Future Thinking in Roman Culture

Future Thinking in Roman Culture is the first volume dedicated to the exploration of prospective memory and future thinking in the Roman world, integrating cutting edge research in cognitive sciences and theory with approaches to historiography, epigraphy, and material culture.

This volume opens a new avenue of investigation for Roman memory studies in presenting multiple case studies of memory and commemoration as future-thinking phenomena. It breaks new ground by bringing classical studies into direct dialogue with recent research on cognitive processes of future thinking. The thematically linked but methodologically diverse contributions, all by leading scholars who have published significant work in memory studies of antiquity, both cultural and cognitive, make the volume well suited for classical studies scholars and students seeking to explore cognitive science and philosophy of mind in ancient contexts, with special appeal to those sharing the growing interest in investigating Roman conceptions of futurity and time. The chapters all deliberately coalesce around the central theme of prospection and future thinking and their impact on our understanding of Roman ritual and religion, politics, and individual motivation and intention.

This volume will be an invaluable resource to undergraduate and postgraduate students of classics, art history, archaeology, history, and religious studies, as well as scholars and students of memory studies, historical and cultural cognitive studies, psychology, and philosophy.

Maggie L. Popkin is the Robson Junior Professor in the Humanities and Associate Professor of Art History at Case Western Reserve University, USA. She is the author of *The Architecture of the Roman Triumph: Monuments, Memory, and Identity* (2016). Her research on Greek and Roman art and architecture has appeared in numerous edited volumes and journals including the *American Journal of Archaeology*, *Hesperia*, the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, and the *Journal of Late Antiquity*. She is a senior member of the American excavations in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods at Samothrace, Greece.

Diana Y. Ng is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, USA. Her research and publications address civic engagements with mythical history via public sculpture and architecture in Asia Minor, elite commemoration, and the application of cognitive theories of learning and remembering to the investigation of Roman public statuary and theatrical space. Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, *Istanbuler Mitteilungen*, and edited volumes on Roman art, memory studies, and applications of cognitive theory to classical studies. She is the co-editor, with Molly Swetnam-Burland, of *Reuse and Renovation in Roman Material Culture: Functions, Aesthetics, Interpretations* (2018).

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Future Thinking in Roman Culture

New Approaches to History, Memory, and Cognition

Edited by Maggie L. Popkin and Diana Y. Ng

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3 Remembering the future in Tacitus' *Annals*

Germanicus' death and contests of commemoration

Aaron Seider

This chapter uses ideas from theories of human cognition to analyze how Tacitus' characters envision the future. More specifically, I focus on how they react to the extraordinary uncertainty surrounding Germanicus' death in 19 CE. A structurally important vignette from *Annals* 2 helps to illustrate how prospective thinking plays a major role in circumstances rife with uncertainty. It is the year before Germanicus' death, and his position in the imperial family is ambiguous. Nephew and adopted son of Tiberius, Germanicus has been granted "authority outranking that of governors" (*maius . . . imperium*, Tac. *Ann*. 2.43.1) over Greece and Asia Minor, even as he is rumored to be the subject of the emperor's animosity (see Davies 2000: 118).[1] Germanicus has already gone to Actium and Troy, two sites from his family's and city's history (O'Gorman 2000: 63; Kraus 2010: 112; Low 2016: 224). Given the past's value as a repository for guidance in Roman culture, these visits imply that Germanicus is thinking about the future as well (Roller 2009; Langlands 2018; Roller 2018). Now, as he finishes his tour of the region, Germanicus confirms this temporal orientation by making his final stop the oracle of Apollo at Claros.

Both the prince's journey and the narrative describing it end with uncertainty:

> And he docked at Colophon to profit from the Apollo oracle at Claros. (This is not a woman, as at Delphi, but a priest from specific families, primarily Milesian. He hears only the questioners' number and names, then descends into a cave, drinks from a secret spring and, though generally ignorant of literature and poems, gives responses in verse on whatever subjects one has in mind.) The priest was said to have intoned for Germanicus, riddlingly—oracular habit!—*imminent departure*.
>
> *adpellitque Colophona, ut Clarii Apollinis oraculo uteretur. non femina illic, ut apud Delphos, sed certis e familiis et ferme Mileto accitus sacerdos numerum modo consultantium et nomina audit; tum in specum degressus, hausta fontis arcani aqua, ignarus plerumque litterarum et carminum edit responsa versibus compositis super rebus, quas quis mente concepit. et ferebatur Germanico per ambages, ut mos oraculis, maturum exitum*[2]*cecinisse*.
>
> (2.54.2–4)

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Even as the epithet "Clarian Apollo" (*Clarii Apollinis*) invites the idea that the god's response will be unambiguous or plain (see *OLD clarus* 4), Tacitus' description of the process undoes any expectation of a clear answer (see Shannon-Henderson 2019: 103–4 on the ambiguity of this episode). The priest does not listen to anyone's question but just learns the names and number of those who approach. Then, he answers "riddlingly—oracular habit!" (*per ambages, ut mos oraculis*), and his actual response "*maturum exitum*" offers contradictory meanings. *Maturum* can signify that something occurs at the proper time or is premature (*OLD maturus* 7 and 9, respectively), while *exitum* may indicate either a departure from a place or an exit from life (*OLD exitus* 1 and 3, respectively). For Germanicus, is this a warning of impending death? Or an upcoming voyage by sea? When the *Annals*' next words ("Piso, however" [*at Cn. Piso*, 2.55.1]) shift the focus and make this Germanicus' last appearance in the *Annals*' narrative of 18 CE, Germanicus' state of irresolution underscores the predictive challenges Tacitus' characters face. While Tacitus' Roman readers may feel a sense of superiority due to their knowledge of what is to come, this would evaporate in their own lives: they inhabit the same uncertain world as the *Annals*' characters and confront similar unknowns in their futures.

