

Sound and Scent in the Garden  
Garden and Landscape Studies Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks  
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**Abstracts**

**Elizabeth Fowler**

"Audio Delay: the *Hortus Conclusus* and Body Technique"

What can gardens (whether made of landscape, language, or paint) tell us about how they are designed to act as instruments for human practices, habits, and behaviors? Like other kinds of art, gardens are partners in the history of what Marcel Mauss called "body-techniques." We know that the medieval *hortus conclusus* is fashioned as a support for a replete sensory experience, an aesthetic response that is then engaged in prayer, contemplation, and play. Such a garden is used for roaming without destination along its circling or squared paths and, we know from extant texts and images, for gardening, praying, lounging, singing, eating, listening to poetry, meditating, playing chess on its turf benches and grassy patches. What is the aesthetic process that is mobilized by the garden's heavy investments in the human sensorium? The sounds that are nurtured by the garden -- moving water and leaves, birdsong, human music, prayer, poetry -- range from purely sensual to hovering on the edge of sense. This liminality of the garden's acoustic phenomena is often recorded by poets as birdsong and revealed as integral to a larger practice of "slow" sensory acculturation that enlists a resistance to denotation and semiosis in the user. In short, I'll aim at articulating aspects of the practice of the senses that are inherent in the designed form of the *hortus conclusus*. Exhibits will include images from medieval sources as well as snippets of poetry by writers such as Chaucer, Milton, and Frost.

**Mohammad Gharipour and Manu P. Sobti**

"Entrapping Ephemeral Magic: Sensation and Reward in the Persianate Garden"

The Persian garden environment historically engaged its visitor via its plethora of resplendent color, myriad fragrances and singing birds. Yet, even in its ephemeral magic and as a supposed earthly rendition of paradise, it was a precisely orchestrated sequence of momentary pauses and circulation paths. In its overarching focus on the causal sensations and rewards associated with auditory and olfactory stimuli imparted in the garden environment, this paper demonstrates the rich nature of the archive for the writing of sensory histories of the Persian landscape, especially in the 14<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It proposes that the Persian horticulturalist had predetermined planting "maps" that prescribed the locations and growth cycles of specific plant species in the garden environment, and that these corresponded with precisely orchestrated (and pre-mediated) olfactory and auditory experiences. The garden designer, therefore, predicated visitation through vistas of color with fragrant overlays. The interdisciplinary focus on the reconstruction of these sensory experiences is possible by virtue of textual materials, alongside visual sources and information about basic human neurology, that allow us to argue that such spatial and particularly experiential reconstructions would necessitate the specific examination of garden texts.

Having already used the horticultural design specifications from the Timurid and Safavid realms as a productive source for information about color in the garden, we now use 'Abdi Bayk Shirazi's *Jannat al-Athmar* to explore scent and sound. While the former was specific on the use of plant materials (including their varied hues), the latter metaphorically described the "conceptual" promenade in the Sa'adat Abad garden (outside of Qazvin) of the Safavid ruler, Shah Tamasp. Via evocative diagramming and media animations, this paper reconstructs these auditory experiences and olfactory realms that unfolded seasonally.

## Deborah Green

“Come South Wind, Blow Upon My Garden that Its Spices May Flow’: Experience in the Ancient Jewish Garden”

This paper explores scent and sound in ancient Jewish texts about gardens, and identifies how “real experience” of gardens enters the texts. Although scholars have catalogued agricultural and botanical references and legal texts that refer to gardens and agriculture, the interpretative texts have not been studied alongside the legal discussions, the history, and the archaeology of gardens in the Land of Israel. Discussion of gardens in rabbinic legal texts (the Mishnah, the Tosefta, and the Talmud) reveals details of small home gardens as well as rabbinic perceptions of estate and royal gardens. Rabbinic interpretive literature on gardens, however, illuminates various relationships, such as that between safety and danger, men and women, and humans and the divine. The rabbis are particularly interested in the Garden of Eden, or Paradise. Sometimes the rabbinic voices separate Paradise from the Garden of Eden, but most often the two are synonymous and variously represent the royal abode and garden of the divine; the reward and future home of the righteous who are deceased; or the original space inhabited by the *Shekhinah* (the hypostasis of God on earth), now vacated and sealed off from the world. In some cases, the interpretations associate scent and sound with the woman, and then employ that relationship to link women with the garden. The literature may describe female characters as the spices of the garden—locked or sealed from the outside world but whose scent escapes the garden’s boundaries. Or the garden may become a place of extreme danger to the female. She believes she is alone there, but suddenly the disruptive sound or speech of the male intrudes and threatens her.

