

THE WAR POETRY OF OSBERT SITWELL

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION: Biographical Sketch; The War Poems; A Statement of Intention .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>World War I Poems .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Russian War Poems .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Post-War Satires .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>World War II Poems .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>POETICAL TECHNIQUES IN THE WAR POEMS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>THEMES IN OSBERT SITWELL'S WAR POEMS .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>World War I Poems .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Russian War Poems .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Post-War Satires .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>World War II Poems .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>FOOTNOTES .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>47</b>

INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH;  
THE WAR POEMS; A STATEMENT OF INTENTION

Osbert Sitwell, poet, essayist, novelist, and writer of short stories and art criticism, was born December 6, 1892, a son of Sir George Baresby Sitwell, 4th Baronet, and a brother of Edith Sitwell and Sacheverell Sitwell.<sup>1</sup> As he himself admits, his education was obtained "during the holidays from Eton."<sup>2</sup> After Eton, in 1911, under his father's direction, he begrudgingly entered the Sherwood Rangers, a regiment of Yeomanry; later, in December 1914, he willingly chose to transfer to the Grenadier Guards, with whom, in France, May 1915, he fought at the battle of Loos. In May 1916, during a leave in England, he developed blood poisoning from a cut he had received on a finger while in the trenches and was very ill for several years from the resultant complications.<sup>3</sup> By late 1918, however, Sitwell was back in the south of France, where the news of his final demobilization reached him and where, consequently, he took leave of his military life with a characteristically eccentric and amusing gesture: "he launched his uniform in a hamper out to sea."<sup>4</sup>

During the war, Sitwell became "very angry with the muddle made by 'profiteers, scamps, fools and the selfishly sentimental'; at heart always an idealist, as early as January 1916 he began to strike mercilessly at the "stupidities and cruelties" he saw around him.<sup>5</sup> This he has continued to do energetically to the present. As he put it, in his entry for Who's Who, originally 1950, an entry he has let stand unchanged down to the present:

For the past thirty years has conducted, in conjunction with his brother and sister, a series of skirmishes and hand-to-hand battles against the Philistine. Though outnumbered, has occasionally succeeded in denting the line, though not without damage to himself. Advocates compulsory Freedom everywhere, the suppression of Public

Opinion in the interest of Free Speech, and the rationing of brains without which innovation there can be no true democracy.<sup>6</sup>

In carrying out his "skirmishes and hand-to-hand battles against the Philistine," Sitwell has written short stories, novels, essays, a four-volume autobiography, angry letters to newspaper editors, and poems. To the same end he has given many lectures and taken part in countless debates. Although the short stories, the novels, the essays, the autobiography and, often, the letters, debates and lectures are interesting and informative, the best place to see Sitwell vigorously in battle remains his poetry, and especially his war poetry: here it is that Sitwell's vision becomes clearest and most meaningful. This paper is an attempt to define the vision of life Osbert Sitwell presents in his war poetry. The treatment herein will be principally a thematic one; necessarily, because Sitwell's war poems date from January 1916 to April 1949, it will involve the study of the development of the poet's mind.

#### A CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

##### World War I Poems

Before we begin our study proper, a chronological outline of Sitwell's war-poetry is in order. Sitwell's first expression as a war poet (and poet) was, naturally enough, in response to World War I. His first war poem, "Therefore Is the Name of It Called Babel," was written in January 1916 and first published as "Babel" in The Times, May 11, 1916.<sup>7</sup> His second war poem, "Twentieth-Century Harlequinade," was written in March 1916, and, along with "The Beginning," "The Lament of the Mole-Catcher," "Black Mass,"

"Night" and "The End," his next poetical efforts (composed sometime between March and early December), it was first published in Wheels, First Cycle, December 1916.<sup>8</sup> Finally, to this group of 1916 war poems must be added "Rag-Time," a poem written in late December 1916, but not published until December 1917 in Wheels, Second Cycle.<sup>9</sup>

Sitwell's poetical response to war continued in 1917. The poet wrote "Armchair" in August; it was first published in Wheels, Second Cycle, December, 1917.<sup>10</sup> Next conceived was "Rhapsode" (in September); it appeared under the pseudonym "Miles," in The Nation, October 27, 1917.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in December came "This Generation," "The Modern Abraham" and "World-Hymn to Moloch" in this order.<sup>12</sup> "This Generation" was first published in Everyman, January 1918; "The Modern Abraham" first appeared in The Nation, by "Miles," on February 2, 1918; and "World-Hymn to Moloch" had to wait until Arnonaut and Juggernaut, October 1919, for publication.<sup>13</sup>

In 1918 Sitwell the "war poet" still engaged in battle against the Philistine. In April he wrote "The Trap"; it first appeared under the pseudonym "Centurion," in The Nation, May 11, 1918.<sup>14</sup> After "The Trap," Sitwell penned (in August) "The Eternal Club," a poem first published in The Nation, August 10, 1918.<sup>15</sup> "The Next War" followed in early September, and was in print by September 21, 1918, in The Nation, by "Miles."<sup>16</sup> Then came "Sheep-Song" in late September; it was first published in The Nation, October 12, 1918, by "Miles."<sup>17</sup> And, finally, "Judas and the Profiteer," written in early December and first published in Cambridge Magazine, December 14, 1918, marked the close to Sitwell's 1918 "war efforts."<sup>18</sup>

As can be seen by its date of composition (early December 1918), "Judas and the Profiteer" was written immediately following the end of World War I.<sup>19</sup>

But it does not mark an end to Sitwell's war poems, nor even to his World War I poems. In 1919, Osbert Sitwell continued his attack against the Philistine of the "First Great War." He wrote "The Blind Pedlar" in January; it was first published in Argonaut and Juggernaut, October 1919.<sup>20</sup> "Heaven" was written next (sometime between January and July); it was also first published in Argonaut and Juggernaut, October 1919.<sup>21</sup> Following "Heaven" was "Corpse-Day," written a few days before July 19, 1919, and first published by "Miles" in The Daily Herald on that day, the official day set aside for the celebration of the peace.<sup>22</sup> And, finally, "Peace Celebration" and "The Poet's Lament," written in late July in this order and both first published in Argonaut and Juggernaut, October 1919, brought an end to Sitwell's 1919 poetical response to World War I.<sup>23</sup>

#### Russian War Poems

So we have Sitwell's twenty-four World War I war poems. The poet, however, by July 1919, the date of his last three World War I poems, "Corpse-Day," "Peace Celebration" and "The Poet's Lament," was by no means finished with war as a poetical subject. In fact, by this date he had already written a poem about a "next war," the Russian Red-White war, in which Britain was taking an active part. This poem was called "The Governess of Europe"; it was published under the pseudonym "Miles," in The Nation, July 5, 1919.<sup>24</sup> And it was not Sitwell's only poem on this war. Two others followed it: "A Certain Statesman," The Daily Herald, July 22, 1919, and "More About Morale," The Daily Herald, July 28, 1919.<sup>25</sup> All three of these were collected and reprinted as The Winstonbury Line in September 1919, by Hendersons, 66 Charing Cross Road, London.<sup>26</sup>

### Post-War Satires

The date of "More About Morale," July 28, 1919, marks an end to Sitwell's so-called war poems until 1939 and the appearance of his World War II poems. Yet there is a group of poems written by Sitwell between July 1918 and June 1923 which are of special interest to us because in each of them Sitwell analyzes the people who caused World War I and who would (and must) cause World War II. These are the poems Sitwell chose to call, in his 1931 Collected Satires and Poems, "Post-War Satires," but are, in actuality, since they depict those responsible for war, war poems.<sup>27</sup> The titles used below for Sitwell's "Post-War Satires" will be those given by the poet in his 1931 Collected Satires and Poems; and three poems ("Old-Fashioned Sportsman," "English Gothic" and "Subtlety of the Serpent") not included in Sitwell's 1931 list of seventeen will be added, since, even though Sitwell did not include them, they properly fit because of their dates of composition and thematic imports. (A further word of explanation is in order about "Old-Fashioned Sportsman": granted Sitwell lists it as a "war-poem" in his 1931 volume;<sup>28</sup> its theme and date of composition, nevertheless, make it more properly a "Post-War Satire.")

The first of the "Post-War Satires" is "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?"; it was written in November 1918, and first published as "Panorama," in The Nation, November 16, 1918.<sup>29</sup> Next, in 1919, came "De Luxe" (July), "War-Horses" (October), "Green-Fly" (October), "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot" (October) and "English Gothic" (November).<sup>30</sup> "De Luxe" was first published partly as "Hymn" and partly as "Nursery Rhyme," in The Monthly Chapbook, July 1919; "War-Horses," "Green-Fly" and "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot" first

appeared in Argonaut and Juggernaut, October 1919; and "English Gothic" first saw print in Wheels, Fourth Cycle, November 1919.<sup>31</sup> In 1920, Sitwell wrote "An Exception" (January), "Malgre Soi" (November), "Mrs. Freudenthal Consults the Witch of Endor" (November) and eight lines which would later (1923) begin the poem "Night Thoughts" (in 1920, these eight lines are the last lines of "Mrs. Freudenthal").<sup>32</sup> "An Exception" was first published as "Song of a General's Wife," in The Apple, January 1920; "Malgre Soi" and "Mrs. Freudenthal Consults the Witch of Endor" (including the eight lines that would later begin "Night Thoughts") first appeared in Wheels, Fifth Cycle, November 1920.<sup>33</sup> ("Night Thoughts" did not become a full-length poem until June 1923; it first saw print in Out of the Flame, June 1923.<sup>34</sup>)

