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## YEATS'S «THE SECOND COMING» AND THE METAPHOR OF MEDIUMSHIP

*Where got I that truth?  
Out of a medium's mouth...*

W. B. Yeats, «Fragments»<sup>1</sup>

From 1911 on, William Butler Yeats was attached to spiritualism for some five years<sup>2</sup>. This is not suprising. Yeats searched for the metaphysical (and poetic ) essence of «the world» not only in «Madame» Blavatsky's theosophy, in Mathers's cabbalism and in Indian thought, but also in any source where he believed or suspected he could find it: in Heraclitus, in Plotinus, in Swedenborg, in the Noh theatre of the Ghosts. Following Paracelsus, «who claimed to have collected his knowledge from midwife and hangman», he did not hesitate to seek this essence even in «the wisdom of some fat old meduim» and, in his mature years, he started «going a good deal to seances»<sup>3</sup>. As Arnold Goldman, Stuart Hirschberg (1976), and M.B. Raizis (1989) have suggested, spiritualism found its poetic equivalent in Yeats's art and left its marks on it. Indeed, Yeats's unpublished records of seances and other spiritualistic material he kept in his files often present us with his sources of inspiration and point towards an understanding of their subsequent elaboration in some of his most celebrated poems.

There is some evidence that «The Second Coming» is also connected with Yeats's spiritualistic experiences. Of course, this major poem cannot be fully «interpreted» with reference to «central situations» particular

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1. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, second edition, London, 1950, p. 241.

2. See Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, second edition, London, 1961, p. 196: «Beginning... especially from 1911 on, Yeats's imagination was captured by a branch of supernaturalism of which up to that time he had known little: the phenomena of spiritualism».

3. See W. B. Yeats. *If I were Four-and-Twenty*, Dublin, 1940, pp. 22-23.

to spiritualism, such as trance-speaking and mediumistic revelations, without considering its place in Yeats's dogmatic prose writings on the pattern of history. However, the following discussion might shed some light on his poetic procedures and tactics.

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?<sup>4</sup>

Professor Goldman was the first to suggest that

the narrator's voice comes to resemble the voice of a control in a trance-vision. The first stanza of the poem, or at the least the lines announcing «The Second Coming» are called «words out», i.e., words spoken, and the voice speaking them is superseded by another which announces «a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*»; a control (or communicator) is speaking, and now telling us what he sees. As the «message» nears the end, «The darkness drops

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4. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, pp. 210-11.

again», less the end of the desert day than of the control's vision<sup>5</sup>.

Indeed, if we are to imagine an ideal «setting» for this poem, it cannot be other than that of the seance-room. One would tend to agree with Goldman's challenging view, but at the same time one would demand concrete evidence. My research into Yeats's spiritualistic papers has convinced me that some evidence of this kind does exist.

First and foremost, this evidence refers to the image of the «rough beast», «a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*.../A shape with lion body and the head of a man...». Yeats's vagueness of description has baffled critics, who have been trying for years to trace concrete visual stimuli that may have suggested the «rough beast». The Egyption sphinx is a likely source, but we cannot be certain.<sup>6</sup> Blake's illustration in an edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* «representing a winged lion with an eagle's head drawing Beatrice's chariot», is regarded by T.R. Henn as another possible source<sup>7</sup>. But, apart from the fact that Yeats's beast has «the head of a man», the *Therion of Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car* seems too harmless and obedient to have suggested the rough beast. Then we have Peter Ure's view that the beast can be traced back to «a black Titan raising himself up by his two hands from the middle of a heap of ancient ruins» in a desert, during the experiments with Mathers in 1887<sup>8</sup>. Unfortunately, Ure misses the point that Titans are anthropomorphous representations. Finally, we have Giorgio Melchiori's reference to Blake's *Nebuchadnezzar*<sup>9</sup>. But, as I have suggested elsewhere<sup>10</sup>, there is something almost ludicrous about Blake's beast-man who seems terrified rather than terrifying as he looks surprised at the form of his own body.

