

## Façade: An Entertainment

Poems by Edith Sitwell

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*Edith Sitwell's Façade contains a lot of outdated ideas, including racial stereotypes and other language, we'd now consider extremely offensive.*

*That in itself is a convincing argument for leaving her poetry well alone, and if it weren't for Walton's music you'd probably be unlikely to come across it outside academic circles. But Walton composed his Façade to include Sitwell's linguistic experiments – her exploration of sound and poetics over sense and meaning are part of it. We've included Sitwell's original words here to give us a fuller understanding of the music, although we acknowledge that there are arguments for avoiding using them in a performance.*

*The debate about how to treat art like Edith Sitwell's is complicated and there is no easy answer, but it's a debate that we're happy to keep having at LMP.*

### 1. Hornpipe

Sailors come  
To the drum  
Out of Babylon;  
Hobby-horses  
Foam, the dumb  
Sky rhinoceros-glum.

Watched the courses of the breakers' rocking horses and with Glaucis,  
Lady Venus on the settee of the horsehair sea!  
Where Lord Tennyson in laurels wrote a Gloria free,  
In a borealic iceberg came Victoria; she  
Knew Prince Albert's tall memorial took the colours of the floreal  
And the borealic iceberg; floating on they see  
New-arisen Madam Venus for whose sake from far  
Came the fat zebra'd emperor from Zanzibar  
Where like golden bouquets lay far Asia, Africa, Cathay,  
All laid before that shady lady by the fibroid Shah.  
Captain Fracasse stout as any water-butt came, stood  
With Sir Bacchus both a-drinking the black tarr'd grapes' blood  
Plucked among the tartan leafage  
By the furry wind whose grief age  
Could not wither – like a squirrel with a gold star-nut.  
Queen Victoria sitting shocked upon the rocking horse  
Of a wave said to the Laureate, 'This minx of course  
Is as sharp as any lynx and blacker-deeper than the drinks and  
Quite as  
Hot as any hottentot, without remorse!  
For the minx'  
Said she,  
'And the drinks,  
You can see  
Are hot as any hottentot and not the goods for me!'

### 2. En Famille

In the early spring-time, after their tea,  
Through the young fields of the springing Bohea,  
Jemima, Jocasta, Dinah and Deb  
Walked with their father Sir Joshua Jebb –  
An admiral red, whose only notion  
(A butterfly poised on a pigtailed ocean)  
Is of the peruked sea whose swell  
Breaks on the flowerless rocks of Hell.  
Under the thin trees, Deb and Dinah,  
Jemima, Jocasta, walked, and finer  
Their black hair seemed (flat-sleek to see)  
Than the young leaves of the springing Bohea;  
Their cheeks were like nutmeg-flowers when swells  
The rain into foolish silver bells.  
They said, 'If the door you would only slam,  
Or if, Papa, you would once say "Damn" –  
Instead of merely roaring "Avast"  
Or boldly invoking the nautical Blast –  
We should now stand in the street of Hell  
Watching siesta shutters that fell  
With a noise like amber softly sliding;  
Our moon-like glances through these gliding  
Would see at her table preened and set  
Myrrhina sitting at her toilette  
With eyelids closed as soft as the breeze  
That flows from gold flowers on the incense-trees.'

The Admiral said, 'You could never call –  
I assure you it would not do at all!  
She gets down from the table without saying "Please",  
Forgets her prayers and to cross her T's.  
In short, her scandalous reputation  
Has shocked the whole of the Hellish nation;  
And every turbaned Chinoiserie,  
With whom we should sip our black Bohea,  
Would stretch out her simian fingers thin  
To scratch you, my dears, like a mandoline;  
For Hell is just as properly proper  
As Greenwich, or as Bath, or Joppa!'

### 3. Mariner Man

'What are you staring at, mariner man  
Wrinkled as sea-sand and old as the sea?'  
'Those trains will run over their trails, if they can,  
Snorting and sporting like porpoises. Flee  
The burly, the whirligig wheels of the train,  
As round as the world and as large again,  
Running half the way over to Babylon, down  
Through fields of clover to gay Troy town –  
A-puffing their smoke as grey as the curl  
On my forehead as wrinkled as sands of the sea! –  
But what can that matter to you, my girl?  
(And what can that matter to me?)'

