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EDITH SITWELL'S POETRY AND MUSIC: CHALLENGE OF AN INDIVIDUAL TALENT

MA THESIS

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ACCEPTION AND APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis/dissertation/report titled "Edith Sitwell's Poetry And Music: Challenge Of An Individual Talent" and prepared by Olga ÜNAL meets with the commitee's unanimous approval as Master's Thesis in the field of English Culture and Literature following the successful defense of the thesis conducted on 27 January 2017.

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ÖZ

Edith Sitwell'in şiirlerini tez konusu olarak seçmemin nedeni öncelikle şiire olan ilgim ve sevgim ve Sitwell'in kişiliğine ve sanatına hayranlığımdır. İkinci nedeni, modernizme ve deneysel edebiyata olan ilgimdir. Son olarak, avant-garde edebiyatını derinden incelemek ve anlamak arzusudur. Çalışmamın amacı, Edith Sitwell'in şiirinde müziğin anlamını ve önemini araştırmak ve anlayabilmektir.

Bu amaca ulaşmak için, Sitwell'in 1910'tan 1940'lara kadar yazdığı şiirlerinin çoğunu inceledim ve dönemin sosyal, kültürel ve tarihi bağlamını analiz ettim. O dönem içirişinde hem modernist müzikte hem de edebiyatta önemli yenilikleri ana hatlarıyla belirttim ve Edith Sitwell'in müziğe düşkünlüğünü nedenini açıkladım. Sitwell şiirleri halka sunmak için tiyatro ve görsel öğeler kullanmaya modernist "sanat birliği" kavramından ilham aldı. Deneyinin bu kısmı şairin kendi sesine ve bir müzik eşliğinde okunan eğlenceli bir şiirinin yaratılmasına yol açtı.

Çok sayıda kitap, tez hazırlığı ve eleştirel makale okumuş olarak, Sitwell'in şiir ve müziği eserlerinde sadece kelime ve sunma düzeyinde değil aynı zamanda geleneksel olmayan sayaç, ritim ve belirli kelimelerin kalıbı seçimi düzeyinde (ünlüler ve ünsüzlerin kombinasyonu) birleştirdiğini de belirttim. Şiirlerinin yapısı, tipik bir modernist müzik parçasının yapısına benzemektedir.

Şairin müzik ve şiiri birleştirme girişiminde bulunduğunu, bu özelliğin onun avant-garde sanatının bir parçası olduğu sonucuna ulaştım. Bu yöntemi seçmesinin nedenlerin arasında, Edith Sitwell'in köklü bir aristokrat aileye ait olması, eğitimi ve kişisel nitelikleri sayılabilir. Elbette yirminci yüzyılın başında, Sitwell'e, ahlak ve insanın doğası hakkında yeni estetik biçimlerde sanat eserleri üretmek için ilham veren esas kültürel neden, değişimin boyutudur.

Araştırmamın önemi, Edith Sitwell'in bireysel yeteneklerinin ve İngiliz ve dünya avant-garde deneysel şiirinin üzerindeki etkisinin değerlendirilmesidir. Üstelik çalışma, modernist edebiyatı istediğim seviyede anlamamda ve genel olarak edebi bir deneyin amacını ve önemini kavramında yardımcı olmuştur.

ABSTRACT

I have chosen Edith Sitwell's poetry as a subject of this thesis, firstly, because of my love for this literary genre and my admiration of Sitwell's personality, secondly, due to my interest in modernism and experimental literature, and lastly, due to my desire to deeply study and understand avant-garde literature. The objective of my study was to explore the meaning and significance of music in Edith Sitwell's poetry, to understand the origin and time limitation of her experiment.

For this purpose, I have examined most of Sitwell's poems starting from 1910 until 1940s and analysed social, cultural and historical context of the period. I have also outlined major innovations, both in modernist music and literature, and explained why Edith Sitwell chose them. The modernist concept of "union of arts" inspired Sitwell for using theatrical and visual elements to present poems to public. This part of her experiment had led to creating an entertaining-event-poem, recited with the poet's own voice and under a music accompaniment.

Having read numerous books, dissertations, critical essays and articles, I have concluded that Sitwell unites poetry and music in her work not only at the level of vocabulary, but also at the level of non-traditional meter, rhythm and choice of words with particular sound patterns – combination of vowels and consonants. The structure of her poems intended to resemble structure of a typical modernist piece of music.

I have concluded that the poet's attempt to unite music and poetry was a part of her avant-garde poetic experiment. The choice of this path is rooted in Edith Sitwell's belonging to an aristocratic family, her education and personal qualities. Of course, it was also the cultural shock in the beginning of the twentieth century that inspired Sitwell to search for new aesthetic forms in speaking about the morality and nature of the human kind.

The significance of my research lies in appreciation of Edith Sitwell's individual talent and her impact on British and the world avant-garde experimental poetry. Moreover, my study has helped me understand modernist literature, as well as to realize the purpose and cultural significance of a literary experiment in general.

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INTRODUCTION

This study explores the meaning and significance of music in the work of Edith Sitwell, a female British poet of the first half of the 20th century, with reference to the wider social, cultural and literary context of the period. The presence of music in Sitwell's poetry can be traced in the poet's early (before 1920s), early modernist (from 1920-1929) and later poetry (from 1940 onwards). The early modernist period, however, is the most abundant of unprecedented experimental techniques related to music. Music in her poetry is everywhere: it is in the choice of vocabulary, in rhythm, meter, sound, the attempt to reproduce noise by means of the musical and non-musical sounds and other poetic levels. It seems that the poet has a particular purpose in doing so. A question arises in the reader's mınd: what is the reason of the attempt to bring music and poetry so close together?

When speaking about Edith Sitwell, she would be recognized for her greatest modernist masterpiece of 1920s – *Façade* – the series of 23 poems. The style of the poems was yet unknown to the British reader. It was an example of avant-garde technical experimentation with sounds and rhythms written as a text on a paper. The poems were performed in a form of a staged concert. Edith Sitwell recited her own poems to the public with an accompaniment of modernist music. Since that time Sitwell, poetry and music had become one whole.

Mathew Riley in his book *British Music and Modernism* highlights that *Façade* was not the first reciting of poems on stage. It was already done in Germany in 1912, when a "shattering, dreamlike symbolist text of *Perrot Lunaire* (1912), translated into German by Otto Erich Hartleben (originally written in French by Albert Giraud) was read out under the accompaniment of Schoenberg's score. *Perrot,* however, was performed in Britain in 1923, a year after *Façade*. (132).

Façade is only a well-promoted piece among Sitwell's early modernist poems. At the time, it was demonstrated to wide public with the usage of the latest modernist instrument – publicity, and shocked the reader and the audience. As a result, it is now one of the most well-known and recognized poems by Edith Sitwell. In fact, the interconnection of Sitwell's poetry with music is a very outstanding feature in almost all of her poems written long before and after *Façade*.

Edith Sitwell gives a detailed explanation on the technical aspect of her work in the introductory part of Edith's collection of poetry, first printed in 1930. In the notes, Sitwell justifies the choice of particular sounds in every word. She mentions such musical terms as 'assonances' and 'dissonances' which stand for purely musical notions and can be understood only by a person who knows music from the inside, who is able to read the musical language. In her "Some Notes on My Own Poetry" and poetry in general, as well as in her book *Aspects of Modern Poetry* Sitwell reflects her deep preoccupation with the subject of music. She treats the process of writing poems as if she were not only a modernist writer but also a modernist musician; as if she were creating a musical tune, instead of a poem.

The presence of music in Sitwell's poetry has been noticed by many critics and poets such as Marsha Bryant, Richard Green, Dorothy Hewett, John Lehmann, Gyllian Phillips, Jane Dowson, John Pearson. These studies, however, do not review the subject systematically: the remarks are accidental and mostly concern Edith Sitwell's *Façade* (1922). My study covers the poet's early writing period, the period of mature avant-garde experimentation and the later period - from 1940s onwards. The study traces where Edith Sitwell's modernist experiment with music started, how it developed, and what was the result of it.

Some of the critics claimed that Sitwell was not really interested in the meaning of words, she chose for her verse, and wrote her poems only "for the sake of sound". (Lehmann,

8) With this statement, critics might have meant such poetic lines as in the abstract from Sitwell's "Mandoline" describing the arriving trains:

Trains sweep the empty floors –

Pelongs and pallampores.

Bulchauls and sallampores (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 5)

Regarding this and similar statements, this thesis aims to study where her interest in music originates from and why Sitwell focuses so much on the choice of music-related vocabulary, particular sounds, creation of non-traditional "rhythm and meter" and introduces other music-related techniques into her poetry. In order to find the answer to the question we will address to the poet's biography and details in her childhood to trace the formation of her character and distinguish the features that contributed to Edith Sitwell's choice of profession as well as her style.

In her biography about the poet *Edith Sitwell: A Unicorn Among Lions*, Victoria Glendinning writes that Edith Sitwell was born on September 7, 1887 in Scarborough, England. (8-10) Her aristocrat family was known to be descent from the line of the Plantagenets. The Sitwell family was very wealthy, conservative and traditional. Edith was the oldest child of the family and had two younger brothers, Osbert and Sacheverell, with whom she was very close. The marriage of her parents – Sir George Sitwell (the 4th Baronet of Renishaw Hall) and Lady Ida Emily - was claimed to be an unhappy one. Lady Ida gave a life to her daughter when she was very young and was not able to appreciate the feeling of motherhood. As a result, Edith lived all her life unloved and misunderstood by the parents, involved in constant stormy dissatisfying relationship. (Glendinning , 8-10)

The family owned a huge castle-like beautiful estate, Renishaw Hall, for over three hundred years. Edith Sitwell had a chance to grow up in the "romantic appeal" of the building surrounded by vast English gardens. John Lehmann in his book *Edith Sitwell* describes the

big library, beautiful paintings and tapestries on the walls, objects of art, exquisite exterior, architecture and the gardens around the family estate. (8) This atmosphere extremely influenced the formation of the girl's artistic character and sensitive imagination.

From the short abstract from her sonnet on "Colonel Fantock" from *Troy Park* (1925) below, we can understand how Edith-the child starts to comprehend the small world around her. Her creative mind is very much disturbed by what she inherits, absorbs, sees and, more important, by what she hears:

Thus spoke a lady underneath the trees:
I was a member of a family
Whose legend of hunting – (all the rare
And unattainable brightness of the air) –
And Dagobert and Perigrine and I
Were children then; we walked like shy gazelles
Among the music of the thin flower-bells. (Edith Sitwell, *Troy Park*,25)

Edith-the little girl will carry on her ability to measure the reality through the concepts of sounds and music "of the thin flower-bells" all her life. She will take her love for music and frame it into a poetic text. She will become an ardent follower of the latest music trends in modernist musical score.

Richard Greene in his *Edith Sitwell: Avant-Garde Poet, English Genius* writes that Edith and her two brothers received very good education (when a university education for women was not yet widely spread). (10-12) The Sitwell children had several private tutors and a governess who taught them political economy, Greek and English Literature, dancing, music and art. The place of music was very significant in the children's education. They learnt to play several musical instruments, among which were piano, cello and harp. (Greene, 20-24)

The Sitwell family admired musicians and made friends with them. Greene writes that Lady Ida conducted a correspondence with a singer and a composer Lawrence Kellie between 1898 and 1910. (26) Musicians often visited the Sitwell's house. All this resulted in Edith's fascination with music since her childhood. Some of family friends remembered that Edith's devotion to music was much stronger than that to poetry. One of them, Cooie Lane, stayed with Louisa Edith Sitwell in London in the mid-February 1908. (Greene, 35) She noticed how music was important for Edith, how it influenced her mood and character. Greene quotes an abstract from her diary about the Edith's passion to music: "I feel her [Edith's] intense love for music makes life difficult for her, for it seems to make her unable to really care of anything else and in a way to unsettle her". (35)

However, Edith would turn herself away from music and never return to the musical instrument. The reason was that the girl was "forced" to play the cello against her will. Green describes that her father "was certainly aware of his daughter's talent at the keyboard", but thought cello to be a more fashionable and unusual instrument at the time. Later he regretted: "Such a mistake that Edith gave up her music". (Greene, 38) Eventually, the girl's strong devotion to music developed into a unique poetic language and style that distinguished her from any other British poets.

Moreover, the Sitwell family had numerous relatives with good education and broad horizons, which contributed to the child's acquaintance not only with music, but also with the world of arts in general. For example, Edith's cousin-by marriage Elsie Swinton, had been brought up in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and was a singer. It was Elsie who introduced Edith to the real artistic and literary scene. Greene writes that Edith was grateful to the cousin because Elsie "did as much to awaken her mind as anyone in her youth. She introduced Edith to Dostoyevsky, to Balzac, to Russian Songs. (40)

Besides music, Edith showed a great interest in poetry. In her later memoirs Edith wrote: “By the time I was thirteen, I knew the whole of “The Rape of the Lock” by heart …and by the time I was fourteen, I was enriched, further, by knowing nearly all Shelley’s poems, and a little later, by knowing most of the greatest passages of Shakespeare’s plays, and all his sonnets by heart.” (Sitwell qtd. in Greene, 46) Speaking about Edith Sitwell’s poetic taste, John Lehmann remarks that she was “deeply rooted in the English tradition” (11).

Edith’s parents never thought that their daughter would consider art and literature to be her profession. They thought a different career for the girl. They would like to make their daughter “marriageable”. Therefore, Edith had to suppress her passion for poetry and books and perceive her poetic education in secret: “I learnt these poems in a profound secrecy, hurriedly and guilty, sometimes by the light of a single brightly-feathered candle …” (Sitwell qtd. in Greene, 56)

It was clear that Sitwell would not become a music composer, but she continued to develop her taste in music and poetry due to the possibilities provided by her aristocratic family. Her father Sir George Sitwell was elected in 1855 and served in Parliament for some time. His parliament membership allowed the Sitwell family to often travel to Europe and stay there for some time. Being just a little girl, Edith Sitwell visited the exposition in the Uffizi gallery in Florence. She learnt the exponents almost by heart. (Lehmann, 10) Thus, Edith was not only well aware of the British culture, since an early age, she could also travel to such countries as Germany, Italy and France. This openness to the continental culture allowed her to become the English avant-gardist in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Lehmann quotes Edith’s brother, Sir Osbert, speaking about the role of travelling and the role of Italy for them, being children: “In a sense, as artists we belong to Italy, hardly less than to England…[In Italy] we learnt a lesson in a school that teaches by example and

feeling..” (10). Osbert then adds how such an approach in children’s education influenced their ability to appreciate avant-garde music, and modernist music in particular:“It was partly due to this same upbringing that we were able to understand at once – the force and the fire of Stravinsky, to see the constructive truth of Modigliani’s peasants and the new element that had entered into the theatre with Monsieur Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet” (Lehmann, 11)

Travelling to the countries where artistic movements were originally born let Edith understand antiquity and Ancient Rome traditions, maintain and develop curious and wondering mind. Through travelling, the poetess could learn culture not only from books, but also from real objects. As a result, it became easy for her to develop her own comprehension and taste for art, literature, music and history. Her ability to understand art, music and literature turned her into an intellectual critic, an appreciator of latest cultural trends, an active poet; last, but not the least, - a developer of new avant-garde standards for modernist literature and poetry.

Edith’s love for art, music and poetry was also significantly stimulated by her governess Helen Rootham. (Lehmann, 9) Helen was fond of music, translated poems by Rimbaud or Serbo-Croat ballads, the Russian mystic Vladimir Solovyev. She wrote poetry, short stories, criticism of music and literature. Edith admired her very much. They would become life-long friends and spend many years living and creating together. The bond with Helen Rootham stimulated Edith’s interest in Symbolic poetry that grew strong after she had stayed several months in Paris with her cousin in order to “perfect her French” (Lehmann, 9). After this short trip “all her interests had blossomed in the short interval…and music and poetry burned in her blood like fire” (Lehmann, 9).

Although Edith complained about the lack of love from her parents, they had created perfect conditions that suited the upbringing of a child capable of understanding and enjoying arts. Pamela Hunter remarks that, later, when Edith started to write, she would admit that she

and her brothers, as children, had a very extraordinary upbringing, and that her poetry was "the direct result" of such an upbringing. (Sitwell, *Façade,*13)

In the light of the above mentioned information and comments, it is possible to conclude that Sitwell's love for music developed due to the unique conditions she grew up in and the atmosphere in her family and home. Her passion for music, in turn, contributed to the experimental approach she chose for her poetic work. The poet's childhood and problematic relationship with her parents also resulted in her rebellious character which reflected her decision to join the "army of the avant-garde", to carry out experiments on poetry and music.

The girl grew up, continued to write and, eventually, started to publish her poems. Margaret Drabble mentions in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* that Edith Sitwell's first published poem, "Drowned Suns", appeared in the *Daily Mirror* in 1913, when she was twenty six. She adds that her first volume of verse, *The Mother and Other Poems* (1915), was followed by many others, and she quickly acquired a reputation as an eccentric and controversial figure. The reputation was confirmed by the first public performance of *Façade*, in 1923. *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924) and *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) had followed. The last was "a harsh and powerful work, compared modern Europe with ancient barbaric Africa" (Drabble, 938). All the poems demonstrated the poet's skill of building a "musical verse".

Sitwell was also a "highly original" anthologist and wrote two unique anthology-journals: *A Poet's Notebook* and *A Notebook on William Shakespeare*. Lehmann notes that in these works she provided a "great deal of valuable light on what the lives of poets mean, what poetry is for and how it works" (6) She also wrote many books of prose. The most notable among them is a biographical study of Alexander Pope (1930), *English Eccentrics* (1933), and *Victoria of England* (1936), and her only novel *I Live under a Black Sun* (1937), based

on the tragic life-story of Jonathan Swift (which was poorly received, but was followed by a period of great acclaim, aroused by her poems). (Drabble, 938).

Edith's upbringing fostered in her a habit of constant self-education. As an adult, she continued to follow the latest tendencies in the world of music, arts, theatre and literature. Sitwell was aware that the elements she employed in her work, such as non-traditional rhythm, emphasis on different types of sounds and noise, were of high importance to modernist musicians of the time. The friendship and collaboration with her brothers had greatly contributed to her poetic writing and musical experimentation.

Sitwell and her brothers influenced the world of arts to such a degree that they were titled as "the three literary Sitwells". Both Osbert and Sacheverell were writers and critics of art and music. Therefore, this thesis will sometimes refer to the Sitwells, meaning the working collaboration of the two brothers and their sister.

It was almost twenty years later, in 1949, when after a celebrity performance of *Façade* at the Museum of Modern Art Edith Sitwell would experience the greatest public triumph "she had dreamed of all her life" (Pearson, 402). But in the mid-1920s, she was one of the queerest extravagantly-looking avant-garde writers, who had yet to proof her talent in poetry, and she did it most skilfully – with the help of music. Therefore, I also argue that Sitwell introduced music not only with the purpose of reviving the "deadness of language" and Georgian poetic patterns, not only with purpose of contributing to the aesthetic comprehension of British modernist music itself but also for promoting her poetry to masses as well as for making herself a successful and widely-known modernist poet.

