

Synesius
Encomium Calvitii

Translated by
Anthony Alcock

Synesius, born in 373, the year when Athanasius died, was a pupil of the philosopher Hypatia, who was brutally murdered by Christians in Alexandria in 415. He converted to Christianity some years before her death and was consecrated, on his own terms, Bishop of Ptolemais in North Africa. Of the relatively modest quantity of his writings to have survived, the text translated below was, by its own account, inspired by a work of Dio Chrysostom. The richest source of personal information about Synesius is probably the collection of 156 letters to his friends, acquaintances and colleagues. Synesius mentions this speech in two letters: 1 to a certain Nicander, which shows that he is quite proud of the speech; and 74 to Pylaemenes, a covering letter in which he is anxious to have the good opinion of someone he clearly respects. Both letters are dated to 402.

In the matter of whether Synesius was a Christian at the time of writing, admittedly a matter of somewhat peripheral concern, it will be useful to consider the chronology: both letters 1 and 74 can be dated to 402, when Synesius was still at Constantinople and seems to have developed feelings of friendship for Christians, who were building a united front to keep out the invading Goths; in 403 he married a Christian. So this speech seems to have been written during his conversion period.¹ In letter 153² to Hypatia, which can be dated to 404, Synesius complains that he is castigated for neglecting philosophy by those who wear white and those who grey garments, the colours of the garments worn by pagan philosophers (white) and Christian (grey), which seems to suggest that he was, as it were, at home in non-Christian and Christian circles.

The translation has been made from the text (with Latin translation) in Jean-Paul Migne (ed.) *Patrologia Graeca* 66 (1863) cols. 1167-1205, essentially a reprint of Johann Georg Krabinger *Calvitii Encomium* (1834), where the translation is in German. The notes and critical apparatus in both editions are the same and are in groups numbered from 1-99. Migne says that he has put them at the end of the volume instead of below the text because of the sheer quantity of them. Krabinger says, on p. iii of the preface to his first publication, that he prepared and published his volume because he had enjoyed it so much (*vehementius eius lectione delectabar*). He collated all available manuscripts and added the substantial notes of earlier commentators, particularly those of Dionysius Petavius (Denis Pétau), a 17th cent. Jesuit scholar.

Augustine FitzGerald translated the entire output of Synesius in *Letters and Essays and Hymns* (1926-1930). Since the translation is available on the internet, I have used principally it for the references in the text.

1 Jay Bregman 'Synesius of Cyrene' *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 7 (1974) pp. 55 ff.

2 *PG* 66 col. 1553ff.

In letter 74 Synesius describes his oration as Ἀττικουργῆ τῆς ἀκριβοῦς ἐργασίας (a work in Attic of careful workmanship). I am not in position to judge this appraisal of the quality of his Greek, but it is difficult to disagree with the final sentiment in this brief covering letter: εἰ δὲ μηδὲν φανεῖται σπουδαῖον, ἔξεστι δῆπου παίζειν τὰ παίγνια (if it does not seem in any way to be worthy of study, it is at least possible to enjoy the playfulness of it).

[1] Dio Chrysostom wrote an encomium on hair that is so illustrious that every bald man should feel shamed by his words. His words are a confirmation of the power of nature, for by nature we all wish to be handsome, and hair plays a major part in this, we having been endowed with it by nature since childhood. For myself, when the terrible thing first began and my hair started to fall out, I was cut to the quick; and, as more fell out, one by one, cumulatively, the war was on and my head was torn this way and that, and I found myself suffering more than the Athenians at the hands of Archidamus³ when he felled the trees of the Acharnians. Fairly soon, I felt like an uncultivated Euboean, with hair on the back of his head, of the sort Homer describes in the *Iliad*. In all of this there is no god or power I have not accused. I thought of writing an encomium on Epicurus, not because I share his opinion about the gods but so that I might get my revenge on them. I thought: where is providence in which each gets what he deserves? What have I done wrong that I should appear less attractive to women? I do not mean neighbours' wives. For I am most scrupulous in matters relating to Aphrodite and could rival the modesty of Bellerophon. But mothers and sisters, so they say, react to the beauty of their men, like Parysatis, who preferred the handsome Cyrus to king Artaxerxes.⁴

[2] Such was my state of mind, and I could think of little besides my misfortune. I became accustomed to it with time, and reason counteracted my distress pain, and gradually things became easier and more bearable. But now Dio has rekindled my sorrow and has become another adversary. According to the proverb, not even Hercules was able to withstand the Molionides⁵ when they fell upon him, while also struggling against the Hydra, until they became one, but when the crab came to the Hydra's assistance, he would have given up if he had not called upon Iolaos as an ally. I felt as though I were suffering at Dio's hands in the same way, not having Iolaos as a nephew. But to forget myself and my reasonings I am now composing elegies about my hair. But since you⁶ are the best of the bald and seem to be a noble person indifferent to misfortune and, in the middle of a party when the food is served an

3 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 2, 19ff. Archidamus did serious damage to this Attic deme, memorialised in Aristophanes' eponymous play.

4 For some indication of the relationship between Cyrus and his mother, cf. Xenophon *Anabasis* 1, 1

5 Eurytus and Cteatus. See, for example, *Iliad* 2, 621.

6 Synesius is talking to himself.

examination is carried out,⁷ can laugh at your baldness, indeed be apparently almost proud of it, put up with the words of Dio and strengthen your heart like Odysseus when he impertubably bore the vulgar behaviour of women.⁸ Do not let yourself be troubled by this. But you cannot? Yes, of course you can. Just listen. No need to open the book. I will tell you. It is short but charming. And the beauty of it is that it will cling to your memory so that you will not be able to forget even if you want to.

