Matthew Feldman

POLITICS, INTELLECTUALS, AND FAITH

Essays by Matthew Feldman

Edited and with an introduction by Archie Henderson

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For Luisa

Introduction

Archie Henderson

Matthew Feldman is a noted scholar of twentieth century literature and history. His publications include three monographs and numerous volumes edited or co-edited by him. His first collection of essays was *Falsifying Beckett: Essays on Archives, Philosophy and Methodology in Beckett Studies* (Stuttgart: ***ibidem***-Verlag, 2015), containing pieces published over a dozen years. This collection, his second, covers a wider chronology and range of subject matter, but finds in its title, "Politics, Intellectuals, and Faith," a unifying theme. What is of overriding concern to Feldman in these essays, written for academic and general audiences between 2002 and 2020, is how, and why, intellectuals of the twentieth-century were drawn to extremism; how the kind of fervent devotion—akin to religious devotion—that they expressed was in fact essential in the construction of totalitarian rule; and how some legacies have influenced, above all, fascist and radical right movements to this day.

Part 1, "Ezra Pound, Modernist and Fascist," consists of a series of interrelated essays devoted to the American poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972), who was the subject of Feldman's compact monograph *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). "Modernist" and "fascist," the two roles for which Pound is probably best known, are frequently considered to be the "two sides" of the poet, which are conveniently separated and compartmentalized in many discussions of his life and works. In this bifurcated formulation, the modernist half of the famous poet's life is the triumph, the fascist half is the tragedy. Feldman does not see it this way. For him, the two sides cannot be so neatly divided, at least during World War II. Just like a coin, one "side" cannot stand alone without the other. Feldman wants to understand how Pound's life—one of the most fascinating of the twentieth century—could have turned out the way it did. For this, he needs to ask and answer the question, "Just how deeply involved was Ezra Pound with fascism?" The question has been evaded by most (but not all) Pound scholars—presumably for fear of what would turn up by way of an answer.

Calling it "high time to start taking Ezra Pound's fascism seriously," Feldman frames his monograph's approach to Pound's last decade in Fascist Italy by arguing that "fascism's 'political faith', typically mapping onto traditional Christian practices, can be usefully understood as a defining feature of fascist ideology." In the words of historian Emilio Gentile, "the construction of a fascist religion, centred around the sacralization of the state, appears to be an attempt to evoke—in order to legitimize the fascist regime—the sacred nature of the Roman archetype as 'an expression of an ethical-religious concept, in which the essential reasons behind the state's existence and power are projected as symbols of faith.'" "It was necessary," said Mussolini (*My Autobiography*, p. 69), "to lay the foundation of a new civilization." As Gentile explains this notion, in the move away from "many centuries of decadence, the Italian people had the chance to create a new civilization; but only total subservience to the *duce*'s leadership, and belief in the fascist religion, would have given Italians the moral force necessary to rise to the challenge." Feldman sees Mussolini's foundation-laying—what Gentile terms, in an article of that title, the "Fascist anthropological revolution"—as "part of a socio-political, revolutionary attempt to overcome perceived decadence by seeking to create literally 'new men' of action and faith: warrior-priests with the will to turn myth into reality and establish a secular utopia; or in Pound's words, a 'paradiso terrestre.'" As applied to Pound—who also advocated for a "new civilization" in 1928—and in many instances before and since—this means that "Pound's veneration for Mussolini only starts to make sense, then, against the unmistakable backdrop of Fascism's 'political faith' […] Even as an expatriate in Fascist Italy, Pound's commitment to the 'Fascist faith' was far from idiosyncratic; it was representative." Extending far beyond his delivery of antisemitic speeches over Rome Radio, Pound's transnational fascist commitments show a dimension of the poet that is not encapsulated in the standard picture of him as a hopeless idealist in wartime Italy: "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 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." Feldman's book stirred considerable controversy among Pound scholars, with its unflinching portrait of Pound as the committed fascist overshadowing his role as the "quintessential modernist and composer of some of the twentieth century's most admired verse."

