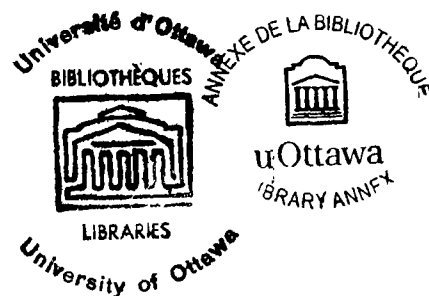


EDITH SITWELL:
A CRITICAL SURVEY OF SELECTED POEMS,
1913 - 1954, IN THE LIGHT OF HER SPIRITUAL CONVERSION
by
Sister Mary Teresa of Avila Cole
Zelda Cole

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Arts of the University of Ottawa
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INTRODUCTION

Edith Sitwell's growth towards poetic maturity is evident in the marked difference in theme, metre, mood and imagery between her first poem, published in 1913, and her last book of poetry, published in 1953. At the same time there has been a parallel spiritual growth in the poet. It is my purpose in this thesis to show that the influence of Christianity is increasingly evident in Edith Sitwell's poetry as her poetic talent becomes more mature. I propose therefore to examine the themes of Miss Sitwell's early poetry by studying a selection of poems from this part of her work; to analyze "Gold Coast Customs", since it marks the turning point of her poetical career and illustrates her changing attitudes; and to show from a close scrutiny of some of her more recent poems that the path of her growth as a poet has lain side by side with that of her spiritual development.

Edith Sitwell's poetic development could always have been visualized, John Lehmann says, by those who from the first had a perception of "her will-power and restless energy, and her intense, untrammelled awareness".¹ By her own acknowledgement, the ideals to which she reached in

1. John Lehmann, Edith Sitwell, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1952, p. 17.

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her poetry were technically, to come to vital language, to "attain to the 'hard and bounding' line that Blake said was necessary to all art, as to all virtue", and spiritually, "to give holiness to each common day".¹ Even in her early poems we find evidences of the discipline, authority, and fire, the desire for which, she said, brought her to the Catholic Church. Throughout her poetic career there can be traced a sympathetic sharing of life with the poor, hand in hand with the growth in her soul of a tender pity, of reverence, and of humility. Surely these qualities must have led her along the path to Rome. Speaking of Edith Sitwell's conversion, Bette Richart says:

... she joined the Church, I should think, for the best of all possible reasons: "that she might weep for those who die of the cold." To weep fervently, but not falsely, for those who die of the cold, is the poet's task more than any other artist's; it is the task that links him so intimately with the saints.

A rainbow shining in the night
Born of my tears

is the key to her personal mysticism. With this knowledge one can see that in many early poems, her conversion, then gathering force underground, is prefigured.²

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1. Edith Sitwell, Collected Poems, London, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1957, p.xlv.
 2. B. Richart, "Dame Edith's Art", in Commonweal, Vol. 69, issue of Feb. 27, 1959, p. 566.

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What is the place among modern poets held by this woman whose spiritual growth, as I intend to show, has paralleled her growth towards poetic maturity? As early as 1925, Mark Van Doren said of her, "Miss Sitwell promises to redeem a whole generation of Georgian poets who had threatened to grow shallow."¹ In the opinion of Richard Eberhart, she has conquered the world of the abstract and of the concrete--a unique achievement in modern letters.² Stephen Spender considers some of Edith Sitwell's poetry comparable with the great achievements of English poetry.³ I. L. Salomon wrote in 1950 that The Canticle of the Rose "implements the conviction that she ranks with the important poets of our time".⁴ Arnold Bennett writing in the Adelphi, August, 1923, stated that Edith Sitwell was the most accomplished technician in verse, with the possible exception of Robert Bridges, then writing. Finally, John Lehmann declares that there have been in the course of English literature very few

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1. M. Van Doren, "First Glance" in The Nation, Vol. 121, issue of Sept. 30, 1925, p. 359.
 2. R. Eberhart, "Silver and Gold", in Poetry, Vol. 87 issue of October, 1955, p. 48.
 3. S. Spender, Poetry Since 1939, London, Longmans Green & Co., 1946, p. 62.
 4. I. L. Salomon, "Facets of the Sitwells", in Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 33, issue of Jan. 14, 1950, p. 13.

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women to make their name as poets, but that in our own age Edith Sitwell is such a figure.¹ Add to these evaluations the tribute of W. B. Yeats, and it is evident that our study concerns a significant English poet.

1. John Lehmann, Edith Sitwell, p. 5.

CHAPTER ONE

HER EARLY PERIOD, 1913-1928: A PREPARATION

From the viewpoint of both theme and style, Edith Sitwell's poetry falls easily into three phases, each one leading into the other in organic fashion. These have been described as two valleys separated by a high ridge; I prefer to think of them as being a natural outgrowth, each from the preceding. The first phase of her writing consists of the poems written previous to 1928; the second of the transition, "Gold Coast Customs"; and the third of the poetry written after the cataclysm of World War II had struck the modern world.

Edith Sitwell's earliest poem was accepted by the "Daily Mirror" in 1913. In 1916, with Osbert Sitwell she produced Twentieth Century Harlequinade and Other Poems. In the same year she began to edit the annual of poetry, Wheels, the theme of which was expressed in Nancy Cunard's title poem:

I sometimes think that all our thoughts
are wheels
Rolling forever through the painted world
Moved by the cunning of a thousand clowns...

Miss Sitwell severed her connection with Wheels in 1917, although cycles of it appeared until 1921, as a "counterblast" to an annual called Georgian Poetry. In the years following she wrote several volumes of poems, including Clowns' Houses, Facade, Bucolic Comedies, The

Sleeping Beauty, and Rustic Elegies. It will be from poems in these volumes mainly that I shall draw conclusions regarding Edith Sitwell's early work.

Many of the early poems 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. These qualities are evident in "Singerie", where the "bright singing birds that pass" are "flames" which "whistled wares as shrill as grass", and in "Minstrels", where the sea is "metallic bright", "sequined with the noisy light". In "Portrait of a Barmaid" the conversations "loud and bright" in the bar, "seem spiral bars of shunting light / In firework-spurting greenery". Closely allied to this mood is her use of color; with it she depicts a kaleidoscopic world, a continual merry-go-round. There is Punchinello "all glistening yellow", "Dinah with the scarlet ruche", an "onyx nail"; there are, too, "peaches bright as parrot's feather", "landscapes clear as glittering glass", "grass in greenest gloom" and "stars in bright blue air". She has a painter's sense of words; there is about her poems a sort of "primitive" art convention which is decidedly modern!¹

1. R. Aldington, "Poetry of the Sitwells" in Poetry, Vol. 17, issue of Dec. 1920, p. 165.

The dazzling colors are a reminder to us that with the brilliant light of gaiety and wit Miss Sitwell sought to open the eyes of the wilfully blind.¹ She was the deliberate ironist whose "artificial but barbed frivolity enabled her to criticize both by the content and the manner of her poetry".²

The inanity of modern civilization was a constant theme of Edith Sitwell's early poems. She herself, writing in the Spectator, said that modern values were based on making records in speed and money. The latter she regards as a Frankenstein monster dominating the world that created it. "Where charity once spread a cloak which was permitted to cover venial faults", she comments, "this...monster now offers the one garment which is allowed not only to cover, but to glorify, any kind of mortal sin."³ When she begins to emphasize the inanity of the modern world, she describes a fashionable concert, or a seaside resort with its heat and its "noisy light" and its "Bank Holiday crowds", "bright sparks struck out by time". Constantly she is using her materials to give the effect of hard, garish

1. M. Wykes-Joyce, Triad of Genius, London, Peter Owen, 1953, p. 46.

2. Ralph J. Mills, Jr., "The Poetic Roles of Edith Sitwell" in Chicago Review, Vol. XIV, No. 4, issue of Spring 1961.

3. E. Sitwell, "Modern Values" in Spectator, Vol. 141 issue of Dec. 22, 1928, p. 951.

light, jangling sound, and an infinite spiritual desolation.¹ "The dust is everything", says her King Pompey, "the emperor's ape,/ Shuddering black in his temporal cape/ Of dust". In "Clowns' Houses" we hear "The market square with spire and bell" clanging out "the hour in Hell!" Barber's Shop" repeats the same use of Hell - a place of spiritual desolation - "Where the hail in the lean/Streets of Hell, sweeps it clean." In "Mandoline" the setting is "Hell's gilded street". In man, too, there is spiritual emptiness; she sees him reduced to animality as "an ape, with black spangled veil", scratching sounds "tuneless and sharp as sin". Life is aimless; it is an "avenue of piano keys" that leads us "we know not where". Although Façade contains many poems that are experimental in nature, "five-finger exercises", so to speak, in technique, still a good many of them also are located in a wearily,

"sinisterly frivolous hell which is full of Negro page boys, apes, tropical birds and flowers, puppets, and 'commedia dell' arte' characters. It is not a place of torture: the hellish thing about it is the absence of all capacity to feel either pain or joy."²

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1. D. Powell, "Edith Sitwell", in Life and Letters, Vol. VI, No. 34, issue of March 1931, p. 179.
 2. H. N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in Modern Poetry, Vol. 5, New York, Columbia University Press, 1962, p. 62.

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The people who live in this empty world of which she has such a horror are absorbed entirely, like trees, in the process of mechanical growth; in their vegetable existence they are impervious "to that lighter and more intense life of religion and art in which humanity finds its only freedom".¹ Père Amelot's death leaves him still nodding in his nightcap, as he has done in life. The Dowager Queen, also vegetating, does not discern that it is a stuffed parrot, giving lifeless immortality, in which she takes pleasure. The ancient Admiral, the poet says, was loath "To see or hear or dream of growth..." His existence was not life but rather a tired stranger's "conversations with life." In "Cacaphony for Clarinet", the Margravine with her "tree-dark-mind" is the poet's expression of the emptiness of the mind of humanity.

This impression of the emptiness and lack of significance in the world about her which we receive from the early poems shows Edith Sitwell on the first step of her poetic journey; she recognizes that "the time is out of joint".

Edith Sitwell's first efforts to set things right were attempts to make her poetry relevant to her time. Her

1. E. Muir, "Edith Sitwell: an Interpretation", in The Nation, Vol. 120, issue of April 15, 1925, p. 427.

reaction against outmoded, artificial literary conventions and her return to significant values may be considered partly the result of a Christian influence. In his book Christianity and Western Culture: The Christian Tradition in English Literature, Doctor Dalton McGuinty shows clearly how the salvation of poetry has been effected by Christianity. He points out that there has been a constant cycle in English Literature of "literary conventions developing, serving their purposes, outliving their usefulness, and being reacted against by some inventive pioneer with the ability to establish new bearings"¹ - men like Shakespeare, Donne, Hopkins, and Eliot. To explain this cycle we must consider not only the "power of the men" able to react against outmoded, artificial, literary conventions, but also "the power of the moment" which stimulated them. The essential business of the poet is to view significant experiences with penetration, to react with sensitivity, and to impose order by forming his impressions into coherent wholes. In the final analysis, it is the force of the Christian tradition that almost compels the poet to re-define the essential business of poetry and then develop

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1. Dalton J. McGuinty, Christianity and Western Culture: The Christian Tradition in English Literature, Ottawa, 1964, p. 172.

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the techniques that will enable him to "fit his thoughts and feelings into an accepted pattern of rhythm and rhyme and elicit more exact, more highly charged meanings from words."¹ The permanence of English poetry which has fulfilled the essential business of that art is an indication that there is, in Western Christian civilization, a permanent force to which the poet can turn for stimulus and guidance. Christopher Dawson has noted, Doctor McGuinty says, that the religious ideal of the West has not been, as in the Oriental civilization, "the worship of timeless and changeless perfection but a spirit that strives to incorporate itself in humanity and to change the world".² The effects of this spiritual force have been felt in every aspect of social and cultural life. The only such permanent force in the Western world is Christianity - that is, Christ who Himself became incarnate and "continues to work on and within the humanity of other men, constantly renewing and transforming them."³ In Some Notes on My Own Poetry, Miss Sitwell explains that when she was beginning to write,

1. Ibid., p. 175

2. Ibid., p. 176

3. Ibid., p. 176

"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 Georgian poetry.¹ In all her early poetry there is much experimentation in rhythm; we see her imitating the motions of the dance in "Foxtrot", "Mazurka", "Waltz", "Hornpipe" and "Country Dance", using the rhythm of the nursery rhyme in, for example, "One O'Clock"; of the lullaby in the poem of that name, and also in Section 15 of "The Sleeping Beauty"; and of course retaining the common iambic tetrameter and pentameter lines as well. Jack Lindsay has pointed out, in the Preface to Façade and Other Poems, that the dance-relation gives the new discipline required by the poet; "it links the lonely revolt with the commonest and most joyous of shared experiences."² Edith Sitwell realized and agreed with Blake that "mechanical excellence is the only vehicle of genius."³ In her reaction to the stolid souls who continued "to grind out the amiable barrell-organ noises, euphemistically called 'Georgian poetry'",⁴ Edith Sitwell attempted a

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1. E. Sitwell, Collected Poems, London, Macmillan, 1957 p. xv.
 2. E. Sitwell, Façade and Other Poems, 1920-1935, London, Duckworth, 1950, p.17.
 3. E. Sitwell, A Poet's Notebook, London, Macmillan, 1943, p. 20.
 4. R. Aldington, "The Poetry of the Sitwells", in Poetry, Vol. XVII, issue of December, 1920, p. 112.

