DECLAMATORY COLOR AND PERSONA IN THE TRAGEDIES OF SENECA THE YOUNGER

by

Natalie MacDougall

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

(Classics)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

October 2015

© Natalie MacDougall, 2015
Abstract

Persona and color were two of the fundamental aspects of Roman declamation. The influence that these two aspects of declamation had on the tragedies of Seneca the Younger has been noted before. For this study, I narrowed my focus to the Controversiae of Seneca the Elder, the tragedian’s father. My approach to studying declamation and the tragedies of Seneca the Younger was to study persona and color in the treatment of two groups common to both the Controversiae and tragedies of Seneca the Younger: the family and women. I found that the manner in which characters within the Controversiae were identified, not by names but by familial or societal position, was reflected in the tragedies within both of the groups of characters which I studied. I also discovered that the characters in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger manipulate the declamatory features of persona and color more than has been previously noted. Within the family, characters either emphasize or deny kinship ties in order to defend against charges of impietas. The stereotypical women of declamation are present in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. The tragic women, in fact, represent their own actions with reference to the stereotypical women from the Controversiae.
Preface

The participants of this research included Natalie MacDougall, Masters of Classics student, thesis advisor Susanna Braund, and the following committee members: Leanne Bablitz and Toph Marshall.
# Table of Contents

Abstract  

Preface  

Table of Contents  

Acknowledgements  

Dedication  

Introduction  

Familial Relationships  
  The Roman Family: Pietas and Patria Potestas  
  The Language and Style of Declamation  
  Paradoxical Relationships in the Controversiae  
  Paradoxical Relationships in the Tragedies of Seneca the Younger  
  Coloring Familial Relationships  
  Wilful Transgressions of Pietas  

Women  
  Women in the Controversiae  
  Declamatory Women in the Tragedies of Seneca the Younger  
    Clytemnestra  
    Medea  
    Phaedra  

Conclusion  

Bibliography
Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my gratitude to UBC and the Department of Classical, Near Eastern, and Religious Studies. I also thank my supervisor, Susanna Braund, for her continual support and advice, along with my committee members.

Of course, I must also thank my friends and family for their support throughout my entire academic career.
To my wonderful family
Introduction

There has, in the past twenty years or so, been much progress made in exploring the place that declamation had in Roman education, thought, and identity. Not much has been done in examining the influence that Seneca the Elder’s work in declamation had on the works of Seneca the Younger. The scholarship that has been done tends to focus on the rhetorical nature of Senecan tragedy. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the influence that the declamatory work of Seneca the Elder, the *Controversiae*, had on the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. I will examine the presence of declamatory *persona* and *color* within two specific groups of characters common to both authors: family members and women.

Recent scholarship agrees upon the importance of declamation in the shaping of identity amongst the elite male population of Rome.¹ In the schools, declamation taught privileged youths how to perform their future roles as fathers, husbands, and leading men.² The continued practice amongst adults, a new phenomenon in Rome only begun within the life of Seneca the Elder himself, reinforced the identity and authority of the Roman male.³ Declamation provided a venue through which the elite male population could discuss their anxieties and potential threats to their authority. The practice of declamation also provided the Roman man with the ability to formulate arguments on behalf of many different characters in a variety of situations. In order to provide the best argument, the declaimer had to adopt a *persona* appropriate to the character he

---


³ Gunderson, *Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity*, passim.
wished to defend. His words and the actions would have to be suitable for the character.

Furthermore, the declaimer had to choose the color, or spin, that he would place upon the facts of the controversy. A more detailed discussion of persona and color will be provided below.

There have been scholars who have noted the influence that the persona and color of declamation had on the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. Pratt, for instance, has devoted two chapters of his book, Seneca’s Drama, to the influence of declamation on the tragedies.\(^4\) He has noted the obvious connection between persona/color and drama,\(^5\) and how the necessity for the declaimer to ‘speak and perform the role of diverse characters placed in conditions of stress’ provided a means for Seneca the Younger to dramatize the moral issues in his plays.\(^6\) Hook has argued for an even greater connection between persona/color and the characters of Seneca the Younger.\(^7\) He argues that the characters in Senecan tragedy are aware of their personae and the colores which are suitable for them.\(^8\) Goldberg has also argued that the characters in Seneca the Younger are recognizable by their persona/color, since drama was no longer as spectacular as it had been in the Republic.\(^9\)

My thesis will focus on two groups which are represented in both the Controversiae and the tragedies of Seneca the Younger: the family and women. The first chapter will explore the paradoxical familial relationships dealt with in the Controversiae and tragedies of Seneca the

\(^4\) Pratt, Seneca’s Drama.
\(^5\) Ibid., 143-4.
\(^6\) Ibid., 151.
\(^7\) Hook, ‘Nothing Within which passeth show: Character and Color in Seneca Tragedy,’ 65.
\(^8\) Ibid., 65.
\(^9\) Goldberg, ‘The Rise and Fall of Roman Tragedy,’ 283.
Younger. The Roman family unit was regulated by the legal power of the father, *patria potestas*, and the moral principle of *pietas*. The structure of the Roman family created a web of relationships and allegiances. This complicated network of relationships had the potential to create situations in which one family member is unable to fulfil obligations demanded of them by *patria potestas* and *pietas*. These complicated relationships are at the centre of many of the *Controversiae*. I shall explore how the *personae* and *colores* present in the *Controversiae* which deal with familial relations are also present amongst the families of Senecan tragedy.

The second chapter explores the female characters present in the *Controversiae* and how the women in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger interact with these declamatory women. Women in the *Controversiae* are not ambiguous. Their actions and motives correspond to those of stereotypical female figures. In the tragedies, the female characters of Clytemnestra, Medea, and Phaedra are certainly ambiguous. The women in the tragedies are aware of the stereotypes of women that are present in the *Controversiae*. These tragic women spin, or colour, their actions with reference to the female *personae* of the *Controversiae*.

Thus my study adds significant depth to the straightforward realization that the tragedies of Seneca the Younger reflect his training in declamation.
Familial Relationships

Pietas and patria potestas were fundamental principles in the organization and maintenance of the Roman family unit. As a genre that dealt primarily with legal and moral issues, declamation was well-suited as a medium through which these concepts and their repercussions on Roman life could be explored. I shall argue that the ways in which issues concerning the Roman family were discussed in Seneca the Elder’s Controversiae are reflected in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. First, I shall discuss how pietas and patria potestas are treated in both authors and the conflict that arises between legal and moral duty; secondly, the re-evaluation of familial relationships that occurs after transgressions of the natural order of kin and pietas; and finally I shall discuss characters who wilfully transgress pietas and natural kin relations. The characters in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger adopt the personae and colores which the declaimers of the Controversiae adopt in cases concerning familial conflict.

The Roman Family: Pietas and Patria Potestas

Pietas most simply refers to the duty one owes to one’s kin, fatherland, and gods. Saller notes two important implications of this definition: ‘First, the emphasis is on duty rather than affection or compassion. Secondly, it is a virtue displayed primarily toward a higher power, whether it be the gods, the fatherland, or parents. Within the family it is thought to have been an attitude particularly appropriate for children to show to parents.’\textsuperscript{10} Although familial relationships in Rome are certainly asymmetrical, pietas not only concerned the duties that a son had to his father, but was reciprocal: just as sons owed duties to their fathers, so fathers owed duties to their sons. Furthermore, the Romans did not limit pietas to only male relationships:

\textsuperscript{10} Richard P. Saller, Patriarchy, property and death in the Roman family, 105.
fathers must maintain their duties to their daughters as well, and children to their mothers.\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, \textit{pietas} affected every relationship within the Roman family, as every member of the family had obligations to one another that they needed to maintain. However, the web of obligations within the Roman family could create conflict when obligations to one family member meant transgressing obligations to another family member. It is these conflicts amongst family members and ‘conflict of allegiances’\textsuperscript{12} that the declaimers of the \textit{Controversiae} are interested in. The \textit{Controversiae} treat almost exclusively \textit{pietas} within the family,\textsuperscript{13} though Breij notes that ‘its various other applications (gods and country) cannot be thought away, for it is the whole concept [of \textit{pietas}] that is such an essential part of Roman identity and moral makeup.’\textsuperscript{14}

The Romans did not consider \textit{pietas} to be specific to their own culture, but rather a principle that was inherent in all human beings.\textsuperscript{15} However, \textit{patria potestas}, the other basis of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 114.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Bloomer, \textit{Latinity and Literary Society at Rome}, 138.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Bé Breij, ‘Dilemmas of Pietas in Roman Declamation,’ 336-7: ‘If we look at the extant \textit{controversiae}, we find that no fewer than 78 have a substantial concern with \textit{pietas}. At best three of these 78 \textit{controversiae} explicitly involve \textit{pietas} towards the gods… In another trio \textit{pietas} towards the state is a central issue… The remaining 72 \textit{controversiae} are all concerned with \textit{pietas} within the family. This is not surprising if we take into account the subject matter of declamations, and their prime target group. The latter, we have seen, consisted of upper-class adolescents. Their main social environment was of course their home, and the most important relationships in their lives were those with parents, siblings, and friends.’
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 338-9.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Valerius Maximus 5.6 ext. 5 (trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey): ‘It is evident, therefore, how men of all orders and ages have arisen with abundant and unstinting piety towards country. A wealth of marvellous examples famous world-wide has corroborated the holiest laws of Nature’ \textit{(Patet ergo quam benigne quamque profusae pietatis erga patriam omnium ordinum, omnis aetatis homines extiterint, sanctissimisque Naturae legibus mirificorum etiam exemplorum clara mundo subscripsit ubertas)}. Cicero \textit{De Inventione} 2.65 (trans.H.M. Hubbell): ‘And the law of nature is something which is implanted in us not by opinion, but by a kind of innate instinct; it includes religion, duty, gratitude, revenge, reverence, and truth’ \textit{(ac naturae quidem ius esse, quod nobis non opinio, es quaedam innata vis adferat, ut religionem, pietatem, gratiam, vindicationem, observantiam, veritatem)}.
\end{itemize}
familial relationships in Rome, was understood to be particularly Roman.\textsuperscript{16} Patria potestas refers to the absolute legal power that the paterfamilias had over his children and other descendants through his sons. This is presented in the extreme power given to the father even to kill his children with impunity, the vitae necisque potestas. However, it seems that this power was in practice only symbolic and that excessive cruelty could be criticized.\textsuperscript{17} It was socially expected that the paterfamilias would consult with other family members in extreme forms of punishment, though this was not demanded in the law.\textsuperscript{18} In practice, the power of the father rested in property, as he had complete control over the property of those in his power.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, anyone in potestate, whether male or female, could not technically own anything themselves. The paterfamilias also had considerable influence over the marriage of those family members in his power.\textsuperscript{20} In the early periods of Rome when women married they would be freed from the patria potestas of their natal family and enter into the manus\textsuperscript{21} of their husband.\textsuperscript{22} However, by the late Republic, and thus in the times of both Seneca the Elder and Younger, women would typically remain under the power of the paterfamilias of their natal family, thus avoiding manus. Any children born in the marriage would be in the power of the husband (or his paterfamilias), and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Saller, Patriarchy, property and death in the Roman family, 114.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 117.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Gardner, Women in Roman Law and Life, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 118.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 119.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 11: ‘Manus (literally ‘hand’) meant a relationship in which the wife stood in the power of the husband… His power over her, though, was more restricted than that over his children. He did not have the right of life and death over her, nor of noxal surrender or sale.’
\item \textsuperscript{22} Treggiari, Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian, 15-6.
\end{itemize}
the mother had no legal connection with her own children.²³

*Pietas* and *patria potestas* thus regulated, both morally and legally, relationships within the Roman family. In practice, *pietas* moderated the extreme power that the *paterfamilias* had over his children.²⁴ However, situations may also arise where these two concepts create conflict, as on the one hand *pietas* demands that one fulfil duties to all family members, while on the other hand *patria potestas* demands by law that the *paterfamilias* be obeyed. The declaimers of Seneca the Elder, and as I shall argue the characters in Seneca the Younger, attempt to resolve issues of *pietas* by more narrowly categorizing familial relationships. Bloomer explains:

‘Themes of social and societal injury reflect, then, the general interest of declamation in investigating *pietas*, in determining the stance to be taken towards father, paternal authority, and speech. The speakers’ division attempts to isolate social roles that in fact are not separate, as, for instance, the *filius* can also be *sui iuris*, the woman can be daughter and wife.’²⁵ Both Seneca the Elder and Younger establish paradoxical relationships which force their characters to choose how or whether they are able to fulfil obligations to their family members.

**The Language and Style of Declamation**

The language of moral and legal obligation is found throughout the *Controversiae*. The declaimers in the *Controversiae* follow closely the division of their argument into *ius* and *aequitas*. Their first consideration would be the *quaestio iuris*, which examines the case from a ‘strictly legal position: is the defendant empowered by law to act as he did (*an liceat, an

²³ Ibid., 32-4.
²⁴ Emiel Eyben, “Father and Sons,” 143.
Next the declaimer considered the *quaestio aequitatis*, which asked, ‘even supposing his actions to have been legally correct, was he morally justified in acting as he did? (*an debeat, an oportuerit*). Declamation was a genre that set ‘social convention against the letter of the law.’ Since so many of the themes of the *Controversiae* involve conflict among family members, the moral issue often involved the concept of *pietas*. As Breij explains, *pietas* ‘was a virtue which came in the category of *ius naturae*, it was fundamental and unassailable and put those who could prove that they possessed, or acted from *pietas*, in the right.’ In situations involving a father and his child(ren), the legality versus morality of the situation often boiled down to *patria potestas* versus *pietas*. In many of the situations involving family members, the issue pits an action that is legal against one that transgresses familial ties. This reflects the the complicated network of obligations within the Roman family unit. The declaimers therefore must determine what the obligations of family members were to one another, both legally and, especially, morally.

Another aspect of declamation that will be relevant to my study of familial relations is *color* and *persona*. *Persona* refers to ‘the convincing portrayal of character’ by the declaimer.

---

26 Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 57.

27 Sussman, *The Elder Seneca*, 41. He notes that the ‘treatment of *aequitas* was one of the most important contributions of Roman law: the development of a concept of equity in which the object of the legal process becomes justice and completeness.’

28 Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 57.

29 Bloomer, *Latinity and Literary Society at Rome*, 140.

30 Breij, ‘Dilemmas of Pietas in Roman Declamation,’ 336.

31 Sussman, *The Elder Seneca*, 40: ‘An appeal to equity was especially effective when there was no conflict on the commission of an illegal act, or when the act was covered under two contrary laws…. Such an appeal would also be useful in a court system where the jury was often free to dismiss evidence and even the applicable law in arriving at its decision.’

32 Fairweather, *Seneca the Elder*, 176.
The declaimer had to be sure that his actions and words were appropriate to the character he chose to portray. *Color* is the spin or interpretation that the declaimer places upon the facts of the *controversia*. Sussman defines *color* as the ‘subtle, unusual, and clever twists of circumstances and argumentation by which the declaimers tried to alter the interpretation of the facts in a case.’³³

As I have just noted, the *Controversiae* deal with paradoxical familial relationships, where family members are placed in situations where they cannot fulfil both their moral and their legal duties. The characters in declamation, who are incapable of fulfilling more than one familial role, are thus forced to re-evaluate the nature of their relationships. This stems from the necessity in the *Controversiae* to categorize the subjects of the declamations into a single role. As Bloomer explains, in order to effectively argue the case, the declaimer had to ‘make distinctions, to categorize, to argue - within a circumscribed field of characters, events, and solutions…[and to know] where to place various *personae* and what words and sentiments were appropriate to them.’³⁴ Along with *personae*, the declaimer then had to provide his own *color*:

He had to define the appropriate *persona* - a matter of decorum, making his self-presentation suit the nature of the case and the character of the speaker (the rapist, say, or the hero). And he had to determine *color* - the narrative background or “spin” - … though he could not alter or deviate from the facts themselves, the declaimer was allowed to interpret them in whatever way he wished or to invent a history for the facts that placed them in a light favorable to his own side.³⁵

When there is conflict amongst family members and transgressions of *pietas* in the

---

³⁴ Bloomer, ‘Schooling in Persona,’ 62.
³⁵ Kaster, ‘Controlling Reason,’ 319-20.
Controversiae, the speakers must define their relationships in ways that defend their own actions.

