



## An English Eccentric: Edith Sitwell and Her Experiments with Sound in *Façade*\*

İngiliz Bir Eksantrik: Edith Sitwell ve *Façade* Şiirlerinde Sesle Yaptığı Deneyler

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### Abstract

Throughout Edith Sitwell's poetic career, one specific factor was always in the foreground in her works, that is, the experimental use of sound. Especially in her earlier period, employing rhythm as an experimental arrangement of sounds dominated the bulk of her poems. Sitwell prioritised this technical element over thematic components, and thus developed an inventive approach to the art of poetry in the early twentieth century. Her famous poetry collection, *Façade* (1922) can be considered one of the most distinguished examples of her experimental manner, consisting of several abstract poems which were compiled for dramatic performance and for William Walton's music. With Walton's contributions, Sitwell combined the elements of music and poetry in *Façade*, and she formed a new artistic domain where she could express and improve her poetic style by working on the use of sound and rhythm. The reason for her emphasis on the role of rhythm in poetry was not only its significance as a technical attribute but also its functioning as a representative of the century's spirit. For Sitwell, the rhythm of the twentieth century must not be the rhythm of the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries, on the contrary, it should reflect the soul of its era. Accordingly, Sitwell advocated that poetry should be compatible with the tone of the period in which it is produced. Therefore, the poems in the collection were designed to be as unsteady, tumultuous, and complex as the era they belonged to, and this composition was achieved through her experimental style. In this respect, the primary aim of this article is to discuss Sitwell's technical and stylistic experiments with sound in her *Façade* poems and examine her perception of artistic creation in the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Sound, Edith Sitwell, William Walton, *Façade* (1922)

### Öz

Edith Sitwell'in şiir kariyeri boyunca belirli bir unsur eserlerinde daima ön planda olmuştur. Bu unsur sesin deneysel kullanımınıdır. Özellikle Sitwell'in erken döneminde ritmin seslerin deneysel düzenlenmesi olarak kullanılması şiirlerinin büyük bir kısmına hâkim olmuştur. Sitwell bu teknik unsuru tematik içeriklerden üstün tutmuştur. Böylelikle yirminci yüzyıl başında şiir sanatına yaratıcı bir yaklaşım geliştirmiştir. Sahne performansı ve William Walton'ın müziği için derlenen çeşitli soyut şiirlerden oluşan ünlü şiir derlemesi *Façade* (1922) Sitwell'in deneysel tarzının en göze çarpan örneklerinden biri olarak değerlendirilebilir. Walton'ın katkılarıyla Sitwell *Façade*'de müzik ve şiir unsurlarını bir araya getirmiş ve ses ve ritim kullanımı üzerinde çalışarak şiirsel stilini ifade edip geliştirebileceği yeni bir sanatsal alan oluşturmuştur. Şiirde ritmin rolüne olan vurgusunun sebebi yalnızca teknik bir özellik olarak önemi değil, aynı zamanda yüzyılın ruhunun bir temsili olarak işlev görmesiydi. Sitwell'e göre yirminci yüzyılın ritmi on sekizinci ya da on dokuzuncu yüzyılların ritmi olmamalı; aksine, ritim döneminin ruhunu yansıtmalıdır. Bu doğrultuda Sitwell şiirin üretildiği zamanın atmosferiyle uyumlu olması gerektiğini savunmuştur. Dolayısıyla derlemedeki şiirler ait oldukları dönem kadar istikrarsız, değişken ve karmaşık olarak tasarlanmıştır. Bu oluşum da Sitwell'in deneysel tarzıyla sağlanmıştır. Bu bakımdan, bu makalenin başlıca amacı Sitwell'in *Façade* şiirlerinde sesle olan teknik ve biçimsel deneylerini ele almak ve yirminci yüzyıldaki sanatsal yaratıcılık anlayışını incelemektir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Ses, Edith Sitwell, William Walton, *Façade* (1922).

