

***The New Ezra Pound Studies*. Ed. Mark Byron. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 290 (cloth).**

Reviewed by Peter Liebrechts (Leiden University)

This collection of essays part of Cambridge University Press's series "Twenty-First Century Critical Revisions", which addresses two main themes in relation to specific authors or literary traditions, namely critical approaches which since *ca.* 2000 have produced new interpretations, and critical shifts made feasible through the emergence of new editions of texts, of source material, and of biographical accounts. Mark Byron's introduction offers a wide-ranging list of foundational shifts in recent Pound studies, which themselves reflect broader shifts in literary studies: the archival turn and the transnational turn.

The archival turn has recently resulted in the magisterial three-volume biography of Pound by David Moody (2007-2015), in new textual editions, such as Massimo Bacigalupo's edition of *Posthumous Cantos* (2015), in several editions of Pound's correspondence, and in a critical edition of Ezra Pound and Olga Rudge's unfinished detective novel, *The Blue Spill* (2019). And much archival work lies also at the basis of critical studies which have deepened our understanding of Pound's work, such as David Ten Eyck's *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos* (2012); Anderson Araujo's *Companion to Guide to Kulchur* (2017); Michael Kindellan's study of Pound's late Cantos (2017); and my own monograph on Pound's versions of Greek tragedy (2019). Archival work has also impacted the study of the relationship between Pound, Italian Fascism, and the American Far Right, as exemplified by excellent books in the last decade by Matthew Feldman, Alec Marsh, and Catherine Paul.

The transnational turn has resulted in a rethinking and deepening of the study of Pound and his work in relation to scholarship in East Asian Studies, particularly China and Japan. Here the output is mainly to be found in academic journals and collections of essays, but we also have a facsimile edition of *Cathay*, edited by Zhaoming Qian (2016), which includes relevant pages from Ernest Fenellosa's notebooks, as well as a critical edition of the same text, edited by Timothy Billings (2019), which includes a wealth of additional material and allows readers with no knowledge of Chinese to get an insight into Pound's translational strategies.

So, these are exciting times for Poundians, and *The New Ezra Pound Studies* not only takes stock of the current state of the field, but also contains many suggestions on how to move forward. The collection is divided into three parts, of which the first addresses Pound's texts (sources, manuscripts, print versions, and the various media on which his work had an impact). Leah Culligan Flack focuses on Pound's two renderings of plays by Sophocles, and stresses his importance in a time where classical studies have been rejuvenated by an increasing interest in classical reception studies (although at the same time, the number of trained classicists has dwindled). Flack rightly notes that the focus no longer lies exclusively on the unidirectional appropriation of a classical text by later artists, but that the scope has widened to show how reception is also a form of constructing the ancient world. Although, unfortunately, she does not follow up on this observation, Flack offers sound general analyses of the two plays, their historical-biographical context, and their relation to *The Cantos*. However, I am not fully convinced by her premise that Pound "used translation to develop a model of reception grounded in the deferral of coherence and meaning" (11). Although I agree that in the late *Cantos* Pound seems to shift the responsibility for the poem's possible coherence from himself to the reader, resulting in the poem's reception as being open and unrealized, here two different notions of reception seem to have become blurred.

Mark Byron in "Early Medieval Philosophy and Textuality" focuses on Pound's apprehension of medieval sources, and how recent shifts in various fields such as Carolingian textuality, Byzantine history, and the history of Islamic transmission of Greek texts to the Latin West may help us to understand Pound's work better. Byron rightly notes a parallel between medieval attempts to preserve the best cultural expressions of antiquity and Pound's encyclopedic approach to sources. He convincingly argues that new insights into medieval culture may help us appreciate Pound's sometimes eclectic choices of cultural *exempla*, and presentation of connecting patterns. While Pound may have shown a disdain for philology and an impatience for all the relevant linguistic and material details of his sources, knowledge of some of which was not even available at his own time, his poetic inquiry often helped him see sharply what scholarly inquiry only recently has been able to establish and confirm.

Ron Bush, who has been working for some time on an eagerly awaited critical edition of *The Pisan Cantos*, offers in his contribution an insightful overview of

| Affirmations 7.1

how the continuous development in Pound studies of archival and text-genetic work, while increasing knowledge of historical-biographical contexts and the printing history of *The Cantos*, has caused the possibility of an authoritative corrected text of *The Pisan Cantos* to remain out of reach. Instead, Bush's new edition will offer a full display of what one may call "the process", that is, a collation of every revision from manuscript notebook to the published text, with an emphasis "on 'not just what but how an author wrote'" (51).

A recent and by now full-flowering branch of Pound Studies is the author's "musical" output, that is, both his writings on music and composition and his own musical works: the opera *Le Testament*, the oratorio *Cavalcanti*, and his setting of poems by Catullus in *Collis o Heliconii*. Where Pound's writings on music often have been mined for their relevance to his poetry, Josh Epstein focuses in his essay on the relationship between Pound's theory and musical praxis. The result is an analysis of Pound's choices of, for example, rhythm and orchestration for his musical works, but also of the link between verbal and musical rhythm, and Pound's interest in the technologies of radio and telegraphy, still an under-researched element of his oeuvre.