This vignette emblematizes the great uncertainty and corresponding predictive challenges that extend throughout the narrative arc of Germanicus' death in the *Annals*. Uncertainty dominates Tacitus' narrative of the early years of Tiberius' reign. Not only must the Romans navigate the imperial era's first succession, but the new emperor's opaque replies and disingenuous actions accentuate the difficulties people face as they ponder what is to come (see Kraus 2010: 102 on the subject of succession in the *Annals*). Within this context, the story of Germanicus' death pushes to the fore questions about characters' internal states and the connection between different times. Indeed, from his introduction at *Annals* 1.33 to the last echoes of his mourning at *Annals* 3.19, Germanicus is portrayed as an unusually ambiguous character (Rutland 1987; Pelling 1993; Kelly 2010: 236; Williams 2009; Kraus 2010: 110; Cogitore 2013; Guilhembet 2013: 199; Woodman 2015: 268). Some hope he will restore the Republic's liberty; Tiberius considers him a threat and hides his true feelings (Shotter 1968; Mellor 2011: 108–9), and a range of Romans wonder what actions he might take. Later, after Germanicus' death, there are no clear models that dictate how the Romans should mourn him. Throughout these episodes, a string of questions arises for the *Annals*' characters: How can they commemorate present deeds, even when they are not complete? Which past memories should be used to judge future actions? In what way is it appropriate to mourn a member of the emperor's family when the emperor himself stays out of view?

In this chapter, I focus on how Tacitus' characters calculate their behavior within the narrative of Germanicus' death. I argue that they use predictive processing in the face of uncertainty to calculate their behavior and that Tacitus' choices of language and structure suggest that he is working through the question of how to respond to uncertainty. In its consideration of how Tacitus' characters (and perhaps his Roman readers) envision the future, this chapter falls into two main sections.

In its first section, I establish that there is a marked interdependence between retrospective and prospective thinking. First in Germanicus' 17 CE triumph and then in Tiberius' actions following Germanicus' 19 CE death, Tacitus illustrates how the Romans attempt to navigate doubt by forging a link between remembering the past and thinking about the future. This portrait of the interactions between past and future shows the potential for mapping ideas from cognitive science onto the *Annals*, and I build on it in my longer section, which considers the more complex mechanism of predictive processing. Here, I offer a reading of a moment when the past does not easily map onto the future and a crowd of mourners are overwhelmed by uncertainty. Considering several factors that attribute to this atmosphere, such as Tiberius' actions and the contradictory models of grief an earlier example offers, I argue that Germanicus' death poses a predictive challenge and that the Romans are able to act only after modifying their expectations to reflect new information. Lastly, in my chapter's conclusion, I explore how, for Tacitus' readers, the *Annals* may come to stand as a part of their own past experience and thereby influence their predictions for the future.

My analysis of how these characters think draws on ideas offered by scholars working on theories of human cognition, particularly relating to temporal thought. This research in the social and natural sciences focuses on people's perceptions of time, and it is well suited to provide a framework for analyzing the work of an author concerned with the links between past and future (see Grethlein 2013: 131–79, 2014, 2016: 74–77 on time, teleology, and narrative structure in the *Annals* and ancient historiography in general; Gowing 2016 on connections between past and present in Tacitus; and Shannon-Henderson 2019 on memory in the *Annals*). Two interrelated areas of research in particular are useful for elucidating the nuances of how Tacitus' characters prepare to act in the midst of uncertainty. For considering the connections between retrospective and prospective thinking, recent work explores the links between mental activity that looks to past and future times. In a wide-ranging study of how humans guide their actions by trying to anticipate what the future might hold, Peter Railton argues that this "simulation and evaluation of possible futures—prospection—can take place implicitly as well as explicitly" (Railton 2016: 74). In this future thinking, memory plays a signal role, providing the information—or building blocks—for simulations of future events (Schacter, Addis, and Buckner 2007: 659; see also Railton 2016: 72; Sripada 2016: 91–92; Conway, Loveday, and Cole). A substantial body of recent work claims that allowing us to imagine the future is one of the key evolutionary functions of human memory (Schacter and Welker 2016: 242; see also Suddendorf and Corballis 2007: 30). These ideas from memory studies elucidate how the characters in the *Annals* connect past and future as they attempt to navigate an uncertain present (Schacter, Addis, and Buckner 2007: 657; see also Sripada 2016: 91–92).

The other area of research I draw on concerns the challenge of predicting the future. Psychologists and cognitive scientists illustrate how people modulate their behavior in the present based on their predictions of what they are about to encounter (Bar 2009b; see also Popkin and Ng, this volume). Predictive processing works well when people's brains are successful in guessing "at the structure and shape

of the incoming sensory array" and their actions correctly meet with their guesses (Clark 2016: 3; see also Seligman et al. 2016: x; Hohwy 2013: 1). Yet, this process fails when the brain incorrectly guesses what it is about to sense; when the brain encounters an unpredicted signal, the result is a prediction error (Clark 2013: 2). To respond to and minimize a prediction error, the brain can change its predictive model or sample external inputs more carefully (Hohwy 2013: 43; see also Clark 2016: 1). In other words, brains can either change the way people make predictions or look for new input that might meet their expectations. This model of predictive processing offers a helpful lens for considering moments after Germanicus' death when uncertainty makes the Romans' predictions of what they are about to experience much more challenging and they are faced with prediction errors. While I do not engage here with the more specialized neuroscientific analysis of how brains generate and respond to predictions, I use these ideas of predictive processing to think about how Tacitus' characters respond to the unprecedented circumstances of the first imperial succession.

