REVIEW ESSAY

Light Enough Against Darkness? Historicizing Ezra Pound

***Ezra Pound's Eriugena*. Mark Byron. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. Pp. 311 (cloth).**

***Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*. David Ten Eyck. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012. Pp. 241 (cloth).**

***Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*. Matthew Feldman. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pp. 192 (cloth).**

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> Blessed are those who pick the right artists and makers.[1]

I

How do you solve a problem like Ezra? To put it another way: what critical methodologies should one use when attempting to catch and perhaps even pin down Pound, that most problematic of modernist figures? This is an important question that needs to be addressed when discussing the following works of recent Pound scholarship: Mark Byron's *Ezra Pound's Eriugena* (2014), David Ten Eyck's *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos* (2012), and Matthew Feldman's *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45* (2013). The first two of these volumes appear on the *Historicizing Modernism* imprint run by Bloomsbury, whilst the third, belonging to Feldman (who also co-edits *Historicizing Modernism* with Erik Tonning), is a contribution to the *Palgrave-Pivot* series published by Palgrave MacMillan. All three authors are, in different ways, concerned with Pound's life and literary career during the latter half of the 1930s. In particular, all three are interested in issues that directly effect the development and compositional history of the poet's modernist epic *The Cantos*—that all-consuming yet tantalizingly incomplete poetic project which the critic Andrew

[1] Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose 1909-1965* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 185.

Crozier once described as being alternatively "Noble, pathetic, and deranged," and which Pound himself came to regard, late in life, as an incomprehensible, botched "tangle of works unfinished" (CXVI: 809).[2]

I quote from Pound's *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII* (1969) because, in the context of the current discussion, I think it important to foreground the fact that over the decades a number of biographically-inclined readers have, in an attempt to account for the huge swathes of doom and gloom which blight the later sections of *The Cantos*, taken Pound's remarks about the apparent failure of his life's work as gospel, often in the hope that his words might provide some sort of poetic or personal reassurance.[3] However, as one of Pound's more insightful critics suggested a long time ago, these and other such assorted statements "carry small weight, being little but the expression of senile depression: in Pound, the man survived the poet."[4] In other words, it behooves us to take Pound's published remarks with more than just a pinch of salt. Indeed, Pound was most emphatically *not* the best judge when it came to measuring the true impact of what can, for better or worse, be described as his achievements, be they real or imagined, literary or otherwise.

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[2] Andrew Crozier, *Thrills and Frills: Selected Prose* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2013), 134. In conversation with Allen Ginsberg in Venice on 28 October 1967, Pound expressed the view that his poetry made no sense. For a more detailed account of this conversation, see Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 897-9. All quotations from Pound*'s Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1996) are cited by canto and page number in the main body of text.

[3] Ginsberg's aforementioned interaction (and subsequently published interview) with an increasingly infirm, depressed, and evidently disinterested Pound is a case in point. As it happens, Peter Stoicheff touches on this meeting in *The Hall of Mirrors: Drafts & Fragments and the End of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1995). Stoicheff's monograph will be great use to those wishing to understand the various ways in which reader expectations and desires for the *Cantos* (and for Pound) influenced the publication and subsequent public reception of *Drafts & Fragments*. In Stoicheff's reckoning, this final, fragmentary collection of poems is best read as "a critically constructed text pushed and pulled by various expectations for *The Cantos'* close, and by interpretations of Pound, that its writer either refused to or more probably could not accommodate, given the problematics of closure he faced at this point in the poem's evolution" (Stoicheff, *The Hall of Mirrors* 33).

[4] Massimo Bacigalupo, *The Formèd Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), 459.

Bearing this in mind, we should consider Mark Byron's far more reasoned, recent assessment of Pound's literary achievements. He suggests that Pound's

> literary career is distinctively singular for several reasons: his reinventions of poetic form, his ability to marshal his own resources and those of his peers to advance a variety of literary innovations, his drawing on history and politics to inform and shape his work, and his attempt to write a modern epic in the lineage of Homer and Dante.[5]

Moreover, in Byron's reckoning, "[t]he engine driving each of these imperatives to innovate is Pound's irrepressible desire to learn from an impressive range of literary, philosophical, artistic and cultural traditions."[6]

Whilst this account of Pound's irrepressibility and indefatigability certainly rings true, it should be added that critical consensus also holds that by the late 1930s—the period in which Byron, Ten Eyck, and Feldman are interested—it had become painfully obvious to all and sundry that not only had the driver of this energetic, Idaho-born "engine" been drinking on the job, but that the rickety train to which this particular engine had been attached was now in danger of jumping the tracks altogether. David Ten Eyck acknowledges this rather unfortunate turn of events in the introduction to *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*:

> Pound cuts the figure in these years of a man working himself to the point of exhaustion, spreading his considerable energy and talent over an impossibly wide field, and in the process compromising the technical care that characterizes his finest poetry and losing the ability to make measured judgments on political, economic and cultural matters. Many of his activities at this time suggest a dangerously inflated sense of his own abilities and of their relevance to world affairs.[7]

One of the prime examples that Ten Eyck proffers whilst discussing Pound's worryingly inflated sense of self-importance during the late 1930s is *Guide to*

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[5] Mark Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), xv.

[6] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, xv.

[7] David Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 5.

Kulchur (1938). In the words of Ira B. Nadel, *Guide to Kulchur* was "a summary of what should be known and what should be discarded by intelligent and aware individuals."[8] The opening paragraph of Pound's idiosyncratic textbook sets the tone for what is to follow:

> This is not written for the over-fed. It is written for men who have not been able to afford an university education or for young men, whether or not threatened with universities, who want to know more at the age of fifty than I know today, and whom I might conceivably aid to that object.[9]

Having first outlined his general aims in characteristically combative prose, Pound declares:

> It is my intention in this booklet to COMMIT myself to as many points as possible, that means that I shall make a number of statements which very few men can AFFORD to make, for the simple reason that such taking sides might jeopard their incomes (directly) or their prestige or "position" in one or other of the professional "worlds." Given my freedom, I may be a fool to use it, but I wd. be a cad not to.[10]

Now, there are a number of things that we need to keep in mind as regards this statement, which, with the benefit of historical hindsight, has taken on a strangely and sadly prophetic quality. Without wishing to get too far ahead of ourselves, we might, for instance, question what "commitment" meant to Pound in the late 1930s.[11] We might also consider the emphasis Pound places on the issue of income, whether personal or professional. Indeed, as we shall see, this is something that comes to the fore in Feldman's detailed—and more often than not distressing—discussion of Pound's livelihood in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

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[8] Ira B. Nadel, *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 15.