[3] "Arising at dawn to address the gods, which is my custom, I was mindful of my baldness. My body happened to be rather soft. My hair had been neglected for some time, much of it somewhat matted and in disarray, like wool hanging on the legs of sheep, much of it harder, for it is bundled together from rather fine hairs. In appearance it was wild and heavy, difficult to untangle or comb without tearing it out. It then occurred to me to write a speech in praise the well-kempt. Also I said to myself that they, for the sake of beauty, attach value to their hair and take care of it and wear a reed in it so that they can comb it when they have a moment. And, when they are stretched out on the ground, they take care that it does not come into contact with the ground. To avoid contact they use a piece of wood as a pillow. They would rather keep their hair clean and tidy than sleep comfortably. It is the hair that lends us a proud and martial air, while sleep, pleasant as it is, robs us of active vigilance. The Spartans were well aware of this when, before the great and terrible battle in the three hundred were the only Greeks to sustain the impact of the entire Persian army, they spent time arranging their hair.⁹ Homer also shows us the excellence of hair: when he wants to point to some perfection, he rarely speaks of the eyes. Of all the heroes the only one whose eyes are praised is Agamemnon and the Greeks in general are praised for their keen eyes, a feature they have in common. But it was the hair that Homer admired most. Look what he says of Achilles: '*... she took Peleides by his fair hair.*'¹⁰ He calls Menelaus fair because of his hair. Hector's hair is also mentioned: '*All around his dark hair in disarray...*'¹¹ When Euphorbus, the handsomest of the Trojans, falls, the poet can find nothing to deplore more than '*his fine hair, like those of the Graces, kept in*

7 An allusion to some procedure I do not understand.

8 Probably a reference to Odysseus' increasing irritation with the insolent serving girls throughout *Odyssey* 20.

9 Herodotus *Histories* 7, 208 quoting the report of a Persian scout.

10 *Il.* 1, 197

11 *Il.* 22, 402ff.

place by a net of gold and silver, stained with blood'.¹² And when he wishes to show us Odysseus beautified by Athena, he says: '*... she covered his head with dark hair*'¹³ and elsewhere he says of Odysseus: '*His hair fell in curls on his neck, like the hyacinth*'.¹⁴ According to Homer hair is more of an ornament to men than to women. At least, when he speaks of the beauty of women, he does not speak so often of the hair. Even in the case of goddesses Homer chooses another feature to praise: Aphrodite is fair, Hera is cow-eyed, Thetis silver-footed. But when it comes to Zeus, he speaks of long hair flowing majestically: '*the freely flowing ambrosian locks of the ruler*'.¹⁵

[4] This is what Dio says. For my part, as I am not a bad soothsayer, I was sure that Thrasymachus¹⁶ would blush, but I felt no such emotion. At first I was captivated by the speech, but now he seems to me a clever speaker without much of a topic but able to deploy the full force of his rhetoric on it. But how much more admirable his achievement would have been if he had undertaken to praise the opposite, to wit, the matter of a head such as mine. What would this speaker of the unspeakable have produced if he had happened upon a topic suitable to his ability? He had a fine head of hair and talent and he used the latter for the benefit of the former. How skilfully he introduces himself into his text, for there is no other hair-lover in it who uses his reed¹⁷ to beautify hair, except of course himself, the writer of the speech. I may be bald, but I can speak, and my subject is much more worthwhile than Dio's. I may not be as good as Dio, but I am ready for the contest and am prepared to test myself and my subject in the hope of being able to put those with hair to shame. But I will say my piece without resorting to the lively combative rhetoric used by some, who act as if they were equipping a trireme with beaks, or to the sort of song that has a musical introduction, like those of Dio when he imitates professional singers: "Arising at dawn to address the gods, which is my custom, I was mindful of my baldness. My body happened to be rather soft. My hair had been neglected for some time." Thus, he slips unobtrusively from castigating neglect

12 *Il.* 17, 51-52

13 Possibly a ref. to *Od.* 16, 176

14 *Od.* 23, 157

15 *Il.* 1, 529

16 In Plato *Republic* 350 D, where Thrasymachus participates in a discussion about justice, in the course of which he is made to blush.

17 The word can mean both 'reed' and 'pen', the same object but with different function.

caused by circumstances to praising diligent care. This is what clever speakers do: they beguile us and then strike fear and terror into us. As for me, I simply engage people in conversation. I do not 'do' oratory. I have cultivated two skills in my life: care of plants and care of dogs for hunting. These fingers are more at home with digging and pruning than with the reed, except course the reed used as a weapon rather than as a pen. It is therefore not surprising if they show signs of physical exercise. I do not apologize for work in the fields and eschew elaborately rounded sentences with proverbial and well thought-out utterances. My greatest strength is the art of expressing simple thoughts directly. I will deal with matters by harnessing the language about them to the matters themselves, shifting the force of language and oratory from disputation to consideration of the matter under discussion, as it were, from the Dorian to the Phrygian.¹⁸ I need enough breath¹⁹ for arguing and reasoning, and I am confident that my heart will provide it.

