CHAPTER II

EDITH SITWELL'S 'INTUITIVE' STYLISTICS

Edith Sitwell, though not a trained linguist has an uncanny insight into the working of language. As a practising poet she shows an absorbing interest in various aspects of language, particularly in its phonetic behaviour. What is of importance to the students of stylistics is that Edith Sitwell has written some significant notes on her poetic practice, articulating her 'felt thoughts' about certain linguistic aspects. Though her statements do not amount to a cogently built theory, they have certain theoretical insights which could be put together as her attempt towards the formulation of a theory. In this chapter I have tried to organize her scattered remarks and examine them in the light of the current linguistic categories. Since there is something extremely tentative and intuitive in her thinking about poetic stylistics, I have termed it Edith Sitwell's 'intuitive or affective stylistics'.

Considering the nature of her rather stray comments, her theory - 'intuitive stylistics' - can be split into three vectors, namely (a) that of easily acceptable apparently scientific ideas, (b) that of illuminating remarks full of valuable insights which are more or less acceptable, and (c) that of highly subjective and impressionistic comments.
I shall now attempt to organize her thinking, which is, of course, generally context-bound, in terms of the accepted categories of description like 'vowels', 'consonants', 'syllabic structure' and suprasegmental features like 'rhyme', 'rhythm', 'dissonance' and 'pause'.

Vowels:

Vowels being the nuclei of sound units called words, it is but inevitable that Edith Sitwell shows remarkable sensitivity towards them. Her comments on vowels and their functions in her analysis of her own poems and those of others like Pope, Coleridge and Blake, reveal that she had an intuitive understanding of their nature and behaviour. It is interesting to see that though she has made comments on almost all the English vowels including diphthongs and triphthongs, she never uses the terms 'diphthongs' and 'triphthongs'. Let us keep before us Gimson's vowel diagram (1970, 100-48) and use it for understanding what Edith Sitwell says about vowels.
Edith Sitwell does not make use of the term 'diphthong' or 'triphthong', though she makes a distinction between vowels and diphthongs by using the term 'double vowels' for the latter. (In fact, 'double vowel' is a paraphrase of 'diphthong'). Moreover, in the absence of her knowledge of the IPA Symbols for phonemes, she uses the usual orthography (i.e. alphabet:) to denote vowels. For instance, she uses the letter "a" to denote various different vowels as represented by the letter "a" in words like 'jaw', 'castellated', 'tall' and 'afraid', as most laymen do.

Now let us briefly look at the vowel diagram. The diagram of vowel phonemes classifies them into three categories, namely, front vowels, central vowels and back vowels, if we consider the vertical axis only. This classification suggests the parts of the tongue involved in the production of vowel sounds. Taking into account the height of the tongue in the oral cavity, vowels are further classified as close vowels, vowels between half-close and half-open positions and open vowels. Although Edith Sitwell does not seem to be aware of this scientific categorization of the vowels, she uses her own functional labels to explain the use of these vowels. On the basis of her comments on the functions of vowels in poetry, her theory could be roughly generalized as follows:

As indicated in the diagram she considers front close vowels /i/ and /i:/ as 'sharp'; back close vowels /u/ and /u:/
as 'deep' and 'dark'; front vowel /e/ as 'light' and 'sharp'; front open vowels /æ/ and /ə:/ as 'flat'; back open vowels /ɔ/ and /ɔː/ as 'warm'; an open central vowel /ʌ/ as 'thick' and 'dull'; diphthongal glides /ua/ as 'dark' and /ʊa/ as 'warm'.

However intuitive her theory may be, her comments are positively acceptable when she talks of lightness and darkness of certain vowels. For instance, the adjective 'dark' is used to denote pharyngalization. It is also used of segments with a not very marked degree of velarization which consists of raising the back of the tongue to the same position as for a close back vowel. For example, she considers the vowel /uː/ as dark, which is a back close vowel and she is certainly right in her description of the vowel.

She is extremely sensitive to vowel 'quantity' and the term she repeatedly uses for this phenomenon is 'vowel length'. She knows that the vowel in the syllable of the pattern CVO is longer than the vowel in a CVC pattern which in turn is longer than CVCC pattern (e.g. /biː/, /biːt/ and /biːst/). She is also conscious of the fact that a vowel before a voiced consonant is longer than a vowel before a voiceless one when she talks of 'varying lengths' of vowels or 'different lengths' of vowels and their effect on speed. For example she says: "The varying length and depth of "a" sounds in