#### 4. Long Steel Grass

Long steel grass –  
The white soldiers pass –  
The light is braying like an ass,  
See  
The tall Spanish jade  
With hair black as nightshade  
Worn as a cockade!  
Flee  
Her eyes' gasconade  
And her gown's parade  
(As stiff as a brigade).  
Tee-hee!  
The hard and braying light  
Is zebra'd black and white  
It will take away the slight  
And free.  
Tinge of the mouth-organ sound,  
(Oyster-stall notes) oozing round  
Her flounces as they sweep the ground  
The  
Trumpet and the drum  
And the martial cornet come  
To make the people dumb –  
But we  
Won't wait for sly-foot night  
(Moonlight, watered milk-white, bright)  
To make clear the declaration  
Of our Paphian vocation,  
Beside the castanetted sea,  
Where stalks Il Capitaneo  
Swaggart braggadocio  
Sword and moustachio –  
He  
Is green as a cassada  
And his hair is an armada.  
To the jade 'Come kiss me harder'  
He called across the battlements as she  
Heard our voices thin and shrill  
As the steely grasses' thrill,  
Or the sound of the onycha  
When the phoca has the pica  
In the palace of the Queen Chinee!

#### 5. Through Gilded Trellises

'Through gilded trellises,  
Of the heat, Dolores,  
Inez, Manuccia,  
Isabel, Lucia,  
Mock Time that flies.  
"Lovely bird, will you stay and sing,  
Flirting your sheened wing, –  
Peck with your beak, and cling  
To our balconies?"  
They flirt their fans, flaunting –  
"O silence enchanting  
As music!" then slanting  
Their eyes.  
Like gilded or emerald grapes,  
They take mantillas, capes,  
Hiding their simian shapes.  
Sighs  
Each lady, "Our spadille  
Is done,"... "Dance the quadrille  
From Hell's towers to Seville;  
Surprise  
Their siesta", Dolores  
Said. Through gilded trellises  
Of the heat, spangles  
Pelt down through the tangles  
Of bell-flowers; each dangles  
Her castanets, shutters  
Fall while the heat mutters,  
With sounds like a mandoline  
Or tinkled tambourine...  
Ladies, Time dies!

#### 6. Tango-Pasodoble

When  
Don  
Pasquito arrived at the seaside  
Where the donkey's hide tide brayed, he  
Saw the banditto Jo in a black cape  
Whose slack shape waved like the sea –  
Thetis wrote a treatise nothing wheat is silver like the sea;  
The lovely cheat is sweet as foam; Erotis notices that she  
Will  
Steal  
The  
Wheat-king's luggage, like Babel  
Before the League of Nations grew –  
So Jo put the luggage and the label  
In the pocket of Flo the Kangaroo.  
Through trees like rich hotels that bode  
Of dreamless ease fled she,  
Carrying the load and goading the road  
Through the marine scene to the sea.  
'Don Pasquito, the road is eloping  
With your luggage, though heavy and large;  
You must follow and leave your moping  
Bride to my guidance and charge!'  
When  
Don  
Pasquito returned from the road's end,  
Where vanilla-coloured ladies ride  
From Sevilla, his mantilla'd bride and young friend  
Were forgetting their mentor and guide.  
For the lady and her friend from Le Touquet  
In the very shady trees upon the sand  
Were plucking a white satin bouquet  
Of foam, while the sand's brassy band  
Blared in the wind. Don Pasquito  
Hid where the leaves drip with sweet...  
But a word stung him like a mosquito...  
For what they hear, they repeat!

## 7. Lullaby for Jumbo

Jumbo asleep!  
Grey leaves thick-furred  
As his ear, keep  
Conversations blurred.  
Thicker than hide  
Is the trumpeting water;  
Don Pasquito's bride  
And his youngest daughter  
Watch the leaves  
Elephantine grey:  
What is it grieves  
In the torrid day?  
Is it the animal  
World that snores  
Harsh and inimical  
In sleepy pores? –  
And why should the spined flowers  
Red as a soldier  
Make Don Pasquito  
Seem still mouldier?

