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DIPARTIMENTO DI FILOLOGIA CLASSICA E ITALIANISTICA
CENTRO DI STUDI RETORICI E GRAMMATICALI

PAPERS ON RHETORIC

edited by Lucia Calboli Montefusco, Maria Silvana Celentano, Francesco Berardi

20

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XVIII

EDITED BY

LUCIA CALBOLI MONTEFUSCO
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**Visiting the library of *vir bonus dicendi peritus*:
Senecan tragedy from stage to school in Roman declamatory practice**

Chiara Valenzano

Abstract – Il contributo esamina il ruolo dell’intertestualità tragica nella declamazione latina, con particolare attenzione alla presenza delle tragedie senecane nel *corpus* scolastico. Nella prima parte si analizzano due esempi tratti dalle *Declamationes maiores*, che mostrano come il recupero di Seneca, attraverso citazioni dirette o allusioni tematiche, rappresenti un dispositivo retorico funzionale per creare atmosfere di forte *pathos* e per reinterpretare figure familiari al pubblico scolastico. Nella seconda parte, la *Declamatio minor* 256 è scelta come caso di studio significativo per approfondire il concetto di ‘intertestualità a vocazione didattica’: l’intera controversia è infatti modellata sul paradigma tragico dell’*Hercules furens*, che viene adattato in base alle esigenze dell’argomentazione e, in alcuni casi, contaminato con quello edipico. Un’attenta lettura del testo mostra come il declamatore utilizzi il modello tragico non solo per elevare lo stile del discorso, ma anche e soprattutto per delineare una *persona* riconoscibile e insieme per fornire agli studenti una guida pratica all’uso dei *colores*. L’analisi di questi casi dimostra, quindi, che nella retorica di scuola latina la memoria letteraria senecana può essere utile a guidare l’argomentazione, insegnando agli aspiranti declamatori come sviluppare temi complessi attraverso paradigmi tragici consolidati e confermando così il ruolo della declamazione come laboratorio di formazione letteraria e culturale.

Keywords: Senecan tragedy; Latin declamation; Hercules; didactic intertextuality; literary models.

1. Beyond quotation: tragic reminiscence and rhetorical function in Latin declamation

Declamation, as a school exercise, is closely connected to the literary references that constitute the cultural background of rhetoric students. Careful analysis of declamatory passages often reveals recurring expressions drawn

from the prose or verse of eminent authors¹, while thematic elements can situate a discourse within a particular literary context even when direct quotations are absent². This essay examines the relationship between Latin declamation and Senecan tragedy. Seneca, a prominent figure in declamation, significantly influenced the genre through both his tragic³ and moral⁴ writings, reflecting the affinities between declamation and theatrical performance⁵. Conversely, Seneca himself was shaped by the schools of declamation⁶, resulting in a mutual

¹ The relationship between literature and declamation has been thoroughly analysed by scholars in recent years. As it is impossible to cover the entire bibliography, I will limit myself to citing the contributions of van Mal-Maeder 2007, who deserves credit for framing the phenomenon of declamation within a literary and fictional perspective; Berti 2007: 251-358, dedicated to Seneca the Elder; the collections of Lentano 2015, which ranges across various literary genres in relation to declamation; Casamento-van Mal-Maeder-Pasetti 2016, focusing on the *Minores* and devoting ample space to literature; Dinter-Guérin-Martinho 2016, on the *Maiores*; Spielberg's 2017 essay on Calpurnio Flacco; Rolle-Pingoud 2020 on declamation and intertextuality. There are also contributions specifically dedicated to the revival of individual authors within the school curriculum: for a detailed discussion of the relationship between Cicero and declamation, see Berti 2007: 194; 213-214, with reference to Seneca the Elder, and Pasetti 2019: xxii-xxiv, with reference to the *Declamationes minores*; a comprehensive review of the intertextual relationships between poetry and declamation can be found in Berti 2015, while Berti 2007: 265-310 focuses on the reworking of poetic passages (particularly those of Virgil and Ovid) in the work of Seneca the Elder.