Castle wall of the ultimate shade
With his cloak castellated as that wall, afraid
give a sense of fear, of something which alternately tries
to shrink away into the darkness, and to rear itself up as
in self protection". The following vowels occur in these
lines: /æ/, /aː/, /ɔː/, /ei/, /u/ and /ɔ/. Vowels /a/ and
/æ/ are short and pure vowels. /aː/ and /ɔː/ are long vowels
and /ei/ and /u/ are diphthongal glides and all of them do
vary in length. Her comments on the vowel length are quite
scientific though intuitive, and are acceptable but the affective
value of these vowels varying in length is context-bound.
These lines are illustrated from her poem 'The Bat' which is
about the 'waiting, watching world of the shadows'. The function
of the use of these vowels, therefore, seems to give a sense
of fear of something 'which alternately tries to shrink away
into the darkness' in the context of the poem. This affective
value that Edith Sitwell attaches to the use of the vowels in
the lines in a particular manner appears to be impressionistic.
The impressionistic nature of her response to vowel length is
better seen in the following analysis of her poem 'Romance',
where she even speaks of 'different wave-lengths of vowels':

When the green century of summer rains
Lay on the leaves, then like the rose I wept...
The rose wept in that green and honeyed clime.

For Edith Sitwell, 'the movement' of the poem is 'like the
growth of a slower plant-life'. She says, "Here the ethereal
quality of the plant-world, the slow growth of the plant, the
the colour and scent of the rose are conveyed by the different wave-lengths of the vowels'. The most interesting term in her analysis of vowels is 'different wave-lengths of the vowels'. In order to see what she means, it is profitable to put these lines in phonemic transcription and later study only the vowel sequences. Let us put these lines in phonemic transcription:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wengri:n sentj'ari əv səmə reinz} \\
\text{lei ən əli:vz fən laik əv rəuz ai wept...} \\
\text{əə rəuz wept in əət gri:n ən hənid klaim}
\end{align*}
\]

When we articulate merely the vowel sequence we do see that there is a 'wave-like' movement of vowel sounds. In the first line we start with 'ə' and play upon 'i:' and the two sounds merge towards the end of the line into 'ei'. 'ei' is further reinforced in the beginning of the second line and now is the time to introduce a new 'wave' so we have 'ə' which later gets into 'əə' and another movement is set into a parallel motion and that is by 'ə' becoming 'i:' - which gets fused with the earlier frequent 'i' becoming 'ai' - which is repeated in the last line. Probably Edith Sitwell perceived this smooth wave-like
motion of the vowel, attributed it to the 'different wavelengths of the vowels' and then fixed them upto the context-bound sense. Whatever effect there is, it is produced by the vowels as well as consonant sequences.

Talking of length, we find that Edith Sitwell is extremely sensitive to the length of diphthongs in which she perceives sometimes an 'extra fraction of the syllable'. For instance, take her analysis of the following lines from Pope:

A brighter wash; to curl their waving hairs /hɔz/
Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs /ɪəz/

She says, "The words 'hairs' and 'airs' have a little wavering sound, like the slight breath of a summer air among young leaves. And this is not only the result of association. We find this tiny freshening sound several times in the poem".4

The sound in the above-quoted two words is a diphthong /ɛʊ/ followed by /z/ which gives the poet the impression mentioned above. She also finds cool shadows in this 'extra fraction of the syllable', the term 'extra fraction' being used for the shwa which is certainly a fraction if we compare it with the vowel /æ/ at which the glide begins. The /ə/ part of the glide makes an 'extra' impression in the immediate presence of /z/. This analysis of the diphthong is acceptable but its function is to be understood in the context alone. What is to be noted here is Sitwell's admirable subtlety in her auditory perceptions.
She believes that the use of certain vowels produce different vibrations in certain contexts. For instance, the "a" sound in the following line from 'The Bat' produces, according to her, such vibrations:

With his cloak castellated as that wall, afraid

\[ \text{i i \ 3 u } \ 2 \text{ ei } \ 3 \text{ x } : \ 3 \text{ ei} \]

She says that the vowels used in the above line are of three kinds - 'poignant', 'dark' and 'flat' - and that their alternate use produces the desired effect. She comments that in the poem 'The Bat', some of the "a"s and the "u"s have 'neither depth nor body', are 'flat and death rotten'. 'Quack', 'clack', 'black', 'dust' and 'lust' are some such words with /\x/ and /\/ vowels in them. The central vowels are, to her 'flat'; 'they can neither have depth nor body'. Even the word 'dust' could be 'flat' to the impressionistic mind of the poet.

In the following two lines from her poem 'The Drum' she comments on the function of the vowel /i/:

Wolfishly and whined

/i/ /ai/

The wind from very far

/i/

The use of the vowel /i/ after the diphthong /ai/ is meant to give the impression of the 'faint breeze'. She describes the vowel /i/ as 'dimming'. However, this adjective 'dimming' is used to describe the movement from /ai/ to /i/ and is
acceptable as the vowel /i/ in the context of the poem could be treated as an extension of the diphthong /ai/, thus 'dimming'.

