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Cassius Dio's Livia and the Conspiracy of Cinna Magnus

Eric Adler

THE CONSPIRACY of Cn. Cornelius Cinna Magnus, which took place at some point during the age of Augustus, has vexed scholars for generations.¹ And for good reason. We possess only two accounts of this unsuccessful plot—one by Seneca (*Clem.* 1.9) and another by Cassius Dio (55.14–22).² These descriptions, as we shall see, prove both mutually contradictory and, in places, internally inconsistent. Accordingly, we cannot be certain about crucial details surrounding the conspiracy: its date, location, participants, and even its historicity. As a result, scholars examining the Cinna plot have understandably tended to focus their attention on these fundamental issues; many, furthermore, have attempted to home in on Seneca's and Dio's likely sources.

Lost in this conversation on the conspiracy of Cinna, however, is Dio's view of Livia. According to both Seneca and Dio, after the plot's detection, Livia successfully counseled Augustus to grant Cinna a pardon. Although this amounts to

¹ For reasons that will become clear, we can be virtually certain that the leader of the plot was Cn. Cinna (*PIR*² C 1339), as Cassius Dio contends (55.14.1), not his half-brother (or father) L. Cinna, as Seneca has it (*Clem.* 1.9.2). Pace R. A. Bauman, *The Crimen Maiestatis in the Roman Republic and the Augustan Principate* (Johannesburg 1967) 194–197, who argues in favor of L. Cinna, but appears later to have changed his mind: R. A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London/New York 1994) 126.

² The book numbers and text of Dio used are from U. P. Boissevain (ed.), *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani historiarum Romanorum quae supersunt I–V* (Berlin 1895–1931). All translations are my own.

only a minor detail in Seneca's version of the conspiracy (1.9.6), Dio greatly expands Livia's part. In fact, Dio offers Livia an extended dialogue with her husband on the matter—a dialogue that culminates in a long disquisition on the practical value of clemency to a monarch (55.16.2–21.4). Though some have remarked on the unusually prominent role Dio accords to an Imperial woman,³ no one has investigated the ways in which he uses the episode to characterize Livia. As a result, scholars have tended to portray Livia's message in Dio's dialogue as corresponding unproblematically to the views of the historian.⁴ To some, in fact, Dio's Livia oration itself testifies to the existence of a pro-Livia historiographical tradition.⁵

This article addresses this important topic. Through an examination of Dio's characterization of Livia in response to the conspiracy of Cinna, it contends that Livia's speech, although proffering ideas Dio advances elsewhere in his history, subtly undercuts Livia's message in numerous ways; and further, that Dio portrays her as self-serving and manipulative in a manner consistent with his depiction of her throughout his history. One detects, in fact, correspondence between the oration of Livia and that of Boudica, the only other female whom Dio

³ E.g. H. R. W. Smith, *Problems Historical and Numismatic in the Reign of Augustus* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1951) 186; M. A. Giua, "Clemenza del sovrano e monarchia illuminata in Cassio Dione 55, 14–22," *Athenaeum* 59 (1981) 317–337, at 318–319; P. M. Swan, *The Augustan Succession: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 55–56* (Oxford/New York 2004) 148.

⁴ E.g. A. V. van Stekelenburg, *De Redevoeringen bij Cassius Dio* (Leiden 1971) 134; B. Manuwald, *Cassius Dio und Augustus: Philologische Untersuchungen zu den Büchern 45–56* (Wiesbaden 1979) 126–127; Giua, *Athenaeum* 59 (1981) 320–326; Swan, *Augustan Succession* 148–149.

⁵ E.g. E. Badian, "Notes on Some Documents from Aphrodisias Concerning Octavian," *GRBS* 25 (1984) 157–170, at 169; N. Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," *PCPS* 32 (1986) 78–105, at 93; Bauman, *Women and Politics* 127; J. Burns, *Great Women of Imperial Rome: Mothers and Wives of the Caesars* (London/New York 2007) 14–15.

grants a set speech in his history (62.3–6).⁶ In these two addresses, Dio appears to demonstrate some regard for influential women; all the same, he calls their claims into question. This suggests that Dio had a particular manner of characterizing women in power—one that was partly indebted to valorizing strong females, but simultaneously undermining them.

Seneca and Dio on the Conspiracy

A summary of Seneca's and Dio's narratives of the conspiracy will provide the requisite historical background. In *De clementia*, Seneca offers the Cinna conspiracy as a familial example of leniency for the young Nero.⁷ He claims that Augustus detected this plot *cum annum quadragensimum transisset et in Gallia moraretur* ("when he had passed his fortieth year and was delaying in Gaul," 1.9.2).⁸ This suggests 16–13 B.C. as the years to which Seneca's reference points, the only time in which Augustus stayed in Gaul during his forties.⁹ Seneca identifies the chief conspirator as L. Cinna, a grandson of Pompey the Great (1.9.2).¹⁰ In this, the vast majority of scholars believe that Seneca was incorrect. Given the chronological clues he offers, he has likely mistaken L. Cornelius Cinna for Cn. Cornelius Cinna Magnus, his son, or, less likely, his half-brother.¹¹ Additionally, Seneca's reference to

⁶ As it survives from antiquity, of course. For a list of Dio's set speeches see E. Schwartz, "Cassius (40)," *RE* 3 (1899) 1718–1719, supplemented by F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964) 78 n.1.

⁷ Seneca (1.9.1) specifically labels it as an example from Nero's family.

⁸ The text used is P. Faider (ed.), *Sénèque De la clémence I* (Ghent 1928).

⁹ On the dating see M. Adler, "Die Verschwörung des Cn. Cornelius Cinna bei Seneca und Cassius Dio," *ŽŮstG* 60 (1909) 193–208, at 196; P. Faider, C. Favez, and P. van de Woestijne, *Sénèque De la clémence II* (Bruges 1950) 72–73. Dio 54.19.1 dates Augustus' trip to Gaul to 16 B.C.

