

XXXX  
CENTONES

from the  
*Cantos*  
of  
EZRA POUND

by  
MARK YOUNG

sandy press

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Design & layout by  
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Some of these poems first appeared in:

*A New Ulster, Argotist Online Poetry, Die Leere Mitte, Fleas on the Dog,  
Futures Trading, Hamilton Stone Review, Home Planet News Online,  
Ink Pantry, Marsh Hawk Review, No Placebos, Offcourse, petrichor,  
Poetry WTF?, Setu, swifts & s l o w s, Synchronized Chaos,  
Unlost Journal, & Ygdrasil.*

Thanks to the various editors.

## CENTO I

I slept in Circe's ingle. Unburied, unwept,  
unwrapped in sepulchre. These many  
crowded about me, with shouting. & in

the water, the almond-white swimmers.  
Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green  
cool light. The sunlight glitters, glitters

atop forked branch-tips, flaming as if  
with lotus, the bride awaiting the god's  
touch. & beneath the jazz a cortex, a

stiffness or stillness. The angle almost  
imperceptible, the calm field, the  
grass quiet. The house a shade too solid,

a dryness calling for death, knocking at  
empty rooms, seeking for buried beauty.

## CENTO II

A light moves on the north sky line.  
Light on the foam, breathed on by  
zephyrs, & a world is covered with jade.

Dig well & drink of the water. I would  
put it in better order than this is. Not  
that it were natural opposite, but only

twisteth out of natural measure. Wild  
geese swoop to the sand-bar, heaping  
the pyre with goods for sacrifice. Then

comes a catalogue, disjunct in mid  
darkness, & all the time, there were  
people going in front of the Moscow

station. A swollen magpie in a fitful  
sun entered the quiet air, the new sky.

### CENTO III

The hooves, moving in  
heavy air, clink & slick  
on the cobbles. Palace in

smoky light. Hard night, &  
parting at morning. Not a ray,  
not a slivver, not a spare disc

of sunlight. Thin husks I had  
known as men, weaving an  
endless sentence, propped

between chairs & table. &  
then went down to the  
ship, mad for a little slave

money, winds stretching out,  
seas pulling to eastward.

## CENTO IV

Smoke hangs on the stream, ply  
over ply, thin glitter of water;  
moves like a worm, in the crowd.

The valley is thick with leaves,  
with a black border half an inch  
or more deep, with leaves, the trees.

There was a man there talking,  
working up to a climax. Holding  
his power even though the gondolas

cost too much, that year. A black  
cock crows in the sea-foam. Moves  
like a worm. The camel drivers

sit in the turn of the stairs.  
Some cook, some do not cook.



## CENTO V

Sound drifts in the evening haze,  
North wind nips on the bough;  
& in small house by town's edge—

slung like an ox in smith's sling—  
now was wine-trunk here stripped,  
here made to stand, stilling the ill

beat music. A young man walks,  
*grave incessu*, at church with  
galleried porch, drinking the tone

of things. Brown-yellow wood,  
& the no-color plaster, all flat on  
the ground now, making mock of

the inky faithful. When you take  
it, give me a slice. A poet's ending.

## CENTO VI

Souls stained with recent tears, girls  
tender. & there were not "those girls,"  
there was one face, light: & the first

light, before ever dew was fallen. That  
big box of sand, with the pawn-brokers—  
silver mirrors catch the bright stones &

flare, gilt rafters above black water.  
Ivory dipping in silver, thick like a  
wheat swath, working up to a climax.

But to have done instead of not doing,  
heard deep platitudes about contentment,  
so making pleasure more certain in seeming.

Where the young boys prod stones for  
shrimp, evening is like a curtain of cloud.

## CENTO VII

Cast on a natal paper, set with  
an exegesis, told, our pact  
stands firm, from half-dark

to half-dark. Goat bells tinkled  
all night. Beaten from flesh  
into light, dark shoulders have

stirred the lightning. The air  
was full of women, flitting  
& fading at will. Honey at the

start & then acorns, passion  
to breed a form of things, of  
men, in shimmer of rain-blur.

Been to hell in a boat yet? The  
words woven in wind-wrack.