[9] Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 6.

[10] Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 7.

[11] The issue of Pound's "commitment" also comes to the fore in A. David Moody's recent critique of Feldman's *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*. I will return to Moody's critique later.

II

The encyclopedic *Guide to Kulchur* is also useful when approaching the first of our three accounts of Pound's mid-career poetic praxis. This has much to do with the fact that the historically obscure ninth-century Irish theologian Johannes Scottus Eriugena features prominently in Pound's esoteric treatise.[12] Consider the following passage:

> The "general" church threw out Scotus Erigena several centuries after his death. We have not sufficiently investigated the matter. Erigena did not, I think, consider himself a schismatic. "Authority comes from right reason," that wd. have been *orthon logon* in greek, not *doxy*. It seems unlikely that he was heretical in this view. Was he cast out for talking nonsense on some other issue, or was it a frame-up, committed in the storm of political passion? Until we know this, we shall not know whether Bousset and Leibniz were at loggerheads, one from stupidity and both from ignorance of the tradition (general).[13]

Argumentative, conspiratorial, and utterly obscure: this is classic 1930s Pound. It's not immediately clear what Pound's ideal or imagined audience of under-fed "young men" was meant to take from such recondite material. But in the preface to *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, Mark Byron reminds us of the fact that the poet's encyclopedic inclinations "led him to question intellectual orthodoxies, and to seek out and understand ideas and texts that ran counter to the received narratives of literary and cultural history."[14] As his appearance in *Guide to Kulchur* suggests, it is clear that Eriugena, who rose to prominence in the court of Charles the Bald, occupied an important role in Pound's alternative historical record of cultural achievement. As Byron tells it, Pound came to regard this complex, if largely forgotten, Carolingian Renaissance figure as "a strikingly original and courageous thinker, willing to endure ecclesiastical opprobrium in his pursuit of systematic theology, and an intellectually adventurous scholar who

12 Relatively little is known about Eriugena, who was known during his lifetime as John Scottus, Johannes Scottigena, and Iohannes Scottus Ierugena. Pound usually referred to him as Erigena.

13 Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 333.

14 Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, xv.

sought to advance Greek learning in Western Europe at the time of its near-eclipse."[15] Hence Pound's suggestion in *Guide to Kulchur* that further research into Eriugena's various theological, literary, and scholarly achievements need be undertaken as a matter of urgency. But there is more to the matter than merely this. According to Byron, Pound's interest in Eriugena, about whom the poet once intended to write a book-length treatment, "extended beyond that of rectifying a curricular oversight."[16] He suggests that the Neoplatonically-inclined Pound "saw in this figure a profound influence of Platonic thought also found in medieval Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna, Averroes, and Al-Farabi, passed on via the scholastic philosophers to (in Pound's estimation) the Troubadours and Guido Cavalcanti."[17] That is to say, "Pound saw in Eriugena a European forebear of [Neoplatonic philosophy's] efflorescence in the Italian Renaissance, and an early proponent of the light philosophy deployed at thematically significant points in *The Cantos*."[18]

Proceeding in a broadly chronological manner, Byron's study, which draws in equal measure on freshly unearthed archival material, preexisting Poundian criticism by scholars such as Ronald Bush, Peter Liebregts, Peter Makin, and A. David Moody, as well as recent developments in the field of Carolingian studies, demonstrates the various ways in which Pound's interest in—and understanding of—Eriugena developed over time. Byron describes how "this progress, begun in the late 1920s, evolved during the later 1930s and was reprised in the later decads of *The Cantos*."[19] Byron's opening chapter focuses on the period of Pound's initial encounter with Eriugena's thought, which occurred sometime before 1928, and came via the pages of the 1921 reprint of the 1879 edition of Francesco Fiorentino's philosophical textbook, *Manuale di Storia della Fiolosofia* (edited by Giuseppe Monticelli). Pound's initial interest in this unduly neglected Carolingian thinker was, Byron notes, "more polemical than philosophical: he was a writer neglected by the 'tradition' and vilified for his unorthodox views."[20] Pound was particularly curious about Eriugena's role in

[15] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, xv-xvi.

[16] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 17.

[17] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 17.

[18] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 17.

[19] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 8-9.

[20] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 24.

the so-called Predestination controversy of 859-60. Eriugena's involvement in this well-documented theological dispute revolves around the public appearance of the first of his intellectual treatises, *De praedestinatione*. Byron notes that this particular volume served "first as a rebuttal to the alleged heresies of Gottschalk of Orbais, and then as an object of ecclesiastical scrutiny and condemnation."[21] Whilst limitations of time and space prohibit discussion of these historical events here, it is not difficult to grasp why Pound's ears would have pricked up on first hearing of the accusations of heresy that were posthumously leveled at Eriugena by Pope Horace III in 1225. Pound, who was always on the lookout for misunderstood, persecuted kindred spirits with whom he might identify—and even more importantly, champion—evidently saw in the historically marginalized figure of Johannes Scottus Eriugena yet another confirmation of his unwavering belief that "Civilization is made by men of unusual intelligence."[22]

At the same time, as we have already noted, there was far more to Pound's interest in Eriugena in the late 1920s and early 1930s than mere hero-worship. This becomes evident when we consider the manner in which Pound chose to introduce Eriugena into the developing textual fabric of *The Cantos*. Here is what Byron has to say on the matter:

> This portrait, partial though it was, drew Pound to include Eriugena at the center of his thinking on the precarious transmission of sacred knowledge. Pound saw fit to combine his translation of "Donna mi prega" with his speculations on Eriugena's doxological status in Canto XXXVI, drawing together a complex and partially submerged constellation of ideas concerning the human-divine nexus that buttresses the entire poetic project of *The Cantos*—from hell and through *purgatorio*, towards *paradiso*.[23]

As this statement suggests, the importance of Eriugena in Pound's thinking cannot be underestimated. However, as Byron also reminds us, Pound's understanding of Eriugena's life and work was far from complete when Canto XXXVI appeared in print, first in *Harkness Hoot*, an undergraduate review

[21] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 9.