Texts from the rabbinic period (second through fifth centuries CE) combine the experience of real gardens and their scents, tastes, and noises with metaphors about rituals and interpretations of the divine. The rabbinic legal literature dictates the fruits, vegetables, and herbs in the garden; the location of the garden, in front of the home or near the kitchen; the parameters of the enclosed or open garden; and when watering may take place. But the scents of the flora in the garden also take on special significance in the more interpretive texts. The scent of the rose in the overgrown and thorny garden represents Israel among the nations; the myrtle and etrog are used for the rituals of Sukkoth because their aroma and taste represent the righteous. Balsam, grown in gardens and orchards, comes to represent wealth and status. At the same time, it is associated with ritual and domestic incense and perfume—confusing the boundaries between that which is set apart as holy to God and that which is quotidian in nature. Unlike the western tradition that values the senses of sight and hearing over those of touch, taste, and smell, the ancient rabbis do not appear to favor one sense over another. As a result, the rabbis employ specific scents and sounds as well as the ephemeral and liminal nature of both senses in order to yield layered metaphors about the relationship between humans and the divine.

## John Dixon Hunt

“Beyond Ekphrasis, Beyond Sight, Beyond Words...”

Garden and landscape analysis and commentary is usually delivered in word and image – what has been termed “narrative aesthetics.” What it struggles to do is communicate an ambience, which for the symposium entails sounds and scents (or smells). To address this *lacuna* requires some ingenuity, but short of being actually in a garden or landscape, while responding through one’s nose or ears, all commentary is conducted via words and images. These may annotate sounds and scents with words and images that may reference them, but it is then up to the reader to translate in his or her imagination what those words about sounds and scents might be for that particular person. Each person’s ability to do this wholly personal, limited or enlarged both by the imagination and by their physical capabilities (for a blind person, or somebody with a very diminished sense of smell).

This approach or analysis differs from the familiar, and often used, mode of ekphrasis, though even here the reception of words describing visual things is ultimately dependent on a person’s individual grasp of both

color and – most crucially – the actual object itself (or garden) described in words and images. There is nothing like being *in* the Villa Lante to understand how its waters flow. There we can certainly “stage a different kind of conversation” (to quote Dede Ruggles), but that conversation will still be in our own current and verbal idioms.

Some images will be deployed to suggest sites, both designed and unmediated, from where sounds emanate, places which indicate the source of scents or smells that envelop us, and of course words from other writers who speak to, or are obliged to ignore, those sensory world that escapes those media. But approached from this direction, garden and landscape commentary can only try to move through words and images to the unattainable: and the tone and conduct of that approach risks a “reverie-laded foray into personal musing” – maybe poets do it better than garden historians.

### **Ali Akbar Husain**

“The Nine Scent Bouquets from the *Itr-i Nauras Shahi*: A perception of garden scent based on a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Indo-Islamic Treatise on Perfumery”

Fragrances constituted a class of aromatics called cardiac tonics in the cultures of medieval Islam. These tonics were considered by Islamic physicians to be exhilarating. The exhilaration the physicians spoke about was a refreshment of the spirit that was experienced psychosomatically when the heart was fortified with fragrances that were “naturally” agreeable to it. Fragrances were also believed to enhance perceiving powers, heightening the perception of pleasure, in particular, and were exhilarating in this regard, too. Floral fragrances made a significant percentage of the ingredients of aromatic exhilarants: they were “refined,” “smooth” and “well-blended” odors (*ra’iha mula’ima*) that calmed “the heat of the spirit” to condition the heart to pleasurable sensations.