¹⁰ *PIR*² C 1338. Cf. *Ben.* 4.30.2, in which Seneca also mentions Cinna.

¹¹ See e.g. E. Hohl, "Ein Stafgericht Oktavians und ein Gnadenakt des Augustus," *WŮrzŷbb* 3 (1948) 107–116, at 111; J. Béranger, "De Sénèque à Corneille: Lueurs sur Cinna," in *Hommages à Max Nidermann* (Brussels 1956) 52–70, at 53; G. V. Sumner, "The Lex Annalis under Caesar (*Continued*),"

Cinna as a young man (*adulescentem*, 1.9.3) fits with Cn. Cinna's post-46 B.C. birth.¹²

As Seneca relates, Augustus, having been informed of the plot, prepared to meet with a council of friends to determine his response. Troubled by the matter, he spent a restless night worrying, concerned that so many people pined for his death (1.9.3–5). While Augustus moaned about the affair, Livia interrupted him and spoke as follows (1.9.6):

“admittis,” inquit, “muliebrem consilium? fac, quod medici solent, qui, ubi usitata remedia non procedunt, temptant contraria. severitate nihil adhuc profecisti; Salvidienum Lepidus secutus est, Lepidum Murena, Murenam Caepio, Caepionem Egnatius, ut alios taceam, quos tantum ausos pudet. nunc tempta, quomodo tibi cedat clementia; ignosce L. Cinnae. deprensus est; iam nocere tibi non potest, prodesse famae tuae potest.”

“Do you,” she said, “allow a woman’s counsel? Do what physicians do: When the customary remedies are of no use, they try the opposite. Up to now you have made no progress through severity: Lepidus followed Salvidienus, Murena followed Lepidus, Caepio followed Murena, Egnatius followed Caepio—and this is to pass over the others, whose daring causes such shame. Now test how clemency works for you; pardon Lucius Cinna. He has been caught; he cannot harm you now, but he *can* advance your reputation.¹³

Delighted by his wife’s advice, Augustus cancelled his advisory colloquy, preferring to address Cinna alone—in a meeting, Seneca informs us, that lasted more than two hours (1.9.7, 11).

Phoenix 25 (1971) 357–371, at 368 n.57; D. C. A. Shotter, “Cn. Cornelius Cinna Magnus and the Adoption of Tiberius,” *Latomus* 33 (1974) 306–313, at 307; M. T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* (Oxford 1976) 411 n.2; P. Grimal, “La conjuration de Cinna, mythe ou realite?” in J.-M. Pailler (ed.), *Mélanges offerts à Monsieur Labrousse* (Toulouse 1986) 50.

¹² See Hohl, *WurzJbb* (1948) 116; Sumner, *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 368–359 n. 57; Grimal, in *Mélanges* 52–53; A. Barrett, *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome* (New Haven 2002) 318–319.

¹³ On Seneca’s view of Livia, see G. Vidén, *Women in Roman Literature: Attitudes of Authors under the Early Empire* (Göteborg 1993) 132–134; Barrett, *Livia* 234–235.

There follows a dialogue between Augustus and the captured plotter, in which the emperor berates Cinna at length, demonstrating the foolishness of his conspiracy. At its conclusion, Augustus pardons Cinna, and even grants him a consulship. Cinna, we are told, became a loyal friend to Augustus, who ultimately was Cinna's sole heir. Further, Seneca claims that, after he demonstrated leniency toward Cinna, no one ever plotted against Augustus again (1.9.8–12).

Although similar in spirit, Dio's presentation of events differs greatly from Seneca's. First, in regard to the conspiracy and its detection, Dio offers numerous details inconsistent with Seneca's version. Dio, for instance, labels Cn. Cinna—a son of Pompey the Great's daughter—the head conspirator, places the attack in A.D. 4, and implies that Augustus learned about it in Rome (55.14.1). Some have suggested that Dio's dating was the result of his interpretation of Seneca's vague language on the conspiracy's chronology; according to this view, Dio mistakenly placed the conspiracy in A.D. 4 because Cn. Cinna was consul during the following year.¹⁴ This conjecture has the added bonus of rendering more reasonable Seneca's claim—which Dio repeats (55.22.2)—that the Cinna conspiracy amounted to the last such plot contemplated during the age of Augustus.

Unfortunately, however, it does not clear up other incongruities. Dio himself, for example, offers evidence of a revolution against Augustus inaugurated by P. Rufus in A.D. 6 (55.27.1–3).¹⁵ In addition, Augustus' awarding the consulship a year after the conspiracy may seem an unrealistic touch: perhaps Cinna would have required more time to prove his new-

¹⁴ E.g. R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 414 n.1; Faider, Favez, van de Woestijne, *Sénèque* 72–73; W. Speyer, "Zur Verschwörung des Cn. Cornelius Cinna," *RhM* 99 (1956) 277–284, at 278–279; Griffin, *Seneca* 411. Shotter, *Latomus* 33 (1974) 308, suggests this as a possibility, but ultimately prefers Dio's date.

¹⁵ The proximity of these competing claims in Dio's narrative (55.22.2 vs. 55.27.1–3) suggests that Dio did not have an opportunity to revise this portion of his history thoroughly.

found fidelity to the emperor. Dio's date for the plot, as well as Augustus' location during its detection, furthermore, do not fit Seneca's version of events. Although in A.D. 4 Augustus might have reasonably been labeled a *senex*,¹⁶ Cn. Cornelius Cinna was by no means a youth.¹⁷

For these and other reasons, scholars have long attempted to solidify the specifics surrounding the plot. In part because of the absence of this conspiracy in the works of Suetonius, Velleius Paterculus, and Tacitus, some have deemed it apocryphal.¹⁸ Others, however, contend that the plot was historical.¹⁹ Seneca, after all, would have been unlikely to mention such a story to Nero if it had not been based—at least tenuously—on reality.²⁰ Much discussion has also surrounded Seneca's possible source(s) for the conspiracy,²¹ as well as the likelihood of Dio's direct or indirect use of Seneca.²² Given our incomplete

¹⁶ Cf. Sen. *Clem.* 1.11.1.