In 1921, Sitwell penned only one "Post-War Satire," "Paradise Regained" (September); it was first printed in At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot, September 1921.<sup>35</sup> Strangely enough, in 1922, Sitwell, as far as is known, did not actually compose any "Post-War Satires," although he must have been thinking in terms of them because in 1923 ten "Post-War Satires" appeared in time to be published in the volume Out of the Flame (June 1923), one of which, "Night Thoughts," has already been commented upon. The other nine include: "Lullaby," "The Manner," "A Touch of Nature," "Youth at the Frow, and Pleasure at the Helm," "Introducing," "Through the Window," "The Open Door," "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen" and "Subtlety of the Serpent."<sup>36</sup> Certain notes are in order about some of these. "Lullaby" was entitled "The War Horse Chants" in Out of the Flame; its title was changed for the 1931 Collected Satires and Poems.<sup>37</sup>

"The Open Door" was a very long poem in Out of the Flame; for the 1931 volume it was divided and its first eight stanzas became "Through the Window."<sup>38</sup> Finally, "Subtlety of the Serpent" was made longer for the 1931 volume; significantly, however, its theme remained unchanged.<sup>39</sup>



## World War II Poems

After his 1923 "Post-War Satires," Osbert Sitwell did not stop writing poetry; but he did stop writing poems directly concerned with war and the responsibility of the Philistine for war (though this is not to say that his own personal battle against the Philistine was over, for the Philistine was vulnerable on accounts other than his responsibility for war and Sitwell was certainly not about to stop letting him know he was). Not until the outbreak of World War II did Sitwell again turn to the composition of war poems to express his vision.

In volume, Sitwell's poetical response to World War II is almost as large as his response to World War I had been. March 1939 marks the date Sitwell wrote his first World War II war poem, "The Vision"; the poem was first published in The Observer, May 14, 1939.<sup>40</sup> "To Charlotte Corday" followed in December 1939; it first appeared in The Observer on January 21, 1940.<sup>41</sup> "Personal Prejudices" came next (in early October); it found publication in Life and Letters To-Day, October 1940, and was followed, in the same month, by "Fool's Song [Y]," published in The Observer on October 27, 1940.<sup>42</sup> After "Fool's Song, [Y]," in May 1941, came "Fool's Song, [Y]," and "The Journalist's Song," both first published in Life and Letters To-Day, May 1941.<sup>43</sup> Apparently no World War II war poems were written in 1942, for none appeared in that year. In 1943, however, two poems appeared, "Lines from 'Demos the Emperor,'" Life and Letters To-Day, October, and "Life-Song," Selected Poems, Old and New, November.<sup>44</sup> As in 1942, in 1944 no war poems were written. But "Aspiring Ape" was penned in early January 1945, and published on the 6th in The Times Literary Supplement.<sup>45</sup> In early 1946, "The Invader" followed it,

to find print in Autumn 1946 in Penguin New Writing.<sup>46</sup> Then, in December 1947, came "A Rose in the Mouth"; it was published for the first time in The Sunday Times, December 8, 1947.<sup>47</sup> And, finally, in April 1949, Demos the Emperor: A Secular Oratorio appeared--to stand as Sitwell's final word on World War II and war.<sup>48</sup>

Some notes are in order about Demos the Emperor. The poem is a long one--nineteen pages--and made up principally of short poems, seven of which (about one third) were published separately before they appeared in Demos (they are outlined above); nonetheless, from the beginning, the poet's intention was to collect these poems and put them into a setting like that of Demos.<sup>49</sup> Note these seven poems, then: "To Charlotte Corday" (without a title in Demos), "Fool's Song, I," "Fool's Song, II," "The Journalist's Song," "Lines from 'Demos the Emperor,'" "A Rose in the Mouth" (as "The Squirrel with the Rose" in Demos), and "The Invader" (as "Spoken Prologue" in Demos).<sup>50</sup>

#### POETICAL TECHNIQUES IN THE WAR POEMS

Metrically, Sitwell's war poems show a great deal of variety. "Twentieth-Century Harlequinade," "The Beginning," "Black Mass," "Night," "The End," and "Armchair" are in blank verse. "Rhapsode," "The Next War," "Sheep-Song," "The Trap," "Corpse-Day," "The Foot's Lament," "The Governess of Europe," "A Certain Statesman," "More About Morale," "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?'" "War Horses," "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot," "An Exception," "Lullaby," "Old-Fashioned Sportsman," "Subtlety of the Serpent," and all the poems that make up Demos the Emperor are in free verse. "This Generation," "The Modern Abraham," "The Eternal Club," "Judas and the Profiteer," "Peace Celebration,"

and "Heaven" are in iambic pentameter lines, with schematized end rime.

"Youth at the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm," "The Manner," "The Open Door," "A Touch of Nature," "Through the Window," "Malgre Soi," and "Night Thoughts," are in predominantly iambic pentameter quatrains, with alternate rime (often slant rime). "Personal Prejudices" is in predominantly iambic pentameter lines; it begins with a quatrain in which end rime is not used, but follows with five six-line stanzas in which end rime is schematized. "Aspiring Ape" is in three five-line and one six-line (its closing one) predominantly iambic pentameter stanzas; it has end rime schematized. "Ragtime" is in predominantly iambic pentameter riming couplets. "The Blind Pedlar," "De Luxe," "Mrs. Freudenthal Consults the Witch of Ender," "Introducing," "English Gothic," "Green Fly," and "The Vision" are in predominantly iambic tetrameter quatrains, with alternate rime. "'Therefore Is the Name of It Called Babel'" is in iambic tetrameter quatrains, except for an initial five-line iambic tetrameter stanza and a final six-line iambic tetrameter one; it has end rime throughout schematized. "Paradise Regained" is in predominantly iambic tetrameter lines; it is made up of ten quatrains, with alternate rime, and nine riming couplets--with a couplet following each quatrain but the last. "Life-Song" is in predominantly iambic trimeter lines; it is made up of eight quatrains and two three-line stanzas, all with end rime schematized. "The Lament of the Mole-Catcher" is alternately in iambic tetrameter-trimeter lines, with alternate rime. And, finally, "World-Hymn to Moloch" is in trochaic tetrameter with anacrusis in nearly every line and with schematized end rime.

If there is an explanation for the great metrical variety in Sitwell's war poems, it is that he believes, with most poets, that a poem's metrical

pattern starts it on its way toward a specific effect. Traditional meters like unrimed iambic pentameter (blank verse), iambic tetrameter, iambic trimeter and trochaic tetrameter are for reasoning, be it logical or illogical, and controlled emotion; free verse is for intense feeling and uncontrolled emotion. Moreover, to Sitwell, rime, when used, is to play as important a role as meter in getting and keeping a poem on the right path. In Sitwell's war poems, rime is an intensifier of meaning; it calls attention to comparisons and contrasts; it stresses certain words; it helps unify ideas and poems. Of course, as might be expected, metrical patterns and rime are by no means the only poetical devices the poet uses in his war poems to achieve his effect. He frequently uses alliteration, consonance, and assonance to this end. And no generalization can be offered about his reason for using these three except to say that he apparently uses them only when he feels his poem needs one or more of them to intensify its meaning, to heighten its effect. Of the poet's use of similes and metaphors much the same can be said: again intensification of effect explains why similes and metaphors appear; again one poem may show the extensive use of them, in fact, work almost solely because of them, while another may show nearly the complete absence of them.

Granted metrical patterns, rime, alliteration, consonance, assonance, similes, and metaphors are of importance to Sitwell in achieving effect, nevertheless, they are of secondary importance, for there are three distinct poetical methods used by him throughout his war poems which must be seen as of primary and crucial importance in determining if and how he achieves his effect. These methods involve Sitwell's way of rendering his material into thought; they involve his point of view in his poems. They are best summarised

as follows: 1) he speaks as poet-seer directly to his readers; 2) he speaks through a persona or personae; and 3) he speaks both as poet-seer and through a persona or personae. But more needs to be briefly said about each of these methods. The poems in which the first method is employed are "Therefore Is the Name of It Called Babel," "Twentieth-Century Harlequinade," "The Beginning," "Black Mass," "Night," "The End," "Ragtime," "This Generation," "Heaven," "The Poet's Lament," "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?'" "The Vision," "Personal Prajudices," "Life-Song," and "Aspiring Ape." In each of these poems the poet-seer's "descriptive voice" is largely responsible for the effect; and objects like flashing rockets and guns, flying bats, crawling snakes, wailing dogs, sobbing men, and the "growing" skulls of betrayed dead men; images of "ember-glowing towns," "rat-infested" houses, "spheres of fire," "gigantic rainbow mists," "glittering light," dank darkness, cold night, and, especially, "scaly snakes"; and, most importantly, an atmosphere of "Primeval terrors" and hidden things, an atmosphere which warns the reader that man has found the "consummation" of his "awful hopes" in the real presence of the devil on this earth, are the most notable creations of this "voice." The poems in which Sitwell's second primary poetical method--the persona or personae--is employed are "Armchair," "World-Hymn to Moloch," "The Blind Pedlar," "A Certain Statesman," "An Exception," and "Lullaby." In each of these poems the poet creates an "ironical tension" to render his effect. That is to say, in each of them, an ironical tension is created when a persona's ideas, illogical and inhumane, on a particular subject are set in implicit contrast to the poet's logical and moral views on the same subject. (There is one exception here. In "The Blind Pedlar," the poet's and the persona's positions are the same and set