Linking past and future

Tacitus and his characters think along a continuum of past, present, and future and look to the past as a model for the future. In this section, I argue that this predilection to link past memories with future actions animates characters' thoughts in two sets of events associated with Germanicus' commemoration. In the first, Germanicus and Tiberius squabble over whether and when a triumph should occur for the prince's victories in Germany. Tiberius' motivation is to curtail Germanicus' glory, but, when this celebration does occur, the Romans' memories prompt them to worry that Germanicus' death may be imminent. The second set of passages focuses on Tiberius' reaction to Germanicus' death. Here, although the *Annals*' characters evaluate imperial behavior through the same framework of retrospective and prospective thinking, they do so with opposing aims and conclusions. For both sets of passages, recent work in cognitive science and psychology illustrates how humans use memories of the past to imagine the future as different time periods come together and influence each other in reciprocal ways. Writing on this topic, Paolo Jedlowski discusses the concept of the

> *present future*, which is not only about 'images' on the future, but also a complex set of expectations, partially formulated on the basis of past experiences, which contributes to confer meaning to the present and make choices that will produce the future.
>
> (Jedlowski 2016: 122; emphasis in original)

Memory, specifically episodic memory or memory of personal experiences (see Popkin and Ng, this volume), plays a crucial role in imagining the future. Such prospective thinking, I argue in this section, guides how the Romans reflect on the past and behave in the present.

The cluster of passages culminating in Germanicus' 17 CE triumph showcases how characters attempt to control how events will be remembered (Shannon-Henderson 2019: 56–65). In considering a taxonomy of future thinking, Karl Szpunar, Nathan Spreng, and Daniel Schacter propose that future thinking contains four basic categories: simulation, prediction, intention, and planning (Szpunar, Spreng, and Schacter 2016; Popkin and Ng, this volume; Popkin, this volume). The overlap, blending, and reciprocal influence among these mental operations helps to analyze how Germanicus' and Tiberius' hopes about future commemoration engage with their present actions. In this process, there is a reciprocal influence between imagining the future based on the present and formulating one's actions in the present based on imaginations of the future. Daniel Gilbert and Timothy Wilson point out how humans' unique ability of prospection allows them "to 'pre-experience' the future by simulating it in our minds" (Gilbert and Wilson 2007: 1352). Tiberius and Germanicus imagine what the future might hold, how it might remember the present, and how they should act now in order to achieve their future goals. In other words, they pre-experience their futures. From a perspective in which people move between setting goals and acting in the present to achieve their desired future (on which see also Seligman et al. 2016: 22), Germanicus and Tiberius both approach the question of a triumph by imagining what the future might be and then working backward from their respective long-term goals. For Germanicus, it is helpful to delay the triumph so that he can gain even more fame in the future, while Tiberius wishes to curtail Germanicus' time as general with an early triumph so that Drusus has more room to succeed in the future.

Tiberius and Germanicus squabble over how long his war should last and how it should be commemorated. At the opening of his narrative for 15 CE, Tacitus simply states: "Germanicus was decreed a triumph, but still had a war" (*decernitur Germanico triumphus manente bello*, 1.55.1). The sentence's structure emphasizes the paradox of commemorating an incomplete war. The syntax of the phrase *decernitur Germanico triumphus* ("a triumph is decreed for Germanicus") leaves this decision's agency and aim opaque, while the trailing ablative absolute *manente bello* ("even with the war continuing") creates friction between structure and meaning: it brings the period to a close even as the war progresses. Tacitus raises questions about who is attempting to memorialize a deed that is not yet complete and how this mnemonic drive relates to future hopes and fears. These questions begin to be answered when Tiberius pushes for this triumph in order to minimize Germanicus' accomplishments and heighten Drusus' reputation. As Germanicus continues to fight in 16 CE, missives arrive:

> Many letters arrived from Tiberius with advice. *Come home! A triumph has been decreed: enough results, enough disasters. Successful and significant battles are to your credit, but remember, too, what winds and waves—through no leader['s] fault—have brought: heavy, painful losses*.
>
> *sed crebris epistulis Tiberius monebat, rediret ad decretum triumphum: satis iam eventuum, satis casuum. prospera illi et magna proelia: eorum quoque*

> *meminisset, quae venti et fluctus, nulla ducis culpa, gravia tamen et saeva damna intulissent*.
>
> (2.26.2)

In an argument that uses future concerns to influence present behavior, Tiberius holds out both a threat and a reward. Karl Szpunar has demonstrated the close relationship between one's memories of the past and thoughts about episodes from the future (Szpunar 2016). Research on future thinking suggests that "human behavior is guided by anticipated emotions" people hope to experience or avoid in the future (Baumeister 2016b: 219; see also Gilbert and Wilson 2009 and Hoerl and McCormack 2016). Tiberius' letters ask Germanicus to imagine the regret he should work to avoid. Here, Tiberius leverages Germanicus' memory of his men's shipwrecks to compel him to imagine similar future disasters, which, if he pushes a triumph off further, may become part of the larger cultural memory. As an alternative, Tiberius holds out the reward of an imminent triumph, which promises certain positive commemoration.

The pair's subsequent exchange unrolls their competing concerns for the future. Germanicus asks for more time, but Tiberius responds with additional enjoinments:

> *If warfare is still necessary, leave something for your brother Drusus' renown. There is no other enemy. Only in Germany can he achieve a victorious name and bring home laurels*. Germanicus delayed no longer, but understood. *Excuses! Envy is the reason—glory all but won—I am being wrenched away*.
>
> *si foret adhuc bellandum, relinqueret materiem Drusi fratris gloriae, qui nullo tum alio hoste non nisi apud Germanias adsequi nomen imperatorium et deportare lauream posset. haud cunctatus est ultra Germanicus, quamquam fingi ea seque per invidiam parto iam decori abstrahi intellegeret*.
>
> (2.26.4–5)

Tiberius' prospective concern becomes apparent: by commemorating Germanicus' battles before he can complete them, Tiberius can cap his adopted son's accomplishments and leave space for his biological son to gain a triumphal commemoration of his own (Shannon-Henderson 2019: 59). For Germanicus, it is a different story. Generally speaking, people benefit from simulating future events; such simulation allows individuals to "engage in emotional regulation and appropriate problem solving activities" (Schacter et al. 2012: 688). Here, Germanicus may partly change his behavior in order to avoid regret in the future, yet, as his thoughts are oriented toward a future he will not be able to enjoy, the simple statement *haud cunctatus est ultra Germanicus* (literally, "Germanicus delayed no longer") is followed by a complex imagining of the future glory that is now being torn away.