¹⁷ On this point see R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1986) 266.

¹⁸ E.g. K. Fitzler and O. Seeck, "Iulius (Augustus)," *RE* 10 (1918) 370–371; Hohl, *WürzJbb* 3 (1948) 110–116; van Stekelenburg, *De Redevoeringen* 133–134; Syme, *Augustan Aristocracy* 266.

¹⁹ E.g. Adler, *ZÖstG* 60 (1909) 193; Smith, *Problems* 185; Speyer, *RhM* 99 (1956) 277–284; Bauman, *Crimen Maiestatis* 195; Grimal, in *Mélanges* 49; M. B. Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor 2006) 66.

²⁰ See Béranger, in *Hommages* 59; Vidén, *Women in Roman Literature* 133.

²¹ Some have posited that Seneca got his information from his father's history: e.g. Adler, *ZÖstG* 60 (1909) 195; E. Albertini, *La composition dans les ouvrages philosophiques de Sénèque* (Paris 1923) 229; Grimal, in *Mélanges* 54–55. Smith, *Problems* 192–193, suggests that Agrippina the Younger was the source.

²² Some scholars suppose that Dio used Seneca directly: e.g. Smith, *Problems* 189; Speyer, *RhM* 99 (1956) 277–280; Swan, *Augustan Succession* 147–148; Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty* 297 n.80. Adler, *ZÖstG* 60 (1909) 193–208, inaugurated the idea that Dio relied on an intermediary rhetorical source—hence the similarities in details between Seneca's and Dio's accounts, but the difference in dating. This view has proved influential: cf. van Stekelenburg, *De Redevoeringen* 133–135; Manuwald, *Cassius Dio* 125. Faider, Favez, van de Woestijne, *Sénèque* 70, reasonably conclude that we cannot prove this, just as we cannot prove Seneca's purported reliance on his

and incongruous descriptions of the plot, it appears improbable that scholars will ever reach a consensus.

Dio's Livia

We may, however, be able to determine important information about Cassius Dio and his thought from the ways in which his account transforms the conspiracy story found in Seneca.²³ For Dio does not offer a colloquy between Augustus and Cinna. Rather, he significantly enlarges Livia's oration, making her, and not Augustus, appear like a rhetorician and philosopher of clemency. This may seem an unusual step for Dio, who elsewhere in his history criticizes women for their supposed congenital lack of judgment and rationality (12.49.4).²⁴ The oration allows us an opportunity to determine the ways in which Dio portrayed Livia, and, more expansively, strong female figures.

Before turning to the Livia-Augustus dialogue, however, we must examine Dio's impression of Livia elsewhere in his history. Unfortunately, the imperfect preservation of Dio's text for the age of Augustus and the Julio-Claudian dynasty renders our views on this topic less than fully assured.²⁵ Even so, we possess a sufficient number of references to Livia to suggest some conclusions.

All in all, as Anthony Barrett justly characterized it, Dio's impression of Livia appears to be a "mixed bag."²⁶ Throughout

father's history (see n.21 above).

²³ This remains true even if Dio largely copied his account from a now lost source. As we shall see, the correspondence between many ideas in Livia's speech and Dio's sentiments in his history makes this unlikely. Still, if Dio copied another source, his decision to keep the story in the same framework as this earlier writer was nevertheless conscious. As a result, Dio remains responsible for his version of the conspiracy.

²⁴ Cf. 62.2.2, in which Dio contends that Boudica possessed *μεῖζον ἢ κατὰ γυναιῖκα φρόνημα* ("greater intelligence than expected of a woman").

²⁵ For a discussion of the state of Dio's text as it has survived see Millar, *A Study* 1–4.

²⁶ Barrett, *Livia* 238.

his discussions of the relevant periods, one can detect his irritation with Livia's power. Dio, as seems typical of senatorial historians, appears attuned to the matter: in a number of circumstances he mentions Livia's weighty influence on affairs.²⁷ His consternation at Livia's authority seems most pronounced, however, in an expatiation on the topic found in a discussion of Tiberius' first year as emperor (57.12.1–6). For instance, Dio informs us (3–4):

πλήν τε ὅτι οὔτε ἐς τὸ συνέδριον οὔτε ἐς τὰ στρατόπεδα οὔτε ἐς τὰς ἐκκλησίας ἐτόλμησέ ποτε ἐσελθεῖν, τά γε ἄλλα πάντα ὡς καὶ αὐταρχοῦσα διοικεῖν ἐπεχείρει. ἐπὶ τε γὰρ τοῦ Αὐγούστου μέγιστον ἠδυνήθη καὶ τὸν Τιβέριον αὐτῇ αὐτοκράτορα πεποιημένα ἔλεγε, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐχ ὅσον ἐξ ἴσου οἱ ἄρχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρεσβεύειν αὐτοῦ ἠθέλεν. ὅθεν ἄλλα τε ἔξω τοῦ νενομισμένου ἐσεφέρετο, καὶ πολλοὶ μὲν μητέρα αὐτὴν τῆς πατρίδος πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ γονέα προσαγορεύεσθαι γνώμην ἔδωκαν. ἄλλοι καὶ τὸν Τιβέριον ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἐπικαλεῖσθαι ἐσηγήσαντο, ὅπως ὥσπερ οἱ Ἕλληνες πατρώθεν, οὕτω καὶ ἐκεῖνος μητρόθεν ὀνομάζεται.

Save for the fact that she never dared to go to the Senate house, the camps, or the assemblies, she endeavored to manage all other affairs like a sole ruler. For in the time of Augustus, she was extremely powerful, and she said that she herself had made Tiberius the emperor, and on account of this she did not wish to rule on equal footing, but to take precedence over him. Accordingly, various unprecedented measures were introduced, and many ventured the opinion that she should be addressed as the Mother of the Fatherland, and many that she should be called its Parent. And other people put forth the notion that Tiberius should be named for her, so as to be called by his mother's name, in the way that the Greeks are called by their fathers'.

