

Module 6: Identifying One's Strengths and Weaknesses

Getting Started: William Butler Yeats, "A Second Coming"

Introduction

"A Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats

Introduction

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
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
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.
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,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
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,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Chinua Achebe titled his most popular novel, *Things Fall Apart*, after a line in the poem "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats. The poem by Yeats is based on change; it implies that when anarchy is in play, the whole community lets things fall apart.

In this interactivity, use the previous and next buttons to learn how *Things Fall Apart* and "The Second Coming" are similar.

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Gyre

"A Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats

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The gyre is a tornado-like spiral representing the current state of affairs in the world. In the poem, the gyre represents the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. In *Things Fall Apart*, you will witness the fall of the Ibo tribe and the rise of British colonization.

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Falcon/Falconer

"A Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats

Falcon/Falconer

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In this analogy, the falcon represents parents and grandparent while the falconer represents the younger generation. In *Things Fall Apart*, the traditional mores of the community are being undermined as British influence takes control of the Ibo tribe.

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Things Fall Apart

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As the mores of the community are eaten away by the changing times, life as it is known to the protagonist falls apart.

As the mores of the community are eaten away by the changing times, life as it has been known falls apart.

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Anarchy

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Anarchy is the total lack of government, authority, and structure. The tribal community in the novel loses its identity as the British dig in.

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Good vs. Evil

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Good Versus Evil

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The protagonist's greatest fears are that those he admires lose their conviction and those he hates and distrusts will gain control through their passionate intensity.

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Spiritus Mundi

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Spiritus Mundi is Latin for "world spirit." This is the collective spirit of the world or of a society.

For the protagonist, the *Spiritus Mundi* of his village falls apart and loses conviction.

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The Sphinx

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Although it is not identified as such, this legendary creature is known as a Sphinx.

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A Sphinx has awoken after "twenty centuries of stony sleep" to represent Christ. This Sphinx symbolizes the second coming of Christ. However, Yeats implies that instead of a kindhearted one, Christ has taken a new form. However, Yeats implies that instead of a kindhearted one returning as a kindhearted savior, Christ takes on a new form.

The Sphinx as a "rough beast" coincides with the protagonist's belief that the rebirth of his society is a dark nightmare rather than an opportunity for salvation.

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