These factors lean more towards it being a departmental issue, but when you look inside the departmental ensembles, the culture comes to center stage.

Gatekeeping Culture of Music

Music has always been sought after and longed for. Everyone interacts with music every day, even if they do not realize it. However, when we create a space for musicians and enjoyers of music to be together, it becomes exclusive and something that is overprotected by those within the group. Music should be cherished by all and not kept hidden from any demographic of people. Yet when we share musical opportunity, there is an underlying feeling of something being taken away.

Non-music majors in the athletic bands have shared with me that they feel welcomed and can be themselves. There is a sense of belonging because everyone is going through the same battle through every rehearsal; everyone is on the same page. Yet, the same non-music majors that are in the athletic bands share a different story when it comes to being involved with the concert ensembles.

Competition, disconnect, pride, masking, and isolation run rampant for many non-majors. They want to be involved with music to enjoy a passion and hobby but cannot due to the culture. Being in a concert band, the culture is different, to say the least, from the athletic bands. Concert bands require a different level of focus and energy to be successful. Everyone could partake for different reasons but for the same end product: a concert. This can be appealing looking into the ensemble, but those who are not there for the same reasons can create tension. The aspect of competition comes into play through part and chair placements.

Could this relate to the feeling of something being taken away when majors share that anyone can be in our ensembles? Musicians can get nasty because they want a specific chair or part. Those that are there just because they want to be involved with music without the [drama] of competition do not enjoy participating. On the flip side, music majors in these ensembles might feel like they are fighting just to keep their spot, making competition and drive necessities. Music majors in the lower ensembles have tensions arise from jokes from studio mates or other music majors. This tension sometimes creates a toxic environment for these musicians that might just need a little more practice. A non-music major considered Robison Hall and the music department's atmosphere as "heavy," making the space where beautiful art is created into a place riddled with anxieties of performance capabilities, concert and audition preparation, deadlines, and assignments.

When It Boils Down

So is this culture or how the department presents itself? A bit of both. It could be the culture of music. Music majors are dedicated to becoming the best musician so that they can get a job after graduation. They are in the ensembles not just for their major but also for their future careers. Non-majors are in these because of their passion for music. A hobby they picked up in high school is now an escape from their monotonous classes and anxieties about deadlines.

Comparatively, musicians involved with music outside of the departmental ensembles do not feel this weight surrounding music. Jam

session participants have fun enjoying music with their friends. Sure, there can be tension, but that is found in any group. But jam sessions don't have tension or heaviness—there is only the joy of music and friendship. The same goes for Greek music fraternities. These organizations have individuals that want to experience music during their collegiate time with like-minded people. Some have not played an instrument in some time, and others play daily. There is cohesion on why these folks want to be there: to enjoy friendship through music.

Conclusion of Observations

Through these observations, questions proposed to peers, and knowledge of my own experience, I understand why music can be so heavy in certain places. When people are involved in a music group, regardless of what type, there is noticeable tension if they are not in the group for the same reasons as everyone else. Yes, everyone has their own reason for participating in the organizations they do, but there is always a common reason for being in an ensemble. Individuals in the athletic bands are there to be a part of a community and continue a passion from high school. Many people participate because they know the perks of being around like-minded people. They want to have friends before starting their first year of college and continue to grow those relationships throughout being in the organization. Everyone in the athletic bands knows when to be serious and when to joke around, which can change their mindset accordingly. People in concert bands are there to be the best musicians they can be. An underlying understanding of competition comes from being in these ensembles because of chair placements and, ultimately, a concert that needs to be performed well.

As I take all of this into consideration, it's clear that issues with music stem from cultural problems that formed when music was first introduced. The cultural differences between the athletic and concert bands have been present since they were created, and they are very stark. Truly, the only similarity between any music organizations is a shared love for music. Music will bring people together in the darkest times, yet we allow people to divide our one commonality because of individual feelings about the subject itself.



Pictures of a City

by Trevor DelBen

What does the city of Charlotte mean to you? It may be your home, whether you were born and raised or simply moved here, or it may be the banking capital of North Carolina. Personally speaking, Charlotte carries very little meaning for me; it's where I attend university, but UNC Charlotte as an institution also means very little to me. Instead, I've found that the relationships I've developed after becoming a student are what make Charlotte meaningful to me, rather than it carrying an inherent meaning simply because "it's the city of Charlotte."

