

THE SECOND COMING

William Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), though born in Dublin, spent his early years in London. His father was the painter John Butler Yeats; his mother's family was from County Sligo in Ireland. Yeats began as a painter but quickly turned to poetry and drama. His fascination with pagan Irish mythology and the occult led him to produce works that reflected Irish legends and other mysterious stories and beings. He founded the Irish National Theatre in 1899. After the Irish rebellion of 1916, he became an avid nationalist and served as a senator from 1922 through 1928. In 1923 he received the Nobel Prize for literature. His first book of poems was The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems (1889) and his first play The Countess Cathleen (1892). Later works include The Green Helmet and Other Poems (1910), Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921), the autobiographical A Vision (1925), and The Tower (1928). "The Second Coming" contains many of Yeats' most important symbols and images compacted into a powerful twenty-two lines.

1	Turning and turning in the widening gyre	1
	The falcon cannot hear the falconer;	
	Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;	
	Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,	
5	The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere	5
	The ceremony of innocence is drowned;	
	The best lack all conviction, while the worst	
	Are full of passionate intensity.	

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Surely some revelation is at hand;
 10 Surely the Second Coming is at hand. 10
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 15 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, 15
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 20 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle, 20
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?