When Germanicus does celebrate his triumph in 17 CE, Tacitus' narrative stresses its fictitious nature and unintended consequences. This triumph is not what it seems: "Germanicus celebrated a triumph over Cherusci, Chatti, Angrivarii and other nations as far as the Elbe, parading plunder, prisoners and representations

of mountains, rivers and battles. The war, since finishing it was forbidden, was considered finished" (*triumphavit de Cheruscis C<h>attisque et Angrivariis quaeque aliae nationes usque ad Albim colunt. vecta spolia, captivi, simulacra montium fluminum proeliorum; bellumque, quia conficere prohibitus erat, pro confecto accipiebatur*, 2.41.2). The polyptoton of *conficere* ("finishing") and *confecto* ("finished") highlights the false commemoration of the past Tiberius promoted in order to serve his hopes for the future. Moreover, this syntactical flourish also calls attention to how such a critique would be absent for the triumph's original audience. In this respect, Tiberius' charade was treated as reality, and the triumphal procession shapes the memory of a war that has not actually been completed and won (see Goodyear 1981: ad 2.41.2; Popkin 2016).

The triumph's aftermath, though, demonstrates Tiberius' inability to control this commemoration's significance. Tiberius hoped to leave space for Drusus' future glory while ending Germanicus' chance at greater success, but the audience forms a different link between past and present. Instead, as they admire Germanicus and his children, the onlookers connect different past memories with other future feelings (see McWilliam 2010: 124):

> But underneath there was hidden alarm, as people reflected. No success attended the crowd's favour for his father Drusus. And his uncle Marcellus, despite the blaze of popular enthusiasm, was snatched away still young. Brief and unlucky are the Roman people's love affairs.
>
> *sed suberat occulta formido, reputantibus haud prosperum in Druso patre eius favorem vulgi, avunculum eiusdem Marcellum flagrantibus plebis studiis intra iuventam ereptum, breves et infaustos populi Romani amores*.
>
> (2.41.2)

When the Romans contemplate Germanicus, their alarm grows. Instead of focusing on the victories this triumph constructs, they think back to how Germanicus' similarly admired father and uncle enjoyed neither happiness nor long life (Drusus died at the age of 29 in 9 BCE, Marcellus at age 19 in 23 BCE). For three years Tiberius maneuvered to reduce Germanicus' future renown via a premature triumph, but the triumph, since it characterizes the war as complete and thereby increases Germanicus' glory, associates him with earlier famous Romans and leaves the crowd with dark forebodings about Germanicus. Moreover, Tacitus' characterization of this reaction shows the Romans collectively remembering the past and using it to think about the future together (see Orlin, this volume, on collective prospection). Focusing on memories of events that individuals share, Clinton Merck, Meymune Topcu, and William Hirst argue that "remembering the past and imagining the future are intricately related not only at the personal level but also at the collective level" (Merck, Topcu, and Hirst 2016: 289; see also Baumeister 2016a; Szpunar and Szpunar 2016). Since Tiberius cannot control the Romans' memories of earlier events, he cannot control how they use knowledge to imagine a future. Here, connecting Germanicus' renown from this false triumph

to their collective memories of earlier young Roman commanders, they imagine a future where the same fate befalls Germanicus.

Germanicus' death in 19 CE occasions another conflict about how retrospective and prospective memory ought to be linked. Here the emperor and his subjects cite different past events as guides for prospective thinking. Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, and Sripada note how memory can be viewed as something that can "make a positive contribution to one's ability to face the present and future" (Seligman et al. 2016: 14). Both Tiberius and the Roman masses turn to memory to think about what meaning Germanicus' death should have for the future (see Gowing 2016: 57; Woodman 2015: 262). Watching the internment of Germanicus' ashes, the Romans remember Drusus' burial:

> Some missed a public funeral's pomp and compared Augustus' magnificent show of respect for Drusus, Germanicus' father. Augustus himself at winter's harshest went all the way to Pavia. Nor did he leave the corpse; they entered Rome together. Surrounding the bier were portraits, Claudii and Julii. Drusus was mourned in the Forum, eulogized from the Rostra. Every tribute the ancestors devised, along with posterity's inventions, was piled high. For Germanicus? Not even traditional honours, those due any nobleman. True, his body, because of the journey's length, was cremated anyhow in foreign lands. But more lustre later is only fair, since chance denied it at first. His brother didn't go more than a day's journey to him, his uncle not even to the gate. Where are the customs of old? A likeness on the bier, poems recited for virtue's memory and praises and tears—or performances of grief.
>
> *Fuere qui publici funeris pompam requirerent compararentque quae in Drusum, patrem Germanici, honora et magnifica Augustus fecisset. ipsum quippe asperrimo hiemis Ticinum usque progressum neque abscedentem a corpore simul urbem intravisse; circumfusas lecto Claudiorum Iuliorumque imagines; defletum in foro, laudatum pro rostris; cuncta a maioribus reperta aut quae posteri invenerint cumulata: at Germanico ne solitos quidem et cuicumque nobili debitos honores contigisse. sane corpus ob longinquitatem itinerum externis terris quoquo modo crematum: sed tanto plura decora mox tribui par fuisse, quanto prima fors negavisset. non fratrem, nisi unius diei via, non patruum saltem porta tenus obvium. ubi illa veterum instituta, propositam toro effigiem, meditata ad memoriam virtutis carmina et laudationes et lacrimas vel doloris imitamenta?*
>
> (3.5)

The Romans remember and compare the funeral of Germanicus' father Drusus in 9 BCE with their present experience. Augustus ensured Drusus' commemoration in a variety of ways, and Tiberius falls short in each of them. Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, and Sripada's observation that memory "must metabolize information into forms that are efficient and effective for the forward guidance of thought and action" (Seligman et al. 2016: 15) fits well with the Romans' rhetorical question,

implying that memory is not currently being used as a guide for thought and action but should be. In other words, the crowd's prediction of what Germanicus' funeral should be like is not met. As they see it, "Tiberius has tried to deny them Germanicus' memory," and they now must reconcile this prediction error (Gowing 2016: 57). Rather than revise their model for what a proper funeral should be (which is what Tiberius will urge them to do), they judge their expectations to have been appropriate and Tiberius' funeral of Germanicus to have been done incorrectly: the funeral itself, with its poor commemoration of Germanicus, was an error, not their prediction that the funeral should commemorate him appropriately.