## CENTO VIII

The Library expressed its annoyance,  
brought a regiment of guards in to  
keep order while he was out in the

privy pumping gas into a sausage.  
It went on from dawn to sunset.  
They thought it was a funeral, or an

offer of marriage alliance, perhaps  
a procession coming down through  
a cut in the hills. The wall of the

building is finished & I shall now  
get the roof on. That he did among  
other things, drifting without a rudder.

The stone-cutters are waiting for  
spring weather to start work again.

## CENTO IX

Beat, beat, whirr, thud, in the soft turf  
to the little gallery over the gate,  
between the towers, making a double

arch, not a patch, not a lost shimmer  
of sunlight. They never speak to each  
other; for 180 years almost nothing.

Then came the seen, thus the palpable.  
Hot wind came from the marshes  
in scaled invention or true artistry.

The prefaces, cut clear and hard in  
some Wordsworthian, false-pastoral  
manner. The limbo of chopped ice &

sawdust rusteth the craft & the crafts-  
man, being divided, set out from color.

## CENTO X

I want it to be quite clear that  
he did among other things  
from the other side, from inside

the chateau, & then out by the  
lower river, the ball as of melted  
amber, coiled lozenge of the

pavement, clear shapes, broken —  
on *les pèse à un centigramme* —  
pouring there into the cataract,

with noise of sea over shingle.  
About ten years after this inci-  
dent he pulled his sword on a

student for laughing. Then the  
telephone didn't work for a week.

## CENTO XI

He took it up to Manhattan, to  
the big company, & they said:  
"The answer to that is they're

solid bone. You can amputate  
from just above the medulla."  
He never could get it to work.

The slick guy, decked all in green,  
with sleeves of yellow silk &  
holding his golden wand, looked

out of the window. He knew me  
& spoke first. "They came & cut  
holes in rock for sacrifice, heap-

ing the pyre with goods. Sparse  
chimneys smoke in the cross light."

## CENTO XII

City of patterned streets: again the  
vision. Torches melt in the glare:  
the sputter of resin. To the little

gallery over the gate, between  
the towers, we also made ghostly  
visits. There is a wine-red glow

in the shallows, grapes with no  
seed, grape-leaves on the stair  
where tar smell had been, the sea

blue-deep about us. Now one man  
rose from his fountain to see what  
the natives were doing, & a cossack

rode out of his squad on the other  
side of the square. The revolution.



### CENTO XIII

I have thought that a passion  
for music danced by the same  
dancers in divers localities might

be considered youthful levity.  
First came the seen, then thus the  
palpable twisteth out of natural

measure in less than a geological  
epoch. Under the cabin roof was  
one lantern. Sparse chimneys

smoke in the cross light. Gate-cliffs  
of amber, the cave salt-white, the  
smell of hay under the olive-trees.

The sea blue-deep about us. From  
toe to head it was all electric.

## CENTO XIV

With no hawks left there on  
their perches, one scarlet flower  
is cast on the blanch-white stone.

The peach-trees shed bright leaves  
in the water, saw but the eyes &  
stance between the eyes, not in

delight but in the being aware.  
Drawing sword from my hip,  
down to the ships we went,

set mast & sail. Clouds gather  
about the hole of the window —  
the prefaces, cut clear & hard, in

scaled invention or true artistry.  
& for 180 years almost nothing.

## CENTO XV

We have had to dig a new  
ditch, two miles wide, &  
perfectly legal, in the marsh

down here under Mantua.  
Water still black in the shadow,  
a regiment of guards in, to

keep order. A boat came,  
one man holding her sail,  
bright welter of wave-cords.

The light now, not of the sun—  
the gold gathers the light  
against the tesserae of the

floor & the patterns. They  
put it all down in writing.

## CENTO XVI

Old men & camels working the water-  
wheels: sound drifts in the evening  
haze, touched with an imprecision,

a dryness calling for death. The poor  
devils dying of cold, whose words  
rattle, left three horses at one gate,

three horses at the other. Said only:  
"Gondolas cost too much, this year."  
Dark blood flowed in the fosse, men

many, mauled with bronze lance heads,  
the ocean flowing backward, cutting  
under the keel. Beasts like shadows in

glass, where tar smell had been. Not a  
splotch, not a lost shatter of sunlight.