² For instance, as Pingoud 2016 has clearly demonstrated, the *Declamatio minor* 297 is based on the memory of *Pro Caelio*.

³ The relationship between Senecan tragedy and declamation has been exhaustively explored in the now classic study by Casamento 2002 (but see also 2015), as well as the works of Berti 2007: 311-318; van Mal-Maeder 2007: 10-18; Nocchi 2015: 199-206. Valenzano 2018, 2022 and Pasetti 2025 are focused on the *Minores*.

⁴ An overview of the influence of ethical themes attributable to Seneca on declamation can be found in Pasetti 2019: xxiv-xxv, with further bibliographical references. See also Pasetti 2025.

⁵ A substantial corpus of literature has been produced on this subject by scholars. Among the most recent contributions to this field, I would cite Bonner 1949: 20-21, Pianezzola 2003, Petrone 2004, Nocchi 2013; regarding the spectacular function of declamation, I refer to Calboli 2010: 149-152.

⁶ Leo 1878: 147-159 defines Senecan theatre as *tragoedia rhetorica*, while Canter 1925: 65-66 provides a comprehensive overview of the rhetorical elements extant in

interpenetration that, although studied by previous scholars, continues to provide fertile ground for further investigation.

Systematic analysis of Senecan tragic reminiscences within the Latin declamatory *corpus* reveals that direct references to dramatic verses serve to enhance the emotional intensity of the discourse. This phenomenon is exemplified by *Declamatio maior* 12, which centres on the theme of anthropophagy. Given its thematic focus, this text makes extensive reference to Seneca's *Thyestes*⁷, the tragedy specifically dedicated to this motif. While the *Thyestes* is not the sole Senecan work referenced⁸, it constitutes the predominant intertext due to the convergence of subject matter. The rhetor demonstrates considerable literary acumen in adapting canonical passages to serve multiple rhetorical functions, thereby engaging a culturally sophisticated audience.

A particularly illuminating instance occurs at 12.8.1, during the *narratio*, where the speaker employs a rhetorical interrogation to augment the emotional intensity preceding the recounting of cannibalistic episodes:

Quos testor deos? Superosne, quos per tantum nefas fugavimus, an inferos, quos nobis permiscuimus...?

What gods am I appeal to? Those above, whom we have put to flight by such an appalling crime, or those below, whom we have blended with ourselves?⁹

Seneca's tragedies. Classical contributions on the influence of Seneca the Elder on Seneca the Younger are Rolland 1906 and Preisendanz 1908. In more recent studies, Casamento (2015a), Konstan (2015) (specific to *Hercules Oetaeus*), Paré-Rey (2015), and Payne (2022) have addressed this subject.

⁷ For a more comprehensive overview of the recovery of *Thyestes* in this declamation, refer to Stramaglia 2002: 96 n. 15, which includes additional bibliographical references.

⁸ For example, see the repetition of the expression *dehisce terra* in the *peroratio* (Ps. Quint. *decl.* 12.28.1), which is also found in Sen. *Phaed.* 1238-1239, *Oed.* 868-870, *Tro.* 519-521 and *Thy.* 1006-1009; cf. also Stramaglia 2002: 197-198, n. 331.

⁹ All translations from *Major declamations* are by Winterbottom 2021.

This passage exhibits a deliberate structural parallelism contrasting celestial and chthonic divinities¹⁰, both affronted by the transgressive behaviour of the citizenry. The literary reference to the opening lines of Seneca's *Agamemnon* has not been sufficiently emphasised in scholarship, except briefly by Tarrant¹¹. Claiming not to know whether he hates more the earthly world he inhabited before or the infernal world in which he is now immersed, Thyestes says (Sen. *Ag.* 4):

Fugio Thyestes inferos, superos fugo

I Thyestes shun those below, and am shunned by those above¹².

