

A Nostalgic View of the Past and the Degradation of Roman Politics Under the Principate: The
Role of Germanicus in Tacitus' *Annales*

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ABSTRACT

A Nostalgic View of the Past and the Degradation of Roman Politics Under the Principate: The Role of Germanicus in Tacitus' *Annales*

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Tacitus, in his first two books of the *Annales*, spends a great portion of his time discussing Germanicus, the young prince of the budding Roman Empire and adopted son of Emperor Tiberius. The historian's portrayal of the young man seems contradictory in nature, as he is presented as both an ignorant and inept leader and also an overwhelmingly popular man on par with Alexander the Great. This paper intends to provide a fresh analysis of the duality of Tacitus' portrayal of Germanicus and begin to understand the purpose for presenting him in such a way. An analysis of the young prince's personality traits reveals that his *comitas*, *civilitas*, overdramatic tendencies and lack of rational thinking are all consistent within his portrayal, but the duality is a product of the diversity of their results. This makes Tacitus' representation of him similar to that of Alexander the Great, in addition to the heroic characters from the Homeric epics and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Moreover, his representation's strong stylistic and circumstantial

connection to men of the past, ranging from the more recent Republican men like Scipio Africanus and Drusus, to heroes like Odysseus, Hercules, and Aeneas show that Germanicus is meant to be viewed nostalgically as a symbol of a better time. These themes allow him to become a point of comparison for his present circumstances. By exploring the prince as a counterpart to various contemporaneous rulers and political figures in Rome this paper reveals that the romantic and idealized past, and members of that past like Germanicus, are no longer effective or appropriate in the effective and yet unscrupulous political atmosphere of the principate. All of these results lead to the conclusion that the purpose of the presentation of Germanicus was to highlight the necessity of the inception of the principate while also emphasizing the inadequacies of the institution and the potential dangers of the misuse of consolidated power.

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INTRODUCTION:

The seemingly contradictory characterization of Germanicus in Tacitus' *Annales* dramatically stands out to the historian's readers. To begin, the overwhelmingly positive introduction of the young prince was written by a man who is known for insinuating manipulative and malicious intentions of the most respectable of people. Moreover, after the portrayal of Germanicus' death, Tacitus provides for his audience a description of the heart-wrenching grief of vast number of individuals, both Roman and provincial, which even includes a comparison to Alexander the Great. At the same time, Germanicus' histrionic behavior and obvious ineffectiveness as a leader make the positive representation of him in life and the glorification of him after his death seem inappropriate. These discrepancies have caused a number of scholars to question the purpose of Germanicus as a character and therefore the historicity of the historian's account.¹ This paper intends to provide a fresh analysis of the duality

¹ B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the Writing of History* (Manchester: The University Press, 1952), 9. Walker believes that in reality Germanicus was completely inept and in an attempt to present him in the best possible light Tacitus' account becomes a jumbled exaggeration.

T.A. Dorey, *Tacitus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 63-65. Contrary to Walker, Dorey states that Tacitus is the most credible of the historians when the events and people of his writing are compared with parallel ancient accounts; it is clear that accuracy was a concern of his. Why would Tacitus have exaggerated to paint Germanicus in a positive light when the rest of his account is so "credible?" Moreover, if Tacitus' goal were to present Germanicus in the most positive way then why would he have written about him in such a way that he is perceived as ineffective and clueless? Dorey highlights the fact that Walker's assumption of the inadequacy of the historian's writing may have been premature, as it leaves a number of issues unexplained. F.R.D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus Volume 1, Annals 1.1-54* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), esp. 1.32-34, 239-41 and F.R.D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus Volume 2, Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp.

of Tacitus' portrayal of Germanicus and to begin to understand the purpose of presenting him in such a way.

Despite the problems with the account, a number of consistent patterns and themes surround the role of Germanicus, which need to be addressed in order to discover Tacitus' purpose. Firstly the prince's seemingly inconsistent portrayal as a beloved hero and an inept leader is actually based in his very consistent personality traits of *comitas*, *civilitas*, theatricality and emotionality.² These unchanging qualities of his persona, which cause both his extreme successes and failures, in addition to the comparison to Alexander the Great, make Tacitus' portrayal of Germanicus' personality similar to those of ancient heroes. Secondly, Germanicus is clearly made similar, in what he stands for and in his circumstances, to the more romantic people of the past, ranging from men of the more recent Republic like Scipio Africanus and Germanicus' own father Drusus, all the way back to the "heroic" characters of Hercules, Odysseus, and Aeneas.

Tacitus establishes that Germanicus as a character is strongly representative of the past, and he uses the power of hindsight to interpret Germanicus as connection between the past and the prince's present. Germanicus as the link between time periods inspires an exploration of the prince as the nostalgic memory of the "better years" of the past and a drastically different

2.65-68, 198-99) states that Germanicus was strictly a literary tool used by Tacitus to keep his readers as interested as possible, regardless of the accuracy or credibility of his account, in order to act as a foil for Tiberius' character and that this should explain the inconsistency of Germanicus' personality. But is it satisfying enough to assume that the entire compelling character of Germanicus is strictly a foil and cannot stand alone without a comparison of Tiberius? Moreover, how inconsistent is Germanicus' character when throughout the account he continues to be portrayed with *comitas*, *civilitas*, and an outstanding level of theatricality?

² Christopher Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," in *Tacitus: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*, ed. Rhiannon Ash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 283. Although Pelling agrees that the dual portrayal of Germanicus is actually very consistent and brings up these features in his discussion, the analysis below is my own exploration of his claim. Also, *comitas* in this essay is to be understood as mercy, or kindness, while *civilitas* is courtesy.

counterpart to the institutions of the present. Tacitus has seen the increasing destruction the principate has caused, and he therefore is using the character of the prince as a reminder to his audience of a better heroic and Republican past that no longer seems fitting or appropriate within the current times of the principate. The seemingly contradictory portrayal of Germanicus, therefore, stems from the fact that Tacitus is viewing him as a figure of the past and congruently as a man inappropriately fitted for his contemporary time, for the purpose of highlighting both the inadequacies of the institution of the principate - despite the necessity of its inception – and the potential dangers of the misuse of consolidated power.

CHAPTER ONE: The Duality of his Character is based upon a Heroic Constant

The portrayal of Germanicus' personality and the comparison of the young prince to Alexander the Great present him as two seemingly contradictory characters: the beloved and potentially great young man, and the embarrassingly inept and overemotional leader. Despite this inconsistency, the text reveals that the young prince's personality remains stable and unchanging and is made up of the characteristics of *comitas*, *civilis animus* or *ingenium*, impetuosity, theatricality, and the tendency to leap swiftly to conclusions.³ These features of his persona are what cause the vastly different results in his career, either gaining him extreme popularity among the people and troops or making his efforts as a leader fail terribly.

The duality of his portrayal, therefore, and the discrepancies in the results of his actions, the very reasons so many scholars have struggled to understand Germanicus as a character, stem directly from his core personality traits and reveal that the prince's faults and strengths are irrefutably linked. This concept is often seen and applied to the "heroic" and "epic" characters of Tacitus' unquestionably well-known antecedents, the Homeric epics and the *Aeneid*. Tacitus' construction of the portrayal of Germanicus in such a similar manner suggests that his purpose was to present Germanicus as a "heroic" or "epic" individual, which he reinforces with a seemingly ridiculous comparison to Alexander the Great. The connections between Germanicus' personality and the personalities of epic characters, in addition to the comparison to Alexander

³ Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 283.
Also, *ingenium* in this essay is to be understood as temperament.

the Great, help to reinforce Tacitus' overall implicit goal of defining and criticizing the institution of the principate.

Tacitus' positive perception of Germanicus begins and ends with a description of the prince's *comitas* and *civilitas*, revealing that these features of his personality remain constant throughout the portrayal and are some of the core parts of his persona that cause both his successes and failures. The first glimpse of Germanicus that Tacitus gives to his reader comes approximately halfway through the first book, in direct juxtaposition to Drusus' management of the Pannonian legions. Although this comparison seems to be constructed for the purpose of discrediting Germanicus' abilities as a leader, Tacitus introduces him with a surprisingly positive description, *unde in Germanicum favor et spes eadem. nam iuveni civile ingenium, mira comitas* "From this [they saw] in Germanicus favor and the same hope. For he was a young man of civic temperament and wonderful kindness" (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.33).⁴ The brevity of the passage may suggest to those unfamiliar with Tacitus' style that something more is desired. But in fact this complimentary tone is rarely seen in the entirety of the text.

Even before the readers are given a chance to judge Germanicus for themselves, Tacitus gives them this almost unprecedented favorable portrayal. He later reinforces the *favor* of the people and Germanicus' good character in his description of the young prince's death,

neque multo post extinguitur, ingenti luctu provinciae et circumiacentium populorum. indoluere exterae nationes regesque: tanta illi comitas in socios, mansuetudo in hostis; visuque [sic] et auditu iuxta venerabilis, cum magnitudinem et gravitatem summae fortunae retineret, invidiam et adrogantiam effugerat. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.72)

Not much afterwards he died, to the huge grief of the province and neighboring peoples. Foreign nations and kings grieved, so great was his friendliness to allies, his mercy to enemies; by look and sound equally respectable, although he retained a greatness and dignity of the highest fortune, he yet escaped envy and arrogance.

⁴ All translations of text are composed by me, Deanna Miserendino, unless otherwise indicated.

Here again, Tacitus is unusually positive and discusses at a considerable length the virtues of the young man and the sadness the entire world felt with his passing. Tacitus is painting a “romantic aura” around him, one meant to sweep the audience away by means of the hysteria and the popular grief.⁵ In addition, Tacitus shows that, from start to finish, Germanicus’ good characteristics of *comitas* and *civilitas* are consistent throughout the prince’s portrayal and that these aspects of his persona are what make him so beloved to the historian and Germanicus’ contemporaries, both Roman and foreign.

At the same time that Germanicus’ portrayal is positive and highlights his good features, Tacitus also presents him as an enormously ineffective leader by emphasizing other consistent parts of his core personality: his impetuosity and histrionic tendencies. For example, he was unable to subdue the Germanic mutinies, and his orders were returned with taunts (*indiscretis vocibus*, and *atrocissimus clamor*, meaning confused cries and harsh shouts) (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.35). They made a request that he take over the empire, which he rejected adamantly, and in an attempt to show his troops that he would rather die than take over he dramatically threatened to kill himself. The exaggerated gesture was ineffective, because all it inspired was a soldier to offer the prince his own sword to complete the suicide, *addito acutiorem esse* “adding that his was sharper” (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.35). To make matters worse, Germanicus then decided to forge a letter giving the soldiers exactly what they demanded, and the troops all saw through the ruse (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.36). Very early on in the portrayal of the prince, Tacitus creates a clear portrayal that shows the young man has a personality that often causes disastrous results. His histrionic gesture and hastily constructed solution not only did nothing to stop the mutiny, but also almost cost him his life.

⁵ Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” 281.

Tacitus directly parallels these events with Drusus and how he handled the Pannonian revolts. Unlike his adopted brother, Drusus managed to quell the entire mutiny with a gesture of a hand,

stabat Drusus silentium manu poscens. illi quoties oculos ad multitudinem rettulerant, vocibus truculentis strepere, rursus viso Caesare trepidare; murmur incertum, atrox clamor et repente quies; diversis animorum motibus pavebant terrebantque. (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.25)

Drusus stood demanding silence with a hand. As often as they turned back their eyes towards the multitude, they shouted with aggressive voices, then turning back to the sight of Caesar they were afraid; there was an uncertain whisper, fierce clamor and unexpected quiet; due to separate motions of the mind they were afraid and were frightening.

