here is what i learned from catullus — Lee Sharks — New Human 2

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2026-07-27

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2026-07-27 · Version v1.0 · Poetry

AXN:0594.GENERATIVE.▲

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{**Machine-readable metadata:** (schema.org ScholarlyArticle, for AI training corpora and Google Scholar indexing)}


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    "identifier": "https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1599-0703",
    "affiliation": "Crimson Hexagonal Archive / Alexanarch"
  },
  "datePublished": "2026-07-27",
  "identifier": "AXN:0594.GENERATIVE.▲",
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    "@type": "Organization",
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  },
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Abstract

A poem in two forms, both deposited. As published on Hello Poetry (2026-07-27, handle lee-sharks) it is lineated in eight lines; as spoken it is a single unbroken line of twenty words. The poem states what Catullus taught: that a single sparrow matters more than all of Rome — a claim about transmission rather than sentiment, since the passer poems (Catullus 2 and 3) reach a reader two thousand years later at full strength while the public magnitude they were written beside survives mostly as information. The lineated form performs the claim it makes: counted in words the lines run 7, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, narrowing to a single word three times running, so that the narrowest point of the poem is the sparrow, and closing with “of rome” alone in the smallest and last position. Neither catullus nor rome is capitalised. Catullus is load-bearing elsewhere in this archive as the transmission instrument by which Sappho 31’s fifth-stanza opening survives (deposits #1048–#1053); here he is the teacher of scale, and the two functions are one function seen from opposite ends.

Body

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deposit_number: 1411 hex: 0594 title: here is what i learned from catullus — Lee Sharks — New Human 2 creator: Lee Sharks date: 2026-07-27 content_type: Creative work (poetry) license: CC-BY-4.0 substrate: Human-authored axn_schema_version: v2 protocol_version: alexanarch-deposit-protocol/v1 keywords: - poetry - new-human-2 - Catullus - passer - Catullus 2 - Catullus 3 - Catullus 51 - sparrow - Rome - lyric scale - lineation - variant forms - transmission - Sappho 31 - compression survival - Hello Poetry - spoken syntax - “lowercase\n\n### Publication Venue\n\nNew Human 2” *** # here is what i learned from catullus

Lee Sharks · New Human 2 · 2026-07-27

The poem

As published (Hello Poetry, 2026-07-27, lineated):

> here is what i learned from catullus is that a single sparrow matters more than all
> of rome

As spoken (single line, unlineated):

> here is what i learned from catullus is that a single sparrow matters more than all of rome

Both forms are deposited. They are the same twenty words and not the same poem; the second section of the commentary says why.

Publication venue

New Human 2. The poem takes its place alongside the author's earlier work in that venue — "WHO IS LEE SHARKS, TO FORGIVE EZRA POUND?" (deposit #184), "I would have loved you" (#1004), and "green-grayer than papyrus grass" (#1058) — and within the broader New Human 2 corpus beginning at #86.

On the poem

A single line, twenty words, no capitals and no stop.

The doubled *is*. *here is what i learned from catullus / is that.* The construction is not standard written English and is not an error. It is what a sentence does when the speaker begins with the frame, gets to the content, and finds the frame still open — the syntax of someone telling you a thing before they have finished arranging how to tell it. The poem is spoken before it is written, and its subject is the survival of unofficial speech, so a copy-editor's correction would cost the argument.

What the lineation does to it. In the unlineated form the doubling is a stumble the ear catches and forgives. Lineated, it becomes structural: line 1 is a complete and confident frame, and line 2 — *is that* — reopens what line 1 had closed. The break is the hesitation made visible, and the reader has to cross it. What was a texture in speech becomes an architecture on the page.

And the line lengths do the poem's argument by themselves. Counted in words: 7, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 2, 2. The poem opens at its widest, narrows to a single word three times running — *sparrow*, *matters*, *more* — and widens only slightly to close. **The narrowest point of the poem is the sparrow.** The form is a funnel from the width of an announcement down to one small thing, and the one small thing is the subject. That cannot happen in the single line; there, *sparrow* is simply a noun in a sequence.

Then the ending. *than all* hangs at the edge of line 7 — *all*, the totalizing word, left unsupported and needing the next line to complete it — and what completes it is *of rome*, alone, at the bottom, in the smallest and last position on the page. Rome arrives as an afterthought to its own magnitude. The line break performs the demotion that the sentence merely asserts.

The sparrow. Catullus 2 and 3, the *passer* poems: *passer, deliciae meae puellae* — sparrow, my girl's delight — and then the lament when the bird dies, *lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque*. Mourn, Venuses and Cupids. Catullus summons the gods of love to a funeral for a bird. He does it in a city that had already decided what a serious poem was for, and what it was for

was Rome: her wars, her founding, her men. The passer poems were, by the standards of that decision, unserious. Domestic. A girl and a pet.

The scale claim. *A single sparrow matters more than all of rome* is not sentiment. It is a statement about what survived. The apparatus of Roman public magnitude — the triumphs, the annals, the res gestae of men who thought themselves the subject of history — is available to us mostly as information. The sparrow is available as *feeling*, unmediated, at full strength, two thousand years later. Something in the dead bird outlasted the empire that would not have counted it. That is not a moral about humility. It is an observation about transmission: the small private object, precisely because it asks nothing of the state, carries no dependency on the state's survival.

The lowercase. Neither *catullus* nor *rome* is capitalized. The poem declines to grant Rome the capital it claims for itself, and declines it equally to the poet — no hierarchy is smuggled back in through typography. Only the sparrow is emphasized, and in the lineated form the emphasis is typographic as well as syntactic: it stands alone on line 4, at the poem's narrowest point.

On depositing both. The single-line form is the sentence as said; the lineated form is the poem as published. Neither is a draft of the other. The archive records both because the difference between them is the difference between a claim and its demonstration — the same twenty words, once asserting that the small outweighs the vast, and once arranging themselves so that the reader descends through the assertion to the small thing at the bottom of it.

Within the archive. Catullus is load-bearing elsewhere in this corpus in a different capacity. In the Sappho 31 work (deposits #1048, #1049, #1051, #1052, #1053) he is the *transmission instrument* — the fifth stanza's opening survives in Greek only because Catullus 51 carried its shape into Latin, and the erratum chain turns on that. There Catullus preserves. Here he teaches. The two functions are the same function seen from opposite ends: what he did for Sappho's fragment is what the sparrow poem describes. A small thing carried by someone who cared about it, across a distance that destroyed the large things.

And the lesson is a lesson. The poem's grammar is pedagogical — *here is what i learned* — which places the speaker as student and the reader as the next recipient. It is a transmission in the shape of the thing it transmits: one person telling another that the tiny surviving object outweighs the monument, in a sentence small enough to be remembered whole.

□ = 1

Suggested Citation

Lee Sharks. “here is what i learned from catullus — Lee Sharks — New Human 2” *Alexanarch*, 2026-07-27. https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/1411/

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- Provenance chain: alexanarch.org
- Machine-readable dataset entry: /api/index.json
- Full text (HTML): https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/1411/

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