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## Introduction

As a modernist avant-garde poet and a literary critic, Dame Edith Louisa Sitwell (1887-1964) was one of the most extraordinary and controversial personas of the twentieth century, mostly due to “[...] her highly stylised appearance, aristocratic background and use of acidic quips to batter her critics rather than her poetic achievements” (Harris, 2015, p. 1). Indeed, her peculiar appearance in public, and her critical stance and sharp-tongued, sometimes vitriolic comments on other figures in the intellectual circle of the time gained her publicity to a great extent. However, it is not her public image but her innovative, meticulous, and prolific art that made her one of the most influential and ingenious women poets of the era, when the modernist movement was exclusively male. She established her name and place in the literary canon, unlike most women writers “[who] were excluded when the male representatives of modernism claimed modernist innovations and ideas and theories concerning the new style(s) of writing as their own” (Samberger, 2005, p. 12). Her efforts to challenge the traditional forms of poetry in her works proved Sitwell’s literary success and gained her a considerable appreciation by the literary figures of the time.

In her lifetime, Sitwell wrote a variety of poems in terms of theme and concern. While in her early works, she mainly dealt with external and human nature inspired by the French symbolism, her later works were under the influence of the wars and the terrifying course humanity was taking. However, in Sitwell’s art during the 1920s, theme often remained in the background, shadowed by the technical aspects, though the two were often in collaboration, reinforcing each other. In “Some Notes on My Own Poetry,” the introduction of her *The Collected Poems*, Sitwell elucidates her particular interest in experimental poetry in terms of technique by asserting that, “[a]t the time I began to write, a change in the direction, imagery, and rhythms in poetry had become necessary, owing to the rhythmical flaccidity, the verbal deadness, the dead and expected patterns, of some of the poetry immediately preceding us” (1957, p. xv). Sitwell points out the incompetency and the invalidity of the quondam poesy in the twentieth-century artistic context. Despite having been inspired by the traditional English poetry, the Romantics in particular, such as Shelley and Blake, Sitwell managed to disengage her art from her predecessors and her Georgian contemporaries with regards to style, and headed for more experimental methods, which were considered, as Lehmann explicates, unfamiliar by the public:

The weight of the English tradition since the Romantic revival has led the public to expect from its poets, especially in their shorter works, poems which transmute into imaginative substance particular experiences and emotions “recollected in tranquillity.” [...] There are almost no such poems in Edith Sitwell’s *oeuvre*. The emotion is indeed there, but it is as it were at a further remove, and generalized or put into the mouth of some historical or fanciful character. (1965, p. 31-32)

Instead of following the footsteps of the Romantics and conforming to the conventional public appetite, Sitwell distanced the focus of her art from “particular experiences and emotions,” and turned it towards experimenting with the technical aspects of poetry. Perhaps her poetry collection, *Façade* (1922) is one of the most prominent examples for her experimental style in the early twentieth century, consisting of several abstract poems which were compiled for William Walton’s music, and for dramatic performance. The poems were assembled and performed to a circle of friends in 1922, accompanied by Walton and his orchestra, with Sitwell reciting the poems (Phillips, 1996, p. 117). By combining music and poetry, Sitwell attained a new domain in her art where she could develop her poetic creativity by practising on the use of sound and rhythm, through which she also expressed her perception of the mechanised condition of the twentieth-century world. As mentioned earlier, technical experiments were prioritised by Sitwell over thematic concerns. However, it must be acknowledged that the atmosphere of the twentieth century had a considerable impact on the formation of Sitwell’s poetry. The poems in the collection, and her early works in general, “reflected the emptiness and hysteria of the post-war world. This mood was captured by a deliberate artificiality and a mask of gaiety which sometimes culminated in a note of hysteria” (Cole, 1967, 2). The post-war climate of the early twentieth century, indeed, motivated Sitwell’s absurd and eccentric

approach towards the art of poetry. Analysing the forms and structures of several poems from the collection, this paper examines Sitwell's technical and stylistic experiments with verse, while also exploring the motivations behind these poems, evoked by the general atmosphere of the century. With respect to *Façade*'s substantial place in Sitwell's literary career and idiosyncratic poetic style, Tramontana advocates that, "[it] does demonstrate several key aspects of Sitwell's eccentric aesthetic: experiment with the 'texture' of language, unsettling synesthesia, the treatment of words not primarily as vehicles of meaning but as patterns of rhythm and sound as well as evokers of emotion" (2000, p. 83). *Façade* poems, in this sense, provide an enquiry into Sitwell's idiosyncratic approach to poetry: sound and rhythm of the words being the ultimate medium to carry the gist of a work of art.