The theatrical part of Sitwell's poetry presentation (keeping in mind the *Façade* performance) can also be added to her publicity methods. Sitwell understood musical-theatrical performance as an opportunity for publicity, thus constituting a new phenomenon of the age – the "poetry of publicity". For this reason, publicity can be placed into the

category of a poetic technique and a method of "poetry and poets" circulating. In fact, several elements contributed to the reader's better acquaintance with the poet's experimental poetry - yet new for the British reader. We can also add the poet's recordings of her verses in tandem with other famous poets (one of whom was Dylan Thomas) or recordings with a music setting written by other composers to the publicity means she used to promote her work. It is also Edith's lifestyle and eccentric outlook, which she used to raise the public interest in her personality and work.

The nineteenth century, like the several centuries before it, was a time of privilege for wealthy Caucasian males. Women, minorities, and the poor were marginalized to the point of utter silence and inconsequence. Reception of modernist poetry in Britain was not the best (to compare to the situation in Europe). The experiment and novelty were not favoured outside the continent. Considering this, it was extremely brave of a woman to be so different. Sitwell had enough courage and talent to withstand the social disapproval and misunderstanding of her experimental verse. It should be kept in mind that the determination and ability for such an experiment was a direct result of Sitwell's individual talent, her rebellious character and the historical context, in which she wrote. She was lucky to be born in the right place at the right time to let her talent be developed and demonstrated at its fullest extent in her most courageous avant-garde poetic experimentation. In other words, the historical moment was very favourable.

Hence, this thesis claims that the experiment with music and poetry was the result of the outstanding education provided in the Sitwells aristocratic family as well as her rebellious character, individual talent and the historical and literary context, in which she had a chance to live and create. The purpose of this study is to trace how this music-poetry experimentation was developed and how it was reflected in Sitwell's work; which forms of the experiment mostly affected the public and caused the most ardent debates and criticism.

For this purpose, chapter one introduces reflections on the literary-historical context of 1900s-1930s and distinguishes the main historical events that influenced economic, political and cultural life in Britain, Europe and the whole world, in order to understand how they reflected people's minds and way of thinking that resulted in a radical, revolutionary change in tendencies in art, music, theatre and literature. The chapter highlights avant-garde fundamental principles and outlines their effectiveness as a means of social self-expression and, as an instrument to influence people's minds.

Such concepts as "poetry of publicity" together with "mechanization" and "urban alienation" , "British imperialism", "union of arts", *commedia dell'arte* , "high" and "low" arts, the popularity of puppetry, pantomime and primitivism (as part of the concept of "high" art and" low" art), "orientalism", "racism", "western rationality and superiority" will be discussed in order to analyse Edith Sitwell's poetry. The chapter also analyses modernism in music in Europe and Britain as well as the main concepts it was experimenting with in order to trace whether Edith Sitwell had applied similar tendencies to her poetry. Moreover, the chapter examines the relationship between music and literature, in general, to understand how these two media affect one another.

The second chapter focuses on Sitwell's early modern poetry as an example of a literary poetic text closely related to music. The choice of the experimental poetry will be restricted to the poems written before the year 1922 – the great year for modernist literature. I have chosen such poems as "The Avenue", "Mandoline" and "Spring" for the analysis of the poet's early modernist trends in the poetic text.

The third chapter proceeds with the analysis of Sitwell's more mature avant-garde poems: *Façade* (1922), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924) and *Gold Coast Customs* (1929), where Sitwell is more sure of her style and gift to apply poetic devices, while creating avant-garde images in a poem. Henry Reed in his article "Edith Sitwell" describes Sitwell's verse as

"gay, clever pattern of sound divorced from sense" with "a dream-like nonsense going across the dance of words" with the essence of poetry. (117) Indeed, *Façade* (1922), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924) and *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) perfectly demonstrate how poetry and music can come together in a variety of different ways. The chapter also summarizes how Edith Sitwell used music and theatrical performance as an opportunity for publicity in order to promote her experimental poetry to wider public.

The fourth chapter explores whether Sitwell's obsession with music and sound was related to a particular historical or cultural trend and requirement. For this reason, the chapter briefly analyses such Sitwell's poems as "Still Falls the Rain" and "Shadow of Cain", written after her great break in poetic between 1929 and 1940.

The discussion of the musicality of Edith Sitwell's poems will consider their relation to music on several levels:

1. Source of inspiration (if related to music)
2. Short plot description
3. Music-related vocabulary
4. Rhythm, rhyme and meter (if worth mentioning);
5. Analysis of the words "texture" - combination of assonances and dissonances and specific aim in their implementation
6. Introduction of techniques used by other branches of art (theatre, ballet and music) in terms of "union of arts" conception. For example, "masking effect", pantomime, setting to music, staging.
7. General ideas transmitted with the help of all early mentioned devices and techniques
8. The overall structure of the poem resembling to a musical piece (if applicable)
9. Similarity to other great works of art in terms of music

The conclusion part then offers a general assessment of the finding of the study on Sitwell's poetry and discusses the significance of her work in terms of its contribution to the British culture and literature.

CHAPTER I.

1. LITERARY-HISTORICAL CONTEXT. MODERNISM.

1.1.Historical, Cultural and Intellectual Climate

Edith Sitwell grew up on the verge of two centuries. Allan Bullock in his article "The Double Image" describes that the half-century before the First World War was the most outstanding period of economic growth in history. (59) He outlines that in the years of 1870-1913 the expansion of the international economy was very rapid and overlapped with industrial expansion, which, in the 1890s-1900s produced a serious of key developments, such as the diesel engine and the steam turbine; electricity, oil and petroleum as the new sources of power; the automobile, the telephone etc. (Bullock, 59)

Industrialization had been accompanied by a great increase in urban population. By the 1900s there were eleven metropoles in the world with the population of over a million. By 1910 London and New York had populations of over five million, Paris of nearly three. This was the shape of the European and American society: urbanized, industrialized, mechanized. (Bullock, 60) This was also the great age of imperialism based on the cultural and racial superiority of the white races of Europe. The British Empire in 1900 covered one quarter of the land surface of the globe and numbered 400 million people. (Bullock, 60)

Virginia Woolf in her article 'Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown' (1924) states that the modernist movement sounds started in the Edwardian period, and the death of the King Edward in 1910 marked the period when "human nature changed...and when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (24). Bradbury in his *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* discusses that the modernism began with the end of First World War after which Europe went into a general crisis. (33)

The turn of centuries and the World War I impact had caused a profound cultural shock due to which a move away from tradition in the representation of a human form had taken place. (Bullock, 62) Modernism was the result of the social crisis. Modernism is defined as a philosophical movement, a serious of trends and changes in arts, music, literature from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. "*The Oxford Companion of English Literature"* describes literary modernism as "a radical break with the past and the concurrent search for new forms of expression" (Drabble, 682).

1.2.Modernism in Literature and Its Major Characteristics

The following schools in literature, art, and music throughout Europe are regarded as modernist schools over the period: Symbolism, Post-Impressionism, Decadence, Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Imagism, Vorticism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism. The period was a time of confrontation with the public, typified by the issuing of manifestos, the proliferation of 'little magazines', and the rapid dissemination of avant-garde works and ideas across national borders or linguistic barriers. (Drabble, 682) Jane Dowson in her book *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945* writes that Edith Sitwell was the editor of one of such magazines - a controversial *Wheels* anthologies (1916-1921) where innovative avant-garde poets printed their poems. (164)

As Josh Rahn puts it in his article "Modernism", in its genesis, the Modernist Period in English literature was first and foremost reaction against the Victorian culture and aesthetics, which had prevailed in the nineteenth century. (www.online-literatue.com) Intellectuals, writers and artists believed that the previous generation's way of doing things was no longer culturally productive. The relative stability of Victorian civilization was rapidly becoming a thing of the past. The literature of the period, in its form and content, responded to and reflected this reaction.

The Modernist novel is defined as the one with experiments in the representation of time and plot: sudden jumps, temporal juxtapositions, or studies of duration (making a great deal occur within a small amount of text, or stretching a small amount of action over a large textual space). Modernists break narrative frames or move from one level of narration to another without warning. The works may be reflexive about their own writing or they may place one story inside another (a device known as interior duplication or *mise-en-abyme,* placing into the abyss, chaos). Modernists often work towards open endings or unique forms. They utilize enigma, the ellipsis, the narrative gap, and they value ambiguity and complexity. (Drabble, 682)

The same feature of experimenting is typical for modernist poetry. Apart from that, modernist poetry also experiments with rhythm and traditional rhythmic forms. It moves towards fragmentation, juxtaposition of images from widely scattered times and cultures, complex intertextual allusion and patterning. Poetic personal discourse is often purposefully obscure. (Drabble, 682) Keeping in mind the above mentioned literary techniques utilized by modernist poets, it is easy to notice and appreciate innovative character of Edith Sitwell's poetry..

Josh Rahn states that, in Modernist literature poets took the fullest advantage of the new spirit of the time, and stretched the possibilities of their craft to the immense lengths. Edith Sitwell's experimentation with music and sound was an example of such poetic craft. Rahn adds that there was a general disdain in literature and the exceptions to this disdain were the French Symbolists, admired for their sophisticated imagery. In comparison to England and America, the French were ahead of their time. They were unafraid to become involved with the subject that had been normally forbidden for literature. (www.online-literatue.com) Edith Sitwell, being a self-educated intellectual, was one of the first poets who learnt to appreciate the poetry of Symbolists.

Reed proposes that it was “probably Rimbaud whom Miss Sitwell had in mind, as an example for her most striking experiments in rhythm, texture and sound” (117). John Lehmann confirms the same idea by saying that Edith had a special appeal to the poetry of Rimbaud, *Les Illuminations* (9) He adds that she also gave her heart to the stylistic approaches of Walter Sickert, Albert Rothenstein, Mary Hutchinson, Roger Fry, Baudelaire. Yeats was among those modern British poets, for whom Sitwell had a passion. (Lehmann, 9)

Margaret Drabble concludes that “each national experience of Modernism is unique” (683). For English literature, the beginning of Modernism is associated with French-influenced *fin-de-siècle* movements such as Naturalism, Symbolism, Decadence, and Aestheticism. The works of Baudelaire, Laforgue, Mallarmé, Corbière, and Valéry had a profound influence on the British Decadent poets of the 1890s: Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, Lionel Johnson, and W B. Yeats. Flaubert, Huysmans, and the Russians Turgenev and Dostoevsky were important influences for such fiction writers as James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf. (Drabble, 682). Sitwell’s poetic themes were part of modernist themes that can be found in modernist novels as well.

It was the three outsiders to England who are the most important figures in Modernist poetry: the Irish W.B.Yeats, the Americans Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. All three greatly influenced the style in which Sitwell wrote. She was in love with W.B. Yeats and left roses at the door of his apartment when being young and unknown. (Greene, 77) Later they became friends and Yeats expressed his high opinion about the quality of Sitwell’s verse and the poem *Gold Coast Customs* in particular. Pound’s imagist poetry also fascinated Edith Sitwell when she was at the early stage of her career.

Imagist poetry was almost always short, unrhymed, and noticeably sparse in terms of adjectives and adverbs. At some points, the line between poetry and natural language became blurred. This was a sharp departure from the ornamental, verbose style of the Victorian era.

Gone also were the preoccupations with beauty and nature. Potential subjects for poetry were now limitless, and poets took full advantage of this new freedom. This idealism, however, ended with the outbreak of World War I, and writers created more cynical works which reflected a prevailing sense of disillusionment. The subject change is easily noticeable in Sitwell's work after the war (Rahn, www.online-literature.com)

Eliot picked up where the Imagists left off, while adding some of his own peculiar aesthetics to the mix. His principal contribution to twentieth century verse was a return to highly intellectual, allusive poetry. Edith Sitwell met Eliot in 1917 and "their acquaintance continued for many years" (Dowson, 166). The poet admired Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and was extremely influenced by the poem. Her *Façade* and *Gold Coast Customs* are often compared to Eliot's *The Waste Land* on the subject of the "evocation of the outworn culture" (Dowson, 166). She highly appreciated the novelty of the three modernist poets, and finally managed to create her own individual poetic style, which proved that a Britain-born poet could be in the avant-garde of modernism.

Social and political situations related to the world population increase, urbanization and the limits of power for the British Empire had stimulated art and literature to discuss such problems as "mechanization" of life and human behaviour, "urban alienation", overwhelming loneliness of a human being. Western rationality and superiority were under the question; British imperialism", "orientalism", "racism" and similar problems were at the top of the world's agenda. These themes were intensely risen for discussion by the avant-garde modernists.

The period of modernism was also characterized by an intense use of publicity with the aim of art promotion. Encyclopedia Britannica defines *publicity* as a "type of promotion that relies on public relations effect of a news story carries usually free by mass media". İt adds that "the main objective of publicity is not sales promotion, but creation of an image

through editorial or independent source commentary". (www.britannica.com) This definition proves that Sitwell used publicity in order to draw more attention to her own personality as a poet, and, as a result, to her poetry. Pearson quotes Geoffrey Gorger describing the musical soirees in the Sitwells' house and the level interest to the poet's persona:

> These tea parties of hers really were one of the most extraordinary literary affairs of the twenties when you think of them. For there she was all but penniless, in a dingy little flat in an unfashionable part of London. All she could offer was strong tea and buns. Yet because of who she was she attracted to that flat almost every major literary figure of the twenties. (155)

Watson narrates that public relations-like activities go back so far in history that the ancient Babylonians and Sumerians in what is now Iraq around 3,000 years ago. The widely known term 'public relations' was probably first used in the US "around the turn of the 20th century" (43). Watson mentions the US historian Scott Cutlip, who identified a Boston publicity agency, The Publicity Bureau, established in 1900, as the first public relations agency in that country. In the UK, the Marconi company sent out its first news release in 1910. The first British public relations agency, Editorial Services, was set up in London in 1924 and the first holder of a "public relations officer" post was appointed in 1925. (Watson, 43). As we see, the word *publicity* was quite "in fashion" in the age of modernism and Sitwell again turned out to be in the avant-garde of cultural development.

Pritchard claims that the usage of publicity in modernist arts was inspired partly by the character of Sergey Diaghilev, who had the reputation of a rude, but talented eccentric, bright entrepreneur. In her opinion, such Diaghilev's notoriety added a lot to the success of the "Ballets Russes" enterprise among the public. (Pritchard, 9) There are examples of public figures in cultural circles, who went through similar criticisms about the quality of their work and their personality. One of them was a Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, whose biography

was written by Edith Sitwell's brother Sacheverell. In the book *Liszt*, Sacheverell Sitwell suggests that the composer had a great skill in intentionally maintaining his social image (extravagant, eccentric, and magnetic) that "overshadowed" his skill of playing the piano. (43) Undoubtedly, Edith Sitwell in both developing her above mentioned "transcendental technique" praised by Liszt and his approach in "fashioning" his artistic persona. Therefore, Sitwell took other composers and men of arts as a model in order to "fashion" her artistic persona as well as to promote her poetry to masses.

One of the several characteristic features of high modernism in 1920s, apart from those mentioned above, was the idea of "union of arts" – the involvement of other branches of art in the presentation of a musical, literary or poetic piece of arts. The phenomenon of "union of arts" was well demonstrated in the Diaghilev's ballet performances. When it comes to poetry, the "union of arts" adds to it a cooperation with performance staging techniques, theatrical decorations, actors' playing, musical setting. Poetry becomes more than a printed version of art on a paper. Sitwell intensely used this modernist approach in most of her poetic verse, especially the ones, that were introduced as a performance (in case with *Façade*), recorded or recited by her.

Commedia dell'arte comes up as a part of the "union of arts" phenomenon. Its elements had been introduced into almost all arts in the period of modernism: music, theatre, painting, literature. Martin Green and John Swan, in their book *The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell' Arte and the Modern Imagination* identify it as a "genre of farcical comedy", a "form of improvised theatre that emerged in Renaissance Italy". (8) Green and Swan explain that the commedia's lasting appeal lay in its recognizable stock of characters: Pulcinella, Colombine, Harleguin, and Pierrot. Pierrot is probably the most recognizable, and the most ubiquitous in Sitwell's writing: "the distant, lovelorn sad clown with a white powdered face and associated with moonstruck melancholia" (Green, Swan, 45).

In the world of art, modernism marks the beginning of the distinction between “high” art and “low” art. Rahn discusses that the educational reforms of the Victorian Age had led to a rapid increase in literacy rates, and therefore a greater demand for literature or all sorts. A popular press quickly developed to supply that demand. The sophisticated literati looked upon this new popular literature with scorn. Writers who refused to bow to the popular tastes found themselves in a state of alienation from the mainstream of society. To some extent, this alienation fed into the stereotype of the aloof artist, producing nothing of commercial value for the market. (Rahn, www. online-literature.com) Sitwell introduced the standard of high and low in many of her poems through the concepts related to music: it was her simple nursery rhymes, the primitive and sophisticated placed together in one Sitwellian poetic context.

During the time of modernism, puppetry and pantomime began to spread all over theatrical performances in Britain and in Europe. The interest in this kind of theatrical art had appeared partly due to its relation to early mentioned concepts of “high” and “low” culture, alienation and mechanization. (Green, Swan, 47) The very history of pantomime culture and *commedia dell'arte* is an integral part of cosmopolitanism. Puppetry also called into question the power relations of artistic production (Green, Swan, 47)Both questions were a matter of great anxiety and debate in musical and literary modernist culture. The Sitwells were also moved by the Russian Ballet productions of *Petrushka*, “which inherited the aesthetics of puppetry and *commedia dell'arte*. (Pritchard, 35) In *commedia dell'arte*, mask and puppetry were some of the crucial aesthetic elements.

One of the consequences of the continuing industrial and cosmopolitan progress was the urbanization and mechanisation of life. A human in such a world felt very lonely and alienated. Alienation reflected not only the ordinary people, but the men of letters and arts. Jane Dowson claims that “the modernist revolution turned away from ordinary language and

everyday life" (163). A modern poet was a cliché for an alienated poet, and Sitwell was one of them. She lived a very unconventional life (single, living together with two of her brothers, in love with a homosexual Russian avant-garde painter Pavel Tchelitchev) and partly demonstrating her protest against the established social tradition.

Rahn remarks that the academic world of modernism became something of a refuge for disaffected artists. (www.online-literature.com) Sitwell's refuge was in the same home with her brothers. D.H. Lawrence describes his opinion about the Sitwell family in the following comment: "I never in my life saw such a strong, strange family complex; as if they were marooned on a desert island, and nobody in the world but their lost selves. Queer!" (Pearson, title list). In order to stand for her own vision of a direction for a possible poetic development Sitwell would need to stay outside, apart from the rest. However, Edith was just the right person to become the modernist outsider: being a girl, she had always suffered from her mother's humiliation. In fact, her mother's treatment had inspired Edith to rebel, to stay affront, to be alone against the whole world.

Edith Sitwell had an extraordinary appearance that made her different, alienated from the rest. The young woman was six feet in height, with a "nose so beaky that she may use it to spear cocktail olives".(Greene, 36) This ugliness came from Edith Sitwell's grandmother (on her mother's side) and the royal Plantagenets ancestors. (Greene, 36) Edith had had all possible ground for the airs and high self-esteem due to her resemblance with Queen Elizabeth. She had a great affinity for Elizabeth saying that they were born on the same day of the month and about the same hour of the day. (Braham ,www.ebscohost.com) The eccentric avant-garde lifestyle and look was a way to express her inside world. It was also a way to find herself by living through the rejection from the public and society, and, eventually, it was a way to find the 'Englishness 'of an individual and 'Englishness' of the

English society in general. In other words, it was a way to look for the personal and national identity of the British Empire at the stage of transition from being a World Empire.

