

*Oscar Wilde and the Radical Politics of the Fin de Siècle* by Deaglán Ó Donghaile. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020. x, 250 pp. ISBN 978-1-4744-5943-3. £80.00.

Oscar Wilde has been many things to many critics over the years. Frequently lampooned in the popular press of his day as the high priest of decadence, he was a man who wore many masks. His heavily overdetermined reputation as a hedonistic dilettante continues to render the precise status of his relationship to the radical political milieus of the fin de siècle, whose edges he skirted, both indeterminate and hard to parse. How is one to take him? Was he just a canny self-publicist, always with half an eye on the latest fad and fashion (of which socialism was just one)? Was he, as Norbert Kohl has argued, a fundamentally conformist rebel? Or is there a more solid core of political and ethical commitment that runs like a red thread through his work? Deaglán Ó Donghaile answers the last of these questions decisively in the affirmative, and offers a patient, detailed, and persuasive reclamation of the seriousness and sincerity of Wilde's political radicalism.

The book as a whole ranges across the full gamut of Wilde's cultural production, and each of the book's seven main chapters is organized around an extended close reading of a given text, the cumulative effect of which is to offer a richly contextualized form of historical description that situates Wilde's work within larger networks of political and ideological discourse. There are many illuminating discussions along the way. In chapter three, for instance, Ó Donghaile reads the well-known arguments of Wilde's 1891 essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" in conjunction with his earlier review of the British diplomat Herbert Giles's translation of the writings of the fourth-century BCE Taoist philosopher Zhuāngzǐ (historically romanized as Chuang Tsū). Ó Donghaile finds in Wilde's celebration of Zhuāngzǐ's anti-authoritarian ethical anarchism an important precursor of the anti-capitalist individualism and anti-utilitarianism that Wilde espouses more fully in "The Soul of Man."

Elsewhere, Ó Donghaile reads Wilde together with the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin's arguments in *The Conquest of Bread* and *Mutual Aid*, as well as the polemical writings and activities of Irish republicans, such as Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell, always finding convincing points of congruence and striking affinities. Fittingly, Wilde's mother also features prominently at several points. During the 1840s, Jane Francesca Elgee Wilde published in the Young Ireland newspaper *The Nation*, under the pseudonym Speranza, and hosted various politically charged soirées at her Dublin residence. Ó Donghaile finds the influence of her anti-colonial nationalism – as articulated in her poem "The Stricken Land" and her essay "Jacta Alea Est"