Just as she talks of the 'dimming' phenomenon of /i/, she also talks of the 'dipping' movement of vowel sounds. For example, while examining Blake's poem 'How Sweet I Roamed from Field to Field', she comments on the sounds and their function in the following two lines:

How sweet I roamed from field to field
And tasted all the summer's pride.

She says that the 'dipping' movement is produced by the use of words with 'a deeper vowel sound'. In these lines, she says that the sound in the word 'all' /ɔːl/ casts a 'deeper shadow' than the vowel in the word 'roamed' /rəʊmd/. One can notice that 'all' is longer than 'roamed' if we consider the vowel quantity. She calls them 'deep' possibly because both the vowels are articulated by raising the back of the tongue towards the soft palate deep inside the oral cavity.

Edith Sitwell says that the sounds "o" and "ou" in the words 'cloud' /klaʊd/, 'shroud' /ʃraʊd/, 'bough' /bɔʊ/, slough /slau/ and "o" sound in words like 'down' /dʌn/, 'ropes' /rəʊps/, 'to' /təʊ/, 'upon' /əˈpʌn/, 'cold' /kəld/, 'long' /lɒŋ/, 'among' /əˈmʌŋ/, 'locks' /ləks/, 'snow' /snəʊ/, 'frog' /froʊ/, 'oblique' /əˈblɪkə/, 'those' /ðəʊs/, 'of' /əf/, are 'warm', according to her principle. She further says that these warm sounds give the impression of growing things waiting
beneath the hard soil in the darkness, till the winter shall be gone. This is highly impressionistic, though in the context quite acceptable. Since some of her generalizations are totally context-bound, they are not true generalizations. Probably every time she wants her 'generalizations' to be taken as specific to particular contexts.

When she says that 'a poignant cold air creeps from time to time into those lines with the sharp freezing "e" sounds' in the words such as 'chalets' /e/, 'red' /e/, 'dead' /e/, 'me' /i/, 'her' /i:/, 'eyes' /ai/, 'she' /i/, she sounds highly subjective. However, the description of the functions of these vowels in the poem appears to be context-bound.

In the lines

Shades on heroic
Lonely grass
Where the moonlight's echoes die and pass,
Near the rustic boorish
Fustian moorish
Castle wall of the ultimate shade

she rightly describes the length of the diphthongs /ɔi/ and /ɔu/ as the 'long "o"s'. She distinguishes between the two sounds by saying that 'lonely' is slightly longer than 'heroic'. Her intuitive impression of the length of the vowels in these two words seems to be accurate. She calls /u:/ in 'moonlight' as a 'still deeper' sound. She perhaps uses the term 'deeper' to mean 'longer' when she compares /u:/ with the diphthongs
/øu/ and /ɔi/. She further says that the "oo"s in 'boorish' and 'Moorish' are still darker, possibly to suggest the manner of articulation of the long /u:/ which is a back close vowel. But her comments on the functions of these vowels like 'they throw long and opposed shadows' or 'these seem broken columns of shade' seem to be highly impressionistic and context-bound.

Sitwell sometimes structures her entire poems on a certain central sound-unit. In 'Fox Trot', for example, she says that the whole poem is structured on "ea" sounds and that it varies in 'lightness'.

Among the pheasant-feathered corn the unicorn has /e/ torn, forlorn the...

/e/ is a light vowel according to her and the effect of its use in the above lines is of 'light pleasant stretches of cornfields over which the flying shadows of the darker vowelled 'corn' /ɔ:/, 'unicorn' /ɔ:/, 'torn' /ɔ:/ and 'forlorn' /ɔ/, /ɔ:/ dip and are gone.

Sitwell speaks not only of context-bound vowels and diphthongs, she also speaks of their effect on rhythm. For example, in the line

Sally, Mary, Mattie, what's the matter, why cry

she says that the changing of the assonances, from the 'limpness' of Sally to the 'hardness' of Mattie, the reversal of sound in the second syllable from 'Mattie' to 'Matter' have a faint
effect upon the rhythm, but the exact rhymes 'why cry' placed together, give'a high leap into the air'. The sounds in the word 'Sally' are 'limp', whereas they are 'hard' in the word 'Mattie'. The first word begins with a fricative /s/ and ends in a liquid whereas the second word sounds 'hard' perhaps because it ends in the voiceless plosive /t/. Two rhymes placed together using the diphthong /ai/ give us an impression of 'the leap in the air', perhaps because of the glide from an open vowel /a/ to a closing vowel /i/. Edith Sitwell says that the first verse of her poem 'Gold Coast Customs', 'the rocking, drum-beating' movement is produced by various 'flatnesses and depths' of the "a"s, the 'thicknesses and dullnesses' of the "u"s and by the intertwining of words of different lengths. She believes that such a use of these vowels produces different 'speeds' in the poem. The lines are as follows:

One fantee wave
Is grave and tall
As brave Ashantees
Thick mud wall
Munza rattles his bones in the dust
Lurking in murk because he must

The vowels /æ/ and /ei/ in words such as 'fantee', 'wave', 'grave', 'tall', 'brave', 'Ashantee's' have 'flatnesses and depths'. Similarly, she says that the words like 'Munza', 'lurking', 'murk', 'must' with /ʌ/ vowel in them have 'thickness' and 'dullness'.