### **Rhythm of the Century and *Façade***

Edith Sitwell's place in English modernist poetry has been a complicated and problematic issue with regards to her stance towards the literature produced by female writers. She did not associate herself with the women's poetry of the time, on the contrary, she is known to have criticised many female writers of the time as well as of the past (Van Der Moere, 2000, 189). Instead, she adopted a rather genderless attitude towards poetic creation. As Dowson also asserts, "[a]lthough vehemently opposed to affiliation with the 'feminine', she did not resort to perceived masculine writing. Her statements about the nature of poetry by women indicate her preoccupation with the relationship between women's poetry and tradition but her formal and syntactical subversions avoided connotations of either male or female practices" (1998, 94-5). Sitwell's understanding of poetry, in this sense, transcends the issue of gender-based writing, and concentrates more on the craftsmanship of poetry. A change and freshness in poetry and poetic style were of utmost importance to Dame Sitwell. She was aware of the fact that the pattern of poetry that was being produced at the time, and the idea of emotion "recollected in tranquillity" were not congruent with the dynamics of the new century. Rhythm, defined as "the pattern of sounds perceived as the recurrence of equivalent 'beats' at more or less equal intervals" (Baldick, 2004, p. 219), carried a crucial role for her in this matter. Sitwell considered the experimental use of sounds in her poetry in a congruent design with the age as the essential factor in achieving the genuine essence of the modernist art. As Albright suggests, "[t]he notion of pure rhythm, liberated from every burden of meaning, is one of many Modernist dreams of the artistic absolute" (2007, p. 38), and in Sitwell's case, "[i]t was therefore necessary to find rhythmical expressions for the heightened speed of [her] time" (Sitwell, 1957, xv). According to Sitwell, the rhythm of the twentieth century must not be the rhythm of the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries, on the contrary, it should reflect the soul of the era. Therefore, the poems in her collection were designed to be as unsteady, tumultuous, and complex as the era in which they were produced. In order to explicate this relation between her poetry and the general mode of the period, Sitwell argues that

[t]he violence of an epoch is responsible for the technical experiments of painters and poets of today. How to attain speed is the problem. And, as far as poets are concerned, to do this we must study the effect of texture or rhythm. These experiments are, for the most part, of a violent order. And if you ask why rhythms have become violent, the answer is: this is an age of machinery, a wild race for time, confined within limits that are at once mad and circumscribed. (2011, p. 142)

Her statement underlines the fact that the erratic nature of the twentieth century created a need for an expression in poetry as erratic as itself. Sitwell found rhythm as an effective means to answer this need. Her experiments in attaining this violent nature of rhythm led Sitwell to combine the features of poetry and music. The significance of *Façade* poems lies in this association of two branches of art. Osbert Sitwell (1892-1969), her brother and also an acknowledged poet of the time, writes of how the concept of the *Façade* poems came into being in his *Laughter in the Next Room: An Autobiography* as follows:

The idea of *Façade* first entered our minds as the result of certain technical experiments at which my sister had recently been working: experiments in obtaining through the medium of words the rhythms of dance measures such as waltzes, polkas, foxtrots. These exercises were often experimental enquiries into the effect on rhythm, on speed, and on colour of the use of rhymes, assonances, dissonances, placed outwardly, at different places in the line, in most elaborate patterns. (1949, p. 185)

The rhythms of the poems in *Façade* are in harmony with the rhythms of Walton's music, both of which are energetic, playful, and at the same time, unstable. Sitwell's recitation naturally becomes a part of the music, and "[she] therefore has to read and perform the music like any other instrument does, only that [...] her voice has no melody where notes vary in pitch, and [she] instead concentrates on techniques which belong to the language of poetry (such as rhythm, sounds of vowels and consonants and rhymes)" (Samberger, 2005, p. 211). The presence of her voice in *Façade* as a component of the music is achieved also through the physical absence of Sitwell in front of the audience. She recited the poems behind "a painted screen [and] through a sengerphone (precursor of the megaphone) mounted in a hole in the screen," thus, creating an ironic atmosphere in which the actual façade of the performance presenting not a visual entertainment, but the playful harmony of the music and the rhythms of the poems (Phillips, 1996, p. 131). Although the name for *Façade* is said to come from her charlady, who commented on the work: "All this carry-on is just one big façade, isn't it?" (FitzHerbert, 2011, np), it can be argued that the title of the collection carries an intentional irony in itself, since the performance lacks the presence of the reciter on the stage, and foregrounds the element of sound. The object of the performance was to make the audience focus on the music and the lyrics, and not the facet of the person who gave life to them.

