

Juliette Bretan

T.S. Eliot, Post-War Geopolitics and ‘Eastern Europe’

Digressing from decidedly prosaic themes in a letter to his mother in December 1919 – a lingering cold, Christmas plans and a vague New Year’s resolution of writing ‘a long poem I have had on my mind for a long time’ – to include a rousing, two-pronged critique against American apathy towards global peacemaking, and the complicated reconstruction of new nation-states, T.S. Eliot pulls no punches at the state of post-war Europe:

The peace treaty seems to be held up indefinitely in America. I hope it will not prevent America from helping in Central Europe; the destitution, especially the starvation in Vienna, appears to be unspeakable. I suppose Americans realise now what a fiasco the reorganisation of nationalities has been: the ‘Balkanisation’ of Europe.¹

Eliot was commenting on American isolationism and neutrality following the First World War, with Woodrow Wilson’s failure to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, and limited American support for the League of Nations. He was also referring to the slow burn and enduringly complex effort to establish the boundaries of the newly appearing nation states of Europe, especially in its east.² This is a passage, we might argue, which reveals Eliot’s interest in the east of Europe – an interest particularly manifesting as a recurrent anxiety about affairs in Vienna, which he pedestals as a site of inarticulate human suffering, reflecting the widespread popularity of support for the city at the time in British cultural and political circles.³ However, the letter also suggests a certain tension within Eliot’s perspective. For whilst he specifies Viennese sympathy, this is counterpointed against a stigmatisation of the wider political difficulties in the region post-war, which were contributing to civic breakdown. Central Europe and Vienna are to be supported, but the wider politics is a ‘fiasco’; a word which imagines not only disaster but also sheer ludicrousness, as if it is unreasonable to even think of the possibility of a ‘reorganisation of nationalities’ in that area in the first place.

For Eliot, concepts of national structure, curation and control have limited scope within what was a multi-ethnic and transforming space.

Eliot's interest in the region remained; for, three years later, a note he provided within the first edition of *The Waste Land* – that 'long poem' he mentions in his letter – claimed the masterpiece (or, at least, one of its sections) was similarly inspired by what he described as 'the present decay of Eastern Europe'.⁴ Similarly, but not quite: for this time Eliot does not redeem the region with tales of victims of Vienna but simply inflates the appalling conditions in the region to a broad-sweep devastation. His description, as many critics have noted, reflects common stereotypes about the region following the First World War: the collapse of the Russian, Habsburg and German Empires, cultural heterogeneity, rising nationalism and lack of legal-political authority in the area meant it was often seen as unstable and volatile within western-inspired and universally applied models of nationality and statehood.⁵ In 1919, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Lloyd George, suggested the region's 'nations were going straight to perdition'; speaking to a political gentleman's club the same year, the former Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, also voiced concerns about the effectiveness of the Peace Treaty on a region fraught with socio-political change and causing the 'deepest anxiety for the future'; Liberal and author Harold Spender similarly dubbed it 'that cauldron' from which 'came the Great War [and] from [which] may yet come another conflict'.⁶

But what – if anything real at all – did Eliot mean by 'Eastern Europe'? What does 'Eastern Europe' represent: what area falls under Eliot's claim to it as category, and what are its limits or borders? Why is Eliot's conceptualisation of this region different from his conceptualisation of the Central Europe of Vienna – and how might this reveal the reasons why Eliot particularly denigrated the former, and not the latter? And furthermore, how might understanding this contribute to a re-reading of the poem, and the poet? My article argues Eliot's references to the region suggest more than generically resonant conditions of decline and hope, for they are also revealing of his anxieties about 'Eastern European' nationhood. This unease may, at first glance, appear to contradict Eliot's embrace of pan-European connections during the 1920s, but I want to explore the tensions which emerge within his work about the region, as his support of cultural tradition and control chafed against a perceived heterogeneity, political contestation and excessive nationalism on the geopolitically tense 'Eastern European' plains.⁷ Drawing on Eliot's letters and cultural criticism, I argue this dichotomy reflects a long-standing western geopolitical imaginary shared by Eliot, through which 'Eastern Europe' was perceived as an insecure space of

multi-nationality and ongoing political transformation – and as a threat to the cultural ideals he epitomised.⁸

For Eliot's return to the region as a frequent yet fraught topic of interest suggests his attitude towards it might have been complex; or, at least, that his sense of international political responsibility and pan-European allegiance conflicted with anxieties about cultural diversity. I contend Eliot's work shows his attempts to manage these two competing ideas, firstly by reinforcing and prioritising what he perceived to be more traditional cultural centres – which helps to explain why he had more sympathy for Vienna, a city with which he was familiar via friends and publishing work.⁹ And, secondly, I argue Eliot played down the significance of 'Eastern Europe' through detached and brief portrayals, suggesting he did not take the various political claims to sovereignty in the region seriously. Simultaneously revealing and assuaging geopolitical developments in the region, Eliot's approach was one of half-baked western concern.

Yet, I also consider *The Waste Land* within a context of transformations in western views of 'Eastern Europe', from stereotypes of chaos, insecurity, nationalist extravagance and vulnerability, as well as reluctant interventionism, to a partial acknowledgement of the strength of national claims; especially following Poland's unexpected victory over the Red Army in 1920, a force perceived as an even greater threat to the west.¹⁰ To be clear, the Polish victory did not cause a complete about face in western sympathy for and reassessment of 'Eastern Europe' – unlike the reckoning with the significance and strength of the region in the last two years, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – but it can be considered as forming another crack in the western ideas promoted by Eliot, particularly in terms of blurring the boundaries between the west and the east of Europe and testing the limits of western politics and principles.¹¹ Eliot never went far enough, but I want to suggest that today's climate of 'decolonising Slavonic Studies' might change the way we read *The Waste Land*, promoting empathy with 'Eastern European' nations as agents defending their freedom and thus tackling stereotypes. What might have seemed heterogeneous, insecure and excessive to Eliot was not viewed the same way in the east, where diverse ethnic groups were developing their own national claims, attempting to solidify nascent states after years of repression, and struggling for independence and survival.¹²

Tracing how Eliot's references to the region in *The Waste Land* contradict his aesthetic and political ideas, I expand on the commonplace critical idealisation of a European Eliot rooted in cultural collaboration, which often elide his racist or stereotyping viewpoints. I suggest the

poem can thus reveal wider debates about the region we might call 'Eastern Europe' at the time Eliot was writing, and in ways which have new resonance today.