Before becoming a student at Charlotte, I spent two years earning an Associate's in Arts. I attended Mitchell Community College, whose Mooresville campus was practically in my backyard. These were, without question, two of the most boring years of my life. Community college culture entails students attending their classes while doing little else, and although I became acquainted with other students or instructors, I failed to create any lasting connections. In a word, I felt alienated. It didn't help that after I finally began opening up to my peers in my senior year of high school, almost all of them dispersed after graduation, choosing to attend college out of town or state. Since I had difficulty "putting myself out there," I felt stuck and abandoned.

That feeling of alienation persisted after I transferred to Charlotte. With my Associate's degree in hand, I attended the virtual onboarding and listlessly chose writing, rhetoric & digital studies as my minor, not wanting to fully commit to English or communications. However, going from Mitchell's Mooresville campus — which can be described as something more like a compound — to Charlotte's campus was quite a culture shock for me. Knowing that you're only one of thousands of people is an arresting thought, and the creeping feeling of insignificance loomed overhead. My status as a commuter only exacerbated that feeling. Charlotte was also not my first choice; more accurately, it was my only choice. My brother is an alum, and it's close enough to home. It was a logical choice; living on campus or attending an out-of-state university was logistically impossible. But a question still lingered in my mind: "How would things have been different if I had followed my friends to another university?"

My entrance to the WRDS program was a rocky one. Having earned my Associate's degree, I qualified out of the first-year writing course, and my first WRDS class was consequently an upper-level one. Again, I felt alienated from my peers, most of whom seemed much more engrossed in the discipline than I was. Had I written this piece a year or two ago, I would continue to focus on that feeling of alienation, on how I felt no connection to Charlotte, on how I felt distant from my friends. But I no longer identify with those feelings. In fact, the process of finding new friendships began with that first WRDS course. My penchant for arriving early fostered one of my first — and best — friendships at

Charlotte. After we began talking, I gradually inched toward the side of the room where they sat with their other friends, whom I'm privileged to also call close. Additionally, I quickly found the department itself to be incredibly welcoming, and I am immensely grateful to be in an environment where the faculty are invested not only in your growth as a student but also in your personal development. I am indebted to several of my instructors for their shows of flexibility, compassion, and kindness.

I have also explored new areas of interest that I wouldn't have otherwise, thanks to my friends' encouragement. I initially hesitated to join the very club I'm writing this piece for because I felt it was "just another thing to do." But I've enjoyed becoming part of a community, and they encourage me to recognize the value in myself that I so often neglect. Last year, three of my close friends gathered to celebrate my birthday with me. At that time, I was in a particularly dark place, and they made me feel like I was someone worth spending time with. After visiting one of my favorite record stores, we reconvened at one of their apartments on campus.

Earlier, I posed a question: "What does the city of Charlotte mean to you?" When I think of Charlotte, I think of that apartment — I finally felt like I belonged. And while I owe the city for its affordance of these kinds of opportunities, I still don't find it inherently meaningful simply because "it's the city of Charlotte." What carries meaning are my friendships and the experiences I've had because of them. I have been encouraged to become more open and vulnerable, and I have been pushed to be a better student, writer, and friend. Overall, I am a more complete person. A year or two ago, I was still asking myself, "how would things have been different if I had followed my friends to another university?" Now, while it might be an entertaining curiosity, I have no need to fixate on what-ifs and hypotheticals. Instead, I have real, meaningful experiences that I am incredibly thankful for.



Figure 1: View from student apartment (Siegel, 2022)





Fates

Phthalo Green Bike

by Olivia Pardo

Unobscured by the clouds, sunlight tickled Jasper's eyes. Their eyelids fluttered, and their glasses picked up on the changing brainwaves and shuttered down a light shielding pane over their eyes. Jasper clicked into awake awareness and looked from side to side. Dirt fell from their arms, and they propped themselves up to sit. They inhaled slowly; the sun washed over them.

Oh, dear. They'd fallen asleep in the garden again.

