

The Second Coming

- William Butler Yeats

Dr. Michalesh Kumar Manjhi
Dept. of English
J. N. College, Madhubani

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"The Second Coming," a prophetic poem has been written by William Butler Yeats. Yeats is one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Even as he was an Irish (poet) man, he ranks with the greatest British poets of the Modern age. Fraser in his book The Modern Writer and his world ranks Yeats with Donne, Milton and Wordsworth and considers him very much superior to Browning, Tennyson and Arnold. The present poem is written in very rough iambic pentameter, but the meter is so loose, and the exceptions so frequent, that it actually seems closer to free verse with frequent heavy stresses. The rhymes are likewise haphazard; apart from the two couplets with which the poem opens, there are only coincidental rhymes in the poem, such as 'man' and 'sun'.

The poem's title is intended, first, to bring to mind the second coming of Christ. The poet describes the spread of time as "turning and turning" i.e. the outward flow of time which is about to complete its life cycle.

At this stage, the entire human race is lost to confusion and can not clearly see what was conveyed and professed to them by Christ. The poet sees a beginning of the fall of Christianity's rise which has already been showing cracks. Further, the Christian world, especially the Europeans had already succumbed to the doubts regarding religions. Orthodox Church was being put to question.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer,
Now European civilization is about to fall to decadence because the centre is unable to hold on. The centre, if seen from Orthodox Christian Church, is Christian religion which for Yeats has already weakened. There are other eminent hints which mark the near destruction and end of the world e.g. mass scale production of deadly weapons. Therefore, the world is likely to go to the dogs before its rebirth when Christ would return as a Saviour.

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

Here the poet sees the world of his time a blood-dimmed because of the horrors of World War I that he has seen. Man has lost even his ceremony of innocence which he once used to display for real innocence. Nothing remained human during the bloody wars that Europe went through. He reminds us of the war madness and savage thoughts of man which dominated the beginning of twentieth century. Therefore, he feels the strong and mighty are the 'worst' that are full of passionate intensity.

If we refer ourselves to the past events as described in Bible and the Holy Quran; whenever the worst situation arises in the human world, help comes from God Almighty to rescue humanity. Therefore, the poet feels:

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the second coming is at hand.

The speaker looks towards heaven for the rebirth of Christ to come for the salvation of man.

This poem seems to be pessimism about the current age and even more pessimism about the future. The main idea of the poem is elusive. It is a prophetic poem and it reflects upon World War I and the horrors of war. It speaks to the chaos, the changes that accompanied the war, the disenchantment of the people, and the advent of modernity.