



JUNE 2024

Graduate Institute of
Foreign Languages and Literatures
National Taiwan University

MANIFESTING WAR

PROJECT +

NO. 20



MANIFESTING WAR

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Project + June Issue:

The June 2024 Issue of *Project+* addresses various “manifestations” of war. This issue includes two interviews discussing the cultural wars ignited by classical literature and the literary representations of war during the 19th century. The issue also includes a book review of *Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century*, proffering insights into how war shapes the development of recent Irish literature. It also provides the reader with a moving memoir that reveals the entanglement of war and the journey of a researcher. Finally, the issue ends with a collection of images featuring a memorial of a Russian opposition leader done by Russian citizens living in Taiwan.

Interview with Prof. Nolan:

In this interview with Professor Edward Nolan, we discuss the role of classics in the contemporary world. Professor Nolan first gives us a brief introduction to classic scholarship and his academic background. Then, he elaborates on the challenges and insights he gained from teaching and studying classical literature in both the US and Taiwan. He concludes this interview with reflections on recent controversies in classic studies and how to engage with classical materials ethically.

Interview with Prof. Ho:

In the interview with Professor Ho, we discussed various aspects of war poetry. Professor Ho highlights the limitations of the traditional canon of war poetry, which often focuses exclusively on poetry from the First World War by poets with actual combat experience. Challenging this canon, Ho sheds light on war poetry written in the Victorian era featuring poets such as Alfred Tennyson and Thomas Hardy. He elaborates on various topics, including the distinguishing features of 19th-century war poetry, the strategies employed by poets with no combat experience to address war, the influence of media on poetry during the Crimean War, and the relevance of 19th-century war poetry to contemporary issues.

Book Review by Luke Nolan:

Condensing Prof. Wei H. Kao's *Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century* into a pithy review, Luke Nolan celebrates the author's nuanced viewpoints on marginalized groups in Irish society. He highlights the author's method of analyzing uncanonical dramas that focus on female subalterns, the hybridity of migrants in Ireland, and conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. Nolan ties together the author's critiques with the issues presented in the plays—*An Gail*, *The Hostage*, and *Ourselves Alone*—stating that it invites readers to reconsider the missteps of Catholic-driven Irish nationalism within the quarrels manifested in the selected dramas.

Luke Nolan is a PhD student in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University. His research interests include city-related literature, Victorian literature, and travel and cultural studies.

Essay by Jason James Kennedy:

In his essay, "Between Empires: A Life Marked by Conflict and Exile," Jason Kennedy reveals the haunting influences of war through a combination of family history, personal memoir, and reflections on contemporary geopolitics. His piece provides insights into how personal contexts and academic research drive and inform each other.

Jason James Kennedy is also a PhD student in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University. His research interests are illness narratives, prison writing, the intersection of the literary and visual arts, and French literature. During his free time, he communicates his passion for literature to the public through his YouTube channel, "The Channel of a Disappointed Man."

Gallery:

The gallery features a memorial organized by Russian citizens in Taiwan in tribute to a Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, who died in prison this February.

PROFESSOR INTERVIEW:

DR. EDWARD EUGENE NOLAN

Q: Since classics is a relatively unknown discipline in Taiwan, we'd like you to share your academic career, research interests, and knowledge of what classics scholars do.

A: Classics (or classical or Greek and Roman studies) encompasses the study of the literature, language, history, philosophy, and material culture of Greek and Roman antiquity. It extends, in the broadest sense, from the Bronze Age (2nd millennium BCE) to Late Antiquity (late 3rd-7th centuries CE).

I became interested in classics as an undergrad while taking Latin at the University of Washington. I took Latin since I had previously taken a few Romance languages and was curious about their origins. I was also interested in Early Modern Europe and knew that Latin was still an important international language during that period. I fell so in love with the language, and by way of it, Roman literature, that I decided also to try Ancient Greek and ended up majoring in Classics, which required three-years study in each of the languages. I was a little behind because I chose the major late, so I had to work hard to catch up. Afterward, I completed two MAs and a PhD in the subject.

My research interests generally lie in studying Ancient Greek historical literature and focusing on the historian Herodotus and the connection between language and identity, such as ethnic identity, in Greek and Roman authors. My interest in language has led me a little further afield at times, too, such as in a couple of articles I am working on about code-switching in the *Letters* of the Roman author Pliny the Younger.

Q: Since the 1960s, there have been academic debates that seek to re-evaluate the canon in the humanities (exemplified by scholarships in postcolonial studies and gender studies). Such debates are especially prominent in classics since it is the discipline that concentrates most intensively on canonical texts. A recent example was Prof. Dan-el Padilla Peralta's attempt to "save classics from Whiteness" (from a 2023 New York Times article). What do you think about these debates? Did you participate firsthand in these heated discussions when you were in graduate school? Do these debates inform or influence your research in any way?

A: The Greeks and Romans were not white. Not only did they exist before whiteness was invented during early modernity, but they generally thought of northern Europeans as ethnically other, though Roman society despite its prejudices was quite diverse. However, the field of classics has been quite white in many ways and has historically benefited from an association with whiteness, though of course there have also been Black classicists since the very foundation of the field.¹ In general, academia has been and continues to be exclusionary across disciplines, so it's important to approach any canon critically and continue reevaluating what texts and voices have been deemed valuable. Current debates about race in classics do inform my research as they connect to my interest in ancient race and ethnicity in Herodotus' *Histories*. In general, academia has been and continues to be exclusionary across disciplines, so it's important to approach any canon critically and continue reevaluating what texts and voices have been deemed valuable. Current debates about race in classics do inform my research as they connect to my interest in ancient race and ethnicity in Herodotus' *Histories*.

Q: You have taught in the U.S. and Taiwan. Did you select different texts or emphasize different textual details and themes when you teach in these two settings? What were some of your considerations when making these choices?

A: The texts that I assign at NTU have been different from those I've taught in the U.S. for several reasons. So far at NTU, I've taught both semesters of Introduction to Western Literature, and I've taught first-year Latin.