Bonner notes that *colores* either ‘tone down the guilt or represent it in even more glaring colours.’\(^{36}\) Similarly, declamatory figures can either emphasize or renounce their familial connections in order to justify their actions.

Indeed, the basis for the self-construction of characters in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger has been argued to be in declamation, as Pratt writes:

For rhetorical training and display, declaimers speak and perform the roles of diverse characters placed in conditions of stress. These conditions evoke conflict, quandary, and pathos, emotions that the speaker must verbalize, intensify, and dramatize, exploiting the whole range of human feeling from distraction to aspiration. The psychological world of declamation was the seed of the drama.\(^{37}\)

Hook argues that in Senecan drama the characters are essentially made up of the *personae* and *colores* of declamation, and notes the conflict that arises when the *color* that two characters take in the dramas conflict:

What we have in place of ignorance, deception, and other more “true” psychological states is the collision of the different *colores* embodied by the various characters.

What may be lost in a subtle, mediating interaction is gained in a brilliant juxtaposition of opposites… It is not a lack of understanding that creates their inability to communicate humanly - it is rather their clear understanding of the opposite, and hated, rhetorical position.\(^{38}\)

I believe much of what I will argue affirms and expands upon Hook’s argument. However, we

\(^{36}\) Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 56.

\(^{37}\) Pratt, *Seneca’s Drama*, 151.

\(^{38}\) Hook, ‘Nothing within which passeth show: Character and Color in Seneca Tragedy,’ 64. Hook uses Phaedra from *Phaedra* and Atreus from *Thyestes* as his examples. These characters are self-aware and conscious of their actions, even though both characters are mentally unstable.
shall see that there are characters in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger who are able to adopt a color that is convenient for their argument at one point in the play, but will then adopt a different color to suit their needs later. This may add to the idea that color is, as Hook states, ‘embodied by the various characters.’

**Paradoxical Relationships in the *Controversiae***

Characters in the *Controversiae* are put into paradoxical positions within their families, as noted in the passage of Bloomer quoted above, since family members are able to occupy multiple, but potentially contradictory, roles within the family unit. Due to the frequency of death, divorce, and re-marriage in Rome, changes in the nature of familial relationships were common. Furthermore, social allegiance and the conflict between legal power and social custom was real, where a ‘father’s formal powers (*patria potestas*) were extensive in concept but restricted by law, custom, and demography. Mothers were perceived as having considerable influence, although technically they were seldom members of the family of their husband and children.’ The *Controversiae* reflect these aspects of Roman society by presenting characters who are placed in situations where fulfilling all of their duties according to law and morality/social custom is impossible. So we find situations in the *Controversiae* where a son must choose to fulfill his duties to either his father or mother (1.4; 7.4), a woman to her father or husband (10.3). Brothers find themselves also enemies (1.7). Sons must defy the commands of their fathers (2.5). The characters are forced to evaluate what their obligations are to their kin and

---


40 Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 210.

41 Ibid., 268.
weigh these against an action that would transgress their obligations, as Breij explains:

Situational ethics comes more clearly to the fore if pietas gives rise to a moral dilemma. This can happen in various ways. Firstly, a protagonist may be landed in a situation where it is difficult for him to keep up his pietas in the face of an opposing force, which may be the state, or legal authority, or a superior power within the family - usually the father. Secondly, he may be confronted by incompatible claims being laid to his pietas. Thirdly, he may be forced to explore the limits of pietas.\textsuperscript{42}

I shall begin by examining in greater detail the issue of pietas and patria potestas in one case from within the \textit{Controversiae}.

\textit{Controversiae} 1.4 offers an evaluation of familial obligations. A father, who has lost his hands in battle, catches his wife committing adultery with another man. The father asks his son to kill the couple for him, as he cannot. When the son refuses, the father disinherits him. The law presented in the declamation, that ‘whoever catches an adulterer with his mistress in the act, provided that he kills both, may go free. A son too may punish adultery on the part of his mother,’\textsuperscript{43} if it ever did exist, is certainly outdated by the early empire. The \textit{Lex Iulia}, which was instituted c.18 B.C., seems to have superseded many earlier statutes on adultery. The law deprived the husband of the right to kill his wife.\textsuperscript{44} Within the realm of declamation the question does not necessarily involve the legality of the father’s actions, as the father is acting in

\textsuperscript{42} Breij, ‘Dilemmas of Pietas in Roman Declamation,’ 340.

\textsuperscript{43} All Latin and English translations of the \textit{Controversiae} are from Winterbottom’s 1974 Loeb edition.

\textsuperscript{44} Bonner, \textit{Roman Declamation}, 120-2: ‘In the earlier Republic, either or both delinquents could be killed, without further proviso (so far as we know); in the later Republic both had to be killed simultaneously; under the Empire the husband was deprived even of this right, which remained only with the woman’s father under certain defined conditions, and he (the husband) was only permitted to kill the paramour if he was of low status.’ The ability of the son to kill his mother is also antiquated. It was perhaps at one point allowed for the act to be committed by the son on the father’s order which ‘would be entirely in the spirit of Roman law, in which illegal acts committed under a binding order were blameless, unless they were atrocia.’
accordance with the laws presented in the case. However, although the husband had the right to kill both his wife and the adulterer, he was not obligated to do so. The declaimers rarely argue about the actual legal issues. In controversiae which deal with familial issues, the declaimers usually base their arguments around familial obligations. So the main issue in this case is whether the son ought to have obeyed his father, as patria potestas mandates, or whether he was correct in not killing his mother, which would surely be in accordance with his sense of pietas. The declaimers do not focus on the legality of what the father asked his son to do.

The argument for the father is that the son, in refusing, has failed to perform as a son should, and thus deserves to be disinherited. The argument for the son is the fact that he weighed parricide a greater crime than disobeying his father. Essentially, it is a contrast between his legal duty, under patria potestas, and his moral duty, mandated by pietas. The obligation of the son to obey his father is argued to be more important in the case than what the son or law is capable of (Contr. 1.4.6):

\[
\text{Latro sic tamen ordinavit: oportuit, etiamsi pater non iuberet, occidere adulteram viri fortis uxorem; oportuit iubente patre, etiamsi ipse posset occidere; oportuit, cum et iuberet et ipse non posset.}
\]

But Latro organized it thus: he ought, even without his father’s orders, to have killed a hero’s wife taken in adultery; he ought, seeing that his father did order him, even if the father was himself capable of killing; he ought, because his father ordered him and could not act himself.

45 See Treggiari, Roman Marriage, 268-75.

46 Breij, ‘Dilemmas of Pietas in Roman Declamation,’ 340: She also notes this in Contr. 1.4. ‘Of course this refusal to kill can only be interpreted as a sign of pietas, but this pietas is opposed by the force of patria potestas.’
We see here the *quaestio aequitatis*, with the repeated use of *oportet*. The declamer above believes that the son should always obey his father and that the son would be killing his own mother does not matter in this case. However, others realize the impossible situation the son finds himself in (*Contr.* 1.4.5): ‘Alas for filial affection, look at the parental prayers you stood between!’ (*O misera pietas, inter quae parentum vota constitisti!*).

Another example in the *Controversiae* that explores familial duty is 10.3. The situation is this: during the civil wars, a woman’s husband and father were on opposite sides. The woman chose to stay with her husband, whose side lost. When she returned to her father’s home, he would not let her in. When she asked ‘How do you want me to make amends to you?’ (*quemadmodum tibi vis satis faciam*?), he told her to die. She then killed herself. His son, the woman’s brother, accused the father of madness. Now, the fact is that there was no action for madness (*dementiae actio*) at Rome. In declamation, madness does not refer to any modern psychological disorder. Rather, as Gunderson says, ‘any father who in his capacity as father has acted so as to damage the structure of the family is thereby exposed to a charge of madness.’

Most of the declaimers in Seneca’s report of the declamation argue that the father asked for too much in punishing his daughter (in other words, what he asked was beyond *satis*). It seems that they understand the position of the woman who is conflicted between two households. Her actions, as some of the declaimers argue, fulfilled obligations to both morally, even if legally she

---

47 Cf. 1.4.6: ‘The question, should he have, is a point of development, which everyone varies as he so wishes’ (*An oportuerit, tractionis quidem est, quam ut quisque vult variat*). 2.5.16: ‘How can you suppose that this question falls under the treatment of equity when what is under discussion is not what ought to be the case but what is allowed?’ (*quomodo istam quaestionem putas in aequitatis tractationem cadere, cum quid liceat quaeratur; non quid oporteat?*).

48 Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 93.

49 Gunderson, *Declamation, paternity, and Roman identity*, 129.
was part of her father’s household (**Contr.** 10.3.1): ‘He had a daughter who loved both her husband and her father; the one she followed till his death, the other she made amends to even by dying’ (**Filiam habuit piam et in maritum et in patrem: alterum usque in mortem secuta est, alteri etiam per mortem satis fecit**). The woman’s situation presents an extreme paradox: the only way that the woman has been able to fulfil all her duties is by her own death. This case adds to the vocabulary of familial obligation in the **Controversiae**. Words such as **licet**, **debet**, **oportet**, and **satis** are repeated by the declaimers in their arguments. We may also note from the examples from the **Controversiae** examined above how the characters in these cases are referred to not by name, but by their familial status.

**Paradoxical Relationships in the Tragedies of Seneca the Younger**

Seneca the Younger in his tragedies emphasizes the similarly paradoxical relationships in the mythological families that he treats. Pratt has remarked that both the father and the son share an interest in morality:

> The moral tensions dominating the plays … had their predecessor and presumably their origin in the psychological tensions of declamation. Clearly, the moral nature of the Senecan dramatic world, the mechanism of the human soul in good and evil, and human behaviour under moral stress were determined by his philosophy, but before he was ready to dramatize such moral insights, he had been exposed to the psychological drama of declamation …\(^{50}\)

Thus we see that Oedipus’ relations to his own family are even more paradoxical than any presented in the **Controversiae**: he is both son and husband to Jocasta and both father and brother to his children. Oedipus must also deal with being the murderer of his own father, who had

---

\(^{50}\) Pratt, *Seneca’s Drama*, 151.
himself intended for Oedipus to die as an infant. In Phoenissae, Polynices is both brother and enemy (Eteocles and Polynices were supposed to share the rule of Thebes, but Eteocles refused to give up the kingship when it was Polynices’ turn). In Agamemnon, Clytemnestra struggles between her position as wife and mother. Even Medea struggles between her role as mother and daughter/sister. The characters of the tragedies, when placed in similar paradoxical relationships as those in the Controversiae, must explore the same issues as the declaimers in these situations, namely how they are able to fulfil familial obligations adequately. I will now explore these cases in greater detail.

Seneca the Younger’s Oedipus is a character who does not know what his duties to his family should be. Boyle in his commentary on Oedipus notes the declamatory nature of this play, especially in terms of the characters’ self-construction and psyche, as well as the presence of language relating to the law and moral responsibility. When Oedipus discovers the true nature of his familial relationships, he asks repeatedly what he owes to each of his family members whom he has wronged by corrupting the natural relationship he should have had with them (Oed. 938-41):

\begin{verbatim}
moreris: hoc patri sat est;
quid deinde matri, quid male in lucem editis
natis, quid ipsi, quae tuum magna luit
scelus ruina, flebili patriae dabis?
\end{verbatim}

\begin{itemize}
\item[51] Marica Frank, Seneca’s Phoenissae: Introduction and Commentary, 32-3: ‘The situation portrayed in the second half of the play as a whole is as complex and paradoxical as that of any controversia: Polynieces is both the victim of Eteocles’ injustice and the hostis of Thebes, since in attempting to avenge the wrong done him by his brother he is committing a greater wrong.’
\item[52] Boyle, Seneca: Oedipus, xlv-xlviii.
\item[53] Ibid., lxvii: He notes that Oedipus ‘takes moral and legal responsibility for actions he unknowingly performed.’
\end{itemize}
You die: this is enough for your father. What then will you offer your mother, or your children, so wrongly brought into the light? What will you offer her who pays for crimes with utter ruin - your pitiful fatherland?\textsuperscript{54}

Oedipus is concerned with what he owes his family members.\textsuperscript{55} We may note that he uses the word \textit{sat}, which is one of the words used in cases of familial obligations in the \textit{Controversiae}.

In \textit{Phoenissae}, Oedipus has at last decided what he owes his father, and his family: his own death, on Mt. Cithaeron, where Laius had intended for him to die as an infant.\textsuperscript{56} Oedipus explains (\textit{Phoen.} 166-72):

\begin{quote}
\textit{et tu, parens, ubicumque poenarum arbiter}

\textit{astas meaarum: non ego hoc tantum scelus}

\textit{ulla expiari credidi poena satis}

\textit{umquam, nec ista morte contentus fui,}

\textit{nec me redemi parte: membratim tibi}

\textit{perire volui. debitum tandem exige.}

\textit{nunc solvo poenas, tunc tibi inferias dedi.}
\end{quote}

And you, my father, wherever you stand to witness my punishment: I did not believe that such a crime as mine could be properly expiated by any punishment, ever; I was not satisfied with this much death, I did not redeem myself by partial payment: I wanted to die for you limb by limb. But now at last exact your debt. Now I am paying the penalty, then I gave you a funeral offering.

\textsuperscript{54} All Latin and English translations of Seneca the Younger are from Fitch’s 2002 and 2004 Loeb editions of the tragedies.

\textsuperscript{55} Boyle (\textit{Seneca’s Oedipus}, 325), for instance, makes the following remarks on this passage: ‘The notion of Oedipus’ death as punishment/vengeance due to his father seems repeated by Oedipus at \textit{Pho.} 90-2 where the self-blinding is stated to be atonement to his mother (92-3). But there the evaluation is different; the self-blinding is represented as a lesser or inadequate penalty for his crimes (\textit{Pho.} 143-4), the beginning of a death-process which needs to be completed (see \textit{Pho.} 166-81). Sophocles’ Oedipus blinds himself so that he cannot see his sufferings or his sins or those his eyes should not have seen (\textit{OT} 1271-4) …’

\textsuperscript{56} Fantham, E. “Nihil iam iura naturae valent: Incest and Fratricide in Seneca’s Phoenissae,” 62.
To Oedipus, the question he has long been deliberating, what he owes his father, what the limits of his duty are to him, is that which is also considered by Seneca the Elder’s declaimers. It seems significant that the language used, where Laius is obtaining what he is owed, is *debitum*, one of the verbs deployed in the *quaestio aequitatis*.\(^{57}\) *sat/satis* is another word that the declaimers use of fulfilling obligations to family members, which was used in 10.3, for example. Boyle notes that characters in Senecan tragedy ‘regularly raise questions of sufficiency of *poena*.‘\(^{58}\) We may also note what Oedipus says slightly earlier in the play, when Antigone protests his decision to die (*Phoen.* 145-6): *tandem libet | quod olim oportet. morte prohiberi haud queo* (‘What was long my duty is at last my desire. I cannot be restrained from death’). Again we see the same language of the debt owed to one’s family members (*oportet*). We may compare this line to one from Seneca the Elder, at *Controversiae* 4.5, where a son, a doctor, refuses to care for his stepmother at his father’s request. Seneca the Elder quotes an argument in favour of the son performing the father’s wish: *inter patres et filios id solum iudex putat licere quod oportet* (‘Between fathers and sons, the only law in the eyes of the judge is an ought’). The complicated relationship that Oedipus has to each of his family members is expressed when he considers his obligations to them. These deliberations reflect the same language used by the declaimers when they consider similarly paradoxical familiar situations.