[22] Pound, *Selected Prose*, 202.

[23] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 30.

published at Yale, and then as part of *Eleven New Cantos* (1934). In Byron's retelling, this situation did not change until late 1939, when Pound came across a copy of the *Patrologia Latina* 122. With the acquisition of this volume, which was edited by Henry Joseph Floss, in one fell swoop Pound came into possession of Eriugena's entire body of printed work. Undertaking an intensive, if hasty, study of texts such as the *Versus* and the five-book philosophical masterwork *Periphyseon*, it was around this time that Pound—whose detailed reading notes Byron transcribes and comprehensively glosses—gave serious thought to producing an extended study of Eriugena, which he apparently hoped to publish alongside his work on Confucius. Whilst Pound's slated "note on Eriugena" never materialized, the impression that his second encounter with the works of the Hibernian theologian left was both deep and lasting. Indeed, as Byron very convincingly demonstrates in the final section of his study, Eriugena's presence is clearly felt in the volume of late poems upon which Pound's posthumous poetic legacy has arguably now come to rest: *The Pisan Cantos* (1948).[24]

Byron's study truly comes into its own in this concluding chapter. Here, Byron describes in great detail the manner in which the "navigational aid" or "long-term reference point" more commonly known as Eriugena

> becomes an emblem of the writing of exile and isolation in *The Pisan Cantos*: a holder of the flame of learning during the Carolingian epoch, and a visionary whose eschatology provides Pound with the means to raise the acute threats to his own being to the register of epic statement.[25]

But this is not all. Byron also considers the occasionally surprising ways that *The Pisan Cantos* positions Eriugena alongside the aforementioned figure of Confucius. As is well known, a range of Confucian materials predominate in this section of *The Cantos*, where they perform a number of different functions.[26]

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[24] Byron's concluding chapter also contains a fascinating discussion of the impact that Pound's Eriugena had on the construction of pivotal shorter lyric pieces such as the earlier Canto XLIX, the "Seven Lakes" canto.

[25] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 208, 209.

[26] Byron acknowledges this in the introduction to *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*. He highlights the fact that "The gravitational pull towards the works of Confucius and Mencius come into sharper focus in *The Pisan Cantos*: the Confucian texts function as guides to the

However, far less had been known about the way in which these materials interweave with insights garnered from the poet's decades-long engagement with Eriugena. In this sense then, one of the great merits of Byron's methodological approach is the manner in which it enables him to elaborate on the claims put forth in the introduction to this valuable contribution to Pound scholarship. That is, it serves to reveal how "Pound establishes the Confucian combination of ethics, politics and metaphysics as cognate to Eriugena's thought—proof of the translatability of the best in thought and action across history and between separate spheres of civilization."[27]

III

David Ten Eyck also touches on Pound's longstanding interest in Confucianism in his groundbreaking revisionist account of the *Adams Cantos* section of the so-called History Cantos. Amongst other things, Ten Eyck's study reproduces the complete text of Pound's unpublished 1943 article "Confucio Totalitario," both in Italian and English. Admittedly, the inclusion of such avowedly Confucian—and explicitly totalitarian—material in a volume ostensibly devoted to the study of Pound's research into, and poetry about, the life and times of America's second democratically elected president might, upon initial inspection, strike the reader as somewhat incongruous. Not so, argues Ten Eyck. To his mind, this particular essay "is of basic importance for understanding the connections Pound was seeking to establish in these years between the individual Chinese characters and a broader understanding of social order."[28] Reading *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, it soon becomes apparent why Ten Eyck might choose to ascribe such importance to this piece of otherwise fairly obscure social criticism. As he reminds us, "John Adams first captured Pound's attention as a potentially new element in the thematic progression of *The Cantos* because his attitude towards the role of language in government seemed to rhyme with Pound's own developing Confucianism."[29] Developing this claim, Ten Eyck also suggests that Pound, who first worked his way through portions of the complete *Life and*

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comportment of the self; the itinerary of the soul; and the relation of the individual agent to society, political rule and metaphysical fruition" (*Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 7).

[27] Byron, *Ezra Pound's Eriugena*, 7-8.

[28] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 123.

[29] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 127.

Works of John Adams sometime in the spring of 1931—roughly at the same time as his preliminary dealings with the theological controversies surrounding Eriugena—"sensed that Adams offered a means of relating Confucian attention to precise terminology to the American scene."[30]

As we will see, the date Ten Eyck ascribes to Pound's initial encounter with the ten-volume *Works of John Adams* is of great significance. Up until now, critical consensus has tended to view the Adams Cantos section of Pound's modernist epic—which he composed over the winter of 1938 and 1939—as little more than a poetic rush-job. Ten Eyck acknowledges this longstanding critical tendency in the opening lines of his first chapter: "Many critical accounts begin by emphasizing the speed at which the section was written, often accompanying such observations with remarks about Pound's frenetic activity of the late 1930s and his desire to respond to the growing international crisis of the time."[31] Critics agree that it took Pound somewhere between five and eight weeks to write the Adams Cantos. It is also common knowledge that all of the poetic content contained in this particular collection of cantos was drawn from Pound's reading of a single text: the aforementioned *Works of John Adams*. These two factors have often counted against the Adams Cantos. Ten Eyck emphasizes this fact whilst discussing preexisting criticism about this section of Pound's epic poem. He outlines how "Pound is variously described as skimming rapidly through his source, as making light markings in his set of the *Works* and as leaving the pages in extended portions of the text uncut as he skipped them entirely."[32] Similarly, citing the scholarship of noted Poundian critics such as Richard Sieburth and Humphrey Carpenter, Ten Eyck describes how "the most commonly held image of the Adams Cantos's composition is that of Pound rushing into an ill-considered engagement with material he was not equipped to handle effectively."[33]

In Ten Eyck's estimation, the overwhelmingly negative critical associations that the Adams Cantos—which were published in 1940 as part of *Cantos LL-LXXI*—have picked up over the years make "it difficult to adequately position these

[30] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 128.

[31] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 13.

[32] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 13.