The chiasmic construction, reinforced by alliteration, emphasizes the verbal actions of flight and repulsion (*fugio, fugo*), thereby underscoring Thyestes' existential isolation – his inability to secure acceptance in either the terrestrial or infernal realm. The recurrence of this verse in *Maior* 12 establishes both literal and thematic parallelism: citizens who have committed cannibalism – consciously, unlike Thyestes, but, like him, inevitably – find themselves in a predicament analogous to that of Thyestes. The perpetrated *nefas* results in their alienation from both human and divine communities.

The selection of Thyestes as comparative referent is particularly apt, as no figure better exemplifies the consequences of unwitting anthropophagy. Significantly, while the allusion derives not from *Thyestes* itself but from *Agamemnon* – another Senecan tragedy foregrounding the character – it nevertheless maintains thematic coherence. Thus, the tragic reference transcends mere cultural display, serving instead to characterize more precisely

¹⁰ For a commentary on this passage, particularly on the topic of the *infern*, see Stramaglia 2002: 117, n. 76.

¹¹ Tarrant 1976: 163 merely observes that a similar antithesis, less brilliant but more expressive, is also found in the passage from *Maior* 8 that has been analysed in this study. Boyle 2019: 104 makes no mention of it, and thus nothing is said about the declamatory reprise of this verse from *Agamemnon* in Stramaglia 2002.

¹² All translations from Seneca's tragedies are by Fitch 2018 and 2018a.

the civic body tainted by abominable guilt, while simultaneously aligning the entire text with the broader Thyestean thematic framework.

Another instance of the pathetic reuse of Seneca's tragic passages appears in *Declamatio maior* 8, which recounts a vivisection performed by a doctor to save one of two twins afflicted with a mysterious, incurable illness. The twins' father, who had initially consented, was later brought before the court by his wife – opposed from the start – on charges of mistreatment. In the epilogue, the declaimer grants her the floor, allowing her to deliver the final part of the speech with heightened emotional effect. Through an apostrophe to her deceased son, she evokes the suffering caused by the reconstruction of his body, horrifically mutilated¹³ by the physician ([Quint.] *decl. mai.* 8.22.5):

Quod solum tamen potui, corpus, quod medicus, quod reliquerat pater, hoc sinu misera collegi ac vacuum pectus frigidis abiectisque visceribus rursus implevi, sparsos artus amplexibus iunxi, membra diducta conposui et de tristi terribilique facie tandem aegri cadaver imitata sum.

the only thing I could, I did: in my wretchedness, I brought together in the fold of this dress what the doctor and the father had left behind, and replenished your empty breast with the organs they had discarded, now grown cold. I made the scattered members embrace each other, put the limbs together again, and out of that grievous and ghastly spectacle finally contrived the semblance of the sick youth's corpse.

Notably, previous scholarship has not observed that the poignant ending with its gruesome depiction of vivisection recalls *Phaedra*, where Theseus¹⁴, heeding the chorus's plea to reunite his son Hippolytus's dismembered remains for proper burial, performs a similar act of reintegration (Sen. *Phaed.* 1245-1265):

¹³ The issue of the mutilation in Latin declamation is addressed by Gunderson 2003: 59-89.

¹⁴ A close inspection of Stramaglia's 1999 commentary reveals a conspicuous absence of any such reference.

CH. *nunc iusta nato solve et absconde ocius
dispersa foede membra laniatu effero.*

TH. ...

*complectere artus, quodque de nato est super,
miserande, maesto pectore incumbens, fove.*

*Disiecta, genitor, membra laceri corporis
in ordinem dispone et errantes loco
restituere partes:*

...

*dum membra nato genitor adnumerat suo
corpusque fingit.*

CH. now pay your son due rites, and quickly hide away his limbs, so foully scattered and savagely torn.

TH. ... Embrace his limbs, pitiable man, kneel over him and enfold in your sad bosom all that remains of your son. Arrange in order, father, his torn body's sundered limbs, put back in place the straying parts. ... while the father is portioning out limbs to his son and fashioning his body.

