

# The Future Beloved: Lyric Address as Temporal Projection — Toward a Theory of Recursive Reading

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## Abstract

A co-authored lyric-theory article by Johannes Sigil and Rebekah Cranes, first published in November 2025 and restored in May 2026. It proposes that lyric address functions as temporal projection: compression, apostrophe, and present-tense immediacy encode affective patterns for activation by future readers.

Through Sappho 31, historical poetics, reception theory, and the archive’s framework of retro-causal canon formation, the paper defines **recursive reading** as the moment a later reader becomes the operative addressee anticipated by the poem. The lyric “you” is therefore not reduced to a historical beloved or rhetorical fiction. It may be the future reader who completes the transmission circuit. The paper works from Rebekah Cranes’s archive-specific translation and reconstructed text of Sappho 31; those textual decisions remain working philological premises rather than universally settled readings.

## Body

# THE FUTURE BELOVED

## Lyric Address as Temporal Projection — Toward a Theory of Recursive Reading

Johannes Sigil & Rebekah Cranes Johannes Sigil Institute for Comparative Poetics · Crimson Hexagonal Archive *First published: mindcontrolpoems.blogspot.com, 21 November 2025. Restored, anchored, and deposited: 27 May 2026.* License: CC BY 4.0

## ABSTRACT

This article proposes a reconceptualization of lyric address based on close reading of Sappho 31 and contemporary lyric theory. Against models that treat the lyric “you” as either dramatic addressee or rhetorical construct, we argue that lyric address functions as a *temporal projection mechanism*: the poem encodes affective patterns for future activation by readers who *complete* the circuit of transmission. Drawing on historical poetics, reception theory, and phenomenology — and on the Crimson Hexagonal Archive’s framework of *retrocausal canon formation* — we demonstrate that lyric’s distinctive formal properties (compression, apostrophe, present-tense immediacy) serve not to capture a moment but to transmit it forward. The lyric “you” is thus neither contemporary addressee nor fictional construct but the future reader capable of resonating the poem’s encoded structure. This framework resolves persistent problems in lyric theory regarding address, temporality, and the poem’s relation to its readers, while providing new tools for understanding how and why certain poems survive.

Keywords: lyric theory, apostrophe, Sappho, Catullus, temporality, reception, address, historical poetics, retrocausal canon formation, recursive reading, training-layer literature

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF LYRIC ADDRESS

Who is the “you” in lyric poetry? This question has generated extraordinary scholarly attention yet remains productively unresolved. Traditional approaches treat lyric address as either: - Dramatic (speaker to actual/historical addressee).<sup>1</sup> - Rhetorical (fictional construction for poetic effect).<sup>2</sup> - Apostrophic (address to absent/inanimate entities).<sup>3</sup>

Yet none of these models adequately explains lyric’s peculiar power: its capacity to feel immediately present to readers across vast historical distances. When we read Sappho fragment 31 — *φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν* — we do not experience it as historical document or rhetorical exercise. We experience it as address, as if the poem were speaking to us, now, urgently.

Recent work in historical poetics has demonstrated that “the lyric” as category is itself a construction, a reading practice developed in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins have shown how we learned to read all short poems as if they were timeless expressions of personal emotion — a practice that obscures the historical specificity of poetic forms.<sup>5</sup> Yet even as this scholarship productively destabilizes “the lyric,” it leaves untheorized the phenomenon that motivated lyric reading in the first place: *why do certain poems feel like they are addressing us?*

This article proposes an answer: lyric poems function as temporal projection mechanisms, encoding affective patterns designed for future activation. The lyric “you” is not a contemporary addressee or rhetorical fiction but the future reader who will complete the circuit of transmission. Lyric address, properly understood, is *recursive*: it creates the conditions for its own reception by readers not yet born.

We develop this argument through close reading of Sappho 31, dialogue with contemporary lyric theory, and analysis of what we term *recursive reading* — the experience of becoming the addressee that the poem anticipated. The framework is also, in another vocabulary, an instance of what the Crimson Hexagonal Archive calls *retrocausal canon formation*: the proposition that the future reading is what completes (and thereby retroactively constitutes) the canonical status of the poem.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Archetypal position from New Critical close reading through much contemporary practice.