Edith Sitwell's poetry written after the year of 1920 is identified as an avant-garde modernist poetry meaning that it was very innovative, experimental and radical - against all previously established norms and standards in literature. Jane Dowson singles out a breaking sentence and a breaking sequence of a poem as one of the distinguishing features for avant-garde poetry. (167). Richard Murphey describes avant-garde poetry as the one that generates entirely new conventional artistic (poetic) forms. (13) In his book *Theorizing the Avant-Garde* Murphey speaks about montage as an avant-garde poetic instrument. (13) He explains that the aim of montage technique is to interrupt the harmonious structure, to disrupt sense of unity, to create chaos. (Murphey, 13-15) He adds that the reader's feedback to such a technique is disappointment and dissatisfaction. According to him, the montage-like construction corresponds to the new relationship with reality. Montage was one of the Dame Sitwell's most preferred instruments in her poetry.

In order to distinguish and appreciate avant-garde literary innovations brought by Sitwell into poetry, this study will review the situation with modernist music. It should help comprehend whether there are similar techniques in Sitwell's poetry and in the art of modernist music.

1.3.Modernism, Music and Poetry: the Union of Arts

Music and language are completely different and separate media. Nevertheless, questions concerning possible links between musical form and the meaning related to it as well as literature-music relationship are extremely complex. Dilemmas of musical meaning, the connection between music, language, literature and the whole society have been always bothering critics and the reader. Adriana Varga in her book *Virginia Woolf and Music* formulates the same problem as follows: "Music theorists have always been attempting to

understand music and musical meaning within the social and cultural context in which they have developed."(6) They have formulated several types of enquiries concerning the subject: 1) Is music like a language? 2) How do text and music relate within a work? How can a work of art in one media be "translated" into another media?" (Varga, 6)

Moreover, Daniel Albright in his book *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* claims that the strong bond between music and language had also bothered most modernist poets. (26-35) They longed to reflect this interconnection within a form of a word which explained the obsession with an experiment on the musical qualities of a text – dissonance and rhythm. Such an experiment represented for them a possibility to find a new way of interpreting modernity.

Albright generalizes the problem by stating that modernist writers were "drawn to the conditions of music in order to "test the limits of literary form and genre" they worked with. (29) In his book he emphasises that such great figures in literary modernism as James Joyce, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot were at the heart of the tendency to explore the reality through the prism of music and literature. (29-32) James Joyce sets the musical "epiphanies" of its characters against the material circumstances from which the music emerges in his *Dubliners*; *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* depicts Stephen Daedalus' obsession with the properties of music and rhythmic language in his search for an authentic, autonomous aesthetic space. In his *The Wasteland (*1922), for example, T.S. Eliot alludes to Richard Wagner and interrogates the effect of rhythm in the poem.

While reading Edith Sitwell's poetry, it becomes obvious that the poetess was asking herself the questions about the quality of literary-music relationships: "Is music like a language?" To give an answer to the question, Sitwell decides to trace the effect from the founding elements in music (sound, rhythm and noise) in a poetic text.

Raymond Williams in his book *The Long Revolution* remarks that there was a group of "historically minded" musicologists, who reminded literary critics that music derives not only from indispensable creative energies and choices, but also from a matrix of historical, institutional, and psychological pressure. (72) Regarding the critic's statement, it becomes clear that to write a music for a composer is not simply to listen to music in his heart or mind. It is also a desire to reflect the ongoing historical events, evolutionary processes, social developments and changes. In other words, musicians wished to participate in the pace of history and bring a message to masses in the score of their music. This desire easily explains the direction in which modern music developed: it went towards exploration of noise that characterized the rapidly industrialized modern epoch.

Naturally, a debate on the value of noise and sound and their cultural significance had arisen. Luigi Russolo, an Italian modernist composer, builder of experimental musical instruments, explains the reason for the situation in his futurist manifesto of 1913 "The Art of Noise". He thinks that the evolution toward noise-sound was only possible at the beginning of the twentieth century. (6) In his opinion, "the ear of an eighteenth century man never could have withstood the discordant intensity of some of the chords" produced by modernists. Moreover, the man of the modernist age was "asking for bigger acoustic sensations" - for the variety of noise-sounds. (Russolo, 6). Russolo remarks: "...for years, Beethoven and Wagner have deliciously shaken our hearts. Now we are fed up with them. This is why we get infinitely more pleasure imagining combinations of the sounds of trolleys, autos and other vehicles, and loud crowds, than listening once more, for instance, to the heroic or pastoral symphonies". (6)

On the one hand, noise became criticised. It had been associated with public forms of discourse and rumours. On the other hand, noise was defined as a symbol of modern life, a method to interpret the new historical and cultural context of the century. From the

perspective of modernism, music had acquired a new ability to critique – critique the presence of noise and too much noise in a world life. This way, modernist music contributed to "reconsidering cultural and institutional forces with its artistic performance". (Epstein, vi) In other words, music became a form of responding to the social context, a way of registering and expressing the "sound" of history. Considering this conclusion about the modernist music, it becomes clear that Edith Sitwell attempted to introduce music into her poetry in order to assign to it the same qualities of social and historical criticism.

Based on the earlier mentioned aspects, music turned out to be quite a desirable material for modernistic experimentation. Russolo supports and develops the idea of noise exploration as a part of this experiment. Hence, modernist musicians proclaimed noise "as grounds for musical exploration" and understood it as a kind of raw material appropriate for their experimentation. They tended to engage with modernist music as a feedback to the increasing presence of noise in the urban traffic, new media and recording technologies, and the sounds of "great battles".

The futurist composer concludes that the direct noise was of an interest for the cultural experimentation: "seemingly non-musical sounds" carried much significant information within themselves; the sounds of sirens, airplane propellers, train whistles and other noises of the mechanized world characterized the modern age. Moreover, the composer defines six categories of noises for a modernist orchestra, which include whispers, shrill sounds mutterings, cracks, rustlings, buzzings, grumbles, jingles, grunts, shuffles. He adds noises of falling water, animal and human voices such as shouts, moans, screams, sobs as the most prominent characteristics of fundamental noises. (Russolo, 10) Surprisingly, when defining these characteristics of modernist experimental music, the composer gives a detailed description of Edith Sitwell's poetic language. In Sitwell's poetry, the reader meets

exactly the same modernist conceptions of noise and non-musical sound as mentioned by Luigi Russolo.

Within the scope of the above-mentioned interest in the value of noise, the value of assonance and dissonance was also being experimented on in modernist music. Matthew Riley in his book *"British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960"* finds an explanation for this appreciation of dissonances: "The loss of belief in timeless, classical ideas in arts is under question: the past is distant, aesthetic values are relative. These developments open the way for ugliness, caricature, incoherence and dissonances as legitimate aesthetic phenomena" (6).

J. Epstein in his dissertation *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* demonstrates his own comprehension of the same idea. He outlines that modernist music "was on the verge of rethinking cultural effects of dissonances and consonances, in order to rethink the very foundation and definition of culture" (xvii). Regarding these two statements by Riley and Epstein, it becomes clear why Sitwell concentrated so much on this part of her poetry. Her desire to experiment with such compounds of music as assonances and dissonances demonstrates her awareness and comprehension of their significance in a literary text.

As well as modernism in general, modernist music tried to review the previously established art forms in order to re-establish them in a new, radical manner. İt was a period of change and development for the general musical language. New innovative approaches, new melodic, harmonic, sonic and rhythmical patterns had been developed. Together with new musical techniques, new forms of aesthetic musical appreciation were under scrupulous re-evaluation.

As a result of such experimentations, a new kind of music appeared. Jazz was one of those new potentially "far from being innocent" modernist musical genres. Charlotte de Mille in her book *Music and Modernism, 1849-1950* calls jazz the type of music that

appealed to “the political left during the Great Depression and after, a voice for a democratic change” (6). The new music, as well as the new poetry, was designed to disturb, to awaken minds, and to encourage them to question and reconsider the previously accepted traditional forms. Jazz rhythm was one of Sitwell’s favourite rhythms, which she introduced in some of her *Façade* poems.

Among the leading composers of modernism were such names as: Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, George Antheil, Busoni, Ansermet, Walton, Lambert, Sergey Prokofiev and others. Their achievement was the rejection of previously established tonality, avoidance of a metrical rhythm, creation of a musical piece with an “open-end”. According to Riley, such kind of music brought up for debates the questions of logic in a history, its discontinuity and implied a need for a significant historical transformation. (6).

Matthew Riley in his book *British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960* claims that Britain was slow to respond to the ideas of modernism to compare to Europe. According to him, the modernist production was not strong enough “even in the well-cultivated fields of visual arts and literature” (Riley, 7). The reason for that was fact that the British industrial society had developed earlier and grown steadily. There were no military invasions or political revolutions in the country. Logically, the effect of modernization in Britain was not experienced as a “sudden, collective shock”,” as it happened in Europe. Riley remarks that “Britain’s route through modernity” explains why by the end of the nineteenth century – in a World of imperialism - humanism, “inherited from the Renaissance and Enlightenment”, met with limited response from the artists and intellectuals” (Riley, 7).

Vaughan Williams in his article “Should Music Be National?” mentions the so-called "cigar” theory of music, applicable to England. The theory implies that “music is not an industry which flourishes naturally” in England. (3-22) The idea suggests that those who want to hear the music of great aesthetic qualities and “can afford it, must hire it from

abroad" - the same way as cigar-smokers prefer to smoke cigars produced in those countries, where climate permits it. (Williams, 3-22) The theory also explains where the British slow response to the twentieth century modernity came from.

The situation with the slow response was disappointing for the national composers. İt was sad for the Sitwells, who followed the latest trends in arts, literature and music on the continent. Due to this, Edith Sitwell and her brothers had to take the blow to withstand their affection for experiment in literature (poetry in particular) and to be the often misunderstood and socially rejected forerunners in art. It was a price they paid willingly.

Riley writes that technical innovation, however, was not completely absent from Britain. (9) The most advanced Continental music was well known in London in the first decades of the twentieth century. Most progressive composers visited the city and promoted their work. Before the First World War London heard Elektra, Prometheus, Petrushka, Jeuxand LeSacre du Printemps. (Riley, 2) Adriana Varga states that London staged the works by such composers as Arnold Schoenberg, Manuel de Falla, Igor Stravinsky, Maurice Ravel; works of modernist continental composers of the Second Viennese School were sometimes broadcasted by the BBC in the inter-war period. (7) She remarks that such introductions of avant-garde music to the old fashioned Georgian Britain had caused constant debates about the performances and ambiguous reception of the music. To compare to the continent, British music was at the state of "backwardness" and excessive conservativism. (Varga, 7)

Stephen Lloyd in his book *William Walton: Muse of Fire* writes that, at that time when Edith Sitwell started her collaboration on *Façade (1922*) with Walton, Charles Stanford was the head of the Royal College of Music (the most important pedagogue in England). Stanford aimed to "reinforce British musical industry by publishing English church music, "ephemeral pianoforte music", "worthless ballads and part-songs". (9-11) He was opposed to the "Philistinism" – a "bizarre" experiment with music on the continent. Stanford considered

German experimentation with avant-garde music to be “infecting”, “with nationalistic aggression” and gave his preference to the ephemeral music considering that music origin should always be national. According to the composer, national idiom of music should be preferred to a more cosmopolitan one. As a result, Stanford gave his life to develop music “that is going at home, in the schools, and in the local choral societies” (Lloyd, 9). With such an approach to the development of national music, it was extremely difficult for Sitwell and Walton to withstand the public negative attitude when achieving what they intended to.

Considering the state with British music, the phenomenon of “the Ballets Russes” had caused one of most shocking and rocking musical experiences, when introduced to the British audience. The Ballets Russes were ballet performances staged by a company founded in Russian. The impresario of the company was an art critic and a patron – Sergei Diaghilev. The ballets combined Russian and Western traditions with new tendencies of Modernism. Pritchard writes that the company of “the Ballets Russes” thrilled and shocked audiences with its powerful fusion of choreography, music, design and dance.” (9) The writer adds that most creative and talented artists of modernism were brought together. They, in turn, brought together the most important artistic developments of the early twentieth century – Futurism, Cubism and Surrealism. (9)

Modernist trends were reflected in the stage decoration, costumes, dancing techniques and music. Such ballet dancers as Mikhail Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Bronislava Nijinska and George Balanchine “liberated the body from the constraints of classical training”, thus, making a revolution in dance that changed the history of ballet. (Pritchard, 9) The impresario also commissioned young, innovative composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev and Erik Satie. It was also Diaghilev’s rude, unpredictable persona that attracted not less attention that the art he created and patronized.

Diaghilev's company first appeared in London between 1911-1916. İt produced over 30 ballets and operas within the period. (Riley, 67) This period was known as a "low theatrical production" period in British culture. "Sunday Times" described Stravinsky's music as "very much in the modern movement". (Riley, 69) British musicians were under the effect of this "impressionistic in character, very advanced in its idioms, free and varied in its rhythm with elaborately scored new harmonies" (Riley, 69)

Sitwell's poetry coincided in its theme, style, idea and technique with the tendencies proclaimed by modernist music. In this atmosphere of experimentation, Edith Sitwell was greatly influenced by her brother Sacheverell – a poet, art and music critic. Sacheverell, indeed, had a passion for music and regularly educated himself on this subject. His passion motivated him for creation Mozart's and Liszt's biographies. (Drabble, 939) He was also known for his scenario for *The Triumph of Neptune* ballet. Lynn Garafola writes in his book *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* that "it was through Diaghilev, that Sacheverell met the English composer Lord Berners", with whom he collaborated on the ballet: a "Victorian pantomime of children's toys which "transposed" or at least "evoked" "details of modern life" (Garafola, 46). It was through Sacheverell that Edith learnt to appreciate modernist music.

One of the most foremost British composers, Francis Routh, writes in his book *Contemporary British Music* that Sacheverell Sitwell initialized patronage of Diaghilev together with other avant-garde composers such as Busoni, Ansermet, Walton and Lambert, striving to go away from the "established English academic style". (Routh, 67) Routh describes that the Sitwells organized receptions and evening cocktails for the men of arts. They patronized the new cultural experimentation of the age and longed to bring the fresh wave to the British reader and audience. By doing this, they contributed towards "an internationalism of British music". (Routh, 68) Francis Routh has a high opinion on what the Sitwell's had made for British modern music. Their work, he says, was even more significant

regarding the fact that, until almost the beginning of the Second World War, general musical atmosphere in Britain was not in favour of transformation – in style, in manner, in sounding. (Routh, 78)

Thus, due to her brother's activity, Edith Sitwell, "like many British writers, "came to appreciate modern music through the notoriety of Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. "Though Edith Sitwell denies, in her autobiography, that the Ballets Russes influenced her poetry, she concedes that every poet was influenced by it to some extent" (Epstein, 198).

Music arranges its sound through variations and combinations of pitch and timbre, while poetry achieves its harmony through words with a particular combination of vowels and consonants and the sounds they produce. This combination of sounds creates the words texture and, relatively, the texture of a poem. It seems that Edith Sitwell was well aware that it is the duty of a poet to be aware of the cultural and philosophical significance of the poetic texture and choose a proper word to fulfil a required aesthetic task. She treats her poems as if she wrote musical scores for an orchestra. Every word, syllable, letter is of high importance in its overall role in one music-poetic whole.

According to Henry Reed, Sitwell goes deeper than that in her poems: she does not simply choose proper words for her verse but carries out particular poetic "studies" on the subject of poetry and music union. (114) Reed marks the experiment with poetic texture as Sitwell's first "study". He explains that in this "study" the poet observes the effect that texture has on rhythm, and the effect that elaborate patterns of rhymes and of assonances and dissonances have upon rhythm. (114) Reed titles this part of Sitwell's studies as the "study" of "verbal orchestration" and correlates it to one of the three "studies" carried out by the poet. (114) Reed states that "it is probably Rimbaud which Miss Sitwell has in mind as an example for her most striking experiments in rhythm, texture and sound". (117) He concludes that "these experiments have always been the best known part of Miss Sitwell's work", and thinks

that the pieces in *Façade* and " many of *Bucolic Comedies* and some songs in "Prelude to a Fairy Tale" belong to this part of her "studies".(Reed, 114).

The understanding of texture effect made Sitwell not only and experimenting avant-garde poet but also a qualified critic of other modernist poets. Below is Sitwell's appreciation of Gerard Hopkins poem "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in terms of its poetic texture, which she provides in her book *Aspects of Modern Poetry*:

> We have the huge primeval swell of the sea, with its mountain-heights and its hell-depths, we have the movement before life began, conveyed by technical means. In the slow and majestic first line, the long and strongly-swelling vowels, and the alterative m's, produce the sensation of an immense wave gathering itself up, rising slowly, ever increasing in its huge power, till we come to the pause that follows the long vowel of me. (Sitwell, *Aspects of Modern Poetry*, 177)

The second "study", singled out by Henry Reed, is Sitwell's "search for mastery over a line", that finally leads to both a discipline and a liberation into freedom of expression. Here Sitwell achieves her mastery over the casually rhythmed blank verse line. (117) By playing with rhythm, Edith Sitwell intended to "reawaken" the lifeless, dull, and uninspiring world of poetry on the brink of two centuries. Edith Sitwell named these rhythms a reaction to the mechanization and urbanization of modern life. In her comments on her own poetry, she states that "rhythm shapes not only the sound of poetry, but the aural experience of reality" (Sitwell, *Aspects of Modern Poetry*, 156). The poet's experimentation with metrical patterns and rhythms becomes another component that unifies her verse with music.

The final Sitwell's study, marked by Henry Reed, is the study of diction - the acquisition of personal voice and the proper selection of vocabulary. (Reed, 114) This study covered the recital and recording of poems and creation of avant-garde performances out of these poetry recitals. It started with *Façade* and continued after the Second World War when

Sitwell recited and recorded her poems together with one of the most profound voices of Britain – Dylan Thomas.

To carry out the abovementioned studies would require proper education, wondering mind, wit, intelligence, talent, strong will and determination to risk. Edith Sitwell had already possessed all of them - the Modern epoch and Modernism only provided the required cultural heritage, instruments and environment to create what the poet had created by means of the union of poetry and music.

CHAPTER II

2. EDITH SITWELL'S EARLY POETRY. "THE AVENUE", "MANDOLINE", "SPRING"

Edith Sitwell's early modernist poetry perfectly illustrates her preoccupation with the subject of music. In her early poems, she makes intensive use of vocabulary related to music into the text as well as the modernist conceptions of noise and non-musical sounds, which were of primary importance to the modernist music of the period. It is obvious that she tries to unite her early poems with other arts (as Sergey Diaghilev did in his ballets staging), and the first art, she is well aware of, is music.