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revivification not only of the rhythms but also of the language of poetry. She confronted the problem of diction which Wordsworth had sought to state, and found a solution for our day, thereby setting off a new series of problems - especially for the critics, whose opinions of what she was doing varied greatly. In reality, she was getting back to Blake and Coleridge and also bringing into our culture, into our language, the tremendous forces set in motion by the French symbolists. A close study of the use made of words by English poets like Beddoes - (with Blake behind it, and many roots in Keats and Shelley) reveals the English equivalent of symbolism. It was killed by the influence of Tennyson in his early work particularly, but has reappeared with Edith Sitwell.¹ The basis of her language, Edwin Muir says, is an unusual type of simile - essentially psychological rather than pictorial, through which she attempts to escape from classified correspondences into others more intimate and more universal.² These similes are simply the psychological equivalent in terms of one sense of what we apprehend usually with another. The images resulting are of two kinds, phantasmic - "A gold

1. J. Lindsay, "Poetry of Edith Sitwell", in Life and Letters Today, Vol. 64, issue of Jan. 1950, p. 45.

2. E. Muir, The Nation, Vol. 120, p. 426.

Man like a terrible Sun", and synaesthetic - "ribbons of noisy heat". In her private associationism Miss Sitwell has developed many such phrases - the "stridency" of the cold, the "hairiness" of the sky, the "shining" of the grass, the "Emily" and "Martha" colours of things - which she partially explains in her introduction to her Collected Poems. Her images seemed strange, she says, for two reasons: they were highly condensed, and second, they were attempts to pierce down to the essence of the thing seen by discovering in it attributes apparently alien but in reality acutely related and using, therefore, the language of one sense to refer to another.¹ I. H. Hassan, writing of Edith Sitwell and the symbolist tradition, says that, like the symbolists, she "often starts with the physical impression an object creates, and... she brings to it those elements which 'exist below the threshold of consciousness, like a sun below the horizon'."² He points out that, in addition to phantasmic and synaesthetic images, she revives from the metaphysical poets the frequent use of conceits, drawing upon "sudden and far-fetched analogies",

1. Edith Sitwell, Collected Poems, p. xix.

2. I. H. Hassan, "Edith Sitwell and the Symbolist Tradition", in Comparative Literature, Vol. 7, issue of Summer, 1955, p. 242.

yoking dissonant elements, and eliciting "both wit and irony from the anomalies and paradoxes it creates".¹ The result is lines like "the Tyrant's ghost and the Low-Man-Flea/Are emperor-brothers". She uses also the auditory conceit, as for example in the poem "Country Dance": "That hob-nailed goblin, the bobtailed Hob,/Said, 'It is time I began to rob!'" The attempt made by Miss Sitwell to reinvigorate the language of poetry led to much unfavorable comment on her early work by critics like W. R. Benét and Horace Gregory. Even in 1925, however, there were not lacking those who would defend her in her efforts at revival. It is alone this change of vision (from the old and out-dated), says E. Muir in The Nation, "imperceptible or violent, that opens up to us the aesthetic revelation of the world. Art begins where our habitual perceptions leave off... In her poetry Miss Sitwell merely emphasizes this character of art, which is as old as art itself..."²

In addition to the Christian influence on Dame Edith's early poetry already mentioned - that influence which resulted in her attempt to revitalize poetry - there are other indications of Christianity: pity arising from charity, which gives us an insight into other people's

1. Ibid., p.243.

2. E. Muir, The Nation, Vol. 120, p. 426.

experiences and situations and enables us to identify ourselves with them; and an absorption with the themes of eternity, death, and sin, although these are not, in the period we are concerned with, approached by Dame Edith on a note of hope. The growing clarity of that note of hope will be one of the indications of the deeper Christian tone audible in her later poetry. There are glimpses in Edith Sitwell's early poetry of a deep tenderness and pity; these, I think, in some way prepare us for the great love of mankind expressed in the later poems. E. Muir writing in The Nation is of the opinion that, before the "Sleeping Beauty", Edith Sitwell has not "humanized her subject-matter; she has not translated the mystical, undifferentiated emotion of horror into the human and discerning emotion of pity".¹ Nevertheless, the "Aubade" is suffused with pity for Jane, "tall as a crane", whose brain the light will never penetrate, for whom the world is just "eternities of kitchen garden". Again, in "The Man with the Green Patch" there is pity for the real world which the green shade hid from the man - a world "terrible and old" where "seraphs in the mart are sold", with

starved men so thin they seem to be
The shadow of that awful Tree
Cast down on us from Calvary.

1. Ibid., p. 427.

We find a poignant tenderness in her attitude towards childhood and children in the images of lilies of the valley like curls of children leading with their candles a religious procession, or flowers "that we call 'dear heart' saying their prayers like children". In the "Sleeping Beauty" this emotion is more pronounced than in the earlier hard, bright, scintillating poetry. Here she seems to be seeing life's burdens from within, not from the outside. The poet has a sympathetic rather than a satirical attitude towards the gardener "old as tongues of nightingales" and the "poor half-human puppets". There is reflective sadness and tenderness in the lines

"... we for a little weep,
Then pray a little, sinking into sleep."

This same nostalgic reflection on the lost paradise of childhood suggests our own regret for innocence lost through evil, and even the vague longing that some souls have for heaven. The flowers in the garden, the poet says, seemed "for a fading while" dear as first love-

Till they bruise and wound the heart and sense
With their lost and terrible innocence.

The happiness of childhood was one of blissful ignorance - "When we were young, how beautiful life seemed!" - in which she knew nothing of man's guilt, the "endless goatish faces", the "basis of clay", the "plumeless wings of Destiny", and "the vistas leading only to the grave". Then

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spring was God singing "through the bird's shaken voice", and summer "the warmth and infinite loveliness of God", and she dreamed of "some far undimmed paradise". Later she mourned the "dead innocence and youth" that were her own, and the ghostly flowers

"Poignant with spring rain...
Smelling of youth that will not come again."

Frequently in the early poems, and especially in "Clowns' Houses" she senses the tragedy of the clown with poignant feeling. There is pity in her heart for the old - for the mariner man, "Wrinkled as sea-sand and old as the sea", for Colonel Fantock, that "old military ghost with may-fly whiskers" who boasted of his victories to the children, though in reality his only battles were fought with "cold poverty and helpless age", his only victories those gained over little boys "who would not learn to spell", who were in turn his only prisoners, and even these death stole from him. The poet puts her feelings into words when she says that "for ever through his braggart voice"

His soul
Wept with a little sound so pitiful
Knowing that he is outside life forever
With no one that will warm or comfort him.

Her pity for the failures and misfits of the world, for the plain Janes, for the poor, silly and shady Lily O'Gradys, for "the poor half-human puppets", for the "poor young people that poverty makes wise", becomes in "The Drunkard"

a wider and more powerful pity. In it there is a strong element of indignation and in fact an indignation that deepens to a more tragic and more agonized mood as we apprehend from the drunkard's words the agony of fear that gnawed "like pain" the hollow of his murdered wife's brain when she heard him approach. In "The Little Ghost Who Died for Love" Deborah's grief for mankind becomes the poet's, as she realized "it is not I/But this old world, is sick and soon must die!" Compassion comes of understanding. What compassion there is in the heart of the poet who realizes that once even Judas had a childish kiss, ("And still his mother knows but this,") and who writes then of a mother who finds excuses for the son who murdered her - that son whose weeping "seemed but play" since when he wept she so quickly kissed his tears away. There is pity, too, in the heart of a poet who can say, of "the ghost whose lips were warm,"

I stole her kiss, the only light
She had to warm her eternal night.

Gerard Meath contrasts the attitude of T.S.Eliot, who seems to observe his characters "as from an upper window", with that of Miss Sitwell. Even in her most detached poems she sets herself among the things she is describing.¹ She takes us walking along the shore with

1. Gerard Meath, O.P. "Flowering of the Rose", in The Tablet, (London), issue of Aug. 13, 1955, p. 153.

Daisy and Lily,/Lazy and silly,
or sauntering with the silly and shady Lily O'Grady who
would like to be a "lazy lady". There is here, as Father
Meath sees, a note of reverence as well as pity. Edith
Sitwell's pity is sympathy and love.¹ That is why we are
prepared in the early poems for the great compassion and
love of the later work.

In her early poetry there are constant references
to death and the dead, and to eternity, beneath all the
surface glitter; however at this point, although apparently
preoccupied with the eternal verities, the poet lacks a
spirit of hope. In "Spring", from Bucolic Comedies, King
Midas, hearing that "All is surface, and so must die",
decides to woo eternity with a feast. Though he says that
he feels "Eternity conquered" beneath his heel, the poem
with its melancholy closing sounds, "their cold, forlorn
madrigals", suggests his disillusionment. "Spinning Song"
ends on a note of inevitability,

"For everything comes to the shadows at last
If the spinning-wheel Time move slow or fast."

In "The Man with the Green Patch", the patch on the eye of
the old Admiral who has returned home to die is "the green
shade of Death's own yew-tree" and death a malefactor who

1. Singleton, G., Edith Sitwell, The Hymn to Life,
London, Fortune Press, 1960, p. 39.

"snuffs out the candle with our breath". The green patch itself is a symbol of the shade of the yew tree and therefore of death. Life, in "The Sleeping Beauty" is a place where we

"...for a little weep,
Then pray a little, sinking into sleep."

The gardener's song reminds us of eternity, "Time itself must die - must die". Again, the poet writes of the little marches that "lead down the lime avenues away/To the dark grave..." Furthermore, it is "goat-footed, mincing Death" that spies upon the ladies of the Court and "hearkens at their doors". Death may come without warning, with Attila's voice or the hum of a gnat" ushering in Eternity. "Courtier Death" blows out the candle flame of life with "civet breath". In "Popular Song" we are reminded that "shade is on the brightest wing" - life is always partly shadowed by death - and "dust forbids the birds to sing". Mr. Belaker, the allegro Negro cocktail-shaker, wonders why he is lost, "Down the endless road to eternity toss'd". "Pedagogues" warns us that we human beings move about with spectacles that concentrate

In one short hour, Eternity,
In one small lens, Infinity.

Even "Minstrels" moves from whimsicality to glimpses of eternity. "Oh! Time is hard to kill!" the poet concludes in a weary and ironical mood. In "The Hambone and the

Heart" and "The Ghost Whose Lips Were Warm" the emphasis again is on death - "The long pang of graveworms in the heart", and "death's cold" where "the dead lie close" when "the spring nights are fiery with wild dew". The "black disastrous sun" has no heat to "warm her eternal night". R. L. Mégroz comments that in all of her early poetry Edith Sitwell expresses her pessimism about human existence.¹ We wonder how much of this spirit of despondency is a reflection of her own conscious attitude to life at this time. The answer is apparently given in a passage quoted by the same critic from Miss Sitwell's introduction to Children's Tales from the Russian Ballet:

Life is a perpetual Can-can.... This terrible gaiety is nothing but a rope ladder up which we must climb to escape from the bottomless pits. But in what air and under what skies we shall find ourselves when we shall have climbed to the topmost rung of that ladder, I dare not guess.²

This pessimism in Edith Sitwell's early references to death and eternity found in such poems as "Spring", "Popular Song", and "The Hambone and the Heart", is not a permanent attitude. In her later poetry she will concern herself again with the theme of death, but this time her deepened Christian outlook will see beyond death to a glorious resurrection. The

1. R. L. Mégroz, The Three Sitwells, London, Richards Press, 1927, p. 194.

2. Ibid., p. 147.

important thing is that she does, even in the early period, penetrate the dazzling surface of the world about her; even when her poems are criticized as being shallow, they are not wholly superficial.

There are, in the poems written before 1930, "many passages where the mood and the images foretell the great phase that was to begin in 1940".¹ Some of the symbols that she uses in the later poetry - for example, the Sun, Gold, Blood, for life; the Moon, the Bone, Cold, for death - have their roots in the early poetry, whether they are intrinsic symbols, bringing with them their own range of reference - like the ape, cold, worm, Cain - or extrinsic, that is, created in a particular context and invested with special meanings, - like lion, claw, bone.² There is much use of colour in the early poems; later, the symbolism of colour is often ambivalent,³ although this use is sometimes found in Edith Sitwell's poetry before 1930. In the poem "Five Musicians", gold is used as a symbol of good, the beneficent light of the sun, which masks the old kind faces of the musicians; in "Spinning Song" (from the same

1. J. Lehmann, Edith Sitwell, London, Macmillan, 1952 p.18.

2. I. H. Hassan, Comparative Literature, Vol. 7, p.245.

3. G. Singleton, Edith Sitwell, The Hymn to Life, p. 35.

collection) gold has a malevolent connotation. "Duckie", an early poem, already uses the image of the bone:

And now I gnaw my bones for bread
And lying on my naked bed -¹
Houp la! the world is gay.

