

Virgil and petroneous



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Essay 1 How much can a civilization change in under a year? The Roman Civilization changed drastically in roughly one hundred years in the way they view many aspects of their life, including the role of women and the role of the gods in their life. In Virgil's *The Aeneid*, he has presented Rome as superior to Greece, being written at the time of Augustus; *The Aeneid* was used as propaganda for the Romans to make them feel superior after the Trojan War.

Petronius wrote about Rome during the reign of Nero, in his novel, it is apparent that by the time Epicureanism had gotten to Rome, they had taken it and formed a twisted version of just how extreme they took Hedonism; as exemplified in *Dinner With Trimalchio* from the novel *The Satyricon*. The two authors Virgil and Petronius have described Roman civilization under their perspective through their novels and have not only made contrasts, but comparisons as well in commonly seen themes such as the role of the gods in their everyday life and the role of women. T) Although they are roughly a hundred years apart, Virgil's novel, *The Aeneid*, has presented a very different approach to Rome and its civilization compared to Petronius' novel, *The Satyricon*. I think this civilization experienced the drastic shift that it did because of the ruler they had at the moment. *The Aeneid* was written under the reign of Augustus, who was interested in bettering Rome and its people as seen with his *Pax Romana* and the construction of roads.

The people during the reign of Augustus were very rational and were not fearful of the gods but rather believed that they were in charge of their own fate, thus making them "better" than the Greeks. *The Satyricon* was written under the reign of Nero, who had very twisted morals due to the lack of

philosophy when he was younger. Nero was very cruel and hedonistic, he did not just live for simple pleasure, he lived for extreme pleasure as seen when he literally built himself a pleasure palace while the entire city was dying of hunger and were homeless.

The story *Dinner With Trimalchio* exemplifies how hedonism and Nero's "morals" have affected the rich as well. In *Dinner With Trimalchio*, not only are they living very hedonistic, but the gods are practically nonexistent, while in the story of *The Aeneid*, they're there, they're just portrayed as cruel and not very helpful or necessary, thus leaving them to their own fate. Virgil portrayed Rome as very rational and nondependent of the gods, while Petronius portrayed Rome as hedonistic with a lack of morals and a loss of the gods.

A commonly seen theme in both *The Aeneid* and *The Satyricon* is the role of the gods. In the *Aeneid*, as previously mentioned, the gods are perceived as cruel and violent. One instance of this can be seen in Book 2 of the *Aeneid* when Minerva sent serpents to kill Laocöus because he not only disobeyed her but he also disrespected her. Minerva sent two serpents to kill him and his sons. She had the serpents kill his sons before his eyes then kill him slowly and painfully. This portrays the gods as cruel and violent.

The gods are portrayed as much more violent when compared to *The Iliad* by Homer in book 22 when Athena is sent down to fasten things up between Achilles and Hector and talk to both of them to ultimately have Hector killed by Achilles. Virgil is making a point that the gods are cruel. Minerva made Laocöus a cautionary tale to not mess with her or she will not only kill you, but your bloodline as well. Another instance can be seen when Hector

appears to Aeneas in a dream and his body is completely disheveled and destroyed. His body is shown the way it would have been should he not have been taken care of Apollo; “...

How he looked, how different from that Hector Who returned to Troy wearing Achilles' armor... ” The Aeneid Book 2 line 325-326. This makes the Greeks look bad because not only did Apollo not keep his promise that he would watch over his body, but the Greeks do not have any battle chivalry and dragged his body from his ankles. Virgil has depicted the gods in the Aeneid as cruel and violent. The role of the gods can also be seen in Dinner With Trimalchio, however, they're not shown as cruel, but instead they are basically nonexistent.

One instance can be seen in the poem that Trimalchio recites, “ Nothing but bones, that's what we are, Death hustles us humans away, Today we're here and tomorrow we're not, so live and drink while you may! ” page 45. This portrayed the cultural mindset of the people. They believed they were atomic and when they died, they merely fell apart and did not have an afterlife, therefore, they lived life with no regrets and lived for pleasure, the gods were nonexistent therefore they would not get punished for whatever “ sin” they committed.

Another instance can be seen on page 52, “ Oh no, we're big lions are home, but scared foxes in public”. This meaning that the people and the government and how corrupt it is because of their lack of the gods. If the people had gods, they would not be so corrupt and would obey them and have a better government not ruled solely by Nero, the reckless emperor. The people were still somewhat fearful of the gods and the government, but

more because they knew they were lacking their fate. Another theme that is commonly seen in both *The Satyricon* and *The Aeneid* is the role of women.

A specific instance of the role of women can be seen in *Dinner With Trimalchio* when Trimalchio, being half drunk, tells his guests that they should ask his wife, Fortunata to dance on the table for everyone to entertain them, but when he does so, she leans over to him and whispers something in his ear and he immediately shuts up, " He was just about to get up on the table when Fortunata went and whispered something in his ear, probably a warning that these drunken capers were undignified.

Never was a man so changeable; sometimes he would bow down to Fortunata in anything she asked at other times, as now, he went his way. " Page 59-60. This shows that Fortunata has power over Trimalchio and he will do whatever she orders him to do. Another instance can be seen when Encolpius is asking about Fortunata and someone describes her. " If she told him at noon it was night, he'd crawl into bed. " Fortunata obviously has a lot of power over Trimalchio and can convince him about anything. She has power over him, even though she is only wealthy though him, she holds power over him.

The role of women can also be seen in Virgil's *The Aeneid* when Aeneas tries to kill Helen because he believes that Helen was the reason why the Trojan War began, " My soul flared with a burning desire To avenge Troy and make her pay for her sins. " Line 673-674 pages 46. Although Aeneas wants to kill her, his mother, Venus has come down to stop him from killing her because it is not the right thing to do. She mentions his father and everything he did and told him that it is not the fault of Helen, but of the gods.

This shows how much of an impact his mother can make on Aeneas because should she not have intervened he would have killed Helen. Another example of the role of women in The Aeneid can be seen in Book 2 when Minerva has Laocoön killed because he was being disrespectful. “ For if you lay violent hands Upon this offering to Minerva, Destruction will fall... ” lines 226-228. Minerva was a goddess to be feared of rather than only the male gods. She was obviously very powerful and very influential to the people. The women portrayed in The Aeneid and The Satyricon are both very influential and very powerful.

The parallels between Contemporary American Society and Imperial Rome can be seen in the constant flux of the mindsets of the people in America. Similar to that of Rome, in a couple hundred of years, religion has changed a lot from being present, to being vaguely there. For example, Christianity was the biggest and most widespread religion 19th century while now, although it is still very widespread and very popular, there are many more religions such as Buddhism and Judaism. However, there was never a time where God was simply not there in American society such as in the time of Nero.

Similar to the Romans, women have great influences and power now such as Fortunata had on Trimalchio and Minerva over not only Laocoön, but the people of Rome as well. Women such as Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton have great power in American society. Michelle has helped many fundraisers and is in charge of many charities and organizations and Hillary Clinton, being the Secretary of State can one day even become the first female president. This tells us that we have adopted and adapted the Roman's

views on many things that have ultimately become very influential in our society.