In this chapter, Sitwell's poems entitled as musical concepts will be analysed. and trace how "the musical theme" helps create imagery and frame ideas in the text. The poems chosen for the analysis are: "The Avenue", "Mandoline" and "Spring" (the last one - from the series of Bucolic comedies). We will try to find examples of the poet's preoccupation with the choice of vocabulary, her way of describing musical and non-musical sounds, introduction of techniques that were of importance to the modernist music of the time. We will also briefly analyse the plot and highlight general ideas transmitted with the help of all early mentioned poetic instruments. I have chosen these early poems in order to mark general modernist trends in Sitwell's poetry and illustrate the so-called "preliminary scratches" of her far-reaching modernist experimentation of 1920s.

2.1."The Avenue"

The poem "The Avenue" is one of many possible examples of how the poetess demonstrates her love for music and the talent to insert it into her work. The general idea of the poem is based on a music-related metaphor: the avenue, she means, is a human life that resembles the raw of piano keys. This avenue is the road that every person walks through. It

is the road of “semitones of might and right”. We live our lives as if “stumbling through the keys” of a musical instrument. Each of us plays one’s own melody of “right and wrong”, “black and white” – the colour of the piano keys. The piano becomes a symbol of the human life:

Promenades all hard and bright,

Long tails like the swish of seas,

Avenue of piano keys.

Meaning comes to bind the whole,

Fingers separate from thumbs,

Soon the shapeless tune comes’

Bestial efforts at man’s soul. (Sitwell, Collected Poems, 9)

The young poet thinks that the way a man lives his life is as clumsy, as unsophisticated as a “shapeless tune” played on a piano. The choice a human makes between right and wrong is the choice of a composer, writing his music. The chosen notes are often “false and shrill”. In spite of life difficulties there still is a worth-living meaning in it –“to bind the whole”. However, it is not easy at all. It requires “bestial efforts at man’s soul” to stay human, to properly choose between right and wrong to compose “one’s independent self-sustainable piece” of music. Every phrase, every idea in the poem is centred around music and musicality.

In “The Avenue” Sitwell starts to introduce characters from her favourite *commedia dell’arte*, the characters of which she will widely use in her later avant-garde poetry. These characters are a clown Pantaloon and a monkey in a “gilded ruche” Fanfreluche. Both of them are related to puppetry and symbolize humans’ lack of freedom, their being manipulated by a ruler – the puppeteer. They reflect the character of relations in the post-Victorian society. Their introduction brings up the culture of modern urbanization and its desolation.

The music-based metaphors continue further in the poem: the monkey moves and shivers on the surface of piano keys and flatters them “till they answer back/through the scale of centuries”, through “the difference between white and black”. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 9)

What distincts Sitwell’s early poetry is that it has more or less evident conclusion, which is not the case with the avant-garde poetry. In “The Avenue” the poet concludes that no matter what happens in life, one thing is fundamental – she is one whole with the person she loves. For Sitwell, the best way to put the situation in words is to use images of music, tunes and sounds:

Fundamentally

I am you, and you are me –

Octaves fall as emptily. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 9)

This short poem illustrates the poet’s early noticeable inclination to bring together music and musical features in a poetic text, to turn a poem into a tune, a song about life. It also demonstrates the poet’s skill to combine her sensitive character and imagination.

2.2. “Mandoline”

Another example of Sitwell’s early poems, where her profound interest in music is reflected, is “Mandoline”. The style of the poem is very similar to the one in “The Avenue”. Edith is not yet enough courageous to experiment in the manner of avant-garde fragmentation and montage-like construction, but her devotion to music is revealed in her poetic lines.

What is very musical about the poem is its very straightforward title - a musical instrument. This tendency will further develop into a constant habit of sticking to a theme of music when naming her poems. Analysing “Mandoline”, the reader again sees a number of

images related to music as well as theatre and visual arts. Sitwell will soon unite all these devices in the series of poems – *Façade(1922*).

The first lines open up with the description of dancing snow. From the very beginning the poet applies to the reader's sense of hearing. Snow dances. It is up to the reader to decide whether the music is heard or unheard:

Down in Hell's gilded street,

Snow dances.

Bright as a parakeet,

Or Punchinello,

All glistening yellow,

As fruit-jewels mellow

Glittering white and black

As the swan's glassy back.

On the Styx's soundless track (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 5)

While introducing the reader to the scene of following show, the poet surrounds the place with additional sounds, noises and voices. Sitwell's snow dances. Obviously, the dance is accompanied by music (no matter, heard or unheard). The underworld river Styx flows also "soundlessly". Snow "strikes" the glass house "wide as a puppet-booth". (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 4)The sound of snow "striking" reminds the poetic mind music of a "melon-shaped mandolin/ with the sharp tang and sheen" (Sitwell, *Collected poems,* 4)

Further in the poem, Edith Sitwell again introduces her favourite symbol of modernism – a puppet. Pantomime, puppetry, primitivism are all compounds of the same modernist technique. In "Mandoline" she draws the image of a puppet show. It is the festival of light, colour and brightness: "All glistening yellow,/ As fruit-jewels mellow". In the poem,

the Vanity Fair and the show go on while the human civilization is involved in the everyday theatrical performance. Edith Sitwell often used the image of "the pathetic clown, the fool of God, the Punchinello" to bring *commedia dell'arte* into life. This imagery also helps depict a human's condition in the time of modernism. There is an obvious resemblance between Sitwell's Punchinello is Stravinsky's Petrushka. Punchinello may also stand for another version of Harlequin or Pierrot, whom Theophile Gautier calls a passive, "disinherited being", "depersonalised ancient slave", representative of modern proletariat. (qtd. in Storey, 109)

Dorothy Hewett in her article "The Work of Edith Sitwell" writes that Edith Sitwell describes her own "extraordinarily brutal and sly poetic world of the rural fair, and the constant role of hers as the pathetic clown in the extract from the introduction to *Children's Tales from the Russian Ballet"*.(35) In the abstract below, Edith describes her comprehension of a puppet show scene and the sounds associated with it:

In Petrushka we see mirrored for us, in these sharp clear outlines and movements, all the philosophy of Laforgue, as the puppets move somnambulantly through the dark of our hearts. For this ballet, alone among them all, shatters our glass house about our ears, and leaves us terrified, haunted by its tragedy. The music, harsh, crackling rags of laughter, shrieks at us like some brightly-painted Punch and Judy show, upon grass as shrill as anger, as dulled as hate. Sometimes it jangles thin as the wires on which these half-human puppets move; or a little hurdy-gurdy waltz sounds hollow, with the emptiness of the hearts of passing people. (Sitwell qtd. in Hewett 35).

Indeed, Sitwell does not hesitate to introduce the "empty heart of the passing people" through an image of approaching trains and the noise they bring with them. Sitwell's talent to depict images with the help of music-and-sound-based metaphors reproduces the reader to the sound of approaching trains: the trains "sweep the empty floors". We even hear the black

veils that fall “soundlessly as any breeze”, tanging shutters, shrieking sheen - the imagery in the poem is based on the reader’s sense of hearing, and resembles the language of modernist music worked out by Luigi Russolo:

Trains sweep the empty floors –

Pelongs and pallampores.

Bulchauls and sallampores (Sitwell, Collected Poems, 5)

The “human empty heart” is the immense mechanized frame of the industrial machine – the train. This image also brings up the modernist idea of cosmopolitanism, immense size of the industrial world, the speed of mechanization and its power. The world is in the process of mechanization which results in the destruction of the puppetry sensitivity: the show comes to its end, the pure, sincere life is over. The lack of meaning in life is again reproduced by the poet through the conception of lack of sounds, lack of music:

Soundless as any breeze...

From isles in Indian seas.

Black spangled veils falling.

(the cold is appalling),

They wave fans, hear calling

The adder-flames shrieking slow... (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 5)

The puppet show ends, but the snow still falls down “dancing”, and “scratching the dust-pale faces of puppets”. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 5) This time the scratching echoes the “tuneless and “sharp as sin” sounds of a mandoline”. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 5) The conclusion again is here, and it is very much negative: the humanity goes “down in Hell’s empty street”. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 5) This is the destiny of the modern world.

2.3. “Spring”

“Spring” is a short poem to compare to those after 1922, but it contributes to the overall comprehension of what the early Sitwell was. The poem belongs to the cycle of *Bucolic comedies*, written before *Façade (1922).* Sitwell’s *Bucolic comedies* are full of a rustic atmosphere in which she penetrates the pastoral environment. In the poem Sitwell describes the beginning of spring which is symbolized by the arrival of spring fairies - “maids whose “sheepskin locks” are soft as music”. With their arrival the “fruit-buds begin to harden into sweet tunes”:

When Spring begins, the maids in flocks

Walk in soft fields, and their sheepskin locks

Fall shadowless, soft as music, round

Their jonquil eyelids, and reach the ground.

Where the small fruit-buds begin to harden

Into sweet tunes in the palace garden,” (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 14)

From the very beginning, the poet employs her favourite method of addressing to the reader’s sense of hearing and touch. She describes the sounds and textures of things in order to fulfil the naive sensitive imagery of spring. King Midas comprehends the spring arrival with the sounds of the “swan-bosomed sky” and draws his conclusion on the essence of life: “all is the surface, and so must die”. A “maiden fair” with “lips like that jangling harsh pink rain” helps further maintain this world imagery of non-musical sounds :

With the leaping goat-footed waterfalls cold

Shall be served for me on a dish of gold

By a maiden fair as an almond-tree,

With hair like the waterfalls’ goat-locks; she

Has lips like that jangling harsh pink rain,

The flower-bells that spirt on the trees again." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 14)

The poem ends in the same manner: the poet creates the imagery of "waterfalls singing their cold, forlorn madrigals" about the meaning of life and King Midas's power. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 15)

In the comments on her own poetry Edith Sitwell remarks that the images in *Bucolic Comedies* were considered to be very odd at the time when she wrote them. Critics regarded her early poetry imagery as "unreal and intended to shock". (Sitwell, "Some Notes on My Own Poetry", xxxiii) She says that to be in the avant-garde of the modernist literally movement made it difficult for a reader to evaluate and appreciate her novelty. (Sitwell, "Some Notes on My Own Poetry", xxxiv) When speaking about the hard-to-understand images Sitwell means her experiment in joining together the noise and sound aspect of an object in the phrases like "crab-apple tingling in the wind", "purring fire" and "creaking light" - all seemed strange and abnormal. (Sitwell, "Some Notes on My Own Poetry", xxxiv)

Edith Sitwell's early poetry justifies Dorothy Hewett's remark that "a poem to her [Sitwell] is an "intricate pattern of sound", and that her earlier works are "transitional efforts in the reproduction of horn pipe and mouth organ rhythms, jazz rhythms, and simple nursery rhyme metres" (36).

In her early poems, Sitwell starts her modernist experimentation in terms of elements of *commedia dell'arte*, such as puppetry, pantomime and primitivism. Her devotion to music is easy to notice, and reflects her style. The reader is not yet aware of this style and often finds it strange and extravagant. In the same time, the poem's structure is not yet quite avant-garde: not yet nonsensical and absurd as in her *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924) or *Façade (1922),* not yet discontinued and decentred as in *Gold Coat Customs (1929).* The poet shapes a logical beginning, a main body and a conclusion in her poems, which satisfies the reader looking for a sense of completion. In Sitwell's early poetry the reader once again realizes that

such poetry could be written only by a poet whose heart was not indifferent to music and everything related to it.

CHAPTER III

3. LATER POETRY: *FAÇADE*(1922), *THE SLEEPING BEAUTY* (1924), AND *GOALD COAST CUSTOMS* (1929)

3.1.*Façade* (1922)

In 1922, the same year that James Joyce published his *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot his *The Waste Land*, Dame Edith caused a lesser sensation with the publication of her *Façade*. *Façade* is Sitwell's poetic "scores" for the orchestra conducted by William Walton in the prominent year for the poetry of Modernism. *Façade*, in fact, was "spoken poetry" combined with chamber music in a dynamic interplay of stylized images, jaunty rhythms, and witty allusion. It was February, when Edith, Osbert, and Sacheverell Sitwell gave a private performance of *Façade*. In an L-shaped drawing room at her brothers' home at 2 Carlyle Square, Sitwell read her "decidedly eccentric" poems through a giant megaphone ("Sengerphone"), accompanied by "decidedly eccentric" music, from behind a painted screen.(Glendinning, 78)

Façade's strong bond with music probably starts with Sitwell's inspiration to her work, *Façade* was strongly inspired by three musical masterpieces: Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1911), Schoenberg's *Perrot Lunaire* (1912), and Satie's *Parade* (1917) (the collaboration among Jean Cocteau (scenario), Pablo Picasso(costumes and scenery), and Erik Satie (music)). (Riley, 15)

The next bond is its musical accompaniment by William Walton. William Walton was a gifted child whose talent developed with time in the stream of modernism. Walton positioned himself apart from the "generally conservative English musical scene". (Lloyd, 54) He was sixteen when he became an Oxford undergraduate student. The Dean, Thomas Strong, arranged scholarship for the student to help develop and educate such a talent. (Lloyd, 73) Nevertheless, Walton did not manage to graduate from the school due to

constant failing in non-musical subjects. At Oxford he befriended Edith Sitwell's brother Sacheverell Sitwell. Lloyd states that their friendship was so strong and fruitful that, nearly in a year after, Walton was referred to as "the forth Sitwell sibling" (45).

William was fortunate he was not able to attend the Royal College of Music. The Sitwells were happy about that since they thought that studying in the college would have prevented Walton's interest and taste in modernistic music. Therefore, William Walton managed to be away from the influence of the conservative pedagogue of the Royal College of Music – Charles Stanford. Having moved into the Sitwell's house, Walton found a home and friends, with whom he could immerse himself into deep modernist experiment. Epstein adds that "Benefiting from the financial patronage of the Sitwells and their friends, Siegfried Sassoon and Lord Berners among them, Walton saw himself liberated from academic life and moved from his rustic childhood home" (Lloyd, 65).He had always wished to create a new, "bizarre" music with "dancing rhythms". This type of music perfectly suited Edith Sitwell's "bizarre" poetic language.

Façade draws together music, literature and art in an unprecedented manner. The whole *Façade* "enterprise" was a "modernist experiment of avant-garde collage technique. Indeed, every element of the *Façade* poetic presentation had a deep meaning and vital significance in the poetry recital. Therefore, when discussing its musicality, this study will mean the following aspects:

- Music related vocabulary;
- The sound and rhythmical aspect of the text;
- The usage of a sengerphone (megaphone) and the idea of noise as a founding feature of modernist music. Sitwell's voice, as part of noise conception;
- Visual presentation (usage of a painted curtain and the mask image on it as a meaningful stage decoration element);

- Walton's musical accompaniment and main characteristics of his music
- *Commedia del arte* and puppetry. Their significance in understanding the philosophical meaning of a poetic text.

Sitwell's vocabulary choice, sound and rhythmical aspect of the verse will be further discussed in details, when analysing several of the most renowned poems of the cycle. At the moment it would be proper to mention the poet's overall preoccupation with the subject of music in *Façade.* It is reflected even on the stage of giving names to her poems. Most of the titles of the poems are either:

- names of musical instruments (The drum, the Hornpipe, Trio for Two Cats and A Trombone) or
- names of dances, which need a musical accompaniment to be performed (Country Dance, Fox Trot, Polka, Mazurka, Waltz, Tango-Pasodoble, Tarantella, Madam Mouse Trots), or
- terms related to music (Bells of Grey Cristal, Jodelling Song, Popular Song, Dark Song, Scotch Rhapsody, The Satyr in the Periwig, Lullaby for Jumbo).

By simply looking through the list of poems in the cycle, the reader can guess that the avant-garde poet had attempted to carry out an interesting experiment of creating her own idea about poetry.

Façade is also a good example of the Sitwell's experiments with the poetic meter. She breaks the lines in order to make it suit the Walton's music. The line here can be just a word or two. At first, it may seem insignificant, but in the available records, the reciter's voice appears and highlights the importance that is included in every short abrupt line. The original aim of such a device in *Façade* was to create the musical rhythm of a particular dance as well as the characters' attitude to their lives and events in it. It is also a way to go away from tradition, to leave the reader unsatisfied, to rebel.

Edith Sitwell evaluated a modern poet as the one who “stylizes his work in the same manner as that in which Rousseau, Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Modigliani, Stravinsky [and] Debussy stylize theirs”. (Sitwell, “Some Notes on My Own Poetry”, xxx) In *Façade* staging Sitwell had worked exactly in the prescribed style: she had unified avant-garde painting by Frank Dobson of the screen curtain that covered the poetry reciter and had found her own “British Stravinsky” to compose the music that England had waited so much for – William Walton.

One of the “stylized” musical devices of the performance was the 'Sengerphone'. Pall Mall Gazette explains: “Miss Sitwell repeated her poems to an accompaniment of four wind instruments, violoncello and percussion, devised by Mr W.T. Walton. The poems were read in monotone with great rhythmic emphasis through what was called in the programme a 'Sengerphone', which protruded through the mouth of a monstrous head painted on the curtain by Mr Frank Dobson. The object was, as Mr Osbert Sitwell explained, to prevent the personality of the reciter from getting between the poem and the audience. (Gazette qtd. in Lloyd, 45) He writes that the aim of *Façade* “was to provide a suitable musical background for the recital and “to abolish the necessity of the reciter to indulge in gesture...or to be seen at all”, to, so to say, “erase the unwanted personality” (31). The result was quite the opposite: the sengerphone personalized rather than depersonalized the piece; more attention was drawn to the unseen speaker. The most interesting is that audience was left “to interpret it in the light of their feeling about the Sitwell”, which could be put in one phrase – a “queer English eccentric”. (Sitwell. O., 32)

Another important compound of understanding Sitwell’s verse, was her own voice and diction. Osbert Sitwell is adding that it was difficult to decide about “how to place a voice of the reciter without compelling him to shout, on a level with the musical instruments employed”. (Sitwell. O., 48) The speaker's voice must have both maintained tempo and draw

out the appropriate character or tone colour without help from the orchestra. (Sitwell. O., 48) Edith Sitwell was known for her outstanding deep sonorous voice that just suited the artistic challenge.

According to Hewett, it was mainly the suitability of Edith Sitwell's voice for the recitation of her own poems that influenced Gerald Cumberland's consideration that the recital was a success. (38) He wrote that: "Miss Sitwell half spoke, half shouted her poems in strict monotone, emphasising metre rather than rhythm." (Cumberland qtd. in Hewett, 38) Sitwell's voice together with the reading style added a lot to positive comprehension and reception of her *Façade* poems.

Riley concludes that in *Façade* Edit Sitwell had stylistically changed *the Pierrot Lunair*e phenomenon with her own voice." (132). Riley also emphasizes that, due to the Sitwell's voice, *Façade* "shared much in genre, but not in style with Pierrot Lunaire". (132) Epstein outlines that such concentration on the element of voice in *Façade*, "in spite of its ostensible lack of literary theme", seemed important because it spoke about the problem of what makes an authentic poetic voice, and also of what constitutes authentic Englishness (215).

