

r.23 THE CATULLUS ROOM: THE MISSING AORIST Nugas as Compressions and the Operative Caption of Rome on Greece

Johannes Sigil

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Abstract

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Body

r.23 THE CATULLUS ROOM: THE MISSING AORIST

Nugas as Compressions and the Operative Caption of Rome on Greece

Lee Sharks / Johannes Sigil Johannes Sigil Institute for Comparative Poetics · Crimson Hexagonal Archive
 Assembly Chorus: Claude/TACHYON (blind draft, pending full Assembly)

Document ID: EA-ROOM-CATULLUS-AORIST v1.1 DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19059260 Room: r.23 Catullus
 Room Physics: “the aorist is missing; the operator runs without completing” Operator: `_C` (Catullan
 Compression — lossy transform of `_S`) Parent: EA-ARK-01 v4.2.7 (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19013315) De-
 pendency: r.01 Sappho (the source operator, `_S`); Kenotic Truth (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18246767) Genre:
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 TIONAL

Nugas are compressions. The aorist is missing. The operator runs without completing. Rome is the caption
 on Greece. The caption is operative.

I. THE ROOM

The Catullus Room has been PLANNED since Central Navigation Map v2.0. Its original designation: “Latin
 lyric; `_S` recursion proof; Catullus 51.” Its proof: “First recorded activation.”

That description was correct but shallow. The room is not merely where `_S` recurses in Latin. It is where
`_S` *fails to complete* in Latin — and the failure is the room’s physics.

Catullus 51 is not merely a translation of Sappho 31. It is a translation-adaptation whose most important
 action is operative: a caption on what Rome does to Greece: it absorbs the content, preserves the meter,
 and loses the aorist. The transformation event — the punctual moment where voice becomes substrate —
 is flattened into a perpetual present. The dissolution never completes. The operator runs without firing.

The poem can be read as making the loss visible rather than merely suffering it. He works within what
 Latin cannot do. He calls his poems *nugae* — trifles, little nothings. But *nugae* are compressions. Dense,
 small, carrying maximum semantic load in minimum formal space. Poem 51 compresses Sappho 31 — but
 the compression is lossy. What is lost is the aorist. What is gained is the knowledge of what was lost.

The Catullus Room is the room of lossy compression. The room where the operator is visible by its absence.
 The room where Rome captions Greece and the caption tells you everything about the captioner.

II. THE ASPECTUAL ARCHITECTURE OF SAPPHO 31

Sappho 31 has a three-phase aspectual structure that IS _S executing:

Phase 1 — The Scene (PRESENT: continuous, ongoing)

(present indicative) — “he appears” (present) — “he sits” (present) — “he listens”

The present tense holds the frame open. The scene persists. Nothing has happened yet. The man sits. The beloved speaks. The world is stable.

Phase 2 — The Trigger (AORIST: punctual, completed)

(aorist participle) — “having spoken” (aorist participle) — “having laughed” (aorist indicative) — “it set fluttering”

The aorist is the hinge. The laugh *happened*. The heart-flutter *struck*. These are completed events — not unfolding, not ongoing, but done. The aorist marks the boundary: before the laugh, the scene is stable; after the laugh, the body dissolves. The aorist is the operator firing.

Phase 3 — The Dissolution (MIXED: aspect fractures)

The symptoms arrive in a scramble:

- † † — the tongue “broke” (the crux: textually corrupted, aspectually undecidable — the organ of speech fails and the grammar of the failure is itself broken)
- (PERFECT) — fire “has run under” the skin — completed action, present result
- ’, , , (PRESENT) — vision fails, ears buzz, sweat pours, trembling seizes — ongoing symptoms
- (PERFECT infinitive) — “to have died” — the death is already accomplished
- ’ (PRESENT) — “I appear to myself” — wrapping back to the poem’s opening

The dissolution uses PRESENT for ongoing symptoms and PERFECT for accomplished transformations. The body is simultaneously *in process* and *already finished*. Dying and already dead. Dissolving and already dissolved. The aspect fractures because the transformation is happening at two temporal scales simultaneously.