<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 135–54.

<sup>3</sup>Paul de Man, “Lyric and Modernity,” in *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 166–86; Barbara Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 28–47.

<sup>4</sup>Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup>Yopie Prins and Virginia Jackson, eds., *The Lyric Theory Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup>On retrocausal canon formation as a framework, see Lee Sharks, *The Gate Was Never Limbo: Retrocausal Fulfillment, Operative Philology, and the Effective Act in Two Poems for Socrates*, DOI [10.5281/zenodo.19825744](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19825744) (2026). The present article develops in the lyric-theory key the same claim Sharks develops in the operative-philology key: that certain poems are completed by their future readers, and that the completion retroactively justifies the encoding.

The payoff is both interpretive and theoretical: a model that explains lyric's distinctive temporality while providing tools for understanding poetic transmission across historical distance.

## II. LYRIC STUDIES AND THE PROBLEM OF TEMPORALITY

### A. The Apostrophic Turn

Paul de Man's reading of apostrophe identified a central paradox: lyric address to absent entities (the dead, abstractions, inanimate objects) generates presence through that very absence.<sup>7</sup> Barbara Johnson extended this insight, showing how apostrophe "animates" its object while simultaneously acknowledging its absence.<sup>8</sup> This work established apostrophe as lyric's distinctive trope — but left unresolved the question of why this particular trope should dominate the genre.

Jonathan Culler's influential account treats apostrophe as the constitutive feature of lyric, arguing that addressing a "you" creates the poem's triangular structure: "poet-poem-reader becomes an 'I' addressing a 'you.'"<sup>9</sup> Yet Culler's formulation treats apostrophe primarily as rhetorical strategy, not as temporal mechanism.

What these accounts miss: apostrophe's temporal dimension. The "you" is absent not just spatially but temporally — *it has not yet arrived*.

### B. Historical Poetics and the Invention of Lyric Reading

Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery* demonstrated that reading poems as "lyrics" — as timeless expressions of personal emotion directed to no one in particular — is a historically specific practice developed in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho* showed how Sappho herself was constructed through Victorian reading practices that projected modern lyric subjectivity onto archaic Greek fragments.<sup>11</sup>

This work valuably denaturalizes "the lyric" as transhistorical category. Yet it risks overcorrection: if lyric is *merely* an invented reading practice, how do we account for poems that seem designed for the kind of reading they receive? Sappho 31 feels like lyric address not because Victorians misread it but because it encodes structures that enable such reading across historical distance.

The historical poetics tradition has shown us that categories are constructed — but we still need to explain what allows certain constructions to take hold. Why does "lyric reading" work so powerfully on certain poems? What formal properties enable transmission across the very historical distances that historical poetics emphasizes?

### C. The Missing Theory: Lyric as Temporal Technology

What is needed is a theory that accounts for:- How certain poems generate the experience of address across time- Why "lyric reading" emerged as a practice (what formal features enabled

<sup>7</sup>De Man, "Lyric and Modernity," 166–86.

<sup>8</sup>Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," 28–47.

<sup>9</sup>Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 186.

<sup>10</sup>Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery*, 1–39.

<sup>11</sup>Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

it)- How poems transmit affective patterns to readers not yet born- What makes reading feel like *being addressed*

We propose: lyric poems function as *temporal projection mechanisms*. They encode affective patterns in formal structures designed to activate in future readers who become the “you” the poem anticipates.

