

The Arrogant-making Hand: *Manus* and *Dextra* in *Hercules Furens*

Early in his *Hercules Furens*, Seneca gives us a tantalizing preview of his treatment of the protagonist by having Juno refer to Hercules' hand as *superbifica* (l. 58). This is a hapax legomenon that literally means "arrogant-making," and is the first of many references, often unusual, to the hero's hands throughout the play. Much of the scholarship on Seneca's *Hercules Furens* centers on the nature of Hercules' characterization, specifically whether he is beset upon by supernatural forces or instead a fatal flaw is responsible for his downfall. The first view is the older and was reinvigorated by Anna Lydia Motto, John R. Clark (Motto and Clark 1981), and Gilbert Lawall (Lawall 1983) in response to a strong challenge led by Jo-Ann Shelton (Shelton 1978) and G.K. Galinsky (Galinsky 1972), who argue the latter. What has never been explored in depth, although Shelton touches on it briefly, is the prevalence of the hand motif and how it could aid in our understanding of the moral argument of the play.

My paper stems from a thorough lexical analysis of the terms *manus* and *dextra* which has yielded surprising results. At 76 total instances, they are twice as common as in Seneca's non-Hercules plays. All but 24 of those instances refer directly to Hercules, and most of the 24 refer to him indirectly. The vast majority can be sorted into categories, often overlapping, that connect to the various scholarly arguments about Hercules' characterization: pollution, violence and arrogance, tyrants, and supplication. Even the minor categories hold significance, as only 5 instances express gentleness, and 6 are connected to the Furies and snakes, revealing an underexplored theme.

I explore all of these categories with reference to both the plot and strong intertextual echoes in Seneca's prose works. This study puts to rest any notion of the "positive" view of Hercules as an exemplar of virtue and sheds light on his true fatal flaw. While his violence and

arrogance do lead to his madness, neither would have been possible without the great power symbolized by his conquering hand, which, when undirected by the gods or by an attentively Stoic Hercules, truly is *superbifica*.

Bibliography

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