Jasper sat up and dusted themselves off, sure to get all the dirt and grass off their jeans. They reached a hand to their glasses and clicked off the shielding pane. The colors of the world around them shone brighter and lighter. They stood up and swiveled their head to look around the garden. Mom was nowhere to be seen — she'd probably left to go to Sophia's birthday party...

Sophia's birthday party!

What time was it? Jasper checked their wristwatch, and it flashed red for a moment. 12:06 pm. Their sister's birthday party was in half an hour. The party was halfway across the city. Half an hour to get across the city. Jasper grimaced — they were not going to miss their sister's party!

They pressed a finger to the arm of their glasses and clicked down a button. "Directions to Optimist Hall!" Their glasses began processing, and they took off out of the garden to run into their house. The lights off inside; the windows were enough to flood the room with sunshine.

Jasper slammed the front door closed and ran down the pathway to their neighborhood hub. They ran through a row of solar panel platforms, where two deer were curled up under the shade from the row of panels. Their local neighborhood hub was a public unit with a recreational center building, gardens, a park, and a radio station. Jasper had their birthday there a few times.

They slammed through the front doors and swung a left to the stairwell next to a ramp down into the underground mushroom farm. The hallway down the length of the underground farm would come back up on the other side of Town Hall. Jasper's glasses projected a path over their view of the hallway; the green path on their glasses screen swung a right up stairwell 10-C. Jasper grabbed the railing, ran up the ramp accompanying the steps, the door closing behind them.

Up onto the pathway past Town Hall, Jasper's eyes scanned the area. The screen of their glasses indicated they were heading in the right direction, but their not-exactly-walking, not-exactly-running jog could use some improvement. Whizzing past the grand piano on the corner of Trade and Tryon, Jasper recognized a few notes of Rocket-

man. They scanned the area — a bike rack! Ten identical phthalo green community bikes rested on the rack, and Jasper skidded to a halt to grab one. Jasper hopped on the bike and sped down the way. The pathway wasn't busy, which let Jasper sigh a breath of relief. Maybe they'd make it with time to spare.

The community bike flew down the street, past a statue of someone they learned about in school a lifetime ago but couldn't remember, past a third-grade field trip, perfectly scattering every seed of eight-year-old Suzy Kaplan's perfectly picked dandelion, and past the magnolias. Jasper's glasses indicated their next turn: through the Charlotte Zoo and Aquarium. Jasper wasn't as big a fanatic about aquatic life as Sophia, but maybe Sophia would get a kick out of their frantic trek across the city.

The aquarium was a good detour, as between Jasper's childhood home and Optimist Hall, there was a significantly-sized natural zone to offset a Charlotte urban heat island.

Wide tiled pathways connected zoo and aquarium exhibits, and their glasses indicated to turn left, 600 feet through the aquarium's crown jewel: a hallway with a glass ceiling and walls, surrounded by the heart of the aquarium's massive indoor tank. Lights reflected from the walls of the hallway, reflecting and fractalizing as catfish swam by.

Jasper sped through the hallway and coasted on the gradually-declining walkway down and out to the exit of the zoo. Animals' heads poked the glass of their spacious enclosures as a speed demon took down the track. Jasper hooked a right through another field of solar panels and the humming energy storage generator for that section of the city. Optimist Hall wasn't far now.

They'd actually missed Sophia's last birthday — they were out in Portland, Oregon working on a project, coordinating with a team from Sapporo, Japan, on a study of the Pacific Ocean. They mostly worked on their sides of the Pacific but went back and forth a handful of times on the Trans-Pacific high-speed rail. Sophia had wrangled them into a big bear hug when they got back at the end of the six-month study. Mom had ruffled their hair with both hands and went for a hug.

A distance from the central Charlotte solar panel farm was a grove of local plants- honeydew, chrysanthemums, cherries. A group of students was picking apples — it wasn't quite apple season yet, but the walk through the orchard was a pleasant enough experience. An interloper biked past them at sub-mach speeds.