In the same poem there are lines that foreshadow the loathsome surfeit of flesh, bones and blood in "Gold Coast Customs":

I wish I had a wealth of flesh
To sell for bread or gnaw afresh.²

It is interesting to compare the imagery of "Elegy on Dead Fashion", published in 1926, and that of "Song of the Cold", published in 1945. In the second half especially of the "Elegy" there are many images and even lines that are echoed in the later poems. In both we find the phrases, "perfumed nosegay brought for noseless Death", and "naked and bare in their mortality". The idea of "Death the Leveler" is found in both poems. The "Song of the Cold" expresses it in the words "...all shall know the cold's equality" and the "Elegy" in the lines

We who were proud and various as the wave -
What strange companions the unreasoning grave
Will give us.

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1. E. Sitwell, Collected Poems, quoted by G. Singleton, Op. Cit., p. 43
 2. Ibid., p. 43.

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The same use of amber, of fire, of Lazarus, the worm and the ape is found in both poems. The "Elegy's" "my glittering fire" becomes in "Song of the Cold", "I am a walking fire"; "O soul, my Lazarus" becomes "Now falls the Night on Lazarus and Dives". In the first we hear the phrase "the apish shuddering dust", in the second, "the hunger of the Ape". Finally the "Elegy" speaks of the worm,

There where the kiss seems immortality
I prophesy the worm

as "Song of the Cold" does also - "Now she is blackened, shrunken, old/As the small worm." To show that the images of the later poems are found also in other early poems, I remind the reader of the symbol of the sun used in "The Ghost Whose Lips were Warm" -

Sun of my life, she went to warm the dead.

In "The Hambone and the Heart" the poet employs several of the later popular symbols - "That terrible Gehenna of the bone/Deserted by the flesh", "the worm within the heart", "the dust of all the Dead". Finally, I would like to draw attention to the symbol of the cold, used as early as "The Sleeping Beauty",

They would be silenced by the cold
That is of the spirit.

This would suggest that in these two representative poems of Edith Sitwell's there is no sudden change but rather a gradual development which kept pace with the change in her

themes; these likewise reflected change in the world around her.

There are other tendencies in Edith Sitwell's poetry that indicate, even before 1930, the religious note that became so evident in the forties. The strain of religious awareness that we find, for example, when she speaks of the summer as "the warmth... of God" will be replaced by a direct statement of her Christianity. Beneath all the glitter of the early poems there are, as we have seen, many references to death and to eternity; her attitude towards the eternal verities will be shifted in the later poems. In spite, too, of the pessimism of the early poems, there is a definite note of joy. Jack Lindsay in his introduction to Façade writes,

Here too we find a rebirth of Joy in poetry;
and yet because of the deep passion of truth
which had made this rebirth possible, there
is always also the sense of the crucifixion
of life by the forces of alienation!¹

There is a sense of sin as we see in these lines from "The Sleeping Beauty",

And ancient satyrs whose wry wig of roses
Nothing but little rotting shames discloses.

To conclude, we may say of her early poems that they are bright, colourful experiments in technique with nursery-rhyme

1. E. Sitwell, Façade and Other Poems, p. 17.

delight of metre and joyous nonsense, but barbed with satire at the emptiness of the world around her; or dream poetry which recalls with a nostalgic longing the innocence and joys of a lost childhood; or poems with an underlying current of pessimism, which surely seem, in her own words,

"The anguished beat of our own heart
Making an endless battle without hope
Against materialism and the world." ¹

We must, however, add that there are road signs that point the direction of her journey: her satirical attitude towards the inane world of the 1920's; her revolt against dead and dull forms of Georgian poetry, which permits us to think of her work as a rebirth of vigour and a renewal of relevance in poetry; her deep pity for individuals—a starting-point often for real love that encompasses all suffering; her awareness of death, of eternity, of sin. All of these signs were visible in her poetry before 1930.

1. E. Sitwell, Collected Poems, p. 86.

CHAPTER TWO

"GOLD COAST CUSTOMS" - A TRANSITION

It is significant that "Gold Coast Customs" was written in 1929. Edith Sitwell's first real experience of the world, which arose from her leaving home and going to London at the beginning of the First World War, left her mourning for the lost world of her childhood. All the longing that she felt for this time of innocence and beauty she expressed in the "Sleeping Beauty," published in 1924. In the poems of "Troy Park," published in the following year, there is a strong note of pathos. Now, by 1929, she saw the world as it really was in a city like London and found its equivalent in the cannibalistic customs of the most uncivilized of African tribes. Writing this poem was for the author an excruciating experience. "It was written with anguish", she said, "and I would not willingly relive that birth."¹

The contemporary scene which "Gold Coast Customs" played was a disturbing one. In the twenties, relief at the end of the war had given place to disillusionment. Neither the victory nor the peace treaties brought what people expected. Unrest was rife. English literature for a time was under Communist influence; there was agitation for

1. Sister Mary Jeremy, O.P., "Clown and Canticle. The Achievement of Edith Sitwell", in Renascence, Vol. 111, No. 2, issue of Spring 1951, p. 133.

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reform on every side, culminating in the great strike of 1926. For the poor the temporary prosperity brought by war was short-lived. On the other hand, among the new-rich there were many war profiteers. It was indeed a flimsy world whose match-board floor did fall through in the crash of 1929.

It was the sins of the rich that aroused in Edith Sitwell the horror we feel in "Gold Coast Customs", both their personal sins and those they caused by impoverishing the lower classes. She had a horror of the Lady Bamburghers of fashionable society. In her autobiography Taken Care Of, she has a chapter on Vulgarity, in which she places its birth in the latter half of the nineteenth century, at a time when there was "a perfect shower of memoirs of Courtesans".¹ As a result, Dame Edith tells us, there developed two new kinds of society leader - one whose voice resembled the bellowing of the Golden Calf, the other a creature possessing "a preference for dwelling in the mud, a stomach and a mouth, but neither heart nor nerves". Only after the First World War, she says, did Vulgarity come into her own, "with the hordes of newly enriched or semi-rich 'fashionable' people who now infest our land or perform rat-like excursions in hordes to the Lido".² Dame Edith

1. Edith Sitwell, Taken Care Of, London, Hutchinson, 1965, p.157.

2. Ibid., p.158.

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was appalled at this vulgarity of the rich which, she remarked, is not a quality of the very poor. And she continued

There is nothing vulgar about the crowds on a Bank Holiday riding donkeys on the sands, or whirling about in a merry-go-round, shrimping, paddling, or eating winkles. Vulgarity has never yet worn a simple dress.¹

Although the whole poem is an attack on the soullessness of fashionable life and the barbarity of the slums, yet the invective is against the wealthy; she is horrified at the conditions to which the poor in the slums have been reduced.

What makes "Gold Coast Customs" a landmark in Edith Sitwell's poetry, especially from the point of view of her spiritual development? In the pity it stirs in us for those who are victims of society and the horror it arouses at their condition, the poem prepares the reader for the great compassion of the poet for all who suffer, observable in her war poetry. This viewpoint is shared by B. G. Brooks who says, when reviewing The Song of the Cold in 1946:

The poem ("Gold Coast Customs") appears here in a very prominent place and is evidently felt by the poet herself to mark a turning point in her career, if not as a poet, at least as a figure in her age. It did, in both senses. It had in it the seeds of the later work. The imagery drew into itself some of the sharpness of her earlier pieces, but it had for the first time the brilliant revelation of the horror of human beings,

1. Ibid., p. 161.

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the horror of the savage echoed in
the horror of the civilized man, which
set her out on her new voyage of discovery
and led her where she is now, with her
wider and deeper synthesis of experience.¹

As the satirist of society in the twenties, Miss Sitwell had mocked the superficiality of life with the glittering, artificial world she pictured in poems like "Clowns' Houses". In the "Elegies" she dealt with the tragic aspect of death as both physical and spiritual decay and showed its cause to be the 'cold' gold of Dives. In "Gold Coast Customs" she becomes the undisguised judge of society. All the references in her earlier poems to the existence of evil in the world are vague and shadowy when compared with the horror of the evil presented in "Gold Coast Customs". In the early poem, "Clowns' Houses", the poet says that the houses are blind and "paper-thin", that "like a hopeless prayer/They cleave the sly dumb air." How much more evil she insinuates when, in "Gold Coast Customs" she writes,

One house like a rat-skin
Mask flaps fleet
In the sailor's tall
Ventriloquist street
Where the rag houses flap -
Hiding a gap.

Here Dame Edith uses simile, assonance, onomatopoeia,

1. B. G. Brook, "Song of the Cold - Review", in The Nineteenth Century and After, Vol. 139, issue of April, 1946, p. 176.

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alliteration - the whole gamut of poetic devices - to imply the repulsiveness of the evil hidden in the modern slum. The "worm within the heart" of "The Hambone and the Heart" carries only a faint suggestion of the evil that the poet expresses when she describes in "Gold Coast Customs" the

hardened hearts
That roll and sprawl,
In a cowl of foul blind monkey-skin,
Lest the whips of the light crash roaring in -

The earlier poems leave an impression of artificiality; "Gold Coast Customs" reveals Miss Sitwell's realization of the vice-ridden and corrupt state of contemporary civilization. In "Mandoline" we are told that the modern world is "Hell's gilded street", but when we read in "Gold Coast Customs" of

the grin
Of the shapeless worm-soft unshaping Sin -
Unshaping till no more the heat of the blood
Can raise up the body from endless mud,

we know that the slums of London are a hell. With her metre, which keeps constantly in our ears the insistent drum-beats of African tom-toms, with the loathsome animal imagery which puts the inhabitants of the slums on a sub-human level, and with the horror of her symbolism - "the world-tall Worm", "the bugbear bellowing bone", the stifling "Negro swamp" - Miss Sitwell has probed the depths to which the moral, physical, and spiritual nature of man is capable of descending. From this point on, her poetry is serious in tone.

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She has made the transition from a period of experimentation in rhyme and rhythm to the assurance of the long flowing lines of her poetry after 1940. She has confronted, as we have seen, the depths of evil - social injustice, modern slum living with its brothels, prostitution, homosexuality, and lesbianism, its degradation of the human personality - and has struck a faint note of hope in her awareness of "God's vast love". Her satirical attitude has been replaced by compassion and a glimmer of hope. In her subsequent poems there is acceptance of the evil in the world and prophecy of the good that will replace it. All this seems to show a change in her spiritual outlook. The note of hope lacking in her earlier poetry is heard here in the tentative promise of new cleansed life and spiritual rebirth:

But yet if only one soul would whine
Rat-like from the lowest mud, I should know
That somewhere in God's vast love it would shine.

From the re-written ending of a few years later we glean a strong and confident hope - the first authentic Christian note in her poems, as Father Meath remarks.¹ "Gold Coast Customs" bridges the change in Edith Sitwell's spiritual development from the irony and pity of her attitude towards others in her early work to her identification of herself and all mankind with the suffering Christ in the poems after

1. Gerard Meath, O.P., "The Flowering of the Rose", The Tablet (London), p. 153.

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1940.

The setting of "Gold Coast Customs", which is the subject of the first six stanzas, is repellent and horrible. The human skin bleaching on the rocks, the Negro wiping his blood-stained knife, the "felted Black Hair" which is the only sign of his humanity - all these prepare us for the greater horror of life in the slums of London. The Lady Bamburghers of the modern world sate themselves, not on the blood of their victims but on their souls; they feast on the latest scandals, on the "foul news-sheet", on the shame of "the rat-fat soul" whose skin they flay to reveal it to the "grinning day". The poverty of the slums has led girls like "starved silly Sally" to sell themselves so that they become only calico things to loll

Over the easy steps of the slum
Waiting for something dead to come.

The figures of the modern large city fall easily into the grotesque and horrible Negro scene.

The notion of bloodshed and cannibalism, of dust and mud, of masks and paint, of drums and fetiches "passes easily from one world to the other and shows a fundamental identity between them."¹ In early poems like "Minstrels"

1. C. M. Bowra, Edith Sitwell, Monaco, The Lyrebird Press, 1947, p. 26.

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Miss Sitwell showed that she was aware of the inanity of much of modern life. In "Gold Coast Customs" she has penetrated the rat-skin surface and has seen the rotting bones beneath. It is her own world that she is exposing, the world of fashion to which by right of birth she belonged, and she makes her revelation with characteristic courage and honesty.

