Abstract of the Ph.D. Thesis entitled
'Edith Sitwell's Development as a Poet
- A Stylistic Analysis'

Introduction: Edith Sitwell's unique position in the history of modern English poetry. Her early poetry - strikingly original in terms of its language, imagery and 'non-representational' quality. Her later poetry particularly that which was written after the second world war - considered as 'major' poetry by literary critics. The most remarkable feature of her poetry: her poetic development. Literary critics' explanation in terms of her 'vision of life' etc. My approach: stylistic.

Assumptions: (a) Stylistics - a more scientific and objective study of a literary text than traditional literary criticism; (b) stylistics - the most suitable approach for the study of Sitwell's poetry with its extraordinary linguistic concerns; (c) Literary critics' awareness of her linguistic deviations; but their comments - highly impressionistic and intuitive. Hence the importance of stylistic analysis of individual texts, and of exploring the pattern of development.

Barthes' theory of 'readerly texts' and 'writerly texts'. Sitwell's poetry: 'writerly text' - language - her primary mode of experience. Examination of her own comments. The purpose and design of the thesis explained: Direct Purpose: stylistic analysis of chosen individual texts in terms of striking linguistic features and working out principles of development
from one phase to another in terms of persistent patterns.
Indirect purpose: Attempt to establish stylistics as a central
mode of investigation in literary criticism - with the awareness
of its limitations. Examination of the usefulness and product-
ivity of synchronic-cum-diachronic study of the works of a
single poet. Hence the open-endedness of analysis.

Chapter One - From Literary Criticism to Stylistics:
A historical survey of the origin and development of Stylistics:

The literary critic's concern with the message and not
with the code. The advent of New Criticism - focus on the text
as a linguistic construct: I.A.Richards, Empson, Brooks, Davie
etc. - Their approach impressionistic.

The phenomenal growth of linguistics leading to the
emergence of stylistics. Early linguistic criticism in the
fifties: Harold Whitehall - 'no criticism can go beyond linguis-
tics' 'linguistics as an independent aid to criticism'. His
approach - 'an overstated, pragmatic assertion about technical
apparatus in criticism' - A.A.Hill's experiment in structural
method - a much noticed example of linguistic criticism. Halliday's
concern with the revelation and precise description of the
language features of a work. Halliday and Hasan's five types
of ties - careful and insightful linguistic description of
relations above the sentence level - a solid base for the
development of stylistic analysis. Sinclair's use of Halliday's
categories of linguistic description. Levin's notion of
equivalence based on Jakobson's theory - his demonstration of its operation at the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels in poetry; his concepts of 'arrest and release', and of 'couplings'. Leech's focus on 'foregrounding' and 'cohesion of foregrounding'.

Influence of Chomsky's Transformational Generative Mode:
J.P.Thorne's preoccupation with deviant sentences - Ohman: style as transformational choice - the relationship between deep structures and content, and surface structures and form. Donald Freeman's demonstration of the effect of unacceptable but not ungrammatical structures. His view of transformations as formal models to express a given concept. Culler's influence on Hawkes; the concept of literary competence.

Anne Cluysenaar - work of art as a unified communicative event. Her stylistic approach: exploration rather than analysis - use of scale and category grammar - emphasis on formal and contextual meaning. Fowler's attempt to connect critical interpretation with linguistic analysis - consideration of the readers' response. Widdowson: stylistics as the media between linguistics and literary criticism - neither a discipline nor a subject in its own right - but a means of relations between disciplines and subjects. Impact of European linguistics - Russian formalists on stylistics.

The approach used in the thesis: close to Cluysenaar, Widdowson, Fowler and Leech. Linguistic analysis of a text -
with a focus on functionally relevant items. Attempt at achieving a balance between response and analysis of stylistically relevant items - with an awareness of the pressure of interpretation. This study of Edith Sitwell's poetry - both synchronic and diachronic - attempt to pinpoint, stylistically, the principles of Sitwell's development. Some necessary strategies: division of her poetry into phases - choice of poems in each phase - choice of 'chunks' from long poems - the use of literary-cum-stylistic motivation.

Chapter Two - Edith Sitwell's 'Intuitive Stylistics:
Sitwell - not a trained linguist - her uncanny insight into the working of language - particularly its phonetic behaviour. Her thinking - spordaic, scattered and context-bound. The need to systematize her intuitive remarks and work out her theory in the light of the current linguistic categories.

