However, apart from Pareto's posthumous peak of fame in the 1930s and 1940s, when his work inspired a generation of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, genuine engagement with his studies has been actually quite rare over recent decades. To most contemporary researchers, Pareto is primarily little else but a name in the "rosary" of great dead white men encountered during one's undergraduate studies, and then a label for two mathematical notions that young academics must familiarise themselves with. Even Pareto's crucial contribution to political science, namely his theory about the circulation of the elites, seems to be poorly known these days.

Perhaps, as Joseph Femia—editor of the volume hereby reviewed—suggests in his concise yet comprehensive introduction to the life and work of "the hermit of Céligny", it is true that Pareto's cynical notion of social equilibrium, his lack of faith in human progress and collective enlightenment, his elusion of the comfortable categories of normal science, and the overwhelming theoretical as well as historical analyses in which he indulged for the sake of scientific completeness, scholarly precision, intellectual integrity, and academic pedantry make of Pareto one of the least inspiring authors that ever reached the status of "classic" in any discipline.

Yet, several scholars of the 20th century did read his work, no matter how uninspiring, depressing, tedious and taxing it could be. And they did not only read it, but also recognised its remarkable character and its profound insightfulness. In particular, many seemed to find Pareto's work extremely appealing in connection with the general decline in individual liberty, social wellbeing and collective hope informing the aftermath of the First World War and of the ensuing boom-bust financial cycle of the 1920s, which unleashed the Great Depression and the affirmation of fascist regimes all over Continental Europe.

Some scholars, albeit fewer than in the inter-war grim interlude, have kept finding Pareto congenial after that time. Amongst them, Femia has proved himself to be one of today's main experts on Pareto within Anglophone academia. In addition to the volume reviewed hereby, to him we owe two further recent books on Pareto: *Pareto and Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and *Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries* (London: Ashgate, 2012). Whereas the former, as the title indicates, focuses upon the work of Pareto as a political thinker, the latter, co-edited with Alasdair Marshall, explores the ramifications of Pareto's contribution for contemporary areas of inquiry, whether sociological (e.g. stratification research), economic (e.g. monetary issues) or humanistic (e.g. rhetorical reasoning).

The 2009 volume that Femia edits comprises three parts, each containing essays on Pareto by variously influential scholars of the 20th century. Specifically, Part I focuses upon

methodological aspects of Pareto's contribution to the social sciences, most notably sociology rather than economics, written in the 1930s and 1960s. Part II explores broader aspects of his social theory and includes studies written between the 1960s and 1990s. Two of them deserve a special mention, i.e. "Vilfredo Pareto's Sociology in his Letters to Maffeo Pantaleoni" and "Introduction to Pareto's Sociology" (pp. 67—87 and 89—112), for they were authored by Italy's leading liberal thinker Norberto Bobbio and constitute a sort of "classics" in Italian Pareto studies. Noteworthy is also "Pareto, Vilfredo: Contributions to Sociology" (pp. 171—80), written by US action theorist Talcott Parsons, who is probably the most famous heir of Pareto's in the Anglophone world. Part III discusses Pareto's politics, especially with regard to English-speaking countries, and offers reflections over the last three decades of the 20th century by, *inter alia*, Nobel-prize economist Amartya Sen ("The Impossibility of a Paretan Liberal", pp. 267—72) as well as Joseph Femia himself ("Pareto and the Critique of Justice", pp. 317—29). All together, these essays represent the most articulate introduction to Pareto's social and political thought, as well as its reception over the past 70 years, currently available in the English language.

What is more, given the high quality of the scholarly work selected by the editor, such an introduction avoids the unfortunate yet widespread oversimplifications and blatantly erroneous depictions of Pareto's thought, which is often "pigeon-holed" into science-worshipping positivism, psychological reductionism and proto-fascist authoritarianism.

Certainly, Pareto did attempt to apply the induction- and experiment-based scientific methods of physics and chemistry to the study of social phenomena. He did so in order to stress and charter the uniformities of human behaviour due to fundamental instincts and mental dispositions characteristic of our species, as well as to criticise much-venerated democratic regimes *qua* demagogic plutocracies. Nevertheless, he never denied the limitations intrinsic to the observation-constrained, abstraction-prone, descriptive, probabilistic hypotheses of the natural sciences. Indeed, even the field of economics, which he himself had contributed to formalise by adopting elements of the mathematics used in physics, had been abandoned by Pareto because of its inability to grasp the non-rational elements of the human psyche, which caused rationality-based economic models to fail regularly and inevitably in their predictions about the future. As Pareto had come to realise, the actual social man was not much of an *homo economicus*. C.B. Macpherson's 1937 essay "Pareto's 'General Sociology'" (pp. 3—16) in Part I of Femia's book is most relevant in this respect, as it accuses Pareto of adhering too much to the allegedly value-free methods of empirical science, yet revealing as well Pareto's awaraness of the profound differences

existing between the study of inanimate or animal phenomena and the study of value-driven human beings.

Analogously, Pareto researched and categorised the fundamental instincts or sentiments ("residues") determining human action within societies and commonly rationalised *post-factum* into fallacious arguments ("derivations") and doctrines ("derivatives") in order to please yet another sentiment of ours, that is, our desire for explanations that sound logical to us. However, he never denied the ever-changing creative power of the human being as a semiotic animal, who is capable of activating and intensifying certain instincts and dispositions by engaging in symbolic activities. The tension between the fundamentally non-rational universal constant of "residues" and the possibility for self-reflective, cunning minds to manipulate them intelligently is discussed in Bobbio's work as well as in the 1972 essay by Vincent Tarascio chosen for this collection ("Marx and Pareto on Science and History: A Comparative Analysis", pp. 145—58), which also belongs to Part II.

Even less did Pareto deny the dangers to social order and public wellbeing stemming from political doctrines fostering despotism, censorship, nationalism and racism. Indeed, Pareto was very much an old-fashioned 19th-century liberal, who certainly disapproved of universal suffrage and other socially "dangerous" socialist aims, but commended the peaceful, direct male democracy of small Swiss cantons as the best example of political life in his age and regarded the liberty of the individual as paramount. *In nuce*, Mussolini's deification of the State and his charismatic leadership of the masses did not belong to Pareto and their common association is, as S.E. Finer called it, "a misfortune" ("Pareto and Pluto-Democracy: The Retreat to Galapagos", pp. 305—15; 305).

A scientist but not a devotee of scientism, a pessimist about human reason but not an irrationalist, and a conservative liberal but not a fascist: Pareto was a complex man and a complex thinker. He tried to mirror in his work the complexities of human phenomena themselves, thus avoiding explanatory shortcuts and ideological simplifications that would have probably granted him a much wider audience and a much broader appreciation. Femia's book, which contains selected essays by some of the most eminent intellectuals who have written about Pareto over the last seven decades, bears witness to such complexities. It is therefore no easy book to read; yet no more candid depiction of Pareto's approach and investigations would be possible.