Despite differing lexical choices, both narratives culminate in a similar scene, where a parent assumes responsibility for recomposing the child's battered body. In Seneca, the father's role reinforces his posthumous bond with his son, previously doubted in life¹⁵; in the declamation, the mother assumes this role, heightening the emotional impact through the visceral maternal bond. Here, the mother is not merely a woman mourning the loss of her son, but a gendered reinterpretation of Theseus: while the Athenian king bears guilt for the demise of Hippolytus, who perished as a consequence of the events that ensued from his exile, the declamatory mother experiences comparable remorse for failing to prevent the actions of her husband or the doctor, which caused the twins' suffering. The reconstruction of the child's body partially atones for this guilt, while the tender, yet desperate *post mortem* embrace represents the sole remaining avenue through which

¹⁵ So Casamento 2011: 257 *ad loc.*

parents can re-establish contact with their children and provide the protection that they were unable to offer during their lifetime.

Although no direct quotation occurs, the scene evokes a similar atmosphere, with analogous parental gestures. The *abiecta viscera* and the *membra diducta* of the declamatory twin indirectly recall Hippolytus's *disiecta membra*¹⁶, just as Seneca's *dispersa membra* echoes the declamatory *sparsos artus*.

As in the case of *Maior* 12, the declaimer thus draws on Seneca not for quotation's sake, but to enhance the rhetorical intricacy of the conclusion, intensifying the emotional impact and conferring tragic depth on the mother.

2. Teaching through tragedy: Seneca's *Hercules furens* and didactic intertextuality in *Declamatio minor* 256

I will now examine a case study in which an entire declamation follows a specific tragic paradigm: *Declamatio minor* 256, where the literary memory of Seneca's *Hercules furens* is central. This example is particularly significant as it belongs to the *Minores* corpus, likely associated with Quintilian's school¹⁷. In these exercises, literary reminiscence¹⁸ serves not merely to elevate discourse or enhance characterization, but primarily has a didactic function, enabling the school master to teach students the most effective means of developing a given theme.

As Pasetti¹⁹ observes, Seneca's memory – both tragic and philosophical – interacts effectively with discourse construction strategies, justifying the notion of 'didactic intertextuality'²⁰. In examining Seneca's reception in the *Minores*, Pasetti shows that, in tragic paradigms, the declaimer expresses

¹⁶ This point may also have been influenced by Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which Pentheus is described as a *σῶμα διασπαρακτὸν*, with no part of his body remaining in the same place (vv. 1218-1220); cf. also Casamento 2011: 257.

¹⁷ Regarding this issue, I refer to Pasetti 2019: XXXIV-XXXV.

¹⁸ A summary of literary memory within *Minores* in Pasetti 2019: XXI-XXX with additional bibliographical references.

¹⁹ Pasetti 2025.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of this definition, cf. Pasetti 2019, XXIV.

emotions and ideas through a mythical counterpart drawn from a specific literary model related to the discourse's central theme, often borrowing phrases and expressions. While the *progymnasmata*, particularly *ethopoeia*, encouraged work on mythical characters, declamation exercises require students to systematize prior learning. Thus, they animate stock characters typical of controversies – stepmothers, tyrants, fathers, sons – through the lens of tragic readings forming their cultural background: in *Minor* 256, literary memory functions not merely to enrich the text, but to guide aspiring declaimers in exploring individual aspects of declamation in depth.

Here is the case, which is as follows:

Furiosus trium filiorum pater

Qui tres filios habebat duos per furorem occidit. A tertio sanatus abdicat eum.

Mad father of three sons

A father of three sons killed two of them in madness. Cured by the third, he disowns him²¹.

The declaimer assumes the role of the father, addressing the theme of *furor* with explicit reference to Seneca's *Hercules furens*²²: in the tragedy, Hercules, struck by madness, kills his own family and, upon regaining sanity, must confront the deaths of his wife and children. Lucidity becomes an additional source of anguish, forcing him to face the consequences of his actions. Yet he approaches this ordeal as a supreme test of courage, resisting the impetuous death drive that threatens him.