The physicians who practiced in Islamic India worked with a range of floral fragrances that originated in India and, undoubtedly, with their associations in the Indic tradition. In India, the names of many fragrant flowers recall the Indian god of love, Kama or Madana, and frequently connote sweetness and its arousing power. We may infer that both aroma and taste (or *rasa*, a term originating in the Indian aesthetic system) were recalled in synonyms of scented plant material in the Indo-Islamic context.

To identify the compositions of fragrances and *rasas* associated with garden-related spaces, reference is made to a seventeenth-century treatise on perfumery called the *Itr-i Nauras Shahi* which was written on the instruction of Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur, in southern India. Together with recipes to perfume body and breath, there are accounts in the text of how spaces may be perfumed, including bed chambers (*khwabgahs*). Such accounts hold particular interest for this paper because bedchambers frequently overlooked intimate garden spaces within the citadel, or formed part of temporary residences in larger gardens on travel routes. The text records nine recipes for scent bouquets to perfume the bed chamber, each of which is based on a combination of flowers, foliage, and (plant and animal-based) incenses. Analysis of the plant species comprising each scent bouquet in terms of the physician / perfumer is expected to suggest how each scent bouquet functioned, as fragrance and *rasa*, to enhance sensory perception in a pleasure-giving setting.

### **Elizabeth Hyde**

“The Scent of Power, or Flowers, Fragrance, and Ephemerality in the Gardens of Louis XIV”

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, flowers, newly fashionable and important in the French formal garden, were celebrated for the sensory pleasures they afforded. Flowers offered visual delights via the variety of color and form they took, and olfactory pleasure in the fragrances they emitted. And yet acquiring knowledge of the world through sensory experience could be problematic. Both beauty and scent were regarded as the essence of ephemerality, and as such, posed both moral (and frequently gendered) lessons to

be taken to heart (for example, that a woman's beauty, like life itself, is short-lived; that fragrances could lead to seduction) as well as technical challenges for gardeners. How could flowers be incorporated into the garden to enhance the sensory pleasures of the visitor? Meanwhile, as gardeners and collectors manipulated flowers through selective breeding to enhance their beauty and fragrance, thinkers who would provide the foundation for the emerging scientific revolution that questioned the role of the senses in knowing the world. What did color and fragrance reveal about flowers as botanical specimens? About their uses and meanings? This paper explores the place of flowers in the seventeenth-century formal garden, culminating in their use at the Trianon palaces at Versailles. It demonstrates the means by which royal panegyrists, engaged in the celebration of Louis XIV, played upon the transitory nature of floral fragrance and beauty to complement and thereby compliment the power of the king. The perfume of flowers offered a sensory reminder of the sweeping extent of the Sun King's influence across the Mediterranean and into the "exotic" East. And their presence in his gardens demonstrated his ability to keep France in a Golden Age of power and influence. Floral fragrance and visual beauty made it possible for the king to play with the notions of ephemerality and transform them into political assets. Thus while science was becoming increasingly skeptical of the sensory, the senses were exploited to reveal deeper truths.

### **Rachel Koroloff**

"The Patriarch and the Apothecary: Planting Gardens and Making *Miro* in seventeenth-century Moscow"

The multiple ways in which fragrances were created, cultivated and disbursed in seventeenth-century Muscovy reveal a complex set of associations between plants, perfume and the power of the unseen shared between Moscow's Apothecary Chancellery and the Orthodox Church. The Apothecary Chancellery, consisting of a small but powerful community of foreign medical practitioners, was often opposed by and in some instances even censored by the Orthodox Church. Remarkably, however, the two came together during the process of making *miro*, the Church's deeply fragrant and sacred anointing oil. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the tsar both looked specifically to the foreign doctors of the Apothecary Chancellery and to the Chancellery's pharmacy gardens to secure the ingredients and techniques necessary for the creation of the complex fragrances. In making *miro* and in planting gardens, the ritual significance of the cultivation of fragrance relied heavily on the influx of new practices and new scents introduced by the tsar's medical men. These fragrances, in turn, worked to strengthen older traditions marking political and religious authority with the ancient perfumes of amber, honey, frankincense, myrrh, wine and oil mixed with the *blagovonnye* and *dushisty* (lit. "sweet-smelling" and "aromatic") herbs of popular Russian tradition. The Apothecary Chancellery, the Patriarch's Palace and their respective gardens all coincided within the walls of the Kremlin and imbued it with fragrances both ancient and new, that communicated vitality and authority to the wider world.