## 8. Black Mrs Behemoth

In a room of the palace  
Black Mrs Behemoth  
Gave way to wrath  
And the wildest malice.  
Cried Mrs Behemoth  
'Come, come,  
Come, court lady,  
Doomed like a moth,  
Through palace rooms shady!  
The candle flame  
Seemed a yellow pompion,  
Sharp as a scorpion,  
Nobody came...  
Only a bugbear  
Air unkind,  
The bud-furred papoose,  
The young spring wind,  
Blew out the candle.  
Where is it gone?  
To flat Coromandel  
Rolling on!

## 9. Tarantella

Where the satyrs are chattering, nymphs in their flattering  
Glimpse of the forest enhance  
All the beauty of marrow and cucumber narrow  
And Ceres will join in the dance.  
Where the satyrs can flatter the flat-leaved fruit  
And the gherkin green and the marrow,  
Said Queen Venus, 'Silenus, we'll settle between us  
The gourd and the cucumber narrow.'  
See, like palaces hid in the lake, they shake –  
Those greenhouses shot by her arrow narrow!  
The gardener seizes the pieces like Croesus for gilding the pot-  
ting-shed barrow.  
There the radish roots  
And the strawberry fruits  
Feel the nymphs' high boots in the glade.  
Trampling and sampling mazurkas, cachucas and turkas,  
Cracoviaks hid in the shade.  
Where, in the haycocks, the country nymphs' gay flocks  
Wear gowns that are looped over bright yellow petticoats,  
Gaiters of leather and pheasants' tail feathers  
In straw hats bewildering many a leathern bat.  
There they haymake  
Cowers and whines in showers  
The dew in the dogskin bright flowers;  
Pumpkin and marrow  
And cucumber narrow  
Have grown through the spangled June hours.  
Melons as dark as caves have for their fountain waves  
Thickest gold honey. And wrinkled as dark as Pan,  
Or old Silenus, yet youthful as Venus  
Are gourds and the wrinkled figs  
Whence all the jewels ran.  
Said Queen Venus, 'Silenus  
We'll settle between us  
The nymphs' disobedience, forestall  
With my bow and my quiver  
Each fresh evil liver:  
For I don't understand it at all!

## 10. A Man from a Far Countree

Rose and Alice,  
Oh, the pretty lassies,  
With their mouths like calice  
And their hair a golden palace –  
Through my heart like a lovely wind they blow.

Though I am black and not comely,  
Though I am black as the darkest trees,  
I have swarms of gold that will fly like honey-bees,  
By the rivers of the sun I will feed my words  
Until they skip like those fleeced lambs  
The waterfalls, and the rivers (horned rams),  
Then for all my darkness I shall be  
The peacefulness of a lovely tree –  
A tree wherein the golden birds  
Are singing in the darkest branches, oh!

## 11. By the Lake

Across the thick and the pastel snow  
Two people go... 'And do you remember  
When last we wandered this shore?'... 'Ah, no!  
For it is cold-hearted December.'  
'Dead, the leaves that like asses' ears hung on the trees  
When last we wandered and squandered joy here;  
Now Midas your husband will listen for these  
Whispers – these tears for joy's bier.'  
As they walk, they seem tall pagodas;  
And all the ropes let down from the cloud  
Ring the hard cold bell-buds upon the trees – codas  
Of overtones, ecstasies, grown for love's shroud.

## 12. Country Dance

That hobnailed goblin, the bob-tailed Hob,  
Said, 'It is time I began to rob.'  
For strawberries bob, hob-nob with the pearls  
Of cream (like the curls of the dairy girls),  
And flushed with the heat and fruitish-ripe  
Are the gowns of the maids who dance to the pipe.  
Chase a maid?  
She's afraid!  
'Go gather a bob-cherry kiss from a tree,  
But don't, I prithee, come bothering me!  
She said –  
As she fled.  
'The snouted satyrs drink clouted cream  
'Neath the chestnut-trees as thick as a dream;  
So I went,  
And leant,  
Where none but the doltish coltish wind  
Nuzzled my hand for what it could find.  
As it neighed,  
I said,  
'Don't touch me sir, don't touch me, I say,  
You'll tumble my strawberries into the hay.  
Those snow-mounds of silver that bee, the spring,  
Has sucked his sweetness from, I will bring  
With fair-haired plants and with apples chill  
For the great god Pan's high altar...I'll spill  
Not one!  
So, in fun,  
We rolled on the grass and began to run  
Chasing that gaudy satyr the Sun;  
Over the haycocks, away we ran  
Crying, 'Here be berries as sunburnt as Pan!  
But Silenus  
Has seen us...  
He runs like the rough satyr Sun.  
Come away!