What is 'Eastern Europe'?

Two names, Eastern Europe and Central Europe, have already appeared as descriptions of the region I will be focusing on in this article, and so it is important to add a brief explanation on historical and present-day descriptions of the area. A nomenclatural splay of terms – each denoting different identities, boundaries, characteristics, ideas and geopolitical significance – has developed over time to define the area broadly between Germany and Russia. The phrase 'Eastern Europe', long critiqued by scholars, intellectuals and policymakers for its broad-sweep allusion to countries formerly under Soviet control, and perpetuation of tired Cold War-era stereotypes is, however, slowly becoming *déclassé*, particularly since increasing efforts to decolonise Slavonic Studies after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.¹³ Of many terms suggested to replace it, 'East-Central Europe', referring to the area between Finland and Greece, or 'Central and Eastern Europe', including states within the former Eastern Bloc, the former Yugoslavia and the three Baltic States, are perhaps the most popular; there are also efforts to remove the tendency to categorise at all, with scholars instead encouraging attention to the diverse individual nations, cultures, religions and socio-economics, which do not easily fit a dichotomy of west or east.¹⁴ There is also a counterpull to reclaim 'Eastern Europe' as a 'New Eastern Europe', reading the region not only as last-stop borderland of Europe, but as a productive and significant meeting place of states, cultures and nationalities.¹⁵ Terms matter for identity, history, destiny, socio-politics and human rights: describing the changing descriptors used for the area after the fall of Communism, the Hungarian author Péter Esterházy suggests the region flitted between swiftly changing geopolitical names, and hence status and significance:

Once, I was an Eastern European; then I was promoted to the rank of Central European ... a few months ago, I became a New European. But before I had the chance to get used to this status ... I have now become a non-core European.¹⁶

Some of the terms and categorisations of the region today are similar to those in the early twentieth century, and Eliot alludes a few different

configurations in *The Waste Land*. As noted, he uses the phrase 'Central Europe' in the letter to his mother: in the early twentieth century, 'Central Europe' was often used as a grab-bag term to describe an area which was a blind spot in western cultural understanding.¹⁷ Writing in 1931, the critic Samuel Putnam noted that the forced mobilisation of soldiers from the colonies of the British Empire meant 'it was Central Europe that became to [Brits] a mysterious and foreign land'.¹⁸ Yet whilst 'Central Europe' did not, at the time, refer to an established concept, it was becoming increasingly associated with early twentieth-century efforts to codify 'a new formula suitable for the representation of the whole cluster of emancipated nations as a distinct political region'; efforts led by the founding president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš G. Masaryk, and British historian Robert W. Seton-Watson, and supported by Britain and America.¹⁹ Masaryk developed the concept of a Central or Mid-Europe, an association which would conjoin together, but not subsume, the individual nations in the region, and which drew on the multinational organisation of the old Habsburg Empire; it also bears similarities to Eliot's nationalist-yet-internationalist cultural ambitions for Europe, in which national cultures could co-exist within a wider 'intellectual-cultural alliance', which would counteract Russia.²⁰ 'Central Europe' saw a resurgent popularity as the category preferred by particularly Czech intellectuals during the Cold War, including the late Milan Kundera who posited the region as a 'Kidnapped West'.²¹ To refer to an area as 'mid' or 'central' is an act of positioning its significance and relevance.

And a Central or Mid-Europe is evident early in *The Waste Land*, in references to aristocracy, historical identity and cross-cultural allegiances:

With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
 Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
 And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
 My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
 And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
 Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
 In the mountains, there you feel free.²²

Here, Eliot assimilates scenes of various nations within the region: Germany, Lithuania, the Austro-Hungarian Empire (through a reference to the archduke cousin, and to Marie, likely Marie Larisch von Moennich, a relative of the Austro-Hungarian archduke), and Bavaria

(with a borrowing from a commemorative song about the Bavarian uplands, ‘In the mountains, there you feel free’) in a way which feels reminiscent of Central European allegiance.²³ Yet there are also allusions here to the idea of ‘Mitteleuropa’, a term now with negative connotations of the nineteenth-century project for German political hegemony over the region – and a vision of the region which Masaryk’s Mid-Europe intended to oppose – which was associated at the time with vast cultural and literary development; most notably from the region’s doyens Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig. Suggestions of a Mitteleuropean imperialism continue in the elevating of the German language and mythologised idea of being ‘echt deutsch’ (‘a true German’); as well as references later in the suggestions of vast open spaces, ‘ringed by the flat horizon only’.²⁴ In 1923, Eliot wrote a letter to Ezra Pound in which he jokingly suggested he was ‘anxious to see the Hapsburgs restored’ and refused Pound’s suggestion of the Times journalist and East-Central European expert Wickham Steed as a contributor to *The Criterion* because ‘he created Czechoslovakia’; an allegiance to the old powers continued through his conjoined imperial tradition of Mitteleuropa and Austro-Hungary in this section of the poem.²⁵

‘Eastern Europe’, though, is a term which is most vehemently contested as an identifier – in intellectual history, and by Eliot – for it signals nothing positive. ‘Virtually no one’, writes Anca Parvulescu, ‘wants to be an Eastern European.’²⁶ From its first conceptualisation during the Enlightenment, ‘Eastern Europe’ denoted an area which is closely linked to Russia, which is backward, contingent and colonisable, in contrast to the civilised west; a perceived division reinforced in the early twentieth-century through a paradigm of the western world as associated with modernism, imperialism, capitalism and progress – and which, of course, took on greater significance during the Cold War.²⁷ Yet beyond – rightful – efforts to replace the term in current discourse, identifying different conceptualisations of ‘Eastern Europe’ is also useful for understanding historical understandings and reckonings with the region, and its place within a wider Europe.²⁸

What is Eliot’s ‘Eastern Europe’?

