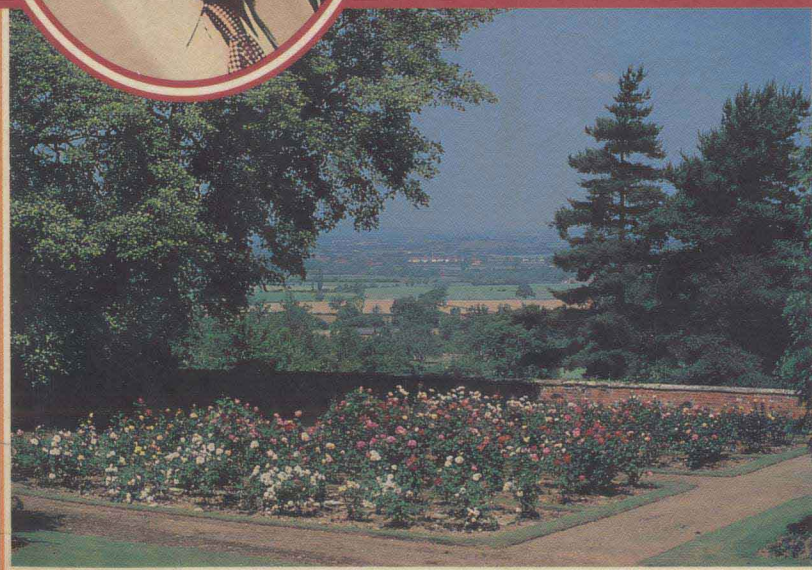




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T·S·ELIOT  
COMPANION  
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*Macmillan Literary Companions*

# A T. S. ELIOT COMPANION

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Life and Works

F. B. PINION

**M**  
MACMILLAN

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# List of Illustrations

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*between pages 148 and 149*

- 1 T. S. Eliot, aged about seven, with Annie Dunne
- 2 With his father in 1898; aged ten, reading
- 3 Henry Ware Eliot, at Harvard, 1902; T. S. Eliot, aged twelve
- 4 Gloucester Harbour from the Eliots' summer-house; the Dry Salvages
- 5 1921: London Bridge and St Magnus Martyr; Mrs Eliot with Tom and his sister Marian
- 6 City churches in 1984: St Mary Woolnoth and St Magnus Martyr
- 7 John Middleton Murry, 1918; Vivienne Eliot at Garsington in 1921
- 8 Bertrand Russell, c. 1923: Wyndham Lewis
- 9 Ezra Pound in Paris, 1923; T. S. Eliot outside Faber and Gwyer's, 1926
- 10 Vivienne in one of the London flats she shared with Tom; 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'
- 11 Crowhurst Church and its historic yew
- 12 Chipping Campden Church, and the dry pools at Burnt Norton
- 13 The rose-garden at Burnt Norton, and Little Gidding Church
- 14 1951: the Epstein bust of Eliot; Eliot at a rehearsal of *Murder in the Cathedral*
- 15 Eliot and his wife Valerie at the University of Sheffield in May 1959
- 16 East Coker: St Michael's Church and the Eliot Memorial

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It is impossible to assess my obligations to writers on Eliot over a long period. I have discarded many interpretations in the course of time, but I am sure I must be indebted to Grover Smith and others for whom I have not made room in my short list of bibliographical recommendations. No study has done more to reawaken, deepen, and intensify my interest in Eliot, particularly his poetry, than Lyndall Gordon's *Eliot's Early Years*.

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# Contents

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<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> ix
------------------------------	----------------

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
------------------------	---

## PART ONE: ELIOT'S LIFE

Chronology	3
1 St Louis to England	6
2 To <i>The Waste Land</i>	17
3 Religious Commitment and Marriage Breakdown	27
4 Years of Growing Fame	43
5 Final Happiness	54

## PART TWO: ELIOT'S WORKS

6 Early Verse	61
7 From 'Preludes' to 'Prufrock'	68
8 Incidental Poetry	78
9 Quatrains	85
10 Preliminaries to <i>The Waste Land</i>	96
11 Influences	109
12 <i>The Waste Land</i>	119
13 Critical Essays	
i Chiefly <i>The Sacred Wood</i>	140
ii Seventeenth-Century Poetry	153
iii More on Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama	160
14 Poems, including <i>Ash-Wednesday</i>	168
15 Essays and Lectures	
i Baudelaire and Dante	185
ii Humanism and Christianity	191
iii Lectures in America, 1932-1933	197



# PART ONE

## Eliot's Life

Valerie Eliot to Timothy Wilson, *Observer Review*, 20 February 1972:

Tom often used to say his life was a Dostoevsky novel written by Middleton Murry.