## 13. Polka

"Tra la la la la la la  
La!  
See me dance the polka",  
Said Mr Wagg like a bear,  
"With my top hat  
And my whiskers that –  
(Tra la la la) trap the Fair.

Where the waves seem chiming haycocks  
I dance the polka: there  
Stand Venus' children in their gay frocks, –  
Maroon and marine, – and stare

To see me fire my pistol  
Through the distance blue as my coat;  
Like Wellington, Byron, the Marquis of Bristol,  
Busbied great trees float.

While the wheezing hurdy-gurdy  
Of the marine wind blows me  
To the tune of Annie Rooney, sturdy,  
Over the sheafs of the sea;

And bright as a seedsman's packet  
With zinnias, candytuffs chill,  
Is Mrs Marigold's jacket  
As she gapes at the inn door still,

Where at dawn in the box of the sailor,  
Blue as the decks of the sea,  
Nelson awoke, crowed like the cocks,  
Then back to the dusk sank he.

And Robinson Crusoe  
Rues so  
The bright and foxy beer, –  
But he finds fresh isles in a negress' smiles, –  
The poxy doxy dear.

As they watch me dance the polka",  
Said Mr Wagg like a bear,  
"In my top hat and my whiskers that, –  
Tra la la la, trap the Fair,  
Tra la la la la la –  
Tra la la la la la –  
Tra la la la la la la la  
La  
La  
La!"

## 14. Four in the Morning

Cried the navy-blue ghost  
Of Mr Belaker  
The allegro negro cocktail-shaker:  
'Why did the cock crow,  
Why am I lost  
Down the endless road to Infinity toss'd?'  
The tropical leaves are whispering white as water:  
I race the wind in my flight down the promenade, –  
Edging the far-off sand  
Is the foam of the sirens' Metropole and Grand, –  
As I raced through the leaves as white as water  
My ghost flowed over a nursemaid, caught her  
And there I saw the long grass weep,  
Where the guinea-fowl plumaged houses sleep  
And the sweet ring-doves of curded milk  
Watch the Infanta's gown of silk  
In the ghost-room tall where the governante  
Whispers slyly fading andante.  
In at the window then looked he,  
The navy-blue ghost of Mr Belaker,  
The allegro negro cocktail-shaker, –  
And his flattened face like the moon saw she, –  
Rhinoceros-black yet flowing like the sea.

## 15. Something Lies Beyond the Scene

Something lies beyond the scene, the encre de chine, marine, ob-  
scene  
Horizon  
In  
Hell  
Black as a bison  
See the tall black Aga on the sofa in the alga mope, his  
Bell-rope  
Moustache (clear as a great bell!)  
Waves in eighteen-eighty  
Bustles  
Come  
Late with tambourines of  
Rustling  
Foam.  
They answer to the names  
Of ancient dames and shames, and  
Only call horizons their home.  
Coldly wheeze (Chinese as these black-armoured fleas that dance)  
the breezes  
Seeking for horizons  
Wide; from her orisons  
In her wide  
Vermilion  
Pavilion  
By the seaside  
The doors clang open and hide  
Where the wind died  
Nothing but the Princess  
Cockatrice  
Lean  
Dancing a caprice  
To the wind's tambourine.