## CENTO XVII

You write me that he needs cash. As  
soon as the Xmas fetes are over I  
will have the moneys paid out on his

account. I cannot receive you — it  
really is not the moment. The wilted  
flowers brushed out a seven year,

marble trunks out of stillness, seen,  
& half seen. Click of the hooves. Tell  
him it's no time for raising his pay.

Old men's voices beneath the columns  
of false marble, the sound went up like  
smoke, the low sounds continuing.

She gave me a paper to write on.  
He is so much pleased with his pony.

## CENTO XVIII

The sky overshot, dry, with no tempest.  
The silver mirrors catch the bright stones  
& flare. Smoke hangs on the stream. We

sit here, beneath our feet a lake knocking  
at empty rooms, seeking for buried beauty.  
A touch of rhetoric in the whole. Dry dust.

Stray paper. & all the time, people going  
over the river, as if on an invisible raft on  
an invisible high current, on toward the

fall of water & then over that cataract.  
Wind drifting off from the island, a glitter  
of crystal, Soft smell from the trees. Evening

is a curtain of cloud, a blur above ripples. &  
through it long spikes of cinnamon. Sharp.

## CENTO XIX

The audience came in black clothes  
to the house of smooth stone that you  
can see from a distance. The priests

were preaching sedition. Girls talked  
there of fucking, beasts talked there  
of eating. A girl's arms have nested

the fire, dark shoulders have stirred  
the lightning. I have eaten the flame.  
Autumn moon; hills rise about

lakes against sunset. A monk's bell  
is borne on the wind behind the  
hill, a cold tune amid reeds. I can-

not make it cohere. If love be  
not in the house there is nothing.

## CENTO XX

Ship stock fast in sea-swirl, water  
cutting under the keel, the sky over-  
shot again, dry, with no tempest,

arms shrunk into fins. Torches  
melt in the glare. The water whirls  
up the bright pale sand, silver

mirrors once more catch the bright  
stones & flare. We sit here. The old  
voice lifted itself, weaving an end-

less sentence, & the sound went up  
as smoke, under the leaves. The  
gate swung on its hinges, panting

like a sick dog, then fell. A poet's  
ending, being smothered beneath it.



## CENTO XXI

I cannot make it cohere to achieve  
the possible, learn of the green world.  
What can be thy place? Careless or un-

aware, working up to a climax. No man  
can find site for his dwelling. A light  
moves on the north sky line. Rain; empty

river; a voyage. Evening is like a curtain  
of cloud, a cold tune amid reeds, out of  
which things seeking an exit throw rocks

to stone us. There is a great deal of man-  
ipulation. As to why they go wrong?  
Many errors. Wrecks lie about me. She

gave me a paper to write on & the power  
over wild beasts. My notes do not cohere.

## CENTO XXII

Wild geese swoop to the sand-bar.  
Hot wind came from the marshes.  
The reeds are heavy, bent. Next

is a river wide, full of water. Small  
boat floats like a lantern. Drift of  
weed in the bay. She gave me a

paper to write on, made like fish-  
net, of a strange quality that sets  
sighs to move, to fascinate the eyes

of the people. Light also proceeds  
from the eye. The echo turns back on  
my mind in a biological process that

very few people will understand.  
Matter is the lightest of all things.

## CENTO XXIII

Swartest night stretched over wretched  
men there. Dark blood flowed in the fosse.  
There is a wine-red glow in the shallows. Seal

sports in the spray-whited circles of cliff-wash,  
lithe sinews of water, gripping her, cross-hold.  
Then they brought the boy, here stripped,

here made to stand, firm even fingers held  
to the firm pale stone. A strange concierge.  
Cast on a natal paper, set with an exegesis,

a young man walks, at church with galleried  
porch. Sound drifts. Peach-trees shed bright  
leaves in the water. A wet cat gleaming in

patches. A poet's ending. The air was full  
of women. Know not by whom death came.

## CENTO XXIV

This is *Mitteleuropa*. Guns are a merchandise. Have special privilege. No retail tax or any of the

other taxes, no broken contracts. Everything in its place, & nothing left over. Let things remain as they

are. A perennial extension of franchise to continue one's labors. The words rattle. Surely we have heard

this before. The bodies so flamed in the air, took flame. Flames flowed into sea. For three days

now as if snow cloud over the sea. & for three days, & none after.