In the eight essays that comprise Part 1, Feldman goes beyond the date range and topics covered in *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-1945* (while including one chapter from the latter). He identifies some key moments in the timeline leading to the poet's being "all in" with activism on behalf of Italian Fascism. These include, of course, his famous meeting with Mussolini in 1933, but also include his reading of a book by Kantorowicz; his print propaganda for the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in the mid-1930s and for the British Union of Fascists between 1936 and 1940, both of which coincided with and reflected his growing antisemitism; and his encounter with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in 1942. During his postwar years of confinement at Saint Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., Pound attracted numerous neo-fascist visitors—with Eustace Mullins, John Kasper, and Matthias Koehl counted among the most notorious of them—and influenced likeminded devotees in the United Kingdom and Australia. Feldman concludes Part 1 with a look at Pound's influence on the Italian neo-Fascist group named after him.

Feldman starts off the first chapter in this volume with a striking quotation from Lawrence Rainey, who asserted in 1999 that it was "the allure, the thrill, the prospect of terror […] that attracted Ezra Pound to Fascism," and not "the multiplicity of motives" that, as scholars have tried to argue, led Pound—and numerous other European intellectuals—"towards the totalitarian temptation." Feldman, however, rejects Rainey's notion of intellectuals as, in essence, bystanders standing agape before the spectacle of totalitarianism, seeing them instead as potentially "key cultural influencers" who were in a unique position to "lead the leaders" on matters of culture. In this connection, Pound's cultural influence has been a particular long-lasting one, extending beyond his work in Fascist Italy to the younger generation of fascists and radical right extremists who gathered around him on the grass at St Elizabeths, as well as contemporary neo-fascist groups such as CasaPound, explicitly named after the poet. In fact, Feldman focuses not on the spectacle of Fascist terror as a motivator for Pound, but on his hero worship of *Il Duce* and "key aspects of Fascism's cultural nationalism" as "essential drivers in his turn toward fascist ideology." Feldman sees Pound, though resident in Italy for nearly a decade, as having first been "radicalized" in 1932-33, followed by a second "radicalisation," or redoubling of his commitment to the Fascist cause, after another decade had elapsed (1942-43), which in turn brought him back to a reconsideration of historical figures representing older, pre-Fascist "Italian traditions to bolster his support for the wartime Axis." In December 1943, during this second radicalisation, Pound wrote a letter to regime functionary Alessandro Pavolini recommending a law mandating the showcasing of *The Protocols of the Elders by Zion*, among other books, by booksellers. Pound's rationale is as shocking today as it was when Feldman quoted it in *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*: "The arrest of Jews will create a wave of useless mercy; thus the need to disseminate the Protocols [of the Elders of Zion]. The intellectuals are capable of a passion more durable than the emotional, but they need to understand the reasons for a conflict." Feldman's concern is to understand how Pound's example could have helped build the foundations for the postwar "fascist traditions" that followed Mussolini; it is only through an understanding of high-profile cases such as Pound's that democratic societies can work toward their "wish to be inoculated from fascist ideology."

In the following chapter, Feldman summarizes the standard picture of Pound as a "naive modernist, swept along by the radical politics of his day," seeking through archival investigation to return the story to its "historical and political contexts." In answer to the question "Just how deeply involved was Ezra Pound with fascism?" Feldman finds that Pound was "far more of a committed political pugilist" than the standard account allows for. The FBI file on Pound suggests, for instance, even if it does not establish with certainty, that "Ezra Pound was a member of a committee in the Ministry of Popular Culture which met every morning to formulate anti-Allied propaganda and that Pound was the head of the United States Division of that committee." Those allegations remain to be investigated; in any event, the FBI file proves that Pound exchanged numerous letters with Gian Gaetano Cabella, a newspaper editor and important regime official—amongst scores of other Fascist apparatchiks—and wrote position papers on framing Axis propaganda.