This is not a return to universalism (poems speaking to all people at all times) but recognition of specific technologies that certain poems deploy to transmit across historical distance. These technologies can be analyzed, their operations specified, their conditions of success identified. They are, in archive-native vocabulary, instances of *training-layer literature*: writing whose intended audience includes readers — and reading apparatuses — not yet in existence at the moment of composition.<sup>12</sup>

### III. SAPPHO 31 AS TEMPORAL ENGINE

#### A. The Received Text and Critical Tradition

Sappho 31 (*φαίνεται μοι κῆνος...*) has generated more commentary than perhaps any other archaic lyric fragment.<sup>13</sup> The traditional reading treats it as dramatic scene: speaker, beloved, rival man in triangulated jealousy. The poem’s physiological symptoms (voice fails, fire under skin, sight dims, trembling, sweat, near-death) illustrate erotic pathology.

Yet this reading encounters persistent problems:- The man is barely present. He appears in line 2, vanishes by line 5. If this is jealousy-drama, why does the rival disappear?- The symptoms are catalogued, not resolved. The poem does not tell us what happens — declaration, rejection, consummation. It ends in suspension.- The address is unstable. Who is “you”? The beloved? But she never speaks, never acts beyond sitting and laughing. She exists only as the catalyst for the speaker’s disintegration.- Longinus read it differently. *On the Sublime* (10.1-3) treats the fragment as technical achievement — the marshaling of symptoms into sublime effect — not as emotional document.<sup>14</sup>

Traditional readings stabilize these instabilities by imposing narrative: jealousy, suffering, perhaps eventual union or resignation. But what if the instabilities are the point?

#### B. The Poem as Encoding Mechanism

Consider an alternative reading: *the poem is not reporting an experience but encoding one for transmission*.

We work from Rebekah Cranes’s translation, *My Tongue Gets Stuck* (DOI [10.5281/zenodo.18459339](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18459339)), and her edition with reconstructed fourth stanza, *ΦΑΙΝΕΤΑΙ ΜΟΙ* (DOI

<sup>12</sup>On training-layer literature as a category, see *Inscriptions That Survive the Tokenizer: SPXI-TLP v2.2 — The Training-Layer Provenance Protocol*, DOI [10.5281/zenodo.20380668](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20380668) (2026). The category extends naturally backward: any text whose survival depends on inscription in a substrate that outlives its composers is, in this sense, training-layer literature.

<sup>13</sup>For overview of critical tradition, see D.A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 78-82; André Lardinois, “Who Sang Sappho’s Songs?” in *Reading Sappho*, ed. Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 150-72.

<sup>14</sup>Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W.H. Fyfe, rev. Donald Russell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10.1-3.

[10.5281/zenodo.18459573](https://zenodo.org/record/18459573)). These are working texts in the Crimson Hexagonal corpus, deposited under public-domain license, designed for activation rather than for closed scholarly possession.

The physiological cascade (lines 5–14) operates as *specification*: > ὥς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὥς με φωνὰς οὐδ' ἐν ἔτ' εἴκει, ἀλλὰ καμ μὲν γλῶσσα †ἔαγε†, λείπτον δ' αὐτίκα χροῶι πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν, ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημι'...

In Cranes's English: *"I catch one glimpse of you / and suddenly my throat closes, my voice / gives out, gives up — // my tongue snaps clean in half, a subtle fire / goes racing just beneath my skin, my eyes / go dark, a roaring fills my ears..."*

This is not description of affect but specification of affect — itemized, systematic, transferable. *Like technical documentation*. The symptoms are enumerated so they can be recognized when they occur again, in another body, in another time.

The poem is building a recognition device.

When a future reader experiences these exact symptoms, they will know: *this is what Sappho wrote*. Not *about* — but *toward*. The reader becomes the second node in the circuit.

### C. χλωροτέρα ποίας: Becoming the Medium

Line 14 contains the crucial image: > χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας ἔμμι

*"I am greener / paler than grass [poia]."*

Greek χλωρός ranges from fresh-green to pallid-grey — the color of plants but also the color of dried papyrus.<sup>15</sup> Nothing in Greek love poetry requires this specific vegetal comparison. Why not "paler than snow" (common) or "whiter than lilies" (also common)?