In *Façade* poems, the thematic concerns are not entirely discarded, but rather merged with the technical aspects. By using the popular dance and rhythmic forms of Victorian and Edwardian periods, such as waltz, foxtrots, and nursery rhymes in a twisted manner, Sitwell "[...] subverts the content of these forms in a subtle and satirical critique of Victorian family, particularly patriarchal structures" (Phillips, 1996, p. 133). The novelty in Sitwell's art, hence, does not come from her concern in forming an explicit content, but from her subtle wit hidden in her technique, which highlights the non-functionality and the incompatibility of the previous centuries' norms and art forms in a new era, and criticises the desolate and mechanised condition of this new period. As Ower also points out:

[...] Sitwell was developing an ironic and satiric poetry based upon her vision of materialistic modern civilization as a sterile and demonic antitype of the sacramental cosmic orgasm. This satiric development finds its culmination in the *Façade* poems (1922), in which Dame Edith ingeniously manipulates lyrical technique partly in order to present a satirically heightened image of a sterile, mechanized and dissociated world, and partly in order to "dissolve, diffuse, dissipate" that world to suggest her vision of a spiritually vitalized universe. (1972, p. 4)

In this respect, through the thematic implications and the technical and visual details in particular, the collection, as a whole, stands as a manifesto against the conventional perspectives of the Victorian and Edwardian norms regarding the producing of art. By involving poetry with other art forms, however, Sitwell creates a harmony between oppositions; sound and written word, experimentation and tradition, and nonsense and meaning. Her use of sound and rhythm, in this sense, can be regarded as the essential agency to combine these conflicting concepts, as Perloff and Dworkin also suggest, "[a]t once the antithesis of meaning and the very essence of meaning, sound in poetry articulates the same problems that have attended early twentieth-century definitions of the category of 'poetry' itself, reflecting the identical logic at a fractal remove" (2009, p. 10). Sound in Sitwell's *Façade*, thus, represents the incoherence and ambivalence of the twentieth-century art both by promoting a sense of inanity in the poems, and being the very instrument of the modernist expression of the century's mode.

### ***Façade Poems***

“Waltz,” one of the poems in the collection based on the dance rhythms of waltz, is an example for the aforementioned characteristics that Sitwell wanted to form in her poetry. It combines certain experimental uses of sounds through rhymes and assonances creating an unconventional rhythm. The collaboration of rhymes and assonances, in Sitwell’s own words, “[...] with their various degrees of darkness, gives a kind of ground rhythm” which is naturally turbulent due to the various use of similar vowels in assonances, “[...] in one case softening–‘apiaries,’ ‘aviaries’–in one case rising–‘fond,’ ‘fanned’” (1957, p. xix-xx). Likewise, the inconsistency in the lines, one comprising of only one word, “Tourelles,” “Pelisses”, and the other comprising of nine, “[l]ike the thin plaided leaves that the castle crags grew” (1957, p. 144), contributes to the oscillating structure of the poem. Throughout the poem, Sitwell’s words and voice become a part of Walton’s orchestra. As the music starts in a low tone, Sitwell recites the lines smoothly. The assonances in the first lines are mild and tranquil, such as “Lily,” “silly,” and “sea,” “tree” (1957, p. 144) The idyllic atmosphere created by the music and Sitwell’s rhythmical recitation gradually gives way to a jubilant and ludicrous mood as the music gains a jazz tune and becomes more vibrant and unstable. Like an instrument, Sitwell’s words embody the same lively jazz rhythm, and the assonances become sharper and more distinct, such as “waterfalls,” “shawls,” “parasols,” and “fountains,” “mountains” (1957, p. 144-145). Both Sitwell’s reciting and Walton’s music reflect the contrasting natures of a waltz and jazz rhythms. Lasansky asserts that Walton “[wrote] a ‘fashionable’ waltz that incorporates jazz elements. [...] The parody is immediately made clear by the dissonant notes in the waltz accompaniment” (1991, p. 52). This contradiction between the rhythms of waltz and that of jazz highlights the very ironic situation of poetry in the early twentieth century imitating the forms of the previous eras. The poem/recital is intended to embody the clash between the regular and orderly waltz rhythm associated with the Victorian and Edwardian fashion, and the fragmented and distorted jazz rhythm associated with the soul of the twentieth century. The combination does not work, and the result is an anomaly. This experimental use of sound in the poem provides Sitwell with the essential means to explicate the mood of the period. This way, the poem becomes the representative of the vigorous mode of the early twentieth century.