in contrast to the illogical and inhumane position other men are judged holding.) The poems in which Sitwell's third primary poetical method--the combinative post-seer-persona one--is employed are "The Lament of the Mole-Catcher," "The Modern Abraham," "Rhapsode," "The Next War," "Sheep-Song," "The Trap," "The Eternal Club," "Judas and the Profiteer," "Peace Celebration," "Corpse-Day," "The Governess of Europe," "More About Morale," "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen," "War Horses," "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot," "Subtlety of the Serpent," "Paradise Regained," "De Luxe," "Mrs. Freudenthal Consults the Witch of Endor," "Introducing," "English Gothic," "Green-Fly," "Youth at the Frow, and Pleasure at the Helm," "The Manner," "The Open Door," "A Touch of Nature," "Malgra Soi," "Night Thoughts," and, if we take it as a whole (and we must), Demos the Emperor. Within this third method the poet moves around considerably: in the two of his Russian satires, "The Governess of Europe" and "More About Morale," and in "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen," the method becomes a persona-poet-seer-persona one; in all but five of the "Post-War Satires" (those five being "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?'" "An Exception," "Lullaby," "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen," and "Subtlety of the Serpent"), the personae introduced rarely speak, but rather act and have their actions laboriously analyzed by the post-seer. Notwithstanding, in the rest of the poems listed under this third method, there is no variation from what we rightly expect. As post-seer, Sitwell sets a scene and introduces a persona or personae; then, he lets his persona or personae present an argument or a position with which he is not in sympathy or with which he is not in agreement. The ironic tension between what the poem's speaker says and what the poet himself means makes each poem move and live. By using his "descriptive voice," that is, by verbally setting his



scenes and introducing his speaker or speakers in vivid images and an atmosphere of horror and mystery, Sitwell is able to heighten each poem's effect. The reader becomes an invisible eavesdropper led on a guided tour through England's war folly by an invisible Sitwell--with Sitwell as post-seer making all the proper comments needed to guide his companion to the desired response.

#### THEMES IN OSBERT SITWELL'S WAR POEMS

##### World War I Poems

Certainly Osbert Sitwell's own very personal experiences during World War I are the raison d'etre for his World War I poems, and especially for "Therefore Is the Name of It Called Babel," his first poem on "The Great War," January 1916. "Therefore Is the Name of It Called Babel" has a very simple theme. It graphically depicts the immediate effects of the war. The world, as a result of "all the havoc, fire and lead, /That fell upon us suddenly," has become a "rat-infested maze" of "torn and broken houses."<sup>51</sup> All that was thought to be good and strong has given way to evil and "monstrous myths of iron and blood" that have obscured "God's clarity"; sin, original and other, has triumphed over the world:

Deep sunk in sin, this tragic star  
Sinks deeper still, and wages war  
Against itself; strewn all the seas  
With victims of a world disease  
--And we are left to drink the lees  
Of Babel's direful prophecy.<sup>52</sup>

Sitwell goes on in "Twentieth-Century Harlequinade," March 1916, to further argue, thematically, that because sin has triumphed over the world,

men's actions on "this tragic star" have become merely "a pantomime of life," a pantomime which is near its end, as Fate, his face painted with blood, deliberately continues to ignite their world--now a "funeral pyre/ Of twisted, tortured, mortifying men," now a stage strewn

---with ends and bits of things,  
With mortals main'd or crucified, and left  
To gape at endless horror through eternity.<sup>53</sup>

Of course there is one being who could especially help men out of their present difficulties--God. But, Sitwell contends, in "The Beginning," December 1916, unfortunately God "slumbers"; He pays no attention to the cries for relief that spring up from the burning, war-torn star called earth.<sup>54</sup> And why does God slumber? He slumbers only because the world's human inhabitants have asked Him to; they have asked Him to "not exist." Such is the poet's cumulative thematic implication in "Ragtime," "Lament of the Mole-Catcher," "Black Mass" and "Night" (all December 1916).<sup>55</sup> But note the particular thematic indictments in each of these poems: men have deliberately cast themselves out from God and their fellow men ("Ragtime"); they have become as small, dumb and blind as moles ("Lament of the Mole-Catcher"); they have become "scaly snakes" whose Prince is the devil ("Black Mass"); yet, since God has given them "signs" to know the "limit" of their "days and powers," they have no excuse for their behavior ("Night").<sup>56</sup>

Given this present world situation, one which promises to be permanent, Sitwell argues, in "The End" (December 1916), there is very little hope that men will ever live in peace: only will long writhing things of slime, snake-men, forever "dance in one long wish to hurt the world./ A world that now is past all agony."<sup>57</sup> So, in his 1916 war poems we have Osbert Sitwell's introductory themes on that generic concept war, that specific occurrence



World War I, and that creature man: war has created a hell on earth; it is fatuous and absurd; nonetheless, it is seemingly inevitable, since men have not yet been able to overcome their inherited sins, since men have not yet been able to stop committing new sins. That Sitwell's "descriptive voice" has played a leading role in helping him make his point in these poems, even "The Lament of the Mole-Catcher," should be obvious. Especially do the poems' atmosphere of "Primeval terrors" and hidden things, their terrifying objects, and their images of chaos and destruction influence the reader's response.

Having given himself in his 1916 war poems to graphically painting the chaotic conditions of his world and to formulating a general statement on World War I, war, and man, it is not surprising that Osbert Sitwell, in his 1917 World War I poems, should become more specific about those evil "slimy creatures" whose "one long wish to hurt the world" had brought about World War I and threatened to prolong it indefinitely. The first of the "slimy creatures" Sitwell identifies particularly is the hypocritical, ruthless Philistine of business who has delusions of political glory; this Philistine is of course Sitwell's persona in "Armchair." And in "Armchair," through this persona, Sitwell presents and identifies other of the sin-plagued "slimy creatures" as well--the incompetent and stubbornly old-fashioned military officers (both in the field and at Whitehall), the incompetent and hypocritical political leaders in all ranks of authority, and the hypocritical and insanely patriotic bishops and priests of the Church of England. All of these Philistines share a common view on war and life: to "bully," "annoy," "patronise" and, especially, exploit the weak is the key to success in life and war. Surely this is no Christian notion. That Sitwell should judge

England's most influential and powerful citizens espousing it is again proof of how completely he thinks sin has invaded English society and its Christian ethic (certainly the implicit theme in the poem). Such a judgment on Sitwell's part makes this poem become by default a plea for peace and spiritual reformation.<sup>58</sup>

"Armchair," of course, is just the beginning of Sitwell's poetical argument for peace and spiritual reformation--and of his identification of the "slimy creatures" who are responsible for starting and for senselessly prolonging World War I. In "Rhapsode" (September 1917), speaking as poet-seer, he continues his condemnation of the war's leaders, then adds the deceiving and immoral members of the press and the sentimental, patriotic, home-front, ordinary British citizens (both "pub leaders" and followers) to the ranks of the "slimy creatures." And, perhaps more importantly, here he presents "the truth" about the war so as to convince all men once and for all, he hopes, that peace is absolutely necessary, and can be achieved through spiritual reformation, through an acceptance and application of Christian principles to everyday life (certainly this is the poet's implication when he shows the war's leaders and unthinking followers as hypocritical and guilty of sin as the Pharisees and Sadducees who murdered Christ were).<sup>59</sup>

If the themes, hypocrisy, hard-heartedness, senseless war, guilt, sin and spiritual reformation, are present in "Armchair" and "Rhapsode," they are mutely so compared with "This Generation" (December), where the members of the "lost generation"--innocent and young--are found to have, by their participation in the war, paid "the debts of many a hundred year/Of foolishness and riches in alloy" without shedding a tear: "Their tears ran dry when they were in the womb,/For, entering life--they found it was their tomb."<sup>60</sup>

"The Modern Abraham" (December) proffers the same themes: hypocrisy, hard-heartedness, senseless war, guilt, sin and spiritual reformation. And significantly it adds another "slimy creature" to the list, the Profiteer, a man so hard-hearted in sin that he complains at a lack of profit at seventy percent in his "new" governmentally demanded arms and munitions business and would "gladly" sacrifice ten sons for his country's sake--provided he be rewarded with the respect of others for his "unselfish" deed.<sup>61</sup>

Searching through England in 1917, then, Sitwell has found many "scaly snakes"--political, military and religious scamps, time-serving journalists, selfishly sentimental patriots, and hypocritical profiteers--responsible for the chaos called war in the England of 1917. Certainly these "snakes" are the individuals who prompt Sitwell to declare, in "World-Hymn to Moloch" (December), as clarification and summarization, that the real reason the British are involved in World War I is that they have become cold-hearted and spiritually dead; they have become obsessed by sin; they have substituted a new and false God, Moloch, for the old and true God. So, here Moloch, the Semites' god whose worship was marked with the sacrifice by parents of their children as burnt offerings; Moloch, Milton's devil of suicidal "open war" and instinctive violence, receives a hymn in petition from his subjects for "Hatred," cold-heartedness, chaos, murder, tears, carnage, and "at least one victory."<sup>62</sup> Clearly, peace in 1917 England is impossible.