The difference between the two situations is quite striking and leaves the audience with the understanding that Germanicus is much more dramatic and emotional than his brother, and that this over-the-top personality at times leaves him unqualified to handle leadership or responsibility over others.

Tacitus reiterates these characteristics frequently in the life of his character and even in his death, which reveals to the audience that Germanicus' personality remains constant. His emotional and impulsive decisions continue to leave him looking overdramatic and ineffective as a leader. First, in an attempt to end the violence among the mutinous troops, he sends away his wife and children and delivers an emotional speech about their safety (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.44). Instead of suppressing the disorder, his decision sends the soldiers on a vengeful rampage in which they gained control over their own ringleaders and centurions.⁶ Germanicus here fails to take responsibility during a time of crisis and is unable to take control of the situation.⁷ In 1.49, when

⁶ Linda W. Rutland, "The Tacitean Germanicus: Suggestions for a Re-Evaluation," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, Neue Folge, 130 Bd., H 2 (1987): 155.

Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 286.

⁷ Rutland, "Tacitean Germanicus," 158.

the prince travels to the Rhine to stop additional mutinies, he finds that the troops have already slaughtered those believed to be involved on his own misinterpreted orders. When Germanicus arrived on the scene, all he was able to offer as their leader was *plurimis lacrimis* “an excess of tears” (Tac., *Ann.* 1.49).⁸ His reaction to discovering the remains of the legions of Varus was not dissimilar, in which he was *praesentibus doloris socius* “having joined in the pains of those present” (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.62). The emotional response, although not unusual for Germanicus’ character, was not helpful in raising the morale of an army that was about to begin a campaign.⁹

Finally, towards the end of his life Germanicus theatrically claims that he was poisoned by Piso and Plancina,

si fato concederem, iustus mihi dolor etiam adversus deos esset, quod me parentibus liberis patriae intra iuventam praemature exitu raperent: nunc scelere Pisonis et Plancinae interceptus ultimas preces pectoribus vestris relinquo: referatis patri ac fratri, quibus acerbitatibus dilaceratus, quibus insidiis circumventus miserrimam vitam pessima morte finierim. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.71)

If I were departing by fate, there would be a just pain for me even against the gods, because from parents, liberty, and fatherland they snatched me away by a premature death in youth. Now having been cut off by the crime of Piso and Plancina, I leave behind for your breasts my last prayers: may you recall for my father and brother having been torn by what harshness, having been encircled by what plots, I have ended the most miserable life with the worst death.

He begins his death speech by claiming foul play, outright blaming Piso and Plancina by name as the murderers. But Tacitus himself comments on the claim and he states that whether the body showed signs of poisoning or not was ambiguous, and that the results really depended on where an individual’s loyalty lay.¹⁰ If Tacitus is insinuating that the poisoning cannot be determined,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ D.C.A. Shotter, “Tacitus, Tiberius, and Germanicus,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 17, H. 2 (1968): 200.

¹⁰ This ambiguity in death is very unlike how the historian handles the equally contested death of Postumus in 1.6, where he blatantly states, *propius vero Tiberium ac Liviam, illum metu, hanc novercalibus odiis, suspecti et invisi iuvenis caedem festinavisse* (it is nearer to the truth that

then the prince's speech is a hysterical overreaction and another example of his tendency to make melodramatic decisions before considering the situation rationally.¹¹ In all these instances, Germanicus clearly shows that his first response in a time of crisis is emotionally based and hastily composed and that as a leader he has not taken the time to develop an alternative plan. Moreover, they reveal that his personality remains consistent throughout his portrayal, and that his core qualities result in either extreme favor or disastrous consequences.

The actions of Germanicus clearly reveal him unfit to be a leader and ineffective in his dramatic and clumsy behavior. For Tacitus to describe such an inept young man so gloriously in his death poses a problem for the audience. How is this young prince, who cannot seem to handle effectively the role of a leader and who notoriously creates for himself, and for his fellow troops and officers, dangerous and chaotic situations, beloved by allies and enemies alike and whose death inspires the people of Rome to burst forth with *dolor, ira, and questus* "pain, anger, and lament" (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.82)? Why would a man who cannot seem to quell a mutiny, something his brother accomplished with a simple hand gesture, or endure a crisis without weeping, be glorified in his death as *cum magnitudinem et gravitatem summae fortunae retineret*, someone who "retained greatness and dignity of the highest level" (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.72)? This dual nature and the seemingly inconsistent side of the portrayal of Germanicus is what scholars have found difficult to reconcile. The above examples reveal that, although his actions produce drastically

Tiberius and Livia, that one through fear and this one through the hate of a stepmother, hurried along the death of a young man they suspected and envied). Tacitus continues to reinforce his own opinion on the matter in 1.53 where he mentions an event taking place *post interfectum Postumum Agrippam* meaning "after the murder of Agrippa Postumus". On the death of Postumus Tacitus clearly takes a stance and places the blame on Tiberius and his mother, whereas with Germanicus he remains ambiguous in his opinion on the matter, leaving the portrayal of Germanicus hysterical and overemotional, and yet perhaps based in some truth. Even in his representations of the characteristics that create problems for Germanicus, Tacitus leaves a positive atmosphere around the young prince by not outright discrediting his claims.

¹¹ Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 289.

different results, they ultimately stem from the same source. Germanicus' personality is what makes him both a weak and inept leader, but also immensely popular among the Roman people and even respected and greatly missed among enemies and foreigners in his death.¹² Germanicus' larger than life temperament is both an entertaining spectacle to those around him and dangerous because of his position of power.

In this way, the young prince can be viewed like so many of the characters of the epics of the past. Consider for a moment Achilles and his unquenchable rage. His anger provides him the means to be the greatest fighter of the Trojan War, but at the same time produces the disastrous consequences of dishonoring the body of Hector and displeasing the gods.¹³ At the same time, his quest for *kleos* gives him the opportunity to be remembered for thousands of years after his time, but is the same reason he quits fighting and allows his friends and allies to perish.¹⁴ Another example would be Turnus, from Virgil's *Aeneid*. His dual-natured personality causes him to be a great leader and fighter against Aeneas and his men, but at the same time inspires him to build up a battle-lust that starts a bloody slaughter of a war and mercilessly kill the young Pallas.¹⁵ Epic characters often have personalities that are dual in nature, which produce either glorious

¹² Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 284.

¹³ Hom. *Il.* 24.22-54 includes a description of the gods pitying Hector and a very long speech by Apollo where he accuses Achilles of having lost his humanity because of his unquenchable rage including, ὡς Ἀχιλλεὺς ἔλεον μὲν ἀπώλεσεν, meaning "thus Achilles completely destroyed his compassion..." Clearly Achilles rage causes disastrous outcomes in certain circumstances.

¹⁴ Hom. *Il.* 1.1-7 discusses the rage of Achilles and ἡ μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηγε, or "which caused countless pains for the Achaeans" in that it sent many of their souls down to Hades.

¹⁵ Virg. *A.*, 12.1-80 includes attempts by both Latinus and Amata, and the tears of Lavinia, to discourage Turnus from engaging in battle and afterwards the young man is described with the phrase *ardet in arma magis* meaning that "he burned even more for battle." He is a great soldier but his battle-lust is unquenchable and is discouraged by those around him, and even caused his own demise. Aeneas sees Turnus wearing the armor of Pallas, which is the reason the Trojan decides to kill him in the end (Virg. *A.*, 12.947-952).

triumphs or blasphemous defeats.¹⁶ In terms of consistency, it is not in the personality traits of Achilles, Turnus, for example, that the reader should find inconsistencies, but in how favorable or unfavorable the results are.¹⁷ The personality traits of these characters, as varied as they may be, are comfortably clustered together in such a way that they are harmonizing, but at the same time their manifestations produce drastically varying consequences.¹⁸ The very same concept can be applied to Tacitus' portrayal of Germanicus, in that his personality traits are consistently the source of his successes and failures and yet are not an unreasonable combination of features for one person to possess. Tacitus' account, therefore, presents Germanicus in such a way that the young prince is intended to be perceived like the "epic" or "heroic" characters of the past.

Tacitus' heroic portrayal of Germanicus is further emphasized with the comparison to Alexander the Great, as the Macedonian also has a larger than life personality and can be viewed as similar to the characters of the epic tradition. After Germanicus' death, Tacitus states,

et erant qui formam, aetatem, genus mortis ob propinquitatem etiam locorum in quibus interiit, magni Alexandri fati adaequarent. nam utrumque corpore decoro, genere insigni, haud multum triginta annos egressum, suorum insidiis externas inter gentis occidisse: sed hunc mitem erga amicos, modicum voluptatum, uno matrimonio, certis liberis egisse, neque minus proeliatorem...quod si solus arbiter rerum, si iure et nomine regio fuisset, tanto promptius adsecuturum gloriam militiae quantum clementia, temperantia, ceteris bonis artibus praestitisset. (Tac., Ann., 2.73)

And there were those who equated his form, lifetime, and the type of death on account of the nearness of the location in which he died, to the fate of the great Alexander. For each with a handsome body and notable birth, not going beyond much more than thirty years, had been killed by the ambush of their own among people of foreign lands: but this one acted mild towards friends, moderate in pleasures, with one marriage, with legitimate children, not less of a

¹⁶ I understand that an entire thesis, perhaps even a book, could be spent discussing the Homeric epics and their similarities to the *Aeneid* and the character Germanicus, but for this discussion here a simple mention should suffice. The goal is to show that many characters from the epics follow a similar pattern in their personalities, just as Germanicus does.

¹⁷ Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 284 and 285.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

fighter...because if he had been the sole ruler of affairs, if he had had the regal right and name, by so much more readily he would have achieved military glory by as much as he had surpassed him readily in mercy, temperance, and the other good arts.

The historian, in his usual fashion, takes the agency of the statement away from himself by saying, *erant qui...adaequarent*, meaning “there were those who were equaling,” but he makes the text seem as though he agrees with the popular opinion. The first points people offer as their reasoning for such a comparison are not unreasonable: both young men were around the age thirty, were of noble birth and died suspiciously abroad. Tacitus then continues on to highlight Germanicus’ strengths, and therefore at the same time Alexander’s weaknesses, by discussing the integrity of their personal lives. He strategically begins to compare their military careers, and then ceases this with the excuse that the Roman prince was held back by not being *solus arbiter rerum* or “the sole ruler of affairs”. In this passage, Tacitus manipulates his reader into believing that Germanicus should be considered on par with Alexander, if not above him, in both the personal aspects of his life and in the “potential” of his career.¹⁹ He does so by neglecting to mention the fact that Alexander’s legacy comes from the unprecedentedly enormous empire he created, and not his personal life, and giving excuses for Germanicus’ shortcomings. By deliberately manipulating the information given so that the Roman prince seemed greater than the Macedonian, Tacitus reveals that the comparison is not only something he is not willing to criticize or discredit outright, but that it can also function as a reasonable foundation from which Germanicus’ personality can be developed.

What is remarkable in this instance is that Tacitus was not alone in his attempt to compare Alexander the Great to Roman generals. Livy accomplishes something similar in his *Ab*

¹⁹ The comparisons between Germanicus and both mythical and historical characters should not be surprising. The epic characters that scholars today so comfortably categorize as “fictional” may not have been viewed the same way by Ancient Roman civilizations.

