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To Rally Discussion

I read Ann Leone Philbrick's article ["Balzac, Proust, and Colette in the Garden: a question of climates," *Places* 2:3] with both pleasure and the odd dissatisfaction that prompts ordering one's own thoughts. I wondered why, having proposed her definition of "climate," combining "place" and "occasion" and drawing on sensation, she has paid no attention to the sound characteristics of the Balzac and Proust gardens.

Balzac does give us a long travelling shot down the Rue Neuve-Ste-Geneviève, but though "even the sound of wheels is unusual," it is a sound movie: we are led to imagine an echoey acoustic like that of the catacombs; we pass through "a wicket gate with a shrill bell attached to it" to enter the garden and the Maison Vauquer. The harsh sound echoing in an inhospitable quiet serves to emphasize that quiet in our imagination, to suggest perhaps a contrast with the bustle of more comfortable quarters, to put the reader on edge, as perhaps are the marginal dwellers in the Maison Vauquer, whose bored, microscopic examinations of the garden, offering no purchase on any desired reality, reveal it as "featureless as a steppe."

Balzac's sounds are as carefully sensational as his visual descriptions, with which they are integral in achieving their effect.

I would rather discuss the house garden at Combray than evidences of its origins in the Illiers house garden, the Pré Catalan, or Auteuil,

however pleasurable these may be. I experienced a slight shock on seeing the photos of the Illiers house garden: the view was towards the house, whereas all the descriptions of the Combray garden are outward looking, either from the little parlour or from under the chestnut tree where one's attention is attracted to the end of the garden by the bell signalling a visit from Swann. We are told the distance from the gate is such that Swann's approaching voice can be discerned before his features. So sound helps delimit this garden-stage for the revelation of grandmother and family and particularly marks the appearance of Swann. The garden is an extension of the house, the "dark path" in the "illuminated panel" into which the mature narrator assembles his childhood memories, and the bell, its sounding as Swann left signalling the moment for the narrator's childhood transgression, becomes for him "a point from which [he] might start to make measurements."

Both these evocations of place strongly suggest a significant part played by sound-perceptions in the formation of the full place-impression, and Proust accords one particular sound a major role in the narrator's inner life. Other readings in fiction suggest that sound perception and moments of crisis may often coexist in memory (for example, episodes in St. Exupéry's *Southern Mail* and Svevo's *As a Man Grows Older*), which leads me to suspect that if place- and occasion-perception are indivisibly fused, then an understanding of the

action and substance of memory are further necessities for an approach to place.

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