[5] My discourse will aim to show that the bald person has no reason to feel shame. His head may be bald, but his intelligence luxuriant, as the poet says of Aeacides, who was so unconcerned about his hair that he offered it to a dead person.²⁰ The hair was dead, a dead thing on the living. The less intelligent creatures have hair on most of their body, but man, since he has a life of the mind, is for the most part smooth skinned and does not carry much of this burden. But he has a little in a few places to remind him that he too is an animal. Men who do not have even a little hair are above other men as man is above the animals. As man is the most intelligent of creatures and the smoothest, it is also acknowledged that the sheep is the least intelligent, with its thick matted hair. It would seem that hair is almost hostile to intelligence, as if they were not willing to co-exist. Think of hunters: they are friendly people and in the skill that they exercise, the cleverest dogs are the ones with smooth ears and bellies, while those with lots of hair are uncontrollable and should better stay away from the hunt. Plato says of the team of horses driven by the soul that the unjust horse has hair on its ears, so how is it possible to think good of hair ? Even if Plato does not say so, it must be the case that hair blocks up the ears, just as one would be blind if it grew on the eyes. Hairy eyes would be a monstrosity. Sometimes the eyelids have two layers of hair, and it is thought to be the worst of

18 As I understand these musical terms, this seems to involve a shift from a relatively bright minor scale (Dorian) to a relatively dark minor scale (Phrygian).

19 The Greek word can also be translated by English 'spirit'.

20 *Il.* 23, 141ff.

misfortunes for hair to grow in the eyes. A great deal of skill and energy is required to prevent the hair from destroying the eye. For nature does permit the least valuable properties to cohabit with the most valuable. The most valuable properties of a living creature are the senses and those in particular that sustain life. Among the most important of these is the soul, which distributes its powers among them. The most divine part is sight, which is also the smoothest. As the most valuable of man's parts are smooth, these must also be the best. As I have already shown, hair is what distinguishes man from beast, so it follows that man is the most sacred of all living creatures and those who lose their hair the most divine.

[6] You can look at paintings in the museum of Diogenes and Socrates and other sages of all periods: it is a sort of theatre of bald men. Apollonius is unimportant, and so is the odd magician and spiritual confidence trickster. They do not really have hair, but they are able to appear as rulers of the people. What they have is perhaps not the wisdom of the magician, but some sort of wonder-working tidigation, not knowledge but power. Thus, the legislators prized the wisdom of the most honoured, but kept executioners for magicians. And, Apollonius may have had hair, but that is not the point. I like him and would wish him to figure in my catalogue. But to get back to my original point: if a man is wise, he is bald; if he is not bald, he is not wise. The same is true of the gods: the one who performs the rites of Dionysus is covered with hair, some of it his, some of it not. The Dionysiac rites require a fawnskin and some borrow the hairs of pine branches, and they can all be seen rolling around, wailing in indecorous jerky movements, as if overcome by strong drink. If drink is involved at some point in their rites. In any case, they seem to have completely lost their mind. Meanwhile, Silenus, the teacher of Dionysus, is portrayed seated and wearing a leather jerkin. Being bald, he is in control of his mind and sober among them all. Do not think that it is a small thing to have been given this signal honour above all the other gods by Zeus: to look after and instruct the boy. For he has to taste the wine and succumb to the manic passion of dancing with the Bacchic revellers, while Silenus is able to moderate his passion so that the boy does not go to excess and become too refractory for his father. So we swiftly conclude from this that where hair has departed, brains have arrived and vice-versa. This is the case with Socrates son of Sophroniscus: moderate in many respects and unwilling to accept praise, he was nevertheless unable not to be flattered when compared with Silenus.²¹ The reason for this was that he

21 *Phaedo* 215A

considered the head to be the house of the brain. And, as in many other aspects of Socrates' thinking, it was a mystery to the unintelligent that he boasted of his resemblance to Silenus. It is fitting for young men to have a good crop of hair, at a time when we think little of life, but when youth has departed and old age sets in and it is clear that intelligence and thought take up residence in humans, what else can one do but impugn the unreasoning nature of hair? There are old men with hair and there are old men who have become deranged, and it is not the case that all men achieve human perfection. Someone is old and has hair. Intelligence and hair do not go together but are opposites, like dark and light. Those who seek to understand this may find it difficult to explain. But, in trying to do justice to our subject, we will try our best not to expose what should not be exposed.

[7] The beginnings of things are simple, but as nature descends, it becomes varied, and matter is the final stage. In the first stages it is varied and, even if it receives something of the divine, it is unable to receive the whole of it at once. Even though it has received faint images and seeds, it cherishes and embraces them and is completely absorbed by them. So, it either hangs on to these things apprehended by chance or, because of a necessary opposition, it overcomes the divine at the first encounter before the image has a chance to become perfect. But either could happen, for they do not really contend with each other, as would appear. However, we are not talking about these. Our subject is different, and it is time to return to it. In the things that are not yet perfect and only in the early stages nature has most power; but in those that have been confirmed and are somewhat stronger, nature has to yield. The seed that is cast on the earth, though lowly, seems to have something of the divine, for it results in cereal, but before it comes to this, consider the procession and the beauty of nature: the root, the stalk, the skin, the ears, the husk, on which there are other husks. The cereal has not yet come out but is hiding unborn inside. When it does come out, it sheds all the unimportant matter. For perfection needs no beautification. It is perfect because it contains within it other seed. For this reason the *Anakalypteria*²² of Demeter was celebrated at Eleusis. Since the mind is the most divine of things from above, it inhabits the head. Like seed cast, it comes to fruition. Here too nature proceeds in its customary way: it causes growth to decorate the head, from which it then removes the hair, the ears and the husks or the flowers that bloom before the fruits. But it is necessary for the flowers to wither before fruit can be borne. True wisdom resides only in

²² The 'revealing' seems to have been an important stage in the marriage process, cf. J. Oakley and R. Binos *The wedding in ancient Athens* (1993) p. 25. Here it seems to be related to revealing mysteries.

head matured by years, when time, like a winnower who separates the good from the bad, has released it from the empty excess of which matter consists. Only then can one be sure that it is like fruit that has ripened to perfection. If you see a forehead completely bare, think of it as the home of intelligence and regard this head as the temple of a divinity. In honour of the head, one might therefore celebrate mysteries and call them the Anakalypteria because of the unsanctified, but the sages would know that they are the Epibateria²³ of the mind. The one who has just joined the ranks of the bald is like an initiate admitted to the Theophania. Just as certain fruits mature in their shells, so there are wicked heads, which have nothing divine in them, covered as they are by dead matter. In Egypt, as we know, the priests did not even let their eyebrows grow and were ridiculous to look at, but they were intelligent, as befits wise men and Egyptians. For the things which are eternal in nature and the substance of which is life itself cannot be related to inanimate parts. To have oneself shaved manually is to embark on the path of sanctity. But to be naturally bald is to come close to God, because God is without doubt bald. The divine itself may be of this sort and this, I hope, will be favourable to what I have to say, all of which is said with a feeling of pious respect.

