

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)

Poet, playwright, and literary critic, Eliot shaped Anglo-American culture profoundly in the first half of the 20th century. His experiments in diction, style and versification revitalized English poetry and made him a leader in the Modernist movement. Born in St. Louis Missouri, he came of New England stock as his forbears left England in the 17th century to settle in Massachusetts. Educated at Harvard, Oxford, and Sorbonne universities, he was deeply interested in history and philosophy. He moved to London in 1914 and eventually became a British citizen and converted to the Anglican church. These events are crucial in understanding his development as a poet. Amongst his outstanding productions, *The Waste Land* lends a vision of the paralysis and spiritual bankruptcy of modern life. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* evokes his American roots with the New England world of polite conversation. Often considered obscure because of his use of quotation and allusion, much of Eliot's poetry can be read with pleasure at first sight. Recognition as the greatest English poet of his time came in 1948 with the award of the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for literature.