With regard to the actual identity of Eliot’s ‘Eastern Europe’: in short, it is difficult to determine what exactly he means. His idea of the term does not appear finalised or certain – for within the poem it is unclear where ‘Eastern Europe’ is, what events are actually occurring there and how expansive they may be; there are also enduring questions of how influential ‘Eastern Europe’ is to a wider European environment, to society,

to the poem itself and to Eliot as a writer. In fact, were it not for his note to 'What the Thunder Said', the region features very little at all.²⁹ So why specify this regional tumult as a central theme in the poem?

I want to suggest Eliot's doing so reveals his critical attitude towards the region, as much as it also signals his interest in it. This is manifested on the page, for the 'present decay of Eastern Europe', is shunted and counterpointed behind two more allusive and Christian themes for the section, 'the journey to Emmaus' and 'the approach to the Chapel Perilous' – with the implication of a geopolitical afterthought, despite the contemporary urgency of this theme. In using the words 'present decay', we see Eliot concerned with time – with a current period of devastation post-war – but whilst 'present' suggests contemporaneity and necessity of action, the lack of continued focus here implies a more detached and dismissive idea of deterioration in the region. Oxymoronic in its joint allusion to immediacy and decline, the implication here is that the region's decay might be of a specific and contingent nature ('present' as in *this particular* decay; as opposed to other moments of decay in the past and future); or even that the region is subject to a suspension of sorts within a perpetual decaying moment. To write of the 'present decay of Eastern Europe', then, is not only to suggest an already-established region which happens to be in decay at the time of writing but also to allude to something more foundational about the very identification of the region itself: 'Eastern Europe' – an amorphous region – is defined by the very fact it is in decay. The term 'decay' similarly alludes both to civilisational and physical decline, continued in references to dry, cracked landscapes in the poem, raising further issues for the possibility of geographic specificity and hope. Reducing down the significance and legitimacy of 'Eastern Europe', this passage thus problematises the possibility of an optimistic future for the region.

Eliot's phrase also refers to his German-language note to a section of 'What the Thunder Said', in which he copied part of Hermann Hesse's *Blick ins Chaos (A Glimpse into Chaos, 1920)*:

Already half of Europe, already at least half of Eastern Europe, is on the way to chaos, drives drunkenly in holy delusion along the edge of the abyss, singing drunkenly, singing hymns, as Dmitri Karamazov sang.³⁰

This is a passage which also raises problems, for whilst the image given looks grimly apocalyptic, the question is: *where* does this chaos occur? The sense of decline here is on multiple fronts – geographic, aesthetic, social – and the mention of Dmitri Karamazov by Hesse

suggests he triangulates its cause, via Dostoevsky, to Russia.³¹ But this is also an amorphous and lyrical-fantastical description, which only gestures towards, rather than conclusively names, the deterioration, and the territory on which it occurs. It thus is no mere image, as critics have previously attested, of western concerns about Russian revolution, but a more ambiguous gesture towards a vague 'Eastern Europe' as a matrix for perceived civilisational decline, a physical and existential 'edge of the abyss'.³² Indeed, the geographical labelling from Hesse – from 'half of Europe' to 'already at least half of Eastern Europe' – works as a kind of zooming in to precision, a means of describing somewhere in 'Eastern Europe' which is different from other areas of 'Eastern Europe', and from other areas of Europe; hence, by implication, he vindicates some places from interest, relationality and blame. Hesse, then, is aware of a strangeness to the idea of 'Eastern Europe': this quotation suggests a difficulty in incorporating different parts of the region into a wider whole which might be classed as 'Eastern Europe', or 'Europe', and so posits the region not as homogenous territory, but as something more diverse.

Eliot's trouble with the east

Should we, then, read Eliot's 'present decay of Eastern Europe' as a more simplified approach to the region, which fails to take into account plurality, and posits instead a broad-sweep 'present decay'? In fact, I would argue the opposite: Eliot's idea of a decaying 'Eastern Europe' is precisely because of this heterogeneity and flux; precisely because different nations developed sovereignty at different rates, and thus the region proved problematic to organise. The complicated impact is felt both on an abstract level and had personal ramifications for Eliot, who was sorting German war debts at Lloyd's Bank.³³ In one letter of 1930 in which he compared publishing to his bank work, Eliot subsumed and abased two East-Central European languages in a complaint that a downside of his first position was being 'called upon to hang about the Offices of the Mighty – only to be rebuked for one's ignorance of Hungarian or Czech or something equally recondite'.³⁴

Enduring legacies of imperial legislation, ongoing socio-political unrest, the unresolved borders of separate states and the effects of wartime damage to infrastructure meant the unification of post-war nation states were difficult and took years to implement, with some laws in the nascent states unfinished even at the outbreak of the Second World War.³⁵ In another letter to Ford Madox Ford in 1924, Eliot similarly explained that he was 'all for empires', because he:

deplore[d] the outburst of artificial nationalities, constituted like artificial genealogies for millionaires, all over the world. The number of languages worth writing in is very small, and it seems to be a waste of time to attempt to enlarge it. On the other hand, if anyone has a genuine nationality – and a genuine nationality depends upon the existence of a genuine literature, and you cannot have a nationality worth speaking of unless you have a national literature – if anyone has a genuine nationality, let him assert it, let the Frenchman be as French, the Englishman as English, the German as German, as he can be; but let him be French or English or German in such a way that his national character will complement, not contradict, the other nationalities.³⁶

This is a damning vision of the independence of new nation states. The idea of an outburst imagines an explosive lack of control, as well as suggesting a suddenness of existence which denies the possibility of long-standing foundation. And it is continued in the suggestion that these nations are 'artificial' and only 'for millionaires', which indicates infidelity as well as corruption, and evokes Eliot's own convoluted debt sorting. The literary-national tautology continues Eliot's idea of cultural tradition and cooperation – notable is his localisation of this tradition to western European nations only. This image of the east thus reflects a long-standing perception of the region as diverse, uncivilised and insecure, and it contrasts the reassuringly pure, curated, traditional and dominant land-mass national cultures Eliot preferred, which were associated with the west, and to which individuals were synthesised through clear-cut generational inheritance – as outlined in his essays 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) and 'After Strange Gods' (1934).³⁷ The nation-states emerging on the post-war map of Europe struck at the heart of questions of sovereignty, legitimacy and even ontology: at once claiming their place as continuations of historical entities, but bearing the legacies of entirely separate states, as well as working out their nascent constitution.³⁸ Lumping together 'Eastern Europe' was thus not to carve out tradition, but to claim the nations of the region were, jointly, in decay through their individuated and illegitimate politics.