[8] As long as the divinity is invisible and wishes to remain so,²⁴ what is one to do? The only things that can be seen are round objects: sun, moon, all the stars, fixed and wandering, large and small, but all the same shape. What could be more bald than a round object? More divine? There is a saying that the soul wishes to imitate the divine. It is the third god, the soul of the world, whose father,²⁵ the creator of the physical world, introduced it into the world, perfect, whole and complete, made of seeds and bodies, giving it the most comprehensive of forms. The more polygonal is always greater than those with equal circumferences. Among two-dimensional objects the circle and among three-dimensional objects the sphere are superior to all polygons. This is known to those who study geometry and measure spaces. So the whole soul animates the whole sphere-shaped world and all that emanates from it and fragments into parts, each wanting what the entire soul wants, *viz.* to administer the body and be souls of the world, which is responsible for the fragmentation in them, and this is why nature needs various spheres, so above stars, below heads have been formed as dwellings of souls, microcosms in the cosmos. It was necessary for the living world to consist of living

23 Among other meanings it can refer to a festival celebrating the advent of a god.

24 *Laws* 821A

25 *Timaeus* 33B ff.

creatures. There was no difference among the simpler souls, who went to live in heads with hair, with the least accuracy of form; the clever souls went to a dwelling worthy of them, some to a star and some to a bald head. Even if nature cannot produce accuracy, it does not allow the part that looks up to heaven to be made other than in the form of the cosmos. The bald head is our heaven, and all the things that one says in praise of the sphere can be said in praise of baldness.

[9] Dio may take written examples from Homer and plastic ones from Phidias, such as a long mane for Zeus, so that he can move the heavens whenever he wants. For the Zeus seen in the sky, we all know what sort he is. If there is another Zeus with a body, I do not know. Let there be one, if one wishes to think so. In any case, whether he is before or after, then he is an image of the model and, whatever the appearance, the disposition of nature must have facilitated a certain similarity. Poetry and plasticity have a certain amount in common, and the mimetic arts pay little attention to the truth, but tend to be somewhat demagogic: whatever they do is for the benefit of prestige not truth. Hair is precious to the ignorant, and people are impressed by all the externals, such as reputation, property, means of transport, houses and furniture, all the things that have nothing to do with the nature of those who have them, but, like hair, are external. They are remote from intelligence and God and are governed by nature and fate. And this is even more alien. The gifts of fate and nature make the unintelligent happy. The one who writes and speaks to the people is inevitably a 'populist' who does and says what pleases the people. And though unintelligent, they are nevertheless more opinionated and become irksome leaders who make absurd decisions, with the result that anyone wanting to alter the old ways will soon have to drink hemlock.²⁶ How do you think the Greeks would have treated Homer if he had spoken the truth about Zeus and not spun fantastic yarns of the sort that frighten children.

[10] The Egyptians in this respect too are clever: the priestly classes do not entrust the making of divine images to manual workers and craftsmen, on the grounds that they might break certain laws. The falcons and ibis statues are made in the temples by the priests, who make fun of the people; they remain hidden in their sanctuaries, where they inspect what has been made; the images are concealed in boxes used during festive processions,²⁷ so that

²⁶ Reference to Socrates

²⁷ I take the word used here to be related to *κομμασία*

people will not know about them and become annoyed at these spherical objects and laugh at them. People being people need something out of the ordinary. Beaks are added to the ibises. One of them, which they do not hide but display, is Asclepius, and he is a lot balder than a pestle.²⁸ At Epidaurus he has hair: the Greeks have little interest in searching for the truth, according to the justified reproach of the historian.²⁹ Egyptians see him and are able to speak to him, not only on festival days but whenever they wish. I hear it said that an Egyptian has arts and charms to control the gods. Whenever he wishes, he can use unintelligible language to draw out whatever of the divinity he needs and bend it to his will. The Egyptians, unlike the Greeks, are able to grasp the true image of the divine. As I said a little earlier, it is enough for someone to do no more than look at the sun and the stars. Is a comet a star? No. The region of the stars is the body that moves in circular fashion, in which there is no change. But in the sublunary spaces, the boundaries of creation, these fiery objects that are merely known as stars are born: one set moves in sequence, the other set, of a different nature, at random. One comes to the meridian from the Altar, from which it moves bringing with it particles as far as the North Pole, unless they perish on the way. You can see very large ones, which might on one day be as long as the zodiac and three days later reduced to two-thirds of the original size. and after ten days be one-thirtieth of the size. They gradually disappear into nothingness. Even if you wish it, I cannot call them stars. Hair is enough to be a mortal threat to stars. Comets are an evil omen and the auspices-takers and diviners sacrifice to them. They are the harbingers of future revolutions: peoples reduced to servitude, towns destroyed, kings murdered, appalling catastrophes that man has not seen since primeval times.