*Phoenissae* is in fact a play that deals with one family’s reaction to a series of

\(^{57}\) Cf. *Contr.* 1.1.13: ‘Latro’s points were these. He made a distinction between law and equity. Can he be disinherited? Should he be?’ (*Latro illas quaestiones fecit: divisit in ius et aequitatem, an abdicari possit, an debeat*).

\(^{58}\) Boyle, *Seneca’s Oedipus*, 329. See also *Oed.* 954 and *Phoen.* 356.
transgressions against the natural order of kinship. The first half of this incomplete, episodic play is dominated by Oedipus, and the second by Jocasta. The question of what their duties are as parents connects the episodes together. It has even been argued that the form of the play, which lacks choral odes and is divided between Oedipus and Jocasta, is such because the two halves were written as two separate pieces of declamation, collected together after the death of Seneca. Each parent is asked to intervene in the feud between Eteocles and Polynices. Antigone and a messenger from Thebes urge Oedipus to exercise the power he has over his sons and appeal to the obligation they should feel to him as their father (Phoen. 288-90; Phoen. 347-9):

*Si nulla, genitor, causa vivendi tibi est,*
*haec una abunde est, ut pater natos regas*
*graviter furentes.*

Antigone: If you have no reason for living, father, this one reason is amply sufficient, that as a father you may rule your sons in their grievous rage.

*Mitte violentum impetum*
*doloris ac te publica exorent mala,*
*auctorque placidae liberis pacis veni.*

Messenger: Check this violent outburst of your pain! Let the sufferings of the people prevail on you; come to sanction peace and calm among your children.

Jocasta is similarly encouraged by the attendant (Phoen 401-6):

*Satelles*

59 Fantham, ‘Nihil iam iura naturae valent’, 68: ‘Two crimes against nature, acts that destroy the family, dominate this play. The first is incest, leading in Seneca’s version to the paradox that love can be evil, and a mother a source of dread and pollution.’


61 Fantham, ‘Nihil iam iura naturae valent,’ 61: ‘Opinion has moved away from the negative judgement of Leo, that these were two detached declamations, arbitrarily grouped after Seneca’s death, to look for the recurring themes and reactions that bind together the response of Oedipus as father and Jocasta as mother to the destructive hatred of their sons.’
i, redde amorem fratribus, pacem omnibus,
et impia arma matris oppositu impedi.

Antigona

Perge, o parens, et concita celerem gradum,
compesce tela, fratibus ferrum excute,
nudum inter enses pectus infestos tene.
aut solve bellum, mater, aut prima excipe.

Attendant: Go, restore love to the brothers and peace to all - check this unnatural warfare by interposing as a mother.
Antigone: Go on, mother, speed with all haste, restrain their weapons, dash the steel from the brothers’ hands, stand firm with your breast bared between the opposing swords! Either break up the fighting, mother, or be first to suffer it.

Both Oedipus and Jocasta are reminded that it is their duty as parents to prevent their sons from killing each other, and that they have power over their children.

The roles that each character plays within the family are repeatedly invoked by the use of family titles (pater, mater, parens, genitor, fratres, and liberi). Indeed, in Phoenissae, despite being short or incomplete, there is the greatest incidence of familial terminology in all of Seneca’s plays, and, as Frank observes, characters rarely address each other by name, but typically refer to one another in terms of their familial relationship. Furthermore, even those characters who are not part of the family refer to the characters with familial terminology.

---

62 Frank, Seneca’s Phoenissae, 16: ‘Most of the structural difficulties of Phoen., taken singly, can be explained away. However, even leaving aside its fragmentary state, the sum of its peculiarities makes it unique among Seneca’s tragedies. Seneca has united two tragic themes in a single drama - Oedipus in exile and the strife between Eteocles and Polynices. This suggests that the play should be regarded as an experiment in the manipulation of the traditional legendary material, an experiment which Seneca perhaps abandoned when the technical difficulties became clear.’

63 Frank, Seneca’s Phoenissae, 4.

anything, this emphasizes the declamatory nature of the play, since in the *Controversiae* too the hypothetical characters are not given names, but are mostly referred to in terms of their familial relations. The result of Oedipus’ and Jocasta’s responses to their respective familial duties are two different takes on the nature of duty within the family. It is perhaps significant that Oedipus’ authority as father is emphasized, with the use of words such as *auctor* and *regas*. However, Oedipus has wilfully abandoned his power, both as king and father, and thus takes no action. In fact, in order to properly (in his eyes) expiate the transgressions against his father with his exile and death, Oedipus must abandon any obligation he has towards his sons. Jocasta, who still believes that an appeal to *pietas* can be effective, appeals to her sons as a mother.

In Seneca’s *Medea*, the titular character deliberates in a monologue how she should take vengeance upon Jason (*Med. 893-977*). Part of her struggle involves transgressing her relationship to her own children, who she views as a means of both hurting Jason and atoning for the betrayal of her father and the murder of her brother. Medea uses the same legal/moral language in her deliberations as the declaimers, particularly in her use of *sat*. She says (*Med. 957*) ‘I gave birth to two, enough for my brother and my father’ (*fratri patrique quod sat est, peperi duos*). Medea betrayed her father by helping Jason obtain the golden fleece. When she was fleeing Colchis with Jason, she murdered her own brother. She sees the death of her sons as atonement for these actions. Medea furthermore tells Jason that the murder of only one son is not

---

65 In rare instances historical figures such as Cicero (*Contr. 7.2*) or Flamininus (*Contr. 9.2*) are discussed.

66 *Phoen.* 295-306.

67 *Phoen.* 454-58: *in vestra manu est, utrum velitis: sancta si pietas placet, donate matri bella; si placuit scelus, maius paratum est: media se opponit parens. proinde bellum tollite aut belli moram.*
enough (Med. 1009-11): ‘If this hand could have been content with one slaughter, it would not have aspired to any. Even if I kill two, the number is still too limited for my pain’ (Si posset una caede satiari manus, nullam petisset. ut duos perimam, tamen nimium est dolori numerus angustus meo). She says that her children must ‘pay the penalty’ (Med. 925: poenas dare) for the crimes of their father and that her brother ‘seeks amends’ (Med. 964: frater est, poenas petit).

Medea sees in the crimes she has committed against her children with Jason a means of amending the acts of impietas that she committed against her native family and land (Med. 982-3): ‘Now in this moment I have recovered my sceptre, brother, father, and the Colchians hold the spoil of the golden ram.’ (Iam iam recepi sceptrum germanum patrem, spoliumque Colchi pecudis auratae tenet). Like the woman from Controversiae 10.3, Medea is caught between her roles as mother/wife and daughter/sister. In order to perform what is owed to one, she is forced to transgress the other. At one point, indeed, the sense of pietas that she feels as a mother almost prevents her from committing the murder (Med. 943-4): ‘anger puts mother love to flight, then mother love, anger. Give way to love, my pain’ (ira pietatem fugat iramque pietas. cede pietati, dolor).

The lengthy deliberations by characters in the tragedy of Seneca the Younger have themselves been linked to declamatory practice. Speeches ‘involving sudden transitions’ and ‘showing the changing emotions of persons hesitating and deliberating over a course of action’ in particular have been seen as declamatory. Fantham notes of Oedipus’ deliberations in the

---


69 Canter, Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca, 56-7.
*Phoenissae* that ‘he aims to exhaust the emotional potential of each situation, including alternative responses, before moving forward.’\(^{70}\) Frank further notes of the speeches between Antigone and Oedipus that ‘the presentation of antithetical alternatives is characteristic of declamation and common in Senecan drama.’\(^{71}\) Tarrant remarks on the influence declamation had on the conflicting emotions of Clytemnestra, for instance.\(^{72}\) We have seen, however, that it is not just in their style that these deliberations reflect declamatory practice. The emotional conflicts present in these speeches are often a result of the conflicting positions within their families and their content often includes the same deliberations on familial duty present in the *Controversiae*.

The factors which regulated relationships within the Roman family, such as *pietas* and *patria potestas*, created a network of allegiances and obligations amongst family members legally and morally. These obligations, however, had the potential to conflict with one another. Declamation, which explores the conflict of law and morality, thus deals with extreme situations in which one family member is unable to fulfil all of their obligations. The declaimers must then weigh the obligations owed to one family member against the transgression of another. These similar paradoxical relationships are common also in the characters of Seneca the Younger’s tragedies. The characters in the tragedies are forced to determine how and if they are able to fulfil their familial obligations. The tragic characters often employ the legal/moral language used in the *Controversiae*. Furthermore, the characters in the tragedies, in particular those from

\(^{70}\) Fantham, ‘Nihil iam iura naturae valent,’ 64.

\(^{71}\) Frank, *Seneca’s Phoenissae*, 99.

\(^{72}\) Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon*, 199.
Phoenissae, refer to one another not by name but by their familial relationships. This reflects the manner in which characters are named in declamation.

Coloring Familial Relationships

Next I shall consider the repercussions of transgressions of familial relationships. In both authors, characters are forced to re-evaluate the nature of their relationships when transgressions are committed. In order to defend the actions of the characters in the Controversiae, declaimers choose a color and persona that favours the character whose side they are defending. When the issue involves familial relations, as it so often does, the declaimer will use a color. Often, he will choose either to emphasize or to deny kinship ties.

For example, in Controversiae 1.7 we find a situation that would indeed not be out of place amongst the mythological families of tragedy. A man has three sons: the first is a tyrant, whom the third son kills. The second commits adultery with the third son’s wife, and the third son kills this brother as well. The third son is then abducted by pirates. The father, instead of providing money for his son’s release, responds that he will pay the pirates double the ransom money to cut off his son’s hands. The pirates refuse, and now that the father has become destitute, the son refuses to provide for him, as would normally fall under the legal duties of children.\textsuperscript{73} The legal issue is between the father and the son. However, as is often the case in declamation, what the declaimers focus on is not the strict legal problem presented. The problem discussed is which member of the family has transgressed the norms of kin relations. The son defends his actions by recasting his familial relationships. He argues that he has committed no

\textsuperscript{73} See Bonner, Roman Declamation 95-6: the obligation of parents and children to support one another was mutually enforced through law, it seems. However, it does not seem that one would be jailed for not supporting relatives, as is the case in the declamatory laws. See also Contr. 1.1 and 7.4.
crime against his family, as he no longer considers his relationships to be intact due to the
unnatural actions of his brothers and father (Contr. 1.7.2):

“Genui,” inquit “<te>, educavi”: nempe istud beneficium et tyranno praestitisti et
adultero... <In> magnis scerleribus iura naturae intereunt: non magis tu pater es
quam illi fratres.

“I begot you,” he says. “and brought you up.” That was what you did for a tyrant and
an adulterer… In great crimes the rights granted by nature perish; you are no more
my father than they were my brothers.

The color that the son places on the story is that he has done no wrong because his family ties no
longer existed.

This same color will occur in the Phoenissae. Polynices, when Jocasta attempts to
intervene in his feud with Eteocles, states (Phoen. 478-80):

_Timeo; nihil iam iura naturae valent._
_post ista fratrum exempla ne matri quidem_
_fides habenda est._

I am afraid: the laws of nature have no power any longer. After this example of
brothers, I must not even trust my mother.

The argument made by the son in the Controversiae and by Polynices in the tragedy is that their
families have committed such grievous transgressions against pietas that they themselves cannot
be expected to maintain normal familial relations. Polynices justifies his own transgressions in
attacking Eteocles and disobeying his mother by indicating Eteocles’ own transgressions in
acting as brother and enemy. The argument of the son in Seneca the Elder, justifying his own
actions against his brothers, is also that their crimes were such that the normal “laws of nature”,
There can be no acts of *impietas* if there are no longer familial relationships. This argument appears, for example, in *Controversiae* 10.3 as well, where the father says of his daughter (*Contr. 10.3.13*) ‘I recognized in her nothing of my daughter’ (*nihil agnovi filiae*).

The father in the case, however, emphasizes that his son was transgressing *pietas*, since he was acting against both his family and his country (*Contr. 1.7.8*):

*Duxi uxorem nimium fecundam: peperit mihi tria nescio quae prodigia variis generibus inter se, [et] iudices, furentia, alium qui patriam posset opprimere, alium qui fratrem, alium qui patrem… Dum inter se pugnant, vict res publica. Reliqui duo, quia non potuerant in nos, inter se tyrannidem exercuerunt.*

I married a wife who was all too fertile: she bore me three indescribable monsters, whose rage they directed in various ways at each other - one capable of wronging his country, one his brother, one his father… They fought amongst themselves - and the commonwealth won. The remaining two, not being able to lord it over us, lorded it over each other.

The father justifies his punishment of his son by noting the familial relationships that he harmed.

The spin, or *color*, which he puts on the events is that the son’s actions are even worse because he was harming his own kin.

When characters in the dramas of Seneca the Younger are forced to reevaluate and recast their familial relationships, they can take up different views, or *colores*, of what their relationship is.74

---

74 Boyle (*Seneca’s Oedipus*, 118) remarks that the ‘laws of Nature are especially the laws of kin’ in *Oedipus*. They appear at *Oed.* 25, 371, and 943. See also *Phoen.* 84-5.

75 Cf. the following passage, *Phoen.* 270-3. Oedipus is here lamenting his marriage to Jocasta:

*in thalamos meos deducta mater, ne parum sceleris foret, fecunda. nullum crimen hoc maius potest Natura ferre.*
is. Just as in the Controversiae, each character chooses a persona and color that favours their own actions and defends against charges of impietas, as we have seen in the example of Polynices quoted above. Another example in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger is the relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra in Agamemnon following the murderer of Agamemnon. Electra, when she arrives late in the play after the murder of her father by her mother, no longer sees Clytemnestra as a mother, but as a murderer and adulteress (Agam. 947-50):

\begin{center}
Adest cruenta coniugis victrix sui,
\[\text{et signa caedis veste maculanta gerit.}\]
\[\text{manus recenti sanguine etiammunc madent}\]
\[\text{vultusque prae se sceleru truculenti ferunt.}\]
\end{center}

Here she is, the bloodthirsty conqueror of her own husband, with the signs of murder on her stained clothes. Her hands are still wet with fresh blood, and her truculent expression reveals her criminality.

Electra does not refer to her mother in familial terms, but only in her new role as murderer.

Clytemnestra, however, still sees their relationship as that of mother-daughter. Thus Electra, in sending Orestes away, has acted against her mother, and violated what Clytemnestra considers to be their proper relationship (Agam. 953): ‘Enemy of your mother, unnatural, brazen creature’ (Hostis parentis, impium atque audax caput). And a few lines later (Agam. 979-82):

Clytemnestra
\[\text{nata genetricem impie}\]
\[\text{probris lacesit, occulit fratrem abditum.}\]

Aegisthus
\[\text{Furibunda virgo, vocis infandae sonum}\]
\[\text{et aure verba indigna materna opprime.}\]
Clytemnestra: My daughter is insulting her mother outrageously, and keeping her brother hidden away.

Aegisthus: Demented girl, hush this infamous talk, these words unfit for a mother’s ears.

Clytemnestra and Aegisthus both take the position that the roles of the family, and the obligations that come with those roles, are intact. They characterize the relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra using familial terminology, where Electra pointedly does not. To Electra, Clytemnestra is the *victrix*, murderer of her own husband, while to Clytemnestra herself she is still *genetrix* and *mater*. Electra recasts Clytemnestra’s *persona* and is thus able to justify disobeying her mother. Each is able to use a different *color* in order to defend their action as *pius*.