Eliot's condemnation of 'Eastern Europe' here may appear to go against his aims for pan-European unity – but this actually formed an element of his critique of the region.³⁹ His editorship of *The Criterion*, a magazine he hoped would become 'a vital conduit of European intellectual currents', epitomised his interest in European cultural connections, and around the same time as he was writing *The Waste Land*, in July

1922, Eliot told Ezra Pound that he was looking beyond the typical nations of western Europe for cultural works for the magazine:

Have you come across anyone who is [at] all informed about Scandinavia? I am *not* anxious to get many French people for the *first two* numbers, more anxious to get other (foreign) nationalities: the French business is so usual (in London) that it doesn't raise a quiver.⁴⁰

Eliot's engagement beyond the west of Europe is clear, but so too is his prioritisation of cultural and aesthetic work. His stigmatisation of the east, then, should be seen not so much as racial but rather historical and cultural. When Eliot writes of the 'Balkanisation' of Europe, he is thus referring not only to the fragmentary appearance of the new European map, but he is transplanting terminology to suggest something even more threatening: that Europe now looks like the Balkans, that it has transformed into something worryingly dissolute, worrying *eastern*.

Eliot's use of Hesse thus suggests crossings between eastern and western Europe are unsettling and form an existential danger to the latter. His references to the east as multi-national and dynamic give the effect of insecurity in keeping with Enlightenment ideas; other examples of the Enlightenment conception of a backwards and dangerous 'Eastern European' landscape occur throughout the poem: Oliver Tearle notes Gothic 'Eastern European' imagery deriving from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in the poem's reference to 'crawled head downward down a blackened wall', in a way which suggests disruption to the natural order.⁴¹ Similarly, Eliot's mapping of a destruction in 'Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/Vienna London' is ominous in its annihilating march westward, suggesting a dangerous merger of the east and west, but it is also telling of his political views. The 'endless plains' between these cities are areas of geopolitical unrest, heterogeneity and insecurity, a negative topography manifesting in the tangible destruction of ancient cultural cities and civilisation.

Yet Eliot would also have known that it was on those long-maligned plains – in the newly independent Poland – that an eastern terror of Bolshevism was unexpectedly crushed before it could reach the west.⁴² This of course bears similarities to contemporary western opinions of Ukraine, a country once dismissed as a 'small but battle-hardened nation', and which, according to the predictions of western governments, analysts and political scientists, would lose Kyiv in three days – but then, surprisingly, did not.⁴³ The revelation that Poland *could* defend

itself, and hence *did* have a valid claim to independence within the global matrix, did not fit Eliot's negative conceptualisation of the region, and thus necessitated a reconfiguration of his stereotypes, evidenced in editorial trick work. The first draft of this section of *The Waste Land* includes what critics have seen as a specific reference to these developments, in the description of 'Polish plains', which Eliot soon changed to the decidedly more amorphous 'endless plains'. The initial imagery of hordes overrunning Polish lands, which moves to scenes of wider global destruction, imparts through its focused setting and chronology a suggestion that chaos in Poland has existential ramifications elsewhere. Eliot's choice to remove this specificity of reference to Poland, then, suggests additional complexity towards the country and wider region. Although the first version of 'What the Thunder Said' was written following the Polish victory, in autumn 1921, and the switch in terms was completed before the spring of 1922, it nonetheless shows Eliot uneasy about relying upon Poland as a place associated with inevitable devastation.⁴⁴ Within a wider passage which alludes to displacement of peoples ('who are those hooded hordes'), his exchange of references is thus an act of re-problematising homogeneity, purity and cultural control, within a wider context of shifting estimations of Polish legitimacy.⁴⁵

The east and the west

'Eastern Europe' is often stereotyped as a place of cultural backwardness and decline – reinforced through the transatlantic creation, codification and mobilisation of modernism as part of a 'cultural Cold War', which reduced Eastern European perspectives to mere *puppets* or *victims* of a repressive system'.⁴⁶ As Yuri Andrukhoych notes, the loss of access to the east is material, as well as epistemic and artistic:

Let's imagine such a thing for a moment – that James Joyce was really an Albanian. That it wasn't in the English language that he created his world but in Albanian. Would we today, as humanity, be able to know, would we even believe Albanians if they told us that their Joyce was some kind of genius? Most probably it would simply remain unknown, closed up in frames, in the borders of its own minor language. Because, quite simply, there would be no translations.⁴⁷

But the quotation from Hesse noted by Eliot also suggests an idea of 'Eastern Europe', and its sociopolitical events, which might metastasize

into wider consequence for the region, for Europe, and for the poet himself, the region posited as a site which demands a negotiation with existing cultural and political ideas. If, for Hesse, and latterly Eliot, the term 'Eastern Europe' is no clear-cut category at all but marks ambiguity, and loss of form, structure and definition, then this also suggests a broader terminological capacity. Hence, it also raises questions regarding how far the region is involved with or matters to global politics, and how far global politics is involved with or matters to it. Hesse's depiction, whilst keenly categorising different areas, is also suggestive of a precarity of spatial differentiation, and of distinctions between centres and peripheries, in the allusions to 'the edge of the abyss' – and indeed to the implication of movement, soused and undisciplined, along this borderline. It is an anthropomorphised description of the region, through which half of Eastern Europe – and of Europe itself – appears, dizzily, to trace the tense frontiers of their own existence and forms; interrogating their status as entities.⁴⁸