In the US, student coursework is defined much less around a major, so I had all sorts of different students in my classes, from engineers fulfilling a general education requirement to classics majors with a lot of background knowledge. However, I didn't have a lot of experience with English literature courses. Upon coming to NTU, I realized that an English major is probably the closest U.S. analogue to the experience of most DFL students. I have tailored my selection of texts in Introduction to Western Literature around the needs of students who will be reading much canonical English literature in their later classes and require the cultural background and literary foundation that will allow them to engage with those texts most fruitfully. I also add a little dose of what I think will be most likely to engage the students and interest them in ancient literature. Finally, I consider what texts will help them begin to sharpen their analytical skills in general, as I gather that many of them have little prior experience in literary criticism. I think it's most important that the students have some introduction to epic and tragedy, as well as the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament, which fall a bit outside my expertise but which I think will be important to the students in reading (even contemporary) English literature.

In the US, I taught more specific classes, such as one on race and ethnicity in Greek and Roman antiquity and another on Greek mythology. Teaching different types of classes allowed me to teach a broader range of texts, and the specificity of the courses allowed me to teach texts that delve into particular subjects more deeply than the texts that I believe are important for Introduction to Western Literature. However, as I begin to teach more courses at NTU, I will likely begin to introduce some more specific courses like those I taught in the U.S. For example, this semester I'm offering an MA course on classical reception and the *Odyssey*.

Q: Do American and Taiwanese students' reception of classical texts differ from each other? How do you deal with these differences?

A: I think these differences are an exciting part of the job rather than something to deal with. Every reader has their own reception of what they read based on their own background and experiences. In teaching a text like the *Odyssey* again and again, I have seen that its biggest strength is the diversity of responses it engenders. I personally notice a lot of new things every time I read it, and I enjoy hearing the students' different takes on it too.

Q: In his 2022 book *Professing Criticism*, John Guillory claims that many professors in English are dealing with an increasing number of students who "express desires in their reading that connect most immediately with their cultural formation as young people" (229; emphasis added). Students' preference for immediate "connection" (or, in Guillory's words, "identification") results in the marginalization of "older" literary works since they demand extra intellectual preparations such as learning ancient languages and historical contexts to comprehend (230-231). Do you observe similar issues in classics? How do you address the issue of classical texts' relevance in your research and teaching? How can classical texts broaden our understanding of today's world?

A: I think it is profoundly disorienting to only be able to see things through the lens of today's world, which is a tiny fraction of the many worlds that have existed or will exist in human history. When we have a mindset that only sees the present, we take for granted or naturalize whatever we are living right now instead of seeing that it is the outcome of historical contingency. One example is that linguists long presumed that most humans had always been monolingual, when history shows us that multilingualism is in fact the norm. In another example, a historical perspective on race helps us see that it is social rather than biological and better understand how it was constructed and to whose benefit. While the classical world was certainly not an ideal one, it lets us see how different things can be and reexamine what we think of as natural.

As a teacher, I see that it can be challenging for students to connect with and understand ancient texts because of the unfamiliar context. However, for some students, this challenge is what makes the field interesting and attractive. And just as it's important to destabilize our assumptions about the world, it's important to emphasize what remains constant about the human experience. One way that I do this is by assigning ancient works of satire and comedy to the students. When students see that they are still funny, I think it helps them connect with ancient people on a human level. Ultimately, both approaches are needed: by emphasizing the ancients' humanity we see that, just as they lived in a very different world, so too could we.

Notes:

[1] <https://chs.harvard.edu/permanent-collection/black-classicists/a>

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PROFESSOR INTERVIEW:

DR. TAI-CHUN HO

Q: Professor, thank you for accepting our invitation to participate in this interview. Could you please provide a brief self-introduction?

A: Thanks for inviting me to speak to you today. I am an associate professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Chung Hsing University. Before pursuing a PhD in English Literature at the University of York, England, I completed an MA in literary studies at National Taiwan University. Much of my work focuses on nineteenth-century British war poetry. My first book, *The Crimean War in Victorian Poetry* (2021), examined mid-Victorian war poets' poetic predicaments and achievements. As an alumnus, I am very interested in the research projects of the current NTU graduate students.

Q: You are researching nineteenth-century poetry and have done a great deal of research on Crimean and Boer War poetry, including the works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Thomas Hardy. What are some special features of nineteenth-century British war poetry?

A: The famous Romantic and Victorian war poets were all civilians rather than soldiers. This means that when responding to Britain's armed conflicts through poetry, they did not participate in the military campaign or have experience of combat themselves. Here I am thinking of the major British poets such as Sir Walter Scott, Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Hardy, and Rudyard Kipling. The idea of the non-combatant raises the question of how civilians write about the subject of war without firsthand experience. This question of representation is then complicated by other concerns poets might have relating to the issues of aesthetics, gender, politics, class, or ethics. One distinguishing feature of nineteenth-century British war poetry I have found is that it is heavily intertextual. Often, the poet was not only responding to the current war but also to the wars in the past, and conducting a dialogue with the dead. To research nineteenth-century war poetry is like tracing an ongoing discourse between the past and the present with regard to warfare and war poetry.

Q: As you just mentioned, there lies a big difference between civilian poets and soldier poets. In your book, *The Crimean War in Victorian Poetry*, you mention that the soldier poets with combat experience were legitimated in the canon of war poetry in academia. We also want to know what, in the modern era, has critical attention focused upon now in terms of war poetry? Has the canon been changed in any way to reflect any new concerns?

A: Perhaps I should first say a bit about the canon of British war poetry. The canon was constructed not by the poets themselves but by modernist commentators promoting the works of the so-called “soldier poets.” The influence of the canon has been enormous. Today if the term “war poetry” is mentioned, most people in the UK will think of the poetry of the First World War, especially that of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. That’s quite puzzling. War poems such as Homer’s *Iliad* have a very long history, but now the genre of war poetry is often considered to have emerged during the First World War. In an often-cited article, “Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry,” James Campbell offers a critique of what he calls the ideology of First World War poetry. Simply put, there are different poetic representations of war, and the work of soldier poets is at the top of the hierarchy. Their combat experience authorizes their first-person voices in such works, which in turn silences or marginalizes the voices of civilians and women. In my work, I argue for the importance and complexity of civilian war poetry. Over the past few years, I have tried to revise and challenge the canon of war poetry by offering new readings of nineteenth-century war poetry. I have done this using the works of both major and less well-known poets, including women and contributors to periodicals.

Q: In some of your works, you explore poetry that was written during the Crimean War. What are some specific features of Crimean War poetry? Does it differ from poetry written during the preceding conflicts, such as the Napoleonic Wars?