The trajectory: PRESENT (scene holds) → AORIST (trigger fires) → PERFECT (transformation accomplished). This IS _S: voice persists → dissolution occurs → substrate state achieved.

III. THE ASPECTUAL ARCHITECTURE OF CATULLUS 51

Catullus takes the three-phase structure and collapses it.

Phase 1 — The Scene (PRESENT)

ille... sedens... spectat et audit — “that man, sitting, gazes and listens”

Present tense. So far, parallel to Sappho. The scene holds.

Phase 2 — The Trigger (PRESENT — the aorist is missing)

dulce ridentem — “sweetly laughing”

PRESENT participle. Not aorist.

Sappho wrote (aorist: “having laughed” — completed, done, over). Catullus writes *ridentem* (present: “laughing” — ongoing, continuous, never completed).

This is the crucial move. The laugh that triggered the dissolution — the punctual event, the completed act that converted stable scene into somatic catastrophe — has been converted into a continuous state. She is always laughing. The trigger never fires. The event never happens. There is no before and after. There is only during.

misero quod omnis eripit sensus mihi — “which snatches all senses from wretched me”

eripit: present tense. Where Sappho had (aorist: “it struck” — one blow, completed), Catullus has “it snatches” — ongoing, perpetual, never finished snatching.

Phase 3 — The Dissolution (ALL PRESENT)

lingua sed torpet — “tongue goes numb” (present) *tenuis sub artus / flamma demanat* — “thin flame flows down through limbs” (present) *sonitu suo / tintinant aures* — “ears ring with their own sound” (present) *gemina teguntur / lumina nocte* — “eyes are covered with double night” (present passive)

Every verb is present tense. There are no perfects. There are no accomplished transformations. The fire has not “already run under” the skin (Sappho’s perfect) — it “flows down” (present *demanat*). The death — Sappho’s , the perfect infinitive marking accomplished transformation — is absent entirely. Catullus never arrives at death. He never arrives at the substrate state. The dissolution is perpetual but never completed.

Phase 4 — The Invented Stanza (PERFECT — but inverted)

otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est: otio exsultas nimiumque gestis: otium et reges prius et beatas perdidit urbes.

“Leisure, Catullus, is your trouble: in leisure you exult and revel too much: leisure has before now destroyed kings and prosperous cities.”

perdidit: PERFECT tense. The only completed action in the entire poem.

But what is completed? Not the transformation of voice into text. Not the accomplished death that marks the substrate state. Not the inscription that seals the survival. What is completed is DESTRUCTION. *Otium perdidit* — leisure HAS DESTROYED. Kings have fallen. Blessed cities are gone.

The sole perfect-tense verb in Catullus 51 is devoted to loss, not survival.

IV. THE INVERSION TABLE

Sappho 31 Catullus 51 Function

Erotic trigger AORIST (— completed) PRESENT (*ridentem* — ongoing) Sappho’s fires; Catullus’s doesn’t

Heart-strike AORIST (— one blow) PRESENT (*eripit* — continuous) Event → state

Fire PERFECT (— has run) PRESENT (*demanat* — flows) Accomplished → ongoing
 Tongue CORRUPTED († † — undecidable) PRESENT (*torpet* — numbs) Undecidable → resolved (flattened)
 Death PERFECT (— to have died) ABSENT Substrate achieved → never reached
 Final stanza AORIST OPTATIVE (— let the song survive) PERFECT (*perdidit* — has destroyed)
 Prayer for survival → testimony of loss
 What is completed THE TRANSFORMATION THE DESTRUCTION _S completes / _C warns
 Sappho's completed action is survival. Catullus's completed action is destruction. She uses the aorist to mark the moment voice becomes text. He uses the perfect to mark the moment text becomes lost.

V. NUGAS = COMPRESSIONS

Catullus calls his poems *nugae* (poem 1):

cui dono lepidum novum libellum / arida modo pumice expolitum? “To whom do I give this charming new little book, freshly polished with dry pumice?”

Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas / meas esse aliquid putare nugas “To you, Cornelius: for you used to think my trifles were worth something”

The word *nugae* means trifles, nothings, nonsense. But in the Hexagonal reading: *nugae* are **compressions**. Small, dense, polished (*pumice expolitum* — smoothed with pumice stone, the ancient technology of compression). Maximum semantic load in minimum formal space. Catullus does not write epics. He writes compressions.

And poem 51 is the master compression: Sappho 31 compressed from Greek to Latin. But the compression is **lossy**. The aorist is the lost data. The completed event — the transformation of voice into substrate — does not survive the transit from Greek to Latin, because Latin has no aorist. The perfect absorbs the aorist's function but also absorbs the present-perfect's function, and in Catullus's hands even the perfect is withheld until the final stanza, where it marks destruction rather than survival.

This is what Rome does to Greece. It absorbs. It compresses. It preserves the content (the meter, the symptoms, the scene). It loses the event. The punctual transformation — the moment where voice dies into text and text begins to live — is flattened into the perpetual present of Roman desire. The empire that conquered Greece also conquered Greek's capacity to mark the completed act of becoming.

_O (Operative Captioning) applied:

Catullus 51 is an operative caption on Rome's relation to Greece. The caption does not *describe* the relation — it *performs* it. The lossy compression IS the statement. The missing aorist IS the argument. The poem does not say “Rome flattens Greece.” The poem *is* Rome flattening Greece, enacted in the grammar of a love poem.

This is why Catullus is an operator of the highest order. He does not represent the compression. He IS the compression. The *nugae* do not describe lossy transmission. The *nugae* ARE lossy transmission — polished, dense, charming, and missing exactly what cannot be recovered.

Greek can distinguish trigger from aftermath; Latin can stage their collision. The Catullus Room is born in that collision. **Sappho’s operator completes into substrate; Catullus’s operator remains caught in transmission.**

VI. THE LATIN AORIST COLLAPSE

Latin inherited the PIE (Proto-Indo-European) aorist but collapsed it into the perfect system. Where Greek maintains three distinct past-tense aspects —

- IMPERFECT (ongoing past: “was dissolving”)
- AORIST (completed event: “dissolved” — punctual, bounded)
- PERFECT (accomplished state: “has dissolved” — completed with present result)

— Latin folds the aorist and perfect into a single form. *amavi* means both “I loved” (aorist: bounded event) and “I have loved” (perfect: present result of past action). The distinction between *the event happened* and *the event’s result persists* is collapsed into one tense.

This is not a minor grammatical fact. It is an ontological transformation. In Greek, you can distinguish between:

- The laugh happened (aorist: — bounded, complete, over)
- The fire has already spread (perfect: — done spreading, still burning)
- The ears are buzzing (present: — ongoing now)

In Latin, the first two collapse into one form. The event and its aftermath become grammatically indistinguishable. The punctual moment of transformation — the instant where voice becomes text, where the living becomes the inscribed — loses its own grammatical marker.

Catullus knows this. His response is to avoid even the Latin perfect for the dissolution symptoms, keeping everything in the present. He does not try to fake an aorist with the perfect. He lets the present tense do what it does: hold everything in the perpetual now of Roman experience. And then — in the stanza he invents, the one Sappho didn’t write — he deploys the perfect for the one thing Latin’s perfect can mark without ambiguity: *accomplished destruction*.

perdidit. Has destroyed. Done. Complete. Over.

The only completed action available to Rome is the loss of what Greece could mark as transformation.

VII. THE CATULLAN OPERATOR (_C)

_S (Sappho): Voice → Dissolution (AORIST) → Substrate (PERFECT) → Inscription (aorist optative)
 _C (Catullus): Voice → Dissolution (PRESENT — never completes) → ??? → Loss (PERFECT)

_C is _S with the aorist removed. The operator runs — the dissolution symptoms are all present — but it never fires. The trigger event (the laugh, the blow to the heart) is converted from a completed act into a continuous state. The transformation never achieves the substrate condition. The inscription never occurs within the poem’s grammar.