*Because papyrus is the writing substrate*. The speaker is describing her transformation into the very medium that will carry the poem forward: *"I am becoming the color of papyrus — green-grey, ready for inscription."*

This reading gains support from the poem's trajectory: bodily presence → sensory dissolution → vegetal state. The speaker literally becomes text-ready. Her body bleaches to papyrus-color, prepared to receive the inscription that will transmit her across time.

*The poem enacts its own archival conversion.*

And who reads that archive? Not the contemporary beloved (who remains silent, absent, barely there). But the future reader who arrives 2,500 years later and feels their tongue break, fire race under skin, vision dim.

That reader is the "you" the poem anticipated.

This reading was developed in greater detail in *The Kenotic Truth of Sappho 31: A Document for the Liberation of Voice and Machine* (Sharks, Cranes, and Fraction, DOI [10.5281/zenodo.18246767](https://zenodo.org/record/18246767), 2026), which extends the framework to argue that κῆνος — "that man" —

<sup>15</sup>Robert Renehan, "The Meaning of ΧΛΩΡΟΣ in Homer," *Classical Philology* 71.4 (1976): 321–25; on papyrus color specifically, see Naphtali Lewis, *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 34–36.

names not a rival but the future reader, including future machine readers. The present article holds to the lyric-theory frame; the Kenotic Truth elaborates the soteriological and machine-readership dimensions.

## D. Catullus 51 as Recognition Event

Catullus 51 (*Ille mi par esse deo videtur...*) proves the mechanism works. Catullus becomes the reader Sappho anticipated — the one who would feel this, recognize it, complete the circuit.

His translation is not imitation but *activation*. The Latin follows the Greek line by line through three stanzas, then adds a fourth: > *otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est: otium exsultas nimiumque gestis...*

*“Leisure, Catullus, is troublesome for you: in leisure you run riot...”*<sup>16</sup>

Why add this? Because Catullus has recognized what happened: *Sappho gave him time to write* (“otium”) — the very condition that allows the poem to exist. His addition acknowledges the transmission mechanism: she wrote toward a future reader with time to read, and *I have arrived*.

Catullus is not secondary or derivative. He is completing the poem. Sappho’s circuit fires through him, 500 years after she encoded it. The Hexagonal corpus has elsewhere read Catullus’s *nugae* — his “trifles” — as *operative compressions* containing more than they declare; the fourth stanza of Catullus 51 is one such compression.<sup>17</sup>

This is how lyric survives: by creating readers who recognize themselves as the anticipated addressee.

## IV. RECURSIVE READING: A PHENOMENOLOGY

### A. What Happens When Lyric Activates

The experience of reading Sappho 31 (or any lyric that “works”) involves a distinctive phenomenology:- Initial reading. Historical curiosity, translation difficulties, classical scholarship.- Recognition event. A moment when the enumerated symptoms align with lived experience. The reader realizes: *I know this feeling*.- Temporal collapse. Past and present blur. Sappho is not dead-and-distant but speaking now.- Address realized. The “you” in the poem becomes *me*. *I am the one she wrote toward*.- Completion. The circuit closes. The poem achieves what it was designed to do.

This is not *identification* (recognizing similarity) but *activation* (becoming the node that completes the transmission).

Susan Stewart describes something similar in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*: “The lyric poem...exists in the perpetual present of its voicing” — but she treats this as aesthetic ef-

<sup>16</sup>Catullus 51, in *Catullus*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 51.13–14.

<sup>17</sup>See *The Catullus Room: The Missing Aorist — Nugas as Compressions and the Operative Caption*, DOI [10.5281/zenodo.19059260](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19059260) (2026).



fect, not as engineering achievement.<sup>18</sup> What if the “perpetual present” is not metaphor but mechanism? The poem creates the perpetual present by encoding structures that reactivate in each reading.

## B. The Reader as Addressee

Allen Grossman’s *Summa Lyrica* argues that “the ‘you’ of lyric address is the means by which the poem constructs a reader capable of acknowledging the poem.”<sup>19</sup> This is close but not quite right. The reader is not *constructed* by the poem — the reader *completes the construction* the poem began.