[33] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 13.

poems within their poetic, historical and intellectual context."[34] But adequately position them we must. To this end, Ten Eyck sets out to clear away some of the negative critical debris surrounding the Adams Cantos. He argues that we need first "to clarify the sequence's compositional history, on the basis of archival evidence, so as to set right certain factual errors and so as to make other assertions appear in a fuller light."[35] Pursuing this line of corrective critical enquiry, Ten Eyck finds that

> While Pound hardly possessed (or claimed to possess) expert knowledge of early American history or of John Adams's life, […] it appears, when the relevant documents are gathered, that he devoted at least as much time to a consideration of these topics as he did to the subject matter from which he fashioned more highly considered cantos, like the Malatesta or the Siena Bank Cantos.[36]

Ten Eyck traces Pound's interest in early American history all the way back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Drawing on biographical research as well as archival materials held at the Beinecke Library, Ten Eyck outlines how Pound's "first meaningful encounter" with the revolutionary period of early American history took place at the University of Pennsylvania's College of Liberal Arts in the academic year of 1901-1902.[37] Specifically, Ten Eyck recounts how the undergraduate classes offered by the historian Herman Vandenburg Ames stimulated Pound's interest in American history. As a 16-year old student, Pound took three of Ames's American history classes whilst enrolled at Pennsylvania: "Foreign Relations of the United States," "The Civil War and Reconstruction," and "American Colonial History." Pound took extensive notes in each of these classes. Whilst some of these college notes are now lost, the ones that have survived bear witness, in Ten Eyck's reading, "to a deep interest in the subject that must have provided a foundation for [Pound's] later reflections on American history."[38]

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[34] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 13.

[35] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 13.

[36] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 13.

[37] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 14.

[38] Ten Eyck, 15.

Ten Eyck's account of Pound's burgeoning interest in American history then moves into the late 1920s. During this period Pound undertook an extensive survey of early American history.[39] Soon to join Eriugena as another of Pound's "men of unusual intelligence," John Adams featured prominently in this survey.[40] Crucially, it was also around this time that Pound first tried to acquire a copy of the *Works of John Adams*. Whilst Pound's preliminary enquiries proved fruitless, Ten Eyck's archival research shows that the poet finally alighted upon a complete edition sometime between 6 April and 22 May 1931, during a six-week research-trip to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Ten Eyck's account of Pound's introduction to the Charles Francis Adams edition of the *Works of John Adams* is worth quoting at length:

> What is most striking about Pound's Bibliothèque Nationale notes on the *Works of John Adams* is the extent to which they reveal that his understanding of Adams remained stable over the course of the 1930s. To be sure, there were changes in Pound's conception of this figure between 1931 and 1938, and these generally reflect the evolution of his political and economic ideas in those years. But on the whole it is possible to identify a distinctive thematic complex that Pound began to associate with Adams at the beginning of the 1930s and that eventually came to occupy a unique place within the poetic economy of *The Cantos*. Central to this were Adams's concern to establish a machinery of government that could offer orderly democracy […], his attention to precise verbal definitions, and his opposition to banks of credit and his fear of oligarchy.[41]

This chronological revelation has notable implications. By demonstrating that Pound was in fact familiar with materials pertaining to John Adams long before 1938, received critical wisdom about this unduly maligned section of *The Cantos* is turned on its head.

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[39] The material that Pound generated during the course of his research would subsequent form the basis of Cantos XXXI-XXXIV and XXXVII.

[40] As did other major American figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Quincy Adams, George Washington, and Martin Van Buren.

[41] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 19-20.

Ten Eyck also insists that "it must be recognized that these poems offer crucial insights into formal strategies and thematic concerns that have broad relevance for Pound's career."[42] Ten Eyck focuses on these in the second and third chapters of his study. His second chapter charts the development of Pound's "documentary" poetic method in the 1920s and 1930s. As is well known, Pound began introducing whole-scale historical documents into his poetry in the early 1920s, whilst writing the Malatesta Cantos (Cantos VIII-XI). However, as Ten Eyck reminds us, things were quite different when Pound sat down to write the Adams Cantos. By the end of the 1930s, "Pound's documentary strategies [had] resulted in his original poetic voice being almost totally subsumed by the sources from which he worked, disappearing with little comment into canto after canto of text-based history. One hundred and eighty-six pages in all."[43] It comes as no surprise, therefore, that a number of readers have often struggled to make sense of Adams Cantos. Ten Eyck acknowledges as much in the third chapter of his study, which discusses the ways in which we might properly measure the scale of Pound's technical poetic achievement in the American History Cantos. This is easier said than done. For it seems the predominantly negative critical responses that the Adams Cantos have elicited over the decades stem from a series of serious misunderstandings on the part of Pound's readership:

> The most enduring of these are based on the notion that Pound's principal interest in the section was biographical, and that he hoped to offer as complete a portrait as possible of the American statesman he had come to admire most by the late 1930s; or that he wrote the Adams Cantos with the aim of disseminating John Adams's work, in the interests of political propaganda; or that the Adams Cantos were meant essentially as marginalia to John Adams's *Works*, needing to be read in parallel with this source if they are to be fully appreciated.[44]

Readers who make simplistic misassumptions such as these fail, in Ten Eyck's estimation, "to appreciate the care Pound exercised in shaping the sounds and rhythms out of the material he had culled from the *Works*."[45] In marked contrast,

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[42] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 1.

[43] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 35.

[44] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 65-6.

[45] Ten Eyck, 78.

Ten Eyck demands that we "reflect in a more theoretical manner on the relation in which one text stands to another [in the Adams Cantos], and on the manner in which material textuality conditions the understanding of the past."[46] Having thus made a compelling case for a sustained reconsideration of the various poetic and conceptual merits of the Adams Cantos, Ten Eyck turns his attention to a range of broader thematic concerns in the final three chapters. In the fourth chapter, Ten Eyck considers the representation of history and law in the Adams Cantos. In the fifth, he analyses how Pound's social criticism of the 1930s and 1940s can be said to have affected the development of the American History Cantos. Finally, in his brief, yet fascinating concluding coda, Ten Eyck gestures towards the ways in which the so-called Adams *paideuma* influenced subsequent sections of *The Cantos*, especially those written during Pound's confinement at St Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. in the 1950s. In sum, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos* is sure to become the benchmark study of Pound's late 1930s literary praxis.