It is true that Miss Sitwell writes as an aristocrat¹ and therefore as one who resents the "nouveau riche" world of Lady Bamburgher. As has been mentioned, she had a strong disdain for the wealthy bourgeois class, which she regarded as vulgar, but she saw no vulgarity in the simplicity of the poor. This disdain for the aristocracy of money and championing of the oppressed one might explain as natural in the aristocrat by birth, especially at a time when, as then, the latter was feeling the pinch of poverty resulting from war and taxation. If, however, contempt of the rising philistine class rather than concern about the material and spiritual desolation of the poor had been the major inspiration of "Gold Coast Customs", the Christian note would not have rung genuine, nor could we have expected it to re-appear with increasing intensity and sincerity in the later poems, as it does. The Christ "that takest away

1. C. M. Bowra, Edith Sitwell, p. 21.

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the sins/Of the world" whom Dame Edith invokes in "Gold Coast Customs" is the same Christ whose forgiveness of all (including the "nouveau riche") is a constant theme of the later poetry.

"Gold Coast Customs" is a transition poem also in containing echoes of earlier poems and suggesting what is to follow. The symbols of Cain and Judas, for example, are found in "The Shadow of Cain"; the "ape's thick pelt" is just one example of animal imagery that recalls poems like "Said King Pompey". In general its symbols are less esoteric than those of the early poems; those of the later poems can be apprehended even more directly and universally. Its rhythm is reminiscent of the early poetry in lines like "Starved silly Sally, why dilly and dally?", in which we hear a faint echo of the nursery rhyme. In the last stanza the poet uses varying length of lines to work up to a climax. The sonority of its long lines is a prelude to the Whitmanlike rhythms of the odes, and well conveys the prophetic tone on which the poem closes.

Referring to these last five lines, Miss Sitwell herself tells us that it was of that wheat, blood, and fire, and of the fires of God that she was to write thereafter.¹ She recognized "Gold Coast Customs", then, as a transition

1. Edith Sitwell, Collected Poems, p. xli.

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poem from the viewpoint of theme. In another respect, too, it marks a transition: it contains the first authentic Christian note in her poetry and thus anticipates the strongly Christian spirit of later poems like "Holiday". The note of hope is not the only evidence of Christianity in "Gold Coast Customs". The influence of Christianity on literature may be reflected when a work makes clear the basic issues of suffering and evil, presenting them with an immediacy and a vitality possible to no one except the artist.¹ There is a spiritual depth to this poem that Edith Sitwell has not reached before, even though we have noted in the early poems her awareness of the emptiness of what is wholly material.

For a decade the seed of her talent, which had been nurtured by a soil rich with the wealth of tradition, and cultivated by years of devoted practice of her craft, having developed to some degree, was left dormant. But when the great rains of inspiration came, it flowered in much beauty and richness. It is this flowering, both in Edith Sitwell's own soul and in her poetry, for which "Gold Coast Customs" prepares us.

It would be redundant at this point to analyze the two versions of "Metamorphosis", as I had proposed to do.

1. Doctor Dalton McGuinty, Op. Cit., p. 150.

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The difference between the 1929 version and that of 1946 emphasizes the change in Miss Sitwell's outlook on life. The early version promises a hope of the warmth of the sun generating a new warmth of love in the heart of man. The later version expresses the synthesis of human and Christ-like compassion which the poet sees diffusing itself throughout the universe. This is precisely the type of change which "Gold Coast Customs" anticipates.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LATER POEMS: FULL MATURITY

In the ten years following the writing of "Gold Coast Customs", Edith Sitwell produced no poetry. It was, however, a fruitful period of silence, like that of the holy night in which the Holy Ghost speaks in the whispering leaves, for her poetry after 1940 revealed a more mature poetic style, and generally a deeper influence of Christianity in themes, symbolism and imagery. The maturity of her style was a result of a synthesis of the best qualities she had developed in her early poetry: its brightness and charm, the living quality of her diction, the gradual emergence of a less esoteric symbolism than in the beginning of her career as a poet, the technical skill she had acquired during her apprenticeship with metres and rhymes, and an imagery capable of conveying experiences of tragic grandeur and intensity. C. M. Bowra sees this great flowering of her genius as the reward for years of devoted and patient labour at her art.¹ Undoubtedly, it was; yet it resulted also from the poet's Christianity, from the compassion stirred in her by the stresses, anxieties and sufferings of her fellow-Europeans. Sister Mary Jeremy points out that Edith Sitwell came to this period of her poetry "from a great isolation",

1. C. M. Bowra, Edith Sitwell, p. 29.

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the period of her care of Helen Rootham during which she wrote no poetry, "allied to a widening sympathy - which is perhaps the only way for the poet in our time."¹

Long before 1940, Sir Edmund Gosse realized the potentiality of Edith Sitwell as a poet. He recognized the development of style in "The Sleeping Beauty" which was more than confirmed by the "Rustic Elegies", and predicted that she had only to cease being a mere 'grotesque' to become an important factor in the literature of her day.² This she could do and did. There is undoubtedly a development toward maturity in the themes of Miss Sitwell's poetry from the fanciful content or barbed criticisms of life of the earliest to the deep religious note sounded in the poems written after 1940. It is not without foundation, then, to say that such a development in theme might readily indicate a poet for whom life takes on continually more meaning, for whom Christianity in its greatest virtues - faith, hope, and love - becomes vital and informing, and for whom reception into the Catholic Church might well be a logical step, as

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1. Sister Mary Jeremy, O.P., "Clown and Canticle", in Renaissance, Vol. 111, No. 2, issue of Spring, 1951, p. 134.
 2. Sir Edmund Gosse, "Miss Sitwell's poems", in The Living Age, Vol. 334, issue of June 15, 1927, p. 1096.

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indeed it was. To support this thesis we shall consider the themes of some representative poems of the post-1940 period. In choosing these poems I have taken an early one, "An Old Woman", with its second part, "Harvest"; then two on a very different theme, "Lullaby" and "Serenade: Any Man to Any Woman"; "Holiday", which, with "Harvest", provides a contrast to the two just preceding; "Still Falls the Rain", Dame Edith's cry of anguish and compassion at the German raids on Britain in 1940, after the Second World War broke out; and finally, "Three Poems of the Atomic Age", since they have a subtle connection with "Gold Coast Customs". In this last poem Edith Sitwell prophesied the Second World War, "The sick thick smoke from London burning", and in the group of these poems she expressed her reaction to the terrible destruction caused by the atomic bomb which brought World War II to an end.

In "Still Falls the Rain" the poet is uttering an intense cry of anguish and compassion for the sufferings of man. This poem, then, shows the influence of the Christian virtue of charity, which increases our sympathetic insight into other people's experiences. The rain of bombs in the dark days of 1940 fell upon rich and poor, good and bad, alike. The rain, the steady beat of which is an echo of the blows of the hammer nailing Christ to the Cross or of the footsteps on the tomb of those who denied the

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Resurrection, becomes not the constant dropping of bombs, but the stream of blood from the wound in the side of Christ. Christ gathers up in Himself the sufferings of all. "He bears in His heart all wounds"; He was offered once to take away the sins of many.¹ Although man brings on himself his own sufferings, through them he may be redeemed. In this rain of bombs, the innocent suffer with the guilty; likewise, the innocent Christ still sheds His Blood, which was spilt for guilty man and flows

Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart
That holds the fires of the world -

a world dark with pain because a dictator was greedy for glory. Although this poem is contemporary it is not merely so; it is an intense, highly imaginative composition on the sufferings of man written with a strong Christian influence. The poet sees Christ in the common man and the continued crucifixion of Christ in the sufferings war inflicts on the individual. She sees Him as the restorer of man, bearing "in His heart all wounds" - those of the self-murdered heart, of the baited bear, of the hunted hare. At the climax of the poem the steady rhythmic pattern is suddenly broken and the movement quickened when the poet quotes Faustus's feverish outburst in a paroxysm of agony, "O Ile leape up to

1. Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 9, verse 28.

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my God: who pulles me doune", striving "to tear herself from the depth of despair, and thereby giving to her own poem a feeling of new light and hope."¹ Finally the poem concludes triumphantly, and with a spirit of charity and forgiveness as Christ says,

'Still do I love, still shed my innocent light,
my Blood, for thee.'

C. M. Bowra sums up the Christian influences discernible in the poem when he states that in it Edith Sitwell "passes beyond the horror of the present moment to a vision of its significance in the spiritual history of man and through her compassion for him finds a ray of hope for his future".²

In "Lullaby" and "Serenade" the influence of Christianity is implied rather than explicit. Both poems are heavily ironical comments on a war which is leaving for children only a levelled, devastated world and for youth a love which leads not to new life but to death. This concern for children, the means by which the renewal of the human race should be accomplished, makes clear the Christian attitude of involvement in the sufferings of others. The suffering of the young seems especially to have moved Dame Edith, as is evident from a poem published in the Atlantic

1. Geoffrey Singleton, Edith Sitwell, The Hymn to Life, p. 21.

2. C. M. Bowra, Op. Cit., p. 36.

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Monthly in November, 1957, "The War Orphans", inspired by a picture of Korean children sleeping in the snow. In "Lullaby" the poet pictures a child whose mother has been killed by war (the means, the steel egg of a pterodactyl laid in the breast of Mother Earth). There is nothing left in the world but the Babioun, which assumes the role of foster-mother and sings the child a sinister, blood-curdling lullaby. Red, it sings, is the bed of Poland and Spain and of your mother who has grown wise. If you were to be born again, she would hide your bones with the pelt of a wolf; being reduced to the condition of an animal, you could descend no lower. There is nothing, she says, you can look for in the future but a deadly, meaningless, hopeless uniformity. There is pleasure in neither possession nor creation. The sun (with its life-giving quality), she finally sings, has gone; you are alone with the Ape. In "Serenade" the poet, deeply outraged by the suffering of the young, assumes the voice of the young lover who knows that his promises of love can never be fulfilled, since death will claim him as it has so many others. His heart and mind can never be wholly his beloved's, for death always hangs over him and distracts his thoughts. He is really not her mate, but the cannon's. The only hope of happiness for such lovers is the grave, and so he invites her to die with him and be his love. Still, at the end of the poem his normal

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feelings emerge when he addresses her as a rainbow born of his tears; her lips the "Summer-old folly of the rose". If these two poems reflect the mood of despair of many at the time, and seem to lack the Christian note of hope, at least they do imply the Christian attitude, "I am my brother's keeper." There is an ironical contrast between the later "Lullaby" with its sinister mood and relevance to so many people of her own day and "The Sleeping Beauty", with its more private relationship to the poet's own childhood. Similarly, beneath the tragic paradox of "Serenade" Miss Sitwell's tenderness, deeply wounded by the barbarities of war, finds an outlet.

Against these two poems which reflect the dark despair of the early years of the war lightened only by the glimmerings of Christian influence, we should place "Harvest" and "Holiday", poems which reveal a constructive outlook and in which the influence of Christianity is clearly evident. In these poems Dame Edith assumes the role of prophet. In the first part of "Harvest", called "An Old Woman", she is an old woman who sees that the divine power, which is revealed in nature - the animal world, the heavenly bodies, the plants - and things, and through them restores the heart of man, "that second sun", is in the end love. It is this that brings comfort to her in her old age and answers easily many of the questions that have disturbed her

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and consoles her for the losses that have been hers. In the second part of "Harvest" the poet is again the old woman who has seen too much - too many sorrows - has heard the war-mongers and seen the young sacrificed in war, yet is not weary of life. Now young women wait for their lost loves and old men reproach their veins that instead of fire have only anger. But Christ, she says, has forgiven all men, including the tyrannical dictators who have caused the tragedy of war. The sign that God has not forsaken us is the growth and harvest which make us feel that we are surely in the keeping of heaven. The rhythm of our lives is the rhythm of the seasons. The poet feels herself become fire - the bright gold in the heart - and is filled with hope as she realizes that, like the eternal cycle of the seasons, God has returned from the dead for the sake of all of us - "the wrong and the right, the wise and the foolish". The ripe wheat, the harvest, takes on, as it were, a multitudinous voice that cries, "Our Christ is arisen, He comes to give a sign from the Dead." As the world of nature is transformed and recreated over and over again by the sun, so love transforms and conquers all our sufferings with the result that "all in the end is harvest".

What are the Christian attitudes observable in the theme of these poems? In Part I Dame Edith sees God's love - "The sun is the first lover of the world" - shining upon

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young and old, good and bad, renewing the face of the earth, remaking, as the poet says, "all men and things in holiness". There is a strong note of forgiveness, eminently Christian, in the poem, expressed clearly in the last line: "Come to bless,/ Forgive and bless all men like the holy light." She writes also of a world of universal brotherhood, where "The man-made chasms between man and man/ Of creeds and tongues are fill'd," and this, she implies towards the end of the poem, will be the result of all creation's cradle "swinging/ In the peace of God's heart".