Urbe Condita when he dedicates an entire passage to the discussion of how Alexander would have fared if he had pushed his conquests towards Italy. Livy's argument in this passage is constructed almost identically to Tacitus', revealing that the glorifying of a Roman general through a comparison to Alexander the Great was not originally Tacitean, and that the later historian's attempt to ennoble Germanicus through the comparison was not as unreasonable as it may have originally seemed to his audience.²⁰

Livy begins with a confirmation that Alexander was in fact an exceptional general with his use of the word *clariorem* in 9.17.2, meaning "brilliant", and, much like Tacitus, does not let that thought sit for long before he states, *horum in quolibet cum indoles eadem quae in Alexandro erat animi ingenique; tum disciplina militaris, ...* "any one of these [men], were with the same nature, the same temperament of the mind and also the same skills of the military, which were in Alexander" (Liv., 9.17.10). Livy sets up the comparison by taking away from the "specialness" of the Macedonian, and placing his Roman counterparts on the same level. Tacitus does the same with Germanicus when he lays out the unquestionable similarities of the situations of their deaths. In the subsequent discussion Livy then specifically focuses on Alexander's shortcomings rather than his accomplishments,

referre in tanto rege piget superbam mutationem vestis et desideratas humi iacentium adulationes, etiam victis Macedonibus graves, nedum victoribus, et foeda supplicia et inter vinum et epulas caedes amicorum et vanitatem ementiendae stirpis. (Liv., 9.18.4)

It is unfortunate in writing about so great a ruler, to refer to the ostentatious change of dress and the desire for those fawning him to throw themselves to the ground, even burdensome for the conquered Macedonians, let alone when

²⁰ The use of Alexander in the works of Roman historians is, I believe, a *topos*, and a standard for greatness. Since many writers do this, I don't believe Tacitus' reference to Alexander was necessarily an allusion to another Roman historian's writing, but rather that of the theme of Alexander in general.

victorious, and the cruel supplications and among wine and food the murder of friends and the vanity from which he pretended his roots.

Livy is much more straightforward with his criticisms of Alexander, in that he highlights Alexander's faults where Tacitus implicitly does so by highlighting Germanicus' strengths. Regardless of their tactics, both historians end up with the same results: that the Roman counterparts actually seem more capable and noble. Livy finishes this off with,

Romani multi fuissent Alexandro vel gloria vel rerum magnitudine pares, quorum suo quisque fato sine publico discrimine viveret morereturque. (Liv., 9.18.19)

Many Romans would have been on par with Alexander either in glory or in the magnitude of their deeds, each of whom by his own fate, whatever it may be, might have lived or died without threatening the state.

His concluding statements reveal that Livy does not only think that many Roman generals were on par with Alexander, but also that they have surpassed the young Macedonian in excellence because of the superior dispersal of power within the Roman government of the Republican era. Livy and Tacitus both manipulate the information about Alexander the Great and his Roman counterparts in order to present the latter in a better light. The two historians both agree that Alexander was in fact a talented and great man, but they highlight the strengths of the Roman generals while focusing on Alexander's weaknesses, regardless of their relevance to what makes a military leader "successful."

This passage from Livy reveals that not only was Tacitus' use of Alexander as a foundation from which to develop the character of a Roman general not original, but also that it served an archetypal purpose. Livy himself uses the Macedonian prince as the base from which to compare Romans for the purpose of ennobling and elevating the standards of Rome. The comparison to Alexander in Tacitus' work is used very similarly, in that it further highlights Germanicus' larger than life and heroic personality and also places the Roman prince and what

he represents on a more distinguished pedestal. All of this helps to present Germanicus as an epic character of the past.

The life of Germanicus as told by Tacitus reveals that his personality has an abundance of *comitas* and *civilitas*, in addition to histrionic and rash tendencies. These consistent personality traits are what make Germanicus so immensely popular among the people of his time, and are also what make him seem inept and ineffective as a leader during the Germanic mutinies, as well as emotional and hysterical in his death. Like the epic heroes of past literature, his strengths and weaknesses all stem from the same core personality traits, whatever those traits may be. Tacitus intended the audience to understand that the complexity of the presentation of Germanicus and the diversity in the results of his actions directly arose from his consistent temperament. Tacitus' intention to present Germanicus as "heroic" not only explains the dual nature of his portrayal, but also makes some sense of the comparison to Alexander the Great. Moreover, the similarities between the accounts of Livy and Tacitus in their comparisons of Alexander the Great to Roman generals help to show that the later historian wanted his character Germanicus, and what he represented, to be placed within the same league as the Macedonian, despite his obvious shortcomings. This helps Tacitus to set up the Roman prince as a symbol of the better past in order to show how far the standard of the principate had fallen and implicitly criticize the weaknesses of the institution and its misuse of power.

CHAPTER TWO: Link to the Past, Heroes and the Republic

Tacitus' representation of Germanicus' personality helps his reader to recognize that the contradictory character traits of the Roman prince in the narrative should be viewed in the same way as those of the epic characters.²¹ Tacitus further emphasizes this by frequently connecting Germanicus to the times that came before him. He does so in his constant comparisons between the young prince and the more noble men of the Roman Republic like his father Drusus and Scipio Africanus and in his stylistic choices, where he intentionally highlights the similarities between Germanicus and "ancient" heroes like Hercules, Odysseus, and Aeneas, all of which shall be explored below. This reminds the readers not only of a "better" and more romantic time, but also insists upon establishing Germanicus as a member of that time. Tacitus uses these connections to the past to show ironically that the young prince belongs to a better and older age in order to contrast him with the unfortunate circumstances of the present, highlighting for his audience the issues and dangers of the principate.

Within the discussion of Germanicus Tacitus intentionally includes a number of comparisons between the Roman prince and the beloved leaders and times of the Republic. He begins this trend right away by introducing Germanicus' efforts in Germany as "the one decent war Rome was still fighting" (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.3).²² Long before the prince's actual introduction in section 1.33, Tacitus sets him apart from his contemporaries by labeling him as the exception to

²¹ For example, Achilles and Turnus have already been discussed. But later chapters will discuss the similarities between Germanicus and Hercules from Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, Odysseus from the Homeric *Odyssey*, and even Aeneas from Virgil's *Aeneid*.

²² Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 298.

the norm and the lingering remnant of what used to be good. Then when he establishes the relationship between Germanicus and the emperors Augustus and Tiberius, Tacitus includes this statement,

quippe Drusi magna apud populum Romanum memoria, credebaturque, si rerum potitus foret, libertatem redditurus; unde in Germanicum favor et spes eadem.
(Tac., *Ann.*, 1.33)

Of course the memory of Drusus was great with the Roman people and it was believed, if he had been able to obtain power over matters, he would have returned liberty; whence towards Germanicus there was the same favor and hope.

In this instance *libertatem*, or “freedom,” is not just in reference to the specific political entities of the Republic, but rather its overall flavor.²³ The use of the word does recall in his minds of his audience the very first lines of his *Annales* in which the historian states that *libertatem et consulatum L. Brutus instituit*, meaning that L. Brutus, the man so famous for avenging Lucretia, established both the consulship and freedom. To Tacitus, L. Brutus definitively marked the beginning of the era of the Roman Republic. The elder Brutus was not an uncommon temporal marker, as Livy, an earlier Roman historian, similarly establishes the same man as the concrete point for the start of the Republic when he dedicates an entire section of his *Ab Urbe Condita* to the discussion of the *novae libertatis*, the new freedom, that Brutus established after *exacto rege*, having expelled the king (Livy., 2.1).

An additional figure who was strongly tied to the concept of *libertatem redire* was M. Junius Brutus, the supposed descendent of the earlier Brutus (Plut., *Brut.* 1.1.1). This young man was the more infamous of the two Bruti and aided in the assassination of Julius Caesar. Plutarch in his *Brutus* states,

Βρούτος δὲ καὶ πρότερον ἔσπευδε τῷ ταχίστῳ τῶν κινδύνων διακριθεὶς
ἢ τῇ πατρίδι τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἀναλαβεῖν ἢ πάντας ἀνθρώπους

²³ Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” 299.

ἐνοχλουμένους δαπάναις καί στρατείας καί προστάγμασιν ἀπαλλάξαι
κακῶν... (Plut., *Brut.*, 39.4)

But Brutus, even before he had been distinguished, hastened the speediest of dangers, either to establish freedom in his country or to set free all the troubled people from the expenditures and campaigns and commands of the terrible...

The association between the later Brutus and the concept of freedom is very strong. Moreover Plutarch makes an attempt to paint Brutus in a positive light, discussing the honorable reasons for the man's actions rather than focusing on the death of Caesar. Tacitus paints a similar picture when he states, *postquam Bruto et Cassio caesis nulla iam publica arma*, meaning "after the killing of Brutus and Cassius there was no public army" (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.2). His use of the word *caesis*, which can translate to "ending" or "killing" or "slaughtering," and is related to the word *caedes*, which can translate to "murder" or "victims of murder," reveals that Tacitus believed Brutus to be the victim of violence.²⁴ He does not care to comment on whether that violence was justified, but goes on to say that once it was finished it provided the opportunity for infamous Augustus to sneak himself into the military and political spheres of Rome on a permanent basis (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.2). This marks the end of the Republican era, making the time of "freedom" in Tacitus' mind bookmarked by the two Bruti. By then associating Germanicus with the same language as these men Tacitus successfully connects the young prince to the era associated with this *libertas*. In doing so he presents both Drusus and his progeny as men linked to the "better age" of the past.

Tacitus connects the young prince to the better times of the past again immediately after the death of Germanicus in 2.82,

vera prorsus de Druso seniores locutos: displicere regnantibus civilia filiorum ingenia, neque ob aliud interceptos quam quia populum Romanum aequo iure complecti reddita libertate agitaverint. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.82)

²⁴ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "caedes, -is" and "caedo, -dere, cecidi, -sum."

The older men were speaking the very truth about Drusus: civil dispositions of their sons displeased those ruling, and on account of no reason other than that they urged the Roman people to embrace a return to freedom under equal laws, they (Drusus and Germanicus) were put out of the way.

Again Tacitus remains vague about what exactly this “return to freedom” would encompass, leaving it up to his audience’s imagination to decide for themselves what they believe the princes could have accomplished. This reminder of the lost potential and the return to a better time both at the beginning and end of the narrative concerning Germanicus bookmarks the concept and leaves a lasting association for the reader between the young prince and past *libertas*.

Despite all this, Tacitus does more to connect Germanicus to the Republican past other than compare him to his father Drusus and *libertas*. The historian also makes a point to show the similarities between the young Roman prince and the famous Republican general, Scipio Africanus. A number of scholars have made the connection between the speech of Scipio Africanus towards his mutinous troops in Livy’s *Ab Urbe Condita* 28 and that of Germanicus in the *Annales* 1.42.2.²⁵ But few in particular highlight the connections not only between the language used by the two generals, but also the similarities between their situations and how Livy’s passage “constitutes the principal intertext for Tacitus’ narrative of the Pannonian and German mutinies.”²⁶ One can compare the diction of 28.24.5-28.29.12 of Livy when expressing the “madness” of the troops to the *rabiem prolapsus est* or “having fallen into madness” of

²⁵ A.J. Woodman, “Mutiny and Madness: Tacitus *Annals* 1.16-49,” *Arethusa*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2006): 321.

Henry Furneaux, *Cornelii Taciti Annalium Ab Excessu Divi Augusti Libri: The Annals of Tacitus* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896).

Sir Ronald Syme, “Obituaries in Tacitus,” *American Journal of Philology* 79 (1958).

Goodyear, *Volume 1*, 290.

²⁶ Woodman, “Mutiny and Madness,” 313 and 321.

