

## **In the Final Years**

*not a shame but a misery*  
*- Gaius Valerius Catullus*

1

In the final years with government reverting  
to big money backed by mercenary armies  
undermining the heroic ethos claimed  
by some to be the only decent benchmark,

highly erudite, well-read and dedicated  
to the innocence of desire, the sanctity  
of instinct, a liberty of sorts in dissolution,  
largely ignoring the canon of the laureled ancients

except in biting satirical epigrams proving  
they had read them, they found in eastern scholar-poets  
more recently dead their taste for learned allusiveness  
in lyric measures with a refinement of execution

unheard of in the west until then,  
as well as their distaste for long, sprawling, pompous,  
cliché-ridden verses (epics in particular,  
especially those churned out by their grandfathers' generation);

and their obsession with originality,  
brevity, aptness of word, phrase and tone,  
the contrapuntal by-play of meter and stress;  
their personal instead of public preoccupations:

dinner party gossip, love-affairs, frequent  
amorous depression and self-dramatization  
expressed in urbane, not to say scabrous, wit;  
their insistence on looking through everybody's closets

for unusual, often pathological  
or aberrant sexual features in traditional myths  
especially those related to origins or causes  
of current customs, practices, programs and taboos.

2

Well past midlife in his twenties, his brother already dead,  
he wrote to a boyhood friend whose marriage poems he'd written  
some years back (not as the best man

but designated poet for that ritual)

which friend now, as expected, more experienced  
in marital difficulties, thanking him for the loan  
some years before of a country house where his lover and he  
for a day and night forgot her family name and husband

indulging his fantasy of himself married to her,  
though sorry to say, he wrote, they were by her decision  
no longer engaged; but nonetheless he was grateful to her  
and to his friend in need for bringing them together

(at no small risk to reputations all around)  
at the onset of their admiration exciting  
one another before her love resolved itself  
to good will among her many friends.