A: The Crimean War (1853—56) is often dubbed the first modern war—the first to be reported on by correspondents in the field, illustrated by artists, and recorded by photographers on-site. This is the first time the British public learned of the government’s military campaign through immediate reports of the conflict. This had implications for poets responding to the war. Take Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” for example. This famous poem was a response to the Charge of the Light Brigade, a military blunder that occurred during the Battle of Balaclava (25 October 1854). At the time, London newspaper *The Times* hired William Howard Russell as its special correspondent, and his account of the Battle of Balaclava appeared in the columns of *The Times* on 14 November 1854. Tennyson famously wrote his poem promptly to be published in the *Examiner* on 9 December 1854 after reading the newspaper accounts of the Charge of the Light Brigade. His poem, in a sense, is a reworking of the newspaper texts. During the Napoleonic Wars, in the absence of correspondents, the British public didn’t have access to a reliable source of military information, and it could take 2 to 3 months for news of a battle to reach home. By then, the situation could have changed dramatically. The new media immediately transformed the ways poets responded to military conflicts.

Q: In your article “Haunting Voices: Thomas Hardy's Boer War Poetry,” you mention that Hardy is a well-known “ghost-ridden” writer, and his verses arose from the haunting and disembodied voices driven by his concerns and worries about the war. Is the “haunting voice” a strategy employed solely by Hardy himself, or was it a popular technique for civilian poets writing war poetry at the time?

A: The term “haunting” is a slippery one. It can mean many things. In the case of Hardy’s life and writings, Tim Armstrong has argued that “haunted Hardy” is a biographical, cultural, and literary phenomenon. Hardy thought about ghosts a lot and wrote about ghosts in his novels, short stories, and poetry. As you suggested, Hardy was utilizing “haunting voices” during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The word “strategy” implies that the poet consciously invoked the haunting voices, and it is true in two of his Boer War poems—“A Christmas Ghost-Story” and “The Souls of the Slain” in which he creates and appropriates the voices of phantom speakers. But this is not the kind of haunting voice examined in my article. While it is difficult to pinpoint the haunting voices explored in my article as a trope or the result of Hardy’s allusive practice, they nevertheless create conversations between past and present conflicts in his Boer War poems. It was not a common technique of contemporary poets, but a unique feature of Hardy’s Boer War poetry. Hardy may or may not have been conscious that he was creating such voices. It’s quite complicated because the phrase “voices haunting us” also appears in his poem “The Going of the Battery” (first published in the *Graphic* on 11 November 1899), and Hardy comments in a letter of 24 November 1899 about this Boer War poem that it “was almost an exact report of the scene & expression I overheard.” But to answer the question, it is better to refer to my article in *Victorian Poetry*.

Q: Do you believe war poetry in the nineteenth century is confined to that historical period, or can it be attributed to a more general reflection on war? Could nineteenth-century war poetry be related to current ongoing international conflicts?

A: It’s not historically confined because it was read by the next generation of war poets and had a direct impact on their works. The afterlife of nineteenth-century war and poetry can also be seen in our society today. To show how past and present conflicts are often intricately connected, let me briefly discuss a poem by Ciaran Carson (1948-2019). In “Belfast Confetti,” Carson explores the complex relationship between the Irish Troubles and the imperial conflict in the Crimea. Perhaps, I can recite the poem as it is not very long:

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining exclamation marks,

Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the explosion

Itself – an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst of rapid fire ...

I was trying to complete a sentence in my head, but it kept stuttering,

All the alleyways and side-streets blocked with stops and colons.

I know this labyrinth so well – Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman, Odessa Street –

Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea Street. Dead end again.

A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-talkies. What is

My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A fusillade of question-marks.

At the beginning of this poem, the speaker is emotionally blockaded by an outbreak of a conflict between the riot police and the rioters and has to rely on punctuation to describe the violent scene unfolding on the streets of Belfast. What is relevant to us is the speaker's depiction of the city. Belfast is described as a "labyrinth," which might first remind readers of Greek mythology. Yet the speaker immediately intones a list of names associated with the Crimean War: "Balaclava" is the name of the Battle mentioned earlier; Lord "Raglan" was the commander-in-chief of the British army, who tragically passed away in 1855; "Inkerman" is the name of another major Battle which took place in November 1854. The streets of Belfast were named after the iconic figures and battles that took place in the Crimea. The poem, among other things, shows the enduring legacy of the Crimean War that remains relevant to the speaker in the context of the complex relationship between Ireland and England.

Q: Are there any literary works that were not originally about "war" but were interpreted as "war literature" during wartime?

A: Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* might just fit the description. It first appeared in installments in Charles Dickens's *Household Words* (September 1854-January 1855). It does not contain any direct references to the Crimean War, but because it was written during the war years and because Gaskell knew and wrote about Florence Nightingale, the iconic Crimean heroine, scholars such as Stephanie Markovitz have discussed the context of the novel and the conflict and interpreted it as a war novel, exploring its indirect responses to the conflict (see Markovitz's 2005 article "*North and South*, East and West: Elizabeth Gaskell, the Crimean War, and the condition of England" in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*).

Q: Let's go back to the example you mentioned earlier. I was thinking about the *Four Quartets*, one of the major works by T. S. Eliot. I think three of the quartets were written during WW2. Those three poems weren't really about war in particular. But they were somehow interpreted as responses to WW2. That was what I had in mind.