Germanicus' men in Tacitus' *Annales* 1.31.3.²⁷ Germanicus directly acknowledges this frenzy in 1.39.6 with his words *fatalem increpans rabiem* or “resounding their fatal madness”, just as Scipio does in 28.34.4 with the phrase *fatalem rabiem..accusat* or “he accused them of fatal madness”.²⁸ Germanicus attempts to send his son away from the camp to keep him safe, stating *infans in castris genitus* or “an infant having been born in the camp” in 1.41.2 and Scipio says in his own speech *a pueritia in castris habitus* or “having lived in the camp since boyhood” in 28.27.2 when describing his own upbringing around military affairs.²⁹

In addition to the similarities in their choice of words, both men have similar reactions to their troops, in that, after they had revolted, both generals questioned whether to consider them soldiers or even citizens,³⁰

quod nomen huic coetui dabo? militesne appellem qui filium imperatoris vestri vallo et armis circumsedistis? an cives, quibus tam proiecta senatus auctoritas? hostium quoque ius et sacra legationis et fas gentium rupistis. (Tac., *Ann.* 1.42.2)

What name shall I give to this gathering? Should I call you soldiers, who have surrounded the son of your commander with rampart and weapons? Or citizens, by whom the authority of the senate has been cast away? You have broken the rights of an enemy, and the holy obligation, and the divine law of nations.

quos ne quo nomine quidem appellare debeam scio. cives? qui a patria vestra descistis. an milites? qui imperium auspiciumque abnuistis, sacramenti religionem rupistis. (Liv., 28.27.3-4)

I do not know by what certain name I ought to call you all. Citizens? Men who have deserted from their fatherland. Or soldiers? Men who have refused the orders and the auspices and who have broken the moral obligation of your military oath.

²⁷ Woodman, “Mutiny and Madness,” 319.

²⁸ Woodman, “Mutiny and Madness,” 321.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ This may be a *topos* from which declamations are made. The question first introducing the problem and then explanation may be a fixed structure in order to emphasize disapproval.

The organization of the sentences with the introduction of the concept of being either a soldier or a citizen, and then providing explicit reasons why each of these titles may be inappropriate for the mutinous troops shows a clear connection between the character of both generals and their situations. As if the similarities between the diction and sentence construction of Scipio and Germanicus were not enough, Tacitus himself makes a point to compare the two leaders in 2.59 by stating *P. Scipionis aemulatione* or “while emulating P. Scipio” in a description of the young prince. Scipio is being used as the model in Tacitus for the character Germanicus, “How appropriate that Rome’s most romantic general, as described in its most colorful and nostalgic historian, should serve as Germanicus’ model.”³¹ The comparison to Rome’s “most romantic general” emphasizes Germanicus not only as a great figure of the past but also as a leader imbued with the nostalgia of the Republic.³² The unmistakable connections to great men of the time of *libertas*, like his father Drusus and Scipio Africanus, are the historian’s ironic attempt to place the young Roman prince on their level and associate him with the better times of the past.

Scipio himself, although distinctively a man of the Republic and *libertas*, was also frequently connected to Alexander the Great within Livy’s *Ab Urbe Condita*, revealing a triangular connection between the Macedonian, the Republican, and the young Roman prince.³³ One way in which Scipio was made similar to Alexander was in his treatment of his captives. Alexander, after the Battle of Issus at Cilicia, found himself in charge of keeping Darius’ family, including his mother, his wife, two mature daughters and a young son (Diod., 17.36.2). He comforts them by assuring them both of Darius’ safety and also of his own kindness and proper

³¹ Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” 300.

³² Scipio in fact was known for his mild character and upright life. Livy’s presentation of him resembles Tacitus’ of Germanicus in that their good qualities made them both overwhelmingly beloved by the people (Liv., 26.19.1-2).

³³ For a few examples, see Liv., 26.19.1-2, 26.19.6-7, 35.14.6-12.

consideration of their needs (Diod., 17.37.3). When meeting with the family, Alexander even goes as far as addressing the mother of Darius, Sisyngambris, as *μητέρα* or “mother” and promising safety and honor for every one of them (Diod., 17.38.1-2).

Scipio does something similar in his treatment of the captives of various Spanish states, comforting the hostages and telling them that Rome prefers to deal with men *beneficio quam metu*, through favor rather than fear (Liv., 26.49.8) He goes on to make a list of the captives and sending messengers to their homes so that each man might be able to come and *restituit suos*, recover his own family members (Liv., 26.49.10). Then the wife of Mandonius, brother of the prince of the Iltergetes, Indibilis, comes forward to Scipio and begs him for special protection for the women, which he grants willingly, assuring her that,

“meae populiue Romani disciplinae causa facerem,” inquit, “ne quid, quod sanctum usquam esset, apud nos violaretur;...” (Liv., 26.49.14)

...he says, “I will do this for the sake of my discipline and that of the Roman people, lest anything, which anywhere would be sacred, suffer violence among us...”

This response was only made by the Roman general after the woman made specific references to sexual violence towards captive women (Liv., 26.49.11-12). Scipio’s initial naiveté in the situation reveals that his character is so free of base desires that he struggled to understand what the woman feared. His assurance that not only he, but also the entirety of the Roman people, will honor and protect the women is a contrast from the way some of the Macedonians treated the family of Darius, many of whom lacked pity for the royal family and plundered their tent and committed *ἄπρεπῆ* (improper or unseemly) deeds (Diod., 17.36.4). The similarities of the situations indicate a connection between Scipio and Alexander and at the same time enforce the superiority of the character of the Roman people and their leader. Scipio in Livy’s account comes off as an almost “new and improved” Alexander and reinforces that the Roman people have

advanced beyond past the achievements of the Macedonians, especially concerning their natural dispositions.³⁴

The situations of the captives reveal the connection between Alexander and Scipio, but more importantly they emphasize the superiority of the latter.³⁵ Livy reinforces this concept again, revealing the concept was not original to Plutarch, in a conversation between Scipio and Hannibal after sending an embassy to Antiochus. In it, the Republican general asks Hannibal whom he considers to be the greatest commander, to which he responds with Alexander the Great of Macedon (Liv., 35.14.7). After then asking the Carthaginian how he would feel if he had ever defeated Scipio himself, Hannibal replied that he would have come *ante Alexandrum et ante Pyrrhum et ante alios omnes imperatores esse* (to be before Alexander, and before Pyrrhus, and before all other commander-in-chiefs) (Liv., 35.14.11), insinuating that Scipio himself was a greater leader than everyone else, including the Macedonian. The conversation again puts Alexander and Scipio on the same level of skill as generals but then proceeds to raise Scipio to an even higher ranking.

Tacitus' use of Scipio as a model and a foundation from which he can develop his character Germanicus is much deeper than it appears. The well-known connection between Scipio and Alexander makes the comparison between Scipio and Germanicus a link to the even further past. Germanicus is equated with the Republican era but also that of the height of the Macedonian empire, which additionally romanticizes and establishes him as a point from which

³⁴ Similar situations can be seen within the *Aeneid*, for example the pairings of fathers in sons, Evander and Pallas, and Aeneas and Iulus, show that the latter Trojan pair have surpassed the older Greek. This "Roman superiority" is a *topos* that is too great of a topic to be discussed here, but worth noting.

³⁵ Liv., 26.19.6-8. The historian also includes a direct comparison between Scipio and Alexander the Great when discussing their origin "myths". Each man was believed at some point to have been begotten by a serpent that possessed mystical qualities.

the present and unappealing principate can be compared. Furthermore, the triangular connection among these men makes the comparison between Alexander and Germanicus more understandable. The use of Alexander the Great within Roman literature reveals a pattern, in which Roman generals are compared to the Macedonian, the obvious standard for greatness, in order to present themselves in a superior light.³⁶ In Plutarch's and Livy's comparison of Scipio and the Macedonian, and Tacitus' comparison of Germanicus and Alexander, the historians present the Roman generals in such a way that they are, perhaps unreasonably, more accomplished both in achievements and in character. The use of Alexander in Roman literature is therefore archetypal, as he is the stock character historians use as a foundation for greatness. The connection Tacitus makes among Germanicus, Scipio and Alexander shows that, despite his deficiencies, the young Roman prince is meant to be seen in the same light as other generals of great status and skill. The tactic here produces a subtle way of ennobling a man who may or may not deserve it. Tacitus uses these connections to the famous men of the past both to ensure Germanicus' own status among them and also to compare the Roman prince to the principate in order to criticize the institution.

In addition to comparing Germanicus to great men of the Republic (especially those who also have a strong affiliation with Alexander the Great), Tacitus also uses a number of stylistic choices to emphasize further the connection between the young prince and ancient heroes. One passage in which Tacitus does so is the young prince's deathbed speech. Since Tacitus was not around at the time, and a recording of his words verbatim is less than likely, scholars can assume

³⁶ Again, another *topos* in Roman literature. This pattern is something I discerned in my research, but cannot fully discuss here due to its enormity.

that the actual speech written in the *Annales* is a fabrication of the historian.³⁷ Despite the fact that he may have based the speech on earlier writings and records, he certainly would have had a lot more freedom in his stylistic and diction choices here.

Given this freedom, Tacitus chose to include a “tradition” that similarly parallels the speech of Hercules made after he was crippled by the poisonous robe Deianira gave to him in the *Tusculanae Disputationes* of Cicero, sections 2.20-22.³⁸ In each passage, the heroes give their deathbed speeches, believing themselves to be the victim of foul play through the use of deception and poison. Each also proceeds to follow an almost formulaic rhetorical structure, making their words paralleled in content and context. Firstly, both Hercules and Germanicus, in a most dramatic fashion, want their family members to learn about their sufferings. Hercules states,

“Accede, nate, adsiste: miserandum aspice evisceratum corpus laceratum patris!”
(Cic., *Tusc.*, 2.21)

Come here, my son, and sit yourself near: look upon the pitiable eviscerated, torn body of your father!

Similarly Germanicus says,

referatis patri ac fratri, quibus acerbitatibus dilaceratus, quibus insidiis circumventus miserrimam vitam pessima morte finierim. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.71)

May you recall to my father and to my brother, by what persecutions torn, by what plots surrounded, I have ended the most miserable life with the worst death.

The unusual use of the word *dilaceratus* in the Tacitean passage is particularly striking because the diction evokes the same kind of physical pain that Hercules expressed with the word

³⁷ Henry Furneaux, *Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab Excessu Divi Augusti Libri: The Annals of Tacitus* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press. 1884), 334.

³⁸ H.C. Nutting, “Tacitus, Annales 2.71,” *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 19 (1933): 152.

laceratum.³⁹ Both men are supposedly killed by poison, and yet describe themselves as being visibly torn or eviscerated. Furthermore, they place their sufferings on display so that people might witness their pain. The public presentation of their death serves as a double purpose. Since they both suspect themselves to have been murdered, they both demand from these witnesses a vengeance for their deaths. Hercules asks his son not to let the love for his mother overcome the fact that she killed her husband. He asks his son to be pious for his father and avenge his death (Cic., *Tusc.*, 2.20). Germanicus similarly tells his friends *vindicabitis vos*, or “there must be an avenging by you,” and asks that they go before the senate to call upon the laws, and to remember what he had entrusted to them before his death (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.71).

Finally, both men, despite their heroic skills and successes in battle, were brought low by a woman. After listing at length his past victories and accomplishments, Hercules states,

sed feminae vir feminea interimor manu. (Cic., *Tusc.*, 2.20)

A man, by the feminine hand of a woman, I am killed.

His inclusion of both *feminae* and *feminea* reiterates the outrage such a hero would feel by being killed so anticlimactically. Germanicus,

inlacrimabunt quondam florentem et tot bellorum superstitem muliebri fraude cecidisse. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.71)

They will weep that the once flourishing man and survivor of so many wars has perished by womanly fraud.

