



The Second Coming

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General meaning

The poem "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats is a modernist work published in 1919, reflecting on the confusion and chaos in the result of World War I and the Russian Revolution. The poem explores themes of change, chaos, and the loss of moral and religious values in a decaying society. The poetic style is symbolist, and it uses ambiguous and imagistic language to convey the message.

Line 1-2

TURNING and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Lines 1-2: The first lines indicate chaos and instability as the falcon spins in an “expanding spiral” until it cannot hear its master. Naturally, the falcon returns to the falconer, but in this poem, it continues to fly. Here the **gyre** is negative, as the falcon here symbolizes the man. That is, the falcon is lost from its owner, so here the modern man is lost from God. The gyre of separation and lack of connection with God appears due to war and care with physical pleasures.

Lines 3-4

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

the poet describes a world that is falling apart and becoming more and more messy.

The line **"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;"** speak to a world that is broken and lacks unity. The idea of the "centre" holding refers to an organized and united society, but the poet is saying that this is collapsing.

In the next line, **"Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,"** the poet continues to paint a picture of chaos and disorder.

Lines 5-6

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The "blood-dimmed tide" is a metaphor for a flood of violence or destruction, and the "ceremony of innocence" may refer to the moral and ethical foundations of society.

These lines suggest that the innocence and purity of society have been corrupted or drowned in the tide of violence and disorder. The poet is painting a picture of a world that is losing its basic moral principles and falling into chaos.

Lines 7-8

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

Yeats mentions that war causes people to be in a state of confusion and disorder. That is, people are now unable to distinguish between good and bad, and this causes the loss and destruction of society. The "best" are the ones who think and reason, but they have also become neglected and unable to observe. Therefore, we cannot blame the "worst"

Lines 9-10

**Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.**

The first line, "Surely some revelation is at hand," suggests that there is a coming moment of clarity or understanding that will bring about a major change.

The second line, "Surely the Second Coming is at hand," is a reference to the biblical idea of Jesus Christ's return to judge the living and the dead. In this context, the poet is suggesting that a world-changing event is about to occur.

Lines 11-12

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of i{Spiritus Mundi}

In the first line, "**The Second Coming!**" the poet is referencing the biblical concept of the return of Jesus Christ. "Hardly are those words out" is a reference to the idea that the moment of revelation or upheaval is fast upcoming.

The second line, "**When a vast image out of i{Spiritus Mundi}**", is a more metaphorical and ambiguous statement. The phrase "**i{Spiritus Mundi}**" is Latin for "spirit of the world."

13-14

Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

Here the poet describes the beast, a magical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a man, it is half man and half animal. It is a historical symbol of the Egyptians who built it in the desert. The poet describes the behavior of humans who have become very animalistic just like it. That is, they appear to be human but they act in an animalistic manner.

◦15-16

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it

The poet describes the strange creature's facial expression. Its gaze seems inhuman. It has no feelings for others and moves slowly, there are birds that fly in circles when they see something dying. This idea is associated with war and death. The birds hint that war is coming, but the beast brings more violence.

17-18

Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know

The first line, "Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds," describes the shadows of birds as they move through the desert. The use of the word "reel" suggests that the shadows are wavering or dancing as they move. In the second line, "The darkness drops again," the poet implies that the setting sun is sinking below the skyline, bringing a return of night and darkness.

Finally, the last line, "But now I know," suggests that the speaker has gained some new understanding or insight.

19-20

That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

The first line, "That twenty centuries of stony sleep" refers to the span of time - 2,000 years - since the death of Jesus Christ. The phrase "stony sleep" suggests that this period of time has been one of dormant and peaceful existence.

In the next line, "Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle," The poet points out that the peace of this long period has suddenly changed with a new, disturbing force - instead of waking up because of the rocking, the child suffers from nightmares. Here the child in the cradle is like the state of Europe, which was a safe and stable country before the First World War, but after the war it entered a state of confusion and violence. This is like a nightmare.

21-22

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

A "rough beast" that is slowly moving towards Bethlehem (the birthplace of Christ). He is making a journey from the spiritual world to the real world. The beast represents the awful prediction of World War II in which Hitler came to rule. These negative events were nightmares that society could not wake up from. Yeats had a feeling that things were getting worse while the people in the society believed things were getting better. The poet also sees the beast as representing the harsh reality, and society must go through this negativity to realize justice.

The Role of Christianity: The poem also explores the role of Christianity in the face of this chaos and disorder. The poet views the coming of the "Second Coming" as a divine figure who can restore order and - bring moral values back to the society. The poet also expresses a sense of submission and acceptance of the chaos and disorder through the repetition of the phrase "That the worst are full of passionate intensity." Overall, the poem can be seen as exploring the role of Christianity in a world that is falling apart.

The symbols

The Falcon

Yeats places the falcon in the opening lines, of the poem to represent humanity's control over the world. Thus, the fact that the falcon "cannot hear" its master symbolizes the loss of this control.

To better understand this symbol, it is important to know a little about falconry in general. Falconry is a practice that dates back thousands of years, and involves people training birds of prey to follow instructions. This was often for hunting purposes, but it is also practiced as an art form. In both cases, the falcon represents humanity training a kind of intelligent control over the natural world. Killer birds such as falcons are placed under the influence of humans.

The falcon's inability to hear the falconer's call (lines 1 and 2) means that the relationship between them has been broken. This symbolizes chaos and confusion, and particularly refers to the breakdown of communication.

The beast

In lines 11-18, the speaker has a vision of the beast. Although the speaker does not specifically name the beast, it is described in vivid and disturbing detail. The beast has the "body of a lion" and the "head of a man." This makes it similar to a **sphinx or a manticore**, both mythical creatures that are prey to humans according to legend. This type of hybrid creature is very common in various stories, and is intended to convey a kind of strangeness, a feeling that nature is somehow wrong. Perhaps this beast, with its animal body and human head, is telling us something about the "nightmare" to come. Although humans have tried to civilize themselves and improve their world, their more violent animal nature may have only been hidden, not defeated. In other words, the beast may symbolize that civilization itself is a kind of illusion. The human head has a "look" that lacks compassion, suggesting that the beast is ready to kill. Since the poem was written between the two world wars in the twentieth century, this surreal image seems to refer to humans' increasing ability to destroy themselves.



Questions

1. Why does Yeats ends the poem with a question?
2. Explain the symbols of the poem .
3. What are the role of Christianity in this poem.
4. Summarize the general meaning of the poem .