## 16. Valse

'Daisy and Lily,  
Lazy and silly,  
Walk by the shore of the wan grassy sea, –  
Talking once more 'neath a swan-bosomed tree.  
Rose castles,  
Tourelles,  
Those bustles  
Where swells  
Each foam-bell of ermine,  
They roam and determine  
What fashions have been and what fashions will be, –  
What tartan leaves born,  
What crinolines worn,  
By Queen Thetis,  
Pelisses  
Of tarlatine blue,  
Like the thin plaided leaves that the castle crags grew,  
Or velours d'Afrande:  
On the water-gods' land  
Her hair seemed gold trees on the honey-cell sand  
When the thickest gold spangles, on deep water seen,  
Were like twanging guitar and like cold mandoline,  
And the nymphs of great caves,  
With hair like gold waves,  
Of Venus, wore tarlatine.  
Louise and Charlottine  
(Boreas' daughters)  
And the nymphs of deep waters,  
The nymph Taglioni, Grisi the ondine,  
Wear plaided Victoria and thin Clementine  
Like the crinolined waterfalls;  
Wood-nymphs wear bonnets, shawls,  
Elegant parasols  
Floating are seen.  
The Amazons wear balzarine of jonquille  
Beside the blond lace of a deep-falling rill;  
Through glades like a nun  
They run from and shun  
The enormous and gold-rayed rustling sun;  
And the nymphs of the fountains  
Descend from the mountains  
Like elegant willows  
On their deep barouche pillows,  
In cashmere Alvandar, barège Isabelle,  
Like bells of bright water clearest wood-well.  
Our élégantes favouring bonnets of blond,  
The stars in their apiaries,  
Sylphs in their aviaries,  
Seeing them, spangle these, and the sylphs fond  
From their aviaries fanned  
With each long fluid hand  
The manteaux espagnoles,  
Mimic the waterfalls  
Over the long and the light summer land.

So Daisy and Lily,  
Lazy and silly,  
Walk by the shore of the wan grassy sea,  
Talking once more 'neath a swan-bosomed tree.  
Rose castles,  
Tourelles,  
Those bustles!  
Mourelles  
Of the shade in their train follow.  
Ladies, how vain, – hollow, –  
Gone is the sweet swallow, –  
Gone, Philomel!

## 17. Jodelling Song

'We bear velvet cream.  
Green and babyish  
Small leaves seem: each stream  
Horses' tails that swish.

And the chimes remind  
Us of sweet birds singing,  
Like the jangling bells  
On rose trees ringing.

Man must say farewell  
To parents now,  
And to William Tell  
And Mrs Cow.

Man must say farewells  
To storks and Bettes,  
And to roses' bells,  
And statuettes.

Forests white and black  
In spring are blue  
With forget-me-nots,  
And to lovers true

Still the sweet bird begs  
And tries to cozen  
Them: "Buy angels' eggs  
Sold by the dozen."

Gone are clouds, like inns  
On the gardens' brinks.  
And the mountain djinns, –  
Ganymede sells drinks;

While the days seem grey,  
And his heart of ice,  
Grey as chamois, or  
The edelweiss.

And the mountain streams  
Like cowbells sound –  
Tirra lira, drowned  
In the waiter's dreams

Who has gone beyond  
The forest waves,  
While his true and fond  
Ones seek their graves.'

## 18. Scotch Rhapsody

'Do not take a bath in Jordan, Gordon,  
On the holy Sabbath, on the peaceful day!  
Said the huntsman, playing on his old bagpipe,  
Boring to death the pheasant and the snipe –  
Boring the ptarmigan and grouse for fun –  
Boring them worse than a nine-bore gun.  
Till the flaxen leaves where the prunes are ripe,  
Heard the tartan wind a-droning through the pipe.  
And they heard Macpherson say:  
'Where do the waves go? What hotels  
Hide their bustles and their gay umbrellas?  
And would there be room? – Would there be room? Would there be  
room for me?'  
There is a hotel at Ostend  
Cold as the wind, without an end.  
Haunted by ghostly poor relations  
Of Bostonian conversations  
(Like bagpipes rotting through the walls.)  
And there the pearl-ropes fall like shawls  
With a noise like marine waterfalls.  
And 'Another little drink wouldn't do us any harm'  
Pierces through the sabbatical calm.  
And that is the place for me!  
So do not take a bath in Jordan, Gordon,  
On the holy Sabbath on the peaceful day –  
Or you'll never go to heaven, Gordon Macpherson,  
And speaking purely as a private person  
That is the place – that is the place – that is the place for me!

