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: a waste of desert sand;
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
Wind 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?
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,
Ceremony of Innocence

a novel by

Timothy Richardson

and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
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:
a waste of desert sand;
A shape with lion body
and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless
as the sun,
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
Wind 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...
...And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem...

to be born?

(Slouches to be born ??)
Hmmm... what should I title my epic comic about Israel and Palestine?

Something from that Yeats poem would be perfect! "Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer... something something... slouches toward Bethlehem..."

Too bad "slouching toward Bethlehem" is already cliché. Sigh.

I should probably write the thing before I worry about a title. "Things fall apart, the center cannot hold..."
What W. B. Yeats’s ‘Second Coming’ Really Says About the Iraq War

By ADAM COHEN

The Brookings Institution, the prominent Washington research organization, just released a report on the Iraq war entitled “Things Fall Apart.” When Representative Jim McDermott, Democrat of Washington, took to the House floor last year to demand that President Bush present a plan for Iraq, he called his speech “The Center Cannot Hold.” Blogs are full of the observation that “the blood-dimmed tide is loosed” in Iraq these days.

These phrases all come from William Butler Yeats’s “Second Coming.” Yeats’s bleakly apocalyptic poem has long been irresistible to pundits. What historical era, after all, is not neatly summed up by his lament that “The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity”? But with its somber vision of looming anarchy, and its Middle Eastern backdrop (the terrifying beast Yeats warns of “slouches towards Bethlehem”),

“The Second Coming” is fast becoming the official poem of the Iraq war.
The pundits who quote it, though, are picking up on Yeats’s words, but not his world view. As Helen Vendler, the great Harvard poetry scholar, and others have pointed out, “The Second Coming” is really two poems. The first eight lines are filled with the pointed aphorisms that pundits like so much, while the rest of the poem suggests the unpredictability of how history will unfold. This second, less quoted part is the one that speaks most directly to the grim situation in Iraq.

Yeats wrote “The Second Coming” in 1919, an especially dismal moment in history. Europeans were shell-shocked from World War I, and deeply cynical. Yeats’s homeland, Ireland, was lurching toward civil war. The old order in Russia had just been toppled by a revolution that Yeats — who had a fondness for aristocracy — feared would spread across the continent and the globe.

Yeats’s perspective on the world’s troubles was not what many people who quote him today might suspect. For one thing, he was not a Christian [note: he was a Protestant but—yes—he was not an orthodox Christian]. He dabbled in theosophy and the occult, and considered Christianity an idea whose time had passed. “The Second Coming” is not, as its title and the Bethlehem reference might suggest, an account of the return of the Messiah. What is being born is nothing resembling Christ.
As for his politics, Yeats was hardly a democrat, and he did not care much for “progress” — which makes him an odd choice for people who hope to turn Iraq into a vibrant democracy. Yeats was attracted to fascism, and he rebelled as a youth against the adults’ talk of progress by embracing its opposite. “I took satisfaction in certain public disasters, felt sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin,” he once wrote.

The first eight lines of “The Second Coming,” as Ms. Vendler notes, are the philosophical part of the poem. A rational, thinking observer — a pundit, of sorts — is describing the world in definite, if foreboding, terms. “The falcon cannot hear the falconer” paints a vivid image of the natural order coming apart. “Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” describes an onslaught of destruction almost matter-of-factly.

But after those eight lines, the poem suddenly becomes, as Ms. Vendler notes, “oracular.” Like the Delphic oracle, this Yeats speaks cryptically. “Surely the Second Coming is at hand,” he says — but of course, “surely” here means its opposite: what follows is not certain at all. Yeats goes on to announce “somewhere in sands of the desert/ A shape with lion body and the head of a man” — an indefinite creature in an indefinite place.
The poem reflects, as Harold Bloom, the Yale professor and literary critic, says, Yeats’s belief that a “change in god” was coming, “and that the 2,000-year reign of Christianity was about to end.” But it does not reveal who this god will be. Its last two lines are a question: “And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”

“The Second Coming” is a powerful brief against punditry. The Christian era was about the ability to predict the future: the New Testament clearly foretold the second coming of Christ. In the post-Christian era of which Yeats was writing there was no Bible to map out what the next “coming” would be. The world would have to look toward Bethlehem to see what “rough beast” arrived.

This skepticism about predicting the future has more relevance to the Iraq war than any of the poem’s much-quoted first eight lines. The story of the Iraq war is one of confident predictions that never came to pass: “We will find weapons of mass destruction”; “we will be greeted as liberators”; “the insurgency is in its last throes.”
The confident predictors who have been wrong in the past do not hesitate to keep offering up plans. That is true of President Bush, certainly: he talks about what his “troop surge” will do as if he had never been wrong before. It is also true of the pundits. The co-author of “Things Fall Apart,” the Brookings guide to going forward in Iraq, is Kenneth Pollack, who is — incredibly — best known for his 2002 book “The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq.”

It is bizarre to see shards of “The Second Coming” appended to the Brookings report, or to any of the other plans and prognostications about the war in Iraq. Yeats, who grew up feeling “sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin,” did not just welcome whatever new order his rough beast was ushering in. He believed the only way it could plausibly be spoken of was in the form of a question.
The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the underling gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy in Heaven-long has stood
The blood-drenched shore
equally distant. The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The head lack all conviction, while it wears
too few of passionate intensity.

TS. Eliot

[Handwritten notes and corrections]

The Second Coming

The dark moon drops again. I know
That thirty centuries of sleep
Was voped to rights more by a murdering crowd
And that group's heart, the hour come round at last
In the slumberous town. The children are born.
That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
--Those dying generations--at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.
O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

This is another poem about the "immortality" of art.

Art is of its time & often ahead of its time.