Her 'theory' split into three vectors: (a) easily acceptable, apparently scientific ideas, (b) illuminating remarks full of valuable insights, and (c) highly subjective and impressionistic comments, both (b) and (c) indicating the future possibilities of stylistics.

A study of her remarks about vowels - Sitwell's remarkable sensitivity towards vowels - her intuitive understanding of their nature and behaviour - her use of the usual orthography for vowels in the absence of her knowledge of IPA symbols. Her functional labels to explain the use of vowels: light and
sharp (for front close), deep and dark (for back close),
flat (for front open), warm (back open), thick, dull (open
central) etc. Her comments - 'lightness and darkness' of
certain vowels acceptable - Sitwell - extremely sensitive to
vowel quantity - her comments quite scientific though intuitive -
hers admirably subtle in her auditory perceptions - but some
context-bound generalizations - resulting in subjectivity -
her accurate intuitive impression of the length of the vowels.

A study of her comments on the affective values of some
consonants: Sitwell's special affective vocabulary: flat,
shadeless, thin, dry for /t/, /d/, /k/ and /g/ in syllable
final positions, partially agreeable comments. Some highly
impressionistic. Her experiment with /r/ - functional terms
'harsh' or 'unmuted' for /r/ followed by a vowel sound; 'dull'
or 'muted' for /r/ in syllable final position or when followed
by a consonant - subjectivity in the functional description.

Sitwell's comments on rhyme, half-rhyme and internal
rhymes - highly impressionistic - when she comments on their
functional effect in the context. Her discussion on the effects
of pause - most sensitive and insightful - Her comments on the
syllabic structure of words - also acceptable. Her comments
on the effect on speed of equivalent syllables - significant,
her remarks on the stanza form, its length etc.

Sitwell's own critical vocabulary - her use of the
terms denoting non-auditory perceptions: shapes, movements
softness, hardness, wetness, dryness. No pure, undiluted auditory sensation in her perception of sounds - multidimensionality of auditory sensations. An attempt at categorization of her descriptive terminology in terms of perception.

Sitwell's contribution: her 'theory' - partially subjective - pointing to the possible development of phono-stylistics.

Chapter Three: Phase I - A detailed stylistic analysis of Sitwell's three poems: 'Aubade', 'Dark Song' and 'Said King Pompey' in terms of sound texture, metrical pattern, images, recurrence of lexical items and the structuring process. Some observations:

Each poem - a linguistic construct held together by its own logic. The central principle of linguistic manipulation. Principle of extreme defamiliarization - resulting in foregrounding on the levels of phonetics, diction and semantics, but not on the level of syntax. In the first phase - phonetics - a centrally operating factor. 'Intransitive' writing - building of meaning structure through intra-textual patterning - 'non-representational' quality of the poetry.

Her surprising collocations, her most unconventional relationships between tenor and vehicle, her synaesthetic imagery. Her sensations and perceptions - highly original and individualistic. Probably an attempt to break down the old traditional modes of perceptions and explore new modes of perceiving the multidimensionality of experience, keeping the process...
conceptualization in abeyance. But towards the end of the first phase - gradual movement from perception-dominated mode of experience to conception-guided perceptual modes. Probably her central preoccupation in the first phase - the nature and possibilities of human perceptions ('I see, therefore, I am').

A 'Sitwellian' poem different from a traditional poem:
The ratio of propositional sense and the meanings arising out of suprasegmental features and semantic deviations that we find in a traditional poem - reversed in the 'Sitwellian' poem. Her poem - not a linear, logical, propositional construct as most traditional poems are. The formal, phonological and semantic foregrounding - so dominant that the structure of meaning cannot be built without giving full attention to the linguistic elements in the poem. Comparisons between 'Aubade' and 'Dark Song': Phonetic motivation in 'Dark Song' - less than what it is in 'Aubade' - lexical motivation more dominant in 'Dark Song'. In 'Said King Pompey', too, a movement towards the imposition of conceptual framework. Speculation about Sitwell's possible questioning about the fundamental nature of existence - its basic animality and its subjection to Time.