The second part of the poem "Harvest" shows more and clearer evidence of Christian influence. Although the poet, again "an old woman whose heart is like the Sun", is aware of the evils of war and the grief it causes, she is still firm in her reliance on God's providence, "The Golden Ones of heaven have us in care". The note of forgiveness in Part II is stronger than in Part I; now we are assured that Christ "has forgiven all men", even the most guilty. The poet sees the cycle of all lives upon earth as a reflection of the ripening and dying of the seasons, the "sowing and reaping in the holy fields", and these in turn, she certainly implies, reflect the death and resurrection of Christ. In this way she introduces into the theme of the poem an element of hope. The end of the poem brings a stronger strain of Christian hope when the poet sees in the harvest

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a pledge of the resurrection, since the wheat will become the universal food of man and in particular the Eucharist. With this reference to Christ's resurrection as a sign of man's transformation - this basic Christian belief - the poem ends.

"Holiday", which we have chosen to regard as a companion poem to "Harvest", shows also a religious influence. Dame Edith's theme here is that the Intelligible Light - representing Christ, of course - falls upon the whole human and natural scene and transforms it, "turns all to gold". "On this great holiday" hostile forces are united; the rich and the poor are brothers again; the hands that have not been able to find employment and because of hunger have become the claws of lions fighting for food, bear now the imprint of Christ's wounds. Even the most forsaken people, the poorest things, are a witness to the presence of Christ in the world: the old people who see the Burning Bush reflected in the broken window of a slum, the crumb given to the starving bird. "Holiday" and "Harvest", when set against "Lullaby" and "Serenade", show us how Edith Sitwell passes through the harrowing doubts and despairs of war to a constructive outlook. This outlook, as we have shown, is religious.

"Dirge for the New Sunrise" is Edith Sitwell's poetic response to the destruction of Hiroshima in August, 1945, by the atomic bomb. In the stress of her emotions at

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this unprecedented destruction of man by man, Miss Sitwell can see nothing of God left in man, nor anything left that made man a man. Blinded by materialism and selfishness man can cause the destruction of the body and of true brotherhood. Christ, on the other hand, "The beautiful First Creature", brought man safety and happiness, and sacramentalized both nature and humanity. It is almost as though for the moment hate is stronger than love. In her great Christian sympathy with suffering humanity, the poet speaks of herself as nailed to a cross, as the Thief was, hanging "between our Christ and the gap where the world was lost." She too is suffering to help redeem man. The theme of this poem shows the change that is taking place within the poet. "Lullaby" and "Serenade", written earlier in the war, depict the horrors of war and spring from a heart whose tenderness has been outraged; yet they do not show the degree of involvement in the sufferings of others that is revealed in "Dirge for the New Sunrise."

About the theme of "The Shadow of Cain" there can be no doubt, since Dame Sitwell herself has told us what it is. "This poem", she has said, "is about the fission of the world into warring particles, destroying and self-destructive."¹ After the Second Fall, man began a spiritual

1. Edith Sitwell, Collected Poems, p. xlii.

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migration into the desert of the Cold. In the course of his wanderings, he found traces of a true brotherhood that had once existed. Though the Wanderers received flashes of the whole meaning of life - birth, struggle, and death - and though all nature called for a return to God, they did not heed the warnings that heralded atomic destruction. After the cataclysm, the world turned to Lazarus, the symbol of the new earthly resurrection of man, for help for its afflicted; then to Dives, the symbol of sterile, material wealth, the power of gold. The latter told the people that gold was the remedy for all disease. But the people rejected his doctrine, crying: "You are the shadow of Cain. Your shade is the primal Hunger." They placed him under the same condemnation as Adam, Cain, Sodom and Judas - namely, destruction of spiritual life and brotherhood. In spite, however, of the doom pronounced on those who by their greed, avarice, lust, and falsehood, cause enmities among men, the poem ends on a note of hope:

And yet - who dreamed that Christ had died in vain?
He walks again on the Seas of Blood, He comes in
the terrible Rain.

What influences of Christianity are observable in the theme of "The Shadow of Cain"? The author tells of the migration of man from God and of how man, in his longing for the spiritual life, found his way back to God through the physical revelation of the Incarnation, with its strong note

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of hope, "great emerald thunders in the air." The poet reminds us of the presence of God in all nature, "For the Son of God is sowed in every furrow." She recognizes the evil in the world that drowns out the voice of Christ and leads to such disasters as war and atomic destruction. With a truly Christian outlook she makes it clear that the evil and suffering in the world is no proof that Christ has died in vain. Rather, he brings good from evil; He comes again in the seas of Blood. Here is a direct affirmation of Christian faith, especially in the atonement for man's sin and guilt which Christ has made. In a truly Christian spirit, too, she equates Christ with suffering humanity, "those torn and parti-coloured garments of Christ, those rags/That once were Men."

"After that poem ('The Shadow of Cain')", Miss Sitwell tells us, "haunted ever by the shadow that fell on Hiroshima, I yet 'blessed Jesus Christ with the Rose and his people', as in 'The Canticle of the Rose'."¹ She is here alluding to Christopher Smart's "Jubilate Agno", which, "with two mediaeval lines, has brought to incandescence her earlier image of the rose."² The Rose cries that it is the voice of fire and that in it Christ's Wounds shine. It is

1. Ibid., p. xlv.

2. Sister Mary Jeremy, Op. Cit., p. 136.

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polarized to light and earth, bringing light to those on earth. Still, in Famine Street, the buyers and sellers want nothing of the light; it has brought only death to them. But when they shout that not all the ashes of our brother men will rekindle the light of life, nor all the world's incendiaries, the Rose cries out that Christ, who is the ultimate Fire," will burn away the cold in the heart of man."

In this poem, the Christian influence is easily discerned in the theme; in the meaning given to death when the poet speaks of its "pomegranate splendour"; the reference to Christ as our Saviour from evil who will burn away "The cold in the heart of Man"; most of all, the fact that the Rose speaks of itself as crying of Christ and showing Christ's wounds - in other words, being a reminder to the world, of Christ.

How does the Christian influence in these eight poems, representative of the poetry written in Dame Edith's mature period, compare with that influence as found in her earlier work? As in every other respect, there is a gradual development and strengthening of the Christian note. When Edith Sitwell began to write she was determined to bring freshness to English poetry, partly because she was reacting to the boredom of her surroundings, mainly because the poetry of her day was so dull and lacking in originality of

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treatment. She wrote of a gaudy, bright-coloured world in which she recognized some forms of evil as well as a gaping emptiness. Even among the early poems there are some, like "The Drunkard" or "Clowns' Houses" that present us with an incident or a picture, the main function of which is to arouse an emotion such as pity. Here is the beginning of the compassion which has been so dominant a part of the later work. The poems of Clowns' Houses, like "Fireworks" or "Minstrels", show Miss Sitwell's method of "stringing ideas¹ like bright beads on a thread of superficial association". When she penetrates beneath the surface it is to give us glimpses of eternity and of the emptiness of the world. In Façade there are poems which are almost completely experiments in technique, like "Trio for Two Cats and a Trombone"; there are, however, others like "Waltz" and "Popular Song", that present characters which arouse pathos. Although the poems of Bucolic Comedies are generally concerned with country themes, they too sometimes, as in "Aubade", show Dame Edith's Christian compassion for the unprivileged which is so strong in the later poems. This strain of compassion continues in Troy Park, in which, through poems like "Colonel Fantock", Miss Sitwell "conveys the pathos of small unimportant lives in which some apparently

1. R. L. Mégroz, The Three Sitwells, p. 147.

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trivial event takes on an almost tragic significance."¹ Here the poet is showing a true sense of Christian democracy; even the most obscure persons possess dignity as human beings. From her concern with the meaning of life and death in the world, in poems like "Marine" and "The Drunkard", the poet moves a step forward to the theme of "Gold Coast Customs" in which the Christian influence grows clearer. The theme of this poem - an indictment of the society of the poet's own day, and especially of her own class, as fundamentally vice-ridden and corrupt - marks a personal involvement of the author in the physical and spiritual sufferings of others. We are prepared now for the continuation and growth of this attitude in the later poems. "Gold Coast Customs" adumbrated "the deep concern with the 'proper study of mankind' which marks the sybilline poetry" of the forties.² Dame Edith sees the sufferings of Christ in those of men; in other words, she becomes aware of man's incorporation in Christ, that is, of the Mystical Body of Christ. Once again she grapples with the problem of death, but now she sees that it is a means of redemption; Christ passed through the portals of death to give us, by His resurrection, an assurance of our own. Nature becomes more

1. C. M. Bowra, Op. Cit., p. 20.

2. W. T. Scott, "A Three-Headed Basilisk", in Saturday Review, issue of Dec. 19, 1953, p. 11.

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than ever to her a manifestation of God's power. Miss Sitwell once wrote, of the poet:

The great artist in each of the arts retains spiritually...the child's wondering vision of the glories of the world. His vision, his hearing, are closer to the quintessence of reality than any other vision or hearing. Like Moses, he sees God in the burning bush when the half-opened or myopic eye sees only the gardener's diurnal task - the burning of leaves on a garden path.¹

She is capable of conceiving of God as contracting His Immensity and shutting Himself in the scope of a small flower. The succession of the seasons is a glorious reminder to her that man, too, will rise to a new life.

"...Our Christ is arisen, He comes to give a sign from the Dead." The poet expresses her belief in God's forgiveness of man - "And Christ has forgiven all men." It is only in the latest work that the poet sees the possibility of healing even after the extremes of evil. To her, the ripening of the harvest is assurance that God is taking care of His world -

O Sons of men, the firmament's beloved,
The Golden Ones of heaven have us in care-

Only Christian faith would recognize in the rain of bombs on Britain in 1940 - suffering so hideous and in some ways so inevitable and so deserved - a reason for seeing

1. Edith Sitwell, "Poet's Vision", in Saturday Evening Post, issue of Nov. 15, 1958, p. 126.

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beyond the catastrophe to the God who permits it. Again, in keeping with the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, Dame Edith sees the blood shed by the victims of war as the innocent blood shed by Christ. The poems "Lullaby" and "Serenade", as we have already pointed out, lack the Christian faith and hope of the other war poems; rather the irony of these two poems reflects the conflict which war created in the poet. That she resolved this conflict in a truly Christian way is evident when, in the face of an even more horrible catastrophe, the explosion of the atom bomb at Hiroshima, she mounts the cross - "I hang between our Christ and the gap where the world was lost" - and, with the Rose, cries of Christ, "Who is the ultimate Fire/Who will burn away the cold in the heart of man." In general, this theme of complete and unquestioning love recurs again and again in the poetry of Edith Sitwell and is the cornerstone of her philosophy. She says - and she witnesses to the truth of her own words - that the poet is the complete lover of mankind.¹

From the study of Dame Edith's themes commencing with her early poetry and progressing to the mature work of the forties and fifties we reasonably conclude that the pathos and compassion of the former has deepened, as the

1. Ibid., p. 29.

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poet has matured, into the Christian faith, hope, and love of the latter. Her initial role as satirist of the hollow society around her has become that of the prophet bringing to mankind a hope that has its roots in the resurrection of Christ.

If Edith Sitwell's poetry can be regarded as an indication of the gradual religious growth that led to her conversion to Catholicism, this change must be evident not only in theme but also in symbolism. In the early poetry the symbols occurring most frequently are clowns, puppets and marionettes. These figures lacking any spiritual affirmations and any connection with nature symbolize, as Ralph Mills points out, "the futility of existence without aim, run automatically from birth to death by the movements of modern industrial and social unrest."¹

"Gold Coast Customs" marks a change in the poet's symbolism as well as in her themes. The mechanical figures of the early poems have been replaced by animal types, symbolic of a world in which the lust for gold and sex is leading to spiritual death. In the poems written after 1940 the kind of revelation Dame Edith takes as her subject matter needs "a language of substantial proportion and

1. Ralph J. Mills, Jr., "The Poetic Roles of Edith Sitwell", in Chicago Review, Vol. 14, No. 4, issue of Spring, 1961, p. 39.

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richness", and this requires, more than a suitable diction, "a vocabulary of symbols into which she can compress her thought."¹ The symbols she chooses show the deepening of her religious convictions and prepare us for her complete acceptance of Christianity as a baptized Catholic.

The symbols of Dame Edith's later poems are neither obscure nor private. They are easily recognized as dealing with the great issues of life, with death, with good and evil. In them the influence of Christianity reveals itself in several ways: they show that the poet has a religious sense of values, since for her the spiritual world takes precedence over the material; the Biblical origin of some and their reverent use tell us that here is a poet who not only reads the Bible as a literary work but also finds in it values which give life its meaning; often the symbols are used as figures of Christ whose presence in the world is a saving one. Not all the symbols have a religious significance; they have a very wide range, embracing Christian and classical history and legend, the Old Testament and primitive pre-history. The poet marries these with the most ancient and universal symbols of animal, flower and corn, gold, sea, sun and stars. By this means she is able to convey an extraordinary sense of depth in time and space and

1. Ibid., p. 56.

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of wisdom ripening in eternal contemplation from a mountain-top vantage point.¹ Among her major symbols we find the ape, the lion, the worm, the sun, wheat, the rose, rain, the cold, Dives, Lazarus, and Cain - but the sun dominates them all.