When the crowd's memories compel them to critique Tiberius, the emperor leverages his elite status to tell his subjects not to stop connecting past and future but rather to revise the connections they draw between these times. Tiberius asserts that the Romans look to the wrong past memories and therefore draw the wrong conclusions about present and future:

> This was known to Tiberius. To repress the crowd's talk, he gave an admonitory edict. Many notable Romans have died on public business, none celebrated with such passionate yearning. This is exemplary in me and everyone else—if—if a limit be applied. For what suits princes and an imperial people is not what suits middling houses or states. Feeling bereavement is appropriate to fresh pain, as is finding solace in mourning. But our character's firmness must now be restored, as once Caesar, having lost his only daughter, and Augustus, after grandsons were torn away from him, put away sadness. No need for more ancient examples, how often the Roman people endured, steadfast, army disasters, commander deaths, noble families' complete annihilation. Princes are mortal, the republic, eternal. So return to your normal pursuits. And since the Megalensia Festival is at hand, resume pleasures too.
>
> *Gnarum id Tiberio fuit; utque premeret vulgi sermones, monuit edicto multos inlustrium Romanorum ob rem publicam obisse, neminem tam flagranti desiderio celebratum. idque et sibi et cunctis egregium, si modus adiceretur. non enim eadem decora principibus viris et imperatori populo quae modicis domibus aut civitatibus. convenisse recenti dolori luctum et ex maerore solacia; sed referendum iam animum ad firmitudinem, ut quondam divus Iulius amissa unica filia, ut divus Augustus ereptis nepotibus abstruserint tristitiam. nil opus vetustioribus exemplis, quotiens populus Romanus clades exercituum, interitum ducum, funditus amissas nobilis familias constanter tulerit. principes mortales, rem publicam aeternam esse. proin repeterent sollemnia et quia ludorum Megalesium spectaculum suberat, etiam voluptates resumerent*. (3.6.1–3)

Tiberius emphasizes the need to remember past examples that prescribe emotional restraint (see Shannon-Henderson 2019: 126–27 on the emperor's disingenuity). According to Tiberius, the Romans should fix their prediction error by changing what they predict as appropriate. By prescribing memories that demand the regulation of

grief and the curtailment of mourning, Tiberius directs his subjects to turn their behavior toward the "pleasures" (*voluptates*) of the approaching games. The force of "resume" (*resumerent*), emphasized by its final position, offers yet another perspective on the links between past and future. Here, it is not the devoted mourning of Augustus that should be taken up again but the pleasures of the more recent past, as it is these pleasures that will turn the Romans' thoughts away from Germanicus.

In Tacitus' narrative of these episodes linked with Germanicus' death, both the historian and his characters conceptualize, evaluate, and respond to events by thinking along a continuum of past, present, and future. Cognitive research that concentrates on the reciprocal influences between those times elucidates how the Romans make decisions in the immediate present while thinking about the past and future. Much work has argued that similar mechanisms govern mental time travel into the past and future (see Suddendorf and Busby 2005: 111 for bibliography), and sets of passages concerning Germanicus' triumph and his mourning concentrate on questions of how the future will ultimately commemorate the present. Amidst the uncertainty associated with Germanicus' death, the Romans link memories of the past and thoughts about the future. As some cognitive scientists might put it, they use memories of the past as building blocks for imagining their future (see Popkin and Ng, this volume). The influence between these mental operations goes both ways. Thinking ahead to how the future will remember his adopted and biological sons, Tiberius decrees a triumph for a war that is ongoing. At that triumph Germanicus' appearance reminds the Romans of the fates of similar young leaders, and they worry over Germanicus' future. Lastly, after Germanicus' death, the Romans and Tiberius judge commemorations for the future according to the past, but they differ in terms of the memories they cite as relevant. These episodes illustrate how the Romans think about the past, present, and future, and they set up both the internal characters' memories of these earlier events and Tacitus' commemoration of them in the *Annals* as significant factors in mental operations to come.

Disruptive uncertainty and failures of prediction

In the examples in this chapter's first section, the *Annals*' characters connect past and future as a strategy for navigating uncertainty, but it is not always the case that characters can reduce uncertainty or even wish to do so. Having established that past, present, and future are linked on a continuum, in this section I focus on the mental operation of predictive processing in an episode where the characters' process of predicting the future and planning accordingly is disrupted: the return of Germanicus' ashes to Brundisium at the start of *Annals* 3. As discussed in the chapter's introduction, models of predictive processing explore the idea that people base their behavior on predictions of what they are about to encounter in the present (see Bar 2009a; Clark 2016). Clark brings out how this process blurs the lines between past, present, and future:

> The line between 'predicting the present' and 'predicting the very-near-future' is one that simply vanishes once we see the percept (the mental representation

> resulting from the process of perception) itself as a prediction-driven construct that is always rooted in the past (systemic knowledge) and anticipating, at multiple temporal and spatial scales, the future.
>
> (Clark 2016: 18)

The episode under consideration here illustrates what happens when it becomes quite challenging, indeed almost impossible, to use systemic knowledge to predict the future with any certainty. I first analyze three elements that contribute to the challenges the Romans face at Brundisium: Germanicus' unique stature, the ambiguous nature of the memories the Romans might recall at his death, and Tiberius' efforts to promote uncertainty. After considering these factors, this section analyzes the return of Germanicus' ashes through the lens of predictive processing. I argue that Germanicus' death poses a predictive challenge, since it is both difficult for the Romans to turn to the appropriate systemic knowledge to think about what is to come and because their predictions do not match the reality they confront. This prediction error leaves the Romans unsure about how to behave, and they only move forward once they understand the cues from their new context and revise their knowledge of how to mourn a public figure.