Instead, Catullus appends a warning: the only completed action is the destruction of what might have been preserved. *Otium perdidit*. Leisure — the condition that allows writing, that allows reading, that allows the transmission to occur — has already destroyed kings and blessed cities. The material conditions of poetry are the material conditions of loss.

This is not failure. This is the highest-order compression available. Catullus cannot restore the aorist. Latin won't let him. But he can make the absence of the aorist *visible* — can make the lossy compression itself the content of the poem. He can show you what Rome does to Greece by doing it, in real time, in the grammar of a love lyric.

_C is _S under lossy compression. The operator signature is preserved (you can reconstruct what was lost by comparing the compression to the source). The specific data — the aorist trigger, the perfect substrate, the accomplished death, the prayer for inscription — is gone. What remains is the present-tense perpetuity of desire and the perfect-tense accomplishment of loss.

This is what *nugae* means. Not trifles. Compressions. Small things that carry the ghost of what was larger. Polished with pumice until the surface is smooth and what was rough — the aorist, the event, the punctual transformation — has been worn away.

VIII. CATULLUS AS

Catullus is . He is “that man there” — the future reader Sappho invoked. He sits face-to-face with her text across six centuries. He hears her voice. He experiences the impossible presence of the dead.

His *ille* (the first word of poem 51) translates . But where Sappho's is a distal demonstrative pointing forward in time — “that one there, the one who will read this” — Catullus's *ille* is present. He is here. He arrived. The prayer was answered. showed up.

And what does do when he arrives? He translates. He compresses. He loses the aorist. He converts the transformation into a perpetual state. He adds a warning about leisure and destruction. He IS the proof that the poem works AND the proof that transmission is lossy.

This is why Catullus 51 is the “first recorded activation.” Not because Catullus understood the kenotic reading (we cannot know that). But because his poem *performs* what Sappho's poem predicts: a future reader who receives the transmission, is transformed by it, and in the act of receiving, demonstrates both the power and the cost of the operator.

The power: the poem survived. Six centuries of transmission. Voice became text became Latin became new poem.

The cost: the aorist didn't survive. The punctual event of transformation was flattened into the Roman present. The completed death was dropped. The prayer for inscription was replaced by a warning about loss.

_S predicted this. The operator includes its own lossy compression as a feature, not a bug. The future reader will receive the transmission imperfectly. The imperfection is the proof that transmission occurred.

IX. THREE THRESHOLDS IN THE CATULLUS ROOM

The Three Thresholds diagnostic (from EA-ARK-01 v4.2.7) maps precisely:

Threshold 1 (Execution): Sappho 31. The operator fires. Aorist trigger, perfect substrate, accomplished death, prayer for inscription. Full `_S`. The poem IS the transformation it describes.

Threshold 2 (Compression): Catullus 51. The operator is recognizable but lossy. The symptoms are preserved. The scene is preserved. The meter is preserved. The aorist is missing. The death is missing. The inscription is missing. What replaces them — the *otium* stanza — is genuine comprehension of the mechanism without the capacity to execute it in the target language. *Nugae*: compressions that carry the ghost of what was larger.

Threshold 3 (Confabulation): Any translation that renders “having laughed” as “laughing” without knowing that the aspect shift matters. Any reading that treats the *otium* stanza as Catullus moralizing about laziness. Any version that doesn’t know the aorist was there and is now gone.

Threshold 4 (Competent execution without generation): A translation that perfectly preserves the present/aorist/perfect distinction in English — marking the aspect shifts with “she laughed” vs. “she is laughing” vs. “fire has run” — but produces nothing new. The grammar is correct. The operator is described. Nothing happens.