Although the poem is mostly designed to be nonsensical, Sitwell does not avoid inserting a critical sight into her lines regarding the materialised mode of the age. The two girls in the poem, Daisy and Lily, “[...] roam and determine / What fashions have been and what fashions will be– / What tartan leaves born, / What crinolines worn” (1957, p. 144). Besides the technical aspects, the sarcastic and cynical tone that Sitwell uses while depicting the two girls’ trip by the seaside substantiates the bulk of the poem in terms of theme and concern, since she describes them as “lazy and silly” (1957, p. 144). Pamela Hunter’s approach highlights the critical stance of the poem against the disharmony in the social strata, and the mechanised condition of the period as follows:

Daisy and Lily are the perfect examples of the empty, superficial, fashion-conscious sillies who walk, or rather parade, when it is essential to be seen in the latest creations. . . . The poem is a detailed description of the various popular modes of attire, materials and accessories. The materials not only refer to fashion but also represent the general preoccupation with materialism that Edith saw reflected in the society. (qtd. in Lasansky, 1991, p. 51-52)

Indeed, Sitwell points out the society’s concerns about trivial matters, such as what to wear, which fabric to choose, or how to avoid the sun in summer. She sarcastically likens Daisy and Lily to nymphs, who wear “bonnets,” “shawls,” and “elegant parasols” (1957, p. 144) to avert from the sunlight. Sitwell concludes the poem by highlighting the vanity of the materialistic concerns of the twentieth-century society as she calls the two girls’ preoccupation with fashion “vain,” and “hollow” (1957, p. 145).

One can argue that each component of the poem, from the technical use of words to the depth of the content, serves a function in reflecting the soul of the era. Sitwell underlines the contrast between the modes of the Victorian society and that of the twentieth century by reciting the poem in both waltz and jazz rhythms, thus creating a disharmony in the structure of the poem. She also emphasises the very contrast by ridiculing

the extravagant manners of the upper-class society. In this sense, concentrating both on the rhythm that the words create in the poem, and the inference from the subject matter of the poem about the general condition of the era indicate the collaboration of the aforementioned oppositions in Sitwell's poetry.

"Fox Trot" is, as Sitwell herself describes, "an experiment in the effect, on rhythm and on speed, of certain arrangements of assonances and dissonances, and of a certain arrangement of intertwining one-syllabled, two-syllabled, and three-syllabled words" (1957, p. xxvi-xxvii). The poem is quite nonsensical in terms of its theme as Sitwell tries to create a fox trot through the rhythmical pattern of words accompanied by Walton's music rather than writing a meaningful text. Although the poem is not about a fox trot, "a ballroom dance [...] of a kind of march-like ragtime, slow or quick" (Kennedy M. and Kennedy J. B., 2013, p. 306), its rhythms are based on the dance itself, accelerating in one line, decelerating in another. This instability is achieved through the stress put on following lines, and the number of words forming a line:

Old  
Sir  
Faulk,  
Tall as a stork,  
Before the honeyed fruits of dawn were ripe, would walk (1957, p. 137).

