

The Second Coming

classmate

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'The Second Coming' is one of the finest poems of English literature written by W.B. Yeats. It was first published in the American magazine, *The Dial*, in November, 1920. Later on, it was included in the volume entitled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* 1921. It was written at a time when Yeats was puzzled by violence displayed by events like the Easter Rebellion of 1916, the Irish Civil War that followed it, and the European Great world war of 1914-19. The times were out of joint; and in terms of his philosophy of history, a new age in the world's history was going to begin. He believed that a full circle of the wheel, that is, the moon, corresponds in time to approximately 2000 years. At the beginning of each one of such two thousand year period, a new dispensation is announced. This pattern could be seen in the history of the world from about the year 2000 B.C.

According to the poet the Second Coming is imminent, because the Christian civilization has almost run its course of two thousand years. The present cycle of the history is almost over and a new history is about to begin. The birth of the new civilization may appear to be the ruin of the ~~world~~ old; its values may appear to us monstrous and terrifying, the very thoughts may be a nightmare to us, but this much sure that a change is in the offing.

The poem "consists of twenty-two lines, in two verse paragraphs, the first of eight lines, and the second of fourteen. The poem opens as if it were, in the midst of a vision. The poet sees a widening gyre (a circular motion which has the effect of broadening the thing going round and round) which is going at top speed. The Controller, in so far as there is any, can not control its movement. This is compared with the activity

of the Falcon who can not hear the falconer because of the distance between the two, or because the falcon is at such emotional heat that it refuses to be guided by its master. The result is all round convulsion in which all finer values of life are lost: anarchy is let loose upon the world. The better people are without a sense or commitment, they have no opinions, they are, as if it were, neutral; while the worst, the undesirable, the rabble, are full of fanatical passions and exhibit their violent tendencies.

The poem manages to use Yeat's system without becoming servient to it. The poet's mind is equally stuffed with the anarchy and blood-dimmed tide of the modern world:

"The blood-dimmed tide is loosened, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

In the concluding lines of the poem Yeat's foresees the end of the present civilization. All this anarchy, decadence and violence implies that a new civilization is about to be born. The sight of the anarchic vision gives the poet a feeling that a second coming is imminent. In his vision, the poet sees a sphinx-like being, coming out of some far desert.

In these lines the poet refers to his vision of some clumsy and awkward shape, like that of a figure with a lion's body and man's head. He sees this shape in some far desert and moving slowly with a clumsy, awkward movement towards Bethlehem, the birth place of Christ, as if it, too, would be born there. The figure is so monstrous, so nightmarish that the birds fly before it in terror. The monster has pitiless destiny; it can not be clearly seen. It symbolizes mindless and merciless violence, and its birth is the death of the present civilization.

It is coming to undo what has been done, for a new era is to be ushered in amidst blood, toil and tears.

The image of the figure of the strange and monstrous bird is very significant. It symbolizes the death of the old civilization and the birth of the new one, just as the sphinx burns itself after five hundred years and is born once again.

The poem is written in blank verse. Its texture is enriched by typical Yeatsian half-rhymes, of Anglo-Irish rhymes, like 'gyre' and 'falcons', 'hold' and 'world', 'man' and 'sun'. The first stanza of the poem is notable for its deliberate use of a kind of high rhetoric rather than images - 'mere anarchy', 'the blood-dimmed tide', 'the ceremony of innocence' etc. In the last stanza, there are three key images: a desert, the flight of birds and a terrific monster moving slowly in the vast desert. The dominant idea is of ferocity, immensity, and vastness, and a feeling of terror is called forth by the emerging pattern in which images apparently dissimilar are linked together by the controlling power of the poet's vision.