## CENTO XXV

Propped between chairs &  
table, torches melt in the glare.  
Flame leaps from the hand,

the rain is listless, the leaves  
are full of voices. Time spent  
knocking at empty rooms,

stubborn against the fact. Bore-  
dom born out of boredom.  
An ex-convict out of Italy,

water running off from his twis-  
ted arms, swung for a moment  
& knocked me into the black

snout of a porpoise gripping the  
blue-gray glass of the wave.

## CENTO XXVI

We were workmen in the same  
village, saying nothing, super-  
fluous. No love of science & letters —

the norm. Beat drums for three  
days. Dragon barge, high buggy  
wheels, fond of rotation, drifted

with the music. The valley is thick  
with leaves, the house a shade too  
solid, knocking at empty rooms

stubborn against the fact. Boredom  
born out of boredom, out of no-  
thing, a breathing in the stillness.

I sleep, I sleep not. This machinery  
is very ancient; who can lift it?

## CENTO XXVII

Unwept, unwrapped in sepulchre,  
pitiful spirit. Pallor upon me, cried  
to my men for more beasts, beasts

like shadows in glass. Moves, yes  
she moves like a goddess, & doom  
goes with her in walking. The gulls

broad out their wings, bend out  
their wing-joints, fearing no cat of  
the wood. I have seen what I have

seen. Evil & further evil. The tower  
like a one-eyed great goose. Coral  
face under wave-tinge, black snout

of a porpoise. The back-swell now  
smooth amongst the rudder chains.

## CENTO XXVIII

Poor old Homer blind, blind.  
A patron of the arts, of poetry,  
& of a fine discernment. All

decked in green, with sleeves  
of yellow silk, saffron sand-  
al so petals the narrow foot.

Eyes of Picasso. Eye-glitter  
out of black air. A titter of  
sound about him, always.

Here stripped, here made to  
stand. "It's a straight ship,"  
I said. The blue-gray glass of

the wave tents them. A black  
cock crows in the sea-foam.



## CENTO XXIX

Out of nothing, a breathing. Out  
of nothing, dry forms in the æther.  
The smell of hay under the olive-

trees. Lifeless air become sinewed.  
The walls tinted discreet, the modish,  
darkish green-blue. The silver mir-

rors catch the bright stones & flare.  
Hooves clink & click on the cobbles.  
In the gloom, the gold gathers the

light against it. The scarlet curtain  
throws a less scarlet shadow. We sit  
here under the wall, near the old sarco-

phagi smothered in grass. The filagree  
hiding the gothic. Now ivory stillness.

## CENTO XXX

I cannot make it cohere above  
the cigar butts, against this  
blackness. Here error is all

in the not done, what follows  
within & persistently, funda-  
mentals in critical moments.

These stones we built on to  
put land back under tillage,  
not knowing, beyond that,

dry spring, a dry summer,  
locusts & rain, gates all open.  
Hot wind came from the marshes

seeking a word to make change.  
To this offer I had no answer.

## CENTO XXXI

The smell of hay under the olive-trees. In the half-light, the tower like a patron of the arts, decked

all in green, pigment flakes from the stone. Forked branch-tips, flaming as if with lotus. The god stood by

me, fearing no bondage nor the bounds of deepest water. The peach-trees shed bright leaves in the water.

Those leaves are full of voices. Caught up in their cadence a man of no fortune & with a name to come. Clouds

bow over the lake. For sacrifice, a young boy loggy with vine-must.

## CENTO XXXII

I don't know what they are  
up to. It wd/ seem unwarranted.  
Read one book an hour,

less a work of the mind than  
of affects, but enough to keep  
out of the briars. The people

are addicted. Life & death are  
now equal, no favor to men  
over women. Boat fades in silver;

slowly. Let no false color exist  
here. Behind hill the monk's  
bell borne on the wind. The

bamboos speak as if weeping.  
Of this wood are lutes made.