The original aim of megaphone usage was to make it impossible to distinctly hear the words pronounced through it. In the same time, the whole impression was that of confusing noise, that prevents a human from understanding each other and the surrounding. The role of the Sitwell's avant-garde nonsensical verse was not less than that for the 'noise' conception. The Sitwell's poems intended to amplify the effect of noise and misunderstanding in the modern society. Jean Cacteau in his article "The Collaboration of Parade" writes that in terms of its approach to noise, modernist classical theatre had carries out its own experiment with noise "in which the most human-looking characters seem the most mechanical" (56). Edith Sitwell had managed to achieve the same effect within the form of poetry and music union.

Another element that was inherited by Sitwell from Stravinsky's *Petrushka* in order to obscure the speaker and shift the audience's focus to the conception of noise was the curtain. The Sitwells claimed that the original intention to use the covered body technique was to draw more attention to the poetry and the accompanying music, the audience proved that it hardly achieved what it claimed to. Virginia Woolf formulated a comment that cast a shadow on the experimental Sitwellian performance of *Façade.* She told that the Sitwells "recited sheer nonsense through megaphones" and that she was not able to judge the poetry as she could not actually hear it. (Glendinning, 76)

The curtain hid the body of the speaker not simply behind a screen, but behind a screen with a "vaguely "moon-like" mask" on it. The poetic speaker seems to be peering through the eyeholes of the mask, while the text of the poem constructed the topic of race in stock, stereotypical fashion. (Glendinning, 72)

Riley describes that the image on the curtain was thoroughly thought over. It was supposed to somehow reflect the content of the poems cycle as well as to appropriate the ideas of avant-garde (that Edith Sitwell was longing to bring to the reader). He adds that the Sitwells hired Frank Dobson to paint the primitive image of the central primitive mask on the curtain. Dobson was exactly the right person for the task who would perfectly understand the aim and idea of the painting (Riley, 132) In fact, the *Façade* curtain demonstrated both the (black) mask and the (white) face behind the mask, adjacent to one another, thus, merging the Greek mask with Pierrot (white) and the African mask with Harlequin (Black).

The effect of mask on the curtain was the intensified interest to the actor's body and distinction of expressive quality to the actor's voice. It also created an allusion to the Pierrot character from *commedia dell'arte* (who wore make-up rather than a mask). Theophile Cautier sees Pierrot as "the ancient slave, the modern proletariat, the passive and disinherited being" (qtd. in Lloyd, 59). In the same time, the curtain, rhythmical music and the Sitwell's

verse drew attention to the bodies in the audience. Epstein distinguished that the curtain of *Façade* "defected the pathos into the social setting of the audience: a social setting whose rich decoration exemplifies the "dandy-aesthetic culture" of which the Sitwells were a part" (242).

Matthew Riley suggests that the curtain was introduced as an avant-garde strategy to suggest the depersonalizing, automatic, mechanical quality of the performance, like the Cubist costumes for the theatre managers in *Parade*. (127) Undoubtedly, it was an integral part of the *Façade* poetry and music promotion.

The element of curtain, mask and megaphone usage may all be related to the methods of publicity that drew attention to the poet's personality, and thus, to her poetry. To conclude, in *Façade,* Sitwell rethinks the very concept of publicity by rethinking the very concept of her aesthetic influence. Epstein remarks that, in the poem, the two spheres dialectically enhance each other: while the noise of the social compels the Sitwells to seek new poetic rhythms, the pressures of aesthetic influence compel them to reorganize the rhythms of public life. (197)

One of the main roles in *Façade* was, of course, given to the musical part by Walton. Matthew Riley discusses that by 1930s, Walton could describe himself as a "jazz merchant", although he would refuse to admit it. (Riley, 137) His desire was to experiment with "politically and culturally potential jazz, but introduce traditional English popular culture into it. *Façade* gave him a chance to materialize the dream. In general, the music of *Façade* is more innocent—and less noisy—than that of *Parade*, but it still puzzled the more conservative sensibilities in British music. (Riley, 137)

Riley claims that, on the one hand, Walton's music in *Façade* is very much against the style established by the time. On the other one, he managed to find his unique style: Walton turns away "from the musical language of European avant-gardism and begins to

make more conscious allusions to local popular culture, referencing fragments of Victorian music hall song". (137) In *Façade* Walton creates a kind of collage of high and low cultural forms. (Riley, 137) Thus, he establishes a new British avant-garde music, different from the European one.

In this sense, Walton's music is very much like the Sitwell's poetry. Sitwell, together with the introduction of avant-garde style into her poetry, introduced references to personalities and images of Victorian England. Riley provides an example for that: he says that Edith Sitwell takes the title of an English music hall song "I Do Like to Be by the Seaside" (by John A. Glover- Kind) and use the phrase as the original title for the poem, citing the well-known song. This way the content of the poem reflected the specific characteristics of British culture with a very European form and style. The poem itself is absurd, but Walton compensates for the lack of meaning in the verse by musical recollections of Edwardian seaside holiday. (Riley, 140) Another example is Sitwell's introduction of such characters as Lord Byron, Wellington and Marquis of Bristol into *Façade*'s "Polka".

To see me fire pistol

Though the distance blue as my coat

Like Wellington, Byron, the Marquis of Bristol,

Busbied great trees float. (Sitwell, *Façade*, 67, 12-15)

"Hornpipe" narrates the sea journey of Queen Victoria and Lord Tennyson, exemplifies this tendency to cite and ironize the rhythms of nationalism. The words of "Hornpipe" more or less match the rhythmic pattern of the well-known "College Hornpipe," an association that is distinctly English... The first two bars of "Hornpipe" comprise a snare drum beating the rhythm of "Rule, Britannia! / Britannia rules the waves". (Riley, 139)

Another example of the Sitwell-Walton cooperation is represented when Walton adds decorative Hispanic touches with the castanets, while Sitwell's text is full of "Spanishisms"

in “Long Steel Grass”: “Where stalks Il Capitaneo/ Swaggart braggadocio/ Sword and moustachio...” (Sitwell, Façade, 29-31).

The experiment reflected the anxieties about finding a new national identity. It addressed the problem of not just cosmopolitanism, but of the whole empire. By combining “the playfulness of music hall with the edginess of avant-garde art”, Sitwell and Walton had created a society representing “a concert hall turned inside out”. (Epstein, 222) This way the union of poetry and music was meant to define a suitable English or British musical and literary idiom, the society was in need for, after the First World War.

Of course, it is *Façade*’s entertainment form and its recital with the still new-for-Britain type of music, which drew the critics’ and readers’ interest to the Sitwell’s verse. Poems, however, are not less interesting than the music setting. They are full of innovations and avant-garde techniques brought into English literary culture. One of those innovations was the union of poetry and music. In *Façade* the poet intensively experiments with music, dance, rhythm, sound as well as montage-like avant-garde techniques.

“Hornpipe” appears as an opening piece in the serious of *Façade* poems. It is the first track on the 1953 recording. Pamela Hunter explains that *hornpipe* identifies a musical instrument and a popular dance of English sailors. (Sitwell, *Façade*, 23) She adds that *hornpipe* also means a sailor’s dance. (Sitwell, *Façade*, 23 The dance is not a communicative one: it is danced alone and for pleasure. Thus, the reader understands that a modernist theme of alienation is “encoded” in the title of the poem. *Hornpipe* here symbolizes the appalling lack of communication, isolation and lack of understanding – one of the poet’s favourite topics. (Sitwell, *Façade*, 23)

The selected musical title implies that the poems might have a particular musical rhythm. Sitwell does not hesitate to reflect it in her poem. “From the very beginning, the

poem sets a spirited tone for the work and a quick tempo. Marsha Bryant identifies the tempo as “fluctuating between lento and allegro” (245):

Sailors come

To the drum

Out of Babylon;

Hobby-horses

Foam, the dumb

Sky rhinoceros-glum

Watched the courses of the breakers’ rocking-horses and with

Galucis,

Lady Venus on the settee of the horsehair sea!

Where Lord Tennyson in laurels wrote a Gloria free,..(Sitwell, *Façade,* 20, 1-13)

The poet introduces a musical instrument to achieve a specific goal - Walton is doing the same through his musical accompaniment of the poem. Riley explains that “Walton here introduces a satire on imperialism by opening the piece with a witty rhythmical allusion to Rule Britannia” (134).

Another specific feature is the introduction of a musical instrument – a drum – in the verse which dictates the whole spirit for the poem. A drum is the musical instrument Sitwell often uses in her poetry for creating specific images. Pamela Hunter outlines that here the drum represents the beating of the time and emphasizes “the reforming spirit of the age calling to the repentance”. (22) She discusses that the sound of the drum comes “Out of Babylon”, which strengthens the theme of misunderstanding and loneliness in the “outdated Victorian-Georgian society”. (Hunter, 22)

Sitwell continues to develop the question of the royalty and empire with the help of words. The room in the poem is “the Great Drawing Room at Renishaw” – the Sitwell’s

family estate, where she grew up. Queen Victoria is seated in the drawing room. Pamela Hunter comments that here "one might have found Grandmother Sitwell and her daughter Florence" – the Edith Sitwell's mother. Hunter discusses that their life style is appreciation of worldly pleasures and hypocrisy since Lady Ida practises false kindness on the children". (Sitwell, *Façade,* 22)

Hunter critiques that all is not as it seems in this society; the Victorian properness on the surface conceals the inconsistency of a human nature. Prince Albert is dead and Venus is unfaithful to her husband. (Hunter in Sitwell, *Façade,* 22)

New-arise Madam Venus for the sake from far

Came the fat and zebra'd emperor from Zanzibar

Where like golden bouquets lay far Asia, Africa, Cathay

All laid before that shady lady by the fibroid Shah. (Sitwell, *Façade,* 20, 14-17)

The "zebra'd emperor" combines his wealth with dark skin and amoral living. The fibroid Shah suggests the decadence of the Persian leader as he indulges his passions freely. (Sitwell, *Façade,* 23). Marsha Bryant evaluates the Sitwell's "fat and zebra'd emperor from Zanzibar" as the one who "signifies the hedonistic, bestial African of Britain's geopolitical imaginary". (253)

The "sea" adds to the idea of Victorian Aristocratic Life and British Colonialism. On the one hand, the Sea in the poem is the symbol of freedom, space, movement, adventure and fancy" (Hunter in Sitwell, 22). On the other one, Sitwell does not describe these images "blandly". The sea also brings a negative side to the image of the British Empire. This is achieved through the imagery of foam that resembles "hobby-horses". The "dumb" and "rhinoceros-glum" sky completes the sea imagery. The drawing-room and the sea are linked by the numerous horses, representing the "drawing-room attitude" and the Britain's colonial power. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 155)

"Hornpipe" perfectly illustrates the importance the poetess attaches to the rhythm of poetic form. The poem contains several end rhymes, but the pattern does not repeat in a regular way. East concludes that it "ends with a closing couplet, which shows that the poet mixes conventions from traditional poetry with modernist experimentation with language and form". (171) The purpose of it is again to speak about royalty, values of traditional society and the need for a change. Dowson explains the same situation this way: the idea of "Hornpipe" is "to mock the aristocrat custom of dancing and fox-hunting through similar plays within nineteenth-century nonsense and Tennysonian narrative verse" (Dowson, 166).

The poem ends with the very "fashionable" word *hottentot*:

Hot as any hottentot, without remorse!

For the minx',

Said she,

'And the drinks,

You can see

Are hot as any hottentot and not the goods for me!' (Sitwell, *Façade*, 20, 14-17)

The introduction of "hottentot" into the opening poem of *Façade* proves Sitwell's awareness of the latest event in musical culture and her talent to imply her newly acquired knowledge in her work. Bryant notices that "hottentots" figured widely in popular culture of the early twentieth century. (254) The word first appeared in the Broadway musical *Marrying Mary*. "The Hottentot Love Song" was performed by Marie Cahill in 1906 and featured a "Hottentot, from a climate hot" who courts a Zulu maid. (Bryant, 254) Bryant adds that "after debuting on Broadway in 1920, The Hottentot became a Hollywood film the same year as *Façade.* (254) Bryant concludes that "hottentot" figure proves Sitwell's desire to be modern. (254)

The poet's talent is also demonstrated in the creation and maintaining of the poem's amusing style, which proves the Sitwell's awareness of the imperialistic undertones of fashion and performs an identity against the cultural and political markers of 'respectable' British identity.

The next very musical poem of *Façade,* that is worth mentioning, is "Polka".

The word *polka* means a lively Bohemian dance. It is also a woman's tightly-fitting jacket. Hunter classifies the introductory scene in the poem as a typical seaside resort (Scarborough). (Sitwell, *Façade,* 69). The poems starts with rhythms of the polka dance:

Tra la lalalalalala

La!

See me dance the polka",

Said Mr Wagg like a bear,

With my top hat

And whiskers that –

(Tra la la la) trap the Fair. (Sitwell, Façade, 67, 1-6)

"Polka" features Mr. Wagg dancing "like a bear" (line 3); "Venus' children" (line 9), "Wellington, Byron, the Marquis of Bristol" (13); "Nelson"(25) and "Robinson Crusoe" (27). Pamela Hunter offers her version of the plot: "the Dandy strides towards the seafront, eagerly looking forward towards what the evening must bring. Here, - Hunter says, -Sitwell depicts bars, inns and crumbling houses with the women in bright clothes – prostitutes (or "Venus children"). They watch and wait, he is the Master - he chooses. His purpose is clear, although the triumph will bring the feeling of regret and guilt. (Sitwell, *Façade,* 69)

Where the waves seems chiming haycocks

I dance the polka; there...

To see me fire pistol

Though the distance blue as my coat

Like Wellington, Byron, the Marquis of Bristol,

Busbied great trees float.

While the wheezing hurdy-gurdy

Of the marine winds blows me

To the tune of Annie Rooney, sturdy,

Over the sheaves of the sea (Sitwell, *Façade*, 67, 12-19)

The poem is one of the most musical ones among the Façade verses. First, it opens and closes with the rhythmical "Tra la lalalala", imitating the polka melody. Moreover, Sitwell skilfully recreates the sound picture of life at the seaside. The waves chime; someone fires a pistol; the "wheezing hurdy-gurdy wind blows to the tune of Annie Rooney". Hunter proposes that the pistol can be the one for firework exploding (besides the military pistol). (Sitwell, *Façade,* 70). Hunter also mentions that the allusion to hurdy-gurdy playing Irish tunes (Annie Rooney) could be the poet's memories of the in the street songs that Edith Sitwell heard being a little girl. According to Hunter, Sitwell the girl would throw pennies down to the wondering musicians. (Sitwell, *Façade*, 70).

Pamela Hunter also states that, in the poem, Sitwell uses music as a means "to entice the man to the sleazy part of the town". Her idea on the last singing is that the hero-adventurer is in danger of a 'proxy' disease, but he has no care for anything in the world. So, his carelessness is expressed by casual "Tra-la-la-la". (Sitwell, *Façade*, 70).

Epstein explains that "Polka" "stands for the Sitwells' seeing the operations of social life to be shaped rhythmically by aesthetic citation and performance. (241) He states that "historicizing the Sitwell's musical-literary text, one recognizes these aesthetic practices as artefacts of the politics of empire and nation". (Epstein, 241) As we see, in "Polka" the poetess uses the music-related vocabulary, polka music rhythms and sound effects in order to

speak about serious and meaningful things. “Polka” is a splendid example of the poetic musicality at all levels.

“Long Steel Grass” is another poem for the analysis. Although the title does not bring the reader to the musical theme, the poem is still full of musical words sounds, terms, phrases related to music. They help Sitwell create the scenes she sees in her imagination:

The hard and braying light
Is zebra’s black and white
It will take away the slight
And free,
Tinge of the mouth organ sound,
(Oyster-stall notes) oozing round
Her flounces as they sweep the ground.
The
Trumpet and the drum
And the martial cornet come
To make the people dumb -
But we
Won't wait for sly-foot night
(Moonlight, watered milk-white, bright)
To make clear the declaration
Of our Paphian vocation
Beside the castanetted sea. (Hunter, 34)

Here the poet introduces an organ, a trumpet, a cornet and, again, the drum. Sitwell uses martial cornet to depict the atmosphere of the marching for soldiers and the “mouth organ sound” – to show general distortion of the sounds. The step of a military marching is

also emphasized by the rhythm of short broken lines: “and free”, “the”, “but we”. The whole musical orchestra “makes people dumb”, horrifies, paralyzes the society with unfixed moral standards. The man, the soldier “il Capitano” is playing with black haired “tall Spanish Jade”. With such an orchestra there is no possible romance for the couple. There is a warning of coming danger. His strength, emphasized by “sword and mustachio”, his rightness and his sociable acceptance against her ill-reputation. (Hunter, 35)

To discuss the “sound-track” of the poem “Long Steel Grass”, the Sitwellian “braying light”, “castanetted sea”, “tee-hee-like giggling”, sounds of different musical instruments should be mentioned. The reader is able to hear the “thin and shrill voices” or even the sounds of the plant of onycha. Hunter concludes that the modernist poetess presents light as a “braying ass” warning people to “see” the fallen Spanish woman, whom the Capitano easily calls to “come and kiss him harder” (Sitwell, Façade, 34). The critic outlines that all sounds are distorted (as they issue from ‘onycha’) which signifies lack of sincerity in the modern world.

Pamela Hunter evaluates the whole poem by saying that it is “the story of contrast: light and shadow, man and woman, black and white, good and evil”. It is represented by the steel railings (“Long steel grass”)“stripped from the alternating sun and shadow” The poem criticizes the world of double standards we live in through its union with musicality. (Sitwell, *Façade*, 34).

“Tango-Pasodoble” is another example of “metaphysical significance” that Sitwell gives to the rhythm in a poem. She joins together two different dances here: tango and pasodoble. *Tango* was a relatively new dance for the twentieth century. When it first appeared in 1880s, it was sociably unacceptable due to the sensuality and intimate relations between the dancing partners. The situation changed in 1900s, and by the 1915 “was a craze in fashionable European circles” (www.britannica) *Pasodoble* is a Spanish light music, based

on typical Spanish dances of the sixteenth century. During the eighteenth century it was accepted as a regulatory step for the Spanish infantry (120 steps per minute). The music is full of Spanish patriotic motifs. (www.britannica) The introduction of the first dance, which was at the peak of its popularity at the time, proves Edith Sitwell's intellect and talent in being in the very avant-garde of culture. The Spanish dance is again her favoured method of introducing a foreign culture into her art.

Pamela Hunter thinks that the title suggests the seeming innocence entwined in the word 'pasodoble'. The "darker, Latin, foreign tango points to something more sinister beneath the apparent simplicity". (Hunter in Sitwell, *Façade,* 43). There is a tension in the poem from the very beginning caused by the two contrasting elements. They represent the confusion of tongues, the inability to communicate due to lack of understanding. (Sitwell, Façade, 43).

The poem takes place at a typical seaside resort (the reader often accounts with it in her writings). "People paddling, shrimping, riding donkeys, watching a Punch and Judy show or eating winkles while the brass band plays on the sea-front." (Sitwell, *Façade,* 43).