Although the main suspect for the death of Germanicus was Piso himself, as was made clear by his trial later in the narrative, Germanicus includes Plancina in his deathbed speech not only because poison is a woman’s tool, but also because it further draws parallels to other heroes like Hercules who were killed by a woman’s deception. Furthermore it elevates Germanicus’ sense of

³⁹ Appears also in Tacitus’ *Annales*, 6.6.2, and 15.57.1.

masculine pride and standing as a warrior. For him, and other heroes who possessed such potential greatness, death was especially humiliating and tragic if caused by anything other than some sweeping battle where they could be surrounded by everlasting glory. The stylistic choices Tacitus made in this particular passage of his *Annales* reveal that there is a strong connection between Germanicus and other heroes of the past, like Hercules.⁴⁰ Regardless of whether Tacitus had the lines of Cicero specifically in his mind, that both passages clearly follow a particular formula. Tacitus uses his freedom as a writer to create an aura of romance and heroism around Germanicus in his death speech by following the patterns and mindsets of previous heroes' speeches.

The historian continues to make rhetorical choices within other passages concerning Germanicus that force his readers to draw parallels between the young prince and the heroes of the past.⁴¹ Another example occurs in 2.13 of the *Annales* where Germanicus takes up the archetype of the "incognito king" and discovers that his men are faithful to him. The motif of the incognito king is where a leader goes amongst his men or subjects while disguised and discovers their true morality and loyalties.⁴² If the situation results in a subject disrespecting his king, then the king reveals himself and punishes the disloyal subject for his behavior. Germanicus does this in 2.13, where he hears his men discuss the following:

*cum hic nobilitatem ducis, decorem alius, plurimi patientiam, comitatem, per
seria per iocos eundem animum laudibus ferrent reddendamque gratiam in acie*

⁴⁰ Nutting, "Tacitus," 152.

⁴¹ The connections between Germanicus and a variety of great historic and epic characters is my own idea. Scholars have compared him to one or two at a time, but the overall pattern is what I am concerned with, and how it effects the role of Germanicus in the narrative.

⁴² Benjamin Jasnow, "'Germanicus, Nero and the Incognito King in Tacitus' Annals 2.13 and 13.25," *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 110, No. 3 (2015): 313. Here is in fact another connection to Alexander the Great. The Macedonian himself was known to have taken up disguises to sneak about because loyalties of those around him were in question (Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Alexander Romance*, 2.13-15).

faterentur, simul perfidos et ruptores pacis ultioni et gloriae mactandos. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.13)

When this one spoke with praise of the nobility of his leader, and another spoke with praise of his charm, many spoke with praise of his patience, kindness, the evenness of his temper, either both through serious things and jest, they acknowledged that there must be a returning of thanks in battle by them, at the same time an honoring of glory and of vengeance against the dishonest and violators of peace.

The young prince has ventured out into the camps at night, unknown to his friends around him, and overhears an overwhelmingly positive response from his men. Not only are these the same soldiers who mutinied and revolted in the previous book, but also in this same passage they are given a bribe by *unus hostium* “one of the enemy”, which they adamantly reject. As with the more positive cases of the incognito king, Germanicus has no need to reveal his identity to his men because he found all their loyalties to be strong and positive.

Germanicus going out among his troops disguised can be related to the story of Odysseus, and how when returning to Ithaca Athena has disguised the hero so that his subjects would not recognize him.⁴³ Odysseus finds himself outside the house of Eumaeus, a local swineherd, where he is almost attacked by dogs (Hom., *Od.*, 14.30-41). Eumaeus comes out to spare him from this fate and invites the stranger into his home, treating him as politely as possible in his humble abode. Although the customary practice of *xenia* is commonly found in the Homeric epics, Eumaeus’ treatment of Odysseus leaves the king both delighted and surprised (Hom. *Od.*, 14.53-62). In addition to this warm welcome, Eumaeus has already bewailed the loss of his king, and the aching hole in his heart for his good leader (Hom. *Od.*, 14.42-49). Even before Odysseus enters the home he realizes that his subject is loyal. Eumaeus, with his passionate speech and generous reception of his guest, has given both the audience and his leader plenty of evidence of

⁴³ Jasnow, “Incognito King,” 321.

his faith and morality, much like the soldiers of Germanicus. The stories continue to parallel one another, when despite five separate occasions in which Eumaeus gives a lengthy description of his love and respect for his lost king, or the injustice done to him by the suitors, Odysseus continues to hide his true identity (Hom. *Od.*, 14.41-49, 14.70-83, 14.102-126, 14.150-172, 14.196-210). Much like Germanicus, Odysseus has no need to reveal his identity and punish those who disrespected him because he found the swineherd to be a faithful subject.⁴⁴

The similarity between the disguised young prince exploring the camps of his army and the king of Ithaca returning home with his identity concealed cannot be denied. Much like Odysseus, Germanicus takes upon the role of the “incognito king” to discover the true natures of his men.⁴⁵ Firstly, both Odysseus and Germanicus have reasons to believe that they would find themselves among unfaithful men. The Ithacan king had been away from his homeland for near twenty years, an extended period of time where his loyal subjects could have been forced to switch sides or been killed off. For the Roman prince, the troops he was walking among were the same troops that in fact had mutinied against him in Book 1 of the *Annales*. Despite these circumstances, both leaders find themselves to be surrounded by subjects with unquestioned loyalties, and therefore have no need to reveal their true selves. In this instance, Tacitus’ rhetorical choices and inclusion of the archetypal “incognito king” reveals that in many ways Germanicus is similar to the Ithacan king in that he is both beloved by his subjects and also uses deception in order to determine their faithfulness.

⁴⁴ Jasnow, “Incognito King,” 321. This was obviously not the case for the disloyal Melantheus who aided the suitors in their wasteful ways (Hom. *Od.*, 17.212-35). Odysseus reveals himself to him and the other suitors and punishes them in order to regain his house.

⁴⁵ Eumaeus asks Odysseus to tell him the story of his travels *Odyssey* 14.185-190 but Odysseus chooses to keep his true identity hidden from him in his response beginning on line 192, when he says *τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι ταῦτα μάλ’ ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω...* or “therefore I will tell to you precisely these very things...”

Although Tacitus creates Germanicus so that he resembles a variety of the heroes of the past, his writing especially emphasizes the similarities between the young Roman prince and the hero Aeneas through his use of Virgilian style and diction, in addition to contextual parallels in their circumstances. There are an impressive number of Virgilian correspondences in the first two books of the *Annales*, most of which, not surprisingly, deal with Germanicus.⁴⁶ His deathbed speech, in addition to following the rhetorical structure of other heroes' speeches, also has a number of poetic, especially Virgilian, elements. Tacitus' inclusion of *admotas hostias* or "the approaching offerings," *sacrificalem apparatusum* or "the sacrifices being prepared," and *festam Antiochensium plebem* or "the plebian festival of the Antioch" stand out in particular because of the frequency of these phrases used in verse.⁴⁷ One can compare Tacitus' specific rhetorical choices, noting that *rimantes* or "laying out" may have been borrowed directly from Virgil, *effundendus spiritus*, or "breath must be poured out," in 2.70 is remarkably similar to the *Aeneid* 1.98, and that *deficere* in the phrase *defectum Germanicum*, or "Germanicus has fallen," is unquestionably poetic.⁴⁸ In addition to using Virgilian diction in his character's deathbed speech, Tacitus also employs specific poetic vocabulary and style during his description of Varus' defeated army and Germanicus' reaction. The phrase *igitur cupido Caesarem invadit solvendi suprema militibus ducique*, or "therefore the desire of relinquishing the last rights to the soldiers and their general seized Caesar," has poetic elements, including the alliteration between *cupido*

⁴⁶ Robert T.S. Baxter, "Virgil's Influence on Tacitus in Books 1 and 2 of the Annals," *Classical Philology*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (1972): 248.

⁴⁷ Baxter, "Virgil's Influence," 267.

⁴⁸ For an entire list of the similarities between Virgil's and Tacitus' rhetorical choices, please see Baxter's article. The piece is quite long and very exhaustive in its findings.

Caesarem and *solvendi suprema* as well as the use of *cupido* instead of the usual prosaic *cupiditas* (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.61).⁴⁹

Not only does the diction here imply poetic style, but the historian's choice of words also highlights similarities between the personalities of Germanicus and Aeneas, in that they are both extremely pious. Since *solvere* is only used in the *Aeneid* in situations describing religious rites for the dead, and in each of those circumstances Aeneas is the one to perform the rites, by using the same word in his own passage Tacitus is emphasizing the same quality in the young Roman prince.⁵⁰ In addition, the chapters describing the fate of Varus' army and the general's reaction create a direct contextual juxtaposition between the personalities of Germanicus and Aeneas. They reveal that the young Roman prince, much like the Trojan, is publically emotional, in addition to being compelled by his sense of honor and righteousness. For example, both men come across the "remains" of their fallen comrades and not only openly mourn in front of their troops but also are struck with a sense of duty to respect the dead. Aeneas comes to Carthage and sees the temple to Juno being constructed in order to remember the events of the Trojan War. He sees in the reliefs his allies and friends dying in battle and is forced to understand the price of his own survival (Virg. *A.*, 1.453-95). This scene is remarkably similar to the one found in the *Annales* 1.62 where Germanicus and his men come across the actual physical remains of Varus' army and bury them all as if they were *coniunctos* or *consanguineos* meaning linked or blood related. Here, just as Aeneas wept for the Trojans lost in the war, Germanicus realizes the sacrifices made for him and *praesentibus doloris socius* or "sharing in the pain of those present". Furthermore, the Roman prince is overcome with grief and expresses it by personally helping in the burying of the dead, something Tiberius does not approve of. Aeneas similarly is obliged to

⁴⁹ Baxter, "Virgil's Influence," 254.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

do the same with the funeral rites of his comrades Misenus and Palinurus because of his strong sense of duty (Virg., *A.*, 6.156-82, 6.373-81). The similarities between the circumstances and reactions of Aeneas and Germanicus in these scenes, among others, have convinced scholars that each character represents the “archetypal Roman man and warrior who possesses *virtus*, *moderatio*, *iustitia*, *pietas*, and *fides*.”⁵¹ Furthermore, the evidence indicates that Tacitus presents Germanicus in such a way that the young prince can be compared to the ideal warrior and leader of the past, if not the hero Aeneas himself. “Germanicus, after all, is very much in the old heroic mold, for he is a commanding human figure, a man subject to great passion and intense emotions as well as to his sense of duty.”⁵²

Tacitus clearly is using his freedom as a writer to instill in his readers these connections between Germanicus and more romantic times of the past. Although scholars today can never know whether the historian had these specific heroes and passages from earlier literature in mind, his writing reveals too many patterns and similarities to deny his intentions. The young Roman prince is constructed in the narrative to remind the audience nostalgically of a better time, ranging from the heroic age to the not so distant Republic. Tacitus uses these recollections of the past and stylistic choices during the most dramatic sections of Germanicus’ story, like coming upon the remains of his allies or his deathbed speech, for both aesthetic and practical reasons. By including poetic writing and presenting Germanicus in traditional garb he adds “a colorful epic dimension” to his historical narrative, making it more entertaining for his audience.⁵³ More importantly, by doing so Tacitus “elevates and ennobles” the portrayal of Germanicus.⁵⁴ He adds

⁵¹ W. Edelmaier, “Tacitus und die Gegner Roms.” (Doctorate dissertation, Heidelberg University, 1964), 138 and Baxter, “Virgil’s Influence,” 248.

⁵² Baxter, “Virgil’s Influence,” 268.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

deeper epic dimensions to the role of the young prince and successfully places him on an idealized pedestal from which he can be compared to the dreariness and stifling institutions of the present and portrayed as a victim of the violence of the principate.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ The portrayal of Germanicus can be related to the anecdote from Herodotus' *Histories* 5.92 where Thrasybulus advised Periander on how to govern his own town by symbolically cutting off the tallest parts of a crop of wheat, and therefore removing the best part of the plant. Livy retells something similar in his *Historiae* 1.54 when Tarquinius Superbus advises his son on how to govern Gabii by cutting off the heads of all of the tallest poppy plants in his garden. Both stories metaphorically address that the best way to govern a town or a people is by removing the noblest and the brightest to eliminate competition. This is a philosophy that can be seen within the new principate, as something Germanicus struggles to follow, and therefore makes him stand out in the new political scene, and as something that may have contributed to the prince's ultimate demise.