Yeats's beast is as vague as it is «vast»; it is a «shape» never actually described. The description of its gaze as «blank and pitiless as the sun»

5. Arnold Goldman, «Yeats, Spiritualism, and Psychical Research» in *Yeats and the Occult*, edited by George Mills Harper, Yeats Studies Series, London, 1976, p. 127.

6. See Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, second edition, London, 1964, p. 259.

7. See Giorgio Melchiori's reference to Henn's view in *The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W. B. Yeats*, London, 1960, p. 36.

8. See Melchiori's reference to Ure's view in *The Whole Mystery of Art*, p. 37.

9. See Melchiori, p. 37.

10. See William Butler Yeats: *Μυθολογίες και Ὁράματα*, Ἀθήνα, 1983, σ. 108 [«William Butler Yeats: Mythologies and Visions», Athens, 1983, p. 108].

refers to what the beast is, rather than to what it looks like. Indeed, as Richard Ellmann observes, «the indeterminate label» («shape») is intended «to increase [the] portentousness» of the image<sup>11</sup>.

Interestingly enough, the «vast» and abstract image of the «shape» corresponds to Yeats's comments on mediumistic imagery in the «Seance with Mrs Harris», held in July 1915, some three and one-half years before the composition of the poem:

I was reminded of the figures that one used to make on a sheet when I was a child by standing between the candle and a sheet. Only now, I was the audience and could not tell what made the figures *so vast and so shapeless* (my italics).

Moreover, in Jon Stallworthy's transcript of the first full draft of the poem «the dark was cut as with a knife» just before the appearance of «a stark image out of spiritus mundi»<sup>12</sup>. This suggests a sudden vision in the same way that «the darkness» which «drops again» in the final version corresponds, as Goldman believes, «less to the end of the desert day than of the control's vision». Of course, the above evidence is not meant as proof. It suggests, however, that Yeats's choice was influenced to a degree by the portentousness of «abstract» mediumistic imagery. (Records of experimental sittings show that mediumistic imagery is «abstract»<sup>13</sup>)

More evidence regarding the connection between «The Second Coming» and Yeats's spiritualistic interests appears to exist in the envelope marked «Note-book of Stainton Moses (1873)», containing a

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11. *The Identity of Yeats*, p. 259.

12. See Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats's Poetry in the Making*, Oxford, 1963, p. 22.

13. In «The *Modus Operandi* of Trance Communication According to Descriptions Received Through Mrs Osborne Leonard», *Proceeding of the Society for Psychological Research*, 38 (1928-29), pp. 49-100, Drayton Thomas remarks that a «communicator» often conveys some message to a «control» (and thus to the sitters, through the medium's vocal organs, which the «control» is supposed to use) «in the form of thought». Yet these thoughts often emerge in the control's or in the medium's consciousness as «hearing» or «sight» so that the control says that it «sees», for example, even when it is only a «thought» that reaches it (p. 52). This extremely complex system of communication (communicator through control—control through medium), whether regarded as communication between different spiritual entities, or between different strata of consciousness, accounts for much of the imprecision of mediumistic «sight».



typescript of more than two hundred pages, which is found among the poet's «occult» papers. William Stainton Moses claimed to be controlled by a group of spirits, the «Imperator Band», whose «mission» was to warn man of an impending crisis and world catastrophe: a «bitter struggle» was «at hand», and it would accompany the crisis of modern civilization. After the death of Moses in 1892, the «Imperator Band» was alleged to have visited other mediums, including the famous Mrs Piper during the last stage of her trances, 1897-1905<sup>14</sup>. Of course, Yeats was well informed on the case of Mrs Piper.