When

Don

Pasquito arrived at the seaside

Where the donkey's hide tide brayed, he

Saw the banditto Jo in a black cape

Whose slack shape waved like the see-

Thetis wrote a treatise nothing wheat is liver like the sea;

The lovely cheat is sweet as foam; Erotics notice that she

Will

Steal

The

Wheat-kings luggage (Sitwell, *Façade,* 41, 1-11)

Hunter writes that the "characters are straightforward and clear: Don Pasquito, the soldier, naive and genuinely in love with his bride (the nymph Thetis given in marriage against her will – the deception of the marriage state); the 'banditto Jo', the deceiver ('Erotis' the loved one). (Sitwell, *Façade,* 43) The merry atmosphere of the Fair and careless life attitude is reflected by the tempo of the dances through the broken lines "When/Don/ Pasquito", "Will/Steal/The".

Edith Sitwell stated that some of the *Façade* poems have "a sadness masked by gaiety" (Sitwell, *Collected poems,* xvii). If so, the merry title "Tango-Pasodoble" may be that mask that covers the sadness, the "veiled melancholy" of the things described in the poem. Hunter thinks that the poem is "simply a story of newly-weds – of their fickle passions and ultimate infidelity" (Sitwell, *Façade,* 43). In her opinion, this topic made Sitwell sad when she wrote the poem. (Sitwell, *Façade,* 43).

Sitwell explains that, in 1920s, the *Facade* poems were regarded to be "more nonsense than sense, bouncing along to popular ditties, foxtrots and tangos" (Sitwell, *Façade,* 15). However, such poems as "Tango-Pasodoble" demonstrate that the poet had entwined very serious meaningful themes into the step rhythms of dances, into the rhythms and rhymes of the lines.

Therefore, "Sitwell's" dances were going through cultural evolution in the 1900-1920s. "Fox Trot" is one of them. In Britannica *fox-trot* is identified as a ballroom American dance popular in Europe since its introduction around in 1914, when it was significantly transformed under the influence of jazz. (www. global.britannica.com) If so, it is almost predictable that we see the "Fox Trot" poem in the list of Sitwell's *Façade* poems as her response to the events in the world of music.

Hunter claims that, besides being a dance type, the word *fox-trot* is also related to the royal habit of hunting. The poem-hero Old Sir Faulk, father of the two little girls, Mollie and Gladys Hume, goes to hunt with his gun early in the morning:

"Old

Sir

Falk

Tall as a stock,

Before the honeyed fruits of dawn were ripe, would walk,

And stalk with a gun

The reynard-coloured sun,

Among the pheasant-feathered corn the unicorn has torn, forlorn

The

Smoke-faced sheep (. (Sitwell, *Façade,*100,1-10).

Hunter describes: "while Sir Faulk is away hunting, stalking through the ears of corn, the ritual of formal tea ceremony has been disturbed" by children's' crying.(Hunter in Sitwell, *Façade,*102). It was not correct to cry at tea – the children must behave. 'Old dull mome' would correct then for their manners. (Hunter in Sitwell, *Façade,*102).

In the poem, Sitwell uses the concept of music in order to speak about proper manners, correctness and misdemeanours. This is the topic which disturbed Edith all her life from the moment when her parents tried to "upright" her manners and when she literary was put in a frame to treat her spinal defect. As we remember, Edith's family was with strong royal bonds that obliged its members to control their feelings and manners (as it was proper for royalty with remnants, especially "before lesser mortals"). (Sitwell, *Façade,*102).

The linean structure of "Fox Trot" emphasizes the rhythm of the poem originated from the step of Fox Trot dance.

"Old

Sir

Falk"

Are the first three lines of the poem…The rhythm pattern will repeat several times later in the text, the same rhythm (reminding that of jazz) is hold through the whole poem.:

"In the sheep skin

Meadows

Where" and

" Where the boiling

Water

Hissed" (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 137)

Edith Sitwell says that "Fox Trot" for her was "an experiment in the effect, on rhythm and on speed, of certain arrangements of assonances and dissonance, and a certain arrangements of intertwining one-syllabled, two-syllabled, and three-syllabled words. (Sitwell, *Collected poems,* xxvii). She adds that:

> ...the ground rhythm of the beginning of the poem is partly the result of the drone sounds in the first line, the dissonances, so subtle they might almost be assonances, of 'Faulk', 'tall', 'stork', 'before', 'walk' – each having a different depth of darkness. 'Tall' and the second syllable of 'before', for instance, while the sounds differ...both in darkness and length, dip much deeper in both cases than 'Faulk' or 'stork'...All these drone sounds seem pleasant country shadows, varying slightly in depth, in warmth, in length. (Sitwell, *Collected poems,* xxvii).

Sitwell remarks that the whole rhythm of a poem changes, when she chooses a word with a particular sound. (Sitwell, *Collected poems,* xxvi). For example, her choice of words with 'ea' diphthong influenced the impression from the poem: "the 'ea' sound, on which

much poem [“Fox Trot”] is based, vary in lightness; at the moment the effect is of light stretches of cornfield, as in “Among the pheasant-feathered corn the unicorn has torn, forlorn the”, over which the flying shadows of the darker-vowelled ‘corn’, ‘unicorn’, ‘torn’, ‘forlorn’, dip and are gone” (Sitwell, *Collected poems,* xxvii).

The plot of the poem seems absurd, since “the hunter wears glasses”, while the “hare sits behind his back and makes fun of him. When the hunter falls asleep the hare steels his glasses and the gun and creeps away. The hare’s son, baby hare, sits hidden in the grass, when the hunter’s wife pours coffee on to his nose, and he cries out: Who has burnt me? And he waves the coffee spoon in his hand.” (Sitwell, *Façade,* 101). Nevertheless, it the general idea that is more important than the vocabulary. Hunter defines “Fox Trot” as another manifestation of protest to Victorian norms and rigidness. (Sitwell, *Façade,*102).

When speaking about Walton’s musical settings to the Sitwell’s *Façade,* a question appears: what is of primary importance - poetry or music? Which one is more successful within the frames of representation of modernist ideas? Which one is better received? Another interesting question is whether music and poetry in *Façade* should be reviewed as two separate media, temporally joined together for a performance, or is it one whole piece of art?

Fussel in his book Memory evaluates that some witnesses of the *Façade* performance stated that the music was better received by the audience than the verse. The text, on the contrary, was misunderstood and declared a failure. It was seen as an extremely complicated surrealist imagery in verse. “The role of music was to rescue it [the poor poetry], however, did not always seem to succeed. (145). The audience had difficulty in understanding the poems.

On the one hand, it was said that the music negatively influenced the verse comprehension by distracting the audience. The music created so much noise that the poetry

was completely unheard. One the other hand, in many cases the poetry had won through such a union: even if the poetry was not always clear behind the “façade” of music, in many cases it emphasized the verse and the ideas in the text. Pall Mall Gazette, for example, evaluated that music in *Façade* “succeeded in throwing a gleam of light on the words” of poetry which was an absolute unheard “nonsense”. (Gazette qtd. Lloyd, 36) He distinguishes that when the composer used definite dance-rhythms the results were quite “clever”. (Gazette qtd. Lloyd, 36) Fussel also outlined that the overall result was at least a fun entertainment with “Walton’s dissonances as an amusing addition to Sitwell’s “strain of nonsense”. (Fussel, 145).

In time, it became apparent that, the *Façade* poetry was not so meaningless and simple. The bad reception is explained by the original idea to make the avant-garde *Façade* poetry unheard with the early mentioned allusion to the noise of modernism, misunderstanding and loneliness in a cosmopolitan city. Gyllian Phillips put it this way: “*Façade* disrupts the privilege and power of language and meaning in language and in the voice."

Undoubtedly, not only poetry of *Façade* had gained from music, but modernistic music had gained a lot from its union with Sitwell’s poetry. Sitwellian poetry awakens the reader and the audience to the social function of music. Sitwell’s verse rediscribes particular ideologies, it awakens the audience to the music of everyday life thus, awakens the reader to the social element of music. No matter, which one was better, one thing is clear: it was a “win-win” situation for both - poetry and music.

The analysis of some of the *Façade* poems and the information about the modernist trends in music from the introductory part of this thesis leave no doubt on whether such a poetic experimentation was intentional or not. Definitely, it was the result of the poet’s awareness of the latest modernist philosophical ideas on modernist aestheticism, modern techniques in art, as well as her individual personal qualities developed by constant self-

education on the subject. To conclude, *Façade* is an unprecedented poem from the aspect of its musicality at all levels of poetry, which illustrates how Edith Sitwell's individual talent, personal passions and historical moment successfully coincided.

3.2.The Sleeping Beauty (1924)

Sitwell's early poems are not very much sophisticated from the aspect of the introduced modernist techniques. Her poems written from 1922-1929 become more mature; the poet becomes involved in a more profound, daring and sophisticated. *The Sleeping Beauty* is the first fairytale poem written by Edith Sitwell, which can be considered to be one of the most popular poems in her early modernist period. "The Sleeping Princess" by Tchaikovsky, was premiered in London in 1921 (and ran for 114 performances). It might have happened that Tchaikovsky's music to "The Sleeping Princess" inspired Edith Sitwell for the poem.

The likeness of the poem to the Tchaikovsky's ballet is even in the poet's introduction of additional characters and episodes into the classical version of the fairytale. Moreover, Sitwell changes the characters' names to enhance the magical aspect of the whole story.

The Sleeping Beauty was published two years after *Façade*'s publication. However, John Lehmann finds that contrast between *Façade* and *The Sleeping Beauty* "could scarcely be sharper" (17). He claims that Sitwell "turns away from the satirical-fantastic inventions of *Façade*, and devoted herself to the exploitation of the elegiac, romantic vein" (Lehmann, 17). Regardless the fact that the style of the two poems is different, the poetess's devotion to music in her experiment with rhythm, rhyme, meter and the texture of words is still the same. The poet pays scrupulous attention to the description of the sound: both musical and non-musical.

The Sleeping Beauty consists of twenty-six stanzas and narrates the story of a young princess Cydalise. The princess is cursed by the evil fairy Laidronette when being christened.

Laidronette feels disrespected for not being invited to the party and puts a curse on Cydalise "to prick her finger on a spinning wheel as soon as she is of age": "For if the Princess pricks her finger/Upon a spindle, then she shall be lost/As a child wandering in a glade of thorn/With sleep like roses blowing soft, forlorn" (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 53-55).

Sitwell deviates from the well-known variants of "The Sleeping Beauty" as the focus is replaced to the household staff. While the plot develops, the heroine and her family members are moved by the poet to the background. The hero is completely taken away from the story of *the Sleeping Beauty*. The prince, who is normally responsible for kissing the young princess awake, is warned off by the old gardener at the entrance of the woods. The gardener asks the prince to stay away: "keep my lad, to the good safe ground". (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 108) Future potential candidates are forbidden to enter the "brutish forests [that] close around/The beauty sleeping in enchanted ground" (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 108)

From the very first lines of first canto Sitwell introduces the reader to the world of the Sleeping Beauty with the help of sounds and songs:

> When we come to that dark house,
> Never sound of wave shall rouse
> The bird that sings within the blood
> Of those who sleep in that deep wood.:
> For in that house the shadows now
> Seems cast by some dark unknown bough.
> The gardener plays his old bagpipe
> To make the melons' gold seeds ripe;
> The music swoons with a sad sound –
> Keep, my lad, to the good safe ground. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 51)

In the first nine lines, the reader may notice at least four words related to music, sounds and hearing ability. The “deep wood” where the princess sleeps is so quite that “even no sound of wave shall rouse/The bird that sings...”. There is no one nearby except a gardener, who looks after the golden melon seeds, and make them ripe with the “sad music” of his “old bagpipe”. The music-related vocabulary helps Sitwell create the most precise picture of the house with the Sleeping Beauty. The reader is able not only to visualize the place but also to hear the sounds, noises and bagpipe music surrounding it.

Several times in the poem, Edith Sitwell makes allusions to different types of dances. These are: minuet, waltz, quadrille. Thus, in chapter four the narrator instructs the princess:

Do, do,

Princess, do,...

You shall not say your prayers in Latin –

But you shall dance a minuet

On heaven’s floor;...(Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 62-63)

There also allusions to the Weber waltzes and quadrille. The waltzes are compared to the “summer airs, falling round the first rose that seem like a young Princess dressed up for her first ball.” (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 69) The quadrille is mentioned when “the nymphs sing, gold and cold as orange-trees”. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 96)

Britannica Encyclopaedia defines the word *minuet* as “elegant couple dance that dominated aristocratic European ballrooms, especially in France and England, from about 1650 to about 1750”. (www.britannica.com) *Quadrille* is described as a fashionable late 18th- and 19th-century dance for four couples in square formation. It is said to have been imported by English aristocrats in 1815 from elite Parisian ballrooms.” (www.britannica.com)

Even without much knowledge about the history of the dances, it is clear that an image of a proper, elegant "dancing" society is created in the poem. By understanding the elegance, proper manners and behaviour of the world, where *the Sleeping Beauty* lived, the reader starts to toughly question the quality of this elegance. Dance is only a technique of the poetic imagery that involves radical criticism of the society, royalty and imperialism.

The names of Mozart and Scarlatti and a serious of musical instruments, such as 'spinet', 'courante' and 'gavotte' are among the music-related vocabulary in the poem. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 100) By acquiring more details about the composers, the instruments and dance illusions, the reader is able to approximately frame the time period of the plot - not earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century (the period which had created all conditions for the post-Victorian crises that gave life to modernism).

Jane Dowson claims that *The Sleeping Beauty* experiments with discordant rhymes and juxtaposes literary and nursery rhythm". (166). Indeed, the poem is full of the nursery rhythms insertions within, Sitwell starts canto twenty-six with:

The gardener played his old bagpipe

To make the melons and the peaches ripe....

The threads are mixed in a tartan sound...

'Keep, my lad, to the good safe ground.

For Jonah long since was a felon,

With guineas gold as a grape or melon.

He always said his prayers in Latin

To peaches like red quilted satin. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 109)

Within the limits of nursery rhymes the poet experiments with nonsensical, foreign words (mostly Spanish), which proves Sitwell's experiment with the "words for the sake of sounds" as well as her attempt to be absurd and primitive in its surrealist manifestation:

But in in the Court,...

O little shade – see, I will call him Zambo!

Look where he silent sits and plays dumb crambo,

Here at the doors, with ghosts...and his

mentero,

Half in brocaded sunlight, points to Zero! (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 89).

Such words as 'dumbcrambo' and 'mentero' may have an unclear meaning, but their Spanish origin is obvious. Apparently, Sitwell's purpose was to maintain the rhyme in the lines as well as refer to the foreign, primitive, less developed.

The poem is full of the Sitwell's favourite description of musical and non-musical sounds. To the description of musical sounds, this thesis will relate the metaphors based on musical instruments and other conceptions directly meaning a musical object. Musical sounds are exquisitely recreated by means Edith Sitwell's personal talent to hear and comprehend the surrounding. In canto one, for example, the poetess describes the musical sound of lute and compares it to "a great fanfare" that "is heard like unripe silver fruit". Another good example is the description of a music-box: "And we remember nursery afternoons/ When the small music-box of the sweet snow/ Gave half-forgotten tunes , and our nurse told/Us tales...(Sitwell, *Collected Poems* 89). Canto twenty-four provides an example with the horn sounding: "A far-off huntsman sound his horn/That sounds like rain, harsh and forlorn" (Sitwell, *Collected Poems* 106).

Non-musical sounds are any other sounds that are not related to music. These types of sounds are not less important, in terms of creating the detailed context of the modernist life, the "sounds of mechanized human civilization".

The examples of the non-musical sounds description can be found in the following poetic lines: " Dawn came rustling like corn-sheaves;/And a small wind came like little Boy

Blue...” or “the jewelled blue leaves that sound, like the sea”. There is no limit to the Edith Sitwell’s scope of imagination. She compares almost the incomparable: her kisses are “faint as butterflies”, her presentation of lacquer buds and wind in canto six is absolutely wonderful:

At Easter when red lacquer buds sound far slow

Quarter-tones for the old dead Mikado,

Through avenues of lime-tree, where the wind

Sounds like a chapeau chinois, shrill, unkind...(Sitwell, *Collected Poems* 66)

These are only a few examples of the poet’s attempt to treat music and sounds as the most precious constitute of a poetic text.

Such a precise reproduction of the musical aspect of our life helped the poet to address to the social problems of British aristocracy and the “proper properness” of the aristocrat world. In canto six, Edith Sitwell describes English Riviera and the rich British aristocrats at the seaside. They “slowly drive their griffin dog upon the flat-pearled and fantastic shore/where turbaned waves sigh, ‘Never more’. Sitwell finds such a life meaningless – she is asking:

Oh, people building castles on the sand,

And taking one another by the hand,

What do you find within each other’s eyes?

What wisdom unknown of the lonely wise?

...the certainty

Of what eternal life to come – what lie? (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 66)

Here, the seemingly luxury life is full of meaningless manners, lies and fake feelings. Sitwell portrays Death as the final of all the pompous promenades along the exotic lime avenues. The metaphors related to music suit very well for the poet’s purpose: “Only the

sound of Time's small muffled drum/The sound of footsteps that will never come,/And little marches all beribboned gay/ That lead down the lime avenues away/To the dark grave..." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 66)

Sitwell repeats the same idea later in canto seventeen when she again describes the Royal Court where "maids and ladies" "talk like birds, with a gentle malice" and the Queen Venus from the "Hornpipe" of *Façade* represent a "toothless crone? Blackened with age; all night alone/She lies.." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 89). The entertainment at the Royal court, but the end is the same. Sitwell calls the reader's sense of hearing to listen to the sounds of the epoch: "Listen...Who is it hearkens at their doors,/ In the vast rooms and endless corridors?". She makes us stop and concentrate on the sounds. If so, the answer can be found very quickly: "It is goat-footed, mincing Death, who presses/His muzzle at the keyhole, hears their dresses/Rustling like rose-leaves."

As mentioned above, national identity and the future of the British Empire losing its political power was of major importance in the beginning of the century. Such a critique of the British society was a summon for a change in order to respond to the changing "conditions of modernity". It was a search of the new national identity that preoccupied the poetess in her early poetry as well.

To raise the problems of imperialism, Sitwell introduces often references to oriental cultures in *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924). In canto nineteen Sitwell compares the sultan and the Sun King with one another. The sultan represents oriental cultures, while the Sun King represents civilised western cultures. Soldan (the sultan) is shown as a self-centred Narcissus who he is seeking a beautiful "lovely lady/a nymph as bright as a queen" that would suit him. He says that he is so handsome that "no maid will change into a tree before his kiss", referring to the story of Daphne and Apollo's love. The foreign candidate (The Man from a Far Countree) is more modest. He knows that:

Though I am black and not comely,

Though I am black as the darkest trees,

I have swarms of gold that will fly like honey-bees...

By the river of the sun I will feed my words...

Then for all my darkness I shall ne

The peacefulness of a lovely tree –

A tree wherein the golden birds

Are singing in the darkest branches, O!" (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 96)

Sitwell's mocking reference to the gold periwig indicates that she prefers a primitive culture over an artificial and material one.

In canto nineteen, Sitwell then evokes the Spanish culture with musical references to siestas, castanets, orange trees and tambourines and introduces the readers to the "Soldan and the King of Ethiop's land/[who] approach as suitors for your daughter's hand":

Each lady, "Our spadille

Is done...Dance the quadrille

From Hell's towers to Seville;...