But of course man can change; he can, it would seem, overcome sin. At this point in his response to war, Sitwell by no means despairs completely of ever finding his nation at peace and men in victory over sin. Even though Moloch has become God of England, Sitwell, in "The Trap," his first war poem of 1918, continues his argument for peace and spiritual reformation; and he

continues to list and condemn the "scaly snakes." But examine his argument; England is like a rabbit caught within a steel trap, and, like the rabbit, will slowly bleed to death because, fearing another "trap," she refuses to get out of the trap when "a kindly passer-by" "stoops and lifts the catch." When the passer-by, exhausted, lets the trap spring back, dying England, like the dying rabbit, is happy, "saying: 'I knew it was only a trap.'"<sup>63</sup> England's logic is not logic; she is simply afraid to admit that she is "only an unfortunate rabbit," only a nation of sinful men who need spiritual reform, for "this might promote disloyalty among the children."<sup>64</sup> Certainly Sitwell's point here is a valid one. He wrote "The Trap" because "there were many offers of peace and suggestions for it, viz., The Pope, Lord Lansdowne, Prince Sixte of Bourbon-Parma," yet "all were refused and referred to in the Press as 'Traps.'"<sup>65</sup> And if there was some vague reason to suspect Lord Lansdowne's or Prince Sixte's peace proposals, there was no justifiable reason for the English (and German, for that matter) reaction to Pope Benedict XV's August 16, 1917, peace proposal. In proof, inspect the Pope's note: "'Shall, then, the civilized world be naught but a field of death? And shall Europe, so glorious and flourishing, rush, as though driven by universal madness, toward the abyss, and lend her hand to her own suicide?'"<sup>66</sup> Then witness The Times' reaction: the Pope's note is "'pro-German and anti-Ally... permeated with German ideas.'"<sup>67</sup> Hypocrisy is rampant; false pride, hard-heartedness, sin and Moloch have again triumphed.

Perhaps false pride, hard-heartedness, sin and Moloch will forever triumph. Perhaps the English will forever remain an "eternal club" of sinful, insensitive "dotards"; clearly at present they do not understand what war does to the warrior. And "this generation" is becoming "bitter and dissatisfied";

it has lost its faith in the sin-bound leaders of the older generation; it no longer wishes to serve sin and Moloch. Sadly, however, no one will listen to "this generation," no one will accept its advice and leadership, so it must remain "bitter and dissatisfied." Sin must maintain its control over mankind. Such is Sitwell's thesis in "The Eternal Club," August 1918.<sup>68</sup>

Now if the argument in "The Eternal Club" is that so long as the "eternal club" remains in existence there is no hope that mankind will live in peace, the argument in Sitwell's "The Next War," September 21, 1918, goes even further. For, following a trenchant condemnation of "Those alchemists" who during the "last war" "had converted blood into gold"--the profiteers--and those leaders--military, political and religious--who during the "last war" had sent the innocent to their deaths, the poem contends that the "eternal club" will exist forever; men will surely forever be controlled by sin with Moloch as their God; they will--if strong and in power--continue to exploit the weak and innocent; they will remain cold-hearted, falsely proud and hypocritical. All this being the case, a "next war"--even though it will be fatuous and absurd--inevitably will come soon.<sup>69</sup> (This is, of course, assuming that the current war will finally end.)

By September 21, 1918, then, Osbert Sitwell had openly decided that another war would soon follow the termination of the one then raging. But it was still left to get the present one over with. In "Sheep-Song" (September 1918) and "Judas and the Profiteer" (December 1918), Sitwell completed his thematic argument for peace, albeit a hopeless argument. "Sheep-Song" can be summed up briefly, for its point is much the same as that of Sitwell's other "argument and identification" poems--with satiric attention this time particularly turned to the slogans of the war-makers: we should not be

fighting this war; it is not the "last war"; it is "no war to end wars"; nor is it "a war to keep the world safe for our children"; in the end, we are sacrificing thousands of lives for nothing. Still we refuse to listen to the "herdmen," Christ and his true ministers; still we blindly follow the shallow patriotic slogans and songs coined by our political, military and religious leaders, the leader sheep, who conduct us into large-scale slaughter while our hypocritical profiteers and blindly sentimental patriots, the home-guard sheep, rest content, too easily comforted by the same trite banalities and silly clichés of the same slogans and songs. Undeniably, "we are the greatest sheep in the world"; stupidity and sin control us.<sup>70</sup> Like "Sheep-Song," "Judas and the Profiteer" offers no "new" themes on war. It stands simply as further castigation of the "Modern Abraham," the Profiteer. Nevertheless, the poem is especially significant because in it Sitwell finds the Profiteer guilty of a greater sin than Judas'--the profiteer has sold the soul of Christ and the souls of his fellow men to the devil in order to reap financial gain.<sup>71</sup> Hence we discover the sin of sins. Hence, we might be tempted to say, Sitwell brought his poems about World War I to an end.

But of course "Judas and the Profiteer" does not mark an end to Sitwell's World War I poems, for, even though he was able to send his uniform out to sea in a hamper upon hearing of his final demobilization, Sitwell was not able to stop speculating about what the ultimate effects and meaning of the war would be--and to stop expressing his "speculations" in verse. So, in "The Blind Pedlar," January 1919, Osbert Sitwell looked closely at his beloved England after the war to find it full of "young men crippled, old, and sad, / With faces burnt and torn away."<sup>72</sup> This being the picture, he postulated



that only men spiritually blind, falsely proud, and the slaves of sin could have permitted a war which would reap such harvest. And, sadly, looking again at England in "Heaven" (early 1919), Sitwell found that the war had wrought no change for the better in men; still under Moloch, they continue to "watch the same old blatant show" of sinful life and senseless murder.<sup>73</sup> Openly, "this generation" had died in vain; so will the next generation.

Given poems like "The Next War," "The Blind Pedlar," and "Heaven," it is not surprising that Sitwell chose the title "Corpse-Day" for his next World War I poem (July 1919), a poem about the official day for the celebration of the peace, July 19, 1919. From the poem's title it is clear that to Sitwell the day was not one of celebration; it was a day of tears and horror. Amidst the "sounds of great triumph and rejoicing," the poet's persona-observer, Jesus Christ, could still detect "A bitter sobbing/--The continuous weeping of widows and children." Then,

As a rocket burst,  
There fell from it,  
Screaming in horror,  
Hundreds of men  
Twisted into the likeness of animals  
--Writhing men  
Without feet,  
Without legs,  
Without faces....

But "The earth-cities still rejoiced"; "Gold flowed like blood/Through the streets;/Crowds became drunk/On liquor distilled from corpses." "The people did not notice/The change," but suddenly Christ Jesus saw that His image had been so retouched through twenty centuries by the priests, "so as to make war more easy/Or intimidate the people," "the face/Had become the face of Moloch."<sup>74</sup> Need Sitwell's argument be explained? The war was not any

victory; it was a senseless exercise in hypocrisy, false pride and hard-heartedness, fought under the false God Moloch; and, as this false God still rules supreme, as men remain sunk in sin, another war might occur at any time.

Well, this is certainly not a very optimistic viewpoint. And, "Peace Celebration" (July 1919), on the same subject, re-asserts this viewpoint. Again the claim is that the "victory" was not a victory, and all the false platitudes in the world can cheer no dead men back to life. Openly, the war should never have been fought, for it has resulted in the loss of an entire generation--and this is our loss, indeed a grave one.<sup>75</sup>

All this being the case, the poet closes his World War I poetry, quite appropriately, with a warning in "The Poet's Lament" (July 1919); even though the war has brought about the loss of that wonderful "confusion of beauty" within men's minds and has caused the loss of their souls, judgment day will come and men's souls "shall be restored," and those responsible "shall remember,/They shall remember."<sup>76</sup>

#### Russian War Poems

If Osbert Sitwell closes his World War I poetry by deciding in "The Poet's Lament" that judgment day will ultimately come and the guilty get their due, this, of course, is not to say that he will sit contentedly back and wait for judgment day. In July 1919, another war is raging--in Russia--and those responsible deserve condemnation. So, Sitwell condemns them in his three satires on British participation in the Russian Red-White war, "The Governess of Europa," July 5, 1919, "A Certain Statesman," July 22, 1919, and "More About Morale," July 28, 1919.<sup>77</sup>



The first of these three satires, "The Governess of Europe," is perhaps the most subtly effective. Its argument is simple and precise: our government is fighting a war to protect our selfish profiteers; our government and its supporters are being coldly hypocritical about the war in Russia, as hypocritical as the Pharisees who killed Christ for his "subversive ideas" about money changers in the temple, "private property" and "the sacredness of the home."<sup>78</sup> Clearly, this war is not morally justifiable.

Having offered a "general statement" on the Russian "war" in "The Governess of Europe," Sitwell, in "A Certain Statesman," turns his satire sharply on the man he feels has instigated, engineered and, in the end, is responsible for the British government's policy toward Russia, Winston Churchill. By the time he has finished, Churchill has been found a lying, hypocritical Philistine deep sunk in sin, British policy toward Russia has again been proved morally unjustifiable, and Moloch has again reared his ugly head as England's God. So we have the poem's themes. But Sitwell's specific satiric details in the poem might also be listed: Winston Churchill and the government's claim that the war was not really a war but merely an action to "restore order"; the aid to Koltchak, the general of the White Russians upon whom Britain rested so many hopes even though he was as much a murderer and barbarian as his British-condemned opponents; Churchill's so-called "blunders" during World War I, Gallipoli and Antwerp (neither of these today are considered "blunders," of course); and, finally, the government's so-called "volunteer only" policy during the war (in actuality, a "Compulsory-Voluntary-Compulsory-Service," as Sitwell puts it).<sup>79</sup>

Finally, in "More About Morale," ostensibly about that deceptively simple process, "keeping up morale," Sitwell concludes his poetical remarks

on the Russian war. The poem's argument lends itself readily to summary: it is fatuous to claim that we are winning in Russia when we are quite obviously retreating by the day, when our troops are deserting by the hour, when Russian intellectuals like Gorki are joining the Bolsheviks by the minute. This is no way to keep up "morale" in Russia and England. Perhaps we have confused "morals" with "morale"; perhaps we have no morally justifiable reason for being in Russia. Openly, we should leave Russia at once; let the Russians settle their own problems.<sup>80</sup>

Thus we have Sitwell's three satires on the Russian "war." If they offer no "new" attitude toward war or man, they do offer a hardening of the one presented in the World War I poems. Again Britain's leaders are judged responsible for creating that chaos called war, with one particular leader in this case more responsible than the rest, Winston Churchill. Again the innocent and the weak pay the penalty. And again sin and Moloch are found triumphant over the men of England.