Past the orchard, Jasper entered a bike lane, quiet, cold, and empty. The areas of the city and surrounding neighborhoods were always bustling with life. If the sun wasn't shining, the path would have felt chilly without the crowd. Another mile down the path would bring Jasper to Optimist Hall. They pushed on, taking longer to look at the sides of the bike path, the buildings in the distance, and the windmills on the other side, twirling in the distance.

Finally, Optimist Hall was in sight. Their family had thrown a few birthday parties there — this would be Sophia's fourth party in the



same place. Jasper checked their wristwatch — 12:28 — wthey grimaced and pumped the brakes as their bike bumped over from the bike pathway to the restaurant sidewalk. They tossed the bike to a bike rack and rocketed up the steps.

Jasper panted and collapsed into a booth in the restaurant under a gazebo on the right.

“Over here!” Sophia called.

Sophia and Mom were sitting there. Jasper smiled and wedged into a seat next to them.

“You fall asleep in the garden again?” Sophia asked, moving a hand to Jasper to pull a piece of dirt from their hair.



Figure 1: Freedom Park (Martin, 2022)



Dear Queen Charlotte

by Haywood Hayes

Dear Queen Charlotte,

I am a peasant in your sight.

I and my people are outsiders to your kingdom, for my domain is smaller than yours.

You have built the unassailability of the camaraderie border, dividing our two lands.

But you desire it that way, and you treat my people like dung thrown in the streets.

My people, who once belonged to your land—people who sought safety and a chance of a new life in your kingdom—have been turned away by your inequality of wealth.

They had nowhere to stay because your areas have been gentrified. You care nothing about equality for your people but only for your rich.

You've pushed them out of their homes, destroyed their neighborhood, along with their history.

For what? To make room for those of wealth and excellence. Leading others into poverty.

People swarm our land and seek new life in Concordia, and they are relieved.

Areas of our land that were encompassed by trees are taken over by residencies.

But you don't care. As long as there is submission to your reign, you never complain.

I pray for the day when you'll be conquered by those who seek equality and fairness. But sadly, I don't think that day will come.

Because of it, your kingdom will turn on itself. Never returning to its former glory.

May your reign be short, sovereign queen of inequality. So Peace and Harmony, the former rulers of your land, may take over your borders.

Hoping for your demise,

An Outsider

Dream of a Liminal City

by Valentin Cannon

In my dream, I stood at the roundabouts at the very top of the I-485 loop, looking down onto the freeway, watching cars. It had looked this way for years now, but as I walked across the bridge, the flutter of the grand opening sign brought a hush to the freeway and ushered all of the cars up onto the bridge. Everyone in the line of cars was excited at the prospect of being able to drive a full, continuous loop around the edges of the greater Charlotte area for the first time ever. Another few steps, and for a moment, the cars were gone. The sole traffic on the northernmost point of I-485 was three people on bikes, relishing the last week before the stretch of interstate would open to the public. One of them was me, and I remembered and felt the pain in my hip as I watched myself catch a traction groove in the concrete and fall from my bike. I looked away, and in a few more steps, the bikes and injuries were replaced by construction equipment before I reached the end of the overpass and turned to see no bridge at all, no interstate. The road as it was. Prosperity Church, Mallard Creek...

I blinked, and I was walking down Eastfield as it had been before even the Circle K had found its spot across the street from the bank. I was now in a place before the years of treating the Circle K as a watering hole. I would come out to my siblings on a walk to that gas station at some point. Once it existed.

I first felt like I was being watched when I passed the Vacation Bible School banners at the front of the church parking lot. At the moment, I was probably in that church, singing a type of gospel I wasn't used to and learning about all the sorts of sins I needed to watch out for. I took a few more steps through a year or two, and I was learning to ride my bike there in the parking lot, vaguely curious but blissfully unaware of what went on inside the giant building that was "like our church, but different." Aren't they all different, though?

There was no red light to abide by at the turn out of my neighborhood anymore, not that it mattered as a pedestrian. The old folk's home was all still forest, the sidewalks growing more and more freshly paved as I made my way home. My vision was growing hazy as my memories of this time drew from farther and farther back. I heard footsteps, turned around. Someone was following me.