The context of Germanicus' death forms a significant part of this predictive challenge. Clark notes that people's uncertainty in the world changes "the shape and flow of all that inner guessing," (Clark 2016: 3), and several factors impact the Romans' inner guessing at this moment. One concerns the models the Romans might consider as they ponder how to mourn Germanicus. In the episodes discussed in the chapter's first section, the Romans' strategy in such situations is to link the future with the past. As Bar writes, when the brain tries to predict the future, it uses a process that moves from analogy to associations to predictions, where the brain finds an earlier analogy that matches the current situation; reviews the factors associated with that analogous situation; and then makes predictions that prepare people to encounter "the representations of what is most likely to occur and be encountered next" (Bar 2009b: 1235–36). Here, even though neither Tacitus nor the *Annals*' characters explicitly recall Augustus' death when Germanicus dies, this earlier trauma stands as an implied model for the reaction to imperial deaths. The first emperor's foundational nature makes any actions associated with him stand as examples for future behavior, a connection strengthened by the Romans' predilection for joining past with present. Two other factors increase the relevance of Augustus' death. In addition to Germanicus' connection with Augustus through his imperial status, no other death in *Annals* 1–3 receives anywhere near the same level of attention as Germanicus', and Tacitus' lengthy focus on the aftermath of Germanicus' passing recalls the importance given to the reactions to Augustus' death at 1.9–10.

Yet, if the Romans do think back to the aftermath of Augustus' death, this would only add to the difficulties of predicting the future and engaging in behavior appropriate for it. This earlier loss prompted divergent reactions, and memories of it would increase people's doubt about how to mourn Germanicus. Tacitus emphasizes how Augustus "was variously extolled or criticized" (*varie extollebatur*

arguebaturve, 1.9.3). Some lauded his justice and restraint, while others pointed out that he offered "a bloody peace" (*pacem . . . cruentam*, 1.10.4). Even as the reactions to Augustus' death stand as a model that might fit this moment, their most distinctive characteristic is their irreconcilable divergence. The only guidance this imperial model offers is that there may be varying reactions to Germanicus' death, thus making it impossible to predict what might happen and to modulate one's behavior appropriately.

To compound the challenges the Romans face in a narrative where the foundational model for a reaction to trauma is one of conflict, Tiberius avoids offering any indication of how he will respond. Clark's work on predictive processing shows how Tiberius foils people's ability to perceive the world: "Perception (rich, world-revealing perception) occurs when the probabilistic residue of past experience meets the incoming sensory signal with matching prediction" (Clark 2016: 107). Here, the Romans' past experience with Augustus' death might lead them to predict that Tiberius could voice a positive or negative opinion of Germanicus. However, Tiberius offers nothing for evaluation; in other words, the "incoming sensory signal" the Roman masses receive is his absence, while for elites he offers ambiguity. Although these passages occur slightly later than the description of the arrival of Germanicus' ashes at Brundisium, they may be taken as representative of the emperor's overall behavior, with the persona he projects and the atmosphere he creates being understood as a backdrop for the period following Germanicus' death. By being so opaque, Tiberius works against the possibility that the Romans can collectively imagine the future and plan for it (see Damon 1999 on the "obsequiousness and dissimulation" [143] in *Annals* 3). As Roy Baumeister argues in a study of collective prospection, sharing "a vision about the future" can lead to such benefits as collective planning, learning, and teaching (Baumeister 2016a: 145), but Tiberius prevents the Romans from reaching a collective understanding of what their future mode of commemorating Germanicus should be.

On both occasions, first with the masses and then with elites, the emperor foils people's attempts to think about what his behavior will be so that they can modulate their own. The theory of predictive processing illuminates why the Roman people were at such a loss in terms of formulating their behavior. In Tacitus' account, which likely leaves out honors the emperor did actually accord Germanicus (González 1999: 140–41), Tiberius' absence both invites speculation and defies it. In sentences of increasing length and complexity, Tacitus' treatment of Tiberius' behavior mirrors the confusion it creates:

> Tiberius and Livia stayed away from the public. Was it beneath their dignity to mourn openly? Or lest—with everyone's eyes scrutinizing their faces—their falsity be perceived? What about Germanicus' mother Antonia? Neither in historians nor in the daily gazette of events do I find that she played any significant role. Yet in addition to Agrippina, Drusus and Claudius, Germanicus' remaining relatives, too, are recorded by name. Perhaps ill health prevented her. Or else defeated by bereavement, her spirit did not tolerate seeing the magnitude of the loss she suffered. My belief inclines more easily to this,

> that Tiberius and Livia, who were not going out, kept Antonia in to give the appearance of equal sorrow and that the mother's example detained grandmother, too, and uncle.
>
> *Tiberius atque Augusta publico abstinuere, inferius maiestate sua rati, si palam lamentarentur, an ne omnium oculis vultum eorum scrutantibus falsi intelleg<er>entur. matrem Antoniam non apud auctores rerum, non diurna actorum scriptura reperio ullo insigni officio functam, cum super Agrippinam et Drusum et Claudium ceteri quoque consanguinei nominatim perscripti sint, seu valetudine praepediebatur, seu victus luctu animus magnitudinem mali perferre visu non toleravit. facilius crediderim Tiberio et Augusta<e>, qui domo non excedebant, cohibitam, ut par maeror et matris exemplo avia quoque et patruus attineri viderentur*.
>
> (3.3.1–3)

Beginning with a four-word declarative clause, the period moves to a pair of probing subordinate clauses ascribing motives largely concerned with appearances. Then, after a statement about the absence of Germanicus' mother, Tacitus offers multiple reasons for this, starting with her illness or extreme grief and progressing toward causes that arise from the emperor's duplicity. This structure, which overwhelms the absences of Tiberius and Livia with an array of interpretations, evokes the uncertainty among those who can neither view the emperor's actions nor know what he thinks. With this lack of understanding, it becomes more challenging for the Romans to predict what the future will be and to modulate their behavior accordingly.