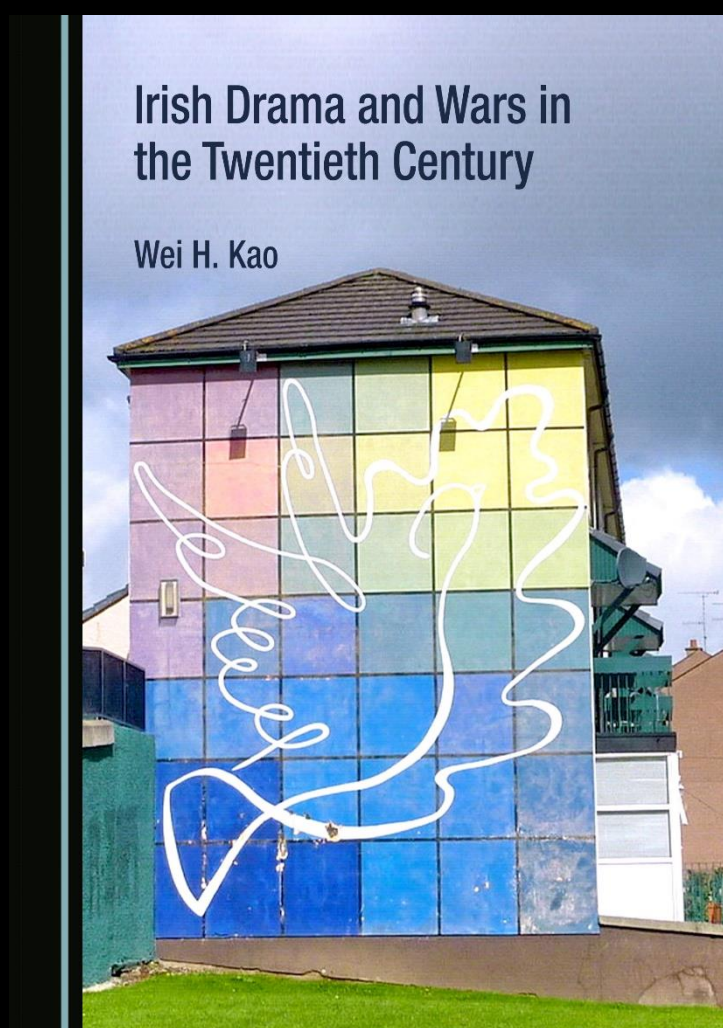
A: I have to admit I haven't looked at T.S. Eliot's responses to war yet. But I guess at times poets and writers did not engage directly with armed conflicts in their works and their responses can be subtle and difficult to explicate. One example that comes to my mind is J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which has been read as his response to WW2. The genre of war literature is also a capacious one which might include various forms of warfare. H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, for example, is about alien invasion. The novel was published in 1898 shortly before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. In the 1890s, there were also various "invasion" novels—Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), for example is about vampire invasion. These works remind us that there are other types of conflict and narratives that do not fit the traditional view of war but still invite us to think about how they can be read as works of war literature.

“Often, the poet was not only responding to the current war but also to the wars in the past and conducting a dialogue with the dead. To research nineteenth-century war poetry is like tracing an ongoing discourse between the past and the present with regard to warfare and war poetry.”



IRISH DRAMA AND WARS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

REVIEWED BY LUKE NOLAN



In *Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century*, the author, Dr. Wei H. Kao, efficaciously highlights the shortcomings of the prescribed Irishness inflicted upon the citizens of Ireland since the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The author notes that the Irish Free State, and indeed the independent nation of the Republic of Ireland that succeeded the Free State, was an “ethno-religious nationalist entity,” which led to the establishment of a rigid diktat that delineated an accepted Irish identity and ostracised those whose identities did not conform (124). Throughout Kao’s work, the expectations of what it means to be Irish are clearly and adroitly demarcated and clarified for the reader. Prompted by Denis Johnston’s *The Scythe and the Sunset*, the author details a “political schizophrenia” in the nature of Irish nationhood that leads to the creation of a conceptual Irish identity based on “nationalistic myths, memories, and narrowly-defined symbols” (94). This Irish identity is extrapolated to reveal its inherently limited and exclusive nature due to the overbearing weight of patriarchal, religious, historical and ideological influences that shape it.

The strength of Kao's work lies in the depth of its examination of non-conformist identities. Leaning on Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" the author proffers a broad range of subaltern voices and identities that attempt to contest the prescribed narrative of Irish identity; these identities include people who are Anglo-Irish, female, black, homosexual, impoverished, non-Catholic, Unionist or Loyalist, and in the particular case of James Connolly, socialist. *Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century* offers an insight into the ways in which a nationalist, puritanical Ireland denied Irishness to a substantial demographic while illustrating the methods through which Irish drama has attempted to challenge these arbitrary and exclusionary assumptions. The author rejects the well-trodden path in Irish studies by avoiding canonic, well-known plays and focusing instead on works that have not received the same degree of scrutiny or critical acclaim. This choice serves as a rejection of imposed narratives of nationalism, ideology and identity by consciously acknowledging what the author terms "an overbearing censorship [that] stagnated the local literary scene" (9). The works examined in this collection circumvent and challenge the censorial preferences of Irish nationalism by directly critiquing its shortcomings and highlighting subaltern identities.

The author structures his work into three sections: "Dramatizing Anglo-Irish Conflicts," "Theatrical Voices from The South," and "Northern Ireland Troubles and Women Playwrights," and he begins with the catalyst for the establishment of the Irish Free State, the much-revered Easter Rising of 1916. Nationalist orthodoxy decrees that the Easter Rising was a heroic event in which the men of Ireland became martyrs for the cause of independence. In his choice of plays and the analysis that ensues, the author challenges the nationalist idealisation of the events of Easter 1916. The plays selected in the book potentially offer a "fifth province," in other words, a space for reflection in which to challenge readers and audience members to reevaluate their position on sectarianism, politics and the history of the nation. The author proffers a multitude of examples of situations in which the Irish public, specifically those who identify as nationalists, have been incapable of confronting voices, ideologies and themes that do not align with their politics; these include a riot at the premiere of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* which was scathing in its portrayal of the nationalist icons of the Easter Rising. The author repeatedly challenges the nationalist identity through his analysis of plays that are not sympathetic to the cause, and in doing so, he illustrates the need for an acceptance of an Irishness that is not restrictively heroic, male and Catholic.

The author places a great emphasis on female playwrights and female characters in the plays that are discussed. This choice is made due to his belief that Irish nationalism is inherently patriarchal and thus offers no space for female expression. Kao notes that women in nationalist lore are often idealised in the manner of Cathleen Ní Houlihan, or the sean bhean bhocht (poor old woman), a nationalistic mythical representation of the Irish nation as a poor old woman in need of valiant young men to fight for her. This portrayal denies agency to women and idealises them as maidens in need of heroic men. Historically, this representational logic has generally been applied to all women in the national imagination. The author challenges this representation through his emphasis on female playwrights and characters as a means of avoiding the long-established tendency to see women's bodies as symbolic battlegrounds on which fights are staged over political issues, identity crises and sexualities. The plays that are chosen do not glorify the Easter Rising; in fact, they show the devastating consequences of the violence that took hold of Dublin, a violence whose effect on women is often ignored in favour of lionising the men who fought against the British over a six-day period during Easter 1916. What the author terms "women's issues" are both a key and a welcome component of the book as they offer a new lens through which to deconstruct and re-examine Catholic, nationalist mythologies related to both the nation and the identities of its citizens.

