

No sense of an ending? Abrupt conclusions as philosophical and political strategies in Dio

A good ending, like a good opening, feeds on suspense; but each handles suspense differently. One draws us towards the next sentence, pulling together in thoughtful development the threads of an underlying tension; the other consumes them. But this is hardly the case for Dio Chrysostom, whose endings often confound any expectation of closure and abandon both speech and audience mid-thought. This paper examines the philosophical and political significance of his abrupt endings: what are the cognitive and formal contexts that allow Dio to end many a discourse in the way he does?

The paper begins with Dio's Libyan myth (Or. 5) and reads it as a revealing prototype for understanding his endings. Dio offers a clear hermeneutic formula: the tantalizing story (deadly half-woman/half-snake beasts) followed by moral elucidation, which he offers in two versions. His third version gives the story but no interpretation, leaving us in suspense while suggesting how to proceed. This seemingly incomplete tale reveals a broader strategy by Dio to make his listeners into active interpreters who fill in the meaning on their own.

I then examine this formal aspect in light of contemporary intellectual expectations, looking to the imperial context and to generic influences. Figurative speech (*oratio figurata*), for example, is one such influence on interpretive sensibilities. It was prominent in the declamation of the educational curriculum and, in certain circles of power, a political necessity. Dio even admits that discussion of literary material can send unstated rhetorical messages to his audience: he discusses Nestor's rhetoric in order to preempt criticism of his own (Or. 57.10-11). From a literary perspective, any number of genres helped to contribute to this formal structure: the Pindaric hymn or Horatian ode, for example, or the philosophical letters of Dio's near contemporary, Seneca, which can leave the reader pondering a complex idea. I consider a range of Greek and Roman sources that elucidate Dio's precedents and his innovations. Dio's use of this literary form, I argue, is at the intersection of philosophy and politics, wedding the possibilities of philosophical exposition with the mental and rhetorical habits of an imperial audience.

The paper concludes by examining two speeches in order to see why the technique was so valuable for both philosophical and political discourse. In *On Virtue* (Or. 8) Diogenes narrates the labors of Herakles but stops abruptly. Dio leaves the reader guessing at Diogenes' reasons

and even his actions (ἐποίει τι τῶν ἀδόξων, 7.36). The sudden ending is part of Dio's efforts "to

disrupt a complacent and uncritical audience" (Kim 2010: 94). In Oration 41 Dio concludes at the height of his argument, leaving the Apameians to ponder the damaging effects of experiencing enmity firsthand (πολὸν δὲ πάντων περρωμένοις βλαβερώτατον, 41.14). Dio's emotive appeal leaves the reader both mid-thought and mid-emotion. The need to linger and contemplate his message makes it all the more persuasive.