Consonants:

Edith Sitwell writes about the affective values of most of the plosives, a few fricatives, a nasal, an affricate, the lateral, the frictionless continuant and the rounded bilabial semi-vowel. She, once again, describes the functions of these consonants in the context in which they are used in her poetry.

The alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ are not fully released or they are rather weakly released when in word-final positions. Consequently, these plosives are less louder, particularly /t/ is totally inaudible in such positions. The development in Phonetics has made it possible to measure the length and loudness of phonemes. In the absence of this scientific knowledge, Sitwell describes these sounds in her special affective vocabulary. For instance, she says that the following words from her poem 'The Bat' ending with /t/ and /d/ are 'flat' and 'shadeless':

ultimate, that, afraid, old, dust, watched,
Bat, shade, furred, head, flat, lenient, upside,
lust, furred, said, ruined, spread, out, membraned

For the similar phenomenon she uses the adjectives 'thin' and 'dry' for "c" /k/ and "t" as in the word Hecate in the following line from 'The Drum':

Black as Hecate hawls a star

The functional meaning of the plosives /t/ and /d/ attached to
their use as illustrated above, though dictated by the poet's intuitive and impressionistic mind is partially agreeable. She, perhaps, equates the 'flatness', 'shadelessness', 'thinness', 'deadness' and 'dryness' with the word final inaudible release of these alveolar plosives.

Plosives, by nature, are stops and if there are more words in a line of a poem ending in the voiced alveolar plosive /d/, the effect, possibly, is that they slow the movement of the verse. This slowness can be felt, and if necessary, can be examined scientifically. Sitwell is quite right when she quotes the following lines from the poem 'Early Spring' to say that in the words ending "d", being placed in close juxtaposition slow the movement of the lines:

Our faces furred with cold like red
 furred buds of satyr springs long dead

The cold wind creaking in my blood
 Seems part of it, as grain of wood

However, her remark that the words ending in "d" close together also 'make a slight leap into the air' as in the line from 'Fox Trot':

The reynard coloured sun
 seems to be highly impressionistic.

Her comments on the use of "G" /g/ as in the following lines appear to be context-bound and highly subjective when
she says that the sound in the first and the last word of the second line gives 'a designedly unwieldy lumbering gait to the line, a gait indicative of the subject'.

Fate is their dotage this fair idiot gave Gross as her sire, and as her mother grave, Laborious, heavy, busy, bold and blind, She rul'd in native anarchy, the mind.

In the third line of the above verse, the voiced bilabial plosive appears four times, particularly in the initial position of the last three successive monosyllabic words - busy, bold and blind. The effect gained by their position and their alliterative nature is certainly perceptable. This special effect does not escape the poet's attention and she says in her analysis that the alliterative "B"s placed so close together in this manner have an overwhelming effect of power. The sound /b/ is a voiced bilabial plosive and the repetitive plosion of it sounds like 'appalling deafening blows' to the highly perceptive mind of the poet. We do get this sort of feeling when we read the line and therefore, we would more or less accept the description of the poet with her valuable insights.

Another example of her sensitive impressionism is her description of voiceless velar plosive /k/. It appears in the initial position in the three words and in the medial position in the last word of the following line:

Or the coral comb of a cock; it rocks
She describes the /k/ in the above line as sharp which "seems pin points of light which leap into a sudden flare with the word comb".

The voiced alveolar lateral /l/ is a liquid sound and when it is articulated, the side/s of the tongue is/are lowered allowing the air to pass freely. This particular manner of articulation gives us an impression of the softness of the sound. Similarly, the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ is produced by raising the tip of the tongue towards the alveolar ridge. The air passes through the narrowing creating the impression of softness. We may, more or less, accept her comment when she says that the "l" sound in

\[ \text{a lalloping galloping candle confesses} \]

and "s" sound in

\[ \text{Outside in the passage are wildernesses of darkness resulting like witches' dresses} \]

'give the softness of the flame that is speaking'. Of course, this interpretation is better understood in the context of the poem. However, when Sitwell says that "s" sound in the following lines gives 'the degrees of the mud', it seems highly impressionistic and subjective:

Where flaps degraded
The black and sated
Slack magerated
And antiquated
Beckoning negress
Nun of the shade
Her comment that the arrangement of "l"s placed near each other as follows gives 'the effect of stretch of mud, clinging to our feet and impeding our progress' again appears to be entirely context-bound.