A reaper, cloaked in stars with a grim sheep's mask, matching my pace about twenty steps and two months behind me. I picked up my pace, as did they. Again. Again. Again, until I was sprinting up the hill and past the model home for the new development me and my little brother and parents had just moved into. That haze in my mind and vision had grown exponentially, so much so that I could barely see in front of me when I twisted the knob and thrust my way into an empty house. A small child who looked like me lay spread out on the carpet



of a bare living room, staring at the ceiling fan and fireplace and their family around them... Only days before, they had been somewhere else entirely, and now, they were in Charlotte. It would be an eternity for that kid before the moving truck arrived with everything, it seemed.

A hand, soft but firm, took hold of my wrist, and I felt a violent upward motion like we were rocketing up from the bottom of a deep sea, the layers of haze and darkness stripping away from the room until it appeared as it had the day I moved out to live on my own, years before. This I could remember clearly.

“You nearly fell out of your memories and into the deeper dreams. There is nothing of value for you down there. Only terrors, paradoxes, and That Eternal Sleep... What possessed you to go that way?” The voice of the reaper was soft, familiar, feminine, wise... Nothing like the feelings that had overcome me as I ran. In fact, sitting here in a full and well-used living room, motes of dust illuminated by the evening sun through the blinds, there was no fear. I only felt a faint comfort and a stinging sadness.

“I... don’t know.”

“You do. Think like a dreamer,” the cloaked figure instructed, soft and direct. It didn’t make sense, but still, I thought like a dreamer for a moment. I thought about how the closer I’d gotten to home, the farther I’d sunk into the past... and I wanted to go further.

“I want to go home,” the reply slipped from my lips. I could feel the eyes behind that mask, gentle like the voice. I could see now that the mask depicted a sheep, spun from some mixture of glass perhaps, so fine and intricate I could see each little hair of the muzzle, the grooves and ridges of the curling horns. Their robes shimmered blue like they had been woven of similar material. This figure was important, I suddenly felt. They said nothing, and I found my eyes wandering around the living room of my... home.

“I... mean my actual home. This is my parents’ home.” I felt as though I were speaking the sensible nonsense of a little child. I had lived most of my early life in this house. What did I think I’d find before this? I had no solid early memories of my place before Charlotte, North Carolina. Was this not home?

The figure extended their hand again, and I saw skin soft and blue like the sky slip past the hemmed sleeve of their robe, fingers ending in well-kept nails that shimmered gently. Let’s go home, said the hand. I took it, and for a moment, I was absorbed in the feeling of their skin, cool like water. I felt like I was submerged in the feeling before breaking the surface and emerging at our destination.

Snow stung my feet and my shoulders. On the horizon, the mountains of the place my parents had come from, their parents had come from... had remained. Still remained. In front of us, a stone listed the name of my mother’s father. 1939 - 2022. I felt tears pooling in my eyes, and like lenses, they made the guardian mountains loom like ominous shapes in the corners of my eyes.

“This isn’t home, either.”

“It is where you were trying to go, wasn’t it?” A whole exam sat behind that question, and I felt that same shame and fear bind my tongue. They carried on speaking. “Would coming to this place some-time earlier have been home, either?” Their words brought the tears flowing over my lashes, and I shut my eyes to drown in the answer. This place was never home at any point. My entire life remembered was in Charlotte.

When I had finally wiped the sorrow from my eyes, the figure and I were sitting on a bench surrounded by the sounds of spring. The rasp of the mockingbird, whisper of the shifting branches, rising notes of the cardinal, rustling leaves tossed aside by squirrels and robins. I was in the gardens of the University, back in Charlotte. I remembered dreaming of planting a garden for myself like this, and felt once again ashamed of dreaming incorrectly. That was, until that cool blue hand held mine, and the question I had been meaning to ask this whole time spilled from my throat.

“Who are you?”

“I call myself Charlotte.” The answer was plain and soft and practiced as their mannerisms. I blushed, envisioning a queen like the name suggested under those robes and mask. I then blushed at the thought that I was holding hands with the whole city that I’d always had mixed feelings about my place in. “Just because I admire this place, and I needed a name,” she added. Oh, so then...

“You’re... what are you?” The question was poorly spoken, poorly worded, possibly offensive, but Charlotte understood it.

