



# **T.S. Eliot, Poetry, and Earth: The Name of the Lotos Rose (Ecocritical Theory and Practice)**

*Etienne Terblanche*

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T. S. Eliot enjoyed a profound relationship with Earth. Criticism of his work does not suggest that this exists in his poetic oeuvre. Writing into this gap, Etienne Terblanche demonstrates that Eliot presents Earth as a process in which humans immerse themselves. *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* in particular re-locate the modern reader towards mindfulness of Earth's continuation as a process in which one participates.

These findings, based on careful reading of the poems, allows the book to venture into ecocritical terrain, focusing on the recent advent of new materialism as a microcosm of ecocriticism, building on and/or critiquing the work of Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, Gary Snyder, Jane Bennett, and others. Here the argument delves into important questions about the relative crisis within ecocriticism to which Eliot's poetry may well give a certain direction. His poetry uses indirectness and skepticism as avenues into directness and affirmation of earthly being and non-being, therefore speaking to the ways in which new materialism places ecocriticism between fairly drastic material skepticism (based on the linguistic turn) and affirmation of earthly agency.

Should new materialism continue to clamor towards the linguistic turn? Should it perpetuate the twin legacies of culture studies that avoid actual analysis in response to the real presence of great art and poststructuralist infinite differentiation that undermines not only real poetic presence, but also that of an agentic Earth? The argument seeks answers to these questions from the *eco-logos* of Eliot's poems, that is, the way in which they orient themselves within Earth's remarkably continuing process. It concludes that his poetic project, which roots the life of significant soil also through the act of linguistic dislocation marks an illuminating instance of the continuing bond between meaningfulness and the primacy of humanity's connections with Earth, providing impetus to ecocriticism's way forward.

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