And the ricketty houses
Rock and rot,
Lady Bambargher airs
That foul plague-spot
Her romantic heart.
From the cannibial mart,
That smart Plague-cart,
Lady Bamburgher rolls where the foul news-sheet
And the shambles for souls are met in the street.

However, Sitwell is possibly right when she considers the sound "l" as soft one. But she is quite highly speculative when she comments on the use of the "l" in the following verse where she finds the sound 'dull and crumbling' which gives the 'sense of flesh decaying'. Perhaps in the context of the poem, this interpretation may be close to the meaning of the stanza:

... hangs like a skull
With a yellow dull
Face made of clay
(Where tained, painted, the plague spots bray)
To hide where the real face rotted away.

Edith Sitwell has experimented with the voiced post-alveolar frictionless continuant /r/ in two of her poems - 'The Dark Song' and 'Said King Pompey'. She says that both the poems are built on the schemes of "r"s and while describing the
nature of the scheme, she uses certain adjectives to explain the variety of the "r" sound. She uses the term 'harsh' or 'unmuted' for the variety of /r/ when followed by a vowel sound, and the term 'dull' or 'muted' for the other variety of /r/ when it is either in the syllable final position or it is immediately followed by a consonant. In the following words from 'The Dark Song' she has used the scheme of 'long harsh animal purring "r"s alternative with dullled "r"s':

Fire furry bear purr brown bear
M UM M M UM M

rambles cruel through dark hairy
UM UM UM M UM

through dark rambled fire bear's fur
UM M UM M M M

heard dark earth furry bear grumbled
M M M UM M UM

There are 13 'muted' "r"s and 10 'harsh' "r"s in the poem. Her comment is context-bound and impressionistic when she says that the words such as fire, bear, purr, dark, fur, heard, earth carry the muted "r" which is intended to convey 'the uncombatable animal instinct'. The denotative meaning of these words, perhaps, suggest this interpretation.

Sitwell's comments on the use of /r/ in 'Said King Pompey' that elision results from "r"s and it gives the effect of 'dust fluttering from the ground or of the heat of a dying heart' is again highly impressionistic and context-bound. The sound "r" is used in the following words in the poem:
Similarly, she is subjective when she says that the 'unmuted' "r"s in red, springs, creaking, grain give the faintest possible movement, 'like that of a bough stirring in the air'. But in words like springs, creaking and grain where /r/ is immediately preceded by a consonant, the effect of the sound, possibly, resembles that of a bough stirring in the air.

The rounded bilabial semi-vowel "w" is considered as a soft sound. This is perhaps owing to its nature of articulation and she may be right in perceiving the sound as 'soft' one.

She considers the consonant cluster 'lf' and the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ as 'thick and soft' sounds in

\[ /wulfisl}\]

She rightly says that the word is 'longer' and 'slower' as the word has consonant clusters which check the speed because of the nature of the articulation of such clusters. The articulation of the alveolar lateral immediately followed by the articulation of labio-dental fricative slows down the production of the sounds. Similarly, the articulation of palato-alveolar fricative immediately followed by the alveolar lateral also
slows down the process of production of these sounds. Such clusters give an impression of 'thickness' as in

The brown bear rambles in his chain

but when she says that 'br' and 'mb' are meant to give the 'thickness of the bear's dull fur', she tends to be context-bound and subjective. She uses an image of honey to illustrate the thickness of it in her use of the clusters 'mb' in amber and 'bl' in blood. The image of 'honey' is quite appropriate as it suggests the slow and 'thick' flow of articulation of these clusters. The cluster 'mb' has two bilabial sounds in it and the articulation of it takes more time than for the individual sounds. The same thing happens in the case of the cluster of 'bl' and Edith Sitwell, possibly, equates this 'slowed articulation' with the term 'thickness' of honey.