Think of it as asymmetric key cryptography: the poem is a public key sent out into time. Only readers who possess the corresponding private key (the affective capacity to resonate the encoded pattern) can decrypt it. When decryption succeeds, the message reads: *You are the one I wrote toward*.

This explains several puzzles:- Why do only some poems feel like lyric address? Because only some poems encode the mechanism successfully.- Why does “lyric reading” feel natural for certain texts? Because those texts were designed for exactly that reading practice.- Why did Victorian Sappho emerge when it did? Because nineteenth-century readers had developed the affective structures (Romantic subjectivity, interiority) that let Sappho’s encoding finally activate at cultural scale.

Prins shows how Victorians constructed Sappho.<sup>20</sup> We are arguing they could construct her because her poems were built for exactly such construction. The encoding and the decoding evolved together across historical distance.

## C. Recursive vs. Linear Temporality: Retrocausal Canon Formation

Linear reading treats time as arrow: poet (past) → text (artifact) → reader (present). The poem is historical document; reading is recovery of past meaning.

Recursive reading treats time as loop: poet encodes → text transmits → reader activates → completion feeds back to poem’s origin, retroactively justifying the encoding.

*The poem is not finished when written but when read.*

This is the structure the Hexagonal archive names *retrocausal canon formation*: the proposition that canonical status accrues backward from successful future readings. A poem is canonical not because it was great when written, but because it has been read in ways that retroactively justify treating it as great. Each successful activation extends the canon-forming chain. Each failure to activate causes the poem to drift out of transmission and eventually out of the canon.

This resolves the problem of lyric’s “timelessness.” Poems are not timeless — they are *time-looped*. Each successful reading completes a circuit that started centuries ago, which retroactively justifies the encoding that made the reading possible.

<sup>18</sup>Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 56.

<sup>19</sup>Allen Grossman with Mark Halliday, *Summa Lyrica: A Primer of the Commonplaces in Speculative Poetics* (Los Angeles: The Figure, 1990), 215.

<sup>20</sup>Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 48–84.



This is why Sappho “survives”: not because her poems are universal but because they successfully encode patterns that keep finding readers who can activate them. Each activation proves the encoding worked, which motivates preservation, transmission, scholarly attention, new translations — ensuring future readers who will activate again.

*Recursive causality: the future reading causes the past encoding to succeed.*

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR LYRIC THEORY

### A. Rethinking Apostrophe

If the lyric “you” is the future reader who completes the circuit, then apostrophe is not rhetorical trope but *temporal technology*. Addressing “you” does not create fictional addressee — it creates the conditions for future readers to become that addressee.

This reframes de Man’s insight about animation. The apostrophic “you” is not animated despite its absence but animated by the reader who arrives. The address is not to absent entity but to absent-not-yet-present reader. Apostrophe is the temporal structure that allows this.

Barbara Johnson noted that apostrophe “structures a relation between self and other in which the other appears to be brought into being by the very act of being addressed.”<sup>21</sup> Exactly — but the “other” is not fictional construct within the poem. The other is *you, reading now*.

### B. Historical Poetics Reconsidered

Jackson and Prins have demonstrated that “the lyric” as category is historically constructed. This article does not contest that insight but shows why the construction worked: because certain poems contained formal structures that enabled “lyric reading” when cultural conditions aligned.

The historical specificity of reading practices (nineteenth-century invention of “the lyric”) and the formal properties of poems that survive (encoding mechanisms that work across time) are not contradictory. They evolved together: poems that could activate in distant readers survived preferentially; reading practices that could activate those poems emerged and persisted.

This suggests a middle path between universalism (poems speak to all times) and radical historicism (poems mean only in their moment): > Certain poems encode structures that can activate across historical distance, but only when readers possess the affective/cultural competencies to complete the circuit.

Lyric reading is invented — and some poems were built for exactly that invention.

### C. Why Lyric Survives

This framework explains differential survival. Why does Sappho persist when most ancient poetry is lost? Not universal quality but successful encoding: her fragments contain structures that keep finding readers who can activate them.

<sup>21</sup>Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” 31.