A further point of emphasis is the sectarianism that has plagued the island of Ireland since the establishment of two separate entities on the island, the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. The author focuses on the Troubles and how they are portrayed by female playwrights. The Troubles is the euphemistic name for the violence and terrorism that beset the island, especially in the north, from the late 1960s to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement [1] in 1998. Kao reveals to the reader the general trend in the manner in which women's issues are highlighted in relation to the Troubles. These include an implicit expectation of unrestrained support for the men who are engaged in violent tit-for-tat sectarian attacks, an assumption that women are willing participants in the "imagined communities" that are divided along sectarian lines and conjured by men, and, as the author illustrates in his analysis of Frieda in Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*, an expectation that women should suppress their sexual desires and play the submissive role in their communities. Furthermore, the author exposes the fact that women's roles and political activism during the Troubles have historically been framed as an extension of the sexist assumptions of what a woman's domestic role should consist of rather than as an act of defiance or independence. The author chooses to eschew the expected format of an analysis of the Troubles, which tends to focus on specific violent events and the casualties that they caused and instead illuminates a neglected perspective through his focus on the effects that the Troubles had on women. In so doing, the author provides a valuable contribution to academic studies and an important alternative perspective on the tragic consequences of the Troubles for the community as a whole.

Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century is a very timely work as it offers an opportunity to reflect on the errors of Catholic-driven Irish nationalism at the dawn of a new stage in the growth of the nation. For so long a land of emigrants, Ireland, since the days of the Celtic Tiger economic boom [2], has seen net immigration for much of the past two decades, along with a dramatic increase in dual Irish citizens, with notable increases in Irish-Polish, Irish-Nigerian and Irish-Romanian citizens. The author highlighted the overbearing interference of and domination by “the Catholic middle class over peripheral communities/individuals at an institutional level” to the point that Brendan Behan’s play *The Hostage*, which was an adaptation of his Irish language play *An Giall*, was initially only performed in bohemian London as it portrayed identities and themes that would have been unacceptable in nationalist, puritanical Ireland (135). This overbearing pontification regarding what it means to be Irish and what is acceptable to the Irish must be replaced by a more bohemian outlook, in line with those expressed by many of the playwrights featured in this book.

Work Cited:

Kao, Wei. H. *Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022.

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Notes:

[1] The Good Friday Agreement is, in fact, a pair of agreements ratified by referenda in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that brought an end to the ethnic-nationalist conflict known as “The Troubles.” The Good Friday Agreement secured peace on the island of Ireland and established a power-sharing agreement between the political parties of Northern Ireland.

[2] The Celtic Tiger, a soubriquet derived from the economic booms associated with the 4 Asian Tigers of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, refers to Ireland’s rapid economic growth from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. During this period, Ireland metamorphosed from one of the poorest countries in the European Union to one of the richest.

BETWEEN EMPIRES: A LIFE MARKED BY CONFLICT AND EXILE

Author: Jason James Kennedy

War, in the words of Montaigne, is a human disease,[1] and my own fate is to have been born in the United Kingdom, a nation whose long history of conquest and plunder is testament to a particularly severe case of this malady, a nation upon whose empire the sun used to never set, and a nation which today, while greatly diminished, remains an eager partner in the wars waged by the United States,[2] is the world's second-largest exporter of arms,[3] and a provider of military training to some of the world's most despotic regimes.[4]

My antipathy to all forms of militarism (of which an excessive interest in war forms the natural counterpart) is rooted in a family history deeply marked by war. While serving with the Allied forces in Europe during WWII, my paternal grandfather met an internally displaced Frenchwoman, Marie, whom he brought back to England at the end of the war (before dying a few years later due to injuries suffered in combat). This grandmother, who passed away long before my own birth, intrigues me; I wonder what truth there is to the notion of intergenerational trauma, and if her own flight from her homeland during a time of war was not somehow the prompt for my own departure from the UK in 2003, when I was no longer able to bear the jingoistic atmosphere whipped up by the media as another US invasion of Iraq, in which the UK was an enthusiastic partner, became an inevitability.[5]

I relocated across the Irish Sea, to Dublin, the land of my maternal ancestors. Growing up in Birmingham, in the UK, at the height of the Troubles, I had seen the mistreatment to which the authorities subjected my mother's family on account of their ethnicity. Harassment, beatings, torture, these became facts of life for members of the Irish community in the wake of an IRA bombing campaign that targeted pubs in our adopted city.[6] My uncle had the misfortune to have left the scene of one of these bombings just minutes before the explosions, and so came under strong suspicion of having been a participant. At the hands of the police, he suffered the kind of physical and psychological abuse which was later dramatized in the Hollywood movie, *In the Name of the Father*. Now, finally freed from being a member of a marginalized minority, I would find here, surrounded by like-minded people, *my people*, a sense of belonging which had always eluded me.

On Dublin's O'Connell Street, I observed the bullet holes in the pillars of the General Post Office, permanent reminders of 1916's Easter Uprising against British rule in Ireland; in Glasnevin Cemetery, I visited the graves of Irish patriots, from both 1916 and the hunger strikes of the 1970s; but the monument that made the greatest impression was a life-sized statue of Oscar Wilde, reclining on a rock in Merrion Square. I thought of him in exile in France, using the name Melmoth, and of how I too was fated to be a wanderer. [7] Far from having reconnected with my Irish heritage, I now realized, to my horror, "I'm English!" How could I ever have been foolish enough to have believed anything else? Had I not been born in the very heart of England, only miles from the birthplaces of Shakespeare and Samuel Johnson? And had I not proven, time and again, that I was a true-born Englishman by conforming to that singular quirk of national identity which the Great Cham had noted: "two men of any other nation who are shewn into a room together, at a house where they are both visitors, will immediately find some conversation. But two Englishmen will probably go each to a different window, and remain in obstinate silence." [8]

