

Literature Insights
General Editor: Charles Moseley

T. S. Eliot:
'The Love Song of
J. Alfred Prufrock'
and *The Waste Land*

C. J. Ackerley

*'He do the
police in
different
voices'*

PUBLICATION DATA

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A Note on the Author

Chris Ackerley took his BA and MA at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, and his PhD at the University of Toronto. He has taught at the University of Otago, New Zealand, since 1976, and was Head of Department 2001–03. His speciality is annotation, particularly of the works of Malcolm Lowry and Samuel Beckett. His books include: *A Companion to 'Under the Volcano'* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984); *Demented Particulars: The Annotated 'Murphy'* (1998; 2nd ed., rev. Tallahassee, FL: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2004); *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, with S.E. Gontarski (Tallahassee, FL: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2005); republished as *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006); and *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated 'Watt'* (Tallahassee, FL: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2005).

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*And I am accustomed to more documentation;
I like to know where writers get their ideas from...*

—Charles Augustus Conybeare,
The Carlton Club, Liverpool.¹

¹ Otherwise T. S. Eliot, writing in *The Egoist* (December 1917).

Part 1: Before *The Waste Land*

1.1 Eliot's Life and Works

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St Louis on 26 September 1888. His father, Henry Ware Eliot, a successful businessman and an executive of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company, married in 1860 Charlotte Champe Stearns, a woman with literary intentions who wrote a biography of Eliot's grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot and a dramatic poem about Savonarola. The family had New England and Unitarian connections (both are manifest in Eliot's early writing). The young Tom Eliot was schooled at Smith Academy, St Louis, and the Milton Academy, Massachusetts, before enrolling at Harvard in 1906, where he took his Master's degree (1910) in philosophy. That year he began the 'The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', which remained published until 1915. In 1911 Eliot went to the Sorbonne, Paris, where he met a young Frenchman named Jean Verdenal; then he returned to Harvard where he studied Sanskrit and furthered his love of French poetry as he began a doctoral dissertation on F. H. Bradley, author of *Appearance and Reality*, a text that exercised considerable influence on his thought. In 1914, Eliot was awarded the Sheldon Fellowship in philosophy, which gave him a year in England. He visited Marburg, Germany, that summer, but the outbreak of war forced him back to Merton College, Oxford, where he continued his studies before making three crucial decisions (each encouraged by Ezra Pound): to forsake philosophy for poetry; to marry Vivien Haigh-Wood; and to settle in England.

Each proved momentous: Eliot would become the spokesman for the disillusion of a post-War generation; the marriage to Vivien would be a defining feature of his life, her neuralgia, insomnia and menstrual problems meeting his highly-strung consciousness and sexual fastidiousness; and he would become a quintessentially English voice and the most respected poet of his age. Partly in reaction to his marriage Eliot began to seek his personal and cultural consolation in Christianity, finally becoming, in his words, 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in