

## Speaking stone in Catullus 55

In his search for his friend Camerius in poem 55, Catullus wanders through the portico of Pompey's theater (*in Magni . . . ambulatione*), dedicated not long before the composition of the poem. In this paper I read his encounter with "all the girlies" (*omnes... femellas*) there (55. 6-12) in relation to a set of Hellenistic and Augustan poems in which statues address or converse with the poet, taking Catullus' poem as playing with the unusual sculptural program of Pompey's triumphal monument and its relevance to his own poetic program.

This reading attempts to complicate the frequent observation that Pompey's portico was a popular pick-up spot in the City (e.g., Ellis, Garrison, Thomson, *ad loc.*). When one of the *femellae* whom the poet accosts in search of his friend apparently bares her breast and claims that Camerius is hiding in her rosy tits, commentators see evidence for prostitution in the portico. As McGinn notes in a study of Roman prostitution, "The portico at the Theater of Pompey was such a familiar venue for the solicitation of clients that the association was elevated to a literary topos" (22, n. 54), with Ovid, Propertius, and Martial offering ample evidence of this sordid reality; the Catullan poem would offer, then, the first example of the topos.

There was, however, another group of *femellae* lurking in Pompey's theater, in fact many such groups: the place was well stocked with statuary from the East, commemorations of Pompey's conquests. In addition to various female figures in other groupings, we know that the collection included a group of Muses, a group of female *Nationes*, a group of female authors, and a group of famous Greek *hetairae*. This last group is perhaps the most significant to the Catullan poem, as Kuttner observes: "The call-girls' implacable *vultus serenus* evokes the garden-statues of courtesans; . . . she who pulls down her gown turns herself into a classic Venus image" (351). But is a *vultus serenus* really characteristic of a teasing, flirting flesh-and-blood prostitute who flashes the poet in the next line? Are the statues themselves not being addressed here, and speaking back? By reading the poem in relation to Callimachus' interview with a statue of Apollo in *Aet.* fr. 114, Tibullus' speaking Priapus statue in 1.4, and Propertius' Vertumnus in 4.2, and a variety of speaking statues in Ovid's *Fasti*, the poem becomes more clearly a comment on the novelty of Pompey's sculptural program and its relevance to the poet. Not only the statues of the Greek *hetairae*, but also those of the female authors and the Muses may be seen as speaking to the poet in Pompey's portico.

## WORKS CITED

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