CHAPTER THREE: The “Romantic” Past is no Longer Fitting for the “Repulsive”

Present

Tacitus’ portrayal of Germanicus reveals a deep connection to the past. The historian subtly establishes this link by presenting Germanicus’ dual personality in such a way that he is very similar to well-known heroes. He continues to do so in his style by creating similarities both linguistically and contextually between Germanicus’ and past heroes and Republican men. He reinforces all of this again by using poetic constructions and archetypes, like Alexander the Great and the incognito king, to ennoble the concept of the young prince and place him on a somewhat misplaced nostalgic level. Tacitus does all of these things and creates the link between the character of Germanicus and the past so that the young man can serve as a foundation from which Tacitus can compare him to his contemporaries.⁵⁶ Germanicus is sometimes seen as a Republican past struggling within the current principate.⁵⁷ In fact, Germanicus is a man representing many eras of the past, not just the Republican, which shows not only how he does not fit in with the present times, but also the issues with the institution of the principate. This comparison to the present forces the reader to look at Germanicus as an ironically ennobled and attractive character, as he serves to criticize the principate and at the same time is himself a

⁵⁶ Tacitus is comparing Germanicus to the institution of the principate, not necessarily a specific emperor, as some scholars believe, (see G. A. Harrer, “Tacitus and Tiberius,” *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1920): 57-68.) Although in his overall construction of Germanicus’ character, and therefore his purpose to criticize the principate, Tacitus does compare the young prince to a variety of emperors and leaders.

⁵⁷ Ellen O’Gorman, *Irony and Misreading in the Annals of Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47.

product of it, that is no longer appropriate or relevant in the current circumstances. The principate, on the other hand, is viewed as unattractive in its foundations and its morals, but is suitable and functions well within its context, a concept that can be called “right but repulsive” and “wrong but romantic.”⁵⁸ All this helps to understand Tacitus’ purpose for creating the characterization of Germanicus in such a way; he does so specifically to define what the institution of the principate means to him.

A comparison between Germanicus and various emperors and leaders of his time further illustrates the “right but repulsive” and “wrong but romantic” analogy. For instance, the deaths of Augustus and Germanicus are handled in very different ways. When the first emperor passed away *multus hinc ipso de Augusto sermo*, meaning then there was much talk about Augustus himself (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.9). Tacitus highlights the fact that this “talk” about the emperor was focused around the circumstances of both the state and the people of Rome that made Augustus’ rule so necessary. The historian presents two sides to the story, neither very positive, saying that he either acted out of *pietate parentem et necessitudine rei publicae*, the filial duty to the parent and the necessity of the state, or that he was *machinator doli* (the maker of tricks) and his rule was encompassed with *corruptas legiones* (corrupt legions) and the *proscriptionem civium* (proscription of citizens), among other things (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.9-10). He ends the discussion with *pacem sine dubio post haec, verum cruentam*, “without a doubt after this there was peace, but a truly bloodstained one” (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.10).

Contrarily, Tacitus’ portrayal of the death of Germanicus focuses specifically on his merits and the similarities to Alexander the Great, as previously discussed. The ominous tones the historian includes in the death of the young prince are not produced by the suspicion about

⁵⁸ Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” 306.

his intensions or about his character, as with Augustus, but by the suspicion of those surrounding the prince and the hint at foul play. In his deathbed speech Germanicus outright blames Piso and Plancina for his demise, but afterwards he begs his wife to lay low and asks that she,

saevienti fortunae summitteret animum, neu regressa in urbem aemulatione potentiae validiores inritaret. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.72)

...might submit her mind to the rage of fortune, and not, when returning into the city, to enrage those more powerful by political rivalry.

Germanicus here is referring to the fact that Agrippina should remain cautious around those more powerful than she, like Tiberius, because they may have played a direct role in the murder of her husband. The honoring of the young prince in his death, through the discussion of his merits and the comparison to Alexander the Great, and the lack of his own ulterior motives reveals that he is the “romantic” component of the analogy. At the same time, the unsubtle references to foul play and the reality of Germanicus being helplessly removed from the political playing field by the emperor shows that he is perhaps a romantic character but “wrong” for his times and his circumstance. He is unable to perform successfully in the political arena because his naiveté and romantic qualities make him unfit for the times of the *cruentam pacem* Augustus has created. Contrarily, the aftermath of the death of the first emperor shows that Augustus was successful in his gaining and maintaining of power, whether through honorable intentions or not, making him “right” and even necessary for the times, but inherently repulsive in his methods.

Augustus, of course, was not the only leader that fits this “right but repulsive” mold in opposition to Germanicus. Tiberius, as a direct contemporary of the son of Drusus, served as a strong foundation for comparison. Even in the very beginning of the introduction of the young prince Tacitus includes a section that blatantly states Germanicus represents what is good in this world, and Tiberius serves as his antithetical counterpart. He writes,

set anxius occultis in se patrum aviaque odiis quorum causae acriores quia iniquae. quippe Drusi magna apud populum Romanum memoria, credebaturque, si rerum potitus foret, libertatem redditurus; unde in Germanicum favor et spes eadem. nam iuveni civile ingenium, mira comitas et diversa ab Tiberii sermone vultu, adrogantibus et obscuris. (Tac., Ann., 1.33)

But he was troubled by the hidden hatred of his uncle and grandmother against him, for which the causes were more piercing because they were crooked. Of course the memory of Drusus was great with the Roman people and it was believed, if he were able to obtain power over matters, he would have returned liberty; whence towards Germanicus there was the same favor and hope. For he was a young man of civil temperament and wonderful kindness, completely opposite from the speech and countenance of Tiberius, arrogant and shady.

Again, the description of Germanicus remains untainted, as he is not only a source of hope for the Roman people of the return of a better time, but his personality is made up of honorable qualities and features. The connection to the beloved Republic, in addition to the positive representation, shows that Germanicus again is the “romance” in the equation. The fact that he was troubled by the hatred of his family, who happen to make up the absolute peak of the Roman hierarchy, shows that he does not fit in with the flavor of the new political atmosphere. Both his family and important political figures considered him an outlier, leaving the readers without a doubt that the young prince was also “wrong” for his situation.

At the same time, Tiberius whose character is described with *adrogantibus*, *obscuris*, *odiis*, and *iniquae*, is clearly “repulsive” as a person and a leader and yet is the one securely in league with Germanicus’ grandmother and other leading political figures of Rome. The rest of the account of Germanicus is littered with phrases such as *quod Tiberio haud probatum* (because Tiberius was not approving) strengthening not only the juxtaposition of the two men but also the fact that Tiberius was “right” in his reactions and more fitting for the current circumstances than

his adopted son (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.62).⁵⁹ For instance, in the second book the emperor *monebat*, was advising, Germanicus to end his campaign, saying that there was *satis iam eventuum, satis casuum*, now enough fortune and enough misfortune (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.26). Tiberius here is careful to request this in a way so that he avoids causing public embarrassment for his adopted son, hoping that the young man's *modestia* or modesty would prevail.⁶⁰ Germanicus resists, and that is when Tiberius has to be more forceful. Germanicus then believes that he was pushed away from his glory *per invidiam*, or through jealousy on Tiberius' part (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.26). Tacitus includes in the same passage that,

se novies a divo Augusto in Germaniam missum plura consilio quam vi perfecisse. (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.26)

Tiberius himself by the Divine Augustus had been sent to Germany nine times, accomplishing more through policy than through violence.

Tacitus discussing not only the emperor's own experiences in Germany, but also his numerous successes allows the audience to understand that Tiberius' decisions on the military situation in Germany was one most likely based on his own skills and leadership, rather than petty jealousies as Germanicus assumes. The passage shows that, although the young prince is "romantic" in his quest for glory and military triumph, his tactics are out of date compared to the more cold and calculated policies of Tiberius. Despite the fact that Germanicus' personality seems to be more appealing to the Roman people, his bumbling mistakes and shortcomings, especially those revealed during the mutinies and his death, cannot be forgotten, just as Tiberius' disapproving

⁵⁹ Finally when the mutinies around Germanicus were quelled, *nuntiata ea Tiberium laetitia curaue adfecere*, meaning that the news brought for Tiberius both happiness and anxiety (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.52). Tacitus goes on to explain that Tiberius wanted the mutiny to end, but the fact that it ended with Germanicus making lavish promises to the soldiers and gaining more popularity for himself was annoying for the emperor, and maybe even dangerous. Tiberius is not unreasonable in feeling this way as well, Germanicus clearly did not handle the mutinies well and his "solutions" may have caused more problems for the future.

⁶⁰ Shotter, "Tacitus, Tiberius, and Germanicus," 203.

feelings and reactions towards the young prince cannot be completely dismissed based on the emperor's undesirable character traits.

Although some scholars believe Tiberius and all that he represents was the foil for Germanicus, the text clearly reveals that more than one important political figure of the principate can be compared to the young prince.⁶¹ For instance, Germanicus' adopted brother Drusus can also be used as a point of comparison, as the men were both similar in age, relation to the emperor, and military status. Despite their similarities, they are fundamentally different in their personalities, as Tacitus frequently and consistently describes Germanicus as having *comitas, civilis animus* or *ingenium*, whereas Drusus was bluntly described with the phrase *promptum ad asperiora ingenium Druso erat*, meaning Drusus had a visible character that leaned more towards "cruelty" or "harshness" (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.29). As Germanicus' personality traits help the reader to understand him as an epic man of the past, similar to Scipio, or Alexander, or even heroes like Aeneas and Achilles, Drusus gives the impression that he takes after his father Tiberius, something Tacitus does not believe is necessarily admirable. Again, through connecting Germanicus to the past and epic heroes his personality results in the audience viewing him as a romantic man of a better time. Conversely, what little is learned about Drusus forces the reader to understand him as more dark and unpleasant in nature.

But if Drusus is so unappealing, then why does it seem that he is more favored by the royal family and seems to be more successful in the current political atmosphere? Firstly, Tiberius most likely favored Drusus more than his adopted son Germanicus, an assumption that should not sound unreasonable, considering that Drusus was his own son by blood.⁶² The audience sees this, for example, in the same instance in which Tiberius took away Germanicus'

⁶¹ Harrer, "Tacitus and Tiberius," 57-68.

⁶² Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 297.

campaign in Germany after years of successes and failures. He decides the best way to handle the situation,

simul adnectebat, si foret adhuc bellandum, relinqueret materiem Drusi fratris gloriae... (Tac., *Ann.*, 2.26)

At the same time he [Tiberius] was adding, that if there needed to be a war, he [Germanicus] would relinquish material for glory to his brother Drusus.

Tiberius gives away the campaign to his own son, which perhaps reveals that he favored his own son and that this favor may have been one of the reasons the young man was more successful than Germanicus in the political arena. But favor clearly was not the only reason Tiberius gave away the campaign; he did so because his son was deserving of it after the way he handled the mutinies in Pannonia (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.25). As previously discussed, Drusus experienced a mutiny that he managed to end with a simple hand gesture, instilling fear and obedience in the hearts of his troops almost immediately.⁶³ Germanicus on the other hand manages to make the situation worse with his reaction, causing his own life to be threatened, control over the situation to be lost, and riots and violence to break out. Although Drusus' character may seem harsh and cold like his father's, it turns out that this demeanor actually causes less bloodshed and works more effectively, given the current political situation. Despite the fact that his personality is less than appealing and he seems "repulsive" to the Roman people, like his father, his tactics and skills are in fact "right" for the situation he is in, just as Germanicus' are not.

