

A Site of Inquiry: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Gardening Philosophy

Aida Muratoglu, 2021

This project started with learning about the history of gardening and garden writing in the state of Maine. I read three primary authors who have been canonized as regional writers: Celia Thaxter, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Harriet Beecher Stowe (though Stowe only lived in Maine for two years). I visited the Thaxter and Jewett historical gardens on Appledore Island and in South Berwick. These visits provided visual material to supplement my theoretical research. The visits allowed me to see what historical gardens look like, who visits them, and what criteria gardeners and managers use to map and plant these gardens. I also met gardeners, historians, and writers on these visits who informed the course of my project—these folks gave recommendations for books, gardening techniques, and gardening stories.

Next, I read Stowe's writing (articles, novels, letters) through an ecofeminist lens, looking for garden and land cultivation allusions, metaphors, and other sentimental techniques. Influenced by Mary Kuhn's 2015 article "Garden Variety: Botany and Multiplicity in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Abolitionism," which focuses on garden writing primarily in Stowe's novel *Dred*, I decided to expand this analysis to Stowe's other writing. I found that Stowe's relationship with gardening heavily influenced her theories on abolition, whiteness, and justice. Her writing about gardens defies the category of "garden writing," a genre popularized in the nineteenth century through gardening manuals, as it instead incorporates her expansive, often mischievous perspectives on politics, race, land and class. Stowe uses an extensive knowledge of gardening to build a horticultural philosophy grounded in the importance of work, equity, and collective liberation. Her writing and thinking, like a blooming and dynamic garden, changed over time, as she received feedback and criticism pushing her work to become more radical.

Throughout the summer, I met regularly with Professor Chakkalakal, as well as other local gardeners, writers and historians. I wrote a paper on regional writing in Maine, and completed reflections on the books and archival sources I read. Focusing on gardening in Stowe's writing showed me how beyond *Walden*, gardens, soil and the act of growing food define American poetics and fiction: the garden is a poem and those who cultivate land have power (so long as they are white). Tracking these patterns shows how colonial violence, connection to land and ideals of private property define American identity.

After completing my theory of Stowe's gardening, I began to map a garden to be planted at the Stowe House (63 Federal Street), where Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The College itself has a long botanical history. The garden at the Stowe House seeks to bring Stowe's gardening philosophy to life, using principles from landscape theory, gardening theory, and indigenous studies to physically represent Stowe's criticisms of Calvinism, colonialism, and slavery. The garden will serve as an interdisciplinary space, modeled after Vassar College's Shakespeare Garden, where students from across the curriculum can perform scenes, catalog plants, read and think. The garden's interdisciplinary and physical interpretations of Stowe's literature will be enjoyed by the general public, celebrating her legacy as a thinker, abolitionist, and learner.

Faculty Mentor: Tess Chakkalakal

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