IV

The historian Matthew Feldman reminds us of the well-documented events leading-up to Pound's enforced return to the shores of the United States in the fourth chapter of his account of *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*. Here are the basic facts. As anyone with more than a passing interest knows, Pound, who lived in Italy during the 1930s, was a staunch—and vocal—supporter of Benito Mussolini's particular brand of fascism. Pound's support for Mussolini's regime can be traced back to the poet's longstanding desire for economic reform. As a passionate Social Creditor, Pound held to the opinion that the economic ills of industrial societies could be cured if governments moved to implement, in Tony Tremblay's words, "a scheme of economic reform that promised to democratize credit and to create economic justice through a fairer distribution of goods."[47] As Tim Redman has shown, the origins of Pound's faith in Italian Fascism arose out of the poet's (ultimately misplaced) belief that Mussolini would implement the economic schemes in which he so fervently

[46] Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 83.

[47] Tony Tremblay, "Douglas, Major Clifford Hugh (1879-1952)," in Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen J. Adams, eds., *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 83.

believed.[48] In this sense, economic idealism underwrote Pound's association with Italian Fascism. Having hitched his horse to Mussolini's wagon for primarily economic reasons, Pound repeatedly—and infamously—emphasized his support for the Italian Fascist regime during the Second World War. In 1940, Pound undertook paid work as a propagandist for EIAR (Ente Italiano Audiozioni Radiofoniche), which was colloquially known as "Radio Rome." Pound's unconventional radio broadcasts were concerned with aesthetic but also economic and political matters. They generated negative publicity—and the possibility of treachery charges—in the United States. On 25 July 1943, Pound was formally indicated by grand jury for the capital offense of treason. After the German surrender of Italy to the Allied forces in 1945, Pound was captured by Italian partisans and turned over to the US Army authorities. Pound was then transferred to the US Army Disciplinary Training Center (DTC) at Pisa before his return to North America. Whilst at Pisa he endured some sort of physical collapse and undertook work on what would subsequently become *The Pisan Cantos*. Controversially, this volume of verse won the Bollinger Prize for Poetry in 1949—some four years after Pound had been declared mentally unfit for trial and committed to St. Elizabeth's, where he remained until 1958. In the decades since, Feldman notes, "debates over Pound's wartime actions and subsequent institutionalization have bitterly divided critics, often shedding more heat than light on pertinent issues of sanity, culpability and treason."[49]

Whilst accurate, why bother revisiting such well-trodden biographical and historical material? As the title of Feldman's study suggests, the answer has much to do with received critical wisdom concerning Pound's fascist activities of the 1930s and 1940s. Feldman highlights this in his preface, which also functions as a kind of methodological rallying call:

> For too long, Pound's fascist activism has simply been dismissed as either mad or bad, the product of political naiveté or misplaced economic idealism. Some or all of these factors may apply but, in short, this misses the wood for the trees. All too often lacking in supporting evidence, this

[48] Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 121.

[49] Matthew Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 66.

> tradition will be directly countered by the archivally driven view advanced here: Pound was a committed and significant English-language strategist and producer of fascist propaganda before, and during, Europe's most destructive war.[50]

Insisting that we theorize from a position of empirical accuracy, Feldman sets out in his study to address and, where necessary, correct a number of "persistent misunderstandings concerning Pound's fascist activism."[51] Feldman begins by establishing a working definition of fascism. Feldman frames his understanding of fascist ideology in terms that will be familiar to readers of Roger Griffins and Emilio Gentile. Faith, myth, and notions of palingenetic social rebirth play important roles in the conceptualization of fascism proposed by these prominent historians.[52] Cleaving to the line of historical enquiry favored by Griffins and Gentile, Feldman argues that we need to view fascist ideology in terms of a secularized "political faith," or a quasi-religious "sacralization of politics."[53] Developing his point, Feldman emphasizes the fact that Italian Fascism's ritualistic "political religion" only makes complete sense when viewed against the ostensibly antithetical social and historical backdrop of Roman Catholic culture and spiritual faith. He suggests that "Fascist liturgy may have appeared to some contrived or even laughable, and Mussolini little more than a posturing buffoon, but for millions of devoted Italians adherence to Il Duce, the 'Pope of Fascism,' betrayed every phenomenological sign of genuine religiosity."[54] Indeed, in Feldman's eyes, the fact "That countless Blackshirts attending Mass on Sundays also, and simultaneously, evangelized for Mussolini's Fascism helps to further illuminate that one 'faith' was not, in practice, exclusive of another."[55] Thus for Feldman:

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[50] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, ix.

[51] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 68.

[52] For a detailed discussion of ideological myths of palingenetic expectation and regeneration see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[53] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, x, xi.

[54] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, xii.

[55] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, xii.

> Paeans to a "secular faith" in Fascist Italy, in short, were sustained and deliberate attempts to deify both state and leader as the mythic embodiments of a regenerated civilization—one which, in the Italian context, necessarily relied upon Catholic traditions and rituals for legitimacy.[56]

What is more, Feldman argues, "Pound's veneration for Mussolini only starts to make sense [when read] against the unmistakable backdrop of [Italian] Fascism's 'political faith'."[57] Admittedly, this statement might strike the sensitive reader as more than a little perplexing. For one thing, the historical record shows that Pound, whilst eccentric and idiosyncratic, was hardly given over to passionate displays of Christian devotion.[58] Despite this, Feldman feels confident enough to declare in the preface to his study that "Even as an expatriate living in Fascist Italy, Pound's commitment to the 'Fascist faith' was far from idiosyncratic; it was representative."[59]

Feldman supports this admittedly surprising claim with extensive reference to a number of underused archival resources pertaining to Pound's fascist activities, most of which come from the Beinecke. Feldman complements his reading of this hitherto overlooked archival material with information drawn from relevant FBI and MI5 files. In so doing, Feldman charts the extent of Pound's efforts—idiosyncratic or otherwise—on behalf of the European fascist cause in the 1930s and 1940s. Feldman's findings make for depressing, damning, and occasionally familiar reading. Feldman begins by documenting Pound's collusion with British fascism in the mid-1930s. He shows that Pound was heavily involved with fascist periodicals such as the short-lived *British-Italian Bulletin*, which was underwritten by Mussolini's regime.[60] After the collapse of the *Bulletin* in

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[56] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, xii.