Chapter Four: Phase II - A stylistic analysis of two major poems: 'Gold Coast Customs' and 'Metamorphosis'. Strategy of sampling and selecting chunks - examination of the striking features of the full text - a detailed and close analysis of the four or five chunks selectively culled from different parts of these long poems.
Literary critics' concern - common opinion - striking change in Sitwell's poetry written after 1929 mainly in terms of her thematic concerns. A very complex and apparently confused phase. Various types of poems: (a) short lyrics; (b) poems demonstrating her experimentation in terms of language and themes; and (c) long poems. Difficulty of choice. 'Gold Coast Customs' and 'Metamorphosis' - clear pointers towards the direction of the third phase. The inadequacy of the procedure of stylistic analysis of long poems. My attempt - working out certain basic features of the poem while being aware of the relationship between the whole and the parts.

'Metamorphosis' - Sitwell's transformation of reality through the process of her perception of it - enactment of the phenomenon of 'change' through language - her perception, imagination and linguistic embodiment. Her celebration of the Metamorphosis through a series of illustrations: life, nature, history, fairy world and mythology. Her concepts - gradually crystallizing into operative symbols: Time, Death, Eternity, Sun etc. - resulting in an extraordinary sense of depth in time and space. Sitwell's conscious use of language in working out Metamorphosis linguistically - an extremely new way. Her preoccupation with the concepts of Birth, Death and Time.

Her foregrounding of polysyllabic words on the increase - parallel to the density of meaning. The device of repetition - establishing connections between the chunks. Paradigmatic and
lexical repetitions - emphasizing and carrying forward the theme. The use of sound devices: alliteration, assonance, consonance and repetition of certain significant sounds. The most operative phenomenon: the use of long vowels - giving the sense of amplitude. The principle of amplitude - central to the sound texture of the poem - the use of iambic rhythm with a number of modulations - spondees, amphibrachs, bachiuses and ionic a minore at the end of lines. Her experimentation with rhymes - rhymed couplets in pentameter.

Sitwell's foregrounding of cohesion - building the structures of meaning. Her metaphorical transfer of meaning from one semantic field to another - resulting in a complex sense impression of vitality and compression, of strain and tension. Her use/formation of concept-making compoundings - resulting in her elliptical style. Her exploitation of the phonoesthetic suggestion of words - resulting in semantic complexity.

The use of the co-ordinator 'and' - resulting in the poet's suppression of his logical, temporal and attitudinal relations - complexity also due to left-branching constructions: multiple modification with the noun phrase.

'Gold Coast Customs' - a characteristically Sitwellian poem: a good deal of incomprehensible, suggestive and vague stuff around the clearly located nuclei. Her notes - useful for understanding the nuclei. Both stable and unstable elements in 'Gold Coast Customs' - the predominance of unstable elements.
My attempt to work out its deep and surface structures of meaning - helping me to trace the principles of development.

A detailed stylistic analysis of its five chunks - strategies - the same as for 'Metamorphosis'.

Difficult to hold the entire poem into one continuous 'stylistic attention' and arrive at its total semantic structure - hence the support of the critics necessary. The literary critic's insights - a convenient strategy to get a tentative entry into the poem. Sitwell's own comments: 'fusion of the levels of barbaric cannibal life with those of capitalistic process' - Her further remarks - a strange mixture of stylistics -

Phonetic orchestration: alliteration, assonance, lexical repetition, end-rhyme, semantic rhymes as an organizing principle. A good deal of flexibility in the use of rhymes and the patterning of verse paragraphs. A unique synthesis of her own rule-based controls of rhyme and rhythm and freedom with the latter. The phonetic device of returning to the same image of verbal repetition at several places in the poem.

Semantic structures built through paradigmatic relations of words - exploration of deeper levels of semantic structures through basic vocabulary of texture, shape and motion - final effect: complex sense impressions or of vitality and compression. As in 'Metamorphosis', her compoundings: syntactic compressions of modifying phrases. Her favourite use of the device of synaesthesia.
Lexical repetitions form semantic links - a blending of cognitive and connotative semantic links - very little easily available propositional sense - greater dominance of 'dhwani' or 'suggested meanings'. Orchestration of semantic units in terms of significant words, phrases and images.

End of the phase - Sitwell's movement towards the final phase. Her journey from the beginning of the first phase to the end of the second phase: a journey from nihilistic, amoral and ahistorical perception to the philosophy of Christianity - a note of prophecy at the end of 'Gold Coast Customs'.

Chapter Five: Phase III - a detailed stylistic analysis of 'Still Falls the Rain', 'Street Song' and 'Bagetelle'. As in Phase II use of literary criticism - Lehmann and others - to get a tentative entry into the poems. In most of her later poems - her grave concern for the age of atom bomb, religion, love, evil, sin, suffering humanity, death, time and so on.