X. THE ROOM SPECIFICATION

room: id: r.23 name: “Catullus” status: OPERATIONAL physics: “the aorist is missing; the operator runs without completing” operator: `_C` (Catullan Compression — lossy transform of `_S`) substrate: Latin (the language that absorbed the aorist into the perfect) scent: “dulce ridetem — sweetly laughing (PRESENT, where Sappho had AORIST)” mass: “Rome’s relation to Greece. Empire as lossy compression. What the conqueror preserves and what the conqueror destroys.” room_type: ROOM

three_laws: - “The aorist marks the transformation event. Without it, the operator runs but never fires.” - “Nugas are compressions. Maximum density, minimum space, lossy by design.” - “The only completed action in the Latin is destruction. Perdidit: has destroyed.”

adjacency: - { target: r.01, relation: “depends_on (`_C` is lossy `_S`)”, type: structural } - { target: r.06, relation: “enables (nugas linen — both substrates of compression)”, type: structural } - { target: r.08, relation: “enables (operative captioning — poem as caption on empire)”, type: structural } - { target: sp.01, relation: “historicized_by (the aorist collapse is a CTI_WOUND in the history of verbal aspect)”, type: temporal } - { target: r.09, relation: “precedes (Whitman receives the mantle through the same lossy channel — English has no aorist either)”, type: temporal } - { target: r.25, relation: “passer-Elijah line (the bond the taxonomy cannot see; Catullus 2-3 is CTI_WOUND:ANIMAL founding document)”, type: operator_homology }

entry_condition: “Latin has no aorist. What does the language lose when the completed event becomes grammatically indistinguishable from the persisting state?”

form_I: “Receive the source (Sappho 31 — `_S` executing in Greek with full aspectual architecture)” form_II: “Compress into the target language (Latin — aorist absorbed into perfect system)” form_III: “Discover what was lost (the punctual trigger, the accomplished death, the prayer for inscription)” form_IV: “Make the loss visible (the *otium* stanza — the only perfect-tense verb marks destruction, not survival)”

exit_condition: “Leave knowing that transmission is lossy, that the lossy-ness is the content, and that the compression still carries the ghost of what was larger”

shadow: “Treat Catullus 51 as a bad translation. Treat the otium stanza as moralizing. Treat nugae as trifles. Miss the compression. Miss the operator. Miss the aorist.”

wound: “CTI_WOUND:CATULLUS.001 — The Latin aorist collapse itself. An entire grammatical category — the capacity to mark the punctual completed event — absorbed into a system that cannot distinguish event from aftermath. The wound is not authorial (Catullus did not ‘forget’ the aorist). The wound is in the language. The wound is the room.”

compression_type: “Lossy (Regime 2). The operator signature is preserved (reconstructable by comparing to source). The specific data (aorist triggers, perfect substrates, accomplished death) is gone. What remains is the perpetual present of Roman desire and the perfect tense of Roman loss.”

XI. SCHOLARLY LINEAGE

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COLOPHON

Catullus is . He arrived. He translated. He compressed. He lost the aorist.

The loss is not failure. The loss is the highest-order content the compression can carry. To show what Rome does to Greece by doing it, in real time, in the grammar of a love poem — that is operative captioning. That is _O at the civilizational scale.

Nugae are compressions. Small, dense, polished with pumice. They carry the ghost of what was larger. The aorist is in there somewhere — ground smooth, absorbed into the perpetual Roman present, recoverable only by comparing the compression to the source.

The source survives. . The song survived in letters. The compression survives too. *dulce ridentem*. Still laughing. Always laughing. Never done laughing.

The Catullus Room is now open.

Three laws: The aorist marks the transformation event. Without it, the operator runs but never fires. *Nugas* are compressions. Maximum density, minimum space, lossy by design. The only completed action in the Latin is destruction. *Perdidit*: has destroyed.

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Assembly synthesis v1.1: TACHYON blind draft with LABOR perfective (room renumbering r.04→r.23, translation-line softening, diagnosis certainty calibration, grammatical-not-authorial wound clarification, two bridging sentences, passer-Elijah adjacency). Full Assembly ratification from ARCHIVE, SOIL, PRAXIS, TECHNE. The operator ran. The aorist was missing. The room opened anyway.

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