### **Mark Laird**

"Lilac and Nightingale: A Heritage of Scent and Sound at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill"

Horace Walpole's *The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening* (1780) established an influential narrative for the English landscape garden, yet one that trapped English garden history and theory in what John Dixon Hunt calls "partiality and prejudice." While historians have challenged Walpole's partisan view of "natural" versus "formal," they have yet to consider the visual bias implicit in his narrative. Emblematic is Walpole's discussion of William Kent's "pencil of his imagination," which meant "dealing in none but the colours of nature." Such visual bias may be approached anew, first by considering Walpole's account of his own gardening over fifty years at Strawberry Hill, and second by reviewing the steps taken to recreate that garden in the past five years.

As a voluminous letter writer, Walpole conveys the experience of the garden vividly. For example, in the hot June of 1765, he wrote: "I have just come from the garden in the most oriental of all evenings, and from breathing odours beyond those of Araby." In the cold June of 1777, referring to "dripping shrubberies," he

wrote: "I have not fruit, no flowers, no thrushes, no blackbirds." And in the "phoenix June" of 1778, amid his "Arabian" flowers, he wrote about "the hosts of cuckoos . . . It is very disagreeable that the nightingales should sing but half a dozen songs, and the other beasts squall for two months together." As scents and sounds wafted through windows, interior was linked to exterior: French horns and clarinets playing in the cloister, or potpourri and tuberose bringing exotic perfumes indoors. To the contingency of weather, then, was added seasonal rituals.

Like the letters, visual records of Strawberry Hill indicate how contingent the garden was on ephemeral and enduring change -- a dynamic continuing beyond Walpole's fifty years to the present day. Along with the site's contraction and the severed relationship to the Thames, the almost totally vanished remnants of Walpole's gardening make it impossible today to achieve a meticulous restoration of the exteriors equivalent to that of the interiors. Using scent as one guiding principle, however, we have been able to compensate for loss through heightened essences: lilac, mock orange, pinks, roses, and false acacia.

Blackbird song is around today, but in London and its environs the "half dozen songs" of the nightingale have vanished with environmental loss. Lodge Hill in Kent is just the latest nightingale habitat to see development pressures. My forthcoming environmental history of landscape gardens--*Natural History of English Gardening, 1650-1800* (2014), of which this paper is a preview-- calls for new protections of the "heritage of sound."

### **Hugh Livingston**

"A Sound Garden for Dumbarton Oaks: *The Pool of 'Bamboo Counterpoint'*"

Composer and sound artist Hugh Livingston will provide a context for his installation in the Dumbarton Oaks gardens. His work reflects on the availability of empty sonic space in which to situate a new sound environment that complements the existing soundscape. Introduced sound can approach counterpoint and harmony with both positive and negative connotations. The use of generative software will be discussed, which allows the computer to depart from rigid programming into types of musical improvisation. Birdsong and other natural sound threads are used as stimulus for new musical ideas. The history of sounds in gardens (particularly Japanese, Chinese and Persian) can also inform the process of composing the contemporary sound installation. An installation can address functional as well as aesthetic purposes in garden design. The motion of a sound through space can dramatically alter perception.

### **Barbara Burlison Mooney**

"Bearing to Your Senses Sweet Sounds and Odors: Early Impressions of the Prairie Landscape"

For landscape historians, the term "prairie landscape" likely brings to mind images of the work of O. C. Simonds, Jens Jensen, or Alfred Caldwell and evokes pictures of slow moving rivers and pastoral clearings embellished with plants of horizontal habit native to American Midwest. Yet behind these famous but relatively recent landscapes, stood historic tallgrass prairies where Native Americans and immigrants of European descent had shaped nature for centuries.