#### Post-War Satires

Given the men of England in sin and under Moloch in Sitwell's World War I and Russian War poems, obviously for spiritual reformation ever to be achieved, at some time Moloch and sin must be overthrown. In his "Post-War Satires," Sitwell looks at the post-war British bourgeoisie to see if such an overthrow is possible. From such after-the-war poems as "The Next War," "Corpse-Day" and "Peace Celebration," we might, of course, already venture a guess as to his conclusion. Nonetheless, let us examine the "Post-War Satires."

The introductory poem to the "Post-War Satires," "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?'" (November 1918), provides Sitwell's instructions on how to

conquer sin and Moloch: we must drive "the old God of the Stock Exchange" from his temple; "We must create and fashion a new God--/A God of power, of beauty, and of strength."<sup>81</sup> And the "Post-War Satires" which follow it--up to "Subtlety of the Serpent"--indicate that England's bourgeoisie will have no part of these instructions. The bourgeoisie in "De LUXE," "Mrs. Freudenthal Consults the Witch of Endor," "Night Thoughts," "War-Horses," "Lullaby," "Youth at the Prov, and Pleasure at the Helm" "The Manner," "A Touch of Nature," "Through the Window," "Green-Fly," "The Open Door," "Introducing," "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot," "An Exception," "Malgre Soi," "Paradise Regained," and "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen" would prefer not to think seriously about the future of mankind. They would rather get back to trivialities, hypocrisy, insensitiveness, Mammon, and sin--in a word, they would rather keep Moloch as their God. So they do; and so does Osbert Sitwell rage as a result, most powerfully in "The Manner," when he satirically offers his poetic characters the following advice:

Avoid ideas--they're common  
And might crack through the varnish of your smile,  
Impinge upon your worship of God Mammon  
Filling your soul with pity, and things vile.<sup>82</sup>

Be blind, then, says Sitwell. Be like Mrs. Freudenthal in "Through the Window" and "The Open Door." Concentrate intently on a trivial game while the world groans in agony, while the world once more falls "through the black/Aeons of hunger, ignorance and fear," crying desperately for charity, for soothing music.<sup>83</sup> Or, be like Mrs. Kinfoot, one of the splendid members of the British Bourgeoisie, who, in "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot," decides that since "'The World was made for the British bourgeoisie'" and the war perserved it, "'The War was splendid, wasn't it?'"<sup>84</sup> Better still, be like "the sentimental wonderless" in "Green-Fly," who see evil and cry if a dog is hurt, yet "watch'd

ten million men/Go out to end in agony!"<sup>85</sup> Yet, even better still, be like the general in "An Exception," the general who hates "Conscientious Objectors" and "disapproves of Art," especially music, for it is obvious that since all musicians have been German and the war was German in origin, the war "was made by German Composers/And not/By German Generals--/Many of whom were fine fellows/Who loved a good Job."<sup>86</sup> Or, finally, join the ranks of the "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen," those gentlemen who thank their God that the war is over, as now they can turn their attention once again to money-making, killing and maiming in business--but most certainly never to "Music, Painting or Poetry," for everyone knows art is useless.<sup>87</sup> Yet, wait, warns Sitwell in "Malgre Soi" and "Paradise Regained," if you do insist on continuing to be so totally and absurdly insensitive and sinful, you will become so perverted in mind, heart, and soul that your "Heaved" will be "in Hell."<sup>88</sup>

Sitwell's point in the "Post-War Satires" so far is not at all vague, then. Like the armchair politicians, profiteers, and incompetent political, religious and military leaders in his World War I poems and those same who appear in the Russian War poems, the British bourgeoisie Sitwell depicts in his "Post-War Satires" are truly dead, sentiently, intellectually, spiritually. They have forgotten how to feel; they no longer have hearts. They have forgotten how to think; they no longer have minds. Hypocritical, cold-hearted, insanely proud and unbelievably uncharitable, they have chosen to remain sunk in sin under the false God Moloch. In a word, they have given up their souls. War, inevitable, must soon come again.

In the decision for sin and Moloch of the bourgeoisie of those "Post-War Satires" we have just outlined, there is an underlying implication that must be noted, just as this implication must be acknowledged present in all the

other poems we have so far examined. This is the implication that part of men's difficulty in overthrowing sin and Moloch is that they may be laboring under a strongly-binding inherited curse, an original sin. It becomes open thematic argument in "Subtlety of the Serpent," the last of the "Post-War Satires." As such, it makes "Subtlety of the Serpent" the key poem in the Sitwell war canon and one deserving of extensive treatment. The poem's principal speaker is a serpent in the Garden of Eden, a serpent who contends that since he was able to corrupt Adam and Eve they really were not "good creatures" in the first place and by "pretending" to him to be so had been sinfully hypocritical and deceptive. Consequently, the serpent hates the men and women of the ape-tribe; he prefers the monkey of the ape-tribe, for "the fact that the monkey/Cannot yet disguise the good with bad words,/Or the bad with the good ones."<sup>89</sup> And the serpent curses Mankind:

"--Man shall know good, but shall not act on it.  
 He shall know good, and turn it to evil purpose,  
 His twin curses shall be words and knowledge.  
 I, the snake, know a thing-or-two;  
 I know that man is a self-made monkey,  
 --And he knows it too!  
 Though he will disguise it  
 With a God of his making,  
 A blustering God, a revengeful God,  
 A God who curses the Serpent  
 With sophistry, subtlety, and--words.  
 But I know that Man is still  
 An ape at heart,  
 A talkative, chattering ape.  
 His curiosity shall discover many strange secrets,  
 But he will use them solely  
 For his two recreations,  
 Lying and killing,  
 Or--as he calls them--  
 Conversation and Sport.  
 His words shall girdle a continent  
 Swiftly, as a flash of fire;  
 They shall be written down,  
 Every day,  
 For millions of men to read  
 --But they will still be lies--black lies!

Men shall journey the world over  
 To kill the beasts of the field, the forest and jungle;  
 He shall kill them secretly, without their knowing  
 As with a thunder-bolt;  
 But his own kind  
 Will he kill in millions,  
 Slaughter and butcher  
 With the last refinements of torture.  
 --And words, words,  
 Shall be the cause and end of it."<sup>90</sup>

Before he crawls away, the curse has taken effect; the poem closes with the serpent hearing "two sharp voices,/Outside the garden":

"You did"--"I didn't."  
 "You did"--"I didn't."  
 ---"It was the serpent."

A long silence, and then the second act,  
 When the brutal voice of the first statesman  
 Roared out  
 "Am I my Brother's keeper?"<sup>91</sup>

Openly, Sitwell's principal theme here is that Original Sin is the plague on man's souls. But the poem says more: man originally sinned of his own volition but he refused to admit he had; he continues, in the same way, to sin himself yet to blame others; man is his brother's keeper, but he refuses to recognize that he is; man is especially a hypocrite, a liar, a selfish, deceptive, chattering ape, a killer who kills both men and gods. Surely to expect this creature not to make wars is unrealistic.

#### World War II Poems

With a case made for Original Sin in "Subtlety of the Serpent," June 1923, Sitwell's war poetry comes to an end until 1939 and World War II. In the inter-war years, the poet continued his attack on the English Philistine in poems, novels, a play, essays, and lectures, apparently in the hope that he



might help his fellow men reconstruct the old and true God into a new and meaningful God of power, of beauty and of strength who would take the place of the false Moloch and so prevent another war. Of course, in spite of his efforts, a new war came in 1939. In treating the poems Sitwell wrote about this war, World War II, we shall first discuss in chronological order those poems which were written not to be included in Demos the Emperor ("The Vision," March 1939; "Personal Prejudices," October 1940; "Life-Song," November 1943; and "Aspiring Ape," January 1945), and then discuss Demos the Emperor as it was constructed and published in 1949, not as it shows itself forming in periodicals from January 1940 to 1949. After all, to be his final word on war, Demos must be taken as Sitwell finally presented it.

Sitwell's first World War II poem, "The Vision," is clearly an optimistic one. For the first time in a war poem, Sitwell cogently argues that sin, original and other, can be overcome, chaos can be ordered, and men restored to his rightful position under his true God--all through the agency of God's grace. To illustrate, when the poem begins, a vulture is seen sitting upon a broken architrave. Then, when a cloud opens wide, a "white dove" comes down from heaven and settles on the war-torn earth. Suddenly men laugh and are loud and free; the Phoenix, before immobile and silent, is no longer held within its shroud and cries "Rejoice! Rejoice!" The poet's soul burns inwardly; he knows men can now break their chains and be free. As the poem closes, the Phoenix chases the vulture from the architrave and "blossoms burst forth from the grave."<sup>92</sup>

Certainly "The Vision" is a very auspicious and happy way to begin a group of war poems. But if it tells us that by God's grace all will be well in the end, "Personal Prejudices" turns us back to Sitwell's normal war poem poetical

procedure--the attack on the fatuous and illogical in men. On the one hand, the poem stands as a catalogue of Sitwellian hates: "I hate high deeds/Mid high, aspiring words, the bellow of old, blowsy buffaloes"; "I hate the clamorous voices of the crowd,/Its call for all to sacrifice forever,/Abhor the dronings of its limpet leaders"; "I hate the boasting first, and then the running,/The blatant brag and then regretful whine,/The bloated money bags that burst like bladders"; "I hate the war's busy beetles all arrayed/In dung-bright armour of old truth outworn"; "I hate the clicking tongues within accustomed grooves."<sup>93</sup> And, as such a catalogue, the poem's theme is clear: political, military and religious leaders, profiteers, hypocritical bourgeois, and unthinking, sentimental patriots have created another war. Yet, significantly, on the other hand, the poem offers positive advice on how men should act: to admire the beauty of nature, to listen to "the quiet talk of those endowed/With reason," to reason logically, and especially "To live and love" are the ways to joy and salvation.<sup>94</sup>