## 19. Popular Song

Lily O'Grady,  
Silly and shady,  
Longing to be  
A lazy lady,  
Walked by the cupolas, gables in the  
Lake's Georgian stables.  
In a fairy tale like the heat intense,  
And the mist in the woods when across the fence  
The children gathering strawberries  
Are changed by the heat into negresses,  
Though their fair hair  
Shines there  
Like gold-haired planets, Calliope, Io,  
Pomona, Antiope, Echo, and Clio.  
Then Lily O'Grady,  
Silly and shady,  
Sauntered along like a  
Lazy lady;  
Beside the waves' haystacks her gown with tucks  
Was of satin the colour of shining green ducks,  
And her fol-de-rol  
Parasol  
Was a great gold sun o'er the haystacks shining.  
But she was a negress black as the shade  
That time on the brightest lady laid.  
That a satyr, dog-haired as trunks of trees,  
Began to flatter, began to tease.  
And she ran like the nymphs with golden foot  
That trampled the strawberry, buttercup root.  
In the thick gold dew as bright as the mesh  
Of dead Panope's golden flesh.  
Made from the music whence were born  
Memphis and Thebes in the first hot morn,  
– And ran, to wake  
In the lake,  
Where the water-ripples seem hay to rake.  
And Charlottine,  
Adeline,  
Round rose-bubbling Victorine,  
And the other fish  
Express a wish  
For mastic mantles and gowns with a swish;  
And bright and slight as the posies  
Of buttercups and of roses,  
And buds of the wild wood-lilies  
They chase her, as frisky as fillies.  
The red retriever-haired satyr  
Can whine and tease her and flatter.  
But Lily O'Grady,  
Silly and shady,  
In the deep shade is a lazy lady;  
Now Pompey's dead, Homer's read,  
Heliogabalus lost his head.  
And shade is on the brightest wing,  
And dust forbids the bird to sing.

## 20. Fox-Trot 'Old Sir Faulk'

Old  
Sir  
Faulk,  
Tall as a stork,  
Before the honeyed fruits of dawn were ripe, would walk,  
And stalk with a gun  
The Reynard-coloured sun,  
Among the pheasant-feathered corn the unicorn has torn, forlorn  
The  
Smock-faced sheep  
Sit  
And  
Sleep;  
Periwigged as William and Mary, weep...  
'Sally, Mary, Mattie, what's the matter, why cry?'  
The huntsman and the Reynard-coloured sun and I sigh;  
'Oh, the nursery-maid Meg  
With a leg like a peg  
Chased the feathered dreams like hens, and when they laid  
an egg  
In the sheepskin  
Meadows  
Where  
The serene King James would steer  
Horse and hounds, then he  
From the shade of a tree  
Picked it up as spoil to boil for nursery tea', said the mourners.  
In the  
Corn, towers strain,  
Feathered tall as a crane,  
And whistling down the feathered rain, old Noah goes again –  
An old dull mome  
With a head like a pome  
Seeing the world as a bare egg,  
Laid by the feathered air; Meg  
Would beg three of these  
For the nursery teas  
Of Japhet, Shem, and Ham; she gave it  
Underneath the trees,  
Where the boiling  
Water  
Hissed,  
Like the goose-king's feathered daughter – kissed,  
Pot and pan and copper kettle  
Put upon their proper mettle,  
Lest the Flood – the Flood – the Flood begin again through these!

## 21. Sir Beelzebub

When  
Sir  
Beelzebub called for his syllabub in the hotel in Hell  
Where Propserine first fell,  
Blue as the gendarmerie were the waves of the sea,  
(Rocking and shocking the bar-maid).  
Nobody comes to give him his rum but the  
Rim of the sky hippopotamus-glum  
Enhances the chances to bless with a benison  
Alfred Lord Tennyson crossing the bar laid  
With cold vegetation from pale deputations  
Of temperance workers (all signed in Memoriam)  
Hoping with glory to trip up the Laureate's feet.  
(Moving in classical metres)...  
Like Balaclava, the lava came down from the  
Roof, and the sea's blue wooden gendarmerie  
Took them in charge while Beelzebub roared for his rum.  
...None of them come!