“I am a Dream Keeper.” The way it was spoken suggested it was a title—a calling—worthy of capitalization and perhaps its own honorific.

“A... Dream Keeper?”

“Yes.” She let go of my hand, and I felt the world around me come back into focus. The University’s gardens... The founder of the college was buried somewhere deeper in the garden, I recalled. Charlotte continued, “A sort of shepherd; dreams are the wilderness through which I herd and guide dreamers like you.”

Dreamers like me...

I felt reminded of my reason for dreaming as I was. Home. This wasn’t it either. I would always walk through these gardens when I was upset or in need of a place that felt beautiful for a change. Everywhere else on campus only felt like a home when I worked for it, and even then, it was an uphill battle as gap years and partial semesters to make room for work or recovery transformed into peers disappearing into graduate programs. Charlotte and I were walking through the garden and out towards the parking lot.

The uphill climb pushed us up through seasons and years and memories like leaves falling and growing and falling again. Fall. We stood together in the parking lot of an apartment complex. A multi-story

warehouse loomed ominously in my peripheral vision. My heart began to sink, and Charlotte caught the feeling before it plummeted any further, holding her hand to my chest. I began to weep again. This was a place that didn't exist yet but felt so imminent that the imminence might have crushed me were it not for her. Through blurred vision, I could see those same figures that had loomed on the mountains, now milling about in the apartment complex that stood where my parents' house was supposed to be. Still was, if I could just turn around and walk back to the present. Not yet, though.

"So, if you aren't mourning the loss of your home, then what is this?" she whispered in my ear, gentle yet pointed in her questioning. I wept. It was the closest thing I'd had to a home. I'd never really had a home. I must have expressed these thoughts through my grief because I received a reply, the first half of an answer.

"What is a home?"

In the parking lot, several cars were parked, their varying age, size, and value a reflection of the class mix of disgruntled warehouse employees and their upper management that these apartments were set to house. Charlotte's steadying hands fell away as I regained my composure, surroundings fading away until only the parking lot and its cars remained.

"A car is like a pathway," she began, "Each path takes you to a different place." Was this some sort of hint? Charlotte began to weave her way between the cars of the parking lot, moving as though the asphalt were ice and she, a skater. As she made her swooping passes, she threw open the doors of each car effortlessly. The luxury sedan, the old electric coupe covered in stickers, the delivery van, emblazoned with a smiling logo. One car was so old and piecemeal that the door came off entirely as Charlotte passed by. She slid to a stop at my side. "Where would you like to go?"

I wanted to go home. I began to walk from car to car, the process much less confident and swift than the one that had opened each car up. Peering inside the luxury sedan, I smelled smoke despite the leather interior. Sitting in the vehicle yielded a vision through the windshield. I was driving down a massive freeway that carved through the land, billboards choking out the sky. The heat was unbearable. I stumbled out of the car and back into a less-distant future. Charlotte was there to help me to my feet.

"Thank goodness there are many cars," she remarked with the faintest edge of humor to her words. I began to walk towards the piecemeal car a few parking spots away, taking care to step over the door where it sat on the pavement, a sprinkle of rusted and broken hardware all around it like metal gore, the victim of an accident. I felt uneasy as I drew closer to the exposed foam of the driver's seat. This car was speeding, driving so fast it threatened to come apart, rushing down a war-torn street away from some threat I dared not look behind me to see. I was pulled from the car.

"You nearly crashed." Her words replaced the rattling cacophony



of the frontline with the parking lot once again. I felt redoubled in my determination to find a car that would take me to a nice place. I could barely stand to glance through the sliding delivery van door. I had a feeling it would take me somewhere similar to the luxury sedan but with less variety in the types of billboards I saw. A fairly average-looking SUV took me to a cookie-cutter suburban home surrounded by crumbling infrastructure. The sticker-adorned coupe took me out of the city and into a dwindling countryside where agriculture seemed to work in spite of nature rather than with it. I could feel my frustration building. None of these futures felt right. No home in sight, anywhere.

Her cloak shimmered in the sunlight as she sat in the passenger seat with me. I had been driving the electric coupe for a good deal longer than the other vehicles. At least it wasn't entirely depressing, was the feeling. "All of these futures are only a dream," she reminded me. I got out of the car.

