Leanne Grech proposes that Wilde's studies at Oxford launched his "conceptualization of aestheticism as an alternative style of education." It is a worthy subject, for Wilde very clearly did prioritize education as a cultural value, however much he may have resisted its institutional forms. As Grech rightly observes, Wilde was initially keen on pursuing a career in education when he graduated from Oxford. Had his efforts to do so met with success, literary history may have been very different. But instead of pursuing life as an Oxford don, he chose to develop his educational ideals outside the bounds of the academy. And in all of the works discussed in this book -- from the travel poetry of his early career to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/91) -- Wilde's treatment of aesthetic education can be directly traced back to his study of the classics.

There is much to buttress such an approach. Plato's model of education has long been recognized as central to Wilde's worldview, as Grech makes clear in Chapter 1, which reviews existing scholarship on Wilde's relation to the classics. Here Grech foregrounds Linda Dowling's *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1994) and Iain Ross's *Oscar Wilde and Ancient Greece* (2013), reviewed elsewhere on this site. These books highlight two major threads of Grech's argument. Among the earliest to explore the sexual politics of Hellenism at Oxford, Dowling argued that in many ways, the study of ancient Greece facilitated the emergence of queer identity as a culturally significant and even salutary development. According to Grech, however, Wilde found the Platonic model of education he encountered at Oxford "impossible to achieve and fraught with danger" (174). Grech's book, therefore, seeks to complicate existing work on Wilde's treatment of the link between *eros* and pedagogy.

By contrast with Dowling, Ross treats Wilde's classical studies comprehensively, from his somewhat obscure years at Portora Royal School through Oxford and beyond. To some extent, Grech seeks to extend this definitive work on Wilde's classical education by focusing on one of the most significant outcomes of his studies: a galvanizing interest in aesthetic education. Understandably, Grech does so by focusing on the works of Plato and Aristotle, both of whom make frequent and compelling appearances throughout this book. Other writers included on the Oxford syllabus for the School of Literae Humanaiores -- such as Homer, Demosthenes, Thucydides, Aristophanes, or Aeschylus -- are understandably absent, because they have less to say explicitly about education. Plato and Aristotle were "the pillars of the Greats curriculum," as Grech puts it, and the *Republic* in particular originated a form of aesthetic education that would prove vital to Wilde's intellectual worldview (11). So rather than featuring Wilde's study of the classics, as reflected for instance in his college notebooks, Grech shows how *reflections* on a Platonic model of education permeate Wilde's published *oeuvre*.

In this spirit, subsequent chapters address Wilde's travel poems, which juxtapose the cultural legacies of Greece with the aesthetic rituals of the Catholic Church; his treatment of aesthetic education and strategic leveraging of his Oxford experience during the lecture tour of America; and his mixed reflections on Oxford in "The Soul of Man" and "The Critic as Artist," where he treats the university as both an intellectual sanctuary and a social institution with troubling ties to imperialism. The final two chapters feature an important component of Wilde’s pedagogy: the link between aesthetic education and *eros*. Probing this link in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chapter 5 highlights Wilde’s complicated response to Benjamin Jowett’s translation of Plato’s *Symposium*, which led him to conclude that the Oxonian model of learning was at once rewarding and potentially perilous. Chapter 6 then shows how these ideas informed Wilde’s later life as manifested in his correspondence, the trial transcripts, and that wonderfully idiosyncratic document now named *De Profundis*. The book concludes with a brief epilogue tantalizingly titled "Some Thoughts on Aesthetic Education."

As countless scholars have observed, the term "aesthetic" is somewhat capacious and even elusive. Calling aestheticism "one of those terms in literary criticism that are impossible fully to define," Jonathan Freedman notes how much the most widely recognized aesthetes -- Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde -- differed in their conceptions of it (*Professions of Taste* [1990] 3). According to Talia Schaeffer, the difficulty of defining aestheticism springs from the variety of its expressive forms, so that it becomes not so much a circumscribed category of writers and artists as a "pervasive mode of textual production" (*The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* [2000] 2). Most applicable to Grech's approach, perhaps, is Stefano Evangelista's observation that aestheticism was "not a programmatic or coherent movement" (*British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece* [2009] 3). For Evangelista, it is Greek culture itself that constitutes the most plausible anchor for aestheticism, for "it is to the Greeks that the aesthetes turn to formulate their late-Romantic theorization of the aesthetic as a discourse of dissent from the dominant culture of the mid-Victorian decades [...]" (2).
Seen this way, aestheticism may be defined less by shared stylistic or social aims than by a common intellectual inheritance -- one that inspired a return to the past.

