

## To beard or not to beard: Expressing (dis)engagement in the age of Dio

Cynthia Damon

Barbering, according to the elder Pliny, is one of just three cross-cultural conventions (*gentium consensus tacitus*) that define human sociability; the other two are the alphabet and timekeeping (*NH* 7.210-215). Shears and razors have rarely appeared in such exalted company, but then in first two centuries CE shaggy hair and beards stood for much more than an autonomic disregard for appearances. The trim/shaggy dichotomy was convenient: Dio mentions an audience member—in Olbia!—whose shaving signified allegiance to Rome, for example. Perhaps too convenient, as in the case of the “philosophers” who substitute a symbol of disengagement for the reality in order to conceal the fact that they have been co-opted by the system, their beards the cosmetic equivalent for the parasite’s *parrhesia*. Doing philosophy without the props, however—as advised by Seneca, Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus, among others—was just as liable to incur concerns about hypocrisy or, worse, self-deception. The present paper begins with the parallel dichotomy between speech and silence, specifically with Tacitus’ critique of both speech and silence as political instruments in a world in which efficacy involved finding a narrow path “between craggy defiance and degrading deference” (*Ann.* 4.20.3), then turns to the role of the written word as an alternative. Among the many forms of political prose that reemerged in Latin after the end of the Domitianic silence—biography, ethnography, dialogue, treatise, panegyric, historiography, etc.—particular attention will be paid to the younger Pliny’s innovative epistolary collection as a vehicle for political engagement.