Much more attention has been paid in the past to Pound and the visual arts, both in terms of his interests in them and of reading his poetry by visual analogies. On the whole, as Rebecca Beasley demonstrates in her article "The Visual Field: Beyond Vorticism", there has since the 1990s been a movement from an excessive focus in early studies on Vorticism and formalism to a far more wide-ranging approach. Beasley takes stock of Pound's position within the relationship between visual and verbal modernisms, where either we find studies that focus on how the visual field has informed Pound's critical and poetic language, or analyses of the poetry as visual object. These studies share an increasing awareness of the ideological and political elements of Pound's aesthetics. More recent studies have widened the scope even further to include the role of technology and new media such as photography and film. Still, there are still under-researched parts of Pound's visual experience, such as his dealings with East Asian art, and how the visual culture of his time may have provided Pound with sources for images and themes. The presence of Pound in contemporary digital media, alongside his influence on contemporary writers, may yet prove to be a strong indicator of his legacy.

It is a commonplace to state that the textual history of *The Cantos* is one of the most complex of any literary text, and in his contribution, which can be read in tandem with that of Ron Bush, Michael Kindellan shows how Pound himself is partly to blame for this. For Pound mistakes and misprints mattered less than ensuring that the reader got the point he was trying to make. This also accounts for his belief that reading a text in a language he was not trained in could offer him better insights as he would not be impeded by too much knowledge. Yet this puts the burden on the reader to assess to what extent a “mistake” is a misreading or part of Pound’s intentions. Another challenge for readers and editors of his texts is that Pound seems to have been interested less in producing a permanent and flawless text and more in the process or act of discovery and writing—hence the use of “draft” in the titles of so many of the groupings which comprise *The Cantos*. This would make all of his texts provisional, and consequently all of our interpretations as well.

The last article in this section is by Richard Parker on “Pound and Influence”, which, of course, is a *mer à boire*. After a general overview Parker discusses three case studies of English-language political poets who have been influenced by the political poetry of Pound (and not his politics) in very different ways. Thus the 1960s activist Ed Sanders, known for his Fuck You Press pirated edition of Cantos 110-116, employed Pound’s methods of (self-)promotion to turn them against the latter’s politics. The poet Amiri Baraka turned Pound’s use of *personae* inside-out as a means to express his ambivalence about Pound’s heritage, while recently the British poet Keston Sutherland in “In Memory of Your Occult Convolutions” (2011) produced a collage of invectives found in a range of Pound’s essays as a means to question his politics. Yet Parker also usefully reminds us that, thanks to the spate of recent translations of *The Cantos* in various languages, Pound’s influence has reached and will continue to reach beyond Anglo-American poetry, opening up new fields for future research.

The second section of *The New Ezra Pound Studies*, “Ezra Pound and Asia”, contains three essays dealing with Pound’s poetry and translations in relation to East Asian studies. Akitoshi Nagahata looks at the change of Pound’s depiction of the frontiers of the Chinese empire throughout his work. He notes that whereas in *Cathay*, Pound had included poems depicting the hardship of soldiers at the frontiers or margins of the empire, in the Chinese history Cantos 53-61 he adopts

| Affirmations 7.1

a centralist or Sinocentric point of view, which results in a sequence that examines the rise and fall of dynasties in relation to their observance of Confucian precepts and their (un)successful overcoming of external Barbarian threats at the borders. In these Cantos, we find a variegated depiction of what frontier lands may represent, ranging from places of barbarism, terror and desolation to settings of pastoral life. Nagahata pursues his exploration with an analysis of the “Naxi” Cantos in *Rock-Drill*, where the frontier life is presented as one of harmony between man and nature. In this way Pound closes in a more serene manner the circle begun with *Cathay*.

Andrew Houwen offers an insightful overview of Ezra Pound’s relationship to Japanese literature, which he divides into three areas: the influence of *hokku* on his work, his interest in *Noh* drama, and his own impact on Japanese literature. Houwen notes how for a long time the first topic has dominated English-language scholarship dealing with Pound and Japan, and he discusses sources for Pound’s use of and preference for *hokku* (and not *haiku*). This serves as a bridge to a discussion to Pound’s use of *Noh*, as both genres for him revolved around the use of a single image. Here Houwen points out several as yet undetected links between *Noh* and *The Cantos*. The article ends with observations about Pound’s reception in Japan (a growing field of research), yet its real conclusion lies in offering some concrete ways in which Pound’s relationship with Japanese literature can be explored further, such as the possible link between the political role of *Noh* in late nineteenth-century Japan and Pound’s involvement in Fascism.