*No star from the time of Zeus is known to have been destroyed*³⁰

What is destroyed is not a star. They are all blessed and spherical bodies. I wish I and those near to me were fortunate enough to be made like the gods. Nobody is nearer to the divine than the bald person. One can say of the bald person in particular that he is the image of the divine and the sight of him gives some idea of the beauty of the gods. And though it is not deserved, it happens: you may often hear the bald being called such names as 'little moons'.

28 The Greek god of medicine was identified with the Egyptian Imhotep, who was an actual person with a reputation for wisdom.

29 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 1, 20

30 Aratus *Phaenomena* 259

[11] I have nearly missed the most important point of all: the moon and its phases, after which the the children of the bald are named and to which they are similar in shape. In its initial phase it is the most lovely crescent, growing into a half moon and finally a full moon. When it reaches the height of good fortune, I mean, when it is full, it can legitimately be known as 'sun'. There are no more phases: it is complete and as bright as the sun. Consider the example of Odysseus. who is thoughtlessly chaffed by the suitors, the boys with long flowing hair, who soon come to a bad end, more than a hundred of them, at the hands of one bald man: when he was carrying the torch to light the lamps, the young braves told him to stop, because his gleaming head would illuminate the entire house. This was surely the most divine thing: it was not just similar to the gods but of the same nature as them, the ability to have and make light. The reason for this luminousness is the good fortune of having little or no hair. One withdraws from the less good and proceeds to the better, a sort of contrast between the dead and the living. Life and light and all such things are and are thought to be good. If light and smoothness go together, then hair must be considered appropriate for darkness. This is not simply a matter of reason but indeed of necessity. The argument might perhaps be strengthened by the use of persuasion so that the need of proof is superfluous. It is true that all people think and say as a matter of course that hair has something of the sunshade about it. The eloquent poet Archilochus³¹ praises it, indeed he praises it on the body of courtesans. This is what he says:

Hair shaded her shoulders and back.

Shadow is nothing more than darkness. What they have in common is that they mean the absence of light. If one examines the matter more closely, one sees that night is the greatest shade, when the earth is deprived of the sun's rays. But in the daytime dense woods do not admit light because they are very dark and hirsute.

[12] All this shows that baldness is divine and one of the most splendid of all divine properties in the ether. If health is good, indeed it is the best of all goods and is the reason why I can see so many people with hair seeking out the razor and the depilatory pitch plaster to

31 This passage is known only from this text, cf. *Archilochus: Fragments* (Loeb Classical Library 259) p. 104.

have their head shaved so that baldness will help them avoid illness.³² If poor sight, excessive mucus and deafness as well as the other complaints that affect the head could be removed along with the hair, this would be a great thing. It would be a much greater thing if this could benefit the feet and the internal organs. Those in this unfortunate state are people obliged to put up with what doctors call 'cycles', the beginning, middle and end of which is the depilatory pitch plaster, which works on their hair more accurately than a blade. It is reasonable to remove hair from the top of the head, as from an acropolis, as one does with what is related to sickness and health in the rest of the body. We do not have an equal share of health, but most of it is god-given. Consider how the statues of Asclepius, though bald in the Egyptian fashion, speak in riddles: they seem to tell us what is best for the common good and the healthiest medical advice and almost seem to say that those who want to be healthy should follow the founder and leader of the medicinal art. The head is exposed to the sun and subject to all seasons, so it is not surprising if it soon becomes metal rather than bone. This being the case, it does not easily succumb to illnesses. Woods and plains produce inferior wood and mountain tops produce superior wood for spears, and Homer tells us why: these areas are nurtured by the wind and are exposed.³³ It was not by chance that Chiron cut the wood for Peleus' spear in the woods of Tempe, not from another valley where there is plenty of wood. He went to the top of Mount Pelion, where the wood is exposed to the full force of the wind. The wood there was good wood and it was good enough for succeeding generations. It is the same with the heads that are shaggy and smooth: the wood from the grove is nurtured in the shade and the hilltop wood is subject to all the winds and so is stronger, whereas the other wood is brittle.

[13] This can be tested by anyone who goes to the border between Egypt and Arabia where the armies of Cambyses and Psammetichus engaged each other. In the fighting both sides thought there would be a decisive moment, and they fought remorselessly, with much bloodshed, and there was not even enough time to remove the bodies of the fallen and the survivors could do little else for the dead, lying in a confused heap as they had fallen, than separate them from each other. There are still two heaps of bones, one Egyptian and the other Mede. The excellent Herodotus, who seems to have examined the heads, has an extraordinary report: some were thin and weak and could be fractured by a small pebble: some, he thought, were so thick and resistant that even sustained stone-throwing would not be enough to

³² *Phaedrus* 244E

³³ *Il.* 11, 256

fracture them, but one would need a club. The reason for this, which we invoke as a witness: the Medes had hair while the the Egyptians were nurtured by the sun.³⁴ If it is difficult to travel to far-distant lands to test this, and in any case it is sacrilegious to crack open a skull with a stone, and you do not trust Herodotus, many besides myself in the city have servants from Scythia who wear their hair in the Scythian fashion, and if you punch them, you will kill them. But in the theatre, on holidays, those who have seats can see a man, not naturally bald but one who goes to the barber several times a day, appear before the public to demonstrate the strength of his head and nothing untoward happens to him: he is immune to seething pitch, repels a ram attacking him with its horns, has Megarian vases smashed over his skull, is struck repeatedly, and, while the spectators are seized with fright, he suffers no more harm than if he had been struck by an Attic sandal. I have seen this many times and blessed myself for my good fortune. I could never do what he does. He is much bolder than me, but he is driven to it by poverty and I do not need, and hope I never will need, to be tested like this. But there is another huge benefit, which is by no means less than any of the others said so far. According to Pindar's prayer,³⁵ if we live on what we have, we can sit in the best part of the theatre and enjoy the performances. If called upon to provide theatrical performances for the city and if asked to make public donations, we will be valued by the city fathers. But if the wind of fortune blows against us and we become impoverished, which God forbid for any right-thinking person, then those who are creative will be spared the worst of all evils, hunger, for they can perform shamelessly on the stage and put on little shows that people might want to attend.