[57] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, xii.

[58] Pound was critical of much Christian doctrine. He also favoured Confucianism over Christianity: "Both Confucianism and Christianity propose a state of sincerity which is almost unattainable, but the Christian proposals are mixed with all sorts of disorder, whereas a Confucian progress offers chance for a steady rise, and defects either in conduct or in theory are in plain violation of simple and central doctrine" (Pound, *Selected Prose*, 69).

[59] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, xiii.

[60] Pound contributed 29 articles to the *Bulletin*, which ran for 42 issues.

October 1936, Pound turned his attention to Walter Mosley and the British Union of Fascists (BUF). Referring to unpublished correspondence with key figures in the BUF, Feldman details Pound's involvement as a *pro bono* propagandist, translator, and economic agitator for Mosley's motley crew of British fascists.[61] Significantly, he also makes a strong case for the various ways in which "Pound's propaganda for the BUF consistently mirrored fascist ideology generally, and British permutations of fascism in particular."[62]

Feldman finds that much the same holds for Pound's pro-Axis propaganda work at EIAR, an undertaking for which the poet was, as we know, reimbursed quite handsomely.[63] The condemnatory picture Feldman paints is that of a committed fascist activist consciously honing his craft between 1940 and 1945, so as to more accurately mirror the increasingly hardline stance of Mussolini's regime, which, despite some occasional grumbles about policy, he followed all the way to the bitter end.[64] As is well known, Pound continued to support Mussolini after Il Duce's dismissal by the King of Italy in the summer of 1943. We all know how the story goes. Having been arrested on the King of Italy's orders on 25 July, Mussolini was placed under house arrest in an alpine sky resort. Having been liberated on 12 September by a team of Nazi paratroopers led by Otto Skorzeny (a key figure in various post-war neo-Nazi movements), Mussolini was installed as the nominally independent leader of the Salò-based Italian Social Republic (RSI). On hearing of these dramatic developments, Pound offered his services as a propagandist to the so-called Salò Republic. His offer was accepted. But the situation had changed. Propaganda was now under the direct control of Nazi Germany.

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[61] Pound wrote for BUF-affiliated publications including *British Union Quarterly*, *Fascist Quarterly*, and *Action!*

[62] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 50.

[63] "At a conservative estimate it […] appears that, through a variety of undertakings for Italian radio propaganda between summer 1940 and spring 1945, Pound earned a minimum of 250,000 lire (about $12,500 US dollars in wartime currency; the buying power of an estimated $185,000 today). Whatever else Pound's wartime broadcasts for Fascist Italy were, they were at least comparatively well paid" (Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 108).

[64] In Feldman's words, "Pound enthusiastically contributed suggestions to Fascist officials, and dutifully followed the contours of Axis propaganda in his transcripts" (Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 117).

It is at this point that Feldman's account of Pound's wartime activities as a paid Axis-propagandist assumes an even darker hue. Citing the scholarship of Redman and Alec Marsh, Feldman considers Pound's response to the "Verona Program" issued by the RSI in November 1943. Pound's enthusiasm for this document, which served as the foundational theoretical text of the newly created fascist state, should be emphasized. This is what Redman has to say about the Verona Program in his seminal account of *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (1991). "Without question," Redman writes, "the eighteen points of the Verona Program were attractive to Pound."[65] Pound, who self-identified as a "left-wing fascist," would have been cheered by the final ten points of the Verona Program, which, in Redman's words, "represented a conscious effort on the part of the new fascist party to appeal to the proletariat, until then hostile to the party (though not always to fascism)."[66] Additionally, the charter "also called for the nationalization of any part of the economy of interest to the public welfare."[67]

On a far more troubling note, however, this important document, which also features in subsequent sections of Pound's *Cantos*, was of an explicitly anti-Semitic nature: it declared that all Italian Jews were now to be regarded as enemy combatants.[68] This period was punctuated by mass arrests and deportations. Feldman reminds us that out of the nearly 43,000 Jews living in Italy in the autumn of 1943, 8,529 were murdered in the Holocaust. Having done so, he encourages us to consider just how much Pound might have known about such events. Choosing his words carefully, Feldman reminds us of the fact that "the third largest deportation of Jews from mainland Italy took place roughly 15

[65] Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, 235.

[66] Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, 236.

[67] Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, 236. On the 13 January 1944, the Council of Ministers issued an additional decree that developed further the eighteen original points of the Verona Program. Redman notes that Pound was profoundly enthused by this decree: "The provisions that probably gladdened him the most were those pertaining to the nationalization of industries indispensable to the political and economic independence of the state. The private capital represented by those industries was to be transformed into credit, betokened by government certificates issued by the state. Here, Pound could well believe, were his dreams come alive: Social Credit realized" (Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, 240).

[68] Of course, the explicitly anti-Semitic dimension of the Verona Program had much to do with the dominant role of the Nazis in the formation of the RSI.

miles from Pound's home in Rapallo."[69] Having furnished us with disquieting geographical details such as these, Feldman then returns to the issue of Pound's propaganda. To be precise, he seeks to position Pound's RSI propaganda work in its proper historical context. Here is what he says:

> Even if he could not know the extent of suffering inflicted upon Italian Jewry during the Holocaust, Pound certainly knew of Jewish persecution and mass arrests and, as noted above, had strongly endorsed the "magnificent" Verona Charter. With Nazism and Fascist Republicanism now inseparable, it merits stressing that Pound's RSI propaganda commenced, and continued, at a time when Italian Jews were already marked for death in Northern Italy. Put another way, he would not have seen yellow-starred Jews in the Salò Republic because they were in hiding, or already dead.[70]

Whether or not ignorant of the true scale of Jewish suffering in Italy, Pound's activities during this period certainly make for profoundly troubling reading. Feldman emphasizes this in the final chapter of his study. In this section, Feldman describes how almost all "of Pound's propaganda for the RSI, unlike before 1943, was tailored and expressed for an Italian audience."[71] Pound continued to work as a radio broadcaster whilst employed by the RSI between late 1943 and the spring of 1945. Pound also sought to place his well-honed skills as a literary promoter in the service of his Italian benefactors during this period. For example, in late 1943, Pound recommended that the high-ranking Fascist government official Alessandro Pavolini pass a decree requiring RSI booksellers to showcase a number of specific books for at least three months, since, in the expatriate propagandist's words, "the bookstores [that were] largely in the hands of the Jews *were* rather a hindrance than a help in spreading useful books."[72] Feldman reproduces Pound's suggested reading list in full towards the close of his study. Pay particular attention to the practical advice Pound offers at the end of the list:

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[69] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 153.