Of course, however, "to live and love" are not easy. "Out of the dark we came/And into the darkness go"; never do we know "into what hooded dark" the wind is currently blowing us; never are we not alone; never does time wait for us. Only can we ask God (Love) to light our way. So cautions "Life-Song."<sup>95</sup> And, with the war, suggests Sitwell in "Aspiring Ape," all this has lost fashion. No longer will men trust God; no longer will men "live and love." This being the case, the poet advises, ironically, that, for the present, men should love the ape in man more than the angel in him. After all, on the one hand,

To man, the ape has given love and courage,  
Dexterity and patience, wit and fire,  
A nameless aching of the heart with wonder,  
That humble, idiot longing to aspire,



while, on the other hand, the angel has brought nothing "Except a sense of righteousness in killing;/And brag of abnegation and of duty," the talk of "crusades" while he kills.<sup>96</sup> The poet's theme could not be clearer: man's mind and tongue drive him to war; the unthinking and feeling ape part of him is better than the thinking and speaking angel part of him so long as he insists on misusing his angelic faculties. (Recall "Subtlety of the Serpent" in this regard; certainly Original Sin, at least in part, lies behind man's "insanity" here.)

So we have Sitwell's four war poems written before and not included in Demos the Emperor, his carefully reasoned-out final statement on World War II and war; they should be seen as a prefatory statement to it. But let us look at Demos the Emperor: A Secular Oratorio itself. The oratorio begins with a two-part "Argument." The first part, "The Squirrel with a Rose," is in the form of a debate between a squirrel and an ass, with the former arguing that the world is a rose of dreams, aspirations, and hopes, and the latter that it "'is a map made solely for ant and for ass'" which offers no "flowers, only gress,/With blood, sweat and tears; then a shroud,/And the cheers of the crowd."<sup>97</sup> Significantly, the dispute ends with the ass proved correct: the rose in the squirrel's mouth "was the blood/As he fell," shot from his tree.<sup>98</sup> The poet's theme is ironic: only Churchill's "blood, sweat and tears" carry man through the wars in life, for man's hopes, his schemes of perfection, are but blood in the end, are but doomed to failure; still the ape in man must be preferred over the angel in him; still sin, original and other, rules man. Yet, as the poet points out in the second part of the oratorio's "Argument," "Spoken Prologue," there is hope for the rebirth of the idealistic man (the squirrel) and for the conquest of sin if we but

recognize that we have been betrayed by the "life-giving myth" the priests and warriors created for us: theirs is a myth of murder and despair; we must create a myth of birth and hope for ourselves.<sup>99</sup> (That is, in terms of "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?'" "We must create and fashion a new God--/A God of power, of beauty, and of strength."<sup>100</sup>)

But how actually was the myth of our priests and warriors proved false? As Sitwell tells it in his oratorio, it is all really quite simple: a single voice complains, "'O Huntsman, when will the spring begin?'" (that is, when will men begin actually living in peace again?). A chorus challenges the single voice, "Who is he, who dares now/To sing, in this, the ant's hour of glory?" But, the single voice, instead of becoming silent, begins lamenting that man's sorrow is no longer "'of divina ordination'" but "'of Man's negation'":

"In all lands under wide skies found,  
Men turn down the light and burrow  
Like moles in the ground;  
Only bully, bore and busybody  
In beetle-armour clad  
Scuttle round and hurry round  
With hearts that are glad.  
Has no man the courage to forbid it,  
Now that the hounds are so near;  
Has all the world no man to rid it  
Of the hearts that have caused this fear,  
Of the icy hearts and the bragging voices,  
So that all the world rejoices,  
In a day when death was dear?"

Naturally enough, this last is too much for the chorus:

Who dares to sing alone,  
Insults our Demos!  
Who is he? Kill him. A drone!<sup>101</sup>

So the war begins. One society, one system of beliefs, has challenged another; one must be proved superior. Demos, Democracy, and Autork, autoocracy (actually Hitler's dictatorship), "two huge antagonists," clench "in titantic

struggle,/Taking the whole world,/Muscle against muscle, heaving,/In their vast agony exulting."<sup>102</sup> Again, as during the First World War, "The shoals of politicians,/And their packs and hacks," encourage their masters in the new slaughter; and, sadly, again those who suffer, those who are "Trampled to death beneath the feet on the two monsters, their masters,/Demos and Autork," are the "innocent" common people.<sup>103</sup>

If to Sitwell the coming of Demos' "hour of anvil and of hammer" with Autork upsets the lives of men, it also disrupts the normal pattern of nature. As Demos continues, we discover that the moon and the sun have lost their peacetime functions, respectively, as cover for young lovers and light for blooming flower gardens; both are now but beacons which light the way for enemy bombers to bring their deadly freight.<sup>104</sup> The world has become one vast ruin; and only a small voice, that of a despairing member of the chorus, calls from the ruin: "'We trusted you, Demos, what have you done to us?/You have taken the sun and the moon, and the heart and the blood.'"<sup>105</sup> Clearly, to Sitwell, the subjects of Demos have been betrayed, just as they were during World War I and the Russian War. Demos has granted them but an equal share of guns, bombs, shells and coffins, truly the rose is their own blood.

Suddenly, more voices shout out from the world's ruins, voices of the Emperor's Court who "'feed and amuse him,'" "'Tom Kicklecross, first with the news in Spain and Abyssinia,'" and Len Stuttenheimer of the Transatlantic Star.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps Kicklecross is really Evelyn Waugh, "who had reported the war in Abyssinia and returned enthusiastic about the Italian conquest," and Stuttenheimer one of The Times' foreign correspondents;<sup>107</sup> yet, in the end, to appreciate Sitwell's point the exact identity of the correspondents being satirized is not needed, for the point is the same one made but a few moments

ago in Demos and the same one made by Sitwell in "Rhapsode" during World War I: the press is the sinful parrot of the sinful government; do not expect it to be truthful or objective.

Now it is time in Demos for the Emperor Demos himself, Winston Churchill, fresh from his "Russian war," toasted by his bishops, camp followers and press, to stumble to his feet out of the ruins of England and address his subjects:

"This is Demos speaking:  
 Let me speak.... You know me;  
 You knew me when I was plain Woolworth Demos:  
 I am the bloated, flat group-ghost  
 Of all the Little Men in all the world,  
 I am your Lord, your Hope.  
 Look at my hands--they are your hands.  
 My feet are your feet. Won't you trust me?  
 Like the foul tyrant who opposes us,  
 I too am image to a sacred herd,  
 I too can give you a signature tune.  
 I reflect you  
 In the same way  
 That the Common Denominator  
 Reflects its derivatives.  
 I am the Mass Mind of Red Bungalows,  
 The tyrant born from timeness,  
 The fire born from the fireless,  
 The hope of those who are content  
 With the top of their minds.  
 Comrades, I've no need  
 To plead my cause. I tell you, I am Demos!"<sup>108</sup>

Need the poet's point be explained? Osbert Sitwell, embittered about war, an advocata of "compulsory Freedom everywhere, the suppression of Public Opinion in the interest of Free Speech, and the rationing of Brains without which innovation there can be no true democracy,"<sup>109</sup> has found Winston Churchill, Demos, a brainless and sinful Philistine, a hypocrite, and a ruthless exploiter of the "Mass Mind." Especially are Churchill's famous speeches during the Second World War condemned for their equivocations and appeal to the emotions; especially is Sitwell's judgment of Churchill a vicious one because the poet finds the "Mass Mind," the very thing Churchill is supposedly exploiting, incapable, destructive, and despicable.

But if Osbert Sitwell has not been "taken in" by Demos' non-informative and contradictory oratory, Demos' audience in the poem has been, for the moment, mesmerized. So, on his good bishops' advice, Demos raises his drinking cup to pledge "a bumper of blood" to his subjects; and a new war-cry is born from his "inspired lips": "'Down with the lilies! Up with the worm!'" (Down with imagination and reason! Up with death!) Send for my officials, my fools and my daughters, Bura, Vida, Bola, and Dira, and let us parade, concludes Demos.<sup>110</sup> Hence a procession--to death--begins. Priests chant hypocritical slogans: officials and journalists answer the priests as hypocritically. A curse is placed on Autork. The voice of one of the journalists rises to bark a platterful of cliches, "'Seductive words for which men die/Every day more willingly,/'Liberty,' "Democracy,/'And--foul fiend!--'Autocracy.'"111 Plainly, Englishmen are marshalling for more senseless slaughter. So that none will become uneasy, after the journalist finishes his song, Demos' daughters, symbols of unthinking and unfeeling modern mechanization and industrialization, join the procession and sing their song, a promise to shelter men from art--and from anything which demands the least bit of sensitivity to understand.<sup>112</sup> Close on the heels of the "daughters" come their worshippers, "the modern masters of the world," those insensitive men who "have no time for art," but know they are "'the fulfillment of man's promise,'" "'the cup-tie Final and the paper cap,'" "'the Soul of the Cash Register,/'The Secret of the Hire-Purchase System,/'The Vacuum, and the Vacuum-Cleaner.'"113 It is time for one of them to sing a song, appropriately, a "Fool's Song." The Song is brief yet exceptionally meaningful; from it we discover--as if we did not suspect so already--that, like the leaders of World War I and the Russian War--the Modern Abrahams,

the profiteers, the members of the eternal club--and the post-war bourgeoisie, the "modern masters" can neither think nor feel: they do not have minds; they do not have hearts; they are soulless. Significantly, however, unlike the World War I, Russian War, and post-war "business bourgeoisie's" "condition," "the modern masters'" condition has been brought about, not by their substitution of a false God for the true one, but by their conscious and deliberate destruction of the true one. They have not asked God to "not exist," then; they have decided He does not. "'The grin of the skull/Is now void and null,/Leaving no laughter/To float after,'" since victory over death is no longer possible; the modern fool can only thank his "love" for her smile "'that will last so long a while'" and shout "'Yesterday is my Tomorrow!'"<sup>114</sup>