As scholars of European integration argue, the boundaries of Europe can be conceptualised as 'privileged sites for the exploration of the tensions between contemporary nationalizing and cosmopolitan political trajectories', where one is actively exposed and entangled with otherness, as much as being aware of its irreducibility to the self – where social orders collapse, and the distinctions between centre and periphery, self and other, near and distant and enemy and friend are negotiated and blur together.⁴⁹ No 'far away lands of which we know nothing', or Rumsfeldian Old and New Europe here.⁵⁰ Michael Levenson similarly notes another of Eliot's sources for 'What the Thunder Said' was John Maynard Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), which focuses on material suffering, and political and military upheaval in East-Central Europe, rather than only a threat of revolution.⁵¹ But whilst Levenson suggests the use of Keynes demonstrates a general European decline of capitalism, Keynes's actual text is more evocative of post-war conditions:

Those readers who, chiefly mindful of the British conditions with which they are familiar, are apt to indulge their optimism, and still more those whose immediate environment is American, must cast their minds to Russia, Turkey, Hungary, or Austria, where the most dreadful material evils which men can suffer – famine, cold, disease, war, murder, and anarchy – are an actual present experience, if they are to apprehend the character of the misfortunes against the further extension of which it must surely be our duty to seek the remedy, if there is one.⁵²

Here is another conceptualisation of present destruction, but for Keynes the use of the term 'present' ramps up the emphasis: there *is* suffering happening right now, he seems to be saying, even if the west is not directly affected by it, as they 'indulge their optimism' about more immediate conditions at home. Like Eliot, Keynes posits a lack of consistent western interest and direct relation to European issues, rather than clear coincidence between the two areas: just before this paragraph, Keynes stresses "'Europe" in my narration must generally be interpreted to exclude the British Isles', whose problems are different from those in Europe.⁵³ Establishing a contrast between the familiarity of immediate environments and foreign tumult, Keynes demands that Brits and Americans cast their minds in an imaginative leap to register, and ultimately support, those who are worse off.⁵⁴ Eliot's range of sources thus attests to his complicated attitude towards the region: at once denigrating its cultural plurality, but also, and reflecting his internationalist bent, unable to ignore its costs.

And western Europe itself also comes in for criticism in *The Waste Land*, as later in 'What the Thunder Said', Eliot challenges its relation to and involvement with the disrupted landscapes earlier in the section. Images of western discipline and action – 'controlling hands' – here meet narcissism and internal tumult: 'shall I at least set my lands in order?'⁵⁵ The question 'shall I' suggests reluctance, compounded through a scarcity in 'at least' which juxtaposes ongoing disruptions in other areas of the world; from the perspective of an Anglo-American writer, it evokes western European uncertainty about its commitment to European stability post-war, and indeed its perception that the decaying east is even European to begin with.⁵⁶ On a wider level, though, its implications of unenthusiastic involvement in maintaining peace efforts following the war, and unsettled lands *at home*, undermine the western ideals of liberalism, progression and unification; Eliot's poem opens up the limitations, and even exploitations, imposed by western European standards and suggests alternative European geographies beyond any conventional equivalence with the west.⁵⁷ So, too, do these questions of Europeanness suggest a debate as to whether the west sees itself as part of Europe.⁵⁸

In the 1970s, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, Jean Monnet, predicted 'Europe will be forged in crises'; Eliot's note on the 'present decay of Eastern Europe' similarly suggests crises across both its western and eastern territories played – and still play – a vital role in reshaping Europe's nature, commonality and future.⁵⁹ Alluding to epistemological and legal debates about the status of new nations

post-war, Eliot problematises long-standing physical and symbolic ideas of west and east and suggests traditionally European ideas of progress and modernity are open to critique.⁶⁰ His depiction of an uncanny, unresolved and conflicted Europe challenges what is conventionally seen as familiar and secure, to reveal the area as actually transformative and ‘very new, inventing and reinventing itself’, its edges, limits and spaces.⁶¹

Indeed, whilst I have argued here that *The Waste Land* was influenced by debates about ‘Eastern European’ identity, nationalist excess and connections to the wider European continent, it is also possible to view this argument the other way around, as a poem which itself influenced ‘Eastern Europe’. As Aleksandra Majak notes, the reception of Eliot’s poetry in post-1945 Poland both attracted criticism from East-Central European writers, among others, who rejected his themes of cultural heritage and faith in a European order amid an awareness that no culture, however traditional, could prevent global devastation.⁶² Yet she also suggests Eliot’s work also encouraged the reworking of a traditionally romantic and individuated Polish poetry to embrace new priorities.⁶³ This influence continues today: Theater of War Productions last year launched ‘The Waste Land Project’ to consider the poem’s timeless depictions of the effects of war on families and communities in relation to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.⁶⁴

Moreover, transformations in Eliot’s attitude towards the region are evident in his later letters and work, which show a growing sympathy – particularly towards Poland – after the initial slow-burn settlement of states in the immediate post-war transition period. In 1930, Faber and Faber published the *Memoirs of Marshal Pilsudski*, one of interwar Poland’s leading politicians, which it advertised as an account from ‘a governor of a great people’ and ‘an important document in the liberation of Poland’.⁶⁵ Eliot later called it an ‘extremely interesting book’ and bemoaned its lack of commercial success; reflecting both his own acceptance of Poland as a place of tradition and purity, as well as a contrast between his views and the broader continuation of western criticism towards the country, particularly in the face of its perceived expansionist politics.⁶⁶