Sitwell's highly objective perception of the voiced bilabial nasal /m/ is noticed in her comments 'opening lines are enormous with the thick, muffling, dull thud of the alliterative "M"s in

The mighty mother, and her son, who brings
The Smithfield muses to the ears of kings

The sound is 'thick, gross, and blind as stupidity itself'. Once again she describes the 'm' sound in the word 'Madden' as a thick thumping M which appears to be one of her highly sensitive perceptions.
Rhyme:

Rhyme has an important structural role to play. It is the congruence of one sound with another at the end of line. Because of metrical and other considerations, usually monosyllabic rhymes are in the majority. This is true of 'The Rape of the Lock'. But Edith Sitwell's comment that 'the whole of 'The Rape of the Lock' is fresh as the summer air blowing down the dew that tastes of the green leaves on which it has been lying, and this comes largely from the absence of female rhyme', seems to be highly impressionistic. However, when she writes about the functional effect of the use of the two rhymes placed immediately together at the end of two lines sound 'like leaps in the air' is more or less acceptable. She quotes the following lines:

Sally, Mary, Mattie, What's the matter, why cry?
/wai krai/

The huntsman and the reynard coloured sun and I sigh
/ai sai/

The vowel phoneme in the rhyming words is a diphthongal glide from an open vowel /a/ to a front close vowel /i/ and when the diphthong is articulated, the front of the tongue is raised upward towards the hard palate, thereby, possibly, creating the effect of the 'leap in the air'. In fact, the movement of the tongue from the position for /a/ to the position of /i/ is a leap of the tongue from the open position to the close
She uses the term half-rhymes, perhaps for the more traditional term 'imperfect rhymes'. In the examples given by her:

\[
\text{Gould-God} \quad \text{sky-neigh} \quad \text{tread-God}
\]

\[
/\text{au}/ \quad /\text{o}/ \quad /\text{ai}/ \quad /\text{ei}/ \quad /\text{e}/ \quad /\text{a}/
\]

the vowels are different, but the syllable closing sounds are the same consonants. She also uses the term 'dissonance' for the similar phenomenon.

The use of internal rhymes is a favourite effect and has been in English poetry for a long time. The effect of internal rhyme is an achievement of kind of balance where the poet seems to weigh the possibilities of the situation. While commenting on its use in Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner', Edith Sitwell convincingly says how the poet 'emphasises the feeling of apprehension of dread, of fate, by the drum beat of an internal rhyme'. The following lines illustrate the point:

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

The words around, cracked, growled, roared, howled and swound in the above lines are connected by internal rhyme. Added to this is the iambic stress pattern which results in the 'drum beat' effect of the lines.
Pause:

A pause is a deliberate silence and is normally appropriate only at a grammatical boundary of some importance. It is often felt necessary at the end of larger syntactic units like sentence, clauses and some phrases and also at the boundaries of intonation units. Leech (1969, 108) says, "Allowance must be made both for pauses in the middle or at the end of measure". Such silent stresses may be marked (\( \Lambda \)) and can occur within a line of poetry where the traditional prosodist would mark a caesura. Great poets often use the caesura for thrilling effects of emphasis which are mainly rhetorical. Edith Sitwell discusses the effects created by the use of pause. Sensations such as the 'effect of windless cold, of the time of waiting and watching when the first buds are spurtling from the dark boughs, and winter is about to change into spring', she says, 'are produced by the stillness of the lines and the faintness of the pauses' in her poem 'Early Spring'. In her poem, most faint pauses occur at the end of lines. Although her comments are context-bound, they are more or less acceptable.

She cites examples of two long pauses in the same poem, one after the word 'whimper' /wimp/ where the second syllable 'dies away like a little cold air'. In fact, the second syllable ends in a muted 'r' sound and since it follows the first stressed syllable, the effect seems to be like the one she describes in her impressionistic manner. However, we may also perceive the
similar effect had we the poet's sensibilities. The other pause, she illustrates, is after the word 'milk' /milk/ in the line

Of their warm sticky milk - the cuds.

She is quite acceptable when she describes the syllabic structure of the word saying that this is a word of one syllable and a fraction, and this extra fraction being inaudibly faint, 'the effect is not that of a flutter or a movement, but of a tiny pause'. The word 'milk' is monosyllabic and the vowel 'i' is immediately followed by the liquid sound /l/. This increases the length of the syllable, but the syllable is closed by the voiceless velar plosive /k/ creating an effect of a tiny pause. However, her remark that such pauses give the line a strange chilliness seems to be acceptable in the context, even though it is impressionistic.

She discusses the nature and effect of the slightness of the caesura in the following lines from 'The Dunciad':

One cell there is, conceal'd from vulgar eye,
The cave of poverty and poetry,
Keen, hollow winds howl thro' the bleak recess,
Emblem of music caus'd by emptiness

The caesura in the third line as marked is considered as shallow as it is hardly perceptible. But the effect it gives, according to her, is a strange chilliness which, again, is more or less acceptable. She further comments on the use of the
words 'hollow' and 'howl' which create 'the little cold wind', again seems to be impressionistic. She analyses the words 'scientifically' in her intuitive manner. She says that 'howl' is a one-syllabled word and has a long vowel sound and also it is louder than the two-syllabled, but short-vowelled word 'hollow'.