This passage clearly presents a negative appraisal of Livia's influence. Additionally, it casts Tiberius as emasculated by his mother in a manner reminiscent of an insult Dio's Boudica offers in regard to the supposedly "female" Nero (62.6.3): ὄνομα μὲν <γὰρ> ἀνδρὸς ἔχει, ἔργω δὲ γυνή ἐστι· σημεῖον δέ,

²⁷ E.g. 56.47.1; 57.3.3, 12.1–6, 16.2; 58.2.5.

ἄδει καὶ κιθαρίζει καὶ καλλωπίζεται (“for though he has the name of a man, he is in fact a woman, as one can tell from his singing, his lyre playing, and his make-up”). In both instances, Dio suggests that powerful women can feminize emperors.

Despite these negative appraisals, Dio in places seems less captious about Livia, and is even inclined to stress her positive characteristics. He notes, for instance, her fidelity to her deceased husband (56.42.4). Although he mentions her potential involvement in various intrigues, he tends to appear non-committal about her role.²⁸ Importantly, he also makes clear that Livia saved the lives of many senators (58.3.3–4), and thus she helped practice the clemency she advocated in the address Dio offered her. His assessment of Livia, then, seems decidedly mixed.

The Dialogue in Dio

With this in mind, we can turn to Dio’s Livia oration, as well as the dialogue leading up to it. In Dio’s account, this dialogue between Augustus and Livia takes place *in cubiculo*. It commences with Augustus unable to sleep, thanks to his fretting over how he should treat the captured Cn. Cinna (55.14.1–2). Dio portrays Augustus as lamenting the fate of a monarch: he is, Augustus tells his wife, unable to live in peace because he is the object of so many plots (2–3).²⁹ Livia responds to these concerns with a bit of philosophizing on human nature (4–5):

ἀκούσασα οὖν τούτων ἡ Λιουία “τὸ μὲν ἐπιβουλεύεσθαί σε” ἔφη
 “οὔτε θαυμαστὸν οὔτε ἕξω τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου τρόπου ἐστί· καὶ γὰρ
 πράσσεις πολλὰ ἅτε τηλικαύτην ἀρχὴν ἔχων, καὶ λυπεῖς, ὥσπερ

²⁸ E.g. 52.22.2; 53.33.4; 55.10.10; 56.30.1–2; 57.3.5–6, 18.6. Cf. 54.15.2–3.

²⁹ This detail fits poorly with Dio’s general impression of the age of Augustus as a period largely lacking in conspiracies. On this topic see van Stekelenburg, *De Redevoeringen* 133. For a discussion of inconsistencies in Dio’s treatment of Augustus see J. W. Rich, “Dio on Augustus,” in Averil Cameron (ed.), *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History* (Chapel Hill 1989) 87–110.

εἰκός, συχνούς. οὐ γάρ που καὶ πᾶσιν οἷόν τε τὸν ἄρχοντά τινων ἀρέσκειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπεχθάνεσθαι πολλοῖς καὶ τὸν πάνυ ὀρθῶς βασιλεύοντα ἀνάγκη. πολλῶ τε γὰρ πλείους τῶν δίκαιόν τι πραττόντων οἱ ἀδικεῖν ἐθέλοντές εἰσιν, ὧν ἀδύνατόν ἐστι τὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἀποπιμπλάναι· καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν ἀρετῆν τινα ἐχόντων οἱ μὲν καὶ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων, ὧν οὐ δύναται τυχεῖν, ἐπορέγονται, οἱ δὲ καὶ ἑτέρων ἐλαττωθέντες ἄχθονται, καὶ οὕτως ἀμφοτέρω τὸν κρατοῦντα αἰτιῶνται.”

And so Livia, having heard these words, said, “it is neither surprising nor opposed to human nature for you to be plotted against; for you accomplish many things, inasmuch as you possess an empire of such a stature, and, as is likely, you distress many people. Indeed, it is not possible for a monarch to please everyone, but it is necessary even for someone ruling altogether justly to become hateful to many. For those who wish to do wrong by far outnumber those who do right, and it is impossible to fulfill their desires; even among those possessing some goodness, some strive for many great things that they are unable to obtain, and some are vexed because they are inferior to others; and thus both groups lay the blame on the ruler.”

Here, as elsewhere in the dialogue, Livia comes across as a Thucydidean realist.³⁰ Like the great Athenian historian, Dio's Livia seems pessimistic about human behavior and motives. In some ways, this portrayal appears incongruous with Seneca's version of the conspiracy's aftermath, which aims at encouraging virtuous conduct in Nero.³¹ Throughout the dialogue, in fact, Dio's Livia remains focused on Augustus acting in a manner that is expedient, rather than one that is morally upright. Thus, for instance, she argues that the inevitability of plots against a monarch requires Augustus to keep close guard

³⁰ Cf. 53.9.3, in which Dio's Augustus presents a similarly downtrodden take on human behavior.

³¹ As Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty* 196–197 noted, Seneca expresses many pragmatic concerns in *Clem.*, and they even appear to dominate the work. All the same, Seneca also offers numerous moral sentiments, and such ideas, as we shall see, are missing from Dio's Livia address.

over his subjects (55.14.8, 15.3).³²

In response to Livia, Dio's Augustus continues to worry about his safety, this time in a manner reminiscent of Dio's famous debate between Agrippa (52.2–13) and Maecenas (14–40) on the comparative merits of democracy and monarchy. As a monarch, Augustus claims, he cannot trust even his friends, who may protect him from enemies, but may turn out to be enemies themselves (55.15.4–6). He continues (7):

τοῦτό τε οὖν καὶ τὸ τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς ἐπιβουλεύοντας ἀναγκάων εἶναι ἀμύνεσθαι πάνδεινόν ἐστιν. τὸ γὰρ τοι τιμωρεῖσθαι τε καὶ κολάζειν αἰεὶ τινὰς ἀναγκάζεσθαι μεγάλην ἀχθηδὸνα τοῖς γε ἀγαθοῖς ἀνδράσι φέρει.