The sun is one of Miss Sitwell's favourite symbols, one that she uses with varying meanings, and one which makes clear the Christian influence in the later poems. This symbol is used even before "Gold Coast Customs" in "Metamorphosis", where it represents not only earthly love - "Our sun, our love, will leave us more alone" - but also, when the poet speaks of her "immortal Sun", Heavenly Love, which will "melt the eternal ice/Of Death." This poem ends with the thought that "the synthesis of human and Christ-like compassion will diffuse itself throughout the universe, radiating its warmth which is Divine love, and which, in the realm of nature, is the Sun."² We find it employed as a symbol of death and decay, the "cannibal sun" in "Gold Coast Customs." The "Judas-coloured sun" of "Lullaby" has much the same connotation. In "Harvest" it is the "Abraham-bearded Sun", the "father of all things", "the laughing Sun" - that is, fecundity, harvest. Here the sun is a symbol of life and permanence. Miss Sitwell carries the

1. John Lehmann, Edith Sitwell, p. 28.

2. Singleton, G., Edith Sitwell, The Hymn to Life, p. 66.

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symbol a long step forward when in "Holiday" the Sun becomes a figure of Christ - "The Sun Whose Body was spilt on our fields to bring us harvest." In stanzas 2 and 7 of "Dirge for the New Sunrise", the Sun portrays the false sunrise of materialism and sin. "The Shadow of Cain" uses the Sun-symbol to represent Christ:

He spoke of our Christ, and of a golden love. ...
But our Sun is gone...

and ambivalently, to represent death

... these vermilion Suns the drops of the blood.

We see then that in the later poems the Sun-symbol is rich and even dominant, and conclude that in making it so the poet is showing us the enrichment of her own life and its dominance by the Christian spirit. Besides its literal meaning it has its metaphorical content in the human heart; it is an object of worship, as the source of the earth's fecundity; it is also a symbol for God and for Christ, his Son. Thus, as Gerard Meath notes, the pagan image is subsumed in the Christian.¹ Around the Sun symbol the poet builds up the idea of a redemptive power at work upon the earth, purifying the dross of humanity, giving a "sign that we have not been forsaken." This symbol is associated with

1. Gerard Meath, O.P., "Flowering of the Rose" in The Tablet, issue of August 13, 1955, p. 153.

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the unbroken rhythm of life, spring following winter, resurrection following death; the sun is a divine power which resolves the discords of life and imparts a harmony to everything. This idea of a world of universal brotherhood reflects the theme of aspiration which is traceable to the influence of Christianity. The metaphor is extended even further to express the perfectibility of the world. Ralph Mills points out that Dame Edith, like Paul Claudel, sees in the physical creation the order implanted there by God; "and in the fullness of time, each particle of this creation, together with man, will receive the proper magnitude."¹

The repetition of the title in "Still Falls the Rain" gives the whole poem a symbolic unity. The rain here is, first of all, the "gentle rain from heaven" which falls on the earth, then the rain of bombs, and finally the Blood from Christ's side, the Blood of our redemption. Because of its depth of meaning, the use of this symbol is a mark of poetic maturity. Only as experience widens does a poet pierce deeply enough into reality that what he says can be seen as truth at various levels of meaning. Blood is used sometimes, as here, to signify redemption. Sometimes, as in "Serenade", it implies blood-shed, death.

1. Ralph J. Mills, Op. Cit., p. 59.

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... a more universal Flood
Than Noah knew, but yours is blood.

The same reference is found in "the seas of blood" in "The Shadow of Cain". Again, as in "Holiday", it is symbolic of life, "the life-blood." Similarly, in "The Shadow of Cain", blood represents life.

But God shall be the Blood
Of the world ...

A frequent symbol from the later poems is the figure of Dives, the materialist, the rich man. In a sense he is a descendant of Lady Bambergher of "Gold Coast Customs", just as the Lazarus symbol is recognized in the girl driven by want to be a calico dummy. In "Still Falls the Rain" Miss Sitwell asks the mercy of Christ on all, "on Dives and on Lazarus", and in the next line, expressing the same idea, on "the sore and the gold". "Holiday" affirms the brotherhood of man, rich and poor alike, when it says,

On this great holiday
Dives and Lazarus are brothers again.

In "The Shadow of Cain" Dives becomes the universal image of evil and spiritual death who tries to suggest that the remedy for the world's ills is wealth. Finally, Dives is denounced as a shadow of Cain and condemned as a destroyer of spiritual life and of brotherhood.

The Lazarus symbol is naturally associated with Dives. Besides symbolizing the poor in a material sense,

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it is used in "The Shadow of Cain" as the symbol of undeserved suffering. When the cataclysm of the Sun destroyed the wholeness of the earth, Lazarus, "upheaved from the world's tomb", lay "in that great Death like the gold in the husk of the world". The Lazarus to whom the Wanderers brought suffering humanity was the Lazarus who had lain, a poor leper, at the gate of Dives and was carried to Abraham's bosom after death. The Wanderers are "the Dives, begging for mercy, for a drop of cold water, or a message for the generations to follow. They are the spiritually crippled, those doomed to death ..."¹

The figure of Cain becomes a very strong symbol in the later poems. There is a single use of it, "Brother Cain" (brother, that is, to rich man Judas) in "Gold Coast Customs". In "Still Falls the Rain" the poet writes of greed, "That worm with the brow of Cain". In "Dirge for the New Sunrise" man with his new means of destruction becomes "red Cain". The most extended use of the symbol is, of course, in "The Shadow of Cain", which refers to the sin of Cain as "some primeval disaster in the heart of Man" which began man's huge migration to the desert of the cold, away from God. Each wound, each stripe received by

1. Sister M. Callistus Sandt, O.S.F., A Critique of Dame Edith Sitwell's Three Poems of the Atomic Age, New York, Pageant Press, 1962, p. 38.

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suffering humanity

Cries out more loudly than the voice of Cain -
Saying "Am I my brother's keeper?"

This symbol of brotherhood broken by confusion and strife, usually for the sake of wealth, is basic to Miss Sitwell's themes, as she laments the sad state of this old world.

Miss Sitwell uses a good number of other symbols, most of which first appear in "Gold Coast Customs": the bone, the worm, the ape (as well as other animals, intended to produce a loathsome effect and to stress man's primal rapacity), the cold (always symbolic of evil), and, very frequently, gold, light, wheat, and the rose. The last four are worth some examination. Of these, gold is used ambivalently. In "Harvest" its use always implies goodness, spiritual life. Golden princes are sacrificed to the Rain-god; the "Golden Ones of heaven" watch over the earth. In "The Shadow of Cain" gold in "the forked lightnings of the gold" is symbolic of death, but it is also symbolic of life in God when applied to Lazarus lying "like the gold in the husk of the world" or to his leprous ulcers - "O you whose sores are of gold". It symbolizes evil in the references to Dives, afflicted with "leprosy of gold", a reference to universal sin, and cowled "with a hood of gold". In "Holiday" she writes of the Intelligible Light that "turns all to gold, the apple, the dust, the unripe wheat-ear".

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Dame Edith is using here St. Thomas Aquinas' statement that God is Intelligible Light.

Light is another frequently-used symbol. The last faint spark in the self-murdered heart is the light of goodness in "Still Falls the Rain". The holy Light spoken of in "Dirge for the New Sunrise" is evidently Christ. The lightning that came in flashes over the floor to the Wanderers, and the whiteness of bread, dead, and claw symbolize spiritual life. The blind eyes - lack of light - symbolize spiritual death. One of the most picturesque uses of this symbol occurs in "Holiday", in lines where the whole natural and human scene is transformed into gold - divinized, that is - by the power of light:

Beneath the flowering boughs of heaven
The country roads are made of thickest gold -
They stretch beyond the world, and light like snow
Falls where we go, the Intelligible Light
Turns all to gold...

and in these:

On this great holiday
Dives and Lazarus are brothers again:
They seem of gold as they come up from the city
Casting aside the grave-clothes of their lives
Where the ragged dust is nobly born as the sun.

Again, the poet uses the phrase, the "Spiritual Light", Christ. The Light to which the Rose cries in "Canticle of the Rose" is Christ. Dame Edith in "Dirge for the New Sunrise" again uses this symbol in referring to the Incarnation.

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There was a moment when the holy Light
 Was young. The beautiful First Creature came
 To our water-springs, and thought us without blame.

One of the most beautiful symbols used in these poems is the wheat symbol. It is always used with the symbolism of food, even as far back as "Gold Coast Customs", where the implication is that one day the wheat of the rich will be food for the poor. Generally, too, it implies richness and maturity. It is used thus in "the first ripe-bearded fire/Of wheat" and in the line referring to the Pentecostal Rushing of Flames, "God in the wind that comes to the wheat". In "Harvest" the meaning goes beyond this, to suggest the beneficence of God to man, culminating in the phrase "the universal language of the Bread". This Bread, which is not broken nor divided, which is eaten but not consumed, this "Bread of Men and Angels", the "esca viatorum et panis angelorum" of St. Thomas, "the Seraphim rank on rank of the ripe Wheat", is indeed the Bread of the Blessed Sacrament, so dear to the hearts of Catholics. This religious and even Catholic symbol used in her later poetry shows, I think, Miss Sitwell drawing near to the Church. The same effect comes from her use of the Rose as a symbol. It has the added significance of having been used with changing meanings through most of the poet's career. In the early poems it has the obvious symbolism of beauty and love, as, for example, in "Metamorphosis" (1929) and

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"Romance": "a rose-shaped heart", "the amber blood, green veins of the rich rose",

For ... I had dwelt in sorrow as the rose
In the deep heaven of her leaves lies close.

In the later poetry, this symbolism is resumed in
"Serenade".

... your lips, the bright
Summer-old folly of the rose.

The poem "Song", with the lines,

Once my heart was a summer rose

and

For withering my heart, that summer rose,
Came another heart like a sun,

bridges the gap between the nature-inspiration of the early poetry already referred to and the symbolism of "The Canticle of the Rose". In the latter poem the Rose upon the wall is represented as the Wounds of Christ, but since it cries to the Light, which is also Christ, I think we may consider it the ancient Catholic title of Our Lady, Rosa Mystica, or the Rose of Sharon. The last line of the poem,

'This smel is Christ, clepid the plantynge of
the Rose in Jerico'

is the climax of all the earlier uses of this symbol.

The tendency that we observe in Miss Sitwell's work of letting the symbol in one poem reinforce and develop itself in another makes the symbolism, says I. H. Hassan,

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easier of elucidation.¹ Of this effect the Sun-symbol is an example. The roots of the poet's conceptions go back in many cases, as we have seen, to "Gold Coast Customs", the "Elegy" and "Metamorphosis". One writer views the latter half of "The Canticle of the Rose" as the culmination of a lifetime of thinking in symbols.² The symbols of the later poetry are so large and deep that they suggest an intensification of her spiritual life. As one's spiritual life develops one ceases to live on the surface of life and begins to penetrate, by faith, to the hidden meanings of things, to the "dearest freshness deep down things" that Gerard Manley Hopkins was aware of. The spiritual view is a long penetrating one; it recognizes the brother-soul in another, despite differences in dress and colour of skin; it sees the hand of God in the events that others regard as merely man-made; and it knows that all the beauty of earth is only a part of "God's Grandeur". Indeed, it views men, events and things "sub specie aeternitatis" - in "the light of eternity". Jacques Vallette comments accurately and with insight, I believe, on Miss Sitwell's symbolism:

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1. I. H. Hassan, "Edith Sitwell and the Symbolist Tradition", in Comparative Literature, Vol. VII p. 246.
 2. I. L. Salomon, "Facets of the Sitwells", in Saturday Review of Literature, issue of Jan. 14, 1950, p. 14.

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Les symboles d'espoir - le Christ et la Rose-
 émergent à leur tour depuis peu, après l'Os,
 le Sang, la Bête. Espoir irraisonné. Le
 poète ne donne pas les raisons de son op-
 timisme final. Elle n'explique pas pourquoi
 de l'assassinat du soleil, de la révolution
 noyée dans un déluge de sang, en un mot de
 l'échec de l'homme, sortirait nécessairement
 la victoire du Christ, de la Rose et de la
 vie. Elle chante un acte de foi et vit
 fidèlement un drame. Voilà pourquoi il
 n'est peut-être pas excessif de conclure
 qu'Edith Sitwell prend de plus en plus
 figure de poète religieux et peut-être
 mystique.¹

An examination of the images used by Dame Edith
 will lead to the same conclusions as those drawn by
 Jacques Vallette from her symbolism. In the development
 of her images, Stephen Spender believes, her growth as a
 poet and a human being living a spiritual life in her
 poetry are most apparent.² He points out that "the light,
 the ripeness, the death and the anguish of these later
 poems are as accurate a picture as we have of an interior
 life of the spirit in our time".³ If we examine her use
 of imagery, we shall see that, as she progressed from her
 early to her mature work, her imagery increasingly showed

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1. Jacques Vallette, "Note sur le style et l'Evolution
 d'Edith Sitwell", in Mercure de France, Tome 308,
 p. 731.
 2. Stephen Spender, "Images in the Poetic World of Edith
 Sitwell" in A Celebration for Edith Sitwell, ed. by
 Jose Garcia Villa, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions,
 1948, p. 12.
 3. Ibid., p. 17.