Like Evangelista, Grech argues that Wilde's vision of "aesthetic education" is rooted in his study of the Greeks at Oxford, a claim that many readers of Wilde would readily concede. On a few points, however, Grech's book pivots from previous studies of this topic. On the one hand, it highlights Wilde's investment in learning and avails new ways of viewing his relationship to social institutions that he is often thought to have resisted outright. On the other hand, it seeks to revise (especially in Chapters 5 and 6) a current of scholarship that aligns Wilde with a Platonic understanding of eros. In probing Wilde's critical response to Benjamin Jowett's translation of the Symposium, Grech's analysis is strong and incisive, for it is firmly grounded in Wilde's immediate intellectual contexts. Grech deftly leverages Jowett's commentary on the Symposium in order to show how Wilde's own vision of eros contests Jowett's even while sometimes converging with it. Also, while showing how Walter Pater's chapter on "Winkelmann" in The Renaissance (1873) informed The Picture of Dorian Gray, Grech spotlights the role of intimacy (and its dangers) in Wilde's text.

For Grech, aesthetic education often seems to hinge upon a kind of "self-directed learning process or a mode of self-culture" that helps to obviate the threat of unwelcome influences (2). As Grech puts it, "those who cultivate a profound and ongoing relationship with art will also transform themselves into exceptional individuals" (259). For avid readers of Wilde, this is hardly a controversial claim, and it certainly complements the volume's focus on Plato. At such moments, Grech's work dovetails with that of scholars like Peter Bailey, who (in a 2009 Cornell dissertation on "Aestheticism and the Erotics of Pedagogy") has explored at length the erotic dimension of Wilde's "aesthetic education" and, much like Grech, treats aesthetic education as a form of autodidactism.

This course of self-education is frequently abetted by a direct encounter with agreeable objects, as Wilde explains in an 1892 lecture on "The Decorative Arts." Here, Grech notes, Wilde indicates that "the moral development of children is formed in response to their everyday surroundings" (104). Elsewhere, however, Wilde's vision of aesthetic education seems to include the world of natural objects as well. Wilde's lecture on "House Decoration" describes a child sketching from nature. "[T]he boy," he says, "who sees the thing of beauty which a bird on the wing becomes when transferred to wood or canvas will probably not throw the customary stone" (Miscellanies, ed. Robert Ross [Methuen 1908] 279-90, 290). Wilde was likely drawing on the work of Ruskin, who famously recommended that artists learn to draw from nature instead of attempting to copy outlines as dictated by the South Kensington system. In Wilde's anecdote, then, the aesthetic experience is not only about receiving pleasurable sensations: the boy learns by depicting beauty, which in turn cultivates his sense of what is good. Wilde calls upon a Platonic understanding of aesthetic education here, though possibly one that has been filtered through the teachings of his own Oxford mentor, a man who thought and wrote much on the subject of aesthetic education.

Assuredly, one of the challenges of a subject like this is that Wilde's experience of the classics was in many cases inflected by other intellectual encounters. In Plato and Platonism (1893), for instance, Pater considers at length how Plato's educational ideas came to be adapted and transformed by generation of Platonists and neo-Platonists, many of whom Wilde studied directly. Indeed, Wilde's understanding of Greek education was shaped not only by Pater and Jowett, but also by the work of his Trinity College mentor J.P. Mahaffy. It was Mahaffy, as Grech observes, who ushered Wilde through the Mediterranean tour that yielded his illuminating travel poetry. Wilde is known to have corrected the manuscript of Mahaffy's earlier volume, Social Life in Greece (1874), which is not only dedicated to Wilde but also -- significantly -- reflects explicitly on the subject of Greek education. For Mahaffy, aesthetic education was not always individualized or Platonic. In Old Greek Education (1881), Mahaffy observes that the Greeks "went so far beyond this as to assert that by constantly playing martial music people would become martial, that by constantly playing and singing passionate and voluptuous music people became passionate and voluptuous" (Mahaffey 61). For Mahaffy, then, the classical view of aesthetic education was not limited to a course of self-education or self-culture; it encompassed a model of influence, whereby forms of beauty pressed upon individuals from without, often irrespective of their particular thoughts or desires.

In the end, Grech's volume helpfully builds on existing accounts of Wilde's aesthetic vision. Her focus on aesthetic education might well prompt more specific avenues of inquiry -- Wilde's mixed views on standardized education, for instance, or his engagement with institutional learning. Certainly, the volume raises vital questions about how Wilde's views on aesthetic education might either complement or contest other educational theories of the time. This complex book is likely to play an important role in future discussions of Wilde's relationship to intellectual culture.