In *Oedipus*, Oedipus and Jocasta are also faced with the re-evaluation of their relationship, and the paradoxical nature of it. In their first meeting after the news of Oedipus’ parentage has been confirmed the two repeatedly emphasize their new relations to one another. Jocasta asks (*Oed.* 1009-10) ‘What shall I call you? Son? You object? You are my son’ (*Quid te vocem? natumne? dubitas? natus es.*) and Oedipus is now sure to address Jocasta as *mater*. The emphasis throughout the play on familial roles emphasizes the transgressions against *pietas* that exist within the family. Oedipus draws attention to familial relationships in the play in order to emphasize the acts of *impietas* committed by himself and his family members. However, Jocasta

---

76 Cf. Frank, “The Rhetorical Use of Family Terms in Seneca’s ‘Oedipus’ and ‘Phoenissae,’” 127. She remarks that Oedipus avoids calling Eteocles and Polynices by familial terminology, thus like Electra not acknowledging them as family members.

77 *Oed.* 1013: *matris, en matris sonus!*

78 Mastronarde ‘Seneca’s Oedipus: The Drama in the Word,’ 302 n.19: ‘of 32 instances of *pater* (*paternus*) and *parens*, I would classify only seven as being emotionally colorless and unconnected with the special ironies and horrors of Oedipus’ kinship ties.’
uses familial terminology in the opposite way: her intent is to use familial terminology in order to evoke a sense of *pietas* among her sons.\(^7^9\) We see here both of the ways in which emphasis on familial roles can either confirm guilt or invoke *pietas*.

The manner in which characters in both the *Controversiae* and the tragedies respond to transgressions of *pietas* involves those characters re-evaluating the nature of their relationship with family members. The differing views on familial relationships stem from the practice in declamation of establishing *personae* and *colores* within their speeches. The characters, who are placed in paradoxical relationships that force them to choose certain familial roles over others or to transgress kin, are able by recasting or emphasizing their familial relationships to defend their actions and transgressions.

**Wilful Transgressions of Pietas**

The last matter concerning *pietas* that I shall examine in this chapter are those characters who wilfully transgress *pietas*. Although characters who do this are lacking from the *Controversiae*, I shall argue that the characters who wilfully transgress in Seneca the Younger do so with an awareness of declamation. I argued above that the characters in both Seneca the Elder and Seneca the Younger emphasize or deny their familial relationships in order to defend their own actions as *pius*. However, there are characters, such as Atreus and Aegisthus, who are willing to commit acts that they know are contrary to how they ought to act towards their family members. In order to commit their acts of *impietas* these characters don the *personae* and *colores* of declamation.

Atreus, for example, is willing to go to the extreme to violate *pietas*, and does not attempt

\(^7^9\) Frank, *Seneca's Phoenissae*, 189: ‘Jocasta must use her trump-card, her position as their mother.’
to defend the impious nature of his actions (*Thyestes* 190-5):

> haec ipsa pollens incliti Pelopis domus
> ruat vel in me, dummodo in fratrem ruat.
> Age, anime, fac quod nulla posteritas probet,
> sed nulla taceat. aliquod audendum est nefas
> atrox, cruentum, tale quod frater meus
> suum esse mallet.

This mighty house of famous Pelops itself - let it fall even on me, so long as it falls on my brother. Come spirit, do what no future age will endorse, but none fail to talk about. I must dare some fierce, bloody outrage, such as my brother would have wished his own.

Unlike the practice in declamation or that of the characters in the tragedies mentioned above, Atreus does not renounce his familial ties in order to defend his actions. Rather he emphasizes that the acts of *impietas* that he will commit are against his own brother. Furthermore, Atreus perverts another extreme form of *pietas* found in both the *Controversiae* and the tragedies, where family members defend their *pietas* through the extreme act of self-sacrifice. Atreus, however, is willing to die himself, if only his transgressions against *pietas* may be fulfilled.

It is clear in *Thyestes* that Atreus has a sense of how one should properly act towards one’s family members. However, the actions that both he and his brother are willing to commit invert what is proper. So he says that (*Thy.* 220) ‘All that is wrong in dealing with a brother is right in dealing with him’ (*fas est in illo quidquid in fratre est nefas*). Atreus knows how one could act in this situation in accordance with *pietas*, as he shows when he offers Thyestes a (falsely) warm welcome home (*Thy.* 508-11):

---

80 *Controversiae* 2.1.4. In the tragedies, Antigone (*Phoen.* 61-6) and Electra (*Agam.* 944-7) express these sentiments as well.
I am delighted to see my brother. Let me feel once more the embrace I have longed for! Any anger that existed must be in the past. From this day ties of blood and family must be cherished, and hatred be condemned and expelled from our hearts.

Atreus is able to play a *pius frater*, in order to fool Thyestes. While other characters unknowingly commit transgressions of *pietas*, or at the very least contemplate the limits of their familial duties, Atreus recognizes these limits and still transgresses them. He uses the same language as others in exploring what they owe their family members, but only to reject these obligations (255-6):

*Nil quod doloris capiat assueti modum;*
*nullum relinquam facinus et nullum est satis.*

Nothing conforming to the limits of ordinary bitterness. I shall leave no deed undone - and none is enough.

Atreus employs words, such as *satis* and *modus*, that other characters use to explore the limits of *pietas*, but perverts the conversation and explores how far he may surpass these limits (889-90): ‘This is good, this is ample, this is enough now, even for me. But why should it be enough?’ (*bene est, abunde est, iam sat est etiam mihi. | sed cur satis sit?*).

In *Agamemnon*, Aegisthus also perverts the *color* of self-sacrifice in his willingness to commit transgressions (*Agam. 226-33*):

*Quod tempus animo semper ac mente horrui*
*adest profecto, rebus extremum meis.*

---

81 See, for example, *Oed.* 938-41.
quid terga vertis, anime? quid primo impetu
deponis arma? crede perniciem tibi
et dira saevos fata moliri deos:
oppone cunctis vile suppliciis caput,
ferrumque et ignes pectore adverso excipe,
Aegiste: non est poena sic nato mori.

The time I have always feared in mind and spirit is plainly upon me - the crisis in my affairs. Why turn aside my spirit? Why lay down arms at the first onslaught? Be sure the cruel gods are engineering destruction and dire fate for you. So set your worthless life to confront all sufferings, breast fire and steel without flinching, Aegisthus: for one of such birth, death is no hardship.

Aegisthus’ actions in the beginning of the play contrast with those of Clytemnestra.

Clytemnestra, at least in the beginning of the play, claims to be acting out of familial duty, and resists further violating her relationship with Agamemnon. While Clytemnestra is willing to die for the safety of her children, Aegisthus does not make such justifications, and knows the repercussions for his actions will be severe. Aegisthus ultimately uses his rhetorical abilities to persuade Clytemnestra, who had been previously conflicted, to commit the murder.

However, we should note that Clytemnestra’s character is perhaps disingenuous in the reasons she gives for her conflicting emotions (Agam. 195-202):

an te morantur virgines viduae domi
patrice Orestes similis? horum te mala
ventura moveant, turbo quis rerum imminet!
quid, misera, cessas? en adest natis tuis
furens noverca! per tuum, si aliter nequit,
latus exigatur ensis et perimat duos!
misce cruorem, perde pereundo virum:
mors misera non est commori cum quo velis.

Or are you held back by the thought of unmarried girls at home and Orestes’ likeness to his father? The thought of their future troubles should spur you on: a whirlwind is threatening them! Why hesitate, poor woman? See, a mad stepmother is at hand for your children! The sword must be driven through your own side, if it cannot be otherwise, and slaughter two; mingle your blood, destroy your man by self-destruction; to die with someone you want to die with is no wretched death.

Clytemnestra creates a scenario for herself which pits her position as wife against that of mother. She justifies her murder of Agamemnon by casting Cassandra as the ‘mad stepmother,’ although when we do meet Cassandra later in the play, it is clear that this is not true. By presenting the arrival of Agamemnon and Cassandra as a threat to her children, Clytemnestra places herself in a position where she may justify the choice between her husband and children. She thus willingly places herself in the same paradoxical relationship that necessitates the transgression of familial duty in the Controversiae. After she has killed Agamemnon, she then targets her son (Agam. 925-7), so clearly any alleged sense of maternal pietas has been discarded.

It has been noted that Senecan characters ‘like the characters in declamation, tend to represent types rather than individuals.’ Pratt, for instance, writes that although ‘declamation gave Seneca a technique for analyzing motives and diagnosing emotions,’ the characters ‘are not delineated as living individuals but are created as voices of attitudes and emotions that serve the

---

82 Another common declamatory character which is present in 8 Controversiae: 2.6, 4.5, 4.6, 6.7, 7.1, 7.5, 9.5, and 9.6.

83 Frank, Seneca's Phoenissae, 34. She sees Antigone and Eteocles potentially as types, but argues against seeing Oedipus and Jocasta in this way.
dramatist’s purposes.’ While this may be true for some of Seneca’s characters, it seems clear to me that there are characters who are aware of their rhetorical abilities and fashion *persona* and *color* for themselves in the same way that a declaimer must fashion his *persona*. In the passage quoted above, Hook states that because the characters of Seneca’s tragedy are the *persona* and *color* of declamation, deception is lacking in the plays. However, characters such as Atreus and Aegisthus, in their knowledge of *persona* and *color*, are evidently able to deceive others and misrepresent their own intentions.

Declamation was concerned with affirming values that maintained Roman order and the power of the Roman male and provided a venue both for young students to learn their future roles as *paterfamilias* and for adult participants to reaffirm and further explore their own roles. However, the Roman family was much more complicated than the absolute power given to the *paterfamilias* in law. A Roman had many, changing familial relationships, which could potentially conflict with one another. Declamation and tragedy provide a safe venue to explore the anxieties concerning duty and transgression of kin ties through extreme and fantastic scenarios. Paradoxical relationships are found throughout both the *Controversiae* of Seneca the Elder and the tragedies of Seneca the Younger, which force the characters to examine how they are able to adequately fulfil their familial obligations. Often, the characters are forced to choose

---

84 Pratt, *Seneca’s Drama*, 152.

85 Hook, ‘Nothing within which passeth show,’ 64.


87 Gunderson, *Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity*, passim.

to fulfil only one role and redefine their relationships to one another. I believe that this study of the use of declamatory persona and color in familial relationships can both affirm and expand upon the argument of Hook which was presented above. The characters in the tragedies often use familial titles in place of proper names, which is characteristic of declamation. I have also shown how the color of either emphasizing or denying familial ties which is used in declamation was also used by the characters in the tragedies. Finally, we have seen how certain characters use the language and color of declamation to deceive their kin or provide justification for their future crimes.
Women

In this chapter, I examine the influence that women of the *Controversiae* had on the female characters of the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. I shall focus in particular on Medea, Clytemnestra, and Phaedra. As Bonner notes, declamation deals with ‘a small number of stock characters and situations.’ Women, who play a significant role in 37 of the 74 *Controversiae*, are in particular viewed in categories. I shall begin by examining the stereotypical female characters in the *Controversiae* and the limited arguments employed on their behalf. Secondly, I shall show how this limited and categorical view of women is present in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. I argue that Medea, Clytemnestra, and Phaedra struggle with their female identity. Medea and Clytemnestra work within the framework of female types from the *Controversiae* to persuade themselves to commit their crimes. However, Phaedra fights in vain against this framework, and fails in her endeavours.

**Women in the *Controversiae***

Women in the declamations are categorized according to their sexual and marital status. The *Controversiae* are concerned with themes involving familial relationships and the proper functioning of the Roman household. Therefore, citizen women are of the greatest concern. I noticed that the women generally fall into the categories of *virgines, uxor/es/matronae* and *matres*. The wicked women of declamation tend to be those who deviate from these roles, such as the *impudica/rapta virgo, adultera*, and the *noverca*. Most women in the declamations fall

---

89 Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 37. Bonner remarks on the similarity between the stock characters of declamation and New Comedy. However, this is a view that could perhaps be challenged, as many of these stock characters (such as the *virgo* or *matrona*) are not portrayed in the same manner in both declamation and comedy.

90 Of the 37 *Controversiae* in which women are play a significant role, two concern prostitutes (2.4 and 9.2) and one a slave-woman (6.3).
under these latter three categories.\textsuperscript{91} Connolly explains the threat that these women pose within the declamatory household: ‘Whether they are the victims of rape, murder, or incest, the participants in adultery or the agents of vindictive gossip, wives, daughters, mothers, slaves, and freedmen are the primary sources of corruption, the weak spots in the household’s defenses, or, at least, the sites at which vice enters the \textit{familia}.’\textsuperscript{92} Rebecca Langlands has examined the concept of \textit{pudicitia} in declamation, and notes that the interest in female sexuality rests on the ‘difficulty… of interpreting the behaviour of those people who find themselves the object of lust and attempted \textit{stuprum}.’\textsuperscript{93} Langlands' conclusion is that it is never possible for a woman to definitively argue that she is not complicit in a relationship and that her \textit{pudicitia} has not been harmed.\textsuperscript{94} The actions of women in declamation are for the most part explained as corresponding, or not corresponding, to one of the types mentioned above. Connolly, who examines both women and slaves in declamation, remarks that ‘Woman (the evil stepmother, the adulterous wife, the incestuous mother) and Slave... by their very presence, in relation to one another and to others, engender social or domestic conflicts. These figures have no dramatic persona, no character development; they are frozen into behavioral patterns of gender and class.’\textsuperscript{95} Within this framework of female types, declaimers will either defend or condemn a woman in reference to these stereotypical figures. I shall now provide examples of this argument

\textsuperscript{91} The \textit{impudica/rapta virgo} is a character in 11, the \textit{adultera} 6, and the \textit{noverca} 8. I have included the incidences of rape because in many cases the complicity of the raped woman is assumed, or the woman is at least placed in a position where she is forced to act against her type.

\textsuperscript{92} Joy Connolly, ‘Mastering Corruption: Constructions of identity in Roman oratory,’ 146.

\textsuperscript{93} Rebecca Langlands, \textit{Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome}, 247.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 279.

\textsuperscript{95} Connolly, ‘Mastering Corruption,’ 148.
in *Controversiae* involving firstly the *virgo* and then the wife.

The *virgo* had been a common character long before the *Controversiae* in New Comedy. The term refers to a young citizen woman who is unmarried but ready for marriage. As an age category, the term is virtually synonymous with *puella*. However, as Watson notes, ‘in most cases she is also sexually inexperienced: this notion, however, is not part of the primary sense of *virgo* but a secondary resonance which the word acquired through social custom: since unmarried girls were expected to be chaste this meaning is usually - but not necessarily - present.’ Young women of the middle and upper classes led sheltered lives before marriage, and thus their physical virginity and *pudicitia* would be well-guarded.

An example of the figure can be found in *Controversiae* 1.2: a *virgo* had been captured by pirates and sold to a brothel. She eventually escaped. She claimed that she never had sexual intercourse with anyone while residing in the brothel. However, when one man tried to force himself upon her, she killed him. The woman now seeks a priesthood, and the issue is whether the woman still fits the criteria that ‘a priestess must be chaste and of chaste [parents], pure and of pure [parents]’ (*Sacerdos casta e castis, pura e puris sit.*) Arguments in her defence are that she has maintained her status as *virgo* despite the position she had been put in (*Contr*. 1.2.21):

‘Whoever you are, immortal gods, who wished chastity to emerge miraculously untouched from that ill-famed spot, the girl who helped you is not ungrateful’ (*Quicumque estis, dii immortales, qui*

---

96 Patricia Watson, ‘Puella and Virgo,’ 143: ‘Virgo, a young unmarried female, is basically a term which defines the girl’s social position; there is an increasing emphasis over the centuries on physical virginity. *Puella,* a more general term, has the emotional associations of a diminutive and so can be applied to both female children and older girls viewed as erotic objects; it is also used of young married women. In later times, *puella* may sometimes replace *virgo* in the sense, “virgin”.’

97 Ibid., 125.

pudicitiam ex illo infami loco cum micaculo voluistis emergere, non ingratae puellae opem tulistis). Arguments against her emphasize how contradictory her actions and situation were for a virgo, painting her, in Langlands' words, ‘as the antithesis of the pure virgin priestess,’99 (Contr. 1.2.13): ‘Suppose you are a virgin, but sullied by everyone’s kisses: even if you haven’t had sex, you’ve nevertheless rolled about with men’ (Puta enim virginem quidem esse te, sed contractatam osculis omnium; etiamsi citra stuprum, cum viris tamen volutata es). According to this color, there is no grey area for the woman’s actions.

The same color is presented in Controversiae 1.6. This case concerns the daughter of a pirate chief whose husband needs to defend the suitability of his wife to his father (Contr. 1.6.2): ‘Certainly her character set her apart from her father: she showed compassion, she made intercession, she wept, was moved by everyone’s perils. There was nothing of the pirate detectable in her’ (certe animum eius natura e patre abduxerat: misericors erat, deprecabatur, flebat, movebatur periculis omnium; nihil in illa deprehendi poterat piraticum). Another example of this color is found in Controversiae 2.7: a woman has been propositioned while her husband is away. She repeatedly refuses the man. When the pursuer died, he left the woman everything in his will, because, as he says, ‘I found her chaste’ (pudicam repperi). The husband now accuses her of adultery. Against the wife, the declaimers describe at length the visual signs a wife must give to avert sexual interest from men or even rumours of sexual misconduct.100 The declaimers

99 Langlands, Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome, 258.

100 Contr. 2.7.3-4, 9. Langlands, Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome, 276: She summarizes the descriptions presented by the declaimers: ‘To look pudica a woman must dress plainly, spend her time exclusively with friends of her own kind, keep her eyes upon the ground, and if she is compelled to greet men in the street she must at least look really embarrassed as she does so. The declamation explores the contradictions in the idea of pudicitia’s need to be visible, and emphasizes the idea that one must look pudica as well as be pudica.
argue that the wife could not have maintained these standards. The brief argument on behalf of the woman again stresses that it is remarkable that the woman, who is beautiful, whose husband is absent, and who has a persistent pursuer, had not committed adultery.\textsuperscript{101} As Langlands notes, the particular irony of this situation is that the woman is being accused of being an \textit{adultera} because she was called \textit{pudica}.\textsuperscript{102}

For the women in the \textit{Controversiae}, the very same circumstances and actions can be the greatest evidence either for or against her status as a respectable woman, whether as \textit{virgo} or wife. A woman is judged based on type and whether her actions correspond to that of a limited selection of stereotypes. As Imber puts it, ‘A married woman in the world of declamation will either be wicked - an adulterous wife or stepmother - or an angel, long suffering in her devotion to her ungrateful husband or sons.’\textsuperscript{103} I shall now briefly examine in further detail the \textit{noverca} and \textit{adultera}.

The \textit{noverca} is a recurring figure in declamation.\textsuperscript{104} Watson argues that the \textit{noverca}’s popularity in Latin declamation is the source of its prominence in Latin literature and notes that the character is not a feature of Greek declamation.\textsuperscript{105} Although Seneca the Elder presents both sides of the \textit{Controversiae}, arguments on behalf of a stepmother are rare, as Watson says: ‘Undoubtedly the malevolence of the stepmother as a stock figure, like a tyrant or a pirate, was so firmly established that even the most ingenious declaimer taking the stepmother’s side might

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Contr.} 2.7 exc.
\textsuperscript{102} Langlands, \textit{Sexual Morality}, 275
\textsuperscript{103} Margaret Imber, ‘Practised Speech: Oral and Written Conventions in Roman Declamation,’ 209.
\textsuperscript{104} The \textit{noverca} is a character in seven of the \textit{Controversiae}, 4.5, 4.6, 6.7, 7.1, 7.5, 9.5, and 9.6.
\textsuperscript{105} Patricia A. Watson, \textit{Ancient Stepmothers: Myth, Misogyny, and Reality}, 92-3.
find it well nigh impossible to prove his case.'\textsuperscript{106} The term \textit{noverca} is related to the adjective \textit{novus}: the stepmother is literally a new and strange woman intruding upon a previously established household.\textsuperscript{107} Remarriage was quite common in Rome and children would normally stay with their father after divorce or upon their mother’s death. Thus the necessary circumstances for the creation of stepmothers seemed to have been present.\textsuperscript{108} Gray-Fow argues that the murderous stepmother had more incentive to kill her stepchildren for inheritance in earlier \textit{manus} marriage, and thus the tradition may stem from early Roman folklore.\textsuperscript{109} Even if stepmothers in the early empire did not murder their stepchildren as they do in declamation, the relationship between stepmother and stepchild was never conceived of as a replacement of the mother-child relationship.\textsuperscript{110} The circumstances for stepmothers and stepchildren having romantic feelings for one another seem to have been more probable because the age of the stepmother would often be closer to that of the her stepson than husband.\textsuperscript{111} Although there certainly are reasons found within Roman marriage customs to fear a stepmother, her role is also symbolic of a ‘negative mother-figure’, as Watson explains: ‘she is a projection of fears and insecurities about the mother as nurturer and disciplinarian, or of unspoken Oedipal desires. In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 102.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Michael J.G. Gray-Fow, ‘The wicked Stepmother in Roman Literature and History: an Evaluation,’ 741.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Watson, \textit{Ancient Stepmothers}, 135. Remarriage was common because death, especially in childbirth, and divorce rates were quite high in ancient Rome.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Gray-Fow, ‘The wicked Stepmother in Roman Literature and History: an Evaluation,’ 753: ‘As a wife \textit{in manu} she had a right of inheritance from her husband if he died intestate that was the same as that of such children as he had by any lawful marriage who were in his power (\textit{potestas}) at the time of his death…Under this form of marriage a man’s second wife would have a strong pecuniary interest in decreasing the number of those who would be co-heirs with herself, which would normally include his children by a previous marriage, i.e. her stepchildren.’
\item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 741.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Watson, \textit{Ancient Stepmothers}, 139.
\end{itemize}
such studies, the stepmother is an encapsulation of negative feelings about the mother.¹¹² We will see that often in declamation the stepmother does fill this role as the opposite of the good mother.

The *adultera* is another recurring female figure in the *Controversiae* who is repeatedly vilified. Bonner notes that although the sexual offences that are the subject of many declamations (adultery is the subject of nine *Controversiae*) are extreme, ‘there is probably more truth than imagination in the general picture of contemporary morals which they supply.’¹¹³ Indeed, in the early empire adultery was for the first time a criminal offence under the *lex Iulia*.¹¹⁴ The law was, however, asymmetrical, as Gardner explains:

> A married woman was guilty of adultery if she had sexual relations with any man other than her husband, a man only if the woman was married, and his own marital status was irrelevant… The law was intended primarily to preserve the chastity of women within marriage.¹¹⁵

It is unsurprising then that the situations in the *Controversiae* are mostly concerned with adulterous wives and their partners. The *adultera* in declamation was particularly associated with poison.¹¹⁶ Poison was in fact so much associated with the *adultera* that one was evidence for the other (*Contr.* 7.3.6): ‘… we have to prove one so that it can serve as a proof for the other, as when we say that a woman has been an adulteress to make people believe that she is therefore also a poisoner’ (*cum alterum probamus, ut id alterius fiat probatio, tamquam cum dicimus*

---

¹¹² Ibid., 209.

¹¹³ Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 36.

¹¹⁴ Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 30: The law was passed c.18 B.C.


¹¹⁶ Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 35.
adulteram fuisse ut credatur propter hoc etiam venefica). Now that I have explained the female characters of declamation, I shall now examine the presence of these stereotypes in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger.

**Declamatory Women in the Tragedies of Seneca the Younger**

The influence that the women of the *Controversiae* had on the characters of Seneca the Younger has already been noted by Bonner, for instance, who says that ‘in characterization, Seneca, like the declaimers, tends to depict types rather than characters.’¹¹⁷ The women in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger seem aware of the stereotypes that represent women in declamation, both the good ones, the proper *virgo* and *uxor/matrona*, and the bad ones. Some women in the tragedies can perhaps be described as stereotypes, such as Antigone, who is the proper *virgo* and whose role as a woman is not questioned.¹¹⁸ However, to call Phaedra the stereotypical *noverca* is certainly an oversimplification.¹¹⁹ The self-awareness of Senecan characters has been noted, as Hook, for instance, explains: ‘Senecan self-presentation does not operate as self-revelation as much as self-confirmation… There is little that we do not know about the plots and the *personae*; and there is little that the *personae* do not know about themselves.’¹²⁰ I will argue that certain female characters in the tragedies, in addition to being aware of their literary *personae*, are aware of the stereotypical female characters of the *Controversiae*. The women in the tragedies will interpret, or colour, their past and present actions

¹¹⁷ Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 162. He continues: ‘Lycus in the *Hercules Furens* is a stock tyrant, Hercules himself the stock ‘vir fortis’; Phaedra is the stock *noverca*; Medea is certainly *ferox invictaque,*’


¹¹⁹ McAuley, ‘Specters of Medea: The Rhetoric of Stepmotherhood and Motherhood in Seneca’s *Phaedra,*’ 45. She notes that Phaedra in fact is aware of the figure of the *noverca* and resists the role.

¹²⁰ Hook, ‘Nothing within which passeth show,’ 58.
with reference to the women who are present in declamation. How the tragic women interact with the framework provided by declamation either stimulates them to commit their crimes or leads to their failure.

**Clytemnestra**

I shall now examine the manner in which Clytemnestra engages with the female characters from declamation. The archetypal women of the *Controversiae* are known to Seneca’s Clytemnestra. In the *Agamemnon*, she is driven by problems in her marriage. Hall notes, for instance, that ‘her dominant motives, it is stressed, are sexual passion for Aegisthus and sexual jealousy of Cassandra.’ Mader notes that Clytemnestra can be depicted as ‘now the slighted mother, now the scheming adulteress’ and that ‘both these dimensions appear in Seneca.’ Clytemnestra, when she enters in the *Agamemnon*, encourages herself to murder her husband. She finds inspiration in the exact same stereotypical wicked women of declamation (*Agam. 108-20*):

```
Quid, segnis anime, tuta consilia expetis?
quid fluctuaris? clausa iam melior via est.
licuit pudicos coniugis quondam toros
et sceptrum casta vidua tutari fide;
periere mores ius decus pietas fides
et qui redire cum perit nescit pudor.
da frena et omnem prona nequitiam incita:
per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter.
```

110
```
tecum ipsa nunc evolve femineos dolos,
quod ulla coniunx perfida atque impos sui
```

115

---

121 Edith Hall, ‘Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition,’ 66.

Oh sluggish spirit! Why look for safe strategies? Why vacillate? The better path is already closed. Once you had the option of safeguarding your husband’s bed and his empty throne through chastity and loyalty. But integrity, right, honour, loyalty, faith are lost, and shame, which once lost cannot return. So loosen the reins, crouch forward, spur on each form of wickedness. For crimes the safest path is always through crimes. Unfurl now in your mind the tricks of womankind, all that any faithless wife, crazed with blind passion, all that stepmothers’ hands have dared commit, or the girl blazing with disloyal trust as she fled her Phasian kingdom on a Thessalian ship.

Although Tarrant, for instance, sees in Clytemnestra’s types of women tragic examples (Phaedra for the noverca), there are certain indications in the text that Clytemnestra is here referring to the stereotypes of women present in the Controversiae. She refers specifically to each of the three wicked women who are regular characters in the Controversiae: the adulteress (coniunx perfida), the noverca (novercales manus), and the impia virgo. The ulla in line 17 suggests that no specific adulterous wife is meant. Furthermore, the adjective novercalis indicates a generalization rather than a specific stepmother. The adjective in fact appears in a passage cited below from the Controversiae. As Mader notes

the parallels provide a framework of reference against which her subsequent development may be gauged… Since the examples encompass coniunx, noverca, and virgo, the implication is that Clytemnestra - combining these three aspects - is an

---

123 Tarrant, Seneca: Agamemnon, 196.

124 Contr. 4.6.: “This one is yours”; why do you look at the other with a step-mother’s eyes?” (“Hic tuus est”: quid alterum novercalibus oculis intueris?). Tarrant, Seneca: Agamemnon, 197: Tarrant notes that this is the earliest extant usage of the adjective.
archetypal example of intense feminine wrath.’

The archetypal women are, in fact, the same stereotypical wicked women dealt with in the

*Controversiae.* Mader further notes that Clytemnestra, although she wavers in the beginning of the play

has no option at all… all stress falls on Clytemnestra’s violation of *pudor* and

*coniugis fides,* that is, on her adulterous liaison with Aegisthus. The list of virtues,

now gone, as well as the morally evaluative terminology (*melior via, nequitiam,*

*scelera*) show that she analyses her situation in terms of ethical norms and is keenly aware of her own guilt and failing.’

We see in Clytemnestra’s speech the same polarity of female roles present in the *Controversiae:* women are either strictly good or wicked. Clytemnestra has failed to maintain the ethical norms of a good woman, and thus her only option is wickedness, which she associates with the stereotypical women of declamation.

Clytemnestra not only views herself within the framework of declamatory women. She proceeds to apply these same stereotypical categories to the other two women in the play who oppose her. Clytemnestra tells herself to imagine Cassandra as a *noverca* (*Agam.* 198-9): ‘See, a mad stepmother is at hand for your children!’ (*en adest natis tuis | furens noverca*). In her confrontation with Electra near the end of the play, Clytemnestra reprimands her daughter for acting as an *impia virgo* (*Agam.* 964). Clytemnestra interprets the actions of her enemies as those of the same stereotypical figures whose acts she wished to emulate, in order to put a more positive *color* on her own actions. We can see here a further echo of declamation. Clytemnestra applies the same *color* at one point to her own actions and at another to those of the other women

---

125 Mader, ‘*Fluctibus Variis Agor,* 55.

126 Ibid., 53.
when it supports her needs.

The confrontation between Clytemnestra and Electra, in fact, presents many of the same arguments and categorizations of women that are present in the *Controversiae*. Electra had smuggled Orestes out of Argos so that Clytemnestra would not kill him in addition to Agamemnon. Clytemnestra and Electra argue when Electra refuses to tell Clytemnestra where Orestes is (*Agam.* 954-65):

Cl: *quo more coetus publicos virgo petis?*
El: *Adulterorum virgo deserui domum.*
Cl: *Quis esse credat virginem -*
El: *natam tuam?*
Cl: *Modestius cum matre.*
El: *Pietatem doces?*
Cl: *Animos viriles corde tumefacto geris;*
*sed agere domita feminam disces malo.*
El: *Nisi forte fallor, feminas ferrum decet.*
Cl: *Et esse demens te parem nobis putas?*
El: *Vobis? quis iste est alter Agamemnon tuus?*
*ut vidua loquere: vir caret vita tuus.*
Cl: *Indomita posthac virginis verba impiae regina frangam.*

Clytemnestra: What behaviour is this, to seek public converse as a virgin girl?
Electra: As a virgin girl I have quit the home of adulterers.
Cl: Who would believe you a virgin?
El.: Your daughter?
Cl.: More modestly with your mother!
El.: Are you teaching right relationships?
Cl: You carry a man’s spirit in your puffed-up heart, but when tamed by suffering you
will learn to play the woman.
El: If I am not mistaken, women have an aptitude for steel.
Cl.: And do you have the crazy notion that you are a match for us?
El.: For you two? Who is that other Agamemnon of yours? Speak as a widow: your husband has lost his life.
Cl: These unbridled words from an undutiful virgin - I shall break them later as queen.

Clytemnestra is able to condemn Electra’s actions because they are not in accordance with that of the stereotypical *virgo*. However, Electra is able to retort that Clytemnestra’s own actions are not in accordance with that of her role now as *vidua*. Furthermore, we see that Electra is in the same dilemma as the women in declamation. She has been placed in a situation where it is impossible for her to act with complete propriety. Clytemnestra emphasizes the effect that mingling in public (*coetus publicos*) has on Electra’s status. On the other hand, Electra emphasizes that remaining amongst the adulterers Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is also an inappropriate position for her as *virgo*. Electra also notes that she is leaving the home as a *virgo*, despite the fact that she was amongst adulterers (note the juxtaposition of *adulterorum* and *virgo*). They are both aware of these stereotypical characters, but disagree on what it is ‘to play the woman’ (*agere feminam*).

