



# The Poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus

*Brandon Brown*

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Poetry. Ever since the poems of Catullus were discovered in a wine cask in Verona in the 13th century, translators have returned to them over and over, insisting on their continued relevance. These troubling poems have scandalized and delighted generations of readers in translation, as they apparently scandalized and perhaps delighted the literary coterie surrounding Catullus in pre-revolutionary Rome. Brandon Brown's **THE POEMS OF GAIUS VALERIUS CATULLUS** is a translation in which the decadent excesses of ascending Roman hegemony meet the decadent excesses of collapsing American domination. The meeting is staged as half confrontation, half party. And this confrontation/party monster goes down in the overdetermined and hyper-privileged site of translation: the translator's body. Instead of reduplicating what Lawrence Venuti calls the "translator's invisibility," Brown is all too visible, exposing himself in various costumes: abject hero, demonic oaf, pathetic provocateur, swaggy braggart. These poems exploit the specificity of times and places to their maximal debasement, so the Gods of ancient Rome can't be distinguished from Brad Pitt watching *Avatar*, finally. And such spectacular cultural force doesn't just live in the sky, but irrupts into this sustained act of interpretive reading. "Imagine if Brad Pitt came to your wedding. No, seriously." Dead serious and impossibly fraught, Catullus's poems lurch in the hallways of the social networks in which we live. The time just before the machines become part of our bodies. Dazzling and devastated.

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