'Still Falls the Rain' - two semantic strata: the surface and the deep, the horizontal and the verticle. Her emotional enactment on the deep level. My attempt to build the paradigmatic structures of meaning through the syntagmatic analysis. Sitwell's 'Gestaltian' perception of experience.

Asymmetrical formal structure of the poem. The meaning structure organized through the semantic and phonetic links - bound by alliteration, rhymes and repetitions, significantly foregrounded vowel quantity - resulting in sonority and
incantatory quality. Density of vowel quantity - the characteristic of lexico-phonological repetition - suggesting a suppressed intensity of feelings. Intensification of the image of Christ. Capitalizations - giving rise to the deep meaning. The 'vehicle' more important than the 'tenor' - with the structure of meaning round the 'vehicle'. Cohesive use of the biblical imagery - resulting in the dominance of the Christ image.

The use of the present tense form for Biblical imagery - resulting in the universality of the theme. Sitwell's 'overdoing' and 'elaboration' strategies of the second phase - now transformed into her natural way of thinking. The poem - demonstration of words gaining semantic dimensions - 'vyanjana' becoming more important. Semantics - occupying a central place as sound in the first phase.

The strategies of the first phase - getting simplified in this phase. Stanzaic variation natural and spontaneous - following the movement of thought-emotion complex. Predominance of long lines - blending intensity of emotions with quiet contemplation - creating a meaningful architecture of rhythms.

No striking compoundings or collocative clashes. The principle of cohesion - working in a natural manner - indicating the clarity and simplicity of her vision. Her poetic world: the socio-political complexities of the world equated with the evil in man. Her first phase - multiplicity of sensations and complexity of perceptions - involving unexpected connections.
The third phase - movement towards simplification and universalization. Her text in phase III - more 'readerly' than 'writerly'. Sitwell - now easily available to the ordinary reader.

'Street Song' - Sitwell's 'kaleidoscopic' use of the meter - heightening the emotions in the poem. The poem - closer to every-day speech. Her usual free verbal repetition and the controlled use of the sound devices. Sitwell's use of wide-ranging universal imagery and her concern for the larger themes: Christ, Cain, Caesar, Adam, Man, Sun, Paradise, Death, Worm, Sin - destruction, rebirth, suffering etc.

The predominance of long vowels and nasals - leading to the prophetic tone. Simplicity of the rhythmic prose - lack of syntactic deviations balanced by extreme foregrounding in semantic structures - very little 'meaning' in the propositional sense, but highly charged thought-emotion complex through suggested meanings. Sitwell's attainment of the crystallization of vision - using deviational dramatic technique and extreme semantic foregrounding - resulting in the loss of the propositional sense.

'Bagetelle' - a myth about the predicament of man in the universe - the Worm and the Hen - symbolic embodiments of certain values of humanity at large - looser in structure - foregrounding of polysyllabic words - indicating Sitwell's growing interest in the themes of universal nature. Considerable amount of phonological structuring - the auditory repetitions within lines - increased emphasis. Other techniques of the first two phases.
Sitwell's own code developed over the years - her peculiar set of images and symbols - crystalization of her faith and code into recognizable units in this phase. The Sitwellian world of gradually evolved images and symbols. Our familiarity with the code necessary for understanding her poems. Semiotics - probably of greater use in this phase than mere stylistics.

The semantic progression of the term 'Sun' through all the phases - attaining multi-dimensionality of meaning.

Sitwell's strategies for impregnating a word - capitalization, animation, contextualization and direct definition. The form of allegory - inadequate for her complex vision in 'Bagetelle'.

Chapter Six - Conclusions:Summing up of the major findings in respect of the stylistic features of Sitwell's poetry, phase-wise, and also in respect of the principles of development operating within each phase and from one phase to another.

Sitwell's 'intuitive stylistics' - pointing to the possibility of the development of phono-stylistics. Need for further study in the area.

Stylistics - extremely helpful in defining the precise, objective contours not only of individual poems but also of the entire body of a poet's works. The stylistic analysis of
long poems - always a problem, and the study of a poet's work in terms of the analysis of every poem also a problem. A stylistic study of a poet's total work - almost an impossible task. The only practical strategy - that of 'sampling' using the literary criticism as a tentative guide. Stylistic analysis - its productivity and significance only when it is done within the context of the pressure of interpretation.