

World Myths and Folktales: Stories of Human Kind**Section 1A: Apocalyptic Myths
“The Second Coming” by William Butler Yeats**

Directions: Read through this poem twice. The first time you read the poem, make sure you understand the points the poet is trying to make. The second time you read the poem, mark phrases you like; parts you agree/disagree with; connections between this text and other texts, the world, or what you’ve learned about apocalypticism so far; and areas of confusion in the space provided in the margin. Be prepared to discuss your notes.

The Second Coming

By William Butler Yeats

Source: *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1989)

Retrieved electronically from The Poetry Foundation’s website

Turning and turning in the widening gyre¹
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
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.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand. 10
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*²
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
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
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle, 20
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

¹ pronounced with a hard “g”, a gyre is a cycle lasting 2,000 years

² Latin for “spirit of the world”