The same uncertainty springs from Tiberius' words a bit later. After Germanicus dies, people suspect that Piso poisoned him. Desperate to sway imperial opinion, Piso voyages to Drusus and sends his son to Tiberius. In Tacitus' rendition, though, the interlaced nature of Piso's actions leads to a singular obliquity:

> Piso, after sending his son to Rome with instructions for appeasing Tiberius, headed for Drusus, whose attitude to him, he hoped, was not grim at his brother's death but, with a rival removed, rather favourable. Tiberius, to show that his verdict was still undecided, received the man affably and with his habitual generosity towards the sons of noble families in gifts. Drusus' reply to Piso: *If the rumours are true, my position is uniquely painful. Better that they be false and empty than that Germanicus' death bring anyone's destruction*. This was said in public, all privacy avoided. No one doubted that these were Tiberius' instructions, seeing that a man otherwise unwary and with youth's easy temper was using an old man's artifice.
>
> *At Piso praemisso in urbem filio datisque mandatis per quae principem molliret, ad Drusum pergit, quem haud fratris interitu trucem quam remoto aemulo aequiorem sibi sperabat. Tiberius, quo integrum iudicium ostentaret, exceptum comiter iuvenem sueta erga filios familiarum nobilis liberalitate auget.*

> *Drusus Pisoni, si vera forent quae iacerentur, praecipuum in dolore suum locum respondit, sed malle falsa et inania nec cuiquam mortem Germanici exitiosam esse. haec palam et vitato omni secreto; neque dubitabantur praescripta ei a Tiberio, cum incallidus alioqui et facilis iuventa senilibus tum artibus uteretur*.
>
> (3.8.1–2)

Piso makes a two-pronged effort to save his life by sending his son to Tiberius and approaching the emperor's son himself. Piso's uncertainty and consequent inability to predict how Drusus will react to Germanicus' death are visible in the lengthy relative clause that ends the first sentence: "whose attitude to him, he hoped, was not grim at his brother's death but, with a rival removed, rather favourable" (*quem haud fratris interitu trucem quam remoto aemulo aequiorem sibi sperabat*). These opposing alternatives recall the conflicting interpretations of Augustus after his death, and this doubt about the future is brought out even more by "he hoped" (*sperabat*). This verb looks with uncertainty to the future, as Piso cannot know for sure what Drusus thinks and what his emotional reaction to Germanicus' death will be. The responses Piso and his son receive are a study in contradiction and ambiguity. The verb "to show" (*ostentaret*) hints at contrasts between surface and depths, and the challenges in figuring out Drusus' and Tiberius' feelings are only highlighted by the contrasting pairs of "true/false (*vera*/*falsa*) and "in public/privacy" (*palam*/*secreto*). Lastly, Tacitus' juxtaposition of "youth" (*iuventa*) and "old man" (*senilibus*) goes beyond establishing Tiberius' responsibility to underscore the duplicity of these responses as a whole. This behavior significantly effects predictions of the future. In their work on how memories of the past engage with predictions of the future, Martin Conway, Catherine Loveday, and Scott Cole argue that, when humans interact with the past and future, they focus most intensely on times within several days of the present (Conway, Loveday, and Cole 2016: 258). From this perspective, the uncertainty Tiberius fosters makes forming predictions and regulating one's own behavior impossible.

With Tiberius' behavior layered on top of the conflicting models offered by the reactions to Augustus' death and the general uncertainty sparked by Germanicus in life and death, it is not at all surprising that there are challenges of prediction when Germanicus' ashes return to Italy. At the beginning of *Annals* 3, Tacitus describes how the Romans wait for Germanicus' ashes at Brundisium and watch for his widow, Agrippina:

> At word of her arrival every close friend and many ex-soldiers who had served under Germanicus, and many strangers, too, from nearby towns—some thinking it a service to the Emperor, more following them—rushed to Brundisium. For travellers by sea this was the quickest and safest dock. As soon as the fleet was visible out at sea, all spots were filled—not only port and adjacent waters, but also walls and rooftops and wherever the longest view was possible. The crowd was lamenting and asking whether silence or some utterance should greet her landing, and had not yet reached agreement about what suited.

> *interim adventu eius audito intimus quisque amicorum et plerique militares, ut quique sub Germanico stipendia fecerant, multique etiam ignoti vicinis e municipiis, pars officium in principem rati, plures illos secuti, ruere ad oppidum Brundisium, quod naviganti celerrimum fidissimumque adpulsu erat. atque ubi primum ex alto visa classis, complentur non modo portus et proxima mari[s], sed moenia ac tecta, quaque longissime prospectari poterat, maerentium turba et rogitantium inter se, silentione an voce aliqua egredientem exciperent. neque satis constabat quid pro tempore foret*.
>
> (3.1.2–3)

The audience is struck with uncertainty about how they should react. While people understand that they should be present, they do not know what to do once they arrive. Tacitus highlights this when he writes that "The crowd was lamenting and asking whether silence or some utterance should greet her landing, and had not yet reached agreement about what suited" (*maerentium turba et rogitantium inter se, silentione an voce aliqua egredientem exciperent. neque satis constabat quid pro tempore foret*, 3.1.3). The difficulty they experience in predicting the near future and modulating their behavior to meet those predictions is emphasized by its appearance at the structurally significant location of the beginning of *Annals* 3. Just like those who search for meaning in Tiberius' words or appearances, this crowd awaits a cue about what they should do. When the brain meets a prediction challenge, it can revise its prior beliefs in an attempt to understand anew what it sees or it can keep on searching for new input that matches its prediction. At this moment, the Romans do not know what path to take.