In Chapter 3, Feldman argues that Pound's reading of Ernst Kantorowicz's idiosyncratic *Frederick The Second 1994-1250* in the early 1930s, probably between 1932 and 1933, may have been an essential way station for his "conversion" to Italian fascism, part of his first wave of ideological "radicalisation." His lionization of Mussolini led him to abandon his libertarian belief in the minimal state, a view which persisted until the mid-1920s at least, in favor of totalitarian government, modelled on Frederick II of Sicily, who, like Mussolini after him, attempted "to enlighten Europe both culturally and economically." Pound might have read Kantorowicz after his meeting with Mussolini in 1933, but he had certainly read Dante's *De Monarchia* beforehand. Dante's "manifesto for secular rule" can be read—and Pound probably did read it—as a justification of total rule in the Mussolinian vein. The difference between Dante's ideal ruler and Frederick II, at least as presented by Kantorowicz, is that "Dante provides the idea that the state is divinely sanctioned; Kantorowicz, by contrast, argues strenuously that the state is willed into being by the autocrat, and ordered by his temporal omniscience, which is numinous in and of itself." In Feldman's words, "Kantorowicz portrays the emperor as an artifex," making him a precursor to Mussolini, still another artifex in Pound's eyes.

The "Make it crude" of Chapter 4's title is explained by Feldman's thesis that, in delivering his propaganda broadcasts over Rome Radio, "[t]he prophet of modernism's quest to 'make it new' had descended, abruptly it seemed, into crude demagogy." Feldman goes on to explain that the "it" refers specifically to Pound's antisemitism, which turned overt around 1935, for reasons that Feldman tries to dissect. The descent into crudity spanned the years 1935-39, when he was writing propaganda for the *British-Italian Bulletin* and publications of Oswald Mosley's

British Union of Fascists (BUF). Pound's earliest antisemitic propaganda for the *British-Italian Bulletin* (1935-1936) was heavily encoded; but "by 1939, these were often less antisemitic codes than stock canards." By the period of his wartime broadcasts, Pound's antisemitic propaganda became "increasingly bound up with Pound's denunciation of usurers and conspirators." Feldman concludes that Pound's vituperative attacks on elites "got more extreme as he went along, from the 1920s to the 1930s to the 1940s." Feldman sees the poet's words delivered over the radio as "the best weapon in Pound's own armoury" to aid what the poet referred to in a letter to William Carlos Williams as "the Axis side of the line." Pound's fascist broadcasts were not delivered in a vacuum; rather, they operated as an eliminationist backdrop to the Holocaust. Close to home, "Jews trapped in the Salò Republic, like Primo Levi, were being rounded up and transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau." Feldman argues that, regardless of Pound's probable ignorance of "the greatest crime in history," "the parallel history of the Holocaust is nevertheless relevant, if only because words help to condition action; something poets appreciate far better than most."

Turning to archives at Yale's Beinecke Library, the FBI file on Pound, BBC's Written Archive Centre and The National Archives in London, in Chapter 5 Feldman draws a picture of Pound as "a committed, strategic and significant propagandist for Fascism's wartime Ministry of Popular Culture." Elaborating on his view that "Ezra Pound used his best weapons, his words, to fight the Allies as a radio propagandist for Fascist Italy," Feldman describes the poet's propaganda strategies as arguably extending beyond his self-appointed "duties as an American citizen," which Pound used to justify his broadcasts. Numbered among those strategies were "closer collaboration with Nazi Germany, especially in terms of anti-Semitic discourse; active participation in a 'New Europe'"; and Italian cultural leadership in radio, press, and music. Pound presented a "publications project" to the Ministry for Popular Culture in November 1939, and later even suggested compulsory reading for Allied prisoners of war: Volpe's *History of the Fascist Revolution*. He continued to discuss these and similar initiatives for much of the war with Camillo Pellizzi, rightly perceived by C. David Heymann to be "his tightest bond with a high-ranking Fascist official."