The «Imperator Band» was an offspring of the end-of-an-era speculation, «the “voices prophesying war” of decadent apocalypticism» in the late 19th century, warnings which «blended with other “prophecies” ... of world catastrophe»<sup>15</sup>. Surely, it was not only Lord Henry and Dorian Grey who spoke of «*fin de siècle*» and «*fin du globe*». The Second Coming was always «at hand» in religious, occult, spiritualistic and other circles that delighted in apocalypticism. We remember Max Nordau's «feeling... of imminent perdition and extinction»<sup>16</sup> and the «Plagues, troubles, blood ... dreadful confusions and upheavals» foreseen by Mère du Bourg<sup>17</sup>. We also remember the cataclysmic visions of Eugene Vintaras<sup>18</sup>, or the popular new fiction of «imaginary warfare», established throughout Europe after the publication of Sir George Tomkyns Chesney's successful *Battle of Dorking* in the widely read *Blackwood's Magazine*, in 1871<sup>19</sup>. As a collector of prophecies and a partisan of the «magical armageddon», the war that «would fulfil the prophets»<sup>20</sup>, Yeats partook of this Millenarian milieu.

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14. See also F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, edited by Susy Smith, New York, 1961, p. 379.

15. See Goldman, p. 410, note 5.

16. Quoted in Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances*, Manchester, 1961, p. 3.

17. See James Webb, *The Occult Underground*, La Salle, Illinois, 1974, p. 296.

18. See Webb, p. 139.

19. Chesney's story, «describing a successful invasion of England» and the collapse that followed, became the prototype for the mass production of fiction of this type, and a «standard device» for writers in Britain, France, Italy, and Germany, from the time of its publication up to 1914. See I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: 1763-1984*, London, 1966, pp. 30-46.

20. As Stuart Merrill wrote in 1896, Yeats «has even collected the prophecies of various countries on this subject» (an impending European war and a subsequent revolution). See Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, p. 100. As regards the «magical armageddon», see Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, *Letters*,

The «cataclysmic terribleness» of «The Second Coming» appears to owe something to the prophecies of the «Imperator Band»<sup>21</sup>. In the Moses script we read, for example, that there

comes the struggle: prolonged, and becoming more bitter as the crisis draws near....

And now a great convulsion is taking place among the evil powers... and the crisis of the struggle is at hand.

The view that «The Second Coming» is a «seance-poem» may prove helpful to students, scholars, and actors reciting it. But, what is more, it may prove helpful in answering the question of «rhyme and meaning» in this poem. As Jon Stallworthy has noted, the drafts of «The Second Coming» show that the poem was originally planned to be written in rhyme<sup>22</sup>. In the final version, however, we have only two rhymes in the first four lines: «gyre» / «falconer» and «hold» / «world». As a Marjorie Perloff has observed, both rhymes involve semantic relationships:

The first rhyme is antithesis-rhyme: the «widening gyre» ... is opposed to the «falconer».... The rhyme thus contains a tension between chaos and order, emphasized by the minimal approximation of the rhyme: the heavily stressed rhyming unit... of «gyre» is barely echoed by the weakly stressed rhyming unit... of «falconer». The second rhyme is irony-rhyme: as «Things fall apart», it is not only the «centre» but the «world» itself that cannot «hold»<sup>23</sup>.

Perloff adds that what happens in the fifth line of the final version of the poem is «particularly interesting»: «As “Things fall apart” in the nightmare vision of the speaker, so does the rhyme scheme of the poem: rhymed couplets give way to blank verse». To explain this, Perloff refers to Stallworthy's view that Yeats abandons rhyme at this point because «it... might distract and limit the reader's attention»<sup>24</sup>; but,

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edited by Clifford Bax, New York, 1941, p. 51, and T.R. Whitaker, *Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History*, Chapel Hill, 1964, p. 57.

21. See Goldmann, p. 127.

22. Stallworthy, p. 18.

23. *Rhyme and Meaning in the Poetry of Yeats*, The Hague, 1970, p. 120.

24. Stallworthy, p. 21. Quoted in Perloff, p. 120.

she says, «it seems more likely that Yeats felt that rhyme would be unsuitable for a poem of such unmitigated violence and bitterness»<sup>25</sup>. Still, taking into consideration Goldman's suggestion, one can suppose that Yeats is creatively imitating the ways of mediums: as his narrator is losing possession of will, the poet is gradually and artfully «losing control» over his own material.

Interestingly, this view is supported by the little noticed fact that after rhymed couplets give way to blank verse and the rhyme scheme «falls apart», the simple grammatical structure of the poem is interrupted by the syntactic confusion of the last four lines. After «the darkness drops again», the speaker *knows*

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?