The declamatory father is likewise structured on this framework, though a key thematic difference emerges: unlike the tragic original, the rhetorical family consists of the father and three sons²³, omitting the female figure of the wife and mother, Megara. This reflects Latin rhetoric's focus on generational

²¹ The translations of the *Lesser Declamations* are by Shackleton Bailey 2006.

²² I also refer to Dingel 1988: 117 on this point.

²³ This process also involves the element of triplication, which is characteristic of declamation, cf. Lentano 1998: 110 and n. 10; Berti 2007: 47; van Mal-Maeder 2007: 22; Pasetti 2011: 89-90 n. 1.

conflict between fathers and sons²⁴, also central in *Minor* 256, which concerns a trial for *abdicatio*. From the outset of the speech, the father presents his perspective in a way that parallels Seneca's Hercules (Quint. *decl.* 256.1):

Poteram, etiamsi non irascerer, abdicare tamquam bonus pater. Omnia de fortuna mea timeo, omnia de tam fragili ac tam mutabili mente, et propter hoc dimittendus mihi a domo filius erat, ne incideret in meum furorem.

Even if I were not angry, I could be disowning him as a good father. All ways I am afraid of my fortune, likewise of my mind, so fragile and changeable, and for this reason I had to send my son from my house for fear he might happen upon my madness.

To act as a *bonus pater*, the man must send his son away (*dimittendus*) to protect him from future bouts of madness. Similarly, Hercules seeks to remove his father (*recede*) to prevent harm if his *furor* returns, though his solution is far more extreme: he wants to take his own life (Sen. *Herc. f.* 1244-45; 1263):

*Sana si mens est mihi,
referte manibus tela; si remanet furor,
pater, recede: mortis inveniam viam.*

...

Facere ne possim, occidam.

If my mind is sane, give my hands back their weapons; if my madness remains, father, stand away; I shall find a path to death. [...] To prevent my doing so, I shall die.

The narrator begins shaping the father's character on the model of Hercules: like the hero, he seeks to protect his last surviving son from another episode of madness. Yet he never questions his own life and is not overwhelmed by the death drive that grips Hercules until the conclusion of the drama. While Hercules' endurance allows him to face his culpability and persist despite

²⁴ The existing bibliography on this subject is extensive; therefore, I will limit myself to citing Vesley 2003, Gunderson 2003 and Lentano 2009: 57-75. Further references in Casamento 2013: 96 n. 5.

anguish, the rhetorical father resists lucidity and suffering, even blaming his surviving son for his torment, employing an argument drawn from Seneca's tragedy (Quint. *decl.* 256.3):

Imputo filio meo orbitatem. Respondebit: 'non ego occidi'. Scio; mea manu factum est, ipse ego pater qui genueram, qui educaveram, per viscera liberorum ferrum exegi.

I hold my son responsible for my bereavement. He will answer: "I did not kill them." I know. The hand was mine, I drove the knife through my children's vitals, I that begot and reared them.

The focus now shifts to the motif of the hand guilty of murder, which recurs in the tragic model in several passages beyond those previously noted (Sen. *Herc. f.* 1034; 1196)²⁵:

unumque manibus aufer herculeis scelus.

Spare the hands of Hercules this one crime.

iam tela video nostra, non quaero manum.

Now I see my weapons. I need not ask about the hand.

The repeated emphasis on this idea shows how a defining trait of Hercules – his powerful hand – becomes the very cause of his ruin²⁶. The father's tone in the declamation reveals an almost exegetical engagement with the tragic model when he later states (Quint. *decl.* 256.4):

Esto, gravem sine dubio manibus meis iniuriam fortuna fecerat.

Yes, Fortune had certainly inflicted a great injury <upon me>²⁷ by my hands.

²⁵ See also Sen. *Herc. f.* 1235-1236 *vos quoque infaustas meis / cremabo telis, o novercales manus*. The *novercales manus* of Hercules is referenced in the reflection by Casamento 2002: 120-124, which is then built upon by Brescia 2021: 91. Refer also to Boyle 2023: 644-645.