Instead of being given either no replies at all or conflicting ones, however, the Roman people, at the height of their uncertainty, do receive a signal. There is a complete change that follows once the crowd receives a new indication about how they should behave. Indeed, as Tacitus' narrative makes clear, after the crowd can judge from Agrippina's actions how they ought to behave, their behavioral shift is immediate and substantial:

> The crowd had not yet reached agreement about what suited when the fleet approached gradually, not, as was customary, with the crew brisk, but with all arrayed for sorrow. With two children and holding the funeral urn Agrippina disembarked, eyes down. A single universal groan went up. You could not distinguish relatives and strangers or men's and women's wailing. Except that Agrippina's company, wearied by long sadness, was outdone by those meeting them, fresh to pain.
>
> *neque satis constabat quid pro tempore foret, cum classis paulatim successit, non alacri, ut adsolet, remigio, sed cunctis ad tristitiam compositis. postquam duobus cum liberis, feralem urnam tenens, egressa navi defixit oculos, idem omnium gemitus, neque discerneres proximos alienos, virorum feminarumve planctus, nisi quod comitatum Agrippinae longo maerore fessum obvii et recentes in dolore anteibant*.
>
> (3.1.3–4)

As the ships come closer, the Romans remain unsure of what would be proper for the moment. The indirect question "what suited" (*quid pro tempore foret*) looks to the future and seeks to find out the information that will help the Romans behave in a way that will meet their predictions. Unsure of what to do in this novel situation and unable to predict what their appropriate behavior might be, the Romans watch Agrippina's sad descent. As Clark illustrates, "unpredicted input" flows back to the brain and then is used to revise future predictions of what will be sensed from the world (see Clark 2016: 30, 29, and 284; also Seligman et al. 2016: 62). That is, when the brain's prediction is not matched by reality, it takes in this new information to make a new prediction. Here, the unpredicted input of Agrippina's behavior enables the Romans to revise their knowledge of how to respond to a death of a public figure. They engage in mourning on a universal level. Tacitus emphasizes how this shift blurs all boundaries: "You could not distinguish relatives and strangers or men's and women's wailing" (*neque discerneres proximos alienos, virorum feminarumve planctus*, 3.1.4). Typically in Roman mourning a distinction would be expected in both these categories: namely, those closer to the deceased would lament more than those who were distant, while women would express their grief more openly than men. Here, though, those boundaries are erased in "a single universal groan" (*idem omnium gemitus*, 3.1.4), with the only difference being in the intensity of those who now mourn for the first time and those who have been mourning on the ship for days.

A glance at one of the passages considered in this chapter's first section illustrates how the shift in the Romans' behavior precipitated by their intake of knowledge from Agrippina continues. Earlier, this chapter considered how in *Annals* 3.5 the Romans critique Tiberius, as compared with Augustus, for his lack of commemoration and personal attention to Germanicus' corpse. We can again see here "the power of top-down predictions . . . to impact perceptual experience" (Clark 2016: 50). Here, the Romans' focus on how Tiberius' behavior does not successfully meet the norms that they expect him to uphold, and, due to the power of Agrippina's actions, instead of revising their own expectations again, they cite the memories of Augustus' devotion to mourning Drusus as both a way to critique the current emperor and to justify their predictions of what the world should be and how people should be behaving. As the Romans themselves mourn, rather than changing their behavior to fit what the emperor is doing, they critique his behavior instead.

Conclusion

Tacitus' narrative of Germanicus' death both links retrospective and prospective thinking and examines the challenges of predicting the future in the midst of uncertainty. My arguments have ramifications for our understanding of the Roman readers of Tacitus' work and the portrait of prospective thinking Tacitus' narrative creates. Tacitus' late first- and early second-century readers inhabit a politically turbulent world similar to that of the *Annals*. In this imperial reality, the level of uncertainty can be so great that predictive processing becomes challenging for

those forced to interpret events and modulate their behavior in real time. For Tacitus' readers, their experience of the *Annals* now becomes another piece of their past and, therefore, another piece of information that will influence their predictive processing for the future. As Latham shows (this volume), literary passages, however fictional(ized), can become very real memory resources. The very shift in the Romans' behavior in their predictive processing between *Annals* 3.1 and 3.5 illustrated earlier raises this possibility, as here Tacitus' characters change how they react based on their newfound experience.

As a piece of past experience for the *Annals*' Roman readers, their readings of these episodes may simultaneously drive them to caution and boldness. Hesitancy or reluctance to act might arise when no indication of the correct path is presented, such as when situations are utterly opaque (like for those facing Tiberius' obfuscations) or when situations could move in either of two opposing directions (like for those forced to model their current behavior on the two divergent reactions to Augustus' loss). In both these cases it becomes impossible to predict what will occur and then model one's actions to meet that prediction.

Yet, at the same time as the experience of reading the *Annals* may encourage caution, so too might it inspire boldness. For at the beginning of *Annals* 3, as Germanicus' ashes are being brought to shore and the crowd is not in agreement "about what suited" (*quid pro tempore foret*, 3.1.3), there is the greatest possibility to shape behavior in a new way. For the person who, consciously or not, provides a model for behavior that suddenly appears appropriate (such as Agrippina does in her mournful procession), there is the possibility to substantially shape people's predictions of what is to occur as well as the behavior they will select in order to meet those predictions. In fact, the dramatic changes that Agrippina's appearance precipitates (complete mourning among the crowd) and its contravention of typical norms of expressing grief hold out the power to introduce new types of behavior at moments when people struggle to make predictions. Thus, bold action in moments of uncertainty can reshape people's expectations, predictions, and behavior. Viewed along the continuum of past, present, and future, this shaping of predictive processing sets up the current moment as a new past that will soon stand to influence the future. For the *Annals*' Roman readers, then, this offers a quintessential Tacitean paradox, as this episode illustrates how it is possible to establish radical new models for behavior in the present, which, thanks to the Romans' conservative reliance on using the past to plan for their future, will soon stand as established *exempla* to influence predictive processing in the years to come.

Notes

1 Except where noted the Latin text of the *Annals* is from Heubner 1994 and the English translation from Damon 2012. Damon 2012, liii uses italics in her translation to indicate "reported speech and thought", and I follow her practice here.
2 *Exitum* is a correction of the manuscript reading of *exitium*; Heubner prints *exitium*; see Goodyear 1981: ad loc. and Woodman 2015: 256, n.4 on this correction.