The simple question «What is the man *saying*?» is not inappropriate here<sup>26</sup>: Yeats's narrator claims to *know* something whose expression in the last two lines turns out to be a question, in the same way that the final sentence turns out to be a grammatical quirk that begins with an assertion and ends with a question<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, James Olney is right in asking whether Yeats conceived «a complex sentence with two direct-object clauses and a nonparallel structure ("I know that... and what...") or «a complex-compound sentence (with "I" and "beast" as the subjects of the two independent clauses)»<sup>28</sup>. It is noteworthy, however, that his «loss of (grammatical) control» towards the end of the poem reminds one of the peculiar character of mediumistic utterance, of the delight of most mediums «in the use of unusual combinations of word-sounds and patterns», a fact explaining why they are called «frustrated linguists»<sup>29</sup>. The early Yeats «delighted in constructing puzzles»<sup>30</sup>; the

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25. Perloff, pp. 120-21.

26. See James Olney, «W. B. Yeats's Daimonic Memory», *Sewanee Review*, 85 (1977), p. 591.

27. Olney, p. 599.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 600.

29. See Vieda Skultans, *Intimacy and Ritual: A Study of Spiritualism, Mediums and Groups*, London, 1974, p. 18.

30. See John Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats*, London, 1975, p. 23.



Yeats of «The Second Coming» imitated the ways of Apollo Loxias, «the ambiguous one».

A question arises at this point: why should Yeats employ the language of trance-speaking? It would appear that Yeats resorted to the ambiguity of mediumistic utterance because he thought it would heighten the portentousness of his message, in the same way that his use of «abstract» mediumistic imagery heightens the portentousness of the «vast image». But one can think of another, less obvious, reason, suggested by Richard Ellmann's view that «The Second Coming» should not be regarded as a poem hailing the «new dispensation», the «new cycle», for

The two editions of *A Vision* paint a pleasanter picture of the new god than might be expected, and are not wholly consistent with the poem.... But ... «The Second Coming» gives no hint of the redeeming of even salutary qualities of the new dispensation<sup>31</sup>.

Like a medium, the poet is not to be held responsible for the «entrance» of the «vast image», the «rough beast»: his ego-consciousness is suddenly controlled by images «out of *Spiritus Mundi*», in the same way that the medium's mind is raped «from above» and extinguished.

The *modus operandi* of trance-mediumship provides the poet with a device that allows him to present a prophecy whose fulfilment is neither welcomed nor rejected by the poem, an oracular riddle for which he is as responsible as a modern sibyl or Cassandra who foresees «Plagues, troubles, blood», fire and cataclysm.

In the above context, Goldman's views on the relationship between «The Second Coming» and trance-mediumship may result in a better understanding of the psychological dimensions of the poem. Indeed, the term «mediumship» can be understood on various levels. For a convinced spiritualist, it is the process of «communication between the material and spirit world»<sup>32</sup>. For a Jungian psychologist, it is a way of communicating with «the deep», with «shadowy personifications of unconscious contents»<sup>33</sup>. For Yeats the poet it is a metaphor for his art. The unconscious may be paralleled to a medium who has the power

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31. *The Identity of Yeats*, p. 258.

32. Nandor Fodor, *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science*, New York, 1966, p. 232.

33. See C. G. Jung, «Psychology and Spiritualism», *The Symbolic Life*, trans. R. C. F. Hull, eds. H. Read, M. Fordham, and G. Adler, London, 1977, p. 312.



of revealing age-old truths, as it «corresponds to the mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors»<sup>34</sup>. Like a «medium», the unconscious perception is not impeded by the space-time barrier, for, as Jung suggests, it can obtain experiences to which the conscious mind has no access—it can fish out collective form and meaning from the universal store-house of images, Yeats's *Spiritus Mundi*. Moreover, as some writers on aesthetics suggest, and as Yeats knows very well, the poet's function is analogous to that of the seer: the poet sits «on the tripod of the Muse» (ἐν τῷ τρίποδι τῆς Μούσης). These writers remind us that George Eliot spoke of a strange power which guided her thoughts and feelings, and that Nietzsche spoke of a revelation, a sudden «presence» which «possesses» the creative mind<sup>35</sup>. And Melchiori noted that, for the poet, the experience of revelation is «of such intensity that the poet feels it as a mental and psychical rape», «a rape from above»<sup>36</sup>, as clearly seen in «Leda and the Swan». One may also speak of an «invasion» or «eruption» of «archetypal» images which possess the mind.