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the influence of Christianity. This influence can be traced in her selection of images: many are based on Scripture, and show a Christian's reverent acquaintance with the Bible. There are frequent references to Christ as God and to symbols that refer to God; there are images relating to Catholic beliefs, to Christian virtues. The influence of Christianity is traceable also in the poet's interpretation of her materials; only a person with a Christian viewpoint of the world would think of humanity's sins during the 1940 years of the Christian era as "the nineteen hundred and forty nails/Upon the Cross." The images that come to our minds naturally and frequently are a good indication or reflection of our thinking habits. The latter, in turn, reflect our beliefs and colour our words. It is the growing Christian influence on a mind becoming gradually more mature that I propose to illustrate through reference to the imagery.

The imagery of the early poems, which has been compared to "rococo jewel work",¹ is largely that of jewels, perfumes, spices, castles, ghosts, goblins, pearls, music, far-off isles, and birds-of-paradise - surface images which reflect the superficial and artificial quality of life in

1. David Daiches, quoted by Sister Mary Julian, "Edith Sitwell and Dylan Thomas: Neo-Romantics", in Renaissance, issue of Spring, 1957, p. 131.

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the twenties. The glowing, ethereal atmosphere of "The Sleeping Beauty" is achieved by using the imagery of gold, darkness, and silver, which is symbolic in the later poems but largely decorative in the early poems. The change reflects the depth of thinking reached by Edith Sitwell and her poetic grasp of reality, for which we can find a parallel in her increasing Christian grasp of reality. This long and beautiful poem, "The Sleeping Beauty", contains such phrases as "the golden nets of summer light", "figs, each like a purse of gold", "leaves like silver fruit that from dark branches grow". In the long poems of her maturity the poet writes of "the leprosy of gold"; in "Eurydice" gold symbolizes the warmth of God's love for men - "O bright gold of the heat of the Sun/Of Love across dark fields."

Beginning with the early version of "Metamorphosis", we become increasingly aware of the interweaving of animal imagery - strongly suggestive of evil - and imagery based on Christian concepts or derived from Biblical sources. All the evil of "Gold Coast Customs", suggested by images like "ape-skin yellow/Tails of hair", and "Want, a cruel rat", will eventually be consumed by the "fires of God" which "go marching on". In "Dirge for the New Sunrise" the lines "The beautiful First Creature came/To our water-springs" remind us of a similar thought expressed in Psalm 13:

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"From your delightful stream you gave them to drink." A quotation from John Donne's Sermon XI appears in "The Shadow of Cain" - "The Son of God is sowed in every furrow." At the end of the same poem Dame Edith assures us that Christ "walks again on the seas of Blood", and in doing so reminds us of the Evangelists' telling us that He walked once on the Sea of Galilee. She quotes from Marlowe the line " O Ile leape up to my God: who pulles me doune", in which the imagery expresses the Christian aspiration towards God. From Middle English, with its culture subject to the pervasive influence of Christianity, she quotes in "The Canticule of the Rose" lines in which the gentle rose image is used: 'This smel is Crist: clepid the plantynge of the Rose in Jerico', and 'I was reddere on Rode than the Rose in the rayne'.

In "The Canticule of the Rose" we find a recurrence of the early fruit imagery, "the pomegranate splendour of death" and " the ruby, garnet, almandine/ Dews". Here, however, the fruit image has a special Christian significance, since it is regarded as a type of the resurrection of all true believers in Christ. Sister Mary Callistus Sandt points out in her critique that the pomegranate has been used to symbolize royalty, hope, the future life, and fertility; that it was used as a decorative motif on the robes of Aaron; and that St. Gregory the Great spoke of it

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as a symbol of the unity of the Church.¹

Another image found in Edith Sitwell's poetry is the circle. It becomes in "Three Poems of the Atomic Age" a structural image.² We see here the image of a tall column surmounted by a circle, in the form of the atomic cloud, the rose rising on its slender stem, the cross hanging over the earth, and the totem pole of dust arising from the earth. The rose itself provides the circular image, as well as the pomegranates, the dew, the hump on the dwarf, the mountain on the plain, and, returning to man and the seasons, "the cycle of all lives upon the earth - /Plants, beasts and men". These, the poet says, "must follow those of heaven". Other images repeating the circle concept include those which carry the death and life-through-death cycle found in the heat, cold, the fire, and the blood. The perfection of the circle is an image of God's perfection, its shape an image of eternity, without end or beginning. Its use gives a tone of completeness to the poems in which it is found. It might be called a Christian image, too, for several reasons: first, the circle has a wholeness which suggests the totality of Christianity - man's body and soul

1. Sister M. Callistus Sandt, Op. Cit., p. 52 (footnote).

2. Ibid., p. 2.

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are destined for beatitude, not just his spiritual faculties; second, the perfection of this figure, as well as its having neither a beginning nor an end, reminds us of the perfection and timelessness of Christ as God.

Imagery of fire reaches its height in "The Canticale of the Rose", where Christ is "the ultimate Fire/Who will burn away the cold in the heart of Man ...". In the earliest fire imagery the poet emphasizes the furry warmth and purring sound of fires; in "Gold Coast Customs" they have become a means of purification, "the fires of God/Shall wash the mud"; in "Harvest" the poet writes "so flames that are men's spirits break from the thick earth". Again in the later poems the poet says over and over again, "with the voice of Fire I cry". It is evident then that the image does reach its climax when the fire becomes identified with Christ.

From this study of Dame Edith's poetry it seems evident that, as her work became more mature, the Christian influences in it became more readily discernible. These influences have been traced in the themes of her poems - the selection of her materials - the symbols she developed, the images she used - her interpretation of her materials. The ironist of the twenties became society's stern critic of the thirties and the seer of the forties, suffering with humanity, but standing far enough apart from it to maintain the power of prophecy.

CONCLUSION

It has been my purpose to show that Edith Sitwell's poetic growth was paralleled by the spiritual development which eventually led to her conversion to Catholicism. In other words, I have tried to trace the Christian influence in her poetry as it has been revealed by the material which she has made the subject of her poems and by the way in which she has chosen to treat this material over a period of more than forty years.

During these years Dame Edith's poetry has passed through stages which form a spiritual autobiography. Like some of the great figures of classical literature, she has made her descent into hell and has brought back to the world of poetry the illumination she there received. The journey of Aeneas through the underworld gave him an awareness of reality, new and startling: the fate of the unburied, the tortures of the damned, his rejection by Dido. He left it, however, with the inspiring knowledge of the glory of the Rome-to-be and of his own great destiny. Edith Sitwell, too, made her descent into a modern hell and returned to the world with a message of hope, the illumination she had received. For the first fifteen years of her poetic career she remained on the surface of life. Her themes, as has been mentioned, were not profound; she was more concerned with experimentation in techniques - rhythms,

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images, sound. Though she knew that the "paper-thin" facades of the houses and the thin, matchboard flooring concealed a world of materialism, it was not until she wrote "Gold Coast Customs" that she actually probed the depths to which society had degenerated, and figuratively descended into the hell of a modern city slum. Even while she saw a "rotting world" which proclaimed that "God is dead", she prophesied that the fires of God would one day purify "the eyeless mud". For ten years Edith Sitwell must have pondered what her Vergilian descent had revealed to her, until finally the illumination of hope was hers. Then for the first time the poet spoke in her own person - "I who was once a golden woman". Her period of silence had been a time of spiritual insight. During it, she seems to have been granted a new faith. "Christ has forgiven all men, and so she too can forgive".¹ In the poem "Eurydice" the poet makes her affirmation that "All the weight of Death in all the world/Yet does not equal Love - the great compassion/For the fallen dust and all fallen creatures". Her return from probing the depths to which modern man had fallen is marked by Christian compassion and, more strongly still, by the hope of the resurrection, so that she can say, "So did my life rise from my Death". Even in the cataclysm of modern

1. Vincent Cronin, "The Poetry of Edith Sitwell", in Month, issue of December, 1957, p. 339.

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warfare and the shock of the use of an atomic bomb Dame Edith, though horrified by war's cruelties and excesses, yet saw God's permissive hand in the destruction and experienced a deeper and more pervasive compassion for suffering humanity. Though her poetry is so often concerned in this later period with the theme of death, she sees it always as part of a cycle: life, death, resurrection. Her concern is never to any extent with moral defection but rather with the transformation of dross to gold, of evil to good, that will take place in the fierce, energetic light of the sun. Her emphasis on the perfectibility of the world reminds one of Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary thought - that the kingdom of God will come on this earth. The journey to this point of affirmation was a long one for Edith Sitwell, and, though it brought her to the Catholic Church on August 8, 1955, her religious conversion, as Ralph Mills notes, took place in secret, away from her writings; there were no poems to mark it. Only the effects of this spiritual event gradually permeated the odes.¹

Dame Edith's poetry points to her conversion also in the change of tone which occurs from the earlier to the later poetry. At the beginning of her poetic career she

1. Ralph J. Mills, Jr., "The Poetic Roles of Edith Sitwell", in Chicago Review, issue of Spring, 1961, p. 60.

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was the ironic commentator on society; as she approached the time at which she wrote "Gold Coast Customs" her tone became that of strong indignation at the evils of materialism; in her later poetry the tone is one of brotherhood, of love and forgiveness. She is the prophet of the fulfilment of all things in Christ, the poet-philosopher who, through long personal suffering and identification with the sufferings of others, has reached a vision beyond the accidents of history. She is inspired to see that all things created are sacred, that there is eternal renewal, spiritual and physical, and that behind the evil and terror of the world there is divine forgiveness and charity. Dame Edith might simply have remained the religious poet that she became and have been deeply Christian though not Catholic. In searching for the explanation of her reception into the Church, we note, among other things, references in A Poet's Notebook to her reading - St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, the New Testament - but finally we must go to the poet herself. When asked by John Freeman in an interview on the British Broadcasting System programme "Face to Face", May 6, 1959, "What is the living thing which all your life has been trying to break out of you?", Dame Edith answered, "The great fire, I suppose, is a humble but unworthy love of God, and certainly a great love of humanity". Earlier, she had said that she wanted the

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fire, the discipline and the authority of the Church.

Fire is a frequently used symbol in Edith Sitwell's poetry. To her it symbolized purification, inspiration, love, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love. The cleansing of the evil in modern cities becomes metaphorically in "Gold Coast Customs" the fires of God that "shall wash the mud". In more than one poem we find the poet writing that she cries "with the voice of Fire". In "The Shadow of Cain" we read again of the fires of purification

"...those ashes that were men
Will rise again
To be our Fires upon Judgment Day!"

Again, the fire is love consuming evil, as in "The Canticale of the Rose", when the poet speaks of Christ as "the ultimate Fire/Who will burn away the cold that is in the heart of man ...". These frequent references to fire are understandable in Dame Edith's poetry when we find her comparing live words and rhythms to the Tongues of Fire that came to the Apostles. She recounts de Quincey's story of Coleridge's father, who used to delight his flock each Sunday with Hebrew quotations, which he always introduced as the immediate language of the Holy Ghost. Dame Edith concludes that we do not need the Hebrew language; English will serve us well enough. But, she says, "We do need the

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Tongues of Fire".¹ Her search for that Fire led her to the Catholic Church.

Edith Sitwell believed that the poet is the complete lover of mankind.² In her, compassion and love were synonymous. The pathos of suffering mankind touched her heart; "the fate of the poor, the alienated from society, those symbolized by the clown, all who are reduced to rabble by the industrial machine and exploitation by their fellows",³ received the full measure of her compassion. As a poet, she had well defined ideals: to come to a vital language; spiritually, to give holiness to each common day; to 'speak for a moment with all men of their other lives'; to produce a poetry that is the light of the Great Morning.⁴ She calls her poems "hymns of praise to the glory of Life". And indeed they are this - but they are more; fired with true compassion, her poetry itself takes part in the mystery of Redemption, for in it Dame Edith's apprehension of the mystery of the Incarnation makes us and our pain

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1. Edith Sitwell, "The Poet's Vision" in The Saturday Evening Post, issue of November 15, 1958, p. 130.
 2. Ibid., p. 29.
 3. Ralph J. Mills, Op. Cit., p. 62.
 4. Edith Sitwell, Collected Poems, p. xlv.

