In the following passage (1696–1704) Philoctetes records the final words of Hercules just before the pyre is lit:

quacumque parte prospicis natum, pater,
te te, pater, quem nocte commissa dies
quaesivit unus, si meae laudes canit
utrumque Phoebi litus et Scythiae genus
et omnis ardens ora quam torret dies,
si pace tellus plena, si nullae gemunt
urbes nec aras impias quisquam inquinat,
si scelera desunt, spiritum admittite hunc, precor,
in astra.

At the beginning of 1697 E reads te te, A iste est. The latter, designated as "plain interpolation" by Housman1), was adopted by Leo who in addition emended quem ... quaesivit to cui ... quievit. Richter followed Leo’s emendation, but retained te te and altered pater to precor. Miller in the Loeb edition prints Leo’s text and Herrmann in the Budé edition prints Richter’s. Giardina reads iste est, pater ... † quaesivit, suggesting in his apparatus that quaesivit was repeated from the beginning of 1694 (quaesivit oculis) and has replaced a verb such as produxit. Most recently Axelson2) has defended Richter’s text, arguing that pater is dittography after pater at the end of 1696 and noting the parallel passages with cui in 1863–66, magnique Iovis / plangite natum, cui concepto / lux una perit noctesque duas / contulit Eos, and Agam. 814–16, magnus Alcides, cui lege mundi / Iuppiter rupta geminavit horas / roscidae noctis. Only the Italian editors, Moricca and Viansino, retain the text as recorded in E. Although Axelson has rightly emphasized that scholars have placed too much faith in E and too little in A, E is nevertheless more trustworthy and its readings should not be rejected without sound reason, especially when, as here, “correction” of the text involves three emendations.

Two objections have been raised to E’s reading, the first being that te te is “ungrammatical”3). That this criticism is unfounded is shown by Vergil, Aen. 4.314–19:

mene fugis? per ego has lacrimas dextramque tuam te

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1) A. E. Housