

Agricola and germania essay



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The Agricola and Germani is a novel that serves two purposes: The Agricola is a eulogy praising Tacitus's father-in-law, and commander of Britain, Agricola. The Germania is an ethnography on German people. Both stories are told through the eyes of Tacitus as he indirectly criticizes Roman politics and society. His reason for sneaking in these criticisms in such a crafty manner had been due to his friendship with high ranking Roman officials whom he did not want to upset.

His criticisms were derived from his experiences with Agricola, speeches given by Calgucus, and his ability to compare and contrast cultural differences of Rome and Germania, targeting Germania as a threat to Rome. Tacitus praises German culture throughout the Germania, and allows readers to applaud them for their stress on the importance of freedom, instead of bashing on them. Tacitus's opinion became an utmost crucial part of the story, that sometimes his viewpoints were stated as facts, which could dupe the reader.

Also, his personal connection with Agricola added to a biased opinion on him, and an exaggeration of his accomplishments, which alter the facts. An example from the text that reveals Tacitus's biased feelings toward Agricola is evident through his theory that Agricola died by poison from Domitian, who had been apparently envious of Agricola's fame, although this theory was never proved. As a historian, military history and geographical knowledge was absent in Tacitus's work.

Whereas he makes up for that as a biographer with the knowledge he did attain from his closely knit relationship with Agricola, and his ability to

powerfully recite these incidents. The Agricola serves to criticize Rome on a political level. Tacitus discretely paints Rome to be a corrupt empire with greedy, tyrannical rulers who held complete control over all aspects of Roman life. They held an impervious belief that it was their certainty to rule the world, and so they sought to do just that.

Tacitus discouraged this insatiable ambition. An excerpt from Calgucus's speech reveals the greed of Rome, "The wealth of an enemy excites their greed, his poverty their lust for power...Robbery, butchery, rapine these liars call "empire": they create desolation and call it peace"(Tacitus, 20). It was not of any concern to the Romans that other nations were in poverty, any land that they could gain the Romans wanted, regardless of the condition. Calgucus's speech was used by Tacitus as a leeway to keep himself out of trouble.

Calgucus was a leader of the British force and gave his speech to the British forces at Mount Graupius, therefore Tacitus could not be held responsible for making this depiction of Rome, yet it is obvious to readers today why it is included. If Tacitus believed that there was one good thing about Rome, it was Agricola. Agricola, as seen by Tacitus was a general and governor, whose footsteps every other ruler should follow. "He succeeded where few succeed: to mention incorruptibility and self-restraint in a man of his calibre would be to insult his virtues"(Tacitus, 7).

Tacitus depicted Agricola as a leader by example of how even though Rome was in a dangerous state, the possibility of making improvements and behaving correctly was much better than acting in the extreme opposite. "

Neither before nor since has Britannia ever been in a more uneasy or dangerous state: veterans butchered, colonies burned to the ground, armies isolated...Yet everything combined to give the young Agricola fresh skill, fresh experience and fresh ambition, and his spirit was invaded by the passion for military glory” (Tacitus, 4).

Tacitus was not greedy or tyrannical like other rulers of Rome had been. Under the government of the despised Domitian, Agricola remained imperial and uncorrupted until his death. Correspondingly to political criticisms, social criticisms were also buried in the Agricola. They deceivingly tricked people into becoming a part of the Roman empire by carrying the social norms of Rome over to Britannia.

Romans helped build temples, public squares, proper houses, and their national toga was suddenly being seen everywhere. In their innocent they called this ‘ civilization’, when in fact it was a part of their enslavement” (Tacitus, 15). By carrying over their social norms to other nations, Rome continued to expand in an eased manner, as suggested by Agricola during his reign. Romans were overruling nations that were unnecessary for them to. Moving forward to Germania, which contained much more social criticism than Agricola did by comparing the cultural difference of Germania and Rome. Tacitus described Germania as an empire that revolves strictly around their freedom.

The kings of Germania did not hold absolute control over the German citizens. “ But even the power of the kings is not absolute or arbitrary. As for the leaders, it is their example rather than their authority that wins them

special admiration” (Tacitus, 38). In contrast, the citizens of Rome strongly believed that they attained their own freedom, however they were wrong in the fact that it was the Emperor who held all power in the Roman empire. In addition, Germans treated slaves with much more respect than Romans did.

In Rome, the upper class were able to purchase numerous slaves to work in their house, and on their land. Slave owners in Rome treated their slaves harshly and with much disrespect, not providing them with necessities needed to survive. Their reason for this was due to the vast amount of slaves available to them, it was cheaper to purchase more slaves than to provide necessities to the slaves they already owned. German slave owners treated their slaves with respect, in attempt to avoid revolt.

Hospitality in Germania was a huge deal, in fact it is considered immoral to turn turn any man away from your door, and if someone were to than the how welcomes his guest was the best meal he can (Tacitus, 45). German slave owners treated their slaves just as they would a tenant. The way that Germans treated their slaves proved to be more effective than the way Romans did because slaves in Roman eventually revolted against their masters creating chaotic disorder in Rome.

Lastly, Tacitus criticized marriage in Rome by comparing it to marriage in Germania. Marriage there is strict, and no feature of their culture deserves better praise” (Tacitus, 43). Men in Germany were satisfied with having only one wife in their lifetime. Also, after marriage the dowry was passed from husband to wife. In contrast to the standards of marriage in Rome; Men often had affairs, and the dowry was passed from wife to husband. Wives in

Germania were treated with more respect than those in Rome. The solidity of marriage proved better in Germania because divorce was not common there as it was in Rome.

As a historian, Tacitus possessed weaknesses. It is obvious that his last concern was of geographical knowledge or military background. This lack of geographical knowledge effects the second part of the Germania particularly. It seems that Tacitus did not work with maps, which located people in topographical locations instead of specific ones (Tacitus, xlii). He does not provide military history in the Agricola, which would have provided better insight for readers to understand why Agricolas' achievements were so great, had more history been included.

Tacitus also possessed some strengths as a historian as well. His personal relationship with his father-in-law gave him much insight that he was able to provide an ample amount of information on Agricolas' achievements from his rise to his fall. Also, his intense knowledge of Germania made it easy for readers today to respect the German culture. Also, readers today can effortlessly understand why some areas of the text were forbidden at the time, due to the boosting of society in Germania. As a biographer, strengths and weaknesses were also possessed.

As a strength, Tacitus's close relationship with Agricola enables him to provide many details that others who were not as close with Agricola, would have never known. His infatuation with Agricola enables readers to appreciate Agricola in a less intense form than Tacitus himself does for his achievements, considering the lack of military history that makes it hard to

understand in the first place. However, he is weakened by his bias viewpoint toward his father-in-law. Tacitus did not reveal a single flaw of Agricola anywhere in the text.

It is nearly impossible for any humane person to have not but one flaw. This makes Tacitus seem less credible because the reader knows that Tacitus only sees Agricola in a positive manner, but what side of the story aren't readers getting? Tacitus does not give any credibility to any of his facts, he instead assumes that the reader finds him credible, which is a powerful weakness. All things considered, Agricola and Germania did justice in praising Agricola for his achievements, and criticizing the empire of Roman in terms of society and politics.

The Agricola's main focus was to criticize the political structure of Rome, and the Germania's main focus was to criticize the societal structure of Rome. However both the Agricola and the Germania provided both political and societal criticisms, one just shined through more than the other in each texts. Tacitus was not allowed to openly criticize Rome, so he did so through speeches made by a British chief, Calgucus, tales of Agricola, and a comparison of Germany to Rome. Ironically, Tacitus himself has been criticized for various strengths and weaknesses he possessed as a biographer and a historian.