But of course, as we have already seen, the world is not made up only of brainless Churchills, hypocritical priests, selfish profiteers, time-serving journalists, and modern masters; some of her inhabitants are innocent. Appropriately, Sitwell ends Demos the Emperor with a chorus in which these innocent join with that "small lone voice" in the poem's beginning to demand: "Demos and Autork,/What have you done to us?" But no reply comes, "only a weeping in the dry dust," "only a sigh in the great hive of stars/--And the sound of one star that is falling."<sup>115</sup>

So Sitwell judges the Second World War in Demos the Emperor. Ostensibly, the poem reveals that since democracy, Demos, not any less than autocracy, Autork, has robbed man of his heart, his mind, and his soul by leading him into war, it has "betrayed" him; it has proved itself invalid; it must be replaced by a valid social system, "true democracy," that social system which permits "compulsory Freedom everywhere, the suppression of Public Opinion in the interest of Free Speech, and the rationing of Brains."<sup>116</sup> Yet, in the end,



the poem's real subject is not democracy but man. Its argument remains: our star is sunk in sin, original and other; we must create a "myth" of hope and rebirth; we must create and fashion a new God of power, of beauty, of strength, and of Love. The implication that if we are true in our efforts God's grace will appear to help us suggests itself; and the poet's warning at the end of World War I in "The Poet's Lament" sounds again: the betrayers of man shall pay; "they shall remember."

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From Osbert Sitwell's first war poem to his last, a sense of sin pervades his work. In his 1916 war poems, he argues that men have ignored their God; they have not been able to break Original Sin's hold on them; they have not been able to stop committing new sins. The poet goes so far as to call men "scaly snakes," long, slimy creatures "whose one long wish" is "to hurt the world"; and he implies that spiritual reformation is needed. In his 1917 and 1918 war poems, Sitwell puts his pleas for spiritual reformation in more literal terms. First, he identifies those particular individuals in his world who are guilty of sinful and ruthless exploitation of the innocent and the weak: hypocritical and cruel wishful thinkers, incompetent and stubbornly old-fashioned military officers, incompetent and hypocritical political leaders, hypocritical and insanely patriotic bishops and priests of the Church of England, profiteers, untruthful journalists, and sentimental, unthinking, home-front patriots. Then, he submits that these men have not only ignored the true God, but have also set up a false God, Moloch. Reasoning from Moloch over men and attendant themes, hypocrisy, hard-heartedness, guilt, and sin,

the poet as early as "The Next War," September 21, 1918, openly asserts that war is the permanent condition of man (a theme implicit throughout the poems before "The Next War," of course). Sadly, in "Corpse-Day" and "Peace Celebration," he laughs at man's futile reconstruction efforts. Hopefully, in "The Poet's Lament," he cries that the exploiters of the innocent and the weak will ultimately suffer God's punishment and men's souls shall again be restored to them.

When we turn to Sitwell's Russian War satires, we find no new attitude toward man or war, but we do find a hardening of the one presented in the World War I poems. Again Britain's leaders, political, military, and religious, her profiteers, and her sentimentally patriotic are judged responsible for creating that chaos called war. Again the innocent and the weak pay the penalty. And again sin and Moloch are found triumphant over the men of England.

With the "Post-War Satires," the poet offers clear and precise instructions on how to conquer sin and Moloch: we must drive "the old God of the Stock Exchange" from his temple; "We must create and fashion a new God--/A God of power, of beauty, and of strength."<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately, the poet's instructions are not acceptable to his fellow men; they prefer trivialities, hypocrisy, insensitiveness (especially to art), Mammon, sin, Moloch. Suffice it to say that men have been able to overthrow neither that powerfully-binding inherited curse, Original Sin, nor that "joy in sinning" anew. So, they must be judged to have destroyed their minds, their hearts, and their souls.

Nevertheless, the way to spiritual restoration always remains open: the creation and fashioning of that "new God" "of power, of beauty, and of strength." In the World War II poems, this "new God" is clarified and redefined. In



"The Vision," He becomes a God of Love, a God who provides "grace" so as to enable men to achieve their victory over sin, original and other. In "Life-Song," this God stands as a light, a guide, to man. And, finally, in Demos the Emperor, He represents the "myth" of hope and rebirth the poet suggests men must create and fashion if they are to finally make the proper use of their angelic reasoning and speaking powers, if they are to finally establish "true democracy."

Yet, if the "new God" in whom man's hope lies is clearly defined in the World War II poems, in Demos the Emperor, Sitwell's final word, He is still not accepted by the majority of men. Sunk in sin, the ruthless exploiters of the innocent and the weak go their merry way, heartless, mindless, soulless. Not have they set up a false God; they have consciously and deliberately destroyed the true one--the very God of beauty, of power, of strength, of love--and left nothing in His place. All is void and null; truly, Yesterday is their Tomorrow.

Notwithstanding, in the end, it is difficult to believe that Sitwell's vision is to be read as closing on so completely pessimistic a note. After all, the implication for a myth of hope and rebirth is strongly present in Demos, and the God of "The Vision" and "Life-Song" cannot but come to mind as a very formidable foe to man's blind acceptance of the void and null. As Sitwell himself put it, in commenting on "The Vision": "No night is eternal, though every night seems long... Men die, even the most evil, and stupidity perishes as much as grace. By its nature, the triumph can be but temporary of ape over man... I, too, am 'on the side of the angels.'"<sup>118</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Hayercraft, Twentieth Century Authors (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 1297.

<sup>2</sup> Osbert Sitwell, Who's Who, 1964 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), p. 2803.

<sup>3</sup> Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1297.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Fulford, Osbert Sitwell (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1951), pp. 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1297.

<sup>6</sup> Who's Who, 1964, p. 2803.

<sup>7</sup> As dated by Sitwell in Osbert Sitwell, Argonaut and Juggernaut (London: Chatto and Windus, 1919), p. 92; see Richard Fifoot, A Bibliography of Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), p. 219, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 91-92, for the poem.

<sup>8</sup> See Fifoot, p. 219, for the poems' composition dates and publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut for the poems: "Twentieth-Century Harlequinade," pp. 93-94; "The Beginning," pp. 49-50; "The Lament of the Mole-Catcher," p. 48; "Black Mass," pp. 82-85; "Night," p. 61; and "The End," pp. 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> As dated by Sitwell in Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 120; see Fifoot, p. 219, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 119-120, for the poem.

<sup>10</sup> As dated by Sitwell in Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 118; see Fifoot, p. 219, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 116-118, for the poem.

<sup>11</sup> As dated by Sitwell in Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 105; see Fifoot, p. 219, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 102-105, for the poem.

<sup>12</sup> All as dated by Sitwell in Argonaut and Juggernaut: "This Generation," p. 95; "The Modern Abraham," p. 106; and "World-Hymn to Moloch," p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> See Fifoot, pp. 219, 133, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut for the poems: "This Generation," p. 95; "The Modern Abraham," p. 106; and "World-Hymn to Moloch," pp. 113-115.

<sup>14</sup> As dated by Sitwell in Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 109; see Fifoot, p. 219, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 107-109, for the poem.

<sup>15</sup> See Fifoot, p. 219, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 110, for the poem.

<sup>16</sup> See Fifoot, p. 219, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see Osbert Sitwell, The Collected Satires and Poems (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1931), pp. 34-35, for the poem.

<sup>17</sup> As dated by Sitwell in Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 98; see Fifoot, p. 220, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 96-98, for the poem.

<sup>18</sup> See Fifoot, p. 220, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 101, for the poem.

<sup>19</sup> Again see Fifoot, p. 220.

<sup>20</sup> As dated by Sitwell in Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 112; see Fifoot, p. 133, for publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 112, for the poem.

<sup>21</sup> See Fifoot, p. 133, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 111, for the poem.

<sup>22</sup> As dated by Sitwell in The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 31; see Fifoot, p. 220, for publication information; see The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 31-33, for the poem.

<sup>23</sup> See Fifoot, p. 133, for the poems' composition dates and publication information; see Argonaut and Juggernaut for the poems: "Peace Celebration," p. 121; and "The Poet's Lament," pp. 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> See Fifoot, p. 220, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see Osbert Sitwell, The Winstonburg Line (London: Hendersons, 1919), pp. 16-19, for the poem.

<sup>25</sup> See Fifoot, p. 220, for the poems' composition dates and publication information; see The Winstonburg Line for the poems: "A Certain Statesman," pp. 5-10; and "More About Morale," pp. 11-15.

<sup>26</sup> See Fifoot, p. 131.

<sup>27</sup> See Osbert Sitwell, The Collected Satires and Poems (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> See The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> As dated by Sitwell in The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 38; see Fifoot, p. 132, for publication information; see The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 36-38, for the poem.

<sup>30</sup> See Fifoot, p. 132.

<sup>31</sup>See Fifoot, p. 132, for publication information; see The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), for the poems: "De Luxe," pp. 39-40; "War-Horses," pp. 44-46; "Green-Fly," pp. 57-59; "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot," pp. 63-64; and "English Gothic," pp. 75-78.

<sup>32</sup>See Fifoot, pp. 132, 135-136.