Just before the beginning of the opposite cycle, the narrator or poet-medium «sees» a «blood-dimmed tide» analogous to the «Plagues, troubles, blood» of Mère du Bourg or Jung's vision of «a monstrous flood» which anticipated the first world war<sup>37</sup>. Then, after the incantatory repetition of «Surely», «at hand», and «the Second Coming»<sup>38</sup>, the «vast image» comes «out of *Spiritus Mundi*» and brings with it the archetypal motif of the Divine Birth or incarnation. Yet there is a shocking contrast between the birth of the «rough beast» and the birth that is considered the entry of the divine into our world<sup>39</sup>.

34. See James Olney, «The Esoteric Flower: Yeats and Jung» in *Yeats and the Occult*, op. cit., p. 40.

35. Γ. Α. Μποζώνης, *Αισθητικοὶ Προβληματισμοί*, Ἀθήνα, 1982, σσ. 33-34. [G. A. Bozonis, «Questions in Aesthetics», Athens, 1982, pp. 33-34].

36. *The Whole Mystery of Art*, p. 68.

37. See C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston, Glasgow, 1967, p. 199: «Towards the autumn of 1913 the pressure which I had felt was in me seemed to be moving outwards, as though there was something in the air. The atmosphere seemed to me darker than it had been.... In October, while I was on a journey, I was suddenly seized by an overpowering vision: I saw a monstrous flood covering all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the Alps.... I realised that a frightful catastrophe was in progress».

38. See also Stallworthy, p. 24.

39. See Maud Bodkin, «The Image of the Divine Birth», *Studies of Type-Images in Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy*, London, 1951, p. 64.

It appears that this contrast annoyed some Christian circles that perhaps would not have been alarmed had the poem been titled «A Second Coming» or «The Second Birth» which appears in the first full draft<sup>40</sup>. Yeats's «irreverent» variation on the archetypal motif of the Divine Birth also annoyed some critical —not necessarily Christian— circles, for, they claimed, «nothing in the poem justifies the ... merely misleading outcry that the Second Coming, with all of its traditional reverberations, is upon us»: the poem is characterized by «much arbitrariness and incoherence», as Christianity is «largely irrelevant to the poem», being «dragged into its vortex by Yeats's title»<sup>41</sup>. According to the spiritualistic scenario, however, the narrator-medium hardly announces «The Second Coming» («hardly are these words out»), when his «sight» is troubled by the «vast image» and his voice is superseded by the voice of a control. *The Second Coming* is expected by the speaker as much as it is expected by the reader. We should not forget that before or after the poem was composed, spiritualists, occultists, and Adventists were thrilled at the prospect of «the good news», the New Dispensation, and that, in 1925, Annie Besant presented the world with the new Messiah who was no other than Krishnamurti<sup>42</sup>. Yeats was in touch with these currents of «the occult underground». But, like a medium, the speaker is suddenly «raped from above»; instead of «the good news», there follows the description of a nightmare vision.

Yeats's «imitation» of trance-mediumship and his «irreverent» variation on the archetypal motif of the Divine Birth point towards a more comprehensive approach to the psychological and even «historical» content of the poem. To understand this content, we should first consider Jung's observations on the «psychological» aspects of the rise of Nazism and the return or rebirth of Wotan, the German god of war. I will give a short summary of these observations, which were published in 1918, 1936, and 1946<sup>43</sup>.

Already in 1918, Jung had noticed some strange disturbances in the unconscious of his German patients, which could not be explained

40. See Stallworthy, p. 22.

41. See Harold Bloom, *Yeats*, New York, 1970, pp. 321-22.

42. See Lady Emily Lutens' account in *Candles in the Sun*, London, 1975, pp. 172-73. Alternatively you can see Webb, *The Occult Underground*, p.104.

