

L3 Study of Literary Texts
Modernist Poetry

W. B. YEATS

"The Second Coming"

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?

From T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

II. A Game of Chess

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne, 77
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion.
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia, 92
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene 98
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king 99
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

'What it that noise?'

The wind under the door. 118

'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'

Nothing again nothing.

'Do

'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

'Nothing?'

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?' 126

But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag - 128

It's so elegant

So intelligent

'What shall I do now? What shall I do?'

'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

'With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?

'What shall we ever do?'

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess, 138

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said -

I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.

He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you

To get herself some teeth. He did, I was there.

You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,

He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,

He's been in the army for four years, he wants a good time,

And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.

Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.

Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.

Others can pick and choose if you can't.

But if Albert makes off, it won't be for a lack of telling.

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.

You *are* a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,

What you get married for if you don't want children?

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot -
HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night. 172

Notes

77. Cf. *Antony and Cleopatra*, II. ii. 190.

This passage is reminiscent of the description of Imogen's bedroom in *Cymbeline*, which also mentions Cupids.

92. Laquearia. V. *Aeneid*, I. 726:

Laquearia means a "panelled ceiling," and Eliot's note quotes the passage in the *Aeneid* that was his source for the word. The passage may be translated: "Blazing torches hang from the gold-panelled ceiling [laquearibus aureis], and torches conquer the night with flames." Virgil is describing the banquet given by Dido, queen of Carthage, for Aeneas, with whom she fell in love.

98. Sylvan scene. V. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iv. 140.

99. V. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vi, Philomela.

118. Cf. Webster: 'Is the wind in that door still?'

128. Hamlet's dying words in the Folio text - either a corruption, or actor's revision, of the speech in the Quarto.

138. Cf. the game of chess in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*.

172. Ophelia's last words in *Hamlet*, IV v.