For Clytemnestra, the phrase refers to women playing their proper societal roles: Electra ought to be playing the unseen and un-troublesome *virgo*. However, Electra notes, sarcastically, that playing the woman often involves more destructive roles (*feminas ferrum decet*). Each woman interprets, or colours, their own actions and the actions of the other woman with reference to the stereotypes of women found in the *Controversiae*.

---

127 Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon*, 353: ‘Electra uses Clytemnestra’s own actions as a basis for a quibble over the meaning of *agere feminam*; the reference to a sword may be a veiled threat.’
We can see that Clytemnestra is aware of the stereotypical figures of women from declamation. In fact, in her monologue quoted above, she mentions the exact same three women who are the stereotypical wicked women of the *Controversiae*: the impious virgin, the stepmother, and the adulteress. However, she also casts the other women in the play, Cassandra and Electra, within this same framework. Not only does Clytemnestra recognize the framework within which women are judged in the *Controversiae*, but she also applies these same *personae* to the other women in order to put a more favourable spin on her own actions. When she uses the same *color* and *personae* both to support her own actions and to condemn those of other women, this resembles the ability of the declaimer to apply these same *colores* and *personae* when they suit his needs.

**Medea**

I shall now explore how Seneca the Younger’s Medea adopts as a *color* the stereotypical women found in the *Controversiae* when she is forced to defend herself and reinterpret her past and present persona. Medea is a character who has consistently had difficulty with her role as a woman. Despite her efforts to make her marriage to Jason seem legitimate, their marriage, as Visser notes, has had the opposite result that a Roman marriage ought to have: whereas the ideal Roman marriage unites the woman’s male kin and her new husband, the marriage of Jason and Medea resulted in the betrayal of her father and the murder of her brother.\(^{128}\) When the play begins, Medea has been cast aside by Jason, who has recently married another woman, Creusa. Medea continues to refer to herself as Jason’s wife, though the other characters in the play do not. The language of Roman marriage and divorce is found throughout the play to mark the

opposing views of the characters regarding Medea’s identity, as Abrahamsen notes:

One of primary issues driving the action of Seneca’s Medea is the conflict over who retains the legitimate identity as Jason’s wife. Seneca marks the contested identity in the way that different characters of the play use the Latin vocabulary associated with marriage. By situating the dramatic issues of Seneca’s Medea into the context of normative Roman marriage and divorce practice, we can begin to perceive one level on which Seneca has played with the mythological heritage of Medea in order to make her legendary criminality more troubling to a specifically Roman imperial audience/reader.129

Every action that Medea had taken since meeting Jason ‘has suddenly been rendered null and void,’ as Guastella notes, ‘This dimension of the plot - the full force of Medea as an active character, making choices and committing crimes in her original adventures with Jason- is strongly emphasized by Seneca.’ Guastella further notes that Creon and Jason try to put all the responsibility on Medea for her crimes, while Medea, though she admits her guilt, insists that Jason also played a part and benefitted from her crimes.130

Medea’s identity, both when she met Jason as virgo and at the present as coniunx and mater, has shifted for the worse. I shall argue that in order to defend her actions, Medea places colores upon her present and past self. She presents herself as two female figures who are among the most sympathetic of those in the Controversiae: the rapta virgo and the wrongfully divorced wife. Her current loss of identity leads Medea to remodel herself after the other, wicked, female characters of declamation in order to commit crimes that go against her roles as wife and mother. To begin, I shall examine the rape cases presented in the Controversiae and then how Medea’s

129 Laura Abrahamsen, ‘Roman Marriage Law and the Conflict of Seneca’s “Medea”,’ 107.
situation resembles these cases.

The cases of rape in the *Controversiae* deal not with *stuprum*, but with *raptus*, or abduction marriage. When a young woman has been raped, the declaimers are not concerned with whether or not she is *casta* or *pura*, as they are with Vestal Virgins and married women. Rather, it is the financial damage that resulted from the loss of virginity. Virginity was essentially part of the dowry of a Roman woman, and could indeed make up for a lack of dowry.\(^\text{131}\) It was important to have a woman married at the appropriate age, and the *paterfamilias* would not want to be in a position where he would be unable to provide a dowry.\(^\text{132}\) As Packman has noted, every one of the women raped in the *Controversiae* is ‘a young girl of citizenship status, which is to say marriageable, but not as yet married. No other victims are reported - no wives, widows, slaves, foreigners, old women, or young children.’\(^\text{133}\) There are six *Controversiae* that deal with the rape of young women.\(^\text{134}\) The law the declaimers are debating presents the girl with a choice: ‘A girl who has been raped may choose either marriage to her ravisher without a dowry or his death’ (*Rapta raptoris aut mortem aut indotatas nuptias optet*). Evans-Grubbs, in her examination of the law on *raptus* under Constantine, sees the situations in the *Controversiae* not only as violent rape, but abduction marriage (*raptus*):

> By the Roman imperial period abduction seems to have become something of a literary topos. *Raptus* appears as a popular topic for rhetorical declamation…

\(^{131}\) Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 105-6.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 343.

\(^{133}\) Zola M. Packman, “Rape and Consequences in the Latin Declamations,” 20. There are, in fact, two cases where men are raped in the *Controversiae*. However, in one (3.8) the act is not described as *raptus*, but *stuprum*. The other (5.6) is described as *raptus*, but the man was dressed as a woman (and believed to be a woman by his rapists), and the charge the victim brings is one ‘of violence’ (*de vi*). 

\(^{134}\) *Contr.* 1.5, 2.3, 3.5, 4.3, 7.8, and 8.6.
details of the descriptions of *raptus* in the *Controversiae* are remarkably similar to those in Constantine’s law: the *raptor* is always aided by companions (as also is the case in modern abductions), who make an assault on the girl’s home; he then seeks marriage from the girl and her father. The abduction generally involves actual rape (*stuprum*) and is very violent.\(^\text{135}\)

Evans-Grubbs further notes that the language used in both the law of Constantine on *raptus* marriage and in the laws of the *Controversiae* concerning rape, cited above, includes the same word, *rapere*. The actual Roman law\(^\text{136}\) under which one could prosecute for rape uses the verb *violare*.\(^\text{137}\) Bonner explains what would happen according to the Roman legal system in the early empire:

> Unless the affair was settled out of court (e.g. in a Roman *domesticum consilium*), the parent (or master) of the girl would bring a private action against the culprit… The sentence would be a fine, but the alternative of marriage without a dowry may commonly have been agreed upon… If the culprit refused both alternatives, he would render himself liable to a criminal charge… In an extreme case he might incur the death-penalty. So, what the declaimers have done is to telescope the civil and criminal law (of either Greece or Rome), and present a highly dramatic position, seizing on the two most exciting features, and bringing them into a striking antithetical relationship.\(^\text{138}\)

Therefore, both the options of marriage and death presented in the declamations are, in fact,

---

\(^{135}\) Judith Evans-Grubbs, ‘Abduction Marriage in Antiquity: A Law of Constantine (CTh IX.24.1) and its Social Context,’ 68-9. In *Contr.* 7.6, where under a tyrant slaves are raping their mistresses and marriage is an impossible result, the verb *violare* is used. Furthermore, as Packman notes (p. 24) in *Contr.* 8.6, where a woman has not been forcibly seized from her home, the man is referred to as *vitiator* as opposed to *raptor*.

\(^{136}\) Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 118: The law was the *lex Iulia de vi* which was most likely introduced during the dictatorship of Julius Caesar.


\(^{138}\) Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, 90-1.
reflected in legal and social custom. The rape described in the *Controversiae* resembles abduction marriage. This is not to say that the women in the *Controversiae* have not been sexually assaulted. *Raptus* involved both sexual violation (*stuprum*) and abduction, which could then result in marriage. They do not cover situations which would be covered under *violare*, but only *rapere*.

I believe that Medea presents herself as the *virgo rapta*, as described in declamation. She repeatedly refers to herself as *virgo* and presents her virginity as something that was taken away from her. Indeed, she often uses the same technical verb from the laws presented in the *Controversiae*, *rapere*. In her opening monologue, she calls upon Proserpina (*Med.* 11-2): ‘lady stolen like me but shown better loyalty’ (*dominam fide | meliore raptam*). She laments the time before she met Jason (*Med.* 218-20): ‘Then suitors pursued me for marriage, men I now pursue. Fortune, so swift and fickle and precipitate, snatched me from my kingdom, and delivered me to exile’ (*petebant tunc meos thalamos proci, | qui nunc petuntur. rapida Fortuna ac levis | praecepsque regno eripuit, exilio dedit*). After she has killed one son, she sees her rape redeemed (*Med.* 984): ‘My realm is restored, my stolen maidenhood restored’ (*rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit*). Medea depicts Jason as a *raptor* (*Med.* 1007): ‘Go on now, arrogant man, seek out virgins’ bedrooms, and abandon mothers’ (*i nunc, superbe, virginum thalamos pete, | relinque matres*). Indeed, the chorus refers to Jason and the Argonauts as *raptores* which, as

---

139 Cf. *Contr.* 3.5, where the phrase *erepta virginitas* is used: ‘I am salving wounds, rebuilding my household, lamenting the despoilment of my house, consoling my daughter for the loss of her virginity, guarding her when she threatens to take her own life’ (*curo vulnera, familiam reficio, expugnatam domum lugeo, ereptam virginitatem consolor, minantem sibi ipsi custodio*).
Boyle notes, ‘seems to have some of its sexual meaning here, as it does generally in Seneca’\textsuperscript{140} (Med. 611-3): ‘…all who entered between the drifting crags and after traversing such toils at sea berthed against a barbaric coast to return as plunderers of foreign gold…’ (\textit{et tot emensus pelagi labores | barbara funem religavit ora | raptor externi rediturus aurî}).

The idea that Medea presents herself as the victim of rape has been presented before. Fyfe has gone as far as to say that ‘the reference to Persephone [\textit{sic}] (11f.) suggests that Medea sees her status as wife reduced to that of victim of ignominious rape.’\textsuperscript{141} This statement has been criticized by Corrigan, who states that ‘Medea admittedly has been wronged by Jason, but she was not completely passive in abandoning her homeland and, although she is often considered as part of Jason’s plunder, she was not raped and did not go against her will.’\textsuperscript{142} However, Evans-Grubbs in her study has found that \textit{raptus} often assumes the consent of the woman, as a means of circumventing the consent of the woman’s \textit{paterfamilias}.\textsuperscript{143} Indeed, this aspect of \textit{raptus} is brought up by the declaimers in two of the cases of rape in the \textit{Controversiae}.\textsuperscript{144} Dixon further notes that

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item in a culture in which marriages were regularly arranged by the older generation, and
\item in which girls were married very young, it was taken for granted that a girl could not be trusted to make important decisions such as whom she married or whom she had sex with. Rape could not therefore be seen as an invasion of her right to choose her
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{140} Boyle, \textit{Seneca: Medea}, 282-3: ‘The language (cf. \textit{intravit} above and \textit{temerata} below) fuses the taking of the golden fleece with the abduction of Medea, explicitly described by Medea as the “rape of my virginity” (\textit{rapta virginitas}) at 984 (see also on 9-12).’

\textsuperscript{141} Helen Fyfe, ‘An Analysis of Seneca’s Medea,’ 77.

\textsuperscript{142} Kirsty Corrigan, \textit{Virgo to Virago: Medea in the Silver Age}, 105.

\textsuperscript{143} Evans-Grubbs, ‘Abduction Marriage in Antiquity,’ 79.

\textsuperscript{144} Contr. 2.3.17-8; 3.5.
own sexual partner so much as the destruction of her chief commodity in the exchange which accompanied marriage, and which she was not equipped to negotiate.\textsuperscript{145}

I believe that Medea is not presenting herself as a victim of sexual assault in a modern sense, but of \textit{raptus}. Just as in abduction marriage, there was no dowry in Medea’s marriage with Jason, except for the very things that are lost in abduction marriage, the consent of the natal family and virginity (\textit{Med.} 498-9): ‘My fatherland fell to you, my father, my brother, my modesty. This was the dowry I married with: give the fugitive back what is hers.’ (\textit{tibi patria cessit, tibi pater frater pudor: \textbar hac dote nupsi; redde fugienti sua}). The lack of consent in the marriage of Jason and Medea is also noted by the chorus (\textit{Med.} 105-6): ‘Seize the Aeolian maid with good fortune, for the first time now a bridegroom with consent from your parents-in-law’ (\textit{felix Aeoliam corripe virginem, \textbar nunc primum soceris sponse volentibus}). As Packman notes, the vulnerability of the victim of rape in declamation is generally emphasized,\textsuperscript{146} whereas ‘the rapist is not represented… as a triumphant assailant against the honor of another’s home, nor even as the triumphant abductor of his chosen love, but rather as a young man forced to plead for the grant of his life from the victim of his attack.’\textsuperscript{147} Although Medea does not portray herself as a complete victim, she does portray the circumstances of her marriage in a way that emphasizes Jason’s action and her own young age.

Both marriage and divorce are common topics in the \textit{Medea}, which I believe has been influenced by the cases of wrongful divorce in the \textit{Controversiae}. As McAuley notes, ‘Medea’s

\textsuperscript{145} Susanne Dixon, \textit{Reading Roman Women}, 53.

\textsuperscript{146} Packman, ‘Rape and Consequences in the Latin Declamations,’ 35.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 36.
split with Jason is configured in terms that evoke a Roman-style divorce or repudium (a term used by Medea itself; Med. 53). The breakup of Medea and Jason further represents a Roman marriage since the children are staying with their father rather than mother (Med. 540-9) and since Medea demands the return of her dowry (Med. 489). The technical term that Medea uses for the divorce is repudium, as opposed to divortium. As Treggiari explains, there was a ‘distinction between repudium, where one partner, but usually, even in classical law, the husband, rejects the other, and divortium, which is used of rivers and roads splitting in two and might therefore suggest mutual assent.’ I shall now examine cases of unjust divorce in the Controversiae and demonstrate how Medea resembles these women.

The divorce of Medea and Jason is remarkably similar to the situation covered in Controversiae 1.6:


A man captured by pirates wrote to his father about a ransom. He was not ransomed. The daughter of the pirate chief forced him to swear to marry her if he was let go. He swore. She left her father and followed the young man. He returned to his father, and married the girl. An orphan appeared on the scene; the father orders his son to divorce the daughter of the pirate chief and marry the orphan. He refuses. His father disinherits him.


149 Ibid., 54.


151 Treggiari, Roman Marriage, 440-1.
The girl, who is a foreigner like Medea,\textsuperscript{152} has betrayed her own family in order to marry the man. Now she is faced with abandonment without the possibility of returning to her natal family\textsuperscript{153} because her husband has an opportunity to make a more advantageous marriage.

Another wrongful divorce is discussed in \emph{Controversiae} 2.5, where a woman has been tortured by a tyrant. She would not betray her husband and was made barren. Her husband divorced her because of her barrenness. The woman then sued her husband for ingratitude.\textsuperscript{154} Although this situation does not resemble that of Jason and Medea, I will show that some of the arguments used by the declaimers on behalf of the wronged wife are used by Medea.

