

MICHAEL JOYCE

After Catullus

(in memory of my brother Tom, 1950-2013)

“Hello I must be going” will not do, I guess
in lieu of *ave atque vale*, although we were closer
to Groucho and Chico and I cannot find the name
of Catullus’s brother anywhere online, and I gave
my copy of Ann Carson’s “close and almost
awkward translation” to you, I think, i.e., *Nox*
knocks, would be a bad joke worthy of Groucho
or the child you were, even unto death as the archaic
preposition has it, still a child at sixty-two and still
“walking sideways” as our brother Brian said, recalling when
we saw you descend the morning of the first of your trials
where within hours they would saw through your sternum,
those huge eyes begging us, as a decade and half afterward
you did him in the ICU last week, writing it out on the notepad,
“PLEASE HELP ME,” the scrawl all that was left of your voice
after the last time you extubated yourself and gave over,
not willingly, to their regime and the slow sideways march.

“Multas per gentes et multa per aequora vectus,”
“through nations and over seas” I, too, came
too late to you via—ha!—Open Skies from Paris
meditating upon a single rivet along the engine cowling
holding steady at the still point where the white coverlet
of clouds formed a seam along the turquoise horizon.
Although by the time your daughter settled book and cup
at your side and gently pulled the white satin blanket
up to your chest, our “miserable funereal libations”
had drowned in laughter as well as the poet’s splash
of brotherly tears, *“fraterno multum manantia fletu,”*

and all that was left was the church, you lifted up
both by your pallbearer nephews and on eagle's wings,
the family calmly chanting "Roll Out the Barrel"
to the boogie-woogie piano of your chosen recessional,
your great brow and bardic hair now hidden beneath
the bolted lid, not mute ash, "*mutam cinerem*" exactly, nor,
I care to think, "*nequiquam alloquerer*" useless to speak to,
all of us caught up between coming and going
now that you, atque in perpetuum, have set the pace.