Finally, Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas’s “Ezra Pound and Chinese Poetry” takes a critical look at widespread general assumptions about *Cathay*, Fenellosa’s essay on the Chinese written character, Canto 49, and the *Confucian Odes*. His contribution is a nuanced and critical assessment of Poundian scholarship on these texts. Twitchell-Waas’s final section, dealing with Pound and contemporary Chinese poetry, challenges our tendency to read *The Cantos* from a Western perspective of representation, whereas a Chinese approach would see the poem more in terms of the text participating in the larger realities it is presenting. Consequently, China is not “a subject of the poem but a defining presence and force within it” (169). In this way, this essay like those of Bush and Kindellan, suggests a radical rethinking of our readerly/writerly relation to the text of *The Cantos*.

In the opening article of the third section of *The New Ezra Pound Studies*, “Culture and Politics”, Josephine Park looks at “The Transnational Turn” in Modernist studies, which has put a spotlight on Pound’s internationalism. She notes how the poet’s “orientalism” may become the saving grace for his legacy, which is in danger of becoming solely defined by his reputation as a supporter of fascism—although I wonder whether Pound’s admiration for Chinese centralist rule is not to some extent also linked to his fascination for strong government, as exemplified in his view of Mussolini. Park offers as a case study of the function of the transnational turn in Pound’s poetics an analysis of the “So-Shu controversy” of Canto 2. After a discussion of possible sources, she suggests that in this Canto about vision and seeing, “So-Shu” becomes an example of how Pound “is transformed by the orient, but his orient is his own” (191). So-Shu and Pound mirror each other in an amalgam of subject and object, in which the Eastern method of self-reflexivity “reveals Western self-consciousness” (190). As such, the transnational turn may offer new avenues into Pound’s poetics and new ways of reading his work through the lens of his “oriental modernism”.

The following three articles are connected through their discussion of what can be seen as the great Poundian “bugbears”. Pound does not have the best of reputations when it comes to his handling of gender and sexuality, and in her article Carrie J. Preston deals with this alleged misogyny, bigotry, and homophobia in the poet’s work. Preston shows how there is no coherent or consistent theory of gender and sexuality in Pound’s oeuvre, and by focusing on *The Pisan Cantos*, she argues that, though a “paranoid reading” may indeed reveal the misogyny and masculine privilege in the sequence, a “reparative” reading would challenge such a one-sided conclusion. Of course, one swallow does not a summer make, but Preston’s suggestions for a “reparative” reading open up the possibility to re-read Pound’s work through this lens.

With already so much written about Pound and Italian Fascism, Anderson Araujo’s contribution offers a much-needed summing-up of the reasons for and contexts related to the poet’s fascination. Araujo does this by usefully discussing the great shifts that have taken place in Fascist studies, while focussing on the ones that seem most promising for a re-examination of Pound’s Fascist leanings. The goal is not exculpation of Pound, as we are no longer in any position to do so, but

| Affirmations 7.1

to present what is already a fraught and complex case with the greatest possible nuance.

In his article Alec Marsh, arguably the greatest authority when it comes to Pound and American politics, considers the poet's "St Elizabethan" Cantos, in which he often adopts examples from the American past as a form of coded language to covertly push one of the major themes in *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*: "politicking in favour of the rights of the states to resist the federal mandates abolishing racial segregation" (228) in the 1950s. Marsh's article is one of the highlights of this collection, as he makes convincingly clear through close and historicizing readings of certain passages that *The Cantos* is not only a poem including history, but also very much an activist text.

Archie Henderson in "Copyright" discusses the tension between the general availability of creative works and a writer's own copyright and subsequent monetary returns. He shows how Pound championed the removal of the American tariff on books and the reform of copyright law, both of which he saw as protectionist measures impeding the possibility of progress of American civilization. Books should not be seen as commodities but as means of communication and enlightenment. Yet Pound also called for a form of perpetual copyright which would make sure that all books, even by dead authors, would be kept in print and would provide a source of income to living authors and their heirs. Henderson deftly discusses the complexity of the legal and cultural repercussions of such a proposal, and Pound's practical steps to try to make it happen.

The last contribution is by Roxana Preda, to whom all Poundians are indebted because of her ongoing digital Cantos Project, a project which, implemented in 2014, offers full digital annotations, a collection of relevant exegesis, and access to sources for each Canto. In "The Temple and the Scaffolding: *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* and Digital Culture", Preda offers a review of the history of digital developments in relation to Pound studies, before assessing the place of her own project within this development. She insightfully discusses what a good annotation should consist of, and the great advantages digital glossing offers in comparison to printed companions—a conclusion which has been borne out by her own project.

In sum, *The New Ezra Pound Studies* is not just another collection of essays on things Poundian but a very valuable contribution to Pound studies, a timely assessment of the state of the art and a presentation of new fields for further research. Moreover, the essays are of a high quality, written by deeply knowledgeable Poundians. The book is also a unified whole, as a careful reading of the individual articles in conjunction permits one to see connecting patterns of potential future research. Not only do the contributors manage to, in the words of Pound, “make it new”, but the editor deserves praise for making it cohere.