The declaimers who argue on behalf of divorced wives criticize the husbands, who are referred to as \textit{ingratus}, and emphasize the services the women did for their husbands. Although the laws in the \emph{Controversiae} employ the neutral word for divorce in Rome, \textit{dimittere},\textsuperscript{155} \textit{repudiare} is still used by the declaimers in cases of wrongful divorce.\textsuperscript{156} The declaimers argue that both women have sacrificed for their husbands and thus do not deserve the poor treatment they have received. The services, \textit{beneficia} or \textit{merita}, the women have done for their husbands

\begin{footnotes}
\item[152] Her husband specifically mentions that he is bringing her to his own \textit{patria} (\textit{Contr.} 1.6.3): ‘I deceived you, girl - this was not what I promised : “When you come with me to my country, I will show my gratitude there”’ (\textit{Decepi te, puella, alia pollicitus: cum veneris in patriam mecum, ibi tibi gratiam referam}).
\item[153] \textit{Contr.} 1.6.6: ‘What direction will you take? Have you a place to go to? Your father has barred the seas to us, mine the land’ (\textit{quas petitura regiones? Est enim tibi aliquis locus? Pater tuus nobis maria praeclusit, meus terras}).
\item[154] Bonner, \textit{Roman Declamation}, 88: ‘Now we may be fairly sure that she could not have brought an \textit{actio ingrati} against her former husband, but she could have brought an \textit{actio rei uxoriae}, claiming restitution of her dowry, on the grounds of his culpability.’
\item[155] Treggiari, \textit{Roman Marriage}, 438: ‘\textit{Dimittere} is the proper and neutral word, which is used by Cicero and good prose authors of the early Principate.’
\item[156] \textit{Contr.} 2.5.17,18; 5.2; 7.6.13, 24.
\end{footnotes}
are repeatedly brought up. Furthermore, it is said of the wife in 2.5 that she was tortured ‘for her husband’ (pro viro) and she repeatedly calls the husband ingratus, ungrateful. The arguments based on the merita/beneficia of the wronged wife in declamation seem to be a result of greater action being taken in the actual law on the part of the rejected wife. As Bonner notes, the concern for those wrongfully divorced ‘would well fit an era in which the rights of women were becoming ever more widely recognised, and the arguments used would be such as advocates could employ to advantage in cases of recovery of dowry.’ It is worth noting that the declaimers in the Controversiae overwhelmingly choose to defend the wronged wives: in 1.6 only one section is presented in defence of the father, while there are seven in defence of the wife and Seneca the Elder tells us (Contr. 1.6.8) that ‘in this controversia there was no dispute, and pretty well all agree’ (in hac controversia nihil litium fuit: fere omnes consentiunt). In 2.5 as well the majority of the declaimers cited argue on behalf of the wife, and not the husband. Furthermore, women who take legal action against their husbands are usually doing so because their husbands have somehow deprived them of their children.

Medea describes the way that Jason has treated her in their divorce in a manner that resembles the declaimers in the Controversiae. Medea sees Jason as similarly ungrateful: she recalls the betrayal of her family as merita (Med. 121, 465), calls him ingratus (Med. 465, 1021)

157 merita: Contr. 1.6.8. beneficium: 1.6.1, 9; 2.5.5, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19.
158 Contr. 2.5.8.
159 Contr. 2.5.5, 9, 10.
160 Bonner, Roman Declamation, 95.
161 See Contr. 3.7, 4.6, and 5.3. Treggiari, Roman Marriage, 430: ‘In rhetorical exercises wives might sue for maltreatment, mala tractatio… The husband has deprived the wife of her children in a variety of improbable ways.’
and reminds him that it was ‘for him’ (pro te) that she had committed her crimes (Med. 449, 503).\textsuperscript{162} Guastella notes that ‘unlike earlier literary versions of this myth, Seneca’s Medea does not list her merita as an offering of help made in vain to an ungrateful man; instead, Medea expresses herself in terms of losses she has suffered, and for which she demands some form of compensation.’\textsuperscript{163} Thus in presenting the same arguments which the declaimers do for wronged wives, Medea is able to appeal to one of the more sympathetic types of women.\textsuperscript{164} The type of woman that Medea portrays herself as is neither complete victim nor complete villain. However, as I shall discuss below, the other characters in the play are unable to see Medea as ambiguously as she sees herself.

In Medea, Medea emphasizes what happened to her as a virgo. She also highlights how unsuitable the actions that she committed were for her as a virgo. When she talks about how she helped Jason to steal the fleece from her father and how she murdered her own brother, she says (Med. 49), ‘I did all this as a girl’ (haec virgo feci), and later describes the actions as (Med. 130-2) ‘the famous ornament of my kingdom stolen, the criminal girl’s little companion cut apart with the sword’ (inclitum regni decus | raptum et nefandae virginis parvus comes | divisus ense). Medea even states that had she acted as a virgo should, the fleet of the Argo would have perished, as she tells Creon (Med. 238-41): ‘Suppose the maiden should opt for modesty, opt for

\textsuperscript{162} I recognize that there are other men in Latin literature who are referred to as ingratus by the women they have wronged. Medea indeed calls Jason ingratus at Heroides 12.206. However, I believe that the use here can still be linked to declamation because of the theme of marriage and divorce present in the Medea.


\textsuperscript{164} Of the 11 women in the Controversiae who do not fall into the types of impudica/rapta virgo, adultera, or noverca, 6 of them are wives whose character is not questioned: 2.2, 2.5, 3.7, 5.2, 6.4, and 7.6.
her father: the entire Pelasgian land will perish, following its leaders, and this son-in-law of yours will fall at the outset before the fierce bull’s fiery breath’ (virgini placeat pudor | paterque placeat: tota cum ducibus ruet | Pelasga tellus, hic tuus primum gener | tauri ferocis ore flagranti occidet).

Medea emphasizes the inappropriateness of her actions as virgo just as the declaimers in the Controversiae do when they attack young women. For example, in Controversiae 9.6, a stepmother has been accused of poisoning her stepson. Under torture, she said that her daughter had helped her in the poisoning. The girl is thus to be executed. The argument for the daughter is that she could not have committed such a crime, as it does not fit the role of the girl as a virgo. However, one declaimer finds precedent in virgins committing horrendous acts in the story of Medea (Contr. 9.6.9): ‘What of the woman who scattered her brother about to delay the pursuit of her father? There is a precedent to fit both sister and virgin’ (Quid illa quae fratrem in moram sequentis patris sparsit? Habes exemplum quod et sorori conveniat et virgini.) The woman who wishes to be a priestess is rebuked for the acts she did as a virgo (Contr. 1.2.4,6): ‘They found nothing virginal in that face, that self-possession, that boldness that feared not even an armed man’ (non videbatur iste virginis vultus, ista constantia et ne armatum quidem timens audacia.) … ‘She glories in the murder’ (Gloriatur homicidio). This girl is again portrayed as a virgo who is able to kill. The opposite side is that such actions are unbelievable (Contr. 1.2.18): ‘No one could believe a man had been killed by a woman, a youth by a girl, one armed by one unarmed’ (Nemo credebat occisum virum a femina, iuvenum a puella, armatum an inermi).165

Medea, as Corrigan notes, stresses her role as the criminal virgo in order to convince herself that

---

165 I am considering the terms virgo and puella as virtually synonymous, as Watson argues in her article, ‘Puella and Virgo.’
she is able to commit further crimes.\textsuperscript{166} Medea applies two different \textit{colores} to her actions as a \textit{virgo}. She defends herself when she interprets her actions as that of a victim, but also urges herself to commit crimes by reinterpreting these actions as criminal.

Medea not only denies her actions as that of the proper \textit{virgo}, but must also deny her role as a proper mother. Guastella sees Medea’s fixation on her acts as a \textit{virgo} as a product of the identity crisis she is undergoing throughout the play, since ‘the divorce strips away the meaning of everything the \textit{virgo} Medea did in order to become the \textit{coniunx/mater}. Creon’s demands, following the normal rules of Roman divorce, deprive Medea of her \textit{coniunx} and also of her sons.’\textsuperscript{167} Medea struggles to accept that she is no longer a wife. She continues to refer to herself as \textit{coniunx}, while other characters in the play do not and Medea is herself forced to use ‘language that denies her own status as wife.’\textsuperscript{168} However, in order to exact her vengeance on Jason and go through with the murder of her children, Medea must herself reject her role as \textit{coniunx/mater}.

Gill has noted the self-awareness of Medea in her monologue before she kills her children. He notes that

\begin{quote}
in the first section of the speech, much of what is said hovers between self-encouragement and self-description; and the primary means of self-encouragement consists of Medea’s promotion of a certain interpretation of her past life and character… The (over-) ingenuity of some of her ideas… can be taken as indicative of a rather desperate attempt to deny the physical and emotional reality of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{166} Corrigan, \textit{Virgo to Virago}, 166: ‘Medea uses these early acts as the foundations on which to build the far more significant act of vengeance she wishes to carry out now. The knowledge that she was capable of such wickedness as a girl, [sic] gives her the confidence to go on and seek a new viler method of punishment now.’

\textsuperscript{167} Guastella, ‘Virgo, Coniunx, Mater: The Wrath of Seneca’s Medea,’ 200.

\textsuperscript{168} Laura Abrahamsen, ‘Roman Marriage Law and the Conflict of Seneca’s “Medea”,’ 113-5.
mother-child bond.\footnote{169}

I will argue that part of her ‘self-encouragement and self-evaluation’ involves adopting the same roles and arguments of the woman in declamation who is able to commit crimes against her own children, the *noverca*.

McAuley argues that there was a fear that every Roman mother is, in fact, a stepmother, since the father is the only true parent.\footnote{170} She makes the following observation about the character of Medea both in Seneca’s *Medea* and *Phaedra*:

In invoking Medea as rhetorical *exemplum* and analogue for Phaedra, Seneca mobilizes the way in which the mythic Medea, both child-killing mother and stepmother, emblematises the function of the stepmother-type not simply as negative of the ‘true mother,’ but as a screen for the repressed or censored figure of the bad mother. In her study of the Medea-Theseus myth, Christine Sourvinou-Inwood (1990, 410) explains: “The negative traits of the figure of the mother, the fear that she will not care for, and may even use her virtually unlimited powers to damage, her powerless (male is what matters) children, have drifted to the figure of the stepmother.” Medea’s mythic *persona* - as daughter, wife, mother, or stepmother - localizes collective anxieties regarding the power of a woman in the domestic or family sphere to damage a man through his paternity, which is in a sense in her hands, even as she is defined by her relationship to it all.\footnote{171}

Although killing her children is, of course, part of ‘becoming Medea,’ Medea must first convince herself that she is no longer the mother of her children. Just before she kills her children, she denies her own motherhood and recasts Creusa as mother to her own children with Jason (Med. 893-977).


\footnote{170} McAuley, ‘Specter of Medea: The Rhetoric of Stepfatherhood and Motherhood in Seneca’s Phaedra,’ 54.

\footnote{171} Ibid., 56.
920-5):

\[
\begin{align*}
{\text{ex paelice utinam liberos hostis meus}} & \quad 920 \\
{\text{aliquos haberet! quidquid ex illo tuum est}}, & \\
{\text{Creusa peperit. placuit hoc poenae genus}}, & \\
{\text{meritoque placuit. ultimum, agnosco, scelus}} & \\
{\text{animo parandum est. liberi quondam mei}}, & \\
{\text{vos pro paternis sceleribus poenas date.}} & \quad 925
\end{align*}
\]

If only my enemy had some children by his mistress! No: all that is yours by him has Creusa for a mother. This path of punishment is decided on, rightly decided on. My spirit must prepare, I recognise, for its ultimate crime. Children once mine, you must pay for your father’s crimes.

In order to commit the murder of her own children, Medea must imagine them not as her own children anymore. Later in her speech, she again imagines her sons as not entirely her own:

\[
\begin{align*}
{\text{scelus est Iason genitor et maius scelus}} & \\
{\text{Medea mater. occidant, non sunt mei;}} & \\
{\text{pereant, mei sunt.}}
\end{align*}
\]

The crime is having Jason as their father, and the worse crime is having Medea as their mother. Let them fall, since they are not mine; let them perish, since they are mine.

Medea had earlier in the play brought up the fact that her role as a mother is inextricably linked to her role as wife (Med. 171): when the nurse reminds Medea that she is a mother (mater es), Medea responds ‘You see for whom’ (Cui sim vides). Guastella notes that ‘Medea is saying that a “mother” (a Roman mother, we might add) is not a mother in some absolute sense, but is a mother only with respect to someone else’s benefit.’¹⁷² The manner in which Medea convinces herself that she is not the mother of her children resembles the arguments used against

stepmothers in the *Controversiae*.

It seems that the *noverca* in the *Controversiae* plays the role opposite of the ‘good mother.’ Mothers in the *Controversiae* do not seem to commit crimes against their own children. Even if their actions are questioned, mothers seem in general to act as they believe a mother should. The mothers who do act against their children are, in fact, also *novercae*. In *Controversiae* 4.6, a woman has a son and a stepson whom she cannot tell apart. The situation is presented as follows:

*Quidam mortua uxor, quae in partu perierat, alteram duxit; puerum rus misit. Ex illa subinde filium sustulit. Utrumque puerum ruri educavit; post longum tempus redierunt similes. Quaerenti matri uter eius sit, non indicat. Accusatur ab ea malae tractionis."

A man, on the death of his wife in childbirth, married another, and sent the child off into the country. Soon he acknowledged a son by his new wife. He brought both boys up in the country. After a long while they returned, looking alike. When the mother asks which hers is, he refuses to tell her. She accuses him of ill-treatment. Her husband refuses to tell her which one is hers, out of fear that she will favour her own son. However, the result is that she cannot truly be mother to either, while the husband is still the father regardless. The father’s side presents the following arguments (*Contr. 4.6*):

*Qualis eris noverca quae sic fieri cupis? Alter tuus est, alter tui frater est, et si per te licuerit neuter privignus est. Dum alterius vis esse mater, utriusque es noverca…*  
*“Hic tuus est”: quid alterum novercalibus oculis intueris?*

What sort of a stepmother will you be if this is the way you desire to become one? One is yours, the other is the brother of yours: and if you will allow it, neither is a stepson. In wanting to be mother of one, you are a stepmother to both… “This one is yours.”; why do you look at the other with a stepmother’s eyes? … and the mother’s side is as follows:
Tibi rediit uterque filius, huic uterque privignus. Eo crudelius filio caret quo propius accessit. Times huius iniquitatem, cum iniquus ipse magis ames eum cui adulterius donare vis matrem quam cui non vis suam reddere.

Both returned to you as sons, both to her as stepsons. It is crueller that she lacks a son, having got so near to it. You fear her unfairness, you are unfair yourself - you love the one you wish to provide with the other’s mother more than the one whom you refuse to give his own back.

The insinuation is that the woman who has been deprived of her motherhood will act as a cruel stepmother even to the boy who is her own child. If she is not able to be a mother, she will become a stepmother.

We can compare Medea’s views towards her children to another stepmother in the Controversiae. In Controversiae 9.6, a woman has poisoned her stepson and claimed that her own daughter had been complicit in the crime. The daughter is to be executed, but her father defends her. The declaimers who take the side of the father argue that the stepmother has falsely accused the daughter. She is described as being a stepmother to her own daughter (Contr. 9.6.1, 3, 6): ‘Wicked woman, stepmother even to her own daughter, she could not even die without killing’ (Nefaria mulier, filiae quoque noverca, ne mori quidem potuit nisi ut occideret); ‘I said to myself: “Remembering she is a mother, she will forget she is a stepmother.”’ In fact, she remembered she was a stepmother and forgot she was a mother’ (aiebam: dum matris meminit, obliviscetur novercae. At illa dum novercae meminit matris oblita est); ‘I had a son so good that even a stepmother could have loved him - but he happened on one who was capable of hating even her own daughter’ (Habui filium tam bonum ut illum amare posset etiam novera, nisi in eam incidisset quae posset etiam filiam odisse). The declaimers furthermore make the argument that only the father can be described now as a parent (Contr. 9.6.16-7):
Quid ergo? inquit, mentita est de filia sua? immo de mea ... Quid ergo? mentita est? Quidni illa mentitetur de accusatoris sui filia?... nominavit privigni sui sororem... qui habuit quod dubitaret an parceret filiae eius a quo occidebatur, sorori eius quem occiderat?