[70] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 153.

[71] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 154.

[72] Cited in Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 154.

> —The Protocols of Zion;
> —The Duties of Man, of Mazzini;
> —The Politics of Aristotle;
> —The Testament of Confucius.
>
> The arrest of Jews will create a wave of useless mercy; thus the need to disseminate the Protocols. The intellectuals are capable of a passion more durable than the emotional, but they need to understand the reasons for a conflict.[73]

Now read it again. Then read what Feldman has to say about the potentially devastating information contained within this previously unpublished piece of correspondence:

> Now, one can legitimately debate whether Pound knew anything about the Holocaust during this time. But it should be very clear that he was simultaneously stoking the flames of conspiratorial anti-Semitism in his texts, both by supporting extremists in RSI and in his propaganda output for them.[74]

This is strong stuff. However, it remains to be seen what lasting impact Feldman's research will have on the direction of Pound scholarship.[75] Yet this much is certain. In light of potentially damaging revelations such as these, it now seems entirely preposterous to entertain the idea, as one of Feldman's more outspoken critics proposes, of simply cutting Pound "some slack."[76]

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[73] Cited in Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 154.

[74] Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*, 154.

[75] *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45* has certainly caused something of a stir in the wider Poundian community. Interested parties are encouraged first to seek out the three very different reviews of Feldman's monograph featured in the second issue of *Make It New* (1: 2, July 2014). Having done so, they need turn their attention to A. David Moody's critique of Feldman's study in the most recent number of *Make It New* (1: 3 November 2014).

[76] Leon Surette, *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens UP, 2011), xv.

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That remark is drawn from the prefatory section of Leon Surette's relatively recent *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics* (2011). I mention *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia* here because Surette himself draws attention to it in his recent review of *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*. It seems fair to say that Surette doesn't really think that much of Feldman's book, or, for that matter, of Feldman. Surette makes this perfectly clear over the course of fifteen hundred or so irascible words. The tone of Surette's review is defensive, aggressively so. Somewhat curiously, Surette opens with a fairly lengthy account of Feldman's credentials as a professional historian. One almost gets the sense that he is setting Feldman up for a fall. In any case, Surette's account of Feldman's academic background and scholarly interests won't come as much of a shock to readers of this essay. "Feldman," we are told, "belongs to the school of fascist study founded by Roger Griffin, and his definition of fascism is recognizably Griffinesque."[77] As previously noted, Feldman's "Griffinesque" stance when it comes to the question of fascism has much to do with notion of palingenetic social rebirth, as well as attendant forms of political religiosity and notions of secularized faith. Surette evidently has little truck with definitions of political faith favoured by academic historians such as Griffin and Feldman, especially when such definitions are subsequently brought to bear on the figure of Ezra Pound. Surette could not be clearer: "To bring Ezra Pound under this definition is possible only if one ignores, or is ignorant of, all of Pound's literary activity apart from his radio and journalistic propaganda in favour of Fascism, Nazism, and anti-Semitism."[78] In Surette's estimation, Feldman is guilty of precisely this:

> Despite his *pro forma* mention of several biographical studies of Pound, Feldman has no idea of the genesis of the views and beliefs that Pound embraced between his college years in New England, his poetic apprenticeship in Old England, his early cultural and literary criticism and

[77] Leon Surette, "Review of Matthew Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-1945*," *Make It New* (1: 2, July 2014), 8.

[78] Surette, "Review," 8.

> his radicalization by Major Douglas' Social Credit ideas during and immediately after World War I.[79]

Surette's assessment of Feldman is certainly harsh. But is it fair to accuse Feldman of having absolutely *no* idea of Pound's literary and economic dealings up until, to pluck a date almost out of thin air, 1920? I'm not all that convinced. Even the most cursory reading of the second chapter of *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-1945* shows that Feldman *does* in fact touch on many of these issues, at least in passing. This is not to say that Feldman's account of Pound's formative literary, social, and economic dealings is perfect. Indeed, far from it. But to angrily dismiss the study out of hand? That strikes this particular reader as mean-spirited, willful, and, ultimately, counterproductive.

In a similarly dismissive vein, despite the mid-review concession that "most of the relevant Pound scholarship gets a least a mention or a footnote in *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda*," Surette goes to great lengths to chide Feldman for his "rather spotty" coverage of the pre-existing Poundian criticism that deals with the poet's "political opinions and behaviour."[80] This, in turn, brings us back to the aforementioned *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia*. Surette seems particularly aggrieved by the fact that Feldman fails to adequately engage with the argument of *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia*, or with that of his earlier volume, the important *Pound in Purgatory: From Economic Radicalism to Anti-Semitism* (1999). I propose now to briefly engage with these two studies. I want do this because I think that an understanding of these two studies might, at least in part, help us to better understand why Surette seems so keen to categorically dismiss Feldman's account of Pound's fascist propaganda. We will address these volumes in chronological order. As the subtitle suggests, the first of these monographs is a study of Pound's economic commitments. As has been noted, Pound was committed to the idea of Social Credit. Founded by Major C.H. Douglas in the aftermath of the First World War, the Social Credit movement

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[79] Surette, "Review," 8.