While the first three lines consist of only one word and are recited quite slowly, the line "[b]efore the honeyed fruits of dawn were ripe, would walk" is performed at breakneck speed. Sitwell establishes this oscillatory movement in the poem by using certain technical devices, and as she explicates, "[t]hroughout the poem the assonances and dissonances are placed in a closely concerted and interwoven design, some being accented, and some so unaccented as to be almost muted [...]" (1957, p. xxviii). It is these dark words ("Faulk," "stork," "walk") and light words ("Sally," "Marry," "Mattie") (1957, p. 137) that form the ground rhythm of the poem, imitating the slow and fast jazz rhythms of the fox trot. According to Lasansky, the comma between "ripe" and "would walk" in the line "[b]efore the honeyed fruits of dawn were ripe, would walk" creates a syncopated rhythm by causing a pause in the recitation in order to "create the illusion of jazz rhythm" (1991, 55-56). In terms of creating the instability in the rhythm of the poem, while the words with more than two syllables, such as "reynard-coloured," "pheasant-feathered," and "goose-king", accelerate the speed of the rhythm, the words with one or two syllables, such as "Meg," "peg," "egg", decelerate the speed (1957, p. 137-138). Emphasising the dynamic structure of the poem, Sitwell uses a pattern which allows the lines to change speed. In the lines, "Sally, Mary, Mattie, what's the matter, why cry?" and "[t]he huntsman and the reynard-coloured sun and I sigh" (1957, p. 137), Sitwell increases the speed of the lines as she recites the words. While "Sally," "Marry", and "the huntsman" are uttered more softly, "Mattie" and "the reynard-coloured sun" are pronounced livelier, and "why cry" and "I sigh" heightens the rhythm and "give a high leap into the air" (Sitwell, 1957, p. xxviii). Thus the arrangement of the words—some of the lines consisting of only one word, some of them consisting of eleven—contributes to the reciting pace, hence the rhythm of the poem (Samberger, 2005, p. 211). In this respect, the words used in the poem are planned to be instruments contributing to the music, rather than conveying a thematic statement. Sitwell's attempt to strip her poetry from a meaning into the mere technical experiment presents itself in "Fox Trot," more than "Waltz," since the poem eliminates any social implications, but engages in catching the musical tone of the period through fox trot rhythms; unstable, lively, and partly slow, partly speedy.

"Trio for Two Cats and a Trombone," also known as "Long Steel Grass," is a poem, in which the technical aspects become more experimental, whereas the content becomes more nonsensical. Despite the reference in the title, the poem is not about two cats or a trombone, but some "white soldiers" and a "tall Spanish jade" (1957, p. 120). This inconsistency between the title and the content renders the poem absurd, even meaningless. However, as Slate-Liggett suggests, it is in fact a trio "[...] written to be sung probably by two shrill voices [two cats] and one deep one [a trombone], a poem, that is, of Sitwellian sound and fury" (1992, p. 84). Indeed, the title of the poem can be interpreted as a reference to the musical performance of the piece, rather than a thematic implication. As Sitwell recites the line, "[b]eside the castanetted sea" (1957, p. 120), the sound of the castanets accompanies the poem, and the triangle follows the line, "[o]r the sound of the

onycha / When the phoca has the pica” (1957, p. 121), which Lasansky calls “a word painting” (1991, 38). Thus, the recitation creates a harmony between the verse and the music by making the poem a part of the music. In this regard, it can be argued that the poem is more concerned with the musical and verbal experiment than thematic depth. The arrangement of the irrelevant lines on the page gives the poem a visual expression, “that of a trombone’s exaggerated movement as it is played” (Slate-Liggett, 1992, p. 85). Indeed, the first six stanzas are divided by the “ee” motifs, “See,” “Flee,” “Tee-hee,” “free,” “The,” “we”, which sound like the sudden movements of a trombone (Lasansky, 1991, p. 38). Sitwell recites the lines quite swiftly, and her voice lingers during these “ee” sounds, which makes the rhythm of the poem unsteady and undulant. While the poem begins in a slow tone, it gains speed and becomes shrill in the fifth stanza, and decelerates towards the end. The musical instruments have a similar role to that of the words. At the very beginning, the martial sound of the trumpet gives the poem an orderly and steady tone alluding to the passing of the white soldiers (1957, p. 120). While the martial tone and the white soldiers’ passing form a harmony between the technical and thematic aspects of the poem, the lines run with the sound of the saxophone in a low tone, and with the involvement of the drum, the rhythm of the poem accelerates. These suddenly changing emphases on words and sound contribute to the unstable form of the poem. The poem combines the martial order of the trumpet and circus atmosphere that the drum creates, and the result is the disruption of regularity through the collaboration of musical and textual experimentation. In this respect, Sitwell manages to “attain the speed” compatible with the “violence” of the period by capturing an oscillating rhythm in the poem.