"Promise me?" It was the middle of the night in the parking lot now.

For the first time, Charlotte hesitated in her reply, glass strands of sheep wool twisting in the night breeze. "There are many, many futures, but only one gets to be real. The rest of them live here as dreams. I promise you this: The paths in this parking lot are a fraction of what could be and also what will never be. That means something..." She hesitated another moment, then turned to look at the far end of the parking lot. "Though, there is one more path for you to try here."

At the far end of the concrete sea, illuminated by a flickering street lamp, was a car. I felt drawn towards it, pushed on by Charlotte's hint. I heard her soft footsteps next to mine.

"Before we go, I know you want to know why I have picked Charlotte as my home." She was right. This was the question that had been waiting for its turn in my mind. I nodded. The car drew closer, and I noticed that Charlotte was slowly pushing us back down toward the present as we walked. I could see the apartment buildings being disassembled in my peripherals.

"You are not alone in never having felt like Charlotte was your home. There are so many people who live and dream in this city that wish they were somewhere better. The threads and paths that pass through this city are so dynamic, so yearning, going to so many places. The place changes in so many ways and shimmers like a diamond of possibilities!" Her voice picked up, and a passion suffused into it that felt like a rare gift to hear, a momentary glimpse beyond the actress. The apartments were gone, and slowly those old, cookie-cutter suburban houses rose to replace them. The parking lot unraveled itself into a suburban road with sidewalks and driveways. My car was sitting parked under the streetlight on the corner by my parents' house. The structure sat empty, like every other house here now was, ready for demolition.

"This is why I've chosen to make it my home." Her voice had fallen back down into its normal, measured, reverent tones. We stood in the middle of the road I used to play in as a kid, though many years

removed from that exact place. I could see someone sleeping in the passenger seat of my car, and I knew it was me. I somehow knew that this was the threshold, the surface of an immense ocean, a dividing line of two essences. In my car was wakefulness.

The wakeful world began, in its haze, to rapidly wash away the details of everything I had just dreamt like eons of waves over an intricate rock, making it smooth and simple. I wiped away the trails of old tears from my face and opened my eyes to morning light through the windshield of my car. As I pulled the passenger seat back into an upright position, I looked out at the empty shell of my parents' house and the sign out front promising a new apartment complex within the next two years.

I reflected upon the strange dream I'd had. In it, a figure in a beautiful cloak with curly white hair like clouds and a face as blue, bright, and familiar as the sky had sat with me and whispered to me, "What is a home? It's a feeling to be felt," before kissing me on the forehead to wake me up.



About the Authors

Elizabeth Barker is a sophomore at UNC Charlotte, pursuing a double major in political science and creative writing. She has a love for reading and writing, concentrating specifically in poetry, and hopes to pursue a writing career after college.

Lily Cagle is a second-year music performance student concentrating in instrumental performance on tuba. She is known to be so busy that she misses a lot of meetings but is there to support when she can. An interest in writing and researching has led to her adding a double major in WRDS, which she will be starting this coming fall.

Valentin Cannon, or Val for short, is a WRDS major, English minor, and secretary of the Axe & Quill. When they aren't writing, they enjoy carpentry, arcade games, speculative fiction, gardening, and loaning their general knowledge and skills to friends. Once Val graduates from UNC Charlotte, who knows where the wind will carry them? Somewhere interesting and full of enriching activities, surely!

Jess Danesi is a senior communication studies major with a minor in journalism, which is also what she hopes to do for the rest of her career. She is passionate about writing, narrative-based video games, and spending most of her paychecks on tattoos. Through her writing, she aims to raise awareness about subjects that deserve attention.

Monique Delagey is a second-year communication and English major with a minor in WRDS. She is also managing editor at the Niner Times, Charlotte's school newspaper. In her free time, she creates fiction stories.

Trevor DelBen is a fourth-year student at UNC Charlotte majoring in WRDS. Apart from his interest in the rhetorical power of language, he is a musician and visual artist.

Brandon Farrington is a prior Air Force linguist and computer science major. He has since switched to majoring in WRDS, as it applied to his interests and work experience better.