[80] Surette, "Review," 9. The two notable exceptions that Surette offers are Robert Casillo's *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (1988) and his own co-edited collection *"I Cease not to Yowl": Ezra Pound's Letters to Olivia Rossetti Agresti* (1998). However, Surette conveniently neglects to mention that Feldman refers to Archie Henderson's more recent *"I Cease not to Yowl" Reannotated: New Notes on the Pound/Agresti Correspondence* (2009).

gained significant traction with the onset of profound economic uncertainty in the 1930s. This movement, which began with Douglas's technical account of the phenomenon of underconsumption, placed, in Surette's words, "emphasis on an alleged structural flaw in the book-keeping of industrial-commercial economics, rather than on the production of useless or harmful consumables, as Ruskin and the distrubutists had done, or on the capitalist's profit, as Marx had done."[81] Crucially, a great deal of the appeal of Social Credit stemmed from the fact "that it promised the resolution of the endemic problems of capitalism—notably the business cycle and maldistribution of wealth—without any significant alteration of prevailing social and political structures."[82]

By all accounts, Pound responded positively to Douglas's economic theories, which he first encountered whilst working in the offices of A. R. Orage's London-based *New Age*. This is where things begin to get a little dicey. As well-intentioned and retrospectively far-sighted as it may have been, Douglas's account of industrialized economic relations also tended to encourage conspiratorial interpretations of major historical events. Whilst it would be wrong to suggest that this tendency towards conspiracism underwrote Pound's original interest in Douglas's economic ideas, it is generally accepted that it did play a significant role in the poet's eventual slide into outright extremism.[83] Often manifested in the form of overt anti-Semitism, Pound's extremism comes to the fore in the radio broadcasts he made during the Second World War. This much is evident in the following extract:

> I think it might be a good thing to hang Roosevelt and a few hundred yidds IF you can do it by due legal process, NOT otherwise. Law must be preserved. I know this may sound tame, but so it is. It is sometimes hard to think so. Hard to think that the 35 ex-army subalterns or whatever who wanted to bump off the kike congressmen weren't just a bit crude and

[81] Leon Surette, *Pound in Purgatory: From Economic Radicalism to Anti-Semitism* (Urbana, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999), 29.

[82] Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, 34.

[83] Surette suggests that Pound had come to accept Douglas's conspiratorial analysis as early as 1920. Surette also suggests the following: "If there is any factor of overriding importance in Pound's slide into extremism, it is this conviction that sinister forces are controlling events" (Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, 43).

> *simpliste*. Sometimes one feels that it would better to get the job done somehow, ANY how, than to delay execution.[84]

Broadcast on 27 April 1943, Pound's "On Retiring" is, as we can see, blatantly anti-Semitic. However, that isn't what makes this broadcast, for want of a better word, interesting. What *is* interesting—and simultaneously distressing—about this particular passage is Pound's opinion that it might be in the public interest, that is, it "might be a good thing," to execute FDR and "a few hundred yidds." How are we meant to interpret a statement like this? How serious is Pound being here? Is he really calling for a series of, in his mind, legally sanctioned public executions? Ultimately, it is difficult to say either way. Still, perhaps we shouldn't be all that surprised to find Pound musing on the supposed merits of physical brutality here. After all, as Surette says in *Pound in Purgatory*, "Like Don Quixote, [Pound] was prepared to do real harm in the real world in pursuit of his ideals, and like him—though less innocently—he chose his ideals unwisely."[85]

Intriguingly, the notion of "innocence" also crops up in the concluding section of Surette's *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia*. In the main, this study focuses on the literary modernism and politics of T.S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and Pound. In some senses, *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia* picks up where Surette's earlier *Pound in Purgatory* left off. In that volume, Surette had cause to describe Pound as "a babe in the woods in his engagement with economics and politics."[86] Like many others of his generation, Pound, we are reminded, succumbed to the illusory attractions of totalitarianism. Surette makes much the same point in *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia.* Regrettably, however, it now seems that Surette has come to favour polemical assertion over sustained critical analysis. Here is a fairly representative sample:

> While it would be wrong to claim that their engagement with political thought was "innocent" in the sense that they should not be held accountable for their views, at the same time, it *was* ineffectual. It was

[84] Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound Speaking: Radio Speeches of World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenpoint Press, 1978), 149.

[85] Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, 16.

[86] Surette, *Pound in Purgatory*, 10.

> "innocent" in the sense that no one other than themselves was helped or harmed by it, and "ineffectual" in the sense that their opinions and doctrines proved incapable of affecting the march of events.[87]

This, it seems, is the reasoning behind Surette's desire to cut Pound some slack. We should, according to Surette, go easy on Pound, because, in the end, despite all his ranting and raving, he never *actually* hurt anyone, apart from himself.[88] That being so, I wonder what Surette would make of the letter to Alessandro Pavolini, the one that Feldman cites in the final chapter of *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-1945*. Does this letter, which does not implicate Pound in the procedures of systematic, genocidal persecution, matter? Perhaps not. But perhaps we might rephrase the question. Does this letter, which reveals Pound to be more than willing to offer helpful practical advice when it came to the issue of human suffering, that is, actual physical suffering, matter? I suspect that the answer is, for a critic such as Surette, not really, because, as he says, Pound never actually hurt anyone.

VI

In the end, why even bother bringing this stuff up? Aren't we in danger, if we choose to focus on troubling details such as those raised above, of losing sight of what made Pound such a vital modernist presence in the first place? Another of Feldman's more vociferous critics, A. David Moody seems to think so. What, the poet's biographer asks in a recently published piece, "is it that makes some of us so uncritically ready to believe the worst about Pound and to have it eclipse what is of permanent value in his work?"[89] To be sure, Moody's comments, which carry significant critical weight, are worth considering. In equal measure, however, we might also ask: what is it that makes some of us so quick on

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[87] Surette, *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia*, 276.

[88] Equally, Surette makes it clear that he does not want his readers to think that he accepts his subjects' "analysis of political movements and systems. Clearly Pound and Lewis were wildly wrong to place their faith in fascism/nazism [sic] as an ideology that would preserve high culture against the ravages of the masses" (Surette, *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia*, 12).

[89] A. David Moody, "On Matthew Feldman's *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-1945*: some notes further to Leon Surette's review in *MIN* 1.2," *Make It New* (1:3, November 2014), 51.

occasion to dismiss those who choose to broach still unresolved, highly controversial issues? Further to that, who gets to decide what is worthy of significant critical attention when it comes to a major modernist figure such as Ezra Pound: the interested historian, the professional biographer, or the literary critic? I don't really know, though similar questions might be asked of modernism studies more generally. But this I do know. Ezra Pound once wrote:

> *If we never write anything save what is already understood, the field of understanding will never be extended. One demands the right, now and again, to write for a few people with special interests and whose curiosity reaches into greater detail.*
> (XCVI: 679)

I agree with the first sentence.