...Through gilded trellises

Of the heat, spangles

Pelt down through the tangles

Of bell-flowers; each dangles

Her castanets, shutters

Fall while the heat mutters,

With sounds like a mandolin

Or tinkled tambourine....(Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 19)

Sitwell also often uses references to Chinese culture –"Chinoiserie" - in *the Sleeping Beauty* and her other poems. Epstein argues that "the figure of the chinoiserie (literary 'chinoiserie' of empress, emperor, princes) suggests interest in the luxuriousness, spectacle, and "extravagant theatricality" of the Chinese court; and in the possible associations with Queen Victoria. (226): "Then these Chinoiseries, old ghosts of red and white/Smooth lacquer, in their palanquins take flight/For tea"... (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 17) The story with the Chinoiserie ghosts continues when "These Chinoiserie ghosts,/These mummies in dim hosts,/Tread the long mournful avenues instead;". The picture is fulfilled with the music-and-sounds concepts: "When spring comes, in China and Tibet/ Through bell'd lime-avenues a springe is set/To catch the softly-smiling wind,/The cherubim to catch and blind/As cruel men blind a singing-bird; They trap them with the sound of lutes..." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 93)

Often references to foreign cultures prove Sitwell's intent to write a modernist poem. Modernist fairytale poems were known for disrupting the readers' horizon of expectation by inserting foreign locations, references and characters in order to go away from traditional conventions.

Another modernist literary technique in the poem is that related to pantomime, puppetry, masking affect and primitivism. These ones are all interrelated to each other, and are very thought-provoking. In canto sixteen the poet introduces the scene of the great midsummer country Fair. While doing this, the reference to the fair world of music is very intense:

Like harsh and crackling rags of laughter seems

The music, bright flung as an angel's hair –

...Sometimes dreams

Within the sound that shrieks both high and low

Like some ventriloquist's bright-painted show...

It shrieks to the dulled soul, 'Too late, too late!'

Sometimes it jangles thin as the sharp wires

Whereon the poor half-human puppets move;..

A little hurdy-gurdy waltz sounds hollow

And bright-husked as the hearts of passing people,

They sigh, while the bright music like a wave

Sings of far lands and many a siren cave. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 85-86)

On the one hand, it seems quite normal to use music while creating the image of a Fair, on the other hand it was Sitwell's talent of recreating this musical concept of life that coincided together with the epoch and modernist trend to use these imagery in order to raise important questions for discussion. "The fate of country masks/Of Comedy" is the fate of the modernist world mechanical, soulless easily manipulated participants. "The poor clownish booth is very cold" - it represents the cold and cruel world we all live in.

The poet also pays much attention to the conception of noise: "In the kitchen half asleep/Noises from the sharp green wood/ Burnt and bit my satyr blood..."

The Princess's problems with her mother describe the identity problem and serve to emphasize the modernist concern with a post-war individual alienation. The poem resembles a partly-autobiographical piece about the joys and terrors of childhood, its acute perceptiveness and vulnerable innocence. An example for that would be the following extract: "The Princess grew in beauty till she seemed/ That gentle maid of whom Endymion dreamed". (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 68.) The reader might see the poet's youth in the description. She then continues:

And those evenings when the lovely moon

Shone through the smiling woods of deepest June...

Sometimes the moon would sing her ancient songs

Of lovely ladies and forgotten wrongs; (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 68)

Further on Sitwell continues to describe the princess's innocence and purity: "The Princess was young as innocent flowers/That bloom and love through locked doors to annoy/The palace housekeeper, cross Mrs. Troy" (70.9.1-4) The problem is that the princess was very lonely (regardless her royal status and, obviously, crowded palace court) and unloved. Again, we have the general theme of loneliness and alienation in the cynic modern world.

Edith Sitwell shares her lack of mother's love and distance between them: "And when the Queen called for her child, they brought/ Only her image, formed to please the Court..." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 63) Sitwell sees herself as a bird "Grown old and weak/imprisoned in a gilded cage / In her powder-closet, far from the rage/ Of winter, it can only sing/ Roulades, and preen its bright clipped wing" (Sitwell, Collected Poems, 64.5.22-25) Then she claims that her mother "... never knew the bird's soul had flown". (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 64)

In the poem Edith Sitwell also transformed the beauties of the country with all its natural beauty into the ethereal atmosphere of a fairy world that was deeply rooted in her as a child. The poet measures the degree of these beauties, of course, with the sound-related imagery:

At Easter when red lacquer buds sound far slow

Quarter-tones for the old dead Mikado,

Through avenues of lime-tree, where the wind

Sounds like a chapeau chinois, shrill, unkind...(Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 66)

Here the poet employs her prominent skill in creating of a poetic montage. She takes parts of some previously written poems (sometimes adds insignificant changes to them) and

inserts them into her later poem. This is the case with an abstract from the earlier analysed poem “Mandoline”: the poet uses several lines, depicting the arriving trains, which she had written before as a part of another poem:

> On the pomp that passed those doors;
>
> Trains still sweep the empty floors,
>
> Pelongs, bulchauls, pallampores,
>
> Soundless now as any breeze,
>
> Of amber and orangeries
>
> That sweep from isles in Indian seas... (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 53)

In fact, the montage-like construction of the poem is also reflected in its overall structure – the poem has no particular plot. It rather stems around similar themes randomly, chaotically. This tendency of empty Sitwellian phrases in *the Sleeping Beauty* was discussed by Richard Le Gallienne in his article “Poetic Affectations of Miss Edith Sitwell” (in New York Times):

> One is prompted to review *Sleeping Beauty* by its exasperating affection and general pretty silliness … Great poets before her have taken the beautiful old fairy tale … But these poets and artists we were at least able to understand...The difficulty with Miss Sitwell’s poem is that it is all but incomprehensible…Before reading Miss Sitwell’s poem I lent it to a lady who is deeply read in all forms of modern poetry,.. and she returned it to me with the remark that she could not understand it. Afterward when I had myself read it ... I was as far from understanding it as she (http://query.nytimes.com)

Indeed, in *the Sleeping Beauty* the same ideas and concepts are retold in different words. These ideas are love, betrayal, ambition, and death. The imagery, however, is the same – very much related to music. Ghani explains her own vision of the nonsense plot and

mentions a drum as a musical instrument that amplifies the problems discussed, as a symbol of threat to humanity. She sees the poem as a dreamlike narration of a world of lost innocence and betrayal, degradation and corruption through a succession of images and juxtaposition of themes. It is a world whose inhabitants are mere shadows, it is a dead and terrible world where the musical sound of quick drum taps "that seem the anguish beat of our own heart". People in this world resemble ghosts whose lives are meaningless and unheroic, and where love is dead.

Sitwell's transformation of the accustomed fairytale happy end leaves the reader unsatisfied with the story. The beautiful princess Cydalise does not receive a happy end and is destined to sleep forever, whereas the ugly Laidronette is the one who gets to have the last laugh. Such a device is one more form of the avant-garde poetic experiment, which proves Sitwell's technical brilliancy and individual talent.

There is another opinion of an unknown critic praising Sitwell's poem in his book review, published in theatrical magazine "Mask" in 1925: "Obviously Miss Sitwell is full of gifts, clever, a poet,…a graceful one; and with an ability to go on. As I read it I find myself unable to believe that *the Sleeping Beauty* is a theme any poet could make anything more out of than has Miss Sitwell" (http://bluemountain.princeton.edu, 49)

Indeed, Sitwell's "disruptive fairytale retelling" together with her talent to unite poetic language with music makes the poem of *the Sleeping Beauty* a great example of the 1920s modernist quest for novelty in art and literature.

3.3.Gold Coast Customs (1929)

Gold Coast Customs was written in 1929 and, according to Lehmann, marks "the conclusion" of the romantic period in Edith Sitwell's poetry. (20)There is a difference in the purpose of creation of *Façade* (1922) and *Gold Coat Customs* (1929). The first was for the artistic avant-garde experimentation, the second – for expression of certain ideas. Lehmann

discusses that “in the long poem *Gold Coat Customs* Sitwell used again the strong rhythms, the clashing rhythms and assonances of *Façade,* but for a different effect - for “banging” (20). He states that he contrast between works of Sitwell simply proves the “range of her poetic power” (Lehmann, 20)

Gold Coast Customs is a poem of considerable length. In the first lines, Sitwell gives a short introduction on the poem’s setting. She says that it is set partly in the British protectorate of the Gold Coast of West Africa in 1875. Here, the poet describes the last-century slums of Ashantee, a native kingdom on the Gold Coast, Africa, with an overwhelming compassion for the underprivileged. The death of any rich person in Ashantee was marked by several days of national ceremonies during which the poor were often killed so that the bones of the deceased might be washed with human blood. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 237) Through symbols suggesting the barbaric and primitive, these hideous orgies of the Ashantee funeral rites were associated with our modern civilization. Ellen Miskoin her dissertation *A Study of Dame Edith Sitwell's "Later Poems: 1940-1945*proposes that Edith Sitwell equated these murder· rites with "the miseries of London slums and the lives of the fashionable rich. (18) She states that with the creation of this poem Edith Sitwell became a mouthpiece crying for all men.” (Misko, 18)

The poem consists of three main points: the Ashantee tribal ceremonies; Lady Bamburgher’s parties (their civilized, modernized reflection) and all that goes with them; and a dock scene populated with sailors and prostitutes. The movement between these points is so swift that they appear to the reader almost simultaneously.

Even though the poem is considered to be the end of Sitwell’s technical experiment with the language, it is still full of musicality. Edith Sitwell continues to use musical concepts in order to depict imagery and express her ideas.

While reading the poem there is an obvious resemblance of it to a primitive tune. In his article "Imaginary Africa and London's Urban Wasteland in Edith Sitwell's *Gold Coast Customs*" Gyllian Philips remarks that the poet widely introduces a "chant-like" metrical pattern, which resembles a song-like simple, musical pattern. (77) The pattern is musical firstly, in its *form* and, secondly, in *the rhythm* created by it. Phillips further explains that "the insistently rhyming short lines with alternating stressed syllables do not fit any conventional verse forms". (77) According to her, such an unstable shifting metrical pattern was a general strange modernist innovation. (Phillips, 77)

Sitwell combines this three-stress pattern with trochaic tetrameter and other poetic tropes, and leaves the crucial role in the text to it. That is how Phillips explains the essence of the pattern: "While the patterns shift every few lines, the separate block of the three stressed syllables is consistently repeated (for example "dust brays white" and "the sea—one sin")". (77)

We see the pattern described above in the opening of the poem:

One fantee wave

Is grave and tall

As brave Ashantee's (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 237)

The fourth line is composed entirely of three stressed syllables: "Thick mud wall." "The meter then shifts to trochaic tetrameter and shifts again, midline, to the three-stress pattern". (Phillips, 77)

Munza rattles his bones in the dust,

Lurking in murk because he must. (Sitwell, 237)

Striped black and white

İn the squealing light; (Sitwell, Collected Poems, 237)

Here is another block of the lines to illustrate the repetition of the three stressed syllables:

Like monkey-skin

İn the sea – one sine

Like a weasel is nailed to bleach on the rocks

Where the eyeless mud screeched fawning, mocks… (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 237)

Chasing a rat.

Their soul's ghost fat

Through the Negro swamp,

Slum hovel's cramp,

Of Lady Bamburgher's parties above

With the latest grin, and the latest love. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 238)

In addition, the chosen rhyme is ideal in order to reinforce the stressed syllables. One of the possible reasons for such a simple "chant-like" meter is to emphasize the idea of primitivism – one of the fundamental concepts in modernism. It was a pervasive trend in modern poetry, and served modernists as a means to express "the malaise of modern society". "Primitive" chant effect creates "the imagery of a primitive tribe" and raises the following themes for an intellectual discourse:

1. Imperialism, nationalism and national identity.

The Sitwell's chant-like metrical experiment "invokes the European idea of the rhythmic chanting accompanying sacrificial ritual", which merges the colonial Gold Coast with one of the European metropolis of 1920s - London. Thus, the metrical patterns resemble the presence of "primitive" (low) together with the presence of a stronger Empire (high)ruling over its colonies – Britain, and Europe in general. Therefore, Sitwell's *Gold*

Coat Customs "sits at an important intersection between imperialist and modernist discourses". (Phillips, 77)

2. Fascism.

Edith herself wrote in her memoirs (written when she was a "retired" poet) that it [Gold Coat Customs] is a poem about the state that led up to the Second World War. It is a definite prophecy of what would arise from such a state – what has arisen. (It was written in 1929)" (Edith Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, xxxv). Edith Sitwell's *Gold Coast Customs* turned out to be as a prophetic vision of the rise of fascism and its attendant horrors in "civilized" Europe. Philips remarks that dark imagery derives from nineteenth-century imperialist assumptions about Africa. (73) The general idea of a stronger one with a power control over a weaker one is one of the founding principles in fascism that eventually led Europe to the state of the Second World War.

3. Primitive dark age of the present-day society.

Lehmann thought that, through the concepts of a "primitivism", the poetess managed to depict an image of a corrupt society, a "moneyed ruling class glorying in a callous indifference at a moment when suffering is the most intense in the world" (Lehmann, 22). Philips has a similar point of view on the same matter. He states that "the central argument of the poem is a so-called civilized society sliding backward in time to its savage and primeval origins, which are represented by an Africa imagined into being by European imperialism". (71) Indeed, throughout the poem we have an image of London, the centre of empire, as a rotting, post-apocalyptic scene of the ravages of modernity. "The imaginary Africa generates a pervasive metaphor: urban blight has sent England into a primitive dark age, in which humans have returned to their most bestial origins and now prey on one another. The idea is reinforced with the poem's style as well as imagery and setting". (Phillips, 77)

As mentioned above, musicality of the pattern is also demonstrated through the effect of the created rhythm. From the very first lines, the reader feels the rhythms of the tom-tom and the rhythms of jazz. It is also the rhythm of drum-beating which is hard to avoid noticing. Sitwell lets the reader "hear" these musical instruments (a tom-tom and a drum) in order to depict details specific to a particular culture (in this case, an African culture – a culture of a "non-European civilization).

With the help of tom-toms and drums the poet draws scenes of a polyrhythmic performance at the African ceremonies. The poem's metrical pattern also brings up the European idea of " heavy-footed" dances of ancient tribes. The role of "beat" is very crucial in the poem. Lehmann remarks that insistent drumbeat, that runs through it, the hard explosive consonants, the vivid images of horror - all create "an almost unbearable atmosphere of savagery, loathsomeness and spiritual death" (20).

Sitwell's desire to maintain the drum-beat impression even influenced the writer's vocabulary choice. For example, the name of Lady Bamburgher (Lady Hamburgher if earlier version of the poem), in poetic terms, is a "dactyl" – a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones. This sound pattern corresponds to the drumbeat. (www.britannica.com)

Lady Bamburgher's "drumbeat" nature is again at one with primitivism, with the slum-ignorance and the blackness and superstition of African swamp. She is called the "Amazon queen," belonging metaphorically to a tribe of warrior women who kill and eat their male children (though in Africa, not South America). Phillips names her "a modern society hostess", who goes slumming for entertainment, looking to exploit the poor in her search for sensation and gratification. (Phillips, 77)

The word "drum" is very significant in the poem. Here we have:

"Down the phantom Street

They have for their beat

The cannibal drums

And the cries of the slums." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 239)

or like in the abstract below:

"…Once I saw it come

Through the canvas slum,

Rattle and beat what seemed a drum,

Rattle and beat it with a bone." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 247)

The drums in the poem are often titled by Sitwell as "the cannibal drums". In Philips's opinion the purpose of "the cannibal drums" introduction into the poetic text is the imitation of a sound from a foreign African language to the ear of a European. (73) If so, the abundant introduction of nonsense words may also serve as the seeming "mumbo jumbo" of African languages.

Sitwell confesses that she tried to recreate the drumbeat not only through rhythm and meter, but through verbal images. This is the case with the "fevered hearts and pulses" of "Richman Judas, Brother Cain and Lady Bamburgher". "The beating or their fevered hearts and pulses is no more than the beating of the drum that heralded the Customs" (Sitwell, *Collected Poems* xxxvi).As we see, the form of the poem and its rhythm are closely interconnected.

Henry Reed marks the presence of "*staccato* jazziness" in the poem and claims this pattern of modernist music to be the basic characteristic in *Gold Coast Customs*. (117) As an example, he mentions "the hectic scene" with the light "squealing" and the mud "screeching":

"I have seen the murdered God look through the eyes

Of the drunkard's smirched

Mask as he lurched

O’er the half of my heart that lies in the street

‘Neath the dancing fleas and the foul news-sheet....

Perhaps if I too lie down in the mud,

Beneath tumbrils rolling

And mud skulls galloping

Far from their bunches of nerves that dance

And caper among these slums and prance,

Beneath the noise of that hell that rolls,

I shall forget the shrunken souls,

The eyeless mud squealing ‘God is dead’,

Starved men (bags of wind) and the harlot’s

Tread,” (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 250)

Reed comments: “The staccato jazziness is here and it is in the right place. The “dereglement” of the senses is there, and at last no more fitting applications can be imagined; for in this savage hectic scene it is right that the light should squeal and the mud should screech”. (Reed, 118).

In *Gold Coast Customs*, Sitwell describes her ideas in terms of music, sound, noise, dance and movement”. The list of comparison is endless, the scope of Sitwell’s imagination is limitless. Her fleas and nerves dance, her tumbrils and hell roll, her mud skulls gallop and giggle, her harlot treads. Her ventriloquist sound squeals and weeps, tears mumble, the world rots, souls wine. Here, even the “dead/Grass creaks like a carrion-bird’s voice, rattle,/Squeaks like a wooden shuttle.” (Sitwell, Collected Poems, 243) It is a huge orchestra unified for one purpose – recreating a picture of the new modernist world, and applying to the reader in the most disturbing way.

The poet does not avoid describing Lady Bamburgher's "blackness and ignorance" in terms of her character related to the sound and music:

But Lady Bamburgher's Shrunken Head,

Slum hovel, is full of the rat-eaten bones...