Chapter 6 holds that "Pound was far closer to interwar fascist theory and practice than has been previously maintained." Between 1936 and 1940, Feldman shows that Pound's chief journalistic outlet was Mosley's British Union of Fascists, to which he "contributed propaganda advice, corresponding regularly with the leadership; recommending potential authors; and subscribing to movement publications—in addition to acting as one of the leading contributors" to BUF publications. Pound's 1930s advocacy of a "United States of Europe" under fascist hegemony was nearly a generation ahead of its time; the cause was subsequently taken up by “second wave” British fascism following the war. In fact, Pound was one of the very few who supported both Mosley’s “first wave” fascism for BUF as well as his post-war “second wave” fascism through the Union Movement’s house journal *The European* in the 1950s.

The last two chapters on Pound address the poet’s legacy among later generations of fascism. In Chapter 7, Feldman and his co-author Andrea Rinaldi argue that “Pound remains an important touchstone for different shades of extreme right thought—most notably in the US, Britain and Italy.” They remind us that Pound was politically active on behalf of the fascist cause as late as 1961, or three years after his release from St. Elizabeths. In the spring of that year he attended a press conference in Rome held by Sir Oswald Mosley; on May 1, he walked in a parade sponsored by the neo-Fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI). The authors also see Pound’s influence at work in contemporary neo-fascism—“Fascism of the Third Millennium”—which may be best observed in the case of the explicitly fascist movement CasaPound Italia and Britain’s New Right. The influence extends from Pound’s radical right circle on the grounds at St. Elizabeths and in correspondence during his residency there—a fascist echo chamber if there ever was one—to far-flung individuals and groups up to the present. The authors conclude that “activists from New Zealand to Italy, and Britain to the United States, testify to his continuing relevance in—at least—three ‘faces’ of the contemporary extreme right: white supremacism, neo-fascism, and New Right ‘metapolitics’. In each, he is lauded as a political martyr and cultural icon.”

In Chapter 8, Feldman and co-author Anna Castriota discuss the fascist movement CasaPound, which confusingly and contradictorily supports left-wing housing occupations, praises Mussolini, and names itself after an American fascist poet. The question the authors raise is: What does CasaPound see in Pound the poet that few others do, at least to the degree that justifies naming an entire group after him? Gianluca Iannone, CasaPound’s founder, avers that “Ezra Pound had to suffer for his ideas”—those ideas being the views of the losing side in the Second World War: fascism and antisemitism (the latter of which, incidentally, Iannone denies on Pound’s behalf and on behalf of CasaPound). Iannone’s statement is another way of rendering Pound’s famous line—made after his arrest, and repeatedly quoted to this day by Italian radical right or fascist figures: “If a man isn’t willing to take some risk for his opinions, either his opinions are no good or he’s no good.” Indeed, it seems to be Pound’s awareness that “words have consequences”—for both winners and losers, books are a weapon of war just as much as the rifle in the Fascist slogan “libro e moschetto”—and his willingness to speak out regardless of the cost, that inspired Iannone and CasaPound to honor the poet. Feldman and Castriota find

CasaPound's approach to social housing and poverty relief to be evidence of a "hybridization of 'neo-fascism and the third way' tradition of Italian Fascism." In this reading, it is in no way a contradiction in terms for fascists to be promoting social justice; attempts to "regenerate the 'national community' through voluntaristic social initiatives" has its roots in the Verona Manifesto of 1943.

Part 2 of this collection is entitled "War and Empire: the fascist way and the liberal way." "The fascist way" speaks for itself; yet Feldman also asks, is liberal democracy much better? Can there be liberalism without war? Can human rights be anything other than empty words? With its wholesale plundering of the earth, has liberalism helped to hasten the moment of eschatological collapse? These are profoundly disturbing questions that need to be asked, especially as we ask ourselves what kind of a world we want to see after the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has run its course. Chapter 9 begins with an excerpt by a Holocaust survivor named Duro Schwartz, an improbable survivor of a Ustaša-run extermination centre—the only death camp run independently from Nazi Germany. The collective horrors of the camp would seem enough to bring on the day of judgment; and this was but one camp. Feldman calls wartime Croatia a "genocidal hybrid between crucifix and dagger." Wartime Catholicism has been subjected to vicious revisionist and often politically-charged attacks for its alleged complicity in Croatian brutality in particular and in the European genocide in general. Rejecting the most extreme of these attacks, Feldman points to the Vatican's wartime interventions on behalf of Jews. As to the Ustaša regime, Feldman sees wartime Croatia as a fascist state with a political religion directed to sacralizing the nation—not the God of the Catholic Church—while instrumentalizing Catholicism for its own ends. It was not Catholicism per se that "may be regarded as a fellow-traveler of fascism," but radical right "political Catholicism," the movement that arose in reaction to the perceived decadence of modernity in the early decades of the twentieth century. Yet this does not absolve the many Catholic perpetrators, whether in the Independent State of Croatia (NDN), or beyond it: "Clearly scores of Catholics, within and outside the Church alike, behaved devilishly."

