

## Robert Casillo: On "Canto 45"

Although usury seems only an economic evil, Pound reaches the conclusion that economics is the key to history, and that cultural vitality depends on the proper use of money. He accordingly finds evidence of usury throughout Western society and culture.

. . . .

. . . while Pound is by no means hostile to all forms of money, he obsessively attacks that form of it - namely usury - which he thinks the Jews created and which figures in economics as the virtual equivalent of the abstract and monopolistic Jewish God, who creates reality ex nihilo. At the same time, Pound is certain that Jewish usurers exploit honest labor and impede the forces of production. He believes implicitly that the Jews, for whom labor is "the curse of Adam," reject the principle of work. The usurers, says Pound, are "against the natural increase of agriculture or of any productive work" (LE, 211). Elsewhere he reveals that, while some usurers may be non-Jews, the system of usury or "Jewsury" is essentially Jewish - "it is, of course, useless to indulge in antisemitism, leaving intact the Hebraic monetary system which is a most tremendous instrument of usury" (SP, 35 1).

. . . .

The Addendum to Canto 100 was written in the early 1940s. Like the broadcasts, it is hallucinatory, filled with duplicating, proliferating monstrosities:

The Evil is Usury, neschek

the serpent. . . .

The canker corrupting all things, Fafnir the worm,

Syphilis of the State, of all kingdoms,

Wart of the commonweal,

Wenn-maker, corrupter of all things.

Darkness the defiler,

Twin evil of envy,

Snake of the seven heads, Hydra, entering all things....

(Addendum, 100/ 798)

A self-duplicating worm, usury is also syphilis, whose germs create doubles of themselves while eating away within; cancer, a monstrous duplication of cellular life; the many-headed snake, an amphibious Hydra; and 'Twin evil of envy,' a double. These lines also imply violence, for usury attacks the state and brings death and profanation, evoked in this case as the breakdown of inner and outer: Usury "passes" the "doors of temples" and "defiles" the "grove of Paphos" (Addendum, 100 / 798). Like the scapegoat, Usury is a parasite, a wenn or cancer, a monstrous excrescence to be excised from the organic community.

....

More than a destroyer of cultural distinctions, usury is the essence of profanation, leaving no aspect of religion untouched. In "A Visiting Card" (1942) Pound speaks of history's "two forces": the first "divides, shatters, and kills, . . . falsifies ... [and] destroys every clearly delineated symbol, . . . [destroys] not one but every religion"; the second "contemplates the unity of the mystery" and "the images of the gods," which "move the soul to contemplation and preserve the tradition of the undivided light" (SP, 306-307). Pound blames the process of desymbolization on the usurers and "Iconoclasts," a "power of putrefaction" like "the bacilli of typhus or bubonic plague" (SP, 317). Usury is a violent plague which infects everything and reduces everything to a state of undifferentiation.

....

In the Usury Cantos Usura causes "the girl's needle [to go] ... blunt in her hand' (511 250); it keeps "the weaver ... from his loom," and the "stone cutter ... from his stone" (511 250). Meanwhile, the force of "Judah" is "destructive EVEN of the mason's trowel" (RB, 155). Usury thus produces a form of castration leading to impotence. It attacks the very instruments and impulses of art and forestalls the very moment of art's inception. So far as the finished art product is concerned, usury either causes its lines to "grow thick" (45/ 229), or else to fade, blur, and finally disappear.

....

In Canto 41, confronting the "tangle" of the swamp, Mussolini creates the determinate out of chaos. Where usury destroys walls and barriers, he builds them. . .

From The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound.  
Copyright © 1988 by Robert Casillo.

**Publication Status:**

Excerpted Criticism [1]

**Publication:**

- Private group -

**Criticism Target:**

Ezra Pound [2]

**Author:**

Robert Casillo [3]

**Poem:**

Canto 45 [4]

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/robert-casillo-canto-45>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/ezra-pound>

[3] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/robert-casillo>

[4] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/canto-45>