[14] As for those who, like Dio, think that hair is more fitting for men than women, does this not conflict with reality and the obvious truth? For since hair makes people weaker, it is hardly reasonable to assign it those who are strong? It goes against nature and law. Against law, because hair is not a good thing for all men everywhere and they do not always have it. The Lacedaemonians had long hair after Thyrea and the Argives before Thyrea.³⁶ Many people have never had it. But women, all of them, everywhere and always, have been very attentive to their hair: it is not and never has been the case that women have their shaved off, unless there are has been some terrible and unavoidable accident. I have never seen or heard of this.

34 *Histories* 3, 12

35 *Olympian Ode* 5, 23

36 *Histories* 1, 82

Nature agrees with law: no bald woman has ever been seen. You cannot say that the baldness is being concealed by a hairnet, for the comedies see through them. If anybody's hair is falling out, there must be an illness, and with the smallest amount of attention it will be restored to its former place. It is not easy to speak of men worthy of the name who have not arrived at this state. It seems to be a natural condition, even if it does not happen to all. Like farmers, who benefit from the growth of healthy plants and take care of them when the plants lack the strength to be healthy by supporting them with sticks and stakes, similarly, there are those like me in the best of condition, *viz.* bald, and there are those whose condition has to be rectified by the razor, and nature has to be given a helping hand.

[15] It is worth recalling the Lacedaemonians tending their hair before the battle of Thermopylae, which Dio calls great, because the Lacedaemonians combed their hair and none of them survived in the face of this unfortunate omen. I mention this, not to recall what I said earlier, that the hair on the living is dead but that it grows on dead bodies. This is known generally to Egyptian embalmers: those who die with a shaven skin grow new hair and beards that can be quite. Dio invokes these whose death among the Greeks was the finest. But those who won the finest and greatest victories and who punished the barbarian on behalf of the Lacedaemonians and the rest of Greece are conveniently forgotten by Dio. I mean the Macedonians and the Greeks in Alexander's army, among whom there were not only Lacedaemonians. Before the battle of Arbela,³⁷ which could rightly be described as great, having learned by experience that hair is a hindrance to the soldiers, collectively had themselves shorn and entered the battle for all with God, fortune and virtue. For this reason hair fell into disrepute, according to Ptolemy son of Lagus, who was present at the battle and understood and who, being king when he wrote his history, was not lying.³⁸

[16] There is a story about a Macedonian, with a lot of hair above and below his head, attacking the enemy. The latter remained composed, though in difficulty, threw his shield and spear away on the grounds that that they were of no use against the Macedonian. He rushed into the fray, managed to avoid his weapons and seized him by the beard and hair and rendered him *hors de combat*, dragging him off by the hair like a fish. He struck the prostrate Macedonian with his sword and killed him. Another Persian saw this, and then more of them,

37 Erbil, the site of the Battle of Gaugemela in 331 BC, when Alexander defeated Darius III.

38 Fragments of this text have been published by F. Jacoby *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* II §B (1926) nos. 106-261. The history was used by the 1st cent. AD historian Arrian for his *Anabasis*.

and quickly threw their shields away and seized the enemy by the hair and pursued them across the plain, as if the order had gone through the Persian army that the Macedonians could be caught by the hair. It appeared that only those of Alexander's army that were bald stood their ground. Meanwhile, the king was somewhat at a loss: he had to succumb to those without weapons when in fact he was the superior of those with weapons. To withdraw to Cilicia in disgrace or to become a laughing stock among the Greeks ? Overcome by a hair war ! But since it was fate that the Achaemenids should yield their sovereignty to the sons of Heracles, he quickly formed a clever plan and ordered the trumpets to be sounded and was able to lead his army as far away as possible to a safe place and summon barbers. These were paid by the king to shear all the Macedonians. Darius and the Persians gave up all hope: there being no longer any point of seizure, they were confronted by a much better armed opposition.

[17] So hair does not make people fearful or show them to be so, unless of course they are trying to frighten children. We see soldiers cover their heads when it is necessary to inspire fear into the enemy. The helmet, according to name and material³⁹ is no more than a bronze head. There are helmets adorned with the hair of horses, and those whose task it is to protect the head know about the form of them. Those who do not know have to be taught that at the back hair has to be arranged in courses between the protective lining and the helmet. Not even Hephaestus could attach hair to the concave surface. The object that most closely resembles a helmet is a bald head, and is the most terrifying item of all the soldier's equipment. Achilles himself said that the Trojans were emboldened, not because they did not see the rising mane of hair. How does he put it ?

They do not see the front of my helmet radiating its brilliance from closeup⁴⁰

The brilliance and smoothness is fear-inspiring baldness. Did Achilles have hair ? Yes, according to Dio. For he was young and easily provoked to anger. He was not mature of soul or body. It is normal in a youth for hair and temper to rise. But, as in the case of Achilles, one does not praise anger of the soul any more than one praises hair as a corporeal marvel. But one has to concede that the son of Thetis was a wonderful example of virtue. My opinion of Achilles is

³⁹ The Greek words κράνος and κρανίον are cognate forms and the wordplay of the Greek is lost in English.