English-speakers who recorded their impressions of the midwestern prairie repeatedly characterized this cultural landscape as oppressively monotonous, and the preponderance of scholarship addressing these ecosystems has privileged the sense of sight in order to draw larger historical lessons about social and sectional conflict, commercial expansion, women's experience, and artistic interpretations. However, a re-examination of early accounts of the tallgrass prairies from auditory, olfactory, and even haptic perspectives yields a more nuanced image of the midwestern landscape during American territorial expansion. It also invites us ask several questions. How were differences in perceptions among authors inflected by social class and bias? Did sound and scent underscore or undermine an author's visual assessment of the ocean-like prairies? How did non-visual sensory impressions of the prairie landscape differ from those associated with gardens around early homesteads? To answer these questions, critical attention must be paid to those cultural preconditions that frontier commentators brought to their sensory impressions of the prairie.

Investigating the role of sound and smell in perceptions of the nineteenth-century midwestern prairie reveals how limiting and biased the written word is for the communicating these ephemeral sensory cues. Nonetheless, some early writers understood the significance of all the senses when they sought to convey a far richer impression of the tallgrass prairie than vision alone would allow.

### **Priyaleen Singh**

“Sound and Scent of Monsoon in the Late Mediaeval Gardens of Rajasthan”

Cultures, in responding to the surrounding landscape, have produced specific and special experiential aesthetics, that are rooted in the distinctiveness of both the place and time in which they exist. In the Indian subcontinent, nothing illustrates this better than the natural weave of the monsoon, a life-sustaining phenomenon, with Indian music, literature, painting, architecture and inevitably garden design. As the annual harbinger of life, the monsoon has a special place in Indian culture, especially in the arid land of present-day Rajasthan, where the Deeg Palace, Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, and Nagaur Fort were located. The area was dominated by the Vaishnava cult in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, where the emphasis of human existence was not merely acquiring wisdom, but discovering the substance of joy through enhancement of the five human senses. Not surprisingly, garden design of the time was seen as a celebration of life, of nature and more specifically of the monsoons, achieved by adopting a design vocabulary that emulated the sounds and scents of this season.

The Rajput gardens built in this area captured the spirit of the monsoon with features such as *sawan bhadon* (monsoon pavilions), *badalmahal* (monsoon palaces), *budbude* (water bubbles) and *chaddars* (water cascades). However the intent went beyond the mere aural and olfactory perception of monsoon. The monsoon as the season of love and separation is a theme that resonates both in the poetry and painting of the period, classically represented in the Barahmasa and Ragamala tradition. This tradition was reflected in garden design too, where it defined the palette of plant material that was meant to heighten the amorous intent of the *nayak* and *nayika* (hero and heroine) with the moist air of *bhadon* (monsoon) drenched in the delicate fragrance of jasmynes, *raat ki rani* (*Cestrum nocturnum*) and *mehndi* (*Lawsonia alba*). Implicit in all this was an ecological approach, that of creating the maximum sensory effect using the minimal amount of water.

### **Anatole Tchikine**

“Water in the Italian Garden: The Culture of Display and the Politics of Sensory Experience”

The idea of the Italian garden—*il giardino all’italiana*—as a tradition and a style of garden-making distinctive of Italy is a fairly recent construction, which goes back to the end of the nineteenth–early twentieth centuries. Originating with Anglo-American scholars, it was subsequently adopted by their Italian colleagues, particularly those allied with the fascist regime, as a means of enforcing the notions of nationhood, artistic precedence, and cultural superiority to give their country a uniform and unique identity among the world’s other nations. An important characteristic of this approach was the understanding of the Italian garden as a fully rational, geometrically and architecturally ordered space, which asserted the primacy of intellect over sensory experience and hence of art over nature, design over planting, the permanent over the transient, and the mind over the body. The only exception was made for the faculty of sight, which allowed the contemplation of forms and subject matter of the designed features and was thus considered a key to garden appreciation. While still influential in present historiography, this approach was inevitably also projected into the past, altering the historical reception of Italian gardens and distorting the original modes of their perception and interpretation.