And so both this and the need to ward off other conspirators are utterly terrible. For always to be under compulsion both to exact vengeance and to punish people entails great distress—to good men, at any rate.

Dio's Augustus portrays himself as a moral monarch—one who deems the inflicting of punishments on transgressors sorrowful. This may signal a nod to the notion, found elsewhere in the ancient literature on Augustus, of the emperor's turn from *severitas* to *clementia*.³³ But it tells us something of greater import to our investigation: Dio here characterizes Augustus as at least partly motivated by moral considerations. It is incorrect, then, to conclude that the dialogue only broadcasts Dio's Thucydidean take on human nature. Rather, Dio presents a contrast between the steadfastly pragmatic Livia and the more principled Augustus. On its own, this need not convince us that Dio

³² Swan, *The Augustan Succession* (2004) 151, notes a quotation in 55.14.8 from Thucydides' speech of Diodotus (3.46.6). According to Manuwald, *Cassius Dio* 124, the basic idea of Dio's dialogue stems from the Diodotus speech, esp. 3.45–46. For a more thorough assessment of the intellectual influences on the dialogue, see Giua, *Athenaeum* 59 (1981) 317–337. On Dio's debt to Thucydides, see below.

³³ On this see Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty* 29–75; cf. van Stekelenburg, *De Redevoeringen* 132, who contrasts the supposed popular and senatorial traditions on Augustus' clemency.

aimed to demonize Livia. Thucydides, after all, remained an important historical model for Dio, and his influence was not confined to the stylistic realm.³⁴ We should note, however, that the display of ethical concerns on the part of Dio's Augustus could cause readers to see Livia as Machiavellian.

Livia replies to Augustus' concerns with cunning pragmatism (55.16.1–2):

“ἀλλ’ ὀρθῶς γε λέγεις” ἀπεκρίνατο ἡ Λιουία, “καί σοι γνώμην δοῦναι ἔχω, ἂν γε καὶ προσδέξασθαι αὐτὴν ἐθελήσης, καὶ μὴ διαμέμψῃ ὅτι γυνὴ οὔσα τολμῶ σοι συμβουλευσαί τι οἶον οὐδ’ ἂν εἰς ἄλλος οὐδὲ τῶν πάντων φίλων παραινέσειεν, οὐχ ὅτι οὐκ ἴσασι αὐτό, ἀλλ’ ὅτι οὐ θαρσοῦσιν εἰπέιν.” “λέγ’” ἢ δ’ ὅς ὁ Αὔγουστος “ὅ τι δὴ ποτε τοῦτό ἐστιν.” ἢ οὖν Λιουία “φράσω” ἔφη “μηδὲν κατοκνήσασα, ἅτε καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου σοι ἔχουσα, καὶ σωζομένου μὲν σου καὶ αὐτὴ τὸ μέρος ἄρχουσα, δεινὸν δέ τι παθόντος, ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, συναπολουμένη.

“Indeed you speak correctly,” Livia answered, “and I have advice to offer you, if, at any rate, you wish to accept it, and do not rebuke me because I, a woman, dare to recommend to you something that nobody else—not even your best friends—would advise, not because they are ignorant of it, but because they do not dare say it.” “Say it,” said Augustus, “whatever it is.” And so

³⁴ See e.g. E. Litsch, *De Cassio Dione imitatore Thucydidis* (Freiburg 1893); E. Kyhnitzsch, *De contionibus, quas Cassius Dio historiae suae intexuit, cum Thucydideis comparatis* (Leipzig 1894); A. Piatkowski, “L’influence de l’historiographie tragique sur la narration de Dion Cassius,” *Actes XII^e Conférence Eirene* (Bucharest 1975) 263–270; B. Manuwald, *Cassius Dio* 282–284; W. Ameling, “Cassius Dio und Bithynien,” *EpigrAnat* 4 (1984) 123–138, at 130–131; G. J. D. Aalders, “Cassius Dio and the Greek World,” *Mnemosyne* 39 (1986) 288–304, at 293–294; M. Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio’s Roman History Books 49–52* (Atlanta 1988) 215–217; Rich, in *History as Text* 88; M.-L. Freyburger-Galland, *Aspects du vocabulaire politique et institutionnel de Dion Cassius* (Paris 1997) 18–19; P. M. Swan, “How Cassius Dio Composed his Augustan Books: Four Studies,” *ANRW* II 34.3 (1997) 2524–2557, at 2525. It should be noted, however, that Dio’s indebtedness to Thucydides seems most fully established among modern scholars in the realm of stylistics. The precise nature of Thucydides’ intellectual influence on Dio remains a subject for debate.

Livia said, “I shall say it without shrinking back, since I possess both good and bad things in equal measure with you, and if you are safe I myself take part in ruling, but if you suffer something awful (perish the thought!), I’ll die along with you.”

The passage commences with Livia’s recognition of her lower status as a woman—a sentiment also found in Seneca’s version (1.9.6). In Dio’s telling, however, she may come across as arch: elsewhere in his history, he stresses her great power, which perhaps renders her protestations *pro forma*. In fact, the intrinsic connection that Livia promotes between an emperor and his wife speaks to an elevated role for a consort as the monarch’s only trusted confidante.³⁵

A contrast between this portion of the dialogue and the opening of Agrippa’s brief in favor of democracy can also point up Dio’s characterization of Augustus’ wife. Unlike Livia, Dio’s Agrippa distinguishes between the benefits monarchy bestows on a ruler’s friends and the miseries for the monarch himself (52.2.1–2). Agrippa contends that he would recommend monarchy if he were unconcerned with Octavian’s well-being (2.2, 10.1–2). Octavian’s loyal friend, then, favors a course of action that will lead to Octavian’s contentment, despite its drawbacks for Agrippa himself. Livia, however, conflates the fate of her husband with her own, and nowhere stresses the importance of Augustus’ happiness.