⁴⁰ *Il.* 16, 70ff.

that, if he had survived, he would have been a bald philosopher. As a young man he dabbled in medicine and music and, as far as his hair is concerned, he had no difficulty sacrificing the blessed hair to sacred grave mounds.⁴¹ Aristoxenus⁴² says the same about Socrates that he was naturally quick to anger and, when overcome by passion, became quite shameless. But Socrates was not yet bald, at the age of twenty-five, when Parmenides and Zeno came to Athens, according to Plato, to attend the Panathenaia.⁴³ But if someone spoke of him later as a difficult man or one with hair, I think that the speaker would be ridiculed by those who had known Socrates. For he was the baldest and mildest of philosophy teachers. So do not condemn the hero's hair. When he spoke about it, he was a boy, not long out of adolescence. I suppose you have no evidence to prove your claim about Achilles, that he would still have had his hair in old age. On the subject of whether he would still have had his hair, I have a lot of evidence that his hair would not have remained: his father, grandfather (I have seen images) and the kinship with the gods. What has been said once is sufficient about the form of the gods.

[18] So why do you hold on to this verse, as if it were treasure trove: '*... she grasped the fair hair of the Peleid*'?⁴⁴ Why do you cite only part of and not the entire line? Allow me to do it for you: '*She came up behind him and grasped the fair hair of the Peleid.*' Very clever, Dio. You have left out words that actually say the opposite of what you mean. I prophesy that even at this age Achilles was partly bald. The goddess came behind him and took him by the hair. Anyone might take me or Socrates or the oldest Greek from behind, for that it is where the visible remnants of perishable nature are to be found. It is not a benefit conferred by human or demon, but a divine gift that one should be parted completely from the 'human community'. So, *she stood behind and grasped the Peleid by the hair*, because there was no hair in front to grasp.

[19] On the whole, there is not a single good thing about hair in Dio's speech. If there were one, Dio would have found it. And however small it was, Dio would have exaggerated it. He goes all the way back to the Lacedaemonians, but they are not relevant here, at least that is

41 *Il.* 23, 141ff.

42 A pupil of Socrates. There is, as far I can tell, no extant written confirmation of this statement.

43 *Parmenides* 127B

44 *Il.* 1, 197

what some might say. Seizing on Homer, like some sacred anchor, he makes him his companion to the end of his text. His speech is of course rhetorical but quite unjust: he quotes half a line, as if it were a law. Elsewhere he uses part of lines which are not in the poem. He tells falsehoods against Hector or rather falsifies what Homer says about Hector, perhaps he falsifies both Homer and Hector. The tradition is that all that is written about the tonsure is very similar to what is written about wise men. The historian has written accurately about heroes, because I think he who wrote these things about Hector was also a soldier who fought against the Trojans. If you are in Troy, every Trojan can show you the Hector monument, and you can still see the statue. Visitors will remark on how the statue has been executed to show Hector in the act of scorning his brother's artificial beauty, his hair.⁴⁵ This is what Dio has written as words attributed to Homer about Hector: '*his dark hair is dragged around*'. Please show me this passage in the Homeric songs.⁴⁶ I do not believe that even Ion the rhapsodist would find it. How would Homer have given him hair when he introduces Paris by comparing him with a dandy whom he insults? It is as if Phileas had accused Andocides of sacrilege after having himself purloined the Gorgoneion of the goddess from the Acropolis.⁴⁷ His comments about the hero can stand.

[20] If Menelaus' head was fair, this does not mean that he had hair, as far as can be gathered from this speech. It is not praise for hair as such, but a description of what was there. For the name that Homer gives to it does not count as praise. But the mention of hair seems to Dio to count as praise, a somewhat extravagant view. He has thus boldly approached the matter by adding to the poem things that are not there and depriving it of things that are there. The intention is to produce a convincing argument that hair becomes men more than women. And in the divine world, he goes on to say: *Homer's praise of women is different, where Hera is cow-eyed and Thetis is silver-footed and Zeus' hair is singled out for special praise.* Perhaps his copy of the text was missing descriptions such as: *for lord Apollo, the fine-haired son of Leto*⁴⁸ and
45 *Il.* 3, 55

⁴⁶ *Il.* 22, 401ff. It is not easy to see why Synesius tells such an obvious untruth, unless his copy of Homer was defective. The verb used in Dio's 'quotation' is quite different from that used in the 'vulgate' Homer texts.

⁴⁷ Phileas (or Philostourgos) was accused by various orators, including Andocides, of stealing this silver amulet towards the end of the 5th cent. BC. Andocides may be singled out because he had formerly been implicated in the infamous destruction of the Herms and profanation of the Mysteries in 415 BC just before the Sicilian campaign, which proved to be a disaster.

⁴⁸ *Il.* 1, 36

put him on the lap of the fine-haired Athena. ⁴⁹On the subject of the conniving Hera, Dio says that she lulled Zeus to sleep by beautifying herself, for which of course she was going to need her make-up box that contained all manner of powerful things to enable her to steal the greatest possession of man, his mind. She rubbed ointments on herself and *combed her hair and braided her beautiful ambrosial red hair,*⁵⁰ a passage worthy of many encomia, indeed worth since the speech about Zeus. There are many things, one might say, that Dio has neglected, which he knows perfectly well and has pretended not to know. I know this and have said nothing false in my argument. I would not allow any of those who live in heaven to have hair, and that applies to both men or women. Among the stars Jupiter is by no means more precise than Venus in its spherical appearance. Thus the speech is also about Zeus, whom Dio has inserted as the crowning touch to his speech. Homer's theology is mostly popular opinion, but not much truth. But there is one point that conforms to popular belief: the hair on the Zeus's head violently shaking and moving heaven, on which the people and sculptors agree. So, apart from Homer and the Spartans, there is not much left in Dio's speech. But even when they are included, as we have said, he says nothing about the nature of hair, either of his own creation or borrowed from another source. He does not say what it is and offers no teaching about what sort of thing it is. He does not show what advantage it is to those who have it and what disadvantage it is to those who do not have it. My speech, which has examined the fundamental issues, has found that baldness is divine, related to the divine and the goal of nature and is quite simply the temple in which we think of God. I have gone through one by one the many thousands of advantages for the body and soul and explained why they are. There is nothing about baldness that does not have a clear reason. Hair, on the other hand, exhibits all that is contrary to this: unreason, bestiality and all that is opposed to the divine, such as what grows on animals and around fruits, the playthings of nature, the pustules of incomplete nature.