Though she is not aware of the term 'diphthong', she can make a distinction between the use of vowels and diphthongs/triphthongs by her intuitive awareness of their lengths when used in different syllabic structures. Consequently, she has her own vocabulary to describe such syllabic structures. For instance, according to her the word 'fire' /faɪə/ has one and a half syllable. This is obviously due to the diphthong /ai/ gliding in the direction of /ə/. Her impressionistic description of the nature of the articulation of this glide that it 'stretches forward and upward and then breaks' also seems to be convincing. When the glide begins at the open vowel /a/, the tongue stretches forward, and it moves upward for the front closing vowel /i/ and finally breaks for the glide and ends in the central weak vowel /ə/.

When she contrasts this syllable with the syllable in the word 'furry' /ˈfɜːri/, her description of /ɜː/ as 'the dark, thick, numb insistence' also appears to be more or less acceptable. Perhaps she associates the darkness, thickness and numbness
with the heavy vowel sound /æ/. Her description of its 'insistence', possibly goes with the heavy stress on the syllable.

Similarly, she describes the first syllable in 'wonder' /wʌndə/ as the dark, dim and long one which 'dies away, but slowly'. The vowel /ʌ/ is longer here because of the voiced nasal phoneme /n/ and the plosive /d/ which immediately follow it. The sound 'dies away slowly' because of its ending in muted "r"s. This affective meaning is acceptable. She illustrates the word 'unbound' /ʌnbaʊnd/ to say that each syllable is a long stretch of sound. This is certainly acceptable as the vowels /ʌ/ and /au/ get elongated because of their phonetic environment - the neighbouring sounds, which are all voiced ones. In such two-syllabled words, she says,'the second syllable dies or sinks or withers into silence'. This is also acceptable if we consider the shape of the syllable. For example, the first syllable is heavily stressed and that is how it affects the second syllable, and the effect is 'it sinks, withers or dies'.

Sitwell's experiments with the effect on speed of equivalent syllables are also scientific. Her statement 'one three-syllabled word has a greater speed than three one-syllabled words which might have been used as its equivalents' can be scientifically proved. She comments on the syllabic structure of 'Ancient Mariner' and says that the poet heightens the
feeling of impending doom by a certain arrangement of lines of certain syllables. When she says that 'in some parts of the 'Ancient Mariner' Coleridge heightens the feeling of impending doom by the contrast between a line of 8 syllables, containing a violent caesura and an irregular sounding line of 7 syllables with practically no caesura, followed by an equally huddled 9 syllable line, which widens again into an 8 (widens because of its irregularity and its high vowels) then shrinks into a final line of only six syllables', she sounds a good practising prosodist. She substantiates this by quoting the following example:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Nightmare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
Who thickens man's blood with cold.

However, the functional meaning of the syllabic contrast in the above lines stated as 'the feeling of impending doom' appears to be more or less context-bound.

Her remarks on the stanza form of the 'Ancient Mariner' and its affective value in the thematic context of the poem are certainly acceptable. According to her, lengthening of the of the stanza is a device which produces added quickening and, therefore, the feeling of 'approaching doom' is produced and heightened continually in the poem. In fact, the ground stanza
in the poem is a quartrain, but the poet enjoys a strange freedom. Her comment that 'Coleridge, at moments of stress and excitement, alters this to a five-line, to a six-line, to a nine-line verse and this has the effect of a heart-beating, now more and more quickly, now a little slower, than dread', sounds quite convincing.

From the foregoing discussion it will be seen that Edith Sitwell has developed, for her theory, a critical vocabulary of her own. While describing vowels, consonants, syllabic structures, rhyme and rhythm, she uses terms denoting perceptions which are not auditory perceptions. Her perceptions belong to other senses. For example, she talks of the shapes of sounds, of their movements, their softness or hardness, their wetness or dryness. What is to be noticed is that there is no pure and undiluted auditory sensation in her perception of sounds. An auditory sense, according to her, is multidimensional with the other sensory perceptions clustering round the nucleus of an auditory sensation. While justifying her peculiar use of language in poetry, she says, "where the language of one sense is insufficient to convey a meaning, a sensation, I use another, and by this means, I attempt to pierce down to the essence of the thing seen, producing or heightening its significance by discovering in it attributes which at first sight seem alien, but which are actually related - by producing its quintessential colour (sharper, brighter, than that seen by
any eye grown stale), and by stripping it of all unessential
details".

I have attempted to categorise some of her descriptive
terms in terms of different kinds of perceptions:

(a) Terms suggesting shape/body/form of sounds:

shapeless (sound), well-shaped(sound), round(syllable),
flat(vowel, consonant), narrow(sound), broad(sound), hollow
(echo), solid(sound), upside down(syllable), formlessness(vowel),
bodiless(syllable, shapeliness(consonant), disembodied(sound),
plumaged(sound), castanet thin(sound), elfish(sound) and
thick(consonants, vowels).