At the end of the Second World War, Eliot also wrote two prefaces to accounts of wartime-occupied Poland, which also suggest his more sympathetic attitude. The first was for the English translation of an account of the horrors of Auschwitz, Jerzy Andrzejewski’s *Roll Call* (1945), in which he argued the text demonstrated ‘Poland is the greatest sufferer among the nations’ and was integral to ‘the future of the whole of Europe’, with Auschwitz an example of the “demonic forces” that were

at work to destroy the religious and cultural heritage of European civilization.⁶⁷ Joanna Rzepa draws attention to the fact Eliot was wooed to write the preface on the basis of wartime Christian discourse which challenged totalitarianism.⁶⁸ Notably, his preface elided any reference to Jewish suffering, reflecting a lack of British awareness of the mass murder of Jews, as well as Eliot's scepticism about the account as a potential atrocity story and 'brilliant piece of imaginative fiction'; evoking his earlier anti-Semitism, and racism towards the east.⁶⁹ Eliot's other preface was for the Faber and Faber publication of *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1944), an eyewitness account of the atrocities of the Soviet occupation of Poland, which stressed the nature of Polish suffering as a part of European history, which had been elided in the British press.⁷⁰

Even within earlier, and more stereotyped, ideas of the east, Eliot also suggests some hope for the future, for the possibility of new identity and survival beyond the chaotic present of an uncertain geopolitics. In *The Waste Land*, it comes through the words of the unnamed Marie, who is stalwart in her description of herself: 'Bin gar keine Russin'.⁷¹ 'I am not a Russian': it is the denial which comes first, which is critical, even before she asserts her own, multiple-stranded sense of belonging. This might appear the chaotic jigsawing of an 'Eastern European' heterogeneous identity, but it is also testament to diversity and survival, with higher stakes than Eliot acknowledges in his dismissal of nascent nationhood. It is vital to determine what you are not just as much as what you are, to carve yourself out from stereotypes and subsumptions, to draw lines around your own identity; 'not a Russian' is thus a kind-of political paragon, which intervenes, reverses and unfixes the conventional order of the world, manoeuvring the perceived peripheral into the core.⁷²

There is a particularly compelling resonance here with further denials and assertions in today's efforts to decolonise Slavonic studies away from the dominant presence of Russia in the field. In 2022, a similar 'not a Russian' was performed by the Ukrainian disco-ball folk drag queen Verka Serdutchka who, in a concert to raise money for Ukraine following the full-scale Russian invasion, changed the nonsense title of the 2007 Eurovision hit 'Dancing Lasha Tumbai' – long seen as phonetically concealing an anti-Russian statement – to sing, now clearly and undeniably, 'Dancing Russia Goodbye'.⁷³ And, just as importantly, Serdutchka did so with fun and joy, in the face of destruction.⁷⁴ Might we imagine this a present-day version of Hesse's image of a drunken 'Eastern Europe': an independent, diverse and resilient – rather than merely chaotic – image of identity and belonging, on the East-Central European

geopolitical and cultural stage? ‘Singing hymns’ *not* as Dmitri Karamazov sang, but as Verka Serduchka sang; and celebrating cultures otherwise lost to us all.

Notes

- 1 I dedicate this article to my mum; and I am indebted to Beci Carver and Erin Dockins for their thoughts on an earlier draft. Eliot to his mother, 18 December 1919, in Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (eds.), *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, I, (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), pp. 863-866 (p. 864)
- 2 Brooke L. Blower, ‘From Isolationism to Neutrality’, in *Diplomatic History*, 38.2 (2014), pp. 345-376 (pp. 345-346).
- 3 Shortly before Eliot’s letter, the government-backed ‘Vienna Emergency Relief Fund’ was supported in the British press; *The Nation* described Vienna as ‘one of the first cities of the world’ (Eliot to his mother, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, p. 866). The British Foreign Office claimed that of all the schemes of national reconstruction in Europe, there were ‘few with a claim as serious as that of Austria’ (in Patricia Clavin, ‘The Austrian Hunger Crisis and the Genesis of International Organization after the First World War’, in *International Affairs*, 90.2 (2014), pp. 265-278. This was even despite Britain and Austria being at war merely a year earlier. There were long-standing cultural connections between Britain and Austria, especially Vienna (see Andrew Thacker, *Modernism, Space and the City* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).
- 4 Eliot, *The Waste Land*: text of the first edition, in Valerie Eliot (ed.), *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p. 148.
- 5 Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 43; Natasha Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 6.
- 6 David Lloyd George, quoted in Laurence J. Orzell, ‘A “Hotly Disputed” Issue: Eastern Galicia at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919’, in *The Polish Review*, 25.1 (1980), pp. 49-68 (p. 57); Arthur Balfour, quoted in ‘Peace Treaty Regrets’, in *The Daily Mail* (12th December 1919), p. 8; Harold Spender, *The Cauldron of Europe* (London: Witherby, 1925), p. 9.
- 7 See Paul Douglass, ed., *T.S. Eliot, Dante, and the Idea of Europe* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), and James Logenbach, ‘*The Waste Land*: Beyond the Frontier’, in Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: The Waste Land* (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), pp. 131-167 (p. 161).
- 8 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- 9 Eliot’s friend, the psychoanalyst Alix Strachey, visited Vienna in 1921 to undergo treatment by Freud (Eliot to Mary Hutchinson, 16 June 1921, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, I, pp. 1133-1,134 (p. 1133); Eliot also knew the American poet and editor of *The Dial*, Scofield Thayer, who settled in Vienna in 1921 and provided Viennese writing, including works by Austrian writer Hugo van Hofmannsthal, for the magazine, which Eliot classed as ‘first-rate’ (Eliot to Thayer, 27 November 1922, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, I, 1554-1556 (p. 1555).