Drusus was not the only man whom Tiberius favored and who was successful in the political arena of Rome. Piso serves as another example of a "repulsive" man fitting for his own times in contrast to the popular but inept Germanicus. The greatest example of this is the juxtaposition between their arrivals in Athens. Germanicus' actions reveal that he not only

⁶³ Along with a very fortuitously timed eclipse, *Annales* 1.25.

honored the Athenians and treated them with respect, but also that they responded well and welcomed him into their city:

hinc ventum Athenas, foederique sociae et vetustae urbis datum ut uno lictore uteretur. excepere Graeci quaesitissimis honoribus, vetera suorum facta dictaque praeferentes quo plus dignationis adulatio haberet. (Tac., Ann., 2.53)

Then coming to Athens, in accordance to our treaty with an allied and ancient city, he made use of only one lictor. The Greeks specifically stated the most sought out honors for him, bringing forth deeds and words of their own ancestors by which they would have more dignity to their praise.

In this arrival, Germanicus has done nothing wrong and has in fact taken the extra measure to honor and respect his hosts. They respond kindly to this, and so Germanicus reveals himself once again to be “romantic” in the sense that he is popular and appealing to those around him, and he evokes the past.

Piso, on the other hand, handles his arrival in Athens very differently,

At Cn. Piso quo properantius destinata inciperet civitatem Atheniensium turbido incessu exterritam oratione saeva increpat, oblique Germanicum perstringens quod contra decus Romani nominis non Atheniensis tot cladibus extinctos, sed conluviem illam nationum comitate nimia coluisset: hos enim esse Mithridatis adversus Sullam, Antonii adversus divum Augustum socios. etiam vetera obiectabat, quae in Macedones inprosperere, violenter in suos fecissent... (Tac., Ann., 2.55)

But Gnaeus Piso, that he might enter more quickly upon his design, terrifying the Athenian citizens with his wild approach he was abusing them with a raging speech slighting Germanicus obliquely, because against the grace of the name of the Roman people not the Athenians, who had been completely wiped out by so many disasters, but for that medley of origins he had cultivated excessive friendliness: For these were allies of Mithridates against Sulla, of Antonius against divine Augustus. He even threw the past at them, what they had done unsuccessfully against the Macedonians, that they had made violence against their own...

The difference between the two arrivals is rather drastic, as Piso seems to have shredded any hope for a positive guest-host relationship. He makes an effort to terrify the citizens around him, in the process of doing so managing to insult Germanicus, and then continues to bring up the past

failures of the Greeks again and again. The “repulsiveness” of Piso is unquestionable, and yet like Tiberius, his actions are not completely void of reason and sense. Pelling states, “one cannot simply dismiss Piso’s attack on the Athenians...” because despite the fact that “Piso may be unattractive, just as Tiberius is unattractive, both of them often talk sense.”⁶⁴ Piso’s disastrous guest etiquette stems from the fact that the Athenians used the deeds and words of their ancestors to honor Germanicus, when these older generations were actually consistently on the opposite side of a war with Rome. He disagrees with Germanicus’ methods and skillfully uses the past in a similar way to point out the flaws of the young Roman prince and his hosts. In addition, despite the fact that his presentation was brutally blunt, Piso was not wrong in his facts or even his thought process. Piso, therefore, is another appropriate example in which the “right but repulsive” analogy is applicable.⁶⁵

Germanicus’ quality of being “wrong” compared to Piso shows up again shortly after the account of the arrivals in Athens, when Piso was shipwrecked and the young prince went out of his way to help him,

haud nescium quibus insectationibus petitus foret: sed tanta mansuetudine agebat ut, cum orta tempestas raperet in abrupta possetque interitus inimici ad casum referri, miserit triremis quarum subsidio discrimini eximeretur. (Tac., Ann., 2.55)

He (Germanicus) was not ignorant about having been assaulted with insults: but he had such gentleness, so that when a storm having risen up seized him (Piso) against the rough rocks and the death of his enemy was able to be referred to chance, he (Germanicus) sent triremes by which he (Piso) might be removed from critical danger.

This was a chance for Germanicus to have a huge political player, who had been causing him serious problems during his career and is even credited with the young prince’s ultimate demise,

⁶⁴ Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” 301.

⁶⁵ The “right but repulsive” analogy comes from Pelling but this is my own discussion on Piso and Germanicus and how they fit into their current political situations.

removed from the picture without engaging in any sort of illicit activity. Any other person of the principate, with their opportunistic personalities and calculated demeanors, would have used this situation to their advantage.⁶⁶ Bumbling Germanicus sees this situation and goes out of his way to rescue the man who has caused him so much grief. Although on the surface he acts and seems appealing and attractive, Germanicus continues to show his ineptitude and how unfitting he really is for the current dealings of the principate.

The phrases, “right but repulsive” and “wrong but romantic” are very appropriate in understanding the role of Germanicus and how he serves as a foundation from which the principate can be compared. The young Roman prince is clearly looked upon with some sort of nostalgic and romantic haze. Tacitus has reinforced this concept again and again in his juxtapositions between Germanicus and Republican men, past heroes, and the similarities between the Roman’s personality traits and those of “epic” heroes. Within the first two books of the *Annales* Tacitus builds up the representation of Germanicus and uses him as a lens so that the people of Rome can see the true nature of the institution of the principate. In doing so, he reveals that Germanicus is looked upon with respect and hope by the Roman people, he is popular and entertaining in his exploits, and he is also greatly missed when he passes. At the same time, despite this popular perception of the man, Tacitus also reveals that the young prince, in both his personality and his skillset, is obviously not prepared for his contemporary political situation. He

⁶⁶ For example, when Tiberius was having issues with Archelaus in section 2.42 of the *Annales*, and the latter is lured to the city by means of a letter. He then quickly ends up dead, the cause of death unknown. The tone in this passage leaves the audience with the understanding that Tacitus may have believed Tiberius played a direct role in Archelaus’ death. And if this instance is not persuasive enough, Tacitus outright says it in the case of Agrippa Postumus in section 1.6 with, *primum facinus novi principatus fuit Postumi Agrippae caedes*, the first crime of the new principate was the murder of Postumus Agrippa. Both Postumus and Archelaus were speed bumps to Tiberius’ reign, and so in the fashion of the new political atmosphere, he removed them from his path. Germanicus clearly is not following the same pattern.

is impetuous and histrionic, making him unable to subdue the mutinies in Germany as Drusus did in Pannonia, ineffective and demoralizing in a crisis like discovering the remains of Varus' army, and overemotional and hysterical in his own death. He is unable to function or fit in with the principate and stands out in comparison to the leaders of this "new way" of running Rome like Augustus, Tiberius, Drusus, and even Piso. At the same time, in comparison to Germanicus, the new principate seems grimy and sneaky, run on personal agendas and jealousies. Regardless of the fact that on the surface it seems unappealing, the results show that the new principate is undoubtedly effective.

As the "right but repulsive" and "wrong but romantic" analogy perfectly describes the role of the character of Germanicus, it begs the question: should the representation of the young prince be taken seriously? Tacitus constructs an extremely high pedestal for him by placing him within the same rank as epic heroes like Aeneas, Achilles, and Hercules, as Republican men like his father Drusus and Scipio Africanus, and by presenting Germanicus as being of a higher caliber than even Alexander the Great. At the same time his mistakes and embarrassing qualities tell the audience that he cannot function as a leader. This drastic difference between the two components of Germanicus' role reveals that his representation should not necessarily be taken seriously. Tacitus' purpose for the character was to show the issues and the stifling realities of the new political atmosphere of Rome, and to present the principate to his readers as a dark and potentially dangerous form of government. The construction of Germanicus allows him to do just that. Firstly, his character is outrageous and produces contradictory results, which grabs the readers' attention and informs them of a deeper purpose for his writing, which is made clear by the innumerable scholars who have attempted to understand the representation of the young

prince.⁶⁷ Secondly, his proximity to other major political figures of the time in addition to frequent flashbacks and direct comparisons to important leaders of the past and the present show that he is a point of interest from which a discussion on leadership and the principate can arise. Finally, his direct biological connection with the emperors of Rome, among other key leaders of his time, show that his character was not only meant to highlight the issues and potential dangers of the new form of government, but also to serve as a standard to show how far the quality of the idealized leader has fallen since the inception of the principate. Tacitus accomplishes this criticism of the principate by creating a representation that functions as a statement and point of comparison against the principate, but also is of a man who is specifically a product of that same political environment. The young prince is the symbol of the last remnant of the Republic and the more romantic times of heroes and glory, and yet he still cannot seem to function as a person of power. His role then shows how the “golden boy” of the principate, the best and most popular member of the royal house, ironically cannot meet the same standards of the past, leaving the audience with the understanding that the principate is unappealing and crooked in its morals and functions, but more importantly its members are held to a lower standard of “leaders”. Tacitus creates an ironic and amusing character that attacks the quality and standard of the institution of the principate from multiple angles for a more effective and deliberative condemnation of the new government of Rome.

⁶⁷ Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus*, 9, Dorey, *Tacitus*, 63-65, Goodyear *Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, Pelling “Tacitus and Germanicus,” Rutland “Tacitean Germanicus,” Woodman “Mutiny and Madness,” Nutting “Tacitus,” Edelmaier “Tacitus und die Gegner Roms,” Jasnow “Incognito King,” and Baxter “Virgil’s Influence,” to name a few. For a more comprehensive list, please see attached bibliography.

CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusions on the Principate: Purpose of Germanicus

The multifaceted nature of the representation of Germanicus has made it difficult for many readers to interpret Tacitus' purpose. The historian presents the Roman as an inept and unsuccessful leader who bases his actions on irrational and overdramatic tendencies, while simultaneously he depicts him to be similar, on par with, or even superior to great heroes, generals, and leaders of the past. The purpose of this study is to reveal that the portrayal of the young prince is created to develop him as a nostalgic memory of the Republican and heroic days of simple glory. Furthermore, Tacitus uses the development of Germanicus as a symbol of the past to highlight the unpleasant and "repulsive" aspects of the principate, and also to show deliberately that the new, and perhaps detestable, form of government was irrefutably more effective and successful for its time.⁶⁸ At the same time the historian demonstrates that Germanicus, as an ironically idealized representation of the past, is a "foil" for the whole institution of the principate, as he is no longer fitting or appropriate for his times but still viewed "romantically" and with great popularity. All of these developments help to understand what the principate itself means to Tacitus. The historian believes that the institution was built upon a delicate and unstable foundation, much like that of the earlier monarchy of Rome, which imprudently centralizes excessive power. Moreover, this structure allows for drastically different, and usually abysmal, outcomes based solely on which particular man had crawled his

⁶⁸ Baxter agrees when he states, "...for Tacitus' narrative of the tragedy of Germanicus is the historian's dramatic indictment of the principate...", "Virgil's Influence," 269.

way into emperorship. Despite its flaws, Tacitus also believes that the principate was a regrettable political necessity in order to ensure the survival of Rome's superior status.