<sup>33</sup>See Fifoot, pp. 132, 135-136, for publication information; see The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), for the poems: "An Exception," pp. 65-68; "Malgrs Soi," pp. 69-71; "Mrs. Freudenthal Consults the Witch of Endor," pp. 41-42; and "Night Thoughts," pp. 43-44.

<sup>34</sup>See Fifoot, p. 135.

<sup>35</sup>See Fifoot, pp. 133-134, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 72-74, for the poem.

<sup>36</sup>See Fifoot, p. 135, for the poems' composition dates and publication information; see The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), for the poems: "Lullaby," p. 47; "The Manner," pp. 51-52; "A Touch of Nature," pp. 53-54; "Youth at the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm," pp. 48-50; "Introducing," pp. 61-62; "Through the Window," pp. 55-56; "The Open Door," p. 60; "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen," pp. 29-30; and "Subtlety of the Serpent," pp. 3-6.

<sup>37</sup>See Fifoot, p. 147.

<sup>38</sup>See Fifoot, p. 147.

<sup>39</sup>See Osbert Sitwell, "Subtlety of the Serpent," Out of the Flame (London: Grant Richards, Ltd., 1923), pp. 49-52; then see Osbert Sitwell, "Subtlety of the Serpent," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 3-6.

<sup>40</sup>As dated by Sitwell in Selected Poems, Old and New (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1943), p. 18; see Fifoot, p. 161, for publication information; see Selected Poems, Old and New, pp. 17-18, for the poem.

<sup>41</sup>As dated by Sitwell in Selected Poems, Old and New, p. 19; see Fifoot, p. 161, for publication information; see Selected Poems, Old and New, pp. 18-19, for the poem.

<sup>42</sup>See Fifoot, p. 236, for the poems' composition dates and publication information; see Selected Poems, Old and New for the poems: "Personal Prejudices," pp. 22-23; and "Fool's Song--I," pp. 19-20.

<sup>43</sup>See Fifoot, p. 236, for the poems' composition dates and publication information; see Selected Poems, Old and New for the poems: "Fool's Song--II," p. 20; and "Journalist's Song," p. 21.

<sup>44</sup>See Fifoot, pp. 162, 236, for the poems' composition dates and publication information; see Selected Poems, Old and New, pp. 23-24, for "Life-Song"; see Demos the Emperor: A Secular Oratorio (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1949), pp. 5-14, for "Lines from 'Demos the Emperor.'"

<sup>45</sup>See Fifoot, p. 239, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see England Reclaimed and Other Poems (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1949), p. 120, for the poem.

<sup>46</sup>See Fifoot, p. 173, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see Demos the Emperor, p. 2, for the poem.

<sup>47</sup>See Fifoot, p. 173, for the poem's composition date and publication information; see Demos the Emperor, pp. 1-2, for the poem.

<sup>48</sup>See Fifoot, pp. 172-173.

<sup>49</sup>See Osbert Sitwell, "Introduction," Demos the Emperor, p. iv.

<sup>50</sup>See Fifoot, p. 173.

<sup>51</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "'Therefore Is the Name of It Called Babel,'" Argonaut and Juggernaut (London: Chatto and Windus, 1919), p. 91.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>53</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Twentieth-Century Harlequinade," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 93-94.

<sup>54</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Beginning," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 49-50.

<sup>55</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Ragtime," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 119-120; Osbert Sitwell, "Lament of the Mole-Catcher," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 48; Osbert Sitwell, "Black Mass," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 82-85; Osbert Sitwell, "Night," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 61.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The End," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 51-52.

<sup>58</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Armchair," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 116-117.

<sup>59</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Rhapsode," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 102-105.

<sup>60</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "This Generation," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 95.

<sup>61</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Modern Abraham," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 106.

<sup>62</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "World-Hymn to Moloch," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 113-115.

<sup>63</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Trap," The Collected Satires and Poems (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1931), pp. 24-25.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

- <sup>65</sup>Osbert Sitwell, in a note to "The Trap," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 24.
- <sup>66</sup>As quoted by Leon Wolff, In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1958), p. 150.
- <sup>67</sup>As quoted by Leon Wolff, p. 150.
- <sup>68</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Eternal Club," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 110.
- <sup>69</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Next War," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 34-35.
- <sup>70</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Sheep-Song," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 11-12.
- <sup>71</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Judas and the Profiteer," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 101.
- <sup>72</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Blind Pedlar," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 112.
- <sup>73</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Heaven," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 111.
- <sup>74</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Corpse-Day," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 31-33.
- <sup>75</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Peace Celebration," Argonaut and Juggernaut, p. 121.
- <sup>76</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Post's Lament," Argonaut and Juggernaut, pp. 99-100.
- <sup>77</sup>See above, p. 4, for publication information.
- <sup>78</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Governess of Europe," The Winstonburg Line (London: Handersons, 1919), pp. 16-19.
- <sup>79</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "A Certain Statesman," The Winstonburg Line, pp. 5-10; see George Stewart, The White Armies of Russia: A Chronicle of Counter-Revolution and Allied Intervention (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933), pp. 73, 155-159, 162-163, for the facts about British participation in the Russian War; see Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1958), p. 310, for the modern historian's position on the Gallipoli Campaign.
- <sup>80</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "More About Morale," The Winstonburg Line, pp. 11-15.
- <sup>81</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?'" The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 38.
- <sup>82</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Manner," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 51-52.



<sup>83</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Through the Window," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 55-56; Osbert Sitwell, "The Open Door," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 60.

<sup>84</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "At the House of Mrs. Kinfoot," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 63-64.

<sup>85</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Green-Fly," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 57-59.

<sup>86</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "An Exception," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 66-68.

<sup>87</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Old-Fashioned Sportsmen," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 29-30.

<sup>88</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Malgre Soi," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 64-71; Osbert Sitwell, "Paradise Regained," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 72-74.

<sup>89</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Subtlety of the Serpent," The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), pp. 4-5.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>92</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Vision," Selected Poems, Old and New (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1943), pp. 17-18.

<sup>93</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Personal Prejudices," Selected Poems, Old and New, pp. 22-23.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Life-Song," Selected Poems, Old and New, pp. 23-24.

<sup>96</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Aspiring Ape," England Reclaimed and Other Poems (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1949), p. 120.

<sup>97</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "The Squirrel with a Rose," Demos the Emperor, pp. 1-2.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>99</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "Spoken Prologue," Demos the Emperor, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup>Osbert Sitwell, "'How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?'" The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 38.

<sup>101</sup>Osbert Sitwell, Demos the Emperor, pp. 3-4.

- 102 ibid., p. 5.
- 103 ibid., pp. 5-6.
- 104 ibid., pp. 6-7.
- 105 ibid., p. 8.
- 106 ibid., pp. 8-9.
- 107 See Alfred F. Havighurst, Twentieth Century Britain (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, and Co., 1962), p. 259.
- 108 Osbert Sitwell, Demos the Emperor, pp. 10-11.
- 109 Osbert Sitwell, Who's Who, 1964, p. 2803.
- 110 Osbert Sitwell, Demos the Emperor, pp. 12-13.
- 111 ibid., p. 15.
- 112 ibid., p. 16.
- 113 ibid., p. 17.
- 114 ibid., pp. 17-19.
- 115 ibid., p. 19.
- 116 Osbert Sitwell, Who's Who, 1964, p. 2803.
- 117 Osbert Sitwell, "How Shall We Rise to Greet the Dawn?" The Collected Satires and Poems (1931), p. 38.
- 118 Osbert Sitwell, Left Hand, Right Hand! (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1945), pp. x-xi.

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THE WAR POETRY OF OSBERT SITWELL

by

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Osbert Sitwell's war poetry can be divided into four distinct chronological groups: World War I poems, Russian War poems, Post-War Satires, and World War II poems. To achieve his effect in his war poetry, while the poet uses such traditional poetical devices as meter, rhyme, alliteration, consonance, assonance, similes and metaphors, he primarily employs three distinct methods: 1) he speaks as poet-seer directly to his readers; 2) he speaks through a persona or personae; and 3) he speaks both as poet-seer and through a persona or personae.

The vision of life Sitwell reveals in his war poems, an interesting one, can be clearly defined through a thematic analysis of these poems. In his World War I poems, Sitwell argues that certain Englishmen--hypocritical and cruel wishful thinkers, incompetent and stubbornly old-fashioned military officers, incompetent and hypocritical political leaders, hypocritical and insanely patriotic bishops and priests of the Church of England, profiteers, untruthful journalists, and sentimental, unthinking, home-front patriots--have subjected the innocent and weak masses of England to a cruel and immoral war. To the poet's mind, these exploiters are despicable sinners: they have not been able to break Original Sin's hold on them; they have not been able to stop committing new sins. Not only have they ignored their true God, they have set up a false god, Moloch, in his place. The poet concludes with a warning: ultimately, God will punish these exploiters of men.

In Sitwell's Russian War poems, no new attitude toward war or man is presented, but there is a hardening of the one revealed in the World War I poems. With the Post-War satires, the poet, for the first time, offers clear and precise instructions on how men can conquer sin and Moloch: the creation of a "new God" of power, beauty, and strength. But the characters

in the Post-War satires do not accept this new God; they remain sunk in sin under Moloch. The poet does not despair, however. In his World War II poems, he clarifies and redefines the "new God": the God becomes one of love and lifesaving grace. Unfortunately, the "new God" is still unacceptable to the poetical characters presented. But, if the "new God," for the present, is unacceptable, Sitwell's war poetry ends with the implication that ultimately this God will triumph and men will overcome sin and find spiritual salvation.