- 10 Norman Davies, 'Lloyd George and Poland', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6.3 (1971), pp. 132-154 (p. 149).
- 11 The Entente of Britain and France were reluctant to support Polish efforts to repress the Bolsheviks – when Poland did triumph at the Battle of the Vistula in August 1920, the Entente claimed their support had been essential (Michael C. Desch, *Power and Military Effectiveness* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2008), p. 82).
- 12 Mazower, *Dark Continent*, pp. 43-44. As Mazower notes, some of the nascent nation-states of East-Central Europe did transform into dictatorships, and violence was common (p. 44).
- 13 Many scholars, including Anne Applebaum and Larry Wolff, note the use of 'Eastern Europe' as a cultural and political term, rather than a geographic one, which was particularly reinforced during the Cold War (Applebaum, *Iron Curtain* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), p. xxiv); debates about the use of the term particularly developed during the latter years, and immediately following, the end of the Cold War, especially within intellectual circles: Milan Kundera notably questioned the 'monstrous mystification' of Eastern Europe against a more Western-oriented Central Europe (quoted in Brian K. Goodman, 'Philip Roth's Other Europe', in *American Literary History*, 27.4 (2015), pp. 717-740 (p. 731); see also Robin Okey, 'Central Europe/Eastern Europe', in *The Cultural and Political Construction of Europe*, 137 (1992), pp. 102-133 and Alan Dingsdale, 'Redefining "Eastern Europe"', in *Geography*, 84.3 (1999), pp. 204-221. For more recent work arguing against the use of 'Eastern Europe', see P.T.W. and E.L., 'Time to scrap "Eastern Europe"', in *The Economist*, 13 July 2012 <<https://www.economist.com/eastern-approaches/2012/07/13/time-to-scrap-eastern-europe>> [accessed 28 July 2023] and Jacob Mikanowski's *Goodbye Eastern Europe* (London: Oneworld, 2023).
- 14 Oskar Halecki, *Limits and Divisions of European History* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950).
- 15 Serhii Plokhyy, *The Frontline* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2023), p. 326, p. 330.
- 16 Péter Esterházy, 'How Big is the European Dwarf', in Daniel Levy et al., eds., *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 74-80 (p. 74).
- 17 Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, *Imaging and Mapping Eastern Europe* (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), p. 94.
- 18 Samuel Putnam, *The European Caravan* (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1931), p. 22.
- 19 Murawska-Muthesius, *Imaging and Mapping Eastern Europe*, pp. 40-41. As Murawska-Muthesius notes, Masaryk and Seton-Watson taught at the newly created School of Eastern European and Slavonic Studies in London, which was the first British university department to focus on the region, and were widely engaged with reconfiguring political ideas about the area.
- 20 Carlos Reijnen, 'A Castle in the Centre', in Rebecka Lettevall, Geert Somsen and Sven Widmalm (eds.), *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 181-206 (p. 186); David Ayers astutely compares Eliot's cultural and political projects in Europe with

- Masaryk's ambitions ('The New Europe and the New World: Eliot, Masaryk, and the Geopolitics of National Culture', in *Modernist Cultures*, 11.1 (2016), pp. 8-25.
- 21 Milan Kundera, *A Kidnapped West: The Tragedy of Central Europe* (London: Faber & Faber, 2023).
- 22 T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Norton & Company, 2001), p. 5.
- 23 Dieter Fuchs, 'Myth Today: The Bavarian-Austrian Subtext of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*', in *Poetica*, 44.3/4 (2012), pp. 379-393 (p. 390).
- 24 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, p. 5.
- 25 Eliot to Ezra Pound, in 14 September 1923, in Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (eds.), *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, II (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 215.
- 26 Anca Parvulescu, 'Eastern Europe as Method', in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 63.4 (2019), pp. 470-481 (p. 472).
- 27 Anita Starosta, *Form and Instability: Eastern Europe, Literature, Post-imperial Difference* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016), p. 76; Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 14.
- 28 I am expanding on Timothy Snyder's approach to 'Eastern Europe', here as a historical term which nonetheless has present value: 'Twenty years after the revolutions of 1989, does the idea of Eastern Europe have anything to offer the world?' ('The Ethical Significance of Eastern Europe, Twenty Years On', in *East European Politics and Societies*, 23.4 (2009), pp. 455-460 (p. 455).
- 29 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, p. 17.
- 30 Hermann Hesse, quoted in "'Making Strange": Non-Translation in *The Waste Land*', in Jason Harding and John Nash (eds.), *Modernism and Non-Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 117-137 (p. 131). Other critics to suggest this include Jean-Michel Rabaté, in 'Strange Revolutions Since I Died', in Gabrielle McIntire (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 9-24 (p. 16).
- 31 As Chris Ackerley notes, Book XI of *The Brothers Karamazov* includes imagery repeated in *The Waste Land*, of 'the third, between us' ('Who are those Hooded Hordes', in *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 82.1 (2014), pp. 103-106 (p. 104).
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Eliot complained about his bank work as 'chaos' to his mother (*The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, I, 22 February 1920, pp. 906-909 (p. 906)).
- 34 Eliot to George Boyle, 18 September 1930, in Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (eds.), *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, V (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), p. 321.
- 35 In the case of Poland alone, as Zbigniew Landau has astutely noted, there were 'nine different legislative systems and five main currencies' across the three once partitioned and now unified areas ('The Economic Integration of Poland 1918-23', in Paul Latawski (ed.), *The Reconstruction of Poland* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 144-157 (p. 145).
- 36 Eliot to Ford Madox Ford, 11 October 1923, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, II, pp. 251-253 (p. 251).