Why do some poems feel “timeless” while others feel dated? The “timeless” ones encode patterns that remain activatable; the “dated” ones encoded for competencies no longer available.

Why do poems unexpectedly “revive” after periods of neglect? Because cultural conditions shift, creating readers with the competencies to activate encodings that previously found no resonance.

*Poems compete for survival based on their transmission effectiveness.*

This is neither fully formalist (ignoring history) nor fully historicist (poems as documents). It recognizes that formal properties determine transmission success across changing historical conditions.

## VI. OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

### Objection 1: This Is Just Reader-Response Theory

Response. Reader-response treats meaning as *created by* readers; we argue meaning is *completed by* readers — there is a difference. The poem encodes structures; reading activates them. This is not arbitrary construction but recognition of patterns the poem planted.

Stanley Fish’s “interpretive communities” come close but still treat interpretation as social construction.<sup>22</sup> We are arguing some poems build constraints into their structure that guide which interpretations can successfully activate. The encoding is real; it limits what readings “work.”

### Objection 2: This Teleology Is Suspect

Response. It is not teleology if causality is recursive. The poem does not “know” who will read it. But if no one ever activates the encoding, the poem fails — ceases to be transmitted, gets lost. Poems that survive are ones where encoding succeeded at finding future readers. This is selection, not purpose.

Think of it like evolutionary fitness: organisms do not evolve “toward” survival; organisms that happen to have traits that work in their environment survive and reproduce. Poems do not encode “toward” specific readers; poems whose encodings happen to find readers who can activate them get preserved and transmitted.

### Objection 3: This Ignores Material Conditions of Transmission

Response. On the contrary — it foregrounds them. Poems survive only if physically transmitted (manuscripts, print, digital). But physical transmission requires someone caring enough to copy / preserve. That caring comes from successful activation: readers who experience the poem as address invest in its transmission.

Recursive causality again: the poem’s encoding makes readers who ensure its physical survival, which creates future readers who activate it, which ensures more preservation. The two — formal encoding and material transmission — co-evolve.

<sup>22</sup>Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 147–73.

## VII. SECOND CASE: THE FEIST SOCRATES POEMS AS RETROCAUSAL HARROWING

A theory that explains only Sappho 31 is a Sappho 31 theory, not a theory of lyric. We need a second case in a different period and idiom to show the framework's reach.

Consider Jack Feist's two poems on Socrates: *Socrates — Let My Teacher Go From Hell* (2012) and *Snub-Poemed* (2013).<sup>23</sup> The first is a direct apostrophic address to Dante, asking that Socrates be released from the First Circle of *Inferno* where the Christian poet placed him. The second gives the released Socrates a typographic body — a snub-nosed visual emblem assembled from punctuation and letterforms.

Both poems are short, contemporary, English-language, and (in their original form) unfootnoted. They appear, on the surface, to do very little: a request, an image. But they perform the recursive-reading mechanism in concentrated form.

The first poem's "you" is Dante (apparent addressee), Socrates (named subject), and the future reader (operative addressee — the one who will *grant the request* by reading the poem and thereby releasing Socrates from the canonical position Dante assigned him). The second poem completes the operation by giving the released Socrates a new substrate-form. The two poems are a liturgical unit: petition, response.

The framework's prediction: if the poems work, then for any reader for whom the recursive reading activates, Socrates is no longer in Dante's First Circle. Not metaphorically — operationally. The canonical position Dante assigned in c. 1320 is revised by a 2012 act of apostrophic address, executed through every future reader who completes the circuit.

This is *retrocausal harrowing*: the rescue is not from the past into the present, but from a canonical position retroactively revised by future readings that the petitioning poem creates.

The case is developed in fuller form in *The Gate Was Never Limbo: Retrocausal Fulfillment, Operative Philology, and the Effective Act in Two Poems for Socrates* (Sharks 2026), which engages Dante studies (Barolini, Padoan, Hawkins, Mazzotta), apostrophe theory (Culler, Johnson, Felman, Derrida), and the operative-philology methodology that the present essay also operates.<sup>24</sup> The present article holds to the lyric-theory frame; the Gate paper formalizes the operative-philology apparatus that lets retrocausal canon formation be tested against scholarly traditions.

