

William Butler Yeats

Yeats is perhaps the most prominent Irish poet of the 20th Century. He was born in Dublin in 1865, the son of a middle class, landowning painter. In his late teens Yeats discovered both his love for poetry and politics, becoming involved in the Celtic Revival Movement that sought to rid Ireland of the cultural influences of England.

Yeats' poetry relied heavily on mythological, spiritual and religious references. He used strong allusion to these areas to present. His, often pessimistic, political views – not only about his home country, but also the politics of the rest of Europe as well. His poetic works are full of rich imagery and philosophical meanderings, and his 1920 poem 'The Second Coming' is considered to be one of the most important works of literature produced in the 20th Century for its vision and almost prophetic symbolism.

Yeats' politics grew stronger as he grew older. He was appointed a Senator of the Irish Free State in 1922 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923, using the win to promote his Nationalistic pride.

Yeats died in January 1939, before the start of the second world war. He was buried in France, and later his remains were moved to County Sligo in his home country. His death wish was to create as little fuss as possible, and his epitaph reflects this with the lines:

"Cast a cold Eye

On Life, on Death

Horseman, pass by!"