- 37 Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 19; Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Perspecta*, 19 (1982), pp. 36-42 (p. 42); Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), pp. 19-20. In the latter text, Eliot makes the anti-Semitic connection between racial heterogeneity and Jewish culture.
- 38 Natasha Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 6. One example is Wilson's celebrated Fourteen Points which claimed a Polish state should be 'erected', rather than 'resurrected' and based on the past (Piotr Wandycz, 'Poland on the Map of Europe in 1918', in *The Polish Review*, 35.1 (1990), pp. 19-25 (p. 21).
- 39 Ayers, 'The New Europe and the New World: Eliot, Masaryk, and the Geopolitics of National Culture', pp. 8-25.
- 40 John Xiros Cooper, 'T.S. Eliot's Die Einheit Der Europaischen Kultur and the Idea of European Union', in Douglass, *T.S. Eliot, Dante, and the Idea of Europe*, pp. 145-158 (p. 146); Eliot to Pound, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, I, 9 July 1922, pp. 1367-1,370 (p. 1368).
- 41 Oliver Tearle, *The Great War, The Waste Land, and the Modernist Long Poem* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 83.
- 42 Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star* (London: Pimlico, 2003).
- 43 Rory Finnin, 'How the West Gets Ukraine Wrong – and Helps Putin As a Result', in *Politico*, 12 February 2022 <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/02/12/west-gets-ukraine-wrong-helps-putin-little-russia-00007977>> [accessed 13 August 2023]; Mike Eckel, 'How Did Everybody Get The Ukraine Invasion Predictions So Wrong?', in *Radio Free Europe*, 17 February 2023 <<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-invasion-predictions-wrong-intelligence/32275740.html>> [accessed 13 August 2023].
- 44 Jed Rasula, *What the Thunder Said* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), p. 166.
- 45 The original reference to Poland here may thus also reflect the denigration of the country by British politicians: Lloyd George frequently condemned Poles as 'children who gave trouble', which earned him widespread criticism in Poland (Davies, 'Lloyd George and Poland', p. 132).
- 46 Starosta, *Form and Instability*, p. 76; Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 28; Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Frances Stoner Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War* (New York: New Press, 2013).
- 47 Yuri Andrukhovych to Anita Starosta, 'Imagine an Albanian Joyce: An Interview', in *Boundary 2*, 41.4 (2014), p. 41.
- 48 Franco Moretti's idea that 'near the border, figurality goes up' is pertinent here (*Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 45).
- 49 Olivier Thomas Kramsch, 'Querying Cosmopolis at the Borders of Europe', in *Environment and Planning*, 39 (2007), pp. 1582-1600, p. 1588; Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Fall, 'Grounding Politics on Nearness', pp. 213-225.
- 50 Neville Chamberlain, in John Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), p. 4; the division between an 'Old Europe' of France and Germany in contrast to a 'New Europe' of Eastern nations was suggested by then US Secretary of Defence Donald

- Rumsfeld in January 2003 (quoted in Tom Lansford, 'Introduction', in Tom Lansford and Blagovest Tashev, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe and the US* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. xi-xxvi (pp. xxi-xxii).
- 51 Michael Levenson, 'Does *The Waste Land* have a politics?', in *Modernism/modernity*, 6.3 (1999), pp. 1-11 (p. 8).
- 52 John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 239.
- 53 Ibid, p. 237.
- 54 Juliet J. Fall, 'Grounding Politics on Nearness', in *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 98.4 (2010), pp. 213-225.
- 55 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, p. 19.
- 56 Patrick O. Cohrs, *The New Atlantic Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 898-899.
- 57 Kramsch, 'Querying Cosmopolis', pp. 1595-1596; Balibar, 'We, the people of Europe?', p. 11; Westphal, *Geocriticism*, p. 115. I draw here on understandings of western liberalism as based on peace, freedom, rationality, civilisation, individual rights, rule of law, consensus and friendship rather than conflict, and moral ideals (see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 23, p. 30; and Sergei Prozorov, 'Liberal Enmity', in *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 35.1 (2006), pp. 75-99 (p. 96).
- 58 Andrukhovych, who posits the idea of East Central Europe as the 'terrain in which the struggle for and over Europe is actualized', suggests both Ukraine, but also more eccentrically western Europe, might fit into this category: 'in a country like Ukraine, in which, after 2004 – after the Orange Revolution – it seemed for a moment that it had made its choice and, in its entirety and not just in some parts of it such as Lviv or Galicia but all of it, had become East Central Europe, a terrain in which the struggle for and over Europe is actualized. And now again this border has receded to the West.' ('Imagine an Albanian Joyce', p. 42).
- 59 Jean Monnet, quoted in John van Oudenaren, *Crisis and Renewal* (London: Roman & Littlefield, 2022), p. 79.
- 60 Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States*, p. 26; Russell Elliott Murphy, *Eliot: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), p. 243.
- 61 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xv; Kramsch, 'Querying Cosmopolis', p. 1584, p. 1595; Balibar, 'We, the people of Europe?', p. 58; Mazower, *Dark Continent*, p. ix.
- 62 Aleksandra Majak, 'Eliot's (Im)personality and voices of Polish Modernism', in *T.S. Eliot Studies Annual*, 3 (2021), pp. 215-235 (p. 219).
- 63 Ibid., p. 230.
- 64 'The Waste Land Project', *Theatre of War* <https://theaterofwar.com/schedule/the-waste-land-project> [accessed 28 July 2023].
- 65 Eliot to Darsie Gillie, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, V, pp. 103-104 (p. 103).
- 66 Eliot to Alexander McKechnie, 1 January 1936, *TS Eliot.com* <<https://tseliot.com/letters/search/person/Alexander%20McKechnie/lv8-0005>> [accessed 16 August 2023]. Peter D. Stachura, *The Poles in Britain, 1940-2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 8.

- 67 T.S. Eliot, 'Preface to *Roll Call*', quoted in Joanna Rzepa, 'The "demonic forces" at Auschwitz', in *Modernism / modernity*, 26.2 (2019), pp. 329-350 (pp. 335-336).
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 334.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 340.
- 70 T.S. Eliot, 'Preface to *The Dark Side of the Moon*' (London: Faber & Faber, 1946), p. 7.
- 71 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, p. 5.
- 72 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 64
- 73 Ben Youngwood, 'Dancing Russia Goodbye', in *Brown Political Review*, 4 March 2022 < <https://brownpoliticalreview.org/2022/03/dancing-russia-goodbye/>> [accessed 5 September 2023]. The song faced some controversy at Eurovision, which is supposed to be politically neutral, because of the phonetic similarity between 'Lasha Tumbai' and 'Russia Goodbye': it was claimed 'Lasha Tumbai' meant whipped cream in Mongolian, although this was disputed.
- 74 Sasha Raspopina has previously written about Verka Serduchka's infiltration of a post-Soviet culture in countries still plagued by homophobia 'Verka Serduchka: A Drag Queen's Guide to Infiltrating Post-Soviet Pop Culture', in *New East Digital Archive*, 20 February 2018 <<https://www.new-east-archive.org/features/show/9675/being-lgbtq-verka-serduchka-drag-queens-post-soviet-pop-culture>> [accessed 28 July 2023].

Author Biography

Juliette Bretan is a PhD student in English at the University of Cambridge. Her research explores representations of Polish and East-Central European geopolitics in Anglophone and Polish modernism.