This passage may also highlight her manipulative qualities. Dio’s Livia articulates her rationale for aiding Augustus strictly on the basis of self-interest. To some extent, this seems reasonable: Dio’s Augustus, after all, has just informed his wife that he is incapable of trusting anyone. Even so, Livia’s notion—that she will give her husband the best advice because a successful plot would mean both their deaths—appears Machiavellian. She does not appeal to her devotion to Augustus, or even to a woman’s proper duty to her husband. Rather, Dio’s Livia, as always, focuses exclusively on expediency. The sentiment Dio

³⁵ Cf. Swan, *The Augustan Succession* 151–152.

has her pronounce, furthermore, is not strictly true. If a conspiracy against the emperor aimed to put Tiberius in power, Livia would be unlikely to suffer her husband's fate. Dio himself, as we shall see, even intimates that Livia herself killed Augustus to advance her son's fortunes.

At this point in her response, Livia launches into the heart of her appeal. Since men are naturally inclined to err and the punishment of conspirators does not improve a monarch's safety, she argues, we should change our course and spare some plotters (55.16.3–4).³⁶ A ruler's subjects, she suggests, love a forgiving monarch; punishment, however, breeds resentment and further plots, even from those who have nothing to fear (6). In order to make her case she employs an analogy with physicians (17.1)—an analogy that also appears in Seneca's version (1.9.6). This obviously suggests that Dio, if he did not base his account on *De clementia* directly, at least made use of a source based on Seneca.³⁷

Continuing on with the previous line of argument, Dio's Livia contends that rebuke and punishment engender wrath in subjects, whereas forgiveness encourages mildness (55.17.3). Already one senses a discordant note. Previously she harped on man's irremediable inclination to commit evil acts. Yet she now avers that a course of leniency on the part of a monarch will lead to his subjects' good behavior.³⁸ These incompatible arguments could signal a tension between Dio's regard for presenting moral lessons to his readership and his esteem for

³⁶ This suggests that Dio was aware of a historiographical tradition of Octavian as cruel, though Dio himself largely does not follow it. After all, Livia here compels Augustus to adopt a new policy toward conspirators, and this suggests that he formerly was harsh. On this topic see, above all, Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty* 29–75.

³⁷ Dio presents other doctor analogies in his history: 56.6.1, 56.39.2. Seneca's *Clem.* 1.24.1 presents another doctor metaphor.

³⁸ For an extended discussion of this incongruity see Giua, *Athenaeum* 59 (1981) esp. 320–321.

Thucydidean *Realpolitik*.³⁹

Dio's Livia next makes clear that some conspirators deserve punishment, but only those whose behavior cannot be corrected (55.18.1). This appears to fit sentiments Dio offers elsewhere: his Maecenas, for example, in presenting his brief in favor of monarchy, counsels a mild response to conspirators, but makes an exception for rebellious Roman commanders (52.31.9–10). In both cases, Dio's characters recommend harsh treatment only in extreme circumstances. Much like Maecenas, in fact, Livia supports mildness: she suggests punishing conspirators with chastisement, and, when appropriate, banishment, disenfranchisement, and fines (55.18.2–3). Further, she asserts that slight humiliations can improve men's conduct (4)—again, a judgment seemingly at odds with her formerly gloomy take on human nature.

Livia continues by noting that people inevitably disbelieve in the reality of conspiracies against monarchs, preferring to surmise that rulers punish purported plotters out of personal resentments, among other nefarious reasons (55.18.5). She then grants considerable attention to unfounded rumors swirling around Rome (18.6–19.3). Augustus, she claims, ought not pay heed to such gossip, though some contend that people are unjustly put to death as a result of it (19.1–2). The focus on this theme may lead the reader to wonder whether it has a self-exonerating motive: it could serve as an oblique way for Dio's Livia to convince Augustus to dismiss rumors about his wife's machinations.

The speech then turns more theoretical. It is the ruler's job to compel his subjects to love him, not to fear him; and he accomplishes this by treating his subjects well (55.19.4–20.2). The

³⁹ See Rich, in *History as Text* 91, who highlights Dio's interest both in displaying Thucydidean pessimism and in presenting moral instruction. Cf. Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate* 215: "Dio is not always consistent or convincing in applying his concept of human nature to historical events." Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* 79, notes the import of moral sentiments in Dio's orations.

ruler, she says, has further duties. He must educate his citizens, in order to make them right-minded, oversee their actions, and rectify their behavior (20.3). All these, of course, would seem impossible tasks, given the view of human nature she previously articulated. From here, she reverts back to her pessimistic impression of Augustus' subjects: one must treat the multitude with clemency because sentencing malefactors as they deserve would leave mankind well-nigh extinct (4). For this reason, she supports exile instead of the death penalty for plotters (5), and contends that the current stature of the Roman Empire renders almost any prospective plotter harmless (6–8). As usual, one notes in Livia's arguments a disinclination to defend mildness on moral grounds. To Dio's Livia, harsh punishment is entirely appropriate. If it were not counterproductive, in fact, she would recommend it.

She next focuses on the Cinna conspiracy as an opportunity to test her theories. Lenient treatment of Cinna and his fellow conspirators may reform them and make other men better (55.21.1). Persons who are the object of kindness, after all, both repent their malefactions and aid those who have shown mildness toward them (3). This sentiment—which may seem unrealistically optimistic—leads to Livia's conclusion (4):

πείσθητι οὖν μοι, φίλτατε, καὶ μεταβαλοῦ. οὕτω μὲν γὰρ καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ δυσχερῆ πάντα ἀνάγκη πεποιηκέναι δόξεις· οὐ γὰρ ἔστι πόλιν τηλικαύτην ἐκ δημοκρατίας πρὸς μοναρχίαν ἄγοντα ἀναιμωτὶ μεταστῆσαι· ἂν δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐπιμένῃς, καὶ ἐκεῖνα γνώμη δεδρακέναι νομισθῆσῃ.