Chapter 10 then takes up the question of the possibility or appropriateness of commercial films on the Holocaust. Could, for example, the harrowing memoir by Duro Schwartz, described in the previous chapter, be given its due in such a film, or filmed at all? Feldman examines how a "diverse range of international films have navigated this 'showing the unshowable' of the Shoah." The films he surveys keep their cinematic distance (in time or space or by the use of black humour or untranslated dialogue) from the worst of the horrors, tending "to circumvent, avoid and perhaps minimise those un-representable realities comprising the Final Solution." In the surveyed "mainstream" Holocaust films—*Schindler's List* (1993), *Life* *is Beautiful* [*La Vita è bella*] (1999), *Jakob the Liar* (1999), *The Pianist* (2003), and *Black Book* [*Zwartboek*] (2006)—the most graphic violence remains off-stage for the most part, and the stories they tell move towards the "trope of Hollywood-style positive endings," which, however, tend to be muted or ambiguous. Feldman finds that "for all of its seeming faults of sentimentality and representational evasion, this genre of Shoah film has been remarkably successful."

In Chapter 11, Feldman explores the use of "fifth column discourse" by postwar radical right groups, by means of which an attack on liberal democracy is waged from within a country through carefully chosen, sanitized rhetoric and institutional self-censorship. The latter, self-censorship, is required because of mainstream rejection and discrediting of fascist and antisemitic rhetoric in the wake of World War II. Not only did the colored shirts and rallies have to be abandoned, but the rhetoric had to change as well—as it began to at the end of the Cold War. In academic terminology, radical right groups developed an "exoteric," or "moderate 'front-stage'" intended for public consumption, and an "esoteric," or "radical 'back-stage'" aimed at an audience comprising activists and militants. In a Trojan Horse effect, the public-facing rhetoric uses seemingly inclusive and democratic language for exclusive and undemocratic ends, which only the radical-right initiated can discern. Feldman cites the example of Holocaust denial, which began during the war at the hands of the Axis perpetrators themselves. Today, this anti-Semitic conspiracy theory is dressed up as Holocaust "revisionism." As Feldman emphasizes, the LaRouche movement in the US—led by its cultic leader, Lyndon LaRouche, until his recent death—is one of the more sophisticated purveyors of "masked antisemitic theories."

With the *cordon sanitaire* broken down in parts of Europe, the goalposts of discourse have moved, with previously centre-right parties shifting further to the right and forming new alliances that were formerly unthinkable. In Chapter 12, Feldman terms this a movement toward a "near-right politics." These developments have stirred the embers of a long-dormant question: is the reformist radical right—or worse, revolutionary fascism itself—on its way back? Fascism stepped into the vacuum of leadership after World War I. History, however, does not repeat itself, and the same historical circumstances will not reassemble and give another opening to fascism. Feldman points out, though, that "many fascist tropes were dangerously mainstreamed in interwar Europe," citing as an example the infamous Nuremberg Laws, or Nazi race laws, followed by several radical right regimes thereafter. This technique has been repackaged by today's radical right in obviously successful ways. Among its other advantages, mainstreaming by the radical right disguises any links it may have to historical fascism. Vitally, contemporary neo-fascism is more than disguised historical fascism; it has introduced two new changes: ethno-pluralism, which is racism by another name, or “white separatism through the back door,” allowing for the popular appeal of their message; and the stripping of overtly fascist trappings like coloured shirts and parades, to similar effect. In recent decades, radical right movements “have truly learnt to speak the language of reform rather than revolution.” Besides mainstreaming their message for popular consumption, the radical right has also encoded the message to retain the loyalty and support of its most committed followers. The online mainstreaming of the radical right, furthermore, is “surely a challenge to liberal stability and legitimacy, and perhaps even a long-term threat to democratic security.” Rather than an interwar assault on power, “it is an ideological assault on the liberal status quo in Europe”: “That means extra susceptibility in a major crisis. And it also means the germs of a collective madness are again in the air.” It is at the point that Feldman issues his rallying cry: “We need ‘political immunologists’ desperately today. For if liberalism fails over the next generation, it will be because we, its guardians, failed it. Let us demonstrate that liberal values include the protection of minority groups, equality of rights, and freedom from fear. This is the kernel of liberalism.”