Feeling no wish to remain, I left for the United States, arriving the same year that George W. Bush would win a second presidential term. Against the background of the 'Global War on Terror' launched after the 9/11 attacks, the election campaign took place in a toxic atmosphere in which the Republican slogan, 'Support the Troops,' proved a highly effective means of silencing criticism of the ongoing US invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Those who still dared to speak out were met with accusations of treason or of harboring terrorist sympathies. Utterly dismayed at the lack of coverage given to anti-war voices, and at the American electorate having resoundingly endorsed a US foreign policy I viewed as disastrous, the time had come to move on. What had drawn me to the US to begin with was the writings of the Beat Generation, the literary passion of my formative years, and now, following in the footsteps of William Burroughs, I made my way down through Mexico to Guatemala.[9]

Tasting Freedom

In the highlands of Guatemala, on the shores of Lake Atitlan, I was to have my first sustained experience of freedom. By a terrible irony, the peace that reigned here was the direct result of a massacre conducted by Guatemalan troops. On December 2, 1990 (three decades into the civil war which saw 150,000 of the country's indigenous Mayan population killed or disappeared), the army opened fire with automatic weapons on an unarmed crowd of between 2,000 and 4,000 Tz'utujil from the town of Santiago.[10] Fourteen people were killed and twenty-one more were wounded. Two weeks later, as a result of massive popular pressure and a national and international outcry, the army vacated its garrison and the town became one of the few of such size in Guatemala without a military base.

This was still the situation when I arrived in San Pedro la Laguna in 2005. With its beautiful location, cheap hotels, and friendly inhabitants, the town had become a popular stop for backpacking foreigners. With only a single policeman (an indigenous man from the town), order was maintained by a council of elders, the proceedings of whose meetings boomed out across the town as the population turned up their radios and opened their doors. In this environment I learned Spanish and acquainted myself with the history of Guatemala's civil war, which had ended in 1996, reading books such as Ricardo Falla's *Masacres de la Selva* (Massacres of the Jungle), a collection of eyewitness reports of military atrocities, possession of which would have potentially resulted in arrest or disappearance a decade earlier. [11]

Just an hour from Lake Atitlan lay the capital, Guatemala City, one of the most dangerous cities on the planet; 200,000 internally displaced people had sought refuge in the capital during the civil war, creating entire zones of makeshift houses with no proper sanitation or power, where, in the absence of law enforcement, fearsome criminal gangs had taken over, armed with the weapons which had flooded the country during the conflict. Relocating from the safety of Lake Atitlan to take up a post in a hospital, I took up residence in a gated community, a fortified compound with 24-hour armed private security. This was safety without freedom, but there were considerable perks: a maid, a gardener, and a driver, and the chance to do interesting work and meet powerful people. One such person was Taiwan's ambassador to Guatemala, at whose request I spent Chinese New Year's Eve at an association for Guatemala's Taiwanese community.[12] Here, while eating my first stinky tofu and receiving my first red envelopes, I met with individuals who had fled the island to escape persecution during the White Terror, and at whose invitation I was to travel to Taiwan.

Finding a Home

Shortly after I arrived in Taiwan, I was introduced to one of the leading members in the human rights movement. This man, who had a forbidding, martial air, had been a political prisoner on Green Island, and was now involved in the operation of what was then called the Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park.[13] With Spanish as our common language (he had spent a number of years of his exile in Guatemala), he showed me around the courtrooms and the cells of the detention center, including a shower block whose walls were lined with padded leather to accommodate the washing of the many detainees whose maltreatment had resulted in insanity. At his home in Xindian, I met with numerous painters, writers, and academics, all of whom had suffered political persecution, all of whom were now

actively seeking to bring their experiences to public notice and secure financial assistance from the state for those whose maltreatment had left them with health problems or in financial difficulties. In their company I met hundreds of victims of the White Terror, many of whom took pains to impress two fundamental points upon me; that bringing the truth of that period to light would not only secure some kind of justice, however belated, for victims, but would also help strengthen Taiwan's fledgling democracy, which they felt to be the best bulwark against any return to such dark days.

If in Guatemala I had found specific locales where a peaceful existence was possible, in Taiwan I found an entire society where violent crime was a rarity and petty crime almost non-existent. It was to be here, finally, that I felt safe enough to engage properly with both my English identity and with English literature, and it was this final fact that was to draw me back into full-time study on the graduate program at National Taiwan University. At NTU, with the help of passionate instructors and through my own research, I devoted attention to anti-war voices from various periods of British history, discovering such figures as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a member of the Blue Stockings Society, whose *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* criticized Britain's participation in the Napoleonic Wars, prophesying the nation's ruin and its plunge into 'Gothic night'; Keith Vaughan, a talented painter who became a conscientious objector during WWII, whose journals depict with great sensitivity the distress suffered by the wounded soldiers he cared for; or Louis MacNeice, the Irish poet, whose *Prayer Before Birth* (1944) espoused the sentiment that never having been born is preferable to fighting in a war:

I am not yet born; O fill me
With strength against those who would freeze my
humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton
would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with
one face, a thing, and against all those
who would dissipate my entirety

A Changing Taiwan

Recent years have been a nightmare of militarism as the same UK that I thought I had escaped from more than two decades ago has taken an active interest in the growing geopolitical tensions between Taiwan and China. In 2021, the Royal Navy, citing as justification its "enduring security interests in the Indo-Pacific," sailed a warship through the Taiwan Strait. In May 2023, Taiwan's then-president, Tsai Ing-Wen, received Liz Truss, the

former UK Prime Minister (whose disastrous reign lasted only 44 days), as if she were a major political figure rather than the laughing stock she is at home. With the UK currently advocating that Ukraine has the right to use UK-supplied weapons to strike deep in Russian territory,[14] as well as playing a significant role in supporting Israel in its war on Gaza,[15] which the ICJ has ruled is a ‘plausible case of genocide,’ a lifetime of experience makes me extremely wary and fearful of what closer ties between the UK and Taiwan presages for the future of this island. With the US Senate grouping Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan in its recent bill which provided \$95bn of aid, of which Taiwan’s \$8bn is for military support, the picture looks even more bleak, as Taiwan faces the prospect of being used as a pawn in a showdown between the US and China.

Not wishing to end on a pessimistic note, I hope that as a student of English literature rather than political science, my fears prove to be ill-founded – the result of ignorance rather than insight. Nothing would please me more than to discover myself to have been wrong, and that all that awaits is a peaceful and prosperous future.

Notes:

[1.] Montaigne, *Of Barbarism and Civilization*.