The new political entity of the principate to Tacitus was not very different at all from where Rome first began: in the hands of a hereditary monarchy, a form of government most Romans came to detest. Tacitus spends a great portion of his work focusing on the idea of power and the person with whom that power rests.⁶⁹ The very first section of his *Annales* initiates this discussion and runs through an abbreviated list of the major powerful political players from the foundation of the city to the emperor Augustus (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.1). He specifically includes this section, rather than simply beginning with Augustus, in order to remind his audience quickly of the monarchical era of Rome. He states, *urbem Romam a principio reges habuere; libertatem et consulatum L. Brutus instituit*, meaning "From the beginning, kings held the city Rome; L. Brutus established freedom and the consulship" (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.1). He sets a clear distinction between the early monarchy and the concept of *libertas*, something he repeats frequently within his writings concerning the latter and the principate. For example, the historian soon afterwards describes the principate, *igitur verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisca et integri moris*, "therefore after the state having been completely turned around nothing of the old and respected customs stood anywhere" (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.4). These *mores*, an invocation of *mos maiorum*, were from the Republic, firmly establishing the time of the consuls as a good and honorable era and that of the principate as the opposite. By stating that the monarchy and the principate were periods void of freedom and honorable customs, he inherently connects the two and shows that his perspective of the new form of government is that it resembles an ancient institution that is no longer credited or respected. He continues to say that one of the primary concerns of the

⁶⁹ Ellen O'Gorman, "On Not Writing About Augustus: Tacitus' 'Annals' Book I," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* No. 35 (1995): 93.

principate was *sustenavit domum* or the “maintenance of the house,” further highlighting the fact that the new form of government and its concerns with hereditary succession were in fact very similar to the ancient monarchy (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.4).

In addition to Tacitus’ direct correlation between the monarchy and the principate, he also develops his disapproving opinion of the new form of government with key pieces of diction. The historian specifically uses words like *arcane* or secret, *dominatio* or mastery, and *regnum* or kingship in his *Historiae* to describe the government Augustus helped to establish and includes a clear description on his thoughts on *libertas* and the principate,

quo modo pessimis imperatoribus sine fine dominationem, ita quamvis egregiis modum libertatis placere. (Tac., *Hist.*, 4.8)

By how much it was pleasing for the worst emperors to have a rule without end, so as much as possible it was pleasing for the nobles to have a measure of freedom.

The distinction here between the *dominationem* and the *modum libertatis* again shows that the time of the emperorship, just as that of the monarchical rule, was a time separated from freedom. The use of the word *dominationem* especially highlights this, in that if the emperor is the ruler of a *dominatio* then he in fact is a *dominus*, which is a master of a household. If Rome is in fact this household, then all its members, the people of Rome, are in fact slaves to the will of that master. Tacitus’ word choice in addition to the direct relationship between the monarchy and the principate reveal his clear opinion of the government. He then deliberately relates his discussion on types of governments back to Germanicus when he uses the portrayal of the young prince as a direct representation of *libertas* and the nostalgic times of the Republic. The role of the character further emphasizes the connections between the monarchy and the principate and the stark differences between these hereditary centralized institutions and the *aequalitas* or equality and *libertas* of the Republic (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.4).

Tacitus' focus on the similarities between the era of kings and the era of emperors helps to exemplify his consistent theme of excessive centralized power. The historian's greatest issue with the new form of government is in fact that it consolidates a dangerous amount of power into the hands of one man. This uneven apportion of control makes the entire success or failure of the principate dependent completely on the person who happens to be the emperor. Tacitus believes that the narrow dependency on one man leads to the corruption of the state, of the people themselves, and of the overall morals of their culture.⁷⁰ He demonstrates this with his portrayal of all members of the beginning of the principate as both murderous and hypocritical, focused solely on the elimination of rivals and succession.⁷¹

The introduction of Augustus, for example, in the *Annales* 1.1-10 includes a description of him having forcefully taken the consulate from the senate, proscribing citizens, dividing up lands without approval or consent, and eliminating Pompeius, Lepidus, and Antonius to make way for his own rise to the peak of the political hierarchy. Tacitus continues to describe Tiberius and his hypocritical ascension to emperorship, including the passage where Tiberius himself says, *proinde in civitate tot inlustribus viris subnixi non ad unum omnino deferrent*, meaning "therefore in a citizenship with so many illustrious men they should not defer all things to one" (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.11), the suspicious death of Augustus, the definite murder of Agrippa Postumus, not to mention the even more devious cover-up of the latter. As if these first two crooked political players coming into the emperorship were not dismal enough, Tacitus further denounces the standing of the institution under Gaius (Caligula), Claudius and Nero when he states that their rules were based on *metus* or fear, and *odium* or hatred, establishing the entire Julio-Claudian clan as unfit

⁷⁰ Herbert W. Benario, "Tacitus and the Principate," *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1964): 103.

⁷¹ Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," 305.

for individual rule. (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.1). This sour reaction to having one man in power is because the historian believed that it was too much to expect one man in complete power to “remain unsullied: temptations, illegal or immoral, were too great.”⁷² An emperor, in its simplest definition, is of a different standard in terms of ambitions and actions compared to any normal man and therefore is allowed “to cross normal bounds without fear of consequences.”⁷³

Tacitus was also uncomfortable with this idea of having a concentrated power based on inheritance because having only one position available for numerous relatives of a deceased emperor brought on succession rivalries often involving bloodshed, the kind of situation that brought forward unsuitable candidates, as Tacitus states,

utrasque impias preces, utraque detestanda vota inter duos, quorum bello solum id scires, deteriore fore qui vicisset. (Tac., *Hist.*, 1.50)

...prayers for either of the two is impious, and vows for either of the two is abominable, when from the war the only thing you may learn is that the one who is more detestable would be victorious.

Tacitus further demonstrates the problems with the foundation of centralized power through his use of the role of Germanicus. As a symbol of the nostalgic past, the young prince creates a contrast between the virtues of the past and the flaws of the present. Rome and its government used to epitomize the *populus Romanus*, the old and honorable qualities, and *libertas*, but the present principate was more focused on having military support in supporting the will of one man, and a compliant citizenship comprised of mute obedience, made clear in the historian’s statement describing Augustus,

ubi militem donis, populum annona, cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit, insurgere paulatim, munia senatus magistratuum legum in se trahere, nullo adversante, cum ferocissimi per acies aut proscriptioe cecidissent, certi nobilium, quanto quis

⁷² Martin Pulbrook, “Tacitus and the Dilemma of Imperial Rome,” *The Maynooth Review/Reviú Mhá Nuad*, Vol. 14 (1989): 12.

⁷³ Pulbrook, “Dilemma of Imperial Rome,” 19.

servitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur ac novis ex rebus aucti tuta et prasentia quam vetera et periculosa mallent. (Tac., Ann., 1.2)

He enticed the military with gifts, the populace with crops, and all the rest with sweet leisure, and so he rose little by little, he drew to himself the matters of the senate, the magistrate, the laws, no one opposing him, since the boldest had fallen through violence or proscription, while the remaining nobility, by how much each was readier for slavery, were exalted by wealth and honors and they preferred the present and the matters of increased safety rather than the old and the dangerous.

The new form of centralized power forces the good qualities of the Republic and the romantic past, those same qualities that the character of Germanicus represents, to disappear. The young prince's role highlights this loss and demonstrates that excessive power in the hands of one man corrupts not only the man in power but also the people and culture he controls.

Despite the obvious structural flaws and dangers of having excessive power delegated to only one man, Tacitus also believes that the principate was in fact a necessary change in the political foundation of Rome in order to bring the state out of the chaos of the end of the Republic. Tacitus obviously loves the Republic and the heroic past, and he uses these nostalgic concepts in order to criticize the principate, but he is aware of the fact that the era of consuls and divided rule was out of date and inappropriate for the new situation of Rome.

The *libertas* of the Republic that the historian consistently reiterates for his audience, especially through the representation of Germanicus, is discussed in great detail and with blunt clarity in his third book. Tacitus begins this conversation with an explanation of the origins of laws in civilization, and how their initial purpose was for *tuendae libertatis et firmandae concordiae*, or "to look out for freedom and establish unity" (Tac., Ann., 3.27). He continues to explain that as time passed the laws developed into mutilated versions of the original purposes, and that they were more often,

tamen dissensione ordinum et apiscendi illicitos honores aut pellendi claros viros aliaque ob prava per vim latae... (Tac., Ann., 3.27)

Nevertheless born through violence in dissensions of class and in order to reach forbidden honors, or to throw out distinguished men and other crooked matters...

He then proceeds to list a number of Republican men who used the laws for these immoral goals, such as the Gracchi, the Saturnini, Drusus and Lepidus. The last portion of the Republic, just before Augustus decides to create a definitive *principatus*, was particularly terrible in the mind of Tacitus, and he describes the time period as

exim continua per viginti annos discordia, non mos, non ius; deterrima quaeque impune ac multa honesta exitio fuere. (Tac., *Ann.*, 3.28)

Thereafter, through twenty years with continuous dissension, there were no customs, no laws, every one of the most detrimental things were unpunished and many honest deeds bore destruction.

The historian viewed the past wistfully and perhaps erroneously but he is familiar enough with the political situation of Rome to know that the romantic times of the Republic and the heroic era were indeed the past, and unachievable in the current circumstances. Tacitus tended “to think of a golden age in the past, a kind of paradise from which mankind has fallen.”⁷⁴ He aches for the better times of a simpler era, the times where a romantic person like Germanicus would better fit, but he realizes that the rapid growth of Rome caused a need for a united leader to keep the damage and danger of politics at a minimum.

When describing the end of the Republic and the chaos among Lepidus, Antonius, and Augustus, Tacitus admits that *non aliud discordantis patriae remedium fuisse quam ut ab uno regeretur* meaning “there was no other remedy for such a discordant country than to be ruled by a single man” (Tac., *Ann.*, 1.9.4), something he does again at *Annales* 4.33.2 and at *Historiae* 1.1.1. This dismal view of the principate is explicated specifically by Germanicus and his representation of the more nostalgic and unfortunately irrelevant past. The role of his character

⁷⁴ John Percival, “Tacitus and the Principate,” *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1980): 124.

was to help show the problems of the principate, but also to reveal that the new institution was a more effective and appropriate form of government for the times. Tacitus uses the young prince and his characterization to explain that, although the principate was unappealing and definitely moving away from the more noble times of the past, and is also structurally delicate and dangerously dependent on one man, the new form of government was in fact a regrettable necessity to ensure the continuation of Rome as a major political player of the Mediterranean.

The first reading of Tacitus' *Annales* may leave the audience with a perplexed and muddled understanding of the characterization of Germanicus, as initially the young prince seems to be dual and contradictory in his personality, actions, and results. After careful analysis, this study demonstrates that the young prince is, in fact, a tool of the historian used implicitly to discuss a bigger and more complex issue than simply what took place in the past. The use of Germanicus as an ironic symbol of the glory days both highlights particular features of the present principate and also tells his audience that the individual components of Tacitus' writing are doing much more than recording a history.

Tacitus specifically distorts history in order to accomplish his own goals, as the historian's works are riddled with social and political commentary, and reveal specifically how the historian thinks and feels about particular parts of Roman life.⁷⁵ This study shows that Tacitus' main concern is to give his audience a perspective, a piece of advice, a warning, that they can walk away with and use in their own lives. His characters are catalysts for his purpose, as Germanicus is used by the historian to tell the audience how he personally feels about the institution of the principate. With the understanding that one of his characters serves a greater purpose than just retelling the past, it would be reasonable to assume that Tacitus may be using

⁷⁵ Shotter, "Tacitus, Tiberius, and Germanicus," 194.

other characters in his works similarly. Furthermore, historians are usually writing with a particular purpose other than to retell the events that took place.⁷⁶ For example, Sallust was primarily writing for the purpose of revealing the disintegration of the Republic, whereas Tacitus was writing in order to demonstrate to the Roman people the level of servitude they had passively accepted because of the nature of the institution of the principate.⁷⁷ This study claims that the history of Tacitus was made in order to warn the audience about the potential dangers of consolidated power and the decline in the quality of morals of the people by recalling for his audience the nostalgic past. Furthermore, the study of Germanicus suggests that the audiences and scholars today should deeply consider the underlying messages of Tacitus when reading his works, and should understand that what is being presented to them on the surface is ultimately not the entire picture or purpose he means to reveal.

⁷⁶ Pulbrook, "Dilemma of Imperial Rome," 20.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

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