Feldman next turns his attention to the recent growth in so-called “lone wolf terrorism”: “why has what is termed here ‘self-activating terrorism’ spiked so massively this century; and just as pressingly, how does lone wolf terrorism relate to radical right extremism?” In Chapter 13, Feldman traces the roots of lone wolf terrorism to nineteenth-century anarchism, whose self-declared war on their symbolic, often bourgeois targets waned between the world wars but has been revived by the radical right, especially the American radical right, beginning in the 1980s. Contemporary lone wolf terrorism, or what Feldman defines as self-directed terrorism, “is personally constructed and undertaken in terms of motivation, targets, and justification.” Attacks on their symbolic targets—whether “the bourgeoisie or multiculturalism in Europe and the United States”—are seen by radical right actors as “strikes in a war against parts of their own society.” The radical right’s embrace of the internet and digital technologies has gone hand in hand with the rise in self-directed terrorism. For instance, the internet not only “provided motive, means, and opportunity” for Andres Breivik’s terrorist attacks on 22 July 2011, but it also allowed him to post online his far-right manifesto *2083*—including its “step-by-step manual for lone wolf terrorism”—on the same date.

In Chapter 14, Feldman looks at the role played by “radicalising networks” in two prosecuted cases in which he was personally involved as an expert witness in court. Feldman locates a distinction between self-directed terrorists and accomplices on the ground, meaning that “having two or more co-conspirators in the conspiracy fundamentally changes terrorist dynamics.” This does not mean that self-activating terrorists are complete loners; they may have an active support network in the form of friends or family, or indeed virtually; and they may have a passive, or indirect, radicalising network that they draw upon for reading material or inspiration. As an example of a passive self-radicalising extremist, Feldman points to the case of Neil Lewington, a would-be bomber who was apprehended in 2008. Among the material confiscated by the police were items linked to two post-war fascist movements: Combat 18/Blood & Honour and Christian Identity/KKK. These groups formed Lewington's indirect "community of support" online. The relationship to fascist ideology, detailed in Feldman's testimony, was noted by the sentencing judge in his address to Lewington. By contrast, Ian Davison was a would-be lone wolf who was passively preparing terrorist attacks online, while at the same time cultivating an active support network via the organisation he led for 18 months, the Aryan Strike Force (ASF). In addition to the 21 book-length texts that he had personally uploaded to the ASF website, including *Mein Kampf* and paramilitary manuals, Davison posted texts on the ASF forum about his neo-Nazi views and announced his germ warfare plans online. Davison's "active engagement with neo-Nazi fora clearly contributed to his 2010 sentencing."

Written in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and US military retaliation, Chapter 15 is perhaps Feldman's most anguished and angry essay. He takes a hard look at globalisation and its (neo-)liberal proponents. Globalisation is not just economic exploitation of the poor; it is also war on the poor, whether conceived in the wider sense (global unsustainability) or the narrower sense (5,000 Iraqi children dying monthly in the decade following the imposition of Western sanctions in 1990). "Standing on the side of Life" and "against the 'storm of death' threatening 'general destruction'" is art, which "weaves an intricate and vivid tapestry of human interactions." In fighting "openly against the instinct of death at work in our history," "art is not only a guide and a refuge, but an oracle as well." The American-led "War on Terror" presented parallels with Kafka's *The Trial*, as Feldman discusses. The character Block's case, "without promise of conclusion, echoes the ongoing crisis of Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War." As Feldman warns us, "the global threats created as a result of human factionalism simply cannot coexist with the parochialism which has thus far shaped so much of human history, and another sixty years similar to the last will assuredly realise the 'inverted utopia' we cannot imagine."