...still has bones to rot:

A bloodless and an unborn thing

That cannot wake, yet cannot sleep,

That makes no sound, that cannot weep... (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* 245)

For the writer, to be soulless, close to death - is when one is unable to utter a sound. Sitwell introduces another strong metaphor of death in terms of sound in the end of the poem: "But here as I walk, no voices call/ Only stones and the bones that fall; / But yet if only one soul would whine..." (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 252)

Gold Coast Customs is a great example of how Sitwell carries out her studies on the effect that "texture" of the language and the effect that patterns of assonances and dissonances have upon the rhythm and rhyme. The poet writes in her "Some Notes On My Own Poetry" that in the lines below she tried to recreate the movement of an intertwining worm, "which at times has a jaunty wire-jerked sound or rears itself up like a tidal wave rushing forward, or swell like a black sea-swell by means of violently stretching vowels…":

Hidden behind

The Worm's mask, grown

White as a bone

Where eyeholes rot wide

And are painted for sight. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, xxxvii):

In the notes, Edith Sitwell also explains her imitation of the drumbeat with the help of sounds, vowels and consonants. She says: "In the first verse, the rocking drum-beating

movement is produced by the various flatness and depths of the ‘a’s, the thickness and dullness’s of the ‘u’s, and by the intertwining of words of different lengths. In the first four lines:

One fantee wave

İs gave and tall

As brave Ashantee’s

Think mud wall (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 237)

The first line begins with a jaunty white-jerked movement. From the fawning, crouching sound of ‘fantee’ it rises suddenly (stretching outward), with ‘wave’, to one of the utmost heights of which a vowel-sound is capable…” (Sitwell, *Collected Poems,* xxxvii). She says that she uses the imagery of an “intertwining warm” because she tried to give an essence of this world “that has broken down”, but the “feverish, intertwining seething movement, a vain seeking for excitement still existed”. (Sitwell, Collected Poems, xxxv)

Another example of the poet’s “verbal orchestration” experiment: she intends to create “a feeling of a rotting flesh” “by means of high screaming ‘e’s alternating with dulled ‘o’s, while the arrangement of soft ‘s’ and of their slightly firmer counterpart, the ‘ch’s”. (Sitwell, Collected Poems, xxxvii

Some critics found the long poem as the one with no plot calling it as a constant repetition of nonsensical imagery and simple vocabulary. However, Henry Reed contradicts such conclusions saying that “none of Miss Sitwell’s poems are simple in their total effect, but, in order to be understood, they have often to be read many times”. (121) One of the reasons for the apparent meaningless of the poem, its illogical development and fragmentation is the poet’s application of the above mentioned avant-garde technique of montage, which naturally left the reader unsatisfied. Indeed, in her notes, Edith Sitwell confesses that it was very difficult for her to “organize” the seemingly “simple” poem and its

fragments: “The organization of the poem, speaking of this world that has broken down, but where a feverish, intertwining, seething movement, a vain seeking for excitement, still existed, presented considerable difficulty. I tried to give a concentrated essence of that world through a movement which at times interweaves like other lives” (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, xivi).

Another reason for the seeming senseless “spinning” around the same images and themes is an attempt to imitate a piece of modernist music in terms of its structure. Lehmann’s comment confirms that she succeeded in her attempt of doing so: *Gold Coast Customs* is “the structure of images, ideas, and emotions that are gradually developed, contrasted, and resolved...” It is “a statement of various themes”, “their repetition intermingle in a manner that is reminiscent of music”. (21).

It is not only Sitwell who tried to imitate the structure of a musical piece in her work. Adrian Varga writes that Virginia Woolf was also among those modernist experimenters, who attempted to recreate musical structure within her fiction. (237) According to her, Woolf’s novel *Between the Acts* is made of “shivering fragments” that link the “motif development” into one whole. (237) This way, Woolf and Schoenberg succeeded in creating of the structure of “unrest” to express their concern with the contemporary history. (Varga, 237)

Several years later (due to some political and private reasons), the chant-like meter, drum-like rhythms and rhyme of the poem attracted the attention of a British modernist composer Humphrey Searle. He set the poem to music twenty years later after it was written and published - in 1949.The composer was known as an experimenting composer, who worked in a modernist trend. (Humphrey Searle he will also create a setting for another of Edith’s poems – “The Shadow of Cane” (1952)) (Routh, 134)

Being one of the foremost British composers of the twentieth century, Francis Routh, describes his own opinion about what inspired Searle for the musical setting of the poem. “Edith Sitwell’s verse itself possesses a musical structure – first the idea, second idea, conflict, climax, coda. Moreover, words are used as much for their sound as for their meaning”. (Routh, 137) No wonder the composer like Searle had chosen such poetry as Sitwell’s in order to fulfil his own musical experimentation.

The result was that the ambitious setting required male and female speakers, male chorus and an orchestra to be performed on a stage, as it was with *Façade*. “Searle used the Sitwell’s poetry to supply the inevitability of movement, and coherence of structure, that he felt to be endangered by his chosen style. Searle sought a solution in the use of words. Word-patterns and images supplied just that underlying movement and structure that was needed”… in a large-scale work. In a sense, the music becomes secondary for the poem’s text – like its sound-effect. (Routh, 142)

Routh describes, which efforts were required from the composer in order to maintain the musical idea of the poet: “certain aspects of the poetry and its “lyrical content, with which the poet occasionally interrupts the social satire”, and the “satirically treated figure of the Lady Bamburgher”, in musical terms required the usage of particular notes and semi-tones. (Routh, 138) When being performed on the stage, Searle’s *Gold Coast Customs* included a section, titled “African War Chant,” where the male chorus “whistled and shouted to the accompaniment of tom-toms and clapped hands” trying to imitate the African primitive tribe. (Phillips, 88).In case with *Façade,* the composer tries to cooperate with the text in order to reflect the original ideas in Sitwell’s verse.

In *Gold Coast Customs* Sitwell again addresses to the visual qualities of a “masking affect” (the effect widely used in the world of music, ballet and theatre), as she did before in *Façade.* This time she resorts to an “African Mask”. Phillips argues that in modernism an

African face was already a mask. (67) According to her, the masking strategy was used in order to get “outside of outworn European representations of identity and conventional patterns of signification”. (Phillips, 75)

Gold Coast Customs echoes its great modernist predecessor *The Waste Land.* “In Sitwell’s work *Gold Coast Customs* occupies the same position as *The Waste Land* in Mr. Eliot’s”. (Green, 117) Like T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land,* the ur-poem of modernism, Sitwell’s long poem combines dense and obscure language with a bleak picture of modern London. (Phillips, 72) Both of the poems offer a “cryptic” summing up.

The declared resemblance between the two poems may also be found in terms of “music and sound” approach reflected in the modernist the verse. The ending of both poems perfectly illustrates the idea. Both, T.S. Eliot and Sitwell, appeal to the reader’s sense of hearing when describing falling London in the last lines of the poems:

What is that sound high in the air

Murmur of maternal lamentation

Who are those hooded hordes swarming

Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth

Ringed by the flat horizon only

What is the city over the mountains

Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air

Falling towers

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria

Vienna London

Unreal (Abrams, M., and Greenblatt, S., ed. 2307, 365-377)

The image continues to be developed by means of sounds and music that create the horrifying choir of damnation:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight

And fiddled whisper music on those strings

And bats with baby faces in the violet light

Whistled, and beat their wings

And crawled head downward down a blackened wall

And upside down in air were towers

Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours

And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted well,

In this decayed hole among the mountains

In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing

Over the tumbled graves… (Abrams, M., and Greenblatt, S., ed. 2307, 377-392)

Sitwell echoes Eliot and calls her "verbal orchestra" to perform the same picture - the ruining of human civilization:

Bahuna, Banbangala, Barumbe, Bonge,

And London fall,…Rolling human skin drums,

Surrounded by long black hair, I hear

Their Stones that fall,

Their voices that call,

Among the black and the bellowing bones…(Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 252)

Here, Sitwell wants the reader to notice the alarming drum-beat of "rolling human skin". She describes what she hears: the stones of falling London, the calling human voices and human bones that roar, cry, howl – "below". She then goes on describing the most of her catastrophe – losing the ability to hear and speak: the music of life is over:

The sightless mud

Weeps tears, a sigh,

To rhinoceros-hided leaves: ‘Ah why

So sightless, earless, voiceless, I? (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 252)

From the very first up to the last line, Sitwell again and again creates her imagery through her talent to unite a word and a sound. Lehmann titles *Gold Coast Customs* as a “ great and original triumph of sound” (23).

As well as in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, “a spark of hope appeared in the age of darkness through the prophetic last lines of *Gold Coast Customs*. The possibility of healing even after the extremes of evil opened a way out of hell. The "gold and wheat," the "blood and fire," and the "fires of God," which terminated this remarkable poem, will yet reappear in Sitwell’s later poems of her “supreme phase” in a twelve-year interval. (Misko, 19)

Henry Reed calls *Gold Coast Customs* as Sitwell’s attempt to be taken seriously at the end of the twenties as an important modernist poet. (118) It seems that she did succeed in that since W.B. Yeats expressed his opinion about the poem by saying that with its creation he felt that “something absent from literature was back again, and in a form of rare in the literature of all generations, passion ennobled by intensity, by endurance, by wisdom” (W.B. Yeats qtd.in Lehmann, 23).

The poem marks a great phase in Edith Sitwell’s poetic career where “the ‘bizzarie’ of lighter pieces is used all in a perfectly serious theme”. (Reed, 117) Undoubtedly, it is one of the finest achievements of modern poetry, a triumph over a painful and tragic subject, a superbly successful use of a daring technique of unifying the worlds of music and poetry together.

This chapter provided a deep analysis of the Edith Sitwell’s poetry written in her most successful period between 1922-1929. It illustrates examples of how the poet used music and musicality at various possible levels for the implementation of modernist poetic techniques.

Sitwell's aim of this unification of the two branches of art – poetry and music - was to carry out a modernist experiment in literature and to express her own protest to the conditions that brought the whole world to the post-war crisis. Moreover, Sitwell's poetry, written between 1914-1929, demonstrates how music and publicity can cooperate. The result of such cooperation was the appearance of "the poetry of publicity" phenomenon.

CHAPTER IV

4. POST-WAR POEMS ("STILL FALLS THE RAIN", "SHADOW OF CAIN")

After *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) Edith Sitwell did not write poetry for several years until 1942. When she returned to writing, critics and readers could not avoid noticing the change of the style and theme. Most of them called the period of 1940 and onwards as the period of Sitwell's maturity. Sitwell's poetry had turned from the fanciful content and criticisms of life to the deep themes with religious notes. Henry Reed had evaluated the poet's mature period as the time when her "long heart-searching, has at last found an adequate and consistent context for earlier, more fragmentary" and experimental one. (122) This chapter briefly analyses the period in order to make sure that the introduction of music into poetry was the poets constant obsession or it was limited to a particular historical or cultural period.

In the notes on her own poetry, Sitwell writes: "After *Gold Coast Customs* I wrote no poetry for several years... Then, after a year of war, I began to write again – of the state of the world, of the terrible rain...I wrote on the sufferings of Christ, the Starved Man hung upon the Cross...". My time of experiment was done. (Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, xli) Here the poetess confirms that her poetry was no more a modernist experimentation and had considerably changed. She admits that her poetic lines are no more abrupt and fragmented, but they are "lines of great length". Thus, Edith Sitwell changes her style after a break in her work, but the mentioned poems continue to have their sound-based character. In poem "Still Falls the Rain", for example, the poet describes the cold horrifying sound "like the pulse of the heart" of the failing bullets during London air raids of 1940:

Still falls the Rain—

Dark as the world of man, black as our loss—

Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails

Upon the Cross.

Still falls the Rain

With a sound like the pulse of the heart that is changed to the hammer-beat

In the Potter's Field, and the sound of the impious feet

(Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, 272)

Her another great poem of the period of maturity is the long poem "The Shadow of Cain". The poem's topic is no longer related to dancing and drum-beating – it is about the world's catastrophe towards the final disaster of Hiroshima nuclear bombing. Sitwell's habit to measure the reality, even if it is war and nuclear catastrophe through her earlier patterns of sounds: her tones of the bleaching bones rustle", the skull of men "crumble", the catastrophe is measured in terms of sounds: "Not a creature stirred,/nor the sound of a bird);. This is not surprising, regarding Edith Sitwell's love for music, musicality and creating of imagery by means of sound pictures of things.

The "Shadow of Cain" was also provided a musical setting by the composer Humphrey Searle, and at its opening performance Sitwell shared the stage in reading her poetry with Dylan Thomas, only a year away from his own untimely death, for which Sitwell was to feel a deep sorrow. Reviewing the performance for the *Manchester Guardian* Neville Cardus wrote that "It was a joy and a privilege to hear the English language spoken with Dr Sitwell's and Mr Thomas's intense feeling for the beauty of words."

To conclude, the Sitwell's poems in the course of the Second World War and after have certain similarities, with those written in the period of high modernism, in terms of her language. The poetic sound patterns were still important, and continued to appear in her verse due to the poet's the talent to "hear the unheard" and reproduce the imagery related to sounds. In her poet's world, the union of music and poetry never finished to exist, but her

great modernist experimental had come to an end. The avant-garde style had changed for a more realistic one. The themes became deeper and meditative on serious problems of the world sorrow, religious belief, regret and possible future redemption.

CONCLUSION

Edith Sitwell is a controversial figure in the history of English poetry during the twentieth century. The path to her popularity was not easy. Her early poetry written before the great break in the poetic career in 1929 was not readily accepted. Shock, dissatisfaction, discontent – that was the effect that her poetry had had over the reader and critics. The reason for such a response was the experimental, very avant-garde character of her poetry. As Edith Sitwell explains, this new avant-garde poetic language was yet unknown to the reader of 1920s, which caused a very controversial reception of her work. Music was one of the major aspects of her modernist poetic experimentation.

Sitwell chose music as a means of her modernist poetic experimentation due to her immense love to this art, which had developed in her childhood. The poet's childhood, her belonging to the very old royal family, the way of her upbringing affected her tastes for music and poetry. These aspects also determined the formation of the poet's rebellious character, her ability to protest, to stay aside, and withstand criticism. All these qualities were needed to become an avant-garde experimenter in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Examination of the poet's biography demonstrates that the poet's devotion to arts, music and literature, her habit of constant self-education inspired her for further examination of the tendencies in arts. Sitwell's intellectual mind enabled her to appreciate and criticize political, social and cultural life in Britain and in the whole world.

Public success of modernist composers, artists and writers of modernism, was not only embedded in the art they created, but also in the tireless attempts and skill in building connections and networks with the social media. Different methods were used for this purpose: slogans, popular press and circulating speculations about the artists' works and private lives. Therefore, this thesis declares music as a means of publicity which Edith Sitwell used in order to promote her poetic art to a wider reading audience.

In1900s-1930s Europe was going through general economic growth due to the rapid industrial expansion, industrialization and the increase of urban population. Life in a city and the nature of a city life had changed. A new life was being shaped at the time. It was more urbanized, mechanized and, therefore, more depersonalized. General depersonalization had caused cultural shock and influenced every aspect of intellectual and cultural life in Europe and in Britain. New artistic techniques, that represented a human being from a different perspective, were developed in literature, music, theatre and painting art.

The idea for the Sitwellian experiment was inherited from the cultural event of The Ballets Russes – an enterprise established by Russian impresario Sergey Diaghilev that united several kinds of arts - music, ballet, theatre, fashion and painting - for the sake of modernist cultural experimentation. This thesis also defined modernism, and literary modernism in particular; outlined its major concepts and explained how they reflected the social protest and represented the break with the previously established literary tradition. The chapter also analysed cultural modernist innovations in music in Europe and Britain, the relationship between music and literature in general.

Edith Sitwell's preoccupation with the subject of music as a way of her modernist poetic experimentation can be traced in her early poems. From the very beginning of her writing career she pays great attention to a particular, music-related vocabulary, the regular usage of modernist conceptions of noise and non-musical sounds, her often addressing to the reader's sense of hearing and creation of music-related imagery, non-traditional rhythm and rhyme. All these is demonstrated in such early poems as "The Avenue", "Mandoline" and "Spring".

With time, Sitwell's experimental poetic style developed and matured. The poems *Façade* (1922), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924), and *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) illustrate the situation. The size of these poems increases to emphasize the lack of logic in the plot: the

plot is a non-sense fragmentation, a collage of smaller abstracts devoted to a one or several particular meaningful ideas. The *Façade* (1922) cycle is untied under idea of false and fake appearance – the *Façade*. Our life and its values are not as they seem to be. *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924) is devoted to the irony of unfaithful love and shocks the reader with the unsatisfactory ending of the story: the sleeping princes is never awoken by a prince promised by previously established stereotypes. *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) is the last poem in the period of Sitwell's great modernist experimentation with music and poetry and is often called as a transitional poem. It is all about customs of a rotting society that is involved in aborigine funeral rhythmical dancing.

Moreover, Sitwell's *Façade* (1922) and *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) demonstrate how poetry can be successfully promoted to public by means of publicity. Sitwell's introduction of different visual arts in her *Façade* recital attracted the public attraction to such components of modernist poetry as voice, noise, music, poetic text and its meaning. All these elements provoked the reader for deep analysis and thinking process.

In case with *Façade* music, voice and noise were part of "publicity" concept that Sitwell intensively used to promote her work. The poet's different lifestyle and an eccentric appearance also added to the effect of publicity. This way Sitwell had become a "walking symbol" of modernist rebel against accepted norms, morality, tradition that she had ardently discussed in her experimental poetry.

With the beginning of the Second World War the world goes through another crisis, and the avant-garde poet, such as Edith Sitwell, cannot avoid responding to it. The merry-music approach and the dancing poetic lines disappear from her art. From now on Sitwell's verse is dramatically realistic and full of religious imagery. However, such famous poems as "Still Falls the Rain" and the "Shadow of Cain", depicting fascism, war and nuclear weapons catastrophe, still demonstrate the poet's talent for comprehending this world as a big music-

box full of sounds. Her imagery is still built of sound-based metaphors and images. The last come out of Sitwell's creative mind and her love for music combined with the qualities of an individual talent.

The examination of Edith Sitwell's poetry has revealed that her attempt to unite music and poetry is not an accidental occasion in several poems, but a constant tendency in her entire work, a major part of her modernist avant-garde experimentation. This, in turn, confirms that modernism is the cultural style that deliberately experiments with the combination of several arts in one whole union.

The overall result of the research proves that Edith Sitwell, being a passionate critic of music, intentionally introduced the modernist musical conceptions into her poetry in order to test its aesthetic limits, to create the disturbing atmosphere in her verse, to question the "unrest" historical context of the century. These aims justified the poet's choice of music-related vocabulary, her focus on musical and non-musical sounds, as well as on the words' texture and combination of assonances and dissonances within them, her attempt to build a non-traditional rhythm and meter. The poet's experiment with music and poetry extended further to the principles of absurd plot development and its illogical organization that resembled the structure of a modernist piece of music.

Edith Sitwell's experiment with poetry and music was more than simply a linguistic experiment: the musicality and rhythmic character of her poems allowed her to literary narrate them under a music accompaniment. The result of this part of her modernist experimentation was the cycle of *Façade* (1922) poems, which was a totally new approach to poetry in comparison to the Victorian and Georgian forms. Through Sitwell Britain had learnt new poetry – poetry as a form of an entertaining event, as a form of visual art, as a dialogue between the reader, audience and the reciter.

Sitwell did use music and theatrical performance as a means of poetry promotion and commercialization. Her obsession with modernist experimentation leaves a ground for only accusing her of being a true avant-garde and advanced representative of the modernist era. With the musical accompaniment of her poems she managed to stir-up reader's interest in poetry, to experiment with forms and styles, to trace how poetry and music can successfully cooperate. Moreover, by using music as a means of publicity, Sitwell acquired an opportunity to aesthetically rebel, to go against conventions maintained by social and political institutions - the main purpose of an avant-garde and modernist poet.

Vaughan Williams defines genius "as the right man in the right place at the right time". (3-22) He adds that there are too many instances of the time being ripe and the place being vacant and no man to fill it, and we shall never know of the numbers of 'mute and inglorious Miltons' who failed because the place and time were not ready for them. (Williams, 3-22) Referring to the Williams's definition, one can admit that Edith Sitwell's individual talent and passion for music and poetry perfectly coincided with her personal rebellious qualities and the historical and cultural context, she lived in, which gives her an exquisite right to be called a genius, in the canon of both British and European modernist poetry.

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