

What Rough Beast

[R Hodges](#) © Feb 2023

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?*

Yeats' awe-ful vision seems at hand. In face of looming crisis after crisis in the world, not least the one Yeats' world faced a hundred years ago, it has long seemed topical. But today, for the first time, we shudder before The Singularity—not yet Kurzweil's Big Singularity (*The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, 2005) when robot machines will become able to evolve and create themselves and humanity will be rendered obsolete, but at least a foretaste: the new AI “transformers,” which transform a few words of instruction into stunning texts (Open AI's ChatGPT, Microsoft's New Bing, Google's Bard) or images (Stable Diffusion). Art, Writing, Education, Scholarship, Journalism, Politics already reel from these still embryonic technologies. While many sneer and deprecate, others already deploy the results, for good (perhaps) and, all too soon, for definite evil too. We need to try to understand this new exudation out of *Spiritus Mundi*. This can only come from actually working with these brave new means, seeing what they can do and cannot do, finding creative ways to use them.

Gurdjieff was one of the last of the great smiths whose heavy hammers were to beat us into Being. But these days his forge-fires run to cold, the iron blanks lie stiff and dark upon the anvil, far from red-glow softness needed for that work. The old cults meant to save the world need new fuel, new human wood and flesh for sacrificial pyramids (“The Way of Sacrifice and the Light

Within”, <https://richardhodes.com/SacrificeAndLight4.htm> R. Hodges 2015); or we need to kindle up new cults entirely.

Fifty years ago J G Bennett started new fire (*I Teach How to Cook (but not what to cook): A story of John Godolphin Bennett*, Ben Bennett 2023). He was not the only one to try to light a fresh Gurdjieff campfire—but one of the more successful: some remnants of his efforts still survive, on life support. He died before his furnace really flared, the few sparks it shot off have mostly faded. But, memorably, he prophesied (*Intimations: Talks with J. G. Bennett at Beshara*, 2016) that, without new fire, in fifty years the world would be unlivable, transformed downward by too many people too dependent on too much technology. Just now that fifty years is up. Does anybody really see what is happening, really care, care enough, and *know* enough (a big issue in this business), to pump the bellows hard and make the iron glow again?