43. C. G. Jung, *Τὸ Ἀρχέτυπο τοῦ Ὀλοκληρωτισμοῦ*, μετφρ. Σ. Ἀντζακᾶ, Ἀθήνα, 1972 [«The Archetype of Totalitarianism», trans. S. Antzaka, Athens, 1972].

on the basis of personal psychology. As these non-personal phenomena were always expressed in dreams as mythological motifs, Jung called them «archetypes», that is typical modi in which such collective phenomena find expression. The archetypes he diagnosed in his patients suggested an eruption of primitive elements such as violence and cruelty. After dealing with a considerable number of similar cases, he concluded that a «strange» mental climate was prevalent in Germany, and in a study he published at that time he hinted that the «blond beast» had started stirring in its sleep<sup>44</sup>.

This mental climate, he thought, was not an exclusively Teutonic phenomenon, though the German psyche proved more vulnerable. The tide that was loosed in the collective unconscious after the first world war had the unmitigated, devastating force of «all the dark powers», «the demons of totalitarianism»<sup>45</sup>, which eventually found an outlet in Hitler's «new order». Already in 1918, Jung was asking:

Where are today's superior intellects, those capable of thought? If they exist no-one pays them any attention. Instead, a general frenzy is prevalent, a universal and fatal force, against whose overwhelming influence the individual cannot react<sup>46</sup>.

Jung spoke of an epidemic of madness, and in his essay on «Wotan», first published in March 1936, he noted that this «ancient god of storm and madness» who releases passions and the thirst for war had been awakened after a long period of sleep<sup>47</sup>. Wotan was reborn in the youth movement (*Jugendbewegung*), and in the sacrifices which celebrated his rebirth much blood was spilt<sup>48</sup>. This phenomenon of mass hysteria was comparable to a «possession» by infernal spirits, Wotan being the «irrational psychic factor» that overwhelms civilization<sup>49</sup>.

The analogies between Jung's observations and «The Second Coming» are obvious. At about the time (1918) when Jung diagnoses an eruption of primitive archetypal elements, violence and cruelty, Yeats's narrator-medium speaks of «Mere anarchy» that «is loosed upon the world». When Jung refers to the tide that was loosed in the «collective

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44. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

45. Ibid., pp. 23 and 31.

46. Ibid., p. 33.

47. Ibid., p. 59.

48. Ibid., p. 57.

49. Ibid., p. 66.

unconscious» the narrator speaks of «The blood-dimmed tide». When Jung asks «Where are today's superior intellects...?» the narrator protests that «the best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity». And when Jung hints at the appearance of the «blond beast» and diagnoses Wotan's return after a long period of deep sleep, Yeats's narrator-medium is «possessed» by the violent «entrance» of the «rough beast» that «Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born» after «twenty centuries of stony sleep».

In this context, «The Second Coming» seems to justify the view that the poet's function is analogous to that of a medium, that like a medium the poet is in contact with the primordial images and forces of the collective psyche which underlie the conscious surface of civilization. Yeats himself accepted the role of a medium or prophet. In a much-quoted letter to Ethel Mannin in which he was trying to prove that, as Ellmann says, «he was not indifferent or callous towards the rise of fascism»<sup>50</sup>, he wrote:

If you have my poems by you, look up a poem called *The Second Coming*. It was written some sixteen or seventeen years ago and foretold what is happening....

I am not callous, every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe, «the ceremony of innocence is drowned»<sup>51</sup>.

But what does a «medium» *know* about his revelations? What will the future bring? «Never trust the poet, trust the poem», as D.H. Lawrence would say<sup>52</sup>.

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50. *The Identity of Yeats*, p. 258.

51. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, edited by Allan Wade, London, 1954, p. 851.

52. Lawrence actually said: «Never trust the artist. Trust the tale». See «The Spirit of Place» in *20th Century Literary Criticism*, edited by David Lodge, London, 1972, p. 123.