What? Did she lie about her daughter? No, about mine… What? Did she lie? Why should she not lie - about her accuser’s daughter?…She named the sister of her stepson… What reason had she for hesitating whether to spare the daughter of one by whom she was being killed, the sister of one she had killed?

In Controversiae 9.6, it is argued that the stepmother’s motive in implicating her own child was to inflict further pain upon her husband (Contr: 9.6.3, 20): ‘In avenging my son, I showed where I could be hurt the most… Stepmother, you have got what you wanted; I am sorry now that I had you convicted’ (Dum filium vindico, ubi gravissime mihi noceri posset ostendi... Noverco, quod volueras consecuta est: damnasse iam paenitet); ‘Everyone used the color that the stepmother named the daughter to grieve the father’ (omnes illo colore usi sunt, a noverca nominatam filiam in dolorem patris).

Medea makes many of the same arguments as the declaimers do in the examples above. Medea too emphasizes Jason as the sole parent of the children when she leaves their bodies with him at the end of the play (Med. 1024) ‘Now recover your sons as their parent’ (recipe iam natos parens). As McAuley notes, this line emphasizes ‘the juridicial principle that the children of a divorce must go to their father, and its underlying logic that he is the only true parens.¹⁷³ This resembles Medea’s reaction to Jason’s love for his children (Med. 549-50): ‘Does he love his sons so much? Good, he is caught! The place to wound him is laid bare’ (Sic natos amat? | bene est, tenetur, vulneri patuit locus). In order to convince herself to commit the murder of her own

¹⁷³ Ibid., 54.
sons, Medea must first abandon her role as mother and wife. In order to do this, she uses the same arguments that the women in declamation who commit crimes: she refashions her relationship with Jason to one with an adulterer, and adopts the same relationship to her own children as that of the *noverca*.

The wicked women of declamation represent the opposite of the roles that women ought to fill, that of wife and mother. They present the fear that a wife may act against her own husband and a mother against her own children. So when Medea needs to perform these actions herself, which she indeed struggles with, she is able to persuade herself by reshaping her relationships to suit the actions she wishes to commit. This is essentially what a declaimer has to do, when he connects the plot to the traits associated with recurring characters. As Imber explains, the declaimer ‘concentrated not on plot, but on motive, and in particular on witty *sententiae* in which he neatly linked the bland fact of a particular *controversia* to the notorious archetypes of declamation.’

There is further evidence for declamatory influence, as Medea applies different *personae* and *colores* to herself at different points in the play, depending on what *persona* and *color* suit her needs.

**Phaedra**

In *Phaedra*, Hippolytus also recalls the types of wicked women found in declamation *(Phd. 558-4)*:

\[taceo novercas: mitior nulla est feris.\]
\[Sed dux malorum femina: haec scelerum artifex\]
\[obsedit animos, huius incestae stupris\]
\[fumant tot urbes, bella tot gentes gerunt\]

---

174 Imber, ‘Practised Speech: Oral and Written Conventions in Roman Declamation,’ 211.
et versa ab imo regna tot populos premunt.
sileantur aliae; sola coniunx Aegei,  
Medea, reddet feminas dirum genus.

I say nothing of stepmothers: not one of them is more merciful than wild beasts. But the leader in evil is woman. This artificer of crimes besets our minds; through this unchaste creature’s adulteries so many cities smoulder, so many nations wage war, and so many peoples are crushed in the utter overthrow of kingdoms. To say nothing of others, Aegeus’ wife Medea alone will reveal women as a monstrous tribe.

Hippolytus explicitly refers to two of the wicked women found in declamation, the noverca and adultera. Again, it would appear that Hippolytus is referring to generalizations, as McAuley has noted, by using the plurals novercas and incestae.175

As Watson notes, it is not surprising that ‘the declamatory theme of the saeva noverca is exploited’ within the Phaedra, and that Seneca exploits the ‘conventional ideas about wicked stepmothers’ to create a paradox, where the noverca does not hate, but loves her stepchild.176 In the Phaedra, the term noverca is used seven times and Phaedra uses it of herself three times.177 Phaedra is herself aware of her own role as the stereotypical noverca and the view that stepmothers hate their stepchildren (Phd. 637-8): When Hippolytus asks her ‘Whatever is the trouble?’ (Quodnam istud malum est?), Phaedra replies ‘A trouble you would hardly believe could fall on a stepmother’ (Quod in novercam cadere vix credas malum). Hill, in his study of Phaedra’s threats of suicide within Seneca’s play, notes how Phaedra struggles to act appropriately within her social role, entertaining the ‘delusion that her social persona as the

175 McAuley, ‘Specters of Medea: The Rhetoric of Stepmotherhood and Motherhood in Seneca’s Phaedra,’ 42.
176 Watson, Ancient Stepmothers, 111.
respectable wife of Theseus is compatible with a sexual liaison with his son Hippolytus.¹⁷⁸

Indeed, Phaedra attempts to not appear as the *noverca* of declamation, as McAuley says:

Disengaged from the pedagogical imperatives of declamation, integrated into a tragic narrative, Seneca’s play gives the *noverca* an emotional voice, destabilizing and ironizing some of the gender norms that declamatory rhetoric sought to justify, and the self-righteous, anxiety-filled mode in which it did so (echoed, to some extent, in Hippolytus’s hysterical tirades)… The unresolved ambiguity within the use of the *noverca* motif feeds into the larger representational ambiguities of Phaedra’s struggles in Seneca’s tragedy, as she vacillates between resisting her illicit desire for Hippolytus and the literary role assigned to her, and maneuvering to fulfil it.¹⁷⁹

Phaedra is certainly not the *noverca* of declamation. However, she struggles to fulfil her desires without fulfilling the stereotype. Unlike Medea and Clytemnestra, who fashion themselves after and find inspiration in the female figures of declamation, Phaedra struggles to escape the role of *noverca* and *adultera*. When she makes her approach to Hippolytus, she fashions herself into more appropriate female roles (Phd. 609-23):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Matris superbum est nomen et nimium potens;} \\
\text{nostros humilius nomem affectus decet:} & \quad 610 \\
\text{me vel sororem, Hippolyte, vel famulam voca,} & \\
\text{famulamque potius: omne servitium feram.} & \\
\text{non me per altas ire si iubeas nives} & \\
\text{pigeat gelatis ingredi Pindi iugis;} & \\
\text{non, si per ignes ire et infesta agmina,} & \quad 615 \\
\text{cuncter paratis ensibus pectus dare.} & \\
\text{mandata recipe sceptra, me famulam accipe;}
\end{align*}
\]

¹⁷⁸ Timothy D. Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature*, 160.

te imperia regere, me decet iussa exequi:
muliebre non est regna tutari urbium.
tu, qui iuventae flore primaevō viges,
cives paterno fortis imperio rege.
sinu receptam supplicem ac servam tege;
miserere viduae.

The name of mother is too grand and mighty. A humbler name suits my feelings: call me sister, Hippolytus, or slave - yes, slave is better: I will bear slavery. If you bade me go through deep snows, I would not object to travelling on Pindus’ frozen heights; if you bade me go through fire and enemy ranks, I would not hesitate to breast drawn swords. Take the regent’s sceptre, accept me as your servant. It befits you to hold sway, me to carry out commands. It is no woman’s role to safeguard the thrones of city-states. You, in the vigorous first flower of youth, should rule the citizens, strong in your father’s power. Take me to your arms, protect your suppliant and slave; pity a husbandless woman.

Phaedra places herself in a position where any power she may have over Hippolytus - as (step)mother or queen- is gone. She furthermore diminishes her role as wife, by presenting herself as vidua (623). McAuley notes that the roles of sister and slave are erotic or elegiac in connotation as well, and that Phaedra proceeds to compare herself to her virginal sister, Ariadne (Phd. 646). As Hill puts it,

Phaedra thus struggles to portray as far as possible sexual union with Hippolytus as an extension of her role as wife of Theseus and queen of Attica. Such an equivalence is obviously bizarre, an indication of how difficult a task it is for Phaedra to integrate the actions to which her passion would drive her with those considered appropriate to a putative widow and regal daughter.¹⁸¹


¹⁸¹ Hill, Ambitiosa Mors, 167.
Despite Phaedra’s efforts, Hippolytus does not see past her role as stepmother (Phd. 683-4): ‘I am guilty, I deserve to die: I have attracted a stepmother - Look, am I suited to adulteries?’ (sum nocens, merui mori: | placui novercae, - dignus en stupris ego?). In fact, in her efforts to escape the negative female role into which she has been placed, she has become even worse than all the other ‘bad women’ before her (Phd. 687, 696-7): ‘Oh, you surpass all womankind in crime… Father I envy you: this is an evil worse, worse than your Colchian stepmother \(^{182}\) (o scelere vincens omne feminineum genus… genitor, invideo tibi: | Colchide noverca maius hoc, maius malum est).

In her study of Seneca’s Medea and Phaedra, McAuley notes the differences between the two female characters:

Phaedra tries on and casts off a whole series of different identities in her desperation not to be a noverca or an impia mater - in essence, not to be “Medea.” Moreover, unlike Medea, Phaedra does not overtly confront the androcentric socio-political order that constrains and categorizes her. Rather, she tries to work within it, to find some way in which it might accommodate her aberrant and excessive desires.\(^{183}\) Medea and Clytemnestra, although they work outside of the socio-political order, work within the framework of declamation. Phaedra fails in her attempt to work against the type imposed upon her because she works against this same framework, which is the only way that Hippolytus is able to see women. Ultimately, the women who reject the stereotypical figures accomplish their goals/crimes. As Corrigan notes in her study of Medea, ‘men of the ancient world did not know how to deal with a woman who did not behave with proper decorum and keep to her

\(^{182}\) ‘The Colchian stepmother is Medea, who was married to Theseus’ father Aegeus.

\(^{183}\) McAuley, ‘Specters of Medea: The Rhetoric of Stepmotherhood and Motherhood in Seneca’s Phaedra,’ 57.
allotted section of society.¹⁸⁴ This is also reflected in the Controversiae, which focuses on stereotypical female characters who commit acts that are the opposite of the virgo, coniunx, and mater. However, in the Controversiae, the women are not depicted as complicated or ambiguous, but either do or do not fit into a handful of types.

The characterization of women in the tragedies of Seneca the Elder, as McAuley says of Phaedra and Medea, ‘reveals the precariousness of a worldview that demands language to map neatly onto reality and generic roles to fit individuals.’¹⁸⁵ The tragic figures of Clytemnestra, Medea, and Phaedra are ambiguous and struggle to conform to appropriate female roles. Medea and Phaedra struggle to be seen by others in the same roles as they see themselves. Medea and Clytemnestra, when they see that it is no longer possible to fulfil the roles of good women, find inspiration in the only other roles provided to women within the rigid declamatory framework: the extreme inversions of good women represented by the impia virgo, adultera, and noverca. They use these women to colour their actions which provides justification for their crimes. Phaedra, on the other hand, is a woman who attempts, and fails, to fight against type in a world that only sees women in this framework.

¹⁸⁴ Corrigan, Virgo to Virago, 189.

Conclusion

Declamation as Seneca the Elder knew and recorded arose as a new genre amongst adults in his own lifetime. Under the empire, there was no longer a space for elite Roman males to explore and reinforce their identities communally, which the competitive political atmosphere in the republic had provided. Thus, declamation became the medium through which elite men could speak together and explore their collective identity and reinforce their authority, in ‘a fantasy world close to and yet apart from that of contemporary Rome.’ Mary Beard has indeed argued that declamation was similar to tragedy in 5th century Athens: both genres served as a medium through which communal values could be discussed and confirmed. This thesis, indeed, has explored the connection between declamation and tragedy within two subsets of Roman society, the family and women. I believe that this thesis has expanded upon the connections that have already been made between the genre of declamation and the tragedies of Seneca the Younger.

Firstly, I have noted a connection in how characters are named in declamation and in the tragedies. Characters in the Controversiae are not referred to by name. They are instead identified by positions that they hold within, for example, the family or greater society. When I chose to separate the subjects of my thesis into two categories, the family and women, I noticed similarities in how these two groups were identified in both the Controversiae and Seneca the Younger’s tragedies. In the first chapter, I noted that in cases involving familial conflict, the declaimers referred to characters by their family titles (e.g. pater, mater, filius, filia, etc.).

---

186 Gunderson, Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity, 148.
187 Langlands, Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome, 250.
188 Beard, ‘Looking (harder) for Roman Myth: Dumézil, Declamation and the Problems of Definition,’ 56.
Seneca’s drama, the tragic characters are also often referred to by their familial titles. Indeed, in *Phoenissae* the characters are only rarely referred to by their actual names. They are, rather, in the style of declamation, identified by their position within the family.

The women in declamation, excluding those whose position as mother or daughter is indicated, are generally identified according to their sexual/marital status. In the second chapter, I noted that there were three women who were repeatedly vilified throughout the *Controversiae*: the *impia virgo, adultera*, and *noverca*. These three declamatory women also appear in the three plays, *Agamemnon, Medea*, and *Phaedra*. Most notably, the three women are grouped together in a monologue given by Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*. Two of the women, the stepmother and adulteress, also appear in a speech given by Hippolytus in *Phaedra*. To my knowledge, the connection between these speeches and the types of women present in declamation has not been noted.

Secondly, I believe I have added to other work that has been done on *persona* and *color* in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger, which has been noted by Pratt, Goldberg, and Hook. Goldberg and Hook argued that the characters in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger were based in the *persona* and *color* of declamation. Hook argued that the characters were aware of their own *persona/color* and presented their internal self more in Senecan tragedy due to declamatory influence. While I agree with Hook and much of this thesis in fact affirms his argument, I believe I have shown other ways in which the *persona* and *color* of declamation is seen within the tragedies of Seneca the Younger.

In the first chapter, I noted the *color* that declaimers put on familial relationships in the *Controversiae*. Declaimers would either emphasize familial relationships or deny kin ties in
order to defend against charges of *impietas*. We saw this reflected also in the families of the tragedies, especially in *Phoenissae* in which certain characters emphasized familial relations while others rejected familial ties. Furthermore, characters in the tragedies, just like declaimers, adopt different *personae* and *colores* at different moments in order to support their own cause. For example, in the first chapter, Clytemnestra reinterprets the relationships within her own family so that she is able to argue that the crimes she will commit are in accordance with *pietas*. I also noted how a character like Atreus exploits *color* to deliberately transgress his kinship relations. I believe these examples show a greater amount of deceit through the use of *persona* and *color* in the tragedies than has been previously noted.

In the second chapter, we also saw the manipulation of *persona* and *color*. Clytemnestra colours her own actions as those of the stereotypical wicked woman in the beginning of the play. However, she then proceeds to also interpret the actions of the other women in the play as those of these same declamatory women. Of the three women characters studied, Medea interprets, or reinterprets, her own actions to the greatest degree. She adopts many different *personae* within the play. When it suits her, she defends her actions as a *virgo* taken advantage of in *raptus* marriage. However, she will at other times emphasize her role as the *impia virgo*. Medea interprets her divorce by Jason as that of a wronged woman who is being robbed of her children. However, in order to commit the murder of her children, she adopts the *persona* and *color* of the *noverca* from declamation. We can see that the women of declamation are not embodied in the women of Senecan tragedy. However, the declamatory women are present in the plays in the *colores* that the tragic women put on their actions or those of other women.

This project could certainly be expanded in the future. There are other characters present
in declamation which also appear in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. Tyrants, for example, are another group that could be studied in a similar manner to the groups covered in this thesis. Furthermore, I believe there is more that could be done on the women of both the Controversiae and the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. The priestess who is a common character in the Controversiae could be explored, for instance. I had to limit my thesis to the women who are perhaps considered villains. There are, of course, many other women in the tragedies who could be studied further in relation to declamation.
Bibliography