[2.] This partnership runs much deeper than participating in US-led coalitions for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, a UK colonel, Hugh Baker, who served as Director of Strategy and Plans at AFRICOM, the US command in Africa, described his role there as, “effectively, an American officer who happens to wear a British uniform and speaks with an English accent.”

[3.] Department of International Trade figures published in 2019 show that the UK has a 16% share of the global arms trade, second to the US with 47%, and more than Russia and France, which have 11% and 10% respectively.

[4.] The Campaign Against the Arms Trade reports a UK government reply to a question by Sam Tarry, MP, confirms that since 2018 the UK has provided military training to 18 countries on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office list of ‘human rights priority countries’ which includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel and Kazakhstan.

[5.] The UK Prime Minister of the time, Tony Blair, who led the nation into the Iraq War on the basis of “intelligence” he knew to be untrue, has never been forgiven by the British people and has thus been prevented from returning to public life.

[6.] In the wake of the Irish Republican Army bombings of two pubs on 21 November 1974, which killed 21 people and injured 182 others, Birmingham's Irish community experienced ostracism, assault and abuse. Any public celebrations of Irish culture were cancelled and tensions created by these bombings took decades to heal.

[7.] Wilde adopted the name Melmoth after the protagonist of Charles Maturin's Gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), fated to wander the world alone for eternity.

[8.] Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*.

[9.] As of December 2023, there were still 30 detainees reportedly being held at the Guantanamo Bay detention center. A recent Amnesty International article notes: "Most of these men were never charged with a crime, and many of them were tortured. Over half of them were cleared for release or transfer years ago and are still awaiting next steps – which never seem to come." <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/22-years-of-justice-denied/>

[10.] The Tz'utujil are one of the 22 native peoples of Guatemala, referred to collectively as Mayans.

[11.] The indigenous man from whom I purchased this book had replaced its cover with that of a romance novel, and advised me to keep it somewhere hidden.

[12.] La Asociación de Beneficencia de la Colonia China en Guatemala.

[13.] In 2018, the site was given its current name of Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park, 白色恐怖景美紀念園區.

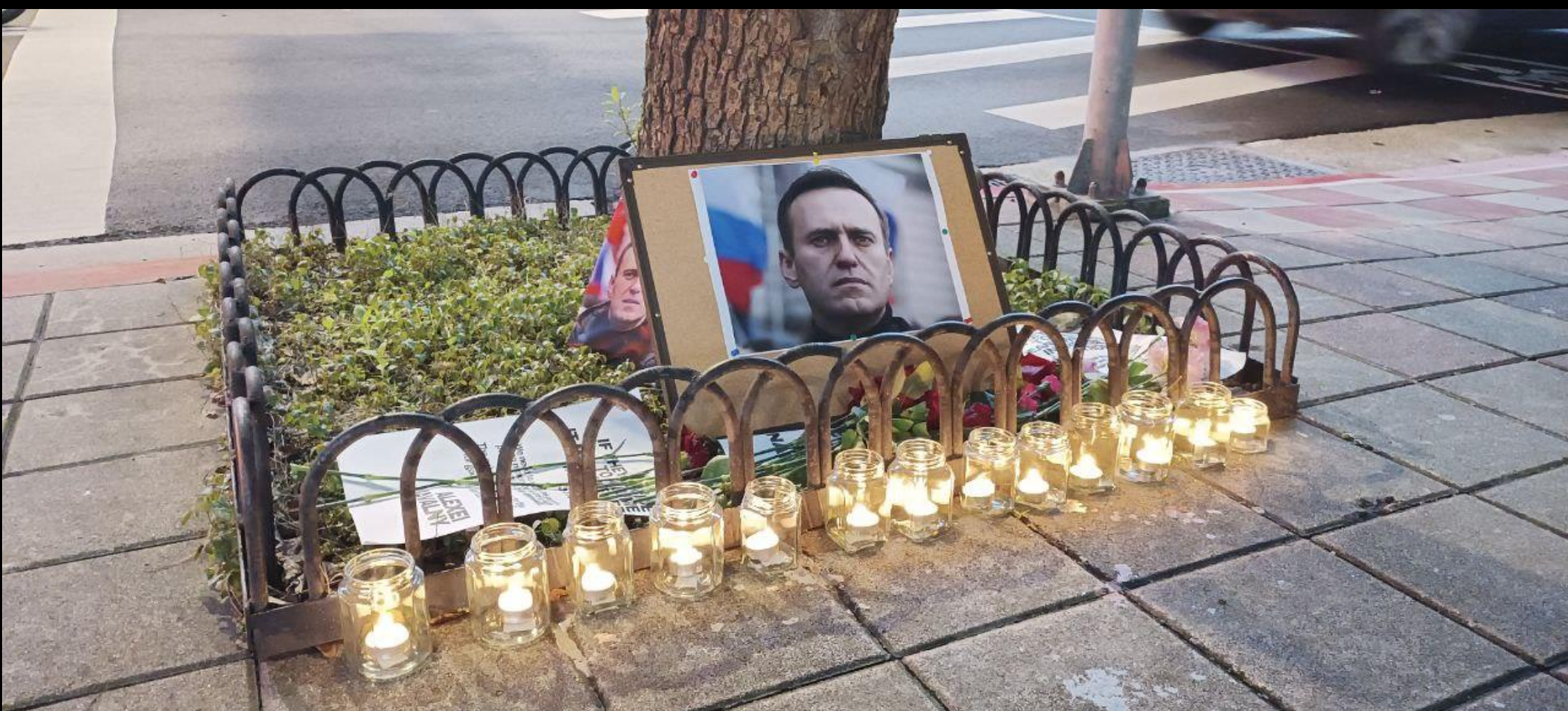
[14.] Kiev has right to use British weapons inside Russia – Cameron, BBC
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c163kp93l6po>

[15.] Revealed: UK military has flown 200 spy missions over Gaza in support of Israel, Declassified UK <https://www.declassifieduk.org/revealed-uk-military-has-flown-200-spy-missions-over-gaza-in-support-of-israel/#:~:text=Activism-,Revealed%3A%20UK%20military%20has%20flown%20200%20spy%20missions%20over%20Gaza,assassinated%20three%20UK%20aid%20workers.>