So trust me, dearest, and change course. For thus you will seem to have done all other vexatious things on account of necessity; truly, it is not possible to change a city of such stature from a democracy to a monarchy without shedding blood; but if you continue on as before, you will be believed to have done even these things purposefully.

After presenting this oration, Dio relays its results: Augustus released Cinna and his followers with some words of admonition, and granted him a consulship (55.22.1). This proved such a successful course of action, Dio informs us, that neither the

plotters nor anyone else conspired against Augustus or was suspected of having done so (2). Further on in his narrative, Dio makes clear that this is not true; in 55.27.1–3, he mentions the revolution contemplated by P. Rufus.⁴⁰ All the same, one has reason to suspect that Dio largely agreed with Livia's advice, even if some of it seems naïve to us.

But Dio's final words on the subject—which do not parallel any sentiments in Seneca's version—call this conclusion into question. For he completes his discussion of the episode with the following observation (55.22.2):

ἡ γὰρ δὴ Λιουία αἰτιωτάτη τῆς σωτηρίας τῷ Κορνηλίῳ
γενομένη ἤμελλεν αὐτὴ τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ Αὐγούστου
λήψεσθαι.

In truth, Livia—who was most responsible for Cornelius' safety—was herself destined to receive the blame for Augustus' death.

Bernd Manuwald and Peter Michael Swan consider this a point too delicious for Dio to leave out of his narrative.⁴¹ But it amounts to more than that. Though Dio here is noncommittal about Livia's culpability,⁴² this summation dramatically undercuts her message. Naturally, if Livia was in fact guilty of conspiring against her husband, her advice in the speech did not make Augustus safer. Indeed, Livia's recommendation not to take rumors at face value could have been selfishly aimed at exonerating her in case stories of her machinations surfaced.

Powerful Women in Dio

This does not imply, however, that Dio largely disagreed with the ideas he has Livia express in the dialogue. Far from it: in fact, throughout his history, Dio expends much energy counseling clemency on the part of those in power—an under-

⁴⁰ See n.15 above.

⁴¹ Manuwald, *Cassius Dio* 125; Swan, *The Augustan Succession* 154.

⁴² As he is at 56.30.1–2, in which he discusses the rumor that Livia poisoned Augustus. Offering the reader this suspicion, however, seems like an example of Tacitean innuendo.

standable preoccupation, given his senatorial career. Many of Dio's orations urge lenient treatment for malefactors. In the address attributed to Fabius Rullus the Elder, for instance, Rullus, much like Livia, contends that oppressive sentences do not have the desired effects (fr.36.1–4). Dio's speech of the Samnite Herennius Pontius suggests that kindness has a greater positive impact on human beings than harshness (fr.36.11–14). In his oration of Julius Caesar to the Senate in 46 B.C., furthermore, Dio highlights the dictator's clemency (43.15.2) and contemns Marius, Sulla, and Cinna for their cruelty (43.15.3–16.1).⁴³ In his expatiation on the benefits of monarchy, Dio's Maecenas advises senatorial trials and mild treatment for plotters (52.31.9–10). Tiberius' funeral oration for Augustus in Dio lauds the deceased emperor for his leniency toward conspirators (56.40.7). Nor are such notions confined to Dio's speeches. In his narrative, for example, he criticizes Septimius Severus for his harshness (74.2.1–2; 75.8.1). Overall, Dio demonstrates keen regard for the ways in which emperors treated senatorial plotters.⁴⁴ All this evidence leads one to conclude that Dio's Livia introduces arguments with which the historian himself was inclined to agree.

In fact, some scholars stress the likelihood that Dio intended the Augustus-Livia dialogue as a rebuke to Caracalla, who, Dio informs us, refused to heed the good advice of his mother Julia Domna (77.18.2).⁴⁵ This remains possible, though we must admit that we do not possess much ancient evidence of Dio's closeness to Julia.⁴⁶ Further, Dio himself in places proves crit-

⁴³ In his version of M. Antonius' funeral oration for Caesar, however, Dio makes clear that Caesar proved too clement (44.39.4–5). This suggests that he did not view clemency as an unadulterated good for a monarch, as his Livia also avers.

⁴⁴ See, in addition to the citations above, 68.5.2, 6.4; 69.2.4–6; 71.28.2–30.4; 74.2.1–2; 78.12.2–3; 79.4.4–6.

⁴⁵ E.g. van Stekelenburg, *De Redevoeringen* 137; Giua, *Athenaeum* 59 (1981) 336; Grimal, in *Mélanges* 55; Swan, *The Augustan Succession* 154 n.152.

⁴⁶ On this see G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford

ical of her.⁴⁷ Although he may have been more inclined to grant Livia a major part in the response to the Cinna conspiracy because of the prominence of Imperial women in the Severan period, the connection between Livia and Julia Domna appears uncertain.

Under the circumstances, it seems reasonable to turn to another powerful female figure in Dio's history to suggest comparisons with Livia. His treatment of Boudica—the Celtic leader of a revolt in Britain during the reign of Nero—often corresponds to that of Dio's Livia.⁴⁸ At the start of his discussion of the Britons' rebellion, Dio provides Boudica a rousing oration to her troops, in which the queen proves deeply critical of both Roman colonial malefactions and the emperor Nero (62.3–6). In this speech—as in Livia's oration—one detects Dio's general agreement with its arguments.⁴⁹ For instance, his Boudica excoriates the Romans' promotion of fiscal misery in Britain (3.3–5)—a point Dio himself makes in the narrative of the revolt (1.1–2). Additionally, the harsh criticisms of Nero that Boudica presents at 6.2–5 match those of the historian.⁵⁰

In both Livia's and Boudica's speeches, then, Dio appears to present some arguments that the historian likely deemed convincing. His Livia and Boudica, furthermore, are valorized insofar as they are granted set speeches replete with arguments Dio typically confined to male speakers. But Boudica—again like Livia—also seems to be an object of the historian's crit-

1969) 101–109. We cannot say that Dio himself was a member of Julia Domna's circle of sophists and philosophers, which Dio discusses in 75.15.6–7.

