

Abstract: For almost six centuries the culmination of any young Roman citizen's education was the school of rhetoric: here, under the guidance of a professional rhetorician, he would spend his teenage years learning how to devise and deliver declamations on fictional themes. Because of their key role in the Roman educational system, these speeches afford an invaluable insight into the ways of thought of the political and intellectual class in imperial Rome. In this paper I explore the fictional world of declamation, with its set of characters, laws, and recurring situations. My aim is to show that, while teaching students how to concoct a fictional speech, Roman teachers exposed them to a broad range of debates on both ethical issues and questions posed by the daily life of their own society. As a case study, I focus on Latin declamations based on situations involving blind characters: I take into account the special rights granted to blind characters, the duties that every fellow-citizen is expected to fulfill towards them, and rules of *pietas* to be followed even when pleading a case against blind people. A comparison with Roman laws will shed light on what was actually mandatory for a Roman and what was added by the fictional laws of declamations, in order to assess to what extent the rhetorical training contributed to the ethical and moral education of the new generations of Roman citizens.

Keywords: Declamation, Rhetoric, Pseudo-Quintilian, Seneca the Elder, Blindness.