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part of Calvary.¹ Her pilgrimage, which began with the pity in her heart for humanity represented by poor souls like "Daisy and Lily", has ended in the identification of herself with all humanity -

We,
The outcast Tree of Bone
On which our Christ is crucified.

1. Gerard Meath, O.P., "Pain and Compassion" in The Tablet, issue of January 23, 1954, p. 57.

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This is an evaluation of Edith Sitwell's early poetry by a critic who appreciates the energy and vitality of her work in contrast with the "amiable barrell-organ noises" of Georgian poetry.

Bowra, C.M., Edith Sitwell, Monaco, The Lyrebird Press, 1947, 42p.
This excellent work on Edith Sitwell's poetry traces the poetic growth evident in it. Bowra shows that Miss Sitwell changes in her outlook, which he finds to be by 1947 constructive and religious.

Brooks, B.G., "Song of the Cold-Review", in Nineteenth Century and After, Vol. 139, issue of April, 1946, p.166-172.

This review is relevant to the thesis as it comments on the poems and shows clearly the great change marked by "Gold Coast Customs".

Cronin, Vincent, "The Poetry of Edith Sitwell", in Month, issue of December, 1957, p.337-343.
In this article Vincent Cronin sees seven stages in Edith Sitwell's development, from the viewpoint of theme and style. He makes special note of the religious strain in her later poetry.

Eberhart, R., "Silver and Gold", in Poetry, Vol.87, issue of October, 1955, p.48-50.
This is a review of Edith Sitwell's Collected Poems. The reviewer classifies the poems as abstract (the early ones) and concrete. He points out the religious nature of the large symbols in the later poems.

Fairchild, H.N., Religious Trends in Modern Poetry, Vol.5, New York, Columbia University Press, 1962, xi-663p.
In this volume tracing religious trends in English poetry from 1880 to 1920, Fairchild shows that the desperately morbid gaiety of Facade was Edith Sitwell's response to the post-war nightmare that seemed too unbearable to be taken seriously, but points out also that eventually she found the religion which enabled her to confront the century's later nightmares.

Gosse, Sir Edmund, "Miss Sitwell's Poems", in The Living Age, Vol.334, issue of June 15, 1927, p.1095-8.

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The writer evaluates Edith Sitwell's early poetry but withholds any final judgment until she has had an opportunity to develop her powers. It is valuable because of the insights it provides into the early poems.

Hassan, I.H., "Edith Sitwell and the Symbolist Tradition", in Comparative Literature, Vol.7, issue of Summer, 1955, p.240-251.

I. H. Hassan attempts to show in this article that the phantasmic and synaesthetic images used by Edith Sitwell reach out to both the symbolist and metaphysical traditions. It is of value in that it shows one way in which she tried to revivify poetry.

Jeremy, Sister Mary, O.P., "Edith Sitwell and Dylan Thomas: Neo-Romantics", in Renascence, Vol.IX, No.3, issue of Spring, 1957, p.120-126.

The writer discusses the possibility of a Neo-Romantic movement stemming from the work of Thomas and of Miss Sitwell. She does make clear some of the elements in Edith Sitwell's work that we have said show a Christian influence in it.

Lehmann, John, Edith Sitwell, London, Published for the British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, Green, Supplement to British Book News: No.25, 1952, 40p.

This is an especially valuable study of Edith Sitwell's poetry, showing its development. The author's comments on individual poems are valuable, as well as his perception that all aspects of her art seem to be present at every stage of her development, while one special aspect dominates at each stage.

Lindsay, Jack, "Poetry of Edith Sitwell", in Life and Letters Today, Vol.64, issue of Jan., 1950, p.39-52.

In this article Jack Lindsay traces Edith Sitwell's use of symbolism back to English rather than French sources. He shows also that the roots of many of the symbols in the later poems go back to "Gold Coast Customs" and "Elegy on Dead Fashion".

McGuinty, Dalton J., Christianity and Western Culture: The Christian Tradition in English Literature, Ottawa, 1964, 241p.

This study is precisely what its title states. The present thesis is basically a searching for the growing Christian influence in Edith Sitwell's poetry. Dr. McGuinty's book makes clear what forms Christian

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influence takes in English literature; hence the book is essential to the work at hand.

Meath, Gerard, O.P., "Pain and Compassion", in The Tablet, (London), issue of Jan. 23, 1954, p.86-87.

In this article, which is really a review of Gardeners and Astronomers, Father Meath makes special note of Dame Edith's compassion as it is revealed in the later poems and prepared for in the earlier poems.

-----, "Flowering of the Rose", in The Tablet (London), issue of August 13, 1955, p.153.

Father Meath shows the humility, reverence, and piety expressed throughout Dame Edith's poetry. The occasion of his writing this was her reception into the Catholic Church on August 8, 1955. There is complete agreement here with the thesis.

Megroz, R.L., The Three Sitwells, London, Richards Press, 1927, 333p.

This book gives a good picture of the Sitwell family background. The writer makes an analysis of Edith Sitwell's early poetry, in which he finds two main types, satirical poetry and dream poetry. The relationship between Edith Sitwell's background and her poetry becomes clear here.

Mills, Ralph J., Jr., "The Poetic Roles of Edith Sitwell", in Chicago Review, Vol. XIV, No.4, issue of Spring, 1961, p.33-64.

This long essay, published since the present thesis was begun, is a close parallel to it. Mr. Mills follows Edith Sitwell's poetic development and sees a parallel spiritual development.

Muir, Edwin, "Edith Sitwell: an interpretation", in The Nation, Vol.120, issue of April 15, 1925, p.426-7.

In this early article Edwin Muir points out that the difficulties of Edith Sitwell's early poems are psychological rather than pictorial. He says that her poetry is mystical and naïve.

Powell, D., "Edith Sitwell", in Life and Letters, Vol.VI, No.34, issue of March, 1931, p.178-201.

This critique, written soon after the publication of "Gold Coast Customs" is of some value to the present work since in it the author evaluates Edith Sitwell's early poetry and, even in 1931, sees visible in it the beginning of authority.

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Richart, Bette, "Dame Edith's Art", in The Commonweal, Vol.69, issue of Feb. 27, 1959, p.564-566.

This article was the outcome of the author's reading Dame Edith's defense of herself against David Daiches' review of The Atlantic Book of British and American Poetry. It has many perceptive and casual comments on Dame Edith and her poetry.

Salomon, I.L., "Facets of the Sitwells", in Saturday Review of Literature, Vol.33, issue of Jan.14, 1950, p.13-14.

This critic considers the latter half of the "Canticle of the Rose" the culmination of a lifetime of thinking in symbols. The volume Canticle of the Rose, which Mr. Salomon is reviewing, convinces him that Edith Sitwell ranks with the important poets of our time.

Sandt, Sister Mary Callistus, O.S.F., A Critique of Dame Edith Sitwell's Three Poems of the Atomic Age, New York, Pageant Press, 1962, 73p.

In her critique of the three poems the author points out the Christian influence in them. She discusses in detail the way in which symbolism and imagery build a structural unity in these poems.

Scott, W.T., "A Three-Headed Basilisk", in Saturday Review of Literature, issue of Dec. 19, 1953, p.11-14.

Scott sees the influence of Yeats and Whitman on Edith Sitwell's later poetry.

Singleton, G., Edith Sitwell, The Hymn to Life, London, Fortune Press, 1960, 127p.

This book has two principal values: Singleton's discussion of the way in which the early poetry prepares for the later and his conviction that Dame Edith's later poetry is basically Christian.

Sitwell, Edith, "The Poet's Vision", in The Saturday Evening Post, issue of Nov. 15, 1958, p.28-29.

Edith Sitwell here defends the poet as the complete lover of mankind. It is part of his work to find the rays of the universe that connect vision and reality. The article is valuable for the insights it gives into Edith Sitwell's poetic beliefs. Her own evaluation of some contemporary poets reveals much about herself.

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-----, A Poet's Notebook, London, Macmillan, 1943,
XI - 153p.

The jottings in this book are interesting because they throw light on the poet's reading. They also reveal her insights on life and her sense of values, as well as her understanding of the nature and function of poetry.

-----, Aspects of Modern Poetry, London, Duckworth, 1934, 264p.

This book not only gives Edith Sitwell's estimate of poets like W. H. Davies, but deplores the loss of the visual sense in poetry and the demand made by the critics that every poem must express some purely contemporary feeling or problem. It is of some value to this thesis because from it we learn Edith Sitwell's theory of poetry.

-----, Collected Poems, London, Macmillan, 1957,
XLVI - 445p.

This collection contains a large number of Miss Sitwell's poems from each period as well as her own introductory essay, "Some Notes on My Own Poetry", and is therefore essential to this thesis.

-----, Facade and Other Poems, 1920-1935, London, Duckworth, 1950, 212p.

This book is valuable chiefly because of Jack Lindsay's introductory essay. He comments on Edith Sitwell's development and attempts to justify her position among English poets.

-----, Taken Care Of, London, Hutchinson, 1965,
192p.

Although Dame Edith's autobiography repeats some of the material in "Some Notes on My Own Poetry" and is not particularly valuable in this work, it does reveal some of the attitudes that colour her poetry, such as her scorn of the new-rich.

Spender, Stephen, Poetry Since 1939, London, Published for the British Council by Longmans, Green, 1946, 70p.
Stephen Spender deals only briefly with Edith Sitwell. In doing so, however, he points out her development and ranks her among the best poets of her time.

Vallette, Jacques, "Note sur le Style et l'Evolution d'Edith Sitwell", in Mercure de France, Tome 308, p.725-731.

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This article is important to the thesis. The author writes of the rhythm, imagery, and texture of Edith Sitwell's verse up to and including her mature poetry. He sees her as a religious poet, and almost a mystic.

Van Doren, M., "First Glance", in The Nation, Vol.121, issue of Sept. 30, 1935, p.359.

This article is not particularly relevant to the thesis. The author does, however, think that Edith Sitwell in 1935 shows promise of redeeming "a whole generation of Georgian poets who had threatened to grow shallow."

Villa, Jose Garcia, ed., A Celebration for Edith Sitwell, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions, 1948, 144p.

This collection of essays on Edith Sitwell was published on the occasion of her visit to the United States and includes nine of the poems to which reference is most often made in the essays. The latter discuss such topics as Edith Sitwell's use of images, her war poetry, the development of her later style, and trends in her poetry.

Wykes-Joyce, Max, Triad of Genius, Part I, Edith and Osbert Sitwell, London, Peter Owen, 1953, 248p.

This was one of the most valuable books available on Edith Sitwell. The author interprets in it a good number of her most important poems, noting particularly the recurring themes. In seeing all-conquering love as one of these themes, the writer has given definite support to this thesis.

ABSTRACT

Edith Sitwell's later poetry comes as a surprise to one who has been acquainted only with her early poems. One wonders how the marked change in theme and style can be accounted for. Some study of her poetry and the influences that shaped her life suggests that this change results from the interaction of spiritual growth and poetic development.

The introduction to this study states briefly some relevant facts of the poet's background. It makes clear her aversion to the bourgeois class of society and also her sympathy towards the poor, a quality which is increasingly evident throughout her poetry. Edith Sitwell's acceptance by many critics as a major poet is established. Finally the purpose of the thesis is stated: to study the theme and form of a selection of Edith Sitwell's early poems, to analyze "Gold Coast Customs" as a transition poem, and to scrutinize closely some of her more recent poems, in order to determine whether the development of her poetry has been paralleled by a deepening Christian influence.

In Chapter 1 a selection of Dame Edith's poems written between 1913 and 1928 is examined critically from the viewpoints of theme and style. They are shown to be a reaction to, and often a reflection of, the emptiness and hysteria of the post-war world. The mood of these poems is satirical and ironical; yet they show some traces of Christian influence. In addition, there is abundant

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illustration that the poems written before 1928 foreshadow--in imagery and symbolism--the later work.

Chapter 2 examines "Gold Coast Customs", 1929, as a transition poem. In the pity it arouses for those who suffer, it points to the great war poetry, and in the glimmer of hope revealed, it prepares for the confidence of the later poems. The author becomes in this poem the severe judge of contemporary society.

In Chapter 3 a selection of Edith Sitwell's later poems is studied. The themes are analyzed and the Christian influences implicit in them are noted: Christ-like compassion, forgiveness, love; hope stemming from Christ's resurrection, redemption through suffering, the unity of all men in Christ. Many of the symbols are shown to have a religious significance. The imagery also in many cases has religious roots. The chapter illustrates the fact that these religious and Christian influences have been prepared for in the earlier poetry.

Finally, a conclusion is drawn that seems justifiable in the light of the earlier chapters: that, as Edith Sitwell's poetry has developed and matured, so her spiritual growth has become increasingly apparent in her poems. Her reception into the Catholic Church in 1955, at a mature age, was a climax of that growth.