## CENTO XXXIII

The sky overshot, dry, with no  
tempest. By river-marsh, a sad  
man, pacing, lost in a forest of

stars. The house a shade too solid  
& the art full of flames & voices.  
The scarlet curtain throws a less

scarlet shadow; knocking at empty  
rooms, seeking for buried beauty.  
Elsewhere, the swimmer's arms

have turned to branches. Smoke  
hangs on the stream. An old man  
with a basket of stones, saying:

*fire — always, & the vision always.*  
& out of nothing, a breathing.

## CENTO XXXIV

I fell against the buttress a second  
time. Then, strong with the blood,  
prayed I many a prayer to the sickly

death's-heads to keep off the impet-  
uous impotent dead. A phantom  
with weighted motion moved before

me, drinking the tone of things. So  
many reflections. One may watch  
them turning & moving, with heads

down now, & now up, stumbling  
with this love of death that is in them.  
Then came to me in a vision a voice

from a time behind me. May you  
live for 10,000 years. Always too late.

## CENTO XXXV

Flame leaps from the hand, the  
rain is listless. The backswell now  
smooth in the rudder chains. Ply

over ply, thin glitter of water  
quiet in the buff sands. Topaz,  
I manage, & three sorts of blue.

Souls stained with recent tears —  
first ill fate & then abundant wine.  
The talks ran long in the night

& many things were set abroad  
& brought to mind. Wherever the  
speech crept, there was mastery,

an ear for the sea-surge. In the half-  
light, mead & then sweet wine.

## CENTO XXXVI

The sky overshot, dry, with no tempest.  
These many crowded about me; with  
shouting. Men wanting spring-water,

mad for a little slave money. Sat we  
amidships, no wind jamming the tiller,  
in thoughts upon pure form, in alchemy.

There is a wine-red glow in the shallows,  
a black cock crows in the sea-foam, the  
ocean flowing backward. Air, fire, the

pale soft light. The vision flitting &  
fading, weaving with points of gold.  
*Aurean coronam habentem, pulchram.*

Moves, yes she moves like a goddess,  
worker of miracles, dealer in levitation.



## CENTO XXXVII

Mr Webster, a man of straw, had no desire  
that the interruption of social intercourse  
shd. continue. So far, so good. But when the

time came to fire he merely lit a cigarette  
& walked away. This is Mitteleuropa;  
nothing good is recorded. The March folk

now go to Verona to buy cloth well colored  
or, needing salt, make their peace with Venice.  
"Can Portugal keep it up?" a lady asks me,

"now that the cannibals of Europe are eating  
one another again." The cicadas continue  
uninterrupted, borne into the tempest,

black cloud wrapping their wings. The  
night hollow beneath them. Time is the evil.

## CENTO XXXVIII

The prefaces, cut clear & hard, bread  
to the liberal arts. No mere succession  
of strokes, sightless narration, but proofs

cast on a natal paper, set with an exegesis.  
'Pretty green bank,' began the half-lost  
poem, 'but is a substance differed from

intellect, weaving an endless sentence  
with a touch of rhetoric in the whole.'  
City of patterned streets; again the

vision. I stepped back; &, out of no-  
thing, a breathing. Beasts like shadows  
in glass. I have seen what I have seen,

I cried in hurried speech. Thus the  
light rains, thus pours, *e lo soleills plovil*.

## CENTO XXXIX

Trees melted in air in the sunlight,  
gate cut by the shadow. Grass  
on the floor of the temple. Carved

stone upon stone. Clear shapes,  
broken. Lozenges of pavement,  
disrupted. Glaze green, & red

feathers, jungle. The light now not  
of the sun. The audience came in  
black clothes. It was a day when

the historians left blanks in their  
writings. If a man commit murder  
should his father protect him or

let things remain as they are? He  
just wanted to talk about Marx.

## CENTO XXXX

In the Cretan's phrase, moral considerations seldom appear to have much weight in the minds of statesmen. & he said, one day a week

later, that the practice of public speaking was addressing crowds through their arse-holes, that the shit used to be blacker & richer, that

unless connected with popular feelings they never could get it to work. Three days after his death, years later, in Naples, when the family

was preparing his body for burial, those same statesmen who scarcely got so far as analysis, would not admit the indulgence of a domestic

band of musicians at his funeral. Hoping, *sans* music, the ill beat of memory would be stilled.

With  
a much qualified  
thank you  
to the Ezratic  
Mr. Pound.