Chapter 16 bears the title "'it became necessary to destroy the town to save it': The United States Between Liberalism and Warfare before Donald Trump." This provocative title points to the absurdities engendered by the perennial conflict between the American ideal of enduring peace and the aggressive practices of American foreign policy. Feldman raises the question of how central political violence—which, in America's case, has long meant perpetual wars—is to liberalism. In view of contemporary political realities, Feldman defines warfare as “organised violence supported by an interested party with the intention of killing large numbers of people to achieve their political aims.” This definition, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians, broadens Clausewitz’s traditional understanding of war to make it nearly synonymous with terrorism. Feldman goes a step further and argues that “the functioning of liberalism is predicated upon war and the institutions of war.” This link between war and liberalism predates the end of the Cold War. Feldman concludes that “liberalism as we understand it today is inextricable from the ‘massification of militarism’ in the political, economic, and cultural spheres.”

In Chapter 17, Feldman looks at the Iraq War from the viewpoint of its justness. A Just War in the Christian tradition consists of just cause and just conduct in conflict. Feldman contends that the 2003 US-led pre-emptive attack on Iraq failed on both counts: the cause lacked right authority and the right intention and failed the test of last resort; and the conduct clearly failed to ensure a just outcome. Lacking by all accounts were “credible evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq”; a “UN resolution backing an invasion”; and “independently-verified proof of Al-Qaida partnering with Saddam Hussein in Iraq.” This raises an unusual question to consider: what would it take, or what would be just, to correct a failed just war? The unjustness of the invasion and occupation of Iraq was so great that, ironically, it might actually be more just (though not necessarily recommended) to reoccupy the country in order to restore the status quo ante (that is, an autocratic Iraq without Saddam). Feldman suggests that weight should be given, before war is declared, to the disparity of strength between the respective parties to a conflict. This disparity is not generally counted as a factor in the analysis of just war doctrine and is often ignored by the British and American press; but the 54 countries that protested against the Iraq invasion recognized it as an expression of European-American imperial hegemony.

In the chapter which opens Part 3, “Ends and Odds,” Feldman returns full circle to a major intellectual figure of the 20th century who gravitated toward fascism between the wars: not Pound, in this case, but the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Feldman sees the myth of socio-cultural decline and renewal to be the core of fascism; and here, he situates Heidegger in the context of non-Nazi strands of fascism prevalent in interwar Germany which supported the same myth. By this measure, Heidegger was hardly alone in his longing for an extensive spiritual renewal in Germany, but in his ultimate rejection of Nazi populism and the prospects of secular revolutionary change. Like them, his ‘philosophical’ acceptance of fascism culminated in disillusion with National Socialism—although for less ideological than personal reasons. In 1950, under the doctoral supervision of Heidegger’s one-time ally, the existential philosopher, Karl Jaspers, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932* by Armin Mohler presented metapolitical fascism as a unified and reasonable alternative to modernity; an alternative seeking to end the present “interregnum.” This idea was picked up later by the French Nouvelle Droite, which emphasized the “right to difference” as a critique of modernity’s egalitarianism, drawing for intellectual support from Heidegger among others of his ilk (such as the jurist Carl Schmitt or the poet Gottfried Benn). As with the ongoing “Pound case”, contemporary fascists seem to understand the political undertones of Heidegger’s works better than a fair few scholars.