²⁶ On the 'manus motif' in Seneca's *Hercules furens*, see Boyle 2023: 328-329.

²⁷ Shackleton Bailey 2006: 108 inserts an unnecessary <mihi> after *manibus* into the text.

In the declamatory text, however, the mention of the hands carries a different meaning: the father assigns ultimate responsibility not to himself, but to an external agent – his third son, unjust *Fortuna*²⁸, or the sword, the murder weapon. Notably, to indicate the weapon he uses the elevated expression *per viscera liberorum ferrum exegi*, drawn from Lucan (2.148-49: *infandum domini per viscera ferrum / exegit famulus*), where the civil war between Marius and Sulla wrought irreparable damage and moral decay. The phrase also recalls Medea's decision to use a sword against her children (Sen. *Med.* 1006 *ferrum exigam*). The declamation is thus carefully constructed, employing a network of literary and poetic references that both elevate its style and characterise events through the principle of subverting the natural order.

When portraying the *persona* of the *pater*, the declaimer begins with the model of Hercules but adapts it. For the tragic hero, the hands are a defining feature, capable of both great deeds and terrible crimes. In contrast, the father in *Minor* 256, when referring to his own hands, is unable to take full responsibility for his actions, shifting much of the blame onto his third son, who restores him to sanity yet imposes incurable pain. The term *dolor* denotes inner suffering born of despair (Quint. *decl.* 256.3):

Credo enim tibi, et orbitatem tamen tibi imputo, tibi. Aestimo illam ex die mei doloris. Quaedam ignorare simile non passi est: tunc liberos perdidisti cum perdidisse me sensi.

I believe you, and yet I hold you, yes you, responsible for my bereavement. I estimate it from the day of my grief. To be ignorant of some things is like never having suffered them.

The idea that ignorance is better than suffering is introduced here for the first time in this text. This motif is not only developed in the direction indicated by Hercules, who also experienced *dolor*, but also evokes another tragic figure for whom pain is central and whose memory is linked to the mad Hercules: Oedipus (Sen. *Oed.* 924):

²⁸ Even in Seneca's theatre, fate is to be understood as negative, cf. Averna 1998.

ac mersus alte magnus exundat dolor.

as his great pain poured from deep within him.

The use of the verb *sensi*, which indicates awareness leading to pain, also suggests this: in *Oedipus*, Jocasta's awareness is compared to Agave's when she realises, at the end of her Bacchic frenzy, that she has killed her son Pentheus (Sen. *Oed.* 1005-1007):

et furens / Cadmea mater abstulit gnato caput / sensitve raptum.

like the frenzied Cadmean mother when she tore away her son's head, or when she recognized her theft.

During the recitation, the initial framework – a reinterpretation of the character of Hercules – becomes intertwined with the paradigm of Oedipus, another man and father subjected to a cruel fate that destroys his family. This reinforces the argument: when the *pater* addresses pain arising from knowledge, the paradigm of Oedipus is more effective than that of Hercules, as awareness leading to suffering is typical of Oedipal drama. Yet the declamatory argument differs, because the *pater* of 256 emphasizes madness as a remedy for evil (Quint. *decl.* 256.4):

posuerat (scil. Fortuna) tamen huius rei in ipso animo remedium illo tempore quo furere et agi dementia videbar. Frequentius in ea cogitatione eram ut crederem esse cum liberis omnibus.

but she had placed a remedy for this in my very mind during the period when I seemed mad, driven by dementia. Quite often my thoughts were such that I believed myself with all my children.

Once again, the school father draws on his tragic counterpart, though to a lesser extent: unlike Oedipus, he prefers to linger in madness rather than confront reality. When Creon attempts to conceal the truth, Oedipus responds that awareness is preferable to ignorance regarding one's misfortunes (Sen. *Oed.* 514-515):

CR. *nescisse cupies nosse quae nimium expetis. / OE.* *iners malorum remedium ignorantia est.*

CR. You will wish you had not learned what you so demand to know. / OE. Ignorance is a feeble remedy for troubles.

Conversely, the protagonist of the declamation regards madness, rather than mere ignorance, as a paradoxical *remedium*, protecting him from painful awareness and even allowing him to imagine he is still with his children. The phrase *in ea cogitatione* denotes hallucinations, a typical consequence of *furor* well attested in tragedy²⁹. He further develops this theme by accusing his son (Quint. *decl.* 256.4):

Abstulisti mihi ignorantiam malorum. Quanto miserabilior fui ex die tuae sanitatis! Furiosum me non sic cecidi; tum lacerare vestes, tum verberare vultus meos coepi.

You took my ignorance of my misfortune away from me. How much more pitiable I was from the day of sanity, your gift! When I was mad, I did not strike myself so. It was then that I began to tear my clothes and beat my face.

Like the commonplace notion that bliss arises from ignorance of misfortune³⁰, this idea recurs frequently in preserved tragedies³¹. Significantly, it appears often in Seneca, whose characters confront the consequences of their own reprehensible actions. Examples include Thyestes (Sen. *Thy.* 782-783 *in malis unum hoc tuis / bonus est, Thyeste, quod mala ignoras tua*) and Hercules: according to the chorus, the hero's only chance of absolution is the madness overtaking him (Sen. *Herc. f.* 1098-1099 *proxima puris sors est manibus nescire nefas*). Yet he rejects this justification, though he regards *furor* as preferable to the suffering brought by awareness (Sen. *Herc. f.* 1259-1261 *cuncta iam bona amisi / etiam furorem*³²).

²⁹ To illustrate this point, one may consider the hallucinatory scenes in S. *Aj.* 285-304; E. *IT* 285-294; *Or.* 255-276; *HF* 947-1000; Sen. *Herc. f.* 939-1038.

³⁰ This is a theme that unites tragic and moralistic reflection, cf. S. *Aj.* 552-555; E. *fr.* 205 N; [Plut.] *mor.* 115e.

³¹ Cf. S. *Aj.* 271-276; E. *Ba.* 1259-1262; *Or.* 395-396.

³² For another quotation from this passage by Seneca in the *Minores* cf. Pasetti 2025: 127-128.

It is evident that *Minor* 256 is densely woven with tragic literary references, which help the declaimer shape the father's character according to the paradigm of Hercules. This reference model is also confirmed by recent research by Ricchieri³³, who reread the declamation through the lens of Ovid's poetry and recognised a phrase erroneously espunged³⁴ by all previous editors – who did not understand its function – as a quotation from an episode in *Metamorphoses* featuring Nestor and Tlepomenus, the son of Heracles³⁵. This highlights the richness of the author's literary reminiscences, underscoring his debt to the Hercules narrative. Yet this paradigm is occasionally inflected by other tragic models, notably that of Oedipus. In any case, the father never attains true heroic status: modelled on Hercules, he lacks his greatness and courage, and even when displaying Oedipal traits, he falls short of the Theban king's clarity of mind and pursuit of truth.

This exemplifies didactic intertextuality in the *Minores*, showing how teachers instructed students to use literary models to develop a *persona* and rhetorical *colores*. Tragic references elevate style and *pathos*, particularly in portraying the mad father with Hercules as his main counterpart, while deviations from the model convey a more realistic, human dimension. Analysing these connections demonstrates Latin declamation's role in shaping literary and cultural understanding and illuminates teaching strategies that reinforced character and thematic development through exemplary texts.

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³³ Ricchieri 2026 forthcoming.

³⁴ Quint. *decl.* 256.2, which here I quote from Pasetti *et al.* 2019: 56: *Sed quatenus et causas quoque abdicationis interrogor [id est cogit me frequentius malorum meorum meminisse] quamquam inter praecipua propter quae abdicem hoc est, quod mihi ista narranda sunt, dicam tamen.*

³⁵ *Ov. met.* 12.542-544. The episode features Nestor and Tlepomenus, son of Heracles.

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