Clare Grealey is a first-year anthropology major with a minor in WRDS. She joined The Axe & Quill after an eclectic presentation by Jackson and AJ in her WRDS class during the fall semester. She enjoys writing research-based papers and plans on pursuing a master's degree in forensic anthropology after completing her undergraduate.

Haywood Hayes is in his third year at UNC Charlotte, pursuing a B.A. in English. If Haywood isn't somewhere reading his Bible, he is reading classics like *Hamlet* and *Beloved* or spending time with friends and family. As he continues the work of ministry, he hopes to build a career in published writing and become a professor of English.

Bree Johnson is a sophomore at Charlotte studying English with minors in Japanese and film studies. They are also members of Sigma Tau Delta and Axe & Quill and work at the Writing Resources Center.

They primarily write narrative prose for young adults and the LGBT+ community.

Daniel “Dekay” Kelly is a history and philosophy major. He is a stay-at-home-nomad, possessed by a creative spirit that ‘beats like a war drum.’ While he states that ‘hope is a strong word,’ he does aim to research and educate people on things that ‘most people do not like to talk about.’

Jackson Martin is a graduating senior at Charlotte with a B.A. in WRDS and a minor in English. Jackson is a co-founder of the Axe & Quill Writing Society, who is known for his hair, glasses, and infamous pacing at club meetings. He plans on taking a gap year before pursuing rhetoric & composition in graduate school.

Olivia Pardo is a WRDS major and creative writer from New Jersey. She wholeheartedly embraces sci-fi as a tool to envision a brighter and more hopeful future. She likes writing, video editing, acting, animation, optimistic sci-fi, bearded dragons, and outer space.

Alaunna Roberts is a sophomore pursuing a B.S. in civil engineering at UNC Charlotte. She is also that she is the event coordinator for the Charlotte chapter of the Society of Women Engineers. If Alaunna is not doing schoolwork, participating in clubs, or working as a writing tutor, she is most likely spending time in her dorm playing video games, relaxing, and forgetting about her creative hobbies. She hopes to get a Master’s in civil engineering and work as a structural engineer. She wishes to someday design her own house and have a husky to bring out her dramatic side.

AJ Siegel is a third-year WRDS and psychology double major with a biology minor thrown in the mix just for fun. They are one of the co-founders of the Axe & Quill Writing Society and will continue to run meetings with oddly-themed PowerPoint presentations next year. AJ’s obsession with weird and harmful internet discourses has inspired them to pursue rhetoric in graduate school with the hopes of eventually being a professor.

Will Washburn is graduating with an English B.A. with a concentration in language and digital technology. He will begin his graduate program at Charlotte in fall 2023 in creative writing with hopes of teaching poetry.

Zoya Zalevskiy is a graduating senior majoring in political science and minoring in journalism. They are the creative director of the Axe & Quill Writing Society and designed this edition of the anthology. They are also the layout editor at the Niner Times and co-president of Planned Parenthood Generation Action at UNC Charlotte. After graduation, Zoya hopes to pursue a career in politics.

E. Alexander Zimmerman is a third-year political science and English double major aiming to have two useless sheets of paper. As a longtime food service employee and annoyance, he has pursued learning about working-class history. Aiming to use his education to help organize unions, he has found meaning in writing about the causes and experiences of working people.

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The Axe & Quill Anthology Vol. I is the culmination of 17 writing contributions from the UNC Charlotte 2022-2023 academic year. Each contributor is a founding member of The Axe & Quill Writing Society. Through poetry, prose, and research, this anthology is representative of our time here as undergraduate writers in Charlotte.

This inaugural edition is based on “Charlotte,” and the pieces provide a variety of critiques, perspectives, and stories exploring Charlotte as a city, campus, and community. It is separated into three chapters: Histories, Perspectives, and Fates. *Histories* takes a reflective approach to the city’s often tumultuous past. *Perspectives* explores what Charlotte is today and how different groups and individuals exist within it. *Fates* visualizes Charlotte’s future as a constantly evolving city.

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The Axe & Quill Writing Society is housed in the Writing, Rhetoric & Digital Studies Department at UNC Charlotte: writing.charlotte.edu