The aforementioned British far-right extremist group, the Aryan Strike Force (ASF), is a representative case study in contemporary neo-Nazi activism. This is the theme of Chapter 19, which finds that the so-called “Aryan” community—perceived by the postwar radical right to need “saving” from “immigrants, multi-cultural society and non-whites more generally”—is geographically dispersed around the world. Postwar fascist movements therefore tend to be “international in scope, and racial in motivation.” The ASF may be described as a neo-Nazi groupuscule whose impact and connections, especially its international links, are magnified by their use of the internet. ASF followed two extreme right-wing traditions: a longstanding Euro-American neo-Nazi movement, and an embrace of the internet to communicate, organise and propagate the message of Universal Nazism. Groups that follow the 1962 “Cotswold Declaration”—a collaboration by the extreme right wing in Britain and the USA—“advocate global Nazi ideology, biological anti-Semitism, paramilitary violence, and an unshakeable ‘faith’ in the existence and superiority of a worldwide ‘Aryan’ race.” ASF used the internet to upload military manuals, racist books and extremist videos. ASF’s adherence to a kind of neo-Nazi “special relationship” between the US and UK is demonstrated by the founding of a US Division.

In crossing the ideological Rubicon Feldman then turns to the Soviet Constructivists. Pioneers of the avant-garde, specifically photomontage, they flourished amidst the utopian aftermath of the Russian Revolution as a synthesis of communist politics and high modernism. Citing Kenneth Burridge’s remark that “there is no human activity which cannot assume religious significance,” Feldman argues in Chapter 20 that “a kind of ersatz faith underpinned much of Stalinism’s transformative zeal in the 1930s.” This application of “political religion” thus makes space for “totalitarian art.” In line with James’s and Durkheim’s definitions of religion based on its functions, “secular faiths” may be seen in the same light: “if one’s definition of religion stems from a functionalist perspective, then political religions may hold a potentially similar power over people as other religions.” As a case study, Feldman turns to the 1930s monthly journal the *USSR in Construction*, whose “mixed-media presentation may be more effectively described as a cultural sermon from devotees of a seductive political religion: one making use of idiosyncratically Russian pictorial traditions, as well as cutting-edge Modernist genres like photomontage; the publication also uses Bolshevik propaganda techniques and of course, Marxist-Leninist ideology.” Relevantly here, “propaganda” in its root meaning is the propagation of the faith.

In the book’s concluding essay, Feldman argues for Samuel Beckett’s political nominalism as a “third option […] between an apolitical Beckett and a ‘soft left’ Beckett: humanistic but not partisan, engaged specifically and individually rather than identified with an ‘ism.’” Beckett’s politics, in Feldman’s reading, “were shaped by the particular and the personal, and each political act or statement demands especial consideration in its own, socio-historical context.” His politics, then, were “a succession of isolated engagements rather than overarching ‘sides’ or ‘ideologies’ or organisational strategies.” In this view, it is a mistake to employ presentism “to describe Beckett’s work as engaging with the Holocaust,” for instance, as it took nearly a generation after the war for the notion of the Holocaust to be firmly established—the term only came into widespread use in early 1960s. Based on what Feldman has written in this chapter, it seems fair to say that, unlike Pound—with whom he is bookended in this collection—Beckett would not have entangled himself in activism in the name of an abstract ideal where real human beings could be hurt. Feldman’s image of this “traumatised witness” of 20th century Europe, in the words of the 1969 Nobel Prize Award ceremony, “sounding liberation to the oppressed, and comfort to those in need”—which is all of us—is a fitting way with which to end his collection of essays.

This brief account does not do justice to the collection’s richness of detail and intensity of argument. As it contains no throwaway lines and wastes no words, the book—unusually for such a collection, both scholarly and passionate—must be savored for its nuances. The running themes of the book can only be touched upon here: working paradoxes and boundaries of all kinds—linguistic, civic, political, and otherwise—and their breaches; the industrial-scale dehumanizing of human beings that must be called out and fought; the watershed moment of 1945—a date mentioned in every chapter—and the fact that we are still living in its shadow; and the use or misuse of language as a political weapon. Yet this is countersigned with the message of hope—in a world that sometimes seems devoid of it—for if words can be weaponized for war, they can also be instrumentalized for peace.