“Said King Pompey,” one of the nonsensical poems in *Façade* written for the purpose of comic mockery subverting any meaningful expression, “is built on a scheme of R’s, which in this case produces a faint fluttering sound, like dust fluttering from the ground, or the beat of a dying heart” (1957, p. xviii). Indeed, the poem is deliberately reduced to meaninglessness. It is a pointless dialogue between the King Pompey, “the emperor’s ape,” and the Bishop, who discusses Eternity while eating ketchup. However, it is characterised by dark sounds due to the dominating “r” letter, such as “emperor,” and “temporal,” and by slower rhythm like, “[b]ut the sea-saw Crowd sent the Emperor down / To the howling dust – and up went the Clown” (1957, p. 117). In this sense, the poem differs from the majority of the collection. Although there is a certain rhythmic pattern, it is prevailed by a more sombre tone.

The poem has two versions; one written during this experimental period of *Façade*, and the other rewritten after Sitwell’s perception of the world became more pessimistic after the 1920s (1957, p. xviii-xix). The original version of the poem is a typical *Façade* poem, with emphasis on the meaninglessness of the content, and focus on the effect of the sound of words on the listener, “Pompey” echoing “Emperor,” “Acropolis” echoing “Indianapolis” as a shadow sound. However, the edited version of the poem reflects Sitwell’s receding from her experiments with sound, and turning her focus to the inevitable fate of humankind, and as Slate-Liggett asserts, in this poem, “[h]ers [is] a vision of a comic sensuality at war with, but submerged in, powers of civilization, history, and death” (1992, p. 91). The absurd ending of the poem, “[t]hat elephantiasis, / The flunkeyed and trumpeting sea” (1957, p. xviii), is changed into the gloomy and depressing lines, “[a]nd the Tyrant’s ghost and the Low-Man-Flea / Are emperor-brothers, cast shades that are red / From the tide of blood – (Red Sea, Dead Sea)” (1957, p. 117). The emphasis on dust refers to this inevitability of death: “[t]he dust is everything – / The heart to love and the voice to sing” (1957, p. 117). A pessimistic mood prevails in this later version of the poem due to the changes in the world, “from the moronic cackling of the 1920’s over ruin, over their bright-coloured hell, to a naked menace, where the only bright colour is that of blood” (1957, p. xviii). The violent trajectory human was taking in the 1930s, thus, led Sitwell to adopt a gloomier manner in her poetry, unlike the playful and carnivalesque tone of *Façade*. In this sense, the poem is one of the least humorous and the darkest among the other poems in the collection, in that, the thematic concerns are no longer hidden in the technical details, but are as visible as the sound of the rhythm itself.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Edith Sitwell's *Façade* accompanied by William Walton owes its significance to its path-breaking technique in poetry, in that, "[...] it combines a spoken poetry and chamber music in a dynamic interplay of stylized images, jaunty rhythms, and witty allusions" (Bryant, 2007, p. 245). Using her voice and words as instruments, as a part of Walton's orchestra, Sitwell creates a new perspective on poetry writing. In her poems, such as "Fox Trot" and "Trio for Two Cats and a Trombone," she experiments with one-syllabled, two-syllabled, and three-syllabled words and their effect on the rhythm of the poems. Depending on the stress she puts on certain words, the lines differ in terms of speed, which leads to a rhythmic tone in the poems. By using only one word in a line, and six in another, she makes the rhythm of the poems playful and at the same time unstable. This way, the words become musical instruments through Sitwell's craft. She gives the words a new rhythmical function in poetry, rather than merely a means to convey meaning. The erratic form of the *Façade* poems proves to be in utter compliance with the conflicting mode and "the violent rhythm" of the twentieth century. Accompanied also by the critical references and allusions regarding the ostentatious manners of the Victorian and Edwardian societies, the poems provide an insight into the soul of the period. Although its first public performance in 1922 received a hostile disapproval from the general public due to its unusual approach to poetry, by the half of the century, *Façade* became a source of inspiration in both fields of poetry and music. Sitwell's attempts to bring different branches of art together for the aesthetic purposes results in great success, in that, *Façade*, as a poetry collection designed to be recited with the accompaniment of an orchestra, is proved to be not only a poetic, but also a visual and auditory feast.

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