(b) Terms denoting movement:

quick(sound), slow(sound), fast(syllable), upward(vowel),
plunging(syllable), soaring(sound), reverse(echo), forward(echo),
quickening(sound), slow(syllable), steady(sound), wavering(pauses),
sink(sound), shrinking(vowel), rocking(sound), deepening(vowel),
jaunty wire-jerked(sound), violently stretching(vowel),
crouching(sound) and fawning(sound).

(c) Terms suggesting tactile sensations:

Warm(sound), cold(sound), chilly(sound), soft(consonants),
harsh(r sound), dry(vowels and consonants), wet(sound),
light(vowel), heavy(syllable), numb(vowel), sharp(vowel) and
freezing(vowel).

(d) Terms suggesting visual sensation:

bright(sound), dim(vowel), dark(vowel), light(vowel),
sink(vowel), wither(sound), shadow(syllable), reverse(sound),
faints(consonant), clear(sound), depth(vowels), height(vowels),
high screaming(vowel), low(sound), long(vowel) and short(vowel).

(e) Terms suggesting mixed sensations:
dull(r and vowels), poignant(sound), dead(vowels),
strange(sound), familiar(sound), dies(syllable), faints(vowels),
violent(sound), strong(syllable), weak(syllable), fresh(sound),
high screaming(vowel), depth of darkness(vowel), crazy(association),
lifeless(vowel), sharp menacing(rhythm), giddy(sound),
grave(sound), distorted(dissonance) and death rotted(vowels).

These descriptive terms are further grouped into three

groups:

(A) Comparatively objective terms which can be easily
accepted:

long(vowels), short(vowels), High(vowels), quick(sound),
slow(rhythm), fast(rhythm), greater(speed), lesser(speed),
soft(sound), hard(consonant), harsh(consonant), quickening(sound),
slow(rhythm), steady(rhythm) and reversed(syllable).

(B) Gradually moving towards objective description;
more or less acceptable:

shapeless(syllable), well-shaped(syllable), depth(vowels),
height(vowels), light(vowels), heavy(sound), narrow(sound),
broad(sound), sharp(vowel), dull(vowel), forward (echo),
reverse(echo), upward(syllable), strengthening(sound), strange
(rhythm), familiar(sound), dies(syllable), dim(vowel),
faint(dissonance), wavering(pauses), formlessness(rhythm),
thickness(consonants), thinness(assonance), hollow(sound) and
tuneless(rhythm).

(C) Intuitive terms which will always remain affective:

fresh(sound), clear(sound), round(syllable, vowel),

flat(vowel), warm(sound), cold(sound), chilly(sound), strong
(vowel), weak(vowel), violent(sound), bright(syllable), dim
(syllable), dry(consonant), light(vowel), dark(vowel), plunging
(vowel), soaring(vowel), poignant(vowel), thick(assonance),

thin(vowel), numb(vowel), sinks(sound), dies(syllable), plunges
(assonance), withers(vowel), soar(syllable), hollow(sound),

shadow(syllable), solid(sound), upside down(syllable), shrinks
(vowel), high screaming(vowel), dulled (vowel), giddy(sound),

rocking(sound), deafening blows(syllable), sharp menacing(vowel),

flatness(assonance), bodiless(syllables), shadow casting(syllables),
disembodied(sound), warmth(syllable), thick(consonants),
depth(dissonance), deepening darkness (vowels), crumbling(vowel),
crazy(sound), lifeless(vowel), castanet thin elfish(sound),
jaunty wire-jerked (sound), violently stretching(syllable),
fawning(syllable), crouching(vowel), thick deadness(syllable)

and death rotten(vowel).

<table>
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<th>A: acceptable</th>
<th>B: more or less acceptable</th>
<th>C: affective</th>
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Classification of the Terms of Perception
used by Edith Sitwell.
(Since the number of references is quite large, I have not given the individual page numbers in the foot notes to avoid clumsiness. However, I have given the details of the essay in 'References' at the end of the chapter.)

The value of Edith Sitwell's theory lies in the fact that it shows the possible development of Phono-stylistics. The areas which she has perceived intuitively are those which will have to be gradually conquered in a more scientific manner, but her pioneering work in this area is a valuable pointer to the direction in which the future development of Phono-Stylistics may proceed. Her theory also affirms that, inspite of all our attempts and objective analysis of the literary medium, there always remains an area of linguistic experience which is intuitive in nature and non-available to scientific analysis.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


Edith Sitwell, *Selected Poems (with an essay on her own Poetry)* (Duckworth, 1936) pp. 9-54.


1 Sitwell, Notes, p.31
2 ibid., p.31
3 ibid., p.12