

Hair and the City: Self and Landscape in Late Dio — Bryant Kirkland, UCLA

The centrality of *êthos* to oratory has been recognized since the earliest examples of rhetorical theory (e.g., Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1356a; cf. Goldhill 2002: 78-79). Likewise, some of antiquity's most influential instances of philosophizing have relied heavily on the philosopher's self-presentation to validate and embody the espousal of particular ideas (Socrates, Diogenes, etc.). In these veins, the corpus of Dio of Prusa presents temptations and frustrations of interpretation (Moles 2005: 112). Dio, as orator and philosopher, seems at one and the same time to perpetuate the orator/philosopher's focus on self-presentation and to confound it. Across various speeches, readers detect a scattered autobiography sublimated to form, a life evocative of but subtly different from philosophical precursors (Moles 1978: esp. 96-100; Moles 2005: 125-27). Given Dio's apparent propensity toward retrospection and toward projecting autobiographic coherence, Dio's late turn toward urban beautification at Prusa, taken by one scholar as the "germ of a new theorizing about civic engagement" (Desideri 2000: 106), merits further consideration for its connections to Dio's larger philosophical program. This paper will consider the relationship Dio sets up in several under-studied late orations (esp. *Orr.* 33, 35, and 47) between his own self's moral legibility and the moral legibility of urban and exurban spaces. It asks how the form of certain late orations helps Dio articulate the tension of representing himself as both civically committed and, seemingly by necessity, as rejected and misunderstood, and thus in maintenance of a (formally determined) philosophical identity.

However much the enterprises are supposedly wedded (e.g., *Or.* 49.13), Dio's philosophical commitments and his civic activities do not always seem to square. Dio's late works exhibit a striking antagonism between his efforts at beautifying Prusa and his views of the ultimate meaninglessness of locale, physical situation, and built environment (cf. *Orr.* 33, 35). Moreover, the nature of the philosopher and the city is subject to misprision, exemplified by Dio's repeated focus on the vulnerability of his philosopher's hair to misinterpretation (e.g., 35.2ff.) and the diverting qualities of urban decoration, at one point also compared to hair (33.18). Elsewhere, Dio points out (47.2) the philosophical conundrum of imitating those who abandon their fatherlands despite the importance they attach to honoring it. In a somewhat inverted fashion, some of Dio's late speeches present his own apparently benevolent self-repatriation at Prusa, even as they tease out the exasperation of being *engagé*. If Dio is critical of misunderstandings induced by urban cosmetics, what strategies does he deploy in representing own efforts at enhancing those of Prusa?

I will explore, as one strategy key to Dio's navigation between competing demands, his repeatedly rhapsodizing features beyond or outside the city, particularly in his recurrent use of landscape catalogues, which can be invoked either to flatter cities ironically for things that will outlast them (Celaenae, 35), or, in Dio's citing unjustified pride in natural features, to convict cities of moral lassitude (Tarsus, 33). Dio's late speeches urge listeners to take the model of his chastened life as preparatory to a collectively attenuated kind of afterlife: cities, doomed to dissipation, offer an illusorily stable moral foundation that cannot deceive the genuinely philosophical. Prusa's fractious relation to Dio can thus be folded into a larger philosophical

understanding: to appear philosophically sound, Dio must at some level *not* be on good terms with his city. The “realia” of a speech like *Oration 47* therefore enact rhetorical tactics endemic to Dio’s philosophical self-image. However evocative of the ironic Socrates, Dio presents his own powerlessness and that of vain urban spaces as instances of an ineluctable transience.

The form of some of Dio’s late orations/essays have a sometimes meandering quality (perhaps analogous to the unbuilt landscape spaces to which they refer). One might also think of their “supplative” quality, in which, as in *Or. 35*, one argument or image replaces or outdoes the last, challenging the reader’s ability to know how seriously or ironically to take the preceding image. We might ask how the ambling form of Dio’s orations presages larger temporal transformations. Why, for instance, does the hyperbolic India cap *Or. 35*? How does Dio make “readings” of exurban space “unnatural” or illegible without the aid of philosopher? What are the politics of Dio’s exurban or fantastic landscapes in the context of Roman domination? Finally, how does our privileged position as readers of multiple texts, obviously different from the atomized experience of hearing different orations in different places, affect the temptation toward coherence?