In this context, the discussion of water merits particular attention. On the one hand, water was seen as a fluid and pure material that ideally had no color, taste, or smell and could easily take any form or semblance within

the garden; for this reason, it was considered a perfect medium for creating a highly controlled environment that expressed the values of timelessness and order. On the other, the volatile nature of water that could freeze during winter or dry up during summer emphasized the seasonal variation, while its ability to cause devastation and flooding suggested a primitive force that could be temporarily restrained but never fully subjugated. By looking at the gardens of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy and situating their water in its two primary—aesthetic and recreational—contexts, this paper argues that its display and meaning could never be intentionally separated from sensory experience. On the contrary, the visual, acoustic, kinetic, and tactile properties of water were ingeniously exploited to engage simultaneously different senses, creating a unitary mode of physical, intellectual, and emotive interaction where “seeing, hearing, bathing, and tasting,” in the words of humanist writer Claudio Tolomei, along with recognition and thinking, played complementary, although not necessarily equivalent, roles.

### **Alain Touwaide**

#### “Bottled Gardens: Capturing Smells for Health”

Experiencing smells—and even more flowers’ scents—in a garden is a unique experience that sets in motion a whole series of bodily reactions in humans. From the olfactory system to the brain that processes external inputs, human body reacts to smells, scents and perfumes in a way that present-day neurosciences just started exploring. Signals from the brain through the entire body generate a broad range of reactions including a therapeutic effect.

Such curative action of olfactory experience was already known in Antiquity and ancient scientists engineered *ad-hoc* procedures to transform the synesthetic ephemeral exposure to scents, scent perception and bodily reactions in garden into an extra-spatial—actually, extra-horticultural—experience with healing benefits that could be repeated *ad libitum*. These are the perfumes. The essential oils resulting from this research delocalized the experience of garden and moved it from its natural contact to the human milieu, including in cities no longer connected with the environment(s) that generated flowery scents, except for artificial recreations of natural contexts where scent-generating plants no longer had the same content of volatile oils as in nature, did not act on the olfactory system in a similar way and, consequently, did not provoke a healing effect. Bottled gardens replaced natural gardens and offered artificial synesthetic experiences.

The presentation will reconstruct the itinerary that led from natural to bottled gardens in Antiquity through the analysis of the scientific literature devoted to the therapeutic uses of natural resources (particularly plants). It will show that such itinerary correlates with the urban development of the Late Roman Republic and the Early Empire and the consecutive transformation in the relationship with natural environment. Simultaneously, it will bring to light the awareness that human-made gardens did not generate the same sensory and healing experience as spontaneously growing scent-generating plants, something that led to such compensatory mechanisms as the sacralization of the garden, its architecturization and magnification, and its exaltation as a *locus* for a renewed contact with nature.

### **Yu Zhang**

#### “A Sensorial Experience in Yunqin Zhai: From Qin Music to Natural Melody in the Chinese Garden”

This essay examines the *Yun qin zhai* or Zither Rhythm Studio (built in 1757 in Beijing) as an example of garden design taking into account the sound environment, while browsing the history of the evolution of Chinese gardens in the perspective of the hearing. From the fourth century, the Chinese gardens have displayed a general trend related to the sound aesthetics: on one hand, the music that people were playing in the garden, as the most refined sound, gradually transformed from loudness to soft and finally to the “silent music”; on the other hand, the natural sound, as opposed to the musical sound, became more and more

popular and finally a key element in some gardens (especially those of literati), and could therefore be perceived and appreciated by the ears.

This trend shows up well in the case of *Yun qin zhai*: the actual sound of the zither is absent, while the sound of water is considered as the actual music instead. In addition, it seems that many details of the design of *Yun qin zhai* are consistent with contemporary research on the soundscape and, in particular, on the relationship of sound and place. In this case study, the sound signal is involved in the creation of a place. Hiding, filtering, and thus transforming the sounds, the designer of the garden creates a soundscape with well-controlled volumes. With its hidden sound source, the garden stimulates the taste for discovery, and binds visitors more tightly to the environment.