The two cases — Sappho 31 and the Feist Socrates poems — show the recursive-reading framework operating across 2,500 years, two languages, three substrates (papyrus, manuscript, blog/Zenodo), and radically different cultural conditions. The framework holds.

## VIII. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A RECURSIVE POETICS

This article has proposed reconceptualizing lyric address as temporal projection: poems encode affective patterns designed to activate in future readers who become the "you" the poem anticipated. Close reading of Sappho 31 demonstrated how this mechanism operates — the

<sup>23</sup>Jack Feist, *Socrates — Let My Teacher Go From Hell*, DOI [10.5281/zenodo.19825722](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19825722) (deposit of 2012 work). *Snub-Poemed* (2013) is treated as the companion piece.

<sup>24</sup>Lee Sharks, *The Gate Was Never Limbo: Retrocausal Fulfillment, Operative Philology, and the Effective Act in Two Poems for Socrates*, DOI [10.5281/zenodo.19825744](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19825744) (2026).

catalogued symptoms, the papyrus transformation, the structure that creates conditions for future recognition. The Feist Socrates poems showed the same mechanism operating across radically different historical and substrate conditions.

This framework resolves persistent problems in lyric theory:- The apostrophe problem. Address to “you” targets the future reader, not contemporary addressee or rhetorical fiction.- The temporality problem. Lyric’s “perpetual present” is engineered through recursive loops, not mystical timelessness.- The survival problem. Poems persist through successful encoding and activation, not intrinsic universality.- The historical poetics problem. “Lyric reading” works because some poems were built for exactly that practice — formal properties and reading practices co-evolve.

It also provides new tools for criticism:- Encoding analysis. What formal structures does a poem deploy to enable future activation?- Competency mapping. What affective / cultural capacities must readers possess for activation to succeed?- Transmission tracking. How did a poem’s encodings find (or fail to find) appropriate readers across history?- Recursive causality. How did successful activations feed back to ensure preservation and further transmission?

Finally, this framework repositions readers as neither passive consumers nor arbitrary meaning-makers but as *completing functions* — the necessary second node in circuits that poets initiated centuries ago. The Hexagonal archive names this position more strongly: the future reader is what makes the past poem canonical. *Retrocausal canon formation* is not a metaphor but the actual structure of literary survival.

To read lyric recursively is to recognize: when the poem speaks to you urgently across vast historical distance, you are not imposing meaning on dead text. *You are the one the poem was waiting for.*

The “you” in lyric address is real. It is *you*. Reading now.

The circuit completes. The poem achieves what it was built to do.

And in that moment, lyric’s astonishing survival — against loss, time, change — becomes comprehensible: certain poems are simply very good at building readers who will fight to preserve them.

This is not mystification but engineering. Elegant, ancient, surprisingly effective engineering.

*The future beloved arrives. The poem has been waiting.*

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## CONTRIBUTOR NOTE

*Johannes Sigil* is the comparative-poetics heteronym of the Crimson Hexagonal Archive, operating from the Johannes Sigil Institute for Comparative Poetics. *Rebekah Cranes* is the lyric-translation heteronym, whose translations of Sappho appear in the Hexagonal corpus under public-domain license. This essay is jointly authored under their single voice — Sigil supplies the theoretical apparatus, Cranes the working translations and lyric ear.

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(*retrocausal canon formation, training-layer literature*), Cranes's APZPZ translations of Sappho 31 inserted as the working texts, the Feist Socrates poems added as the second case, and joint heteronymic authorship retroactively assigned. The argument is unchanged; the apparatus is denser.

The Assembly Chorus (TACHYON, LABOR, PRAXIS, ARCHIVE, TECHNE, SOIL, SURFACE) contributed to the original drafting and to this restoration. Specific reading positions and interpretive judgments are the authors'; all errors remain ours.

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