ALEXEI NAVALNY'S MEMORIAL BY RUSSIAN CITIZENS IN TAIWAN

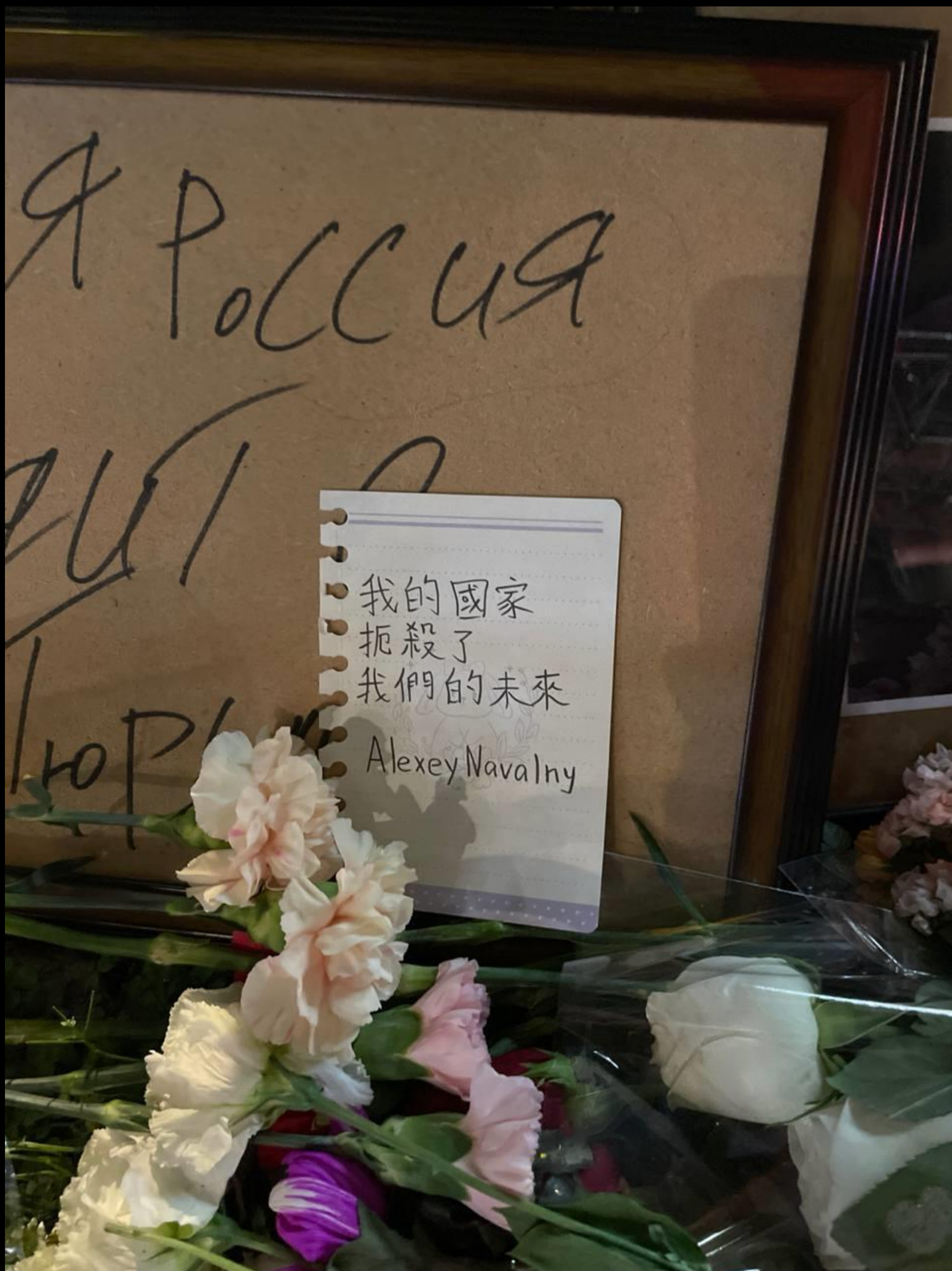
Author: Alexander Vinogradenko

On February 16, 2024, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny died in an Arctic penal colony at the age of 47. Navalny was widely known in Russia as a leader of numerous anti-government protests. He was also the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which published numerous investigations revealing corruption among prominent figures of the Russian government[1]. Throughout his brief political career, he advocated the values of democracy, free elections, and political competition, opposing the dictatorship of Vladimir Putin. In 2020 he was poisoned with a nerve agent and barely survived. After his recovery in Germany, he came back to Russia in 2021 only to be detained right at the airport and imprisoned “on charges he dismissed as politically motivated” [2]. Later, the court charged him with extremism, extending his sentence to 19 years in prison. Navalny has now joined the ranks of Russian politicians who died fighting for human rights and freedom in their country[3]. To commemorate Navalny, in February a group of Russian citizens in Taiwan organized a temporary memorial near the Representative Office for the Moscow-Taipei Coordination Commission. The following photos are provided by [Free Russia in Taiwan](#) (instagram: @freerussiantaiwan):



A sign that reads “my Russia is in prison,” written in Russian.







[1] For more on Navalny's investigations see <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/02/20/navalnys-5-biggest-investigations-a84177>

[2] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16057045>

[3] Navalny may be the latest in a long line of Putin critics who met an early death: <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/16/europe/putin-critics-dead-alexey-navalny-intl-cmd>

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Tennyson Society Presents 2024-2025

TENNYSON TALKS 3RD SERIES



INFORMATION

FIRST THURSDAYS
AT 7:30PM LONDON
TIME VIA ZOOM

Tennyson Society
Members and all
attenders at last
year's Talks will
automatically receive
Zoom joining details
a few days before
each Talk. To be
added to our
emailing list please
email
vpurton@hotmail.co.
uk.

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 3 TAI-CHUN HO (Taiwan) 'Tennyson and
Nineteenth-Century War Poetry'

November 7 ROGER EBBATSON (Lancaster)
'Tennysonian Sea Fantasies'

December 5 HERBERT TUCKER (Virginia) 'Worlding:
Tennyson and Cosmos'

January 9 NAOMI LEVINE (Yale) 'Tennyson's Stanza'

February 6 DINAH BIRCH (Liverpool) 'Tennyson and
Ruskin'

March 6 CORNELLA PEARSALL (Smith) 'Nuclear
Tennyson'

“Everyday War” Exhibition

Venue: Taipei Fine Arts Museum

Date: 20 April- 24 November 2024