⁴⁷ Cf. 77.10.2, 18.3. Elsewhere, however, Dio seems sympathetic to Julia: 75.15.7, 78.24.1–2.

⁴⁸ On the Iceni rebellion and Dio's speech of Boudica see E. Adler, "Boudica's Speeches in Tacitus and Dio," *CW* 101 (2008) 173–195.

⁴⁹ See Adler, *CW* 101 (2008) 184–193.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Dio's impression of Nero see A. M. Gowing, "Cassius Dio on the Reign of Nero," *ANRW* II 34.3 (1997) 2558–2590.

icism. For example, he portrays Boudica as a monstrous Amazonian (62.2.2–4). Some of her rhetoric in the pre-battle exhortation, furthermore, seems toothless, if not absurd.⁵¹ In the same vein, as we have seen, Dio's Livia, for all her intellectual and rhetorical abilities, comes across as conniving and selfish. After all, in the dialogue Livia—not Augustus—is portrayed as a devotee of Thucydidean *Realpolitik*. Given Dio's inclination to emulate Thucydides, on its own this need not imply that he intended to criticize Livia.⁵² To some extent, of course, his Livia merely focused on what he may have considered the sordid realities of human nature. But by casting Augustus as in part a moralist and Livia as a steadfast realist, Dio can leave the reader with the impression that Livia was the more cold and calculating of the two—that, perhaps, she took advantage of her husband.

Additionally, one should note that in other orations counseling clemency in Dio's history, the speakers offer distinctly moral points. Julius Caesar's address to the Senate, for instance, advertises the dictator's future leniency chiefly through moral arguments (e.g. 43.16.1–2). M. Antonius' funeral oration for Caesar, furthermore, focuses on Caesar's clemency as motivated by the deceased's regard for justice (44.39.4–5). Dio, then, elsewhere chose to present advertisements for clemency in moral/ethical language. But he eschews such language in his Livia oration, choosing to home in on pragmatic concerns alone.⁵³ This could reinforce the reader's impression of Livia as

⁵¹ E.g. 62.5.2, in which Boudica chastises the Romans as cowards because they wear armor in battle. On Dio's portrayal of Boudica see Adler, *CW* 102 (2008), esp. 184–193.

⁵² Despite Dio's high regard for Thucydides, one can find examples of his implicit criticism of hardheaded realism, e.g. Caesar's speech about war with Ariovistus (38.36–46); on this speech see van Stekelenburg, *De Redevoeringen* 38–39.

⁵³ We should note that heavily pragmatic speeches in Dio's history can seem weak: e.g. M. Antonius' address before the battle of Actium (50.16–22); Suetonius Paulinus' responses to Boudica (62.9–11). On these orations

manipulative and amoral. Dio's ancient audience, after all, was not necessarily as devoted to Thucydidean views of human nature as was Dio, and his characterization of Livia leaves room for readers to view Livia negatively.

This disapproving portrait of Livia could partly result from the vicissitudes of the situation Augustus and his wife discuss. As Melissa Barden Dowling has demonstrated, clemency implied an unequal relationship between the clement and the spared.⁵⁴ In part for this reason, the Romans appear to have viewed clemency as a male virtue.⁵⁵ Livia's insistence on mildness, then, could have rankled senatorial elites such as Dio, who could feel humiliated as recipients of a woman's leniency. That the recipient of Livia's mercy was a scion of Pompey the Great may have particularly perturbed. To be sure, this might not have been as acutely felt during Dio's time as it was in Republican Rome, since the dishonor attached to the receipt of clemency appears to have dissipated to some extent.⁵⁶ Elsewhere in his history, however, Dio seems irked by female displays of power. Thus Livia's appeal to clemency could reinforce Dio's advertisement of her as forebodingly masculine (cf. 57.12.4).

This may prove key to Dio's semi-critical portrayals of both Livia and Boudica. As the result of their ability to craft eloquent appeals that feature persuasive arguments, his Livia and Boudica obviously lack the irrationality and dimwittedness the historian associates with females.⁵⁷ Hence, to Dio, there remains something wondrous about the Amazonian Boudica. All the same, according to Dio's ancient audience, the qualities the historian grants Livia and Boudica may also render the women

see E. Adler, *Valorizing the Barbarians: Enemy Speeches in Roman Historiography* (forthcoming).

⁵⁴ Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty* 27–30, 200.

⁵⁵ Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty* 27.

⁵⁶ Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty* 166.

⁵⁷ See 139 above.

disturbingly masculine. To Dio, Livia and Boudica, as a result of their stature, emasculate those—like Tiberius (57.12.3–4) and Nero (62.6.3)—with whom they vie for power.⁵⁸ In the case of both Livia and Boudica—the former a Roman noblewoman, the latter a Celtic rebel—Dio's narrative betrays both attraction and aversion to powerful women.

None of this, of course, gainsays the ways in which Dio uses Livia to promote a message with which he was inclined to sympathize. For this reason, scholars are correct to connect Livia's oration to an issue of great import on Dio's part. Even so, as we have seen, in providing Livia remarks on clemency, he appears to put to the test notions he otherwise finds attractive, to determine whether he can complicate them.⁵⁹ In his version of the Cinna conspiracy, Dio both gets his message about clemency across, and reinforces his equivocal take on Livia as a woman in power.⁶⁰

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⁵⁸ On this see 140 above.

⁵⁹ Perhaps Dio accomplishes this same feat with his Boudica speech.

⁶⁰ I would like to thank Richard Moorton, Kent Rigsby, and the anonymous readers for *GRBS*, who read earlier versions of this article and made helpful comments and suggestions.