[21] I think it is appropriate to arrange men celebrated in the two speeches according to type and lifestyle. Surely it is the ranks of the hair-lovers that produce adulterers. Homer made Paris, with his shining horn-shaped hair,⁵¹ a seducer of women, as if beautified hair were the

49 Il. 6, 273

50 Il. 14, 175ff.

51 Il. 11, 385

instrument to destroy women. Paris was an adulterer, the chief adulterer, who is worthy of reproach. This type is the most heinous and, within the walls of a city among fellow citizens, the most hostile. We risk our lives by going to war so that our wives and daughters may not be violated, and a dandy comes along and seizes them and takes them wherever he wants, if not out of the country then into some dark secluded corner. If a woman is taken prisoner in war, her husband can still feel affection for her, but in the matter of adultery, the first thing the adulterer does is to rob the partner of his affection so that the husband loses not only his wife but also her affection. It is right that the laws equip executioners with arms and farmers plant Attic radishes that can be used to punish adulterers when they are apprehended. This is one type that has broken so many homes, and even wrecked cities. Two continents went to war with each other and the Greeks went up against the might of Priam, and the pretext for this was adultery. But there is another type that is even worse: the type that made Alexander infamous,⁵² the Cleisthenes⁵³ and Timarchus type and all those ruin the bloom of youth for money, and if not for money, then for something else. And if not for that, then for abominable pleasure. In a word, all effeminate creatures take great care of their hair. Those who exhibit themselves in houses of ill repute think that they will attract clients by behaving like women. The one who is depraved in secret, even if he abjures this publicly and shows no sign of participating in the revels of Cotys,⁵⁴ would nevertheless reveal himself for what he is by the attention he devotes to his hair, applying oil to it and and arranging it in curls. Everyone can tell that this man participates in the orgies of the Chian goddess and the ithyphallic revels. Pherecydes⁵⁵ wrapped himself in his cloak and said, pointing with his finger to his illness: "It is clear from my skin". Similarly we recognize a young man given to unnatural pleasures by his hair.

[22] If the proverb is wise, how is it not to be wise ? As Aristotle says,⁵⁶ proverbs are the residue of ancient philosophy that has perished over the generations, but preserved in abbreviated and pithy form ? The following is a proverb, a saying with the dignity of the philosophy from which it derives in respect of antiquity so that it should be considered

52 The object Lucian's scorn in *Alexander the False Prophet*

53 Attacked by Aristophanes in the *Acharnians* (117), *Clouds* (355) and *Thesmophoriazousae* (574ff)

54 Thracian goddess worshipped with orgiastic rites

55 FitzGerald has no note at all and Krabinger has no useful note on this person.

56 *Metaphysics* 1074B

carefully. For the ancients had a better nose for the truth than the current generation. What is this and what does it mean ? “There is no long-haired person who does not . . .”. and the final part you can add yourself, provided it suits the rhythm. I will not say that terrible name and thing. Yes, that is a good ending, so finish it off. What do you think ? Heavens, the truth ! An oracular utterance, to be sure. Yes, it is clear. But how many people have used it and still use it and are going to use it ! The immortal property of proverbs is the continuing use of them by people who are reminded of things they see. For, when we see things happening, we constantly describe them in proverbs, which then becomes a way of understanding them.

[23] Be that as it may, Dio has produced an admirable speech about hair. But one hardly needs Plato to refute him when the orator makes it quite clear that oratory is a cosmetic exercise. Do you think that hair-dyers can show that hair is more attractive when a Greek praises it in public ? I think that the emasculated servants of Cybele will be grateful for the speech and anyone who covets his neighbour's wife will be grateful to Dio for having bathed the head of each one, as it were, in this speech, like some fragrant perfume. That which is honoured in public is enviable, especially when the orator is celebrated. But this orator may increase the number of reprobates in the city. But the bald, with what types does he compare them ? What sort of men have we praised over adulterers ? For example, in the precincts of the gods priests and prophets and temple servants; in the schools teachers and pedagogues; in the military, other things being equal, generals and officers; and, in particular, the intellectuals who are valued by the people. I think that the singer left by Agamemnon to entertain Clytemnestra was one of our type.⁵⁷ He would never have trusted a woman from a questionable house with a long-haired person. Painters provide substantial evidence for the speech when they are not simply copying something but when they try to find a way to express a form that is based on actual model. Then if they are commissioned to portray an adulterer or lecher, and their job is done if they make him long-haired. But if you want a portrait of a philosopher or temple servant, the the subject will be bald. It is the image on the coin !

[24] I have donated to philosophers and sages of all types an oration in which the gods are revered and men are well counselled. Even if, after publication, it enjoys good reviews, to such an extent that the long-haired who have been shamed get themselves a decent haircut and those who do not need a haircut feel flattered, no thanks are due to me for this. But enough of

⁵⁷ *Od.* 3, 267

the subject, on which even the worst orator, alongside the best, is apparently able to speak. If my speech is not convincing, someone might accuse me of being unable with my material to counter the sheer graceful style of Dio. I can only hope that many will take up, read and benefit from this speech.