Lines often quoted by T. S. Eliot from E. B. Browning's 'A Musical Instrument':

The true gods sigh for the cost and pain –  
For the reed which grows never more again . . . .



# Chronology

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*Titles are placed according to the dates of publication.*

- 1888 26 September: birth of Thomas Stearns Eliot.  
1898 Enters Smith Academy, St Louis.  
1905 Sent to Milton Academy.  
1906 Begins his graduate studies at Harvard University.  
1910 Graduates and, after his summer vacation at Gloucester, Cape Ann, travels to Paris for a year at the Sorbonne.  
1911 Returns to Harvard for postgraduate studies, after a visit to Munich (and probably to the Bavarian Alps).  
1914 Awarded a Sheldonian Travelling Scholarship to pursue philosophical studies for one year at Oxford. After visits to Belgium and northern Italy, he reaches Marburg to attend lectures in philosophy. Leaves hurriedly when war is threatened, and reaches London just before its outbreak. Work at Oxford begins in October.  
1915 Dardanelles (Gallipoli) campaign. 26 June: marries Vivienne Haigh-Wood.  
1917 Joins Lloyds Bank in March. America enters the First World War, and Eliot volunteers for service in the Navy. *Prufrock and Other Observations*.  
1918 Renewed attempts to enlist in the summer. War ends in November.  
1919 Death of Eliot's father in January. *Poems*. Holiday in the Dordogne with Ezra Pound.  
1920 *Ara Vos Prec*. Holiday with Wyndham Lewis in France: meets Joyce in Paris. *The Sacred Wood*.  
1921 Eliot's mother visits England. October: to Cliftonville, near Margate. November: to Lausanne.  
1922 Editing of *The Criterion*; the first issue (October) contains *The Waste Land*. In America, after the appearance of the poem in *The Dial* (November), it is published for the first time in book form, with notes.

- 1923 The first British edition of *The Waste Land* in book form (September).
- 1924 Eliot's mother visits England again. He wishes to write modern drama to drum-beat rhythms. *Homage to John Dryden*.
- 1925 Eliot appointed to a directorship with the publishers Faber and Gwyer. 'The Hollow Men' completed and included in *Poems, 1909-1925*.
- 1926 *Savonarola*, his mother's long dramatic poem, published with an introduction by Eliot. Sweeney dramatic fragments published in October and the following January.
- 1927 Eliot becomes a convert to the Church of England. 'Journey of the Magi'. Introduction to *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*. Eliot becomes a British citizen.
- 1928 Second edition of *The Sacred Wood*, with an important new preface. *For Lancelot Andrewes*.
- 1929 March: Faber and Gwyer becomes Faber and Faber. Essay on Dante.
- 1930 *Ash-Wednesday*, Eliot's translation of St-John Perse's *Anabase*, and 'Marina', are published. He meets Bishop Bell and Martin Browne.
- 1931 'Thoughts after Lambeth'; 'Triumphal March'.
- 1932 Leaves England in September to give the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard.
- 1933 Returns to England in June, having decided not to live with his wife again. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*.
- 1934 *After Strange Gods; The Rock*.
- 1935 *Murder in the Cathedral*.
- 1936 *Collected Poems, 1909-1935*, including 'Difficulties of a Statesman' and 'Burnt Norton'.
- 1938 Awarded an honorary degree at Cambridge (June). 29 September: France and Britain sign pact on Czechoslovakia with Hitler at Munich.
- 1939 *The Criterion* discontinued. *The Family Reunion*. *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* published in October, about a month after the outbreak of the Second World War. *The Idea of a Christian Society*.
- 1940 'East Coker'. British troops evacuated from Dunkirk beaches from 29 May to 3 June.

- 1941 'Burnt Norton' (*see* 1936); 'The Dry Salvages'.  
1942 Visit to Sweden. 'Little Gidding'.  
1943 *Four Quartets* (New York edition; London edition, 1944).  
1945 In May, at the end of war in western Europe, Eliot visits Paris; in December he sees Ezra Pound in Washington.  
1947 23 January: death of Vivienne. Eliot receives an honorary degree at Harvard.  
1948 Awarded the Order of Merit. *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. Receives the Nobel Prize in Stockholm.  
1949 Appoints Valerie Fletcher as his secretary (August). Lecture tour in Germany with Arnold Toynbee.  
1950 *The Cocktail Party*. Lectures at the University of Chicago on education.  
1951 Enlarged edition of *Selected Essays* (first published in 1932).  
1953 Address at Washington University, to mark the centenary of its foundation by Eliot's grandfather.  
1954 *The Confidential Clerk*.  
1957 10 January: Eliot marries Valerie Fletcher. *On Poetry and Poets*.  
1959 *The Elder Statesman*.  
1962 *Collected Plays; George Herbert*.  
1963 *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*.  
1964 *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*.  
1965 4 January: death of Eliot. *To Criticize the Critic* (and other writings).  
1967 Memorial unveiled in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, on the second anniversary of Eliot's death. *Poems Written in Early Youth*.  
1969 *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*.

# 1

## St Louis to England

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Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on 26 September 1888 in the mid-west frontier town of St Louis, near the confluence of the broad Missouri and Mississippi rivers. His parents were of New England descent. On the paternal side, several of his ancestors had been Boston merchants; one, a Congregationalist, declined to leave his ministerial post after being elected President of Harvard University. They were the descendants of Andrew Eliot, who emigrated to America in 1669 from his home in the village of East Coker, near Yeovil, Somerset. The ashes of T. S. Eliot were buried, about three months after his death in January 1965, in the church of his ancestral parish, and there, in the north-west corner of St Michael's, East Coker, a plaque was unveiled to his memory the following September. 'In my end is my beginning.'

The first of the Eliots to reside in St Louis was the writer's grandfather William Greenleaf Eliot, who left Harvard Divinity School to complete his education in Washington, where he fell in love with a beautiful girl who shared his missionary zeal. They decided they could be most useful at St Louis, which had become the chief transport centre for the western states, and was to increase in importance with the extension of the railways until the development of Chicago on the Great Lakes. Originally a French eighteenth-century trading-post, St Louis now had a considerable German immigrant population, and was largely Catholic, with a growing influx of southerners and New Englanders. Drinking, gambling, slave-ownership, and even duelling were common. From Washington, after his marriage in 1837, W. G. Eliot returned with his bride to this conglomerate centre on the edge of the wild west, intent on fulfilling his

Unitarian and civilizing mission. He had the personality, organizing ability, and integrity to achieve great things; an able business man later claimed that, had he and Dr Eliot been in partnership, they would have gained financial control of all the great enterprises west of the Alleghenies.

Philanthropy came foremost, however. Eliot's grandfather was a leading figure when flood and fire disasters, followed by cholera, had to be coped with; even with a growing family he and his wife found time and room at home to provide for twenty-six orphans. A strong Union supporter, he was active in preventing the secession of Missouri and abolishing slavery in the State. During the Civil War his administrative talents ensured the building and maintenance of several military hospitals. He fought for prohibition and women's franchise, opposed the legalizing of prostitution, and did all he could to promote education. He set up a free mission school, founded Washington University (St Louis), with Smith Academy as its preparatory school, and Mary Institute as a school for girls; from 1872 until his death in 1887 he was President of Washington University.

Only five of his fourteen children survived. Of the four sons, two became Unitarian ministers; the second, Henry Ware Eliot, a graduate of Washington University, went into a wholesale grocery business, then joined a brickmaking firm, of which he became secretary and ultimately chairman. In 1869 he married Charlotte Champe Stearns, a St Louis teacher; she was a Bostonian, whose maternal ancestors included a seventeenth-century judge in the infamous Salem witch trials (at one of which Andrew Eliot is said to have served on the jury); another ancestor was the second President of Harvard. Unusually intelligent and cultured, she resented women's lack of opportunity for university education, wrote poetry, and exerted a strong but kindly moral and spiritual influence in the home. Her seven children were all born at 2635 Locust Street; of the six who survived, the first four were girls; an interval of nine years separated Thomas, the youngest, from his brother Henry. Like Tennyson, Thomas Stearns Eliot owed much to his mother; his poetry, like hers, shows the appeal of sainthood and regeneration. (Such was her admiration for her father-in-law that she worked arduously on his biography, which appeared in 1904; her longest poem, on Savonarola, was published in 1926,



with a preface by T. S. Eliot.) Her husband was interested in art and music; he had been a member of philharmonic and choral societies. He loved chess, and delighted his children in many ways, not least in sketching faces on egg-shells and drawing cats to the life. He gave generously to charities, Washington University, the Academy of Science which his father had founded, and the Missouri Botanical Garden. The Eliot home was happy and cultured.

Handicapped by congenital hernia, Tom was not allowed to take part in strenuous games, nor did he attend school until he was seven or eight. An early photograph suggests that he was mischievous and engaging, and he may have been spoilt at times. When his mother was engaged in social work, particularly with juvenile offenders, he was supervised by an elder sister, or by his Irish nursemaid Annie Dunne, for whom he conceived a genuine affection; she talked to him about God, and took him to her Catholic church. Some of his earliest pleasures are recalled in the poem 'Animula'. He remembered the sound of steamboats 'blowing in' the New Year, and expeditions to gather fossil shellfish on limestone bluffs above the Mississippi. It was more exciting and alarming to see the great river in flood, bearing its cargo of devastation and wreckage, with corpses of negroes and cattle, as an unforgettable testimony of nature's terrible ravages. He had acquired a taste for good food, and could remember late in life how, after enjoying his dessert when he was a child, he would feign astonishment at its disappearance, and exclaim 'There it isn't!' Far from being pampered, he was taught to be self-denyingly concerned for the wants of others, so much so that he grew up thinking it a sin to eat sweets, and unable to allow himself such an indulgence until he gave up smoking in his sixties. During his early years, his grandmother lived near, an embodiment of her departed husband's principles, which seemed like the Mosaic tables of God's testimony.

Henry Ware Eliot, who had prospered from railroad and other industrial investments, took his family to New England for seaside holidays; eventually to Gloucester, a deep-sea port on the sheltered side of Cape Ann. From 1896 they stayed at the shingled, high-chimneyed villa built for him at Eastern Point, a small rocky moorland peninsula overlooking the Atlantic and Gloucester harbour. Here Tom became friendly

with fishermen of strong religious outlook, from whom he heard tales of storm and shipwreck. To the north-east of Cape Ann could be seen a rocky reef known as the Dry Salvages (a corruption, Eliot thought, of 'les trois sauvages', though 'Dry' is usually interpreted as non-submerged); lost in seething foam and spray, or in thick far-flung mist, this barrier had proved fatal to many vessels. During his adolescence Eliot became a proficient sailor; he learnt much from his brother Henry, more from local fishermen, and became habituated to varying voices of the sea, its howl and yelp, the wailing warning on Thacher Island or at Eastern Point lighthouse, the clanging bell, and the whistling buoy. With further experience, he participated in sailings as far north as Maine, becoming familiar with coast and islands; at times, when befogged close inshore, he could scent the pines or hear the song of the woodthrush; on returning, there were the rocky hazards of the Dry Salvages, the Little Salvages (visible only at low tide), and the intervening Flat Ground, which was always submerged.

It is no wonder that, probably after reading Melville, he wrote two nautically informed, incident-packed, fantastically sensational stories, 'A Tale of a Whale' and 'The Man who was King', both set in the South Pacific (to which he was to return in a Sweeney fragment). They were composed while he was a student at Smith Academy, which he had attended from 1898. Here he proved to be an outstanding scholar, taking the Greek prize and excelling in English; he remembered being introduced to the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* in the same year. At the age of fourteen he came under the spell of Omar Khayyám's *Rubáiyát*, and wrote gloomy atheistical quatrains in the style of its 'translator' Edward FitzGerald. He enjoyed reading and re-reading *The Light of Asia*, a long epic poem by Sir Edwin Arnold on the life of Buddha. His poems in the *Smith Academy Record* reveal the influence of anthology lyrics by Jonson and Herrick, of *The Ingoldsby Legends*, Byron, and other Romantic poets, and of Victorians such as Tennyson and Swinburne. The ode written to express the feelings of graduands such as he on leaving their *alma mater* in 1905 would have pleased his grandfather: the new century would be great only if her sons proved to be heroic in the fight against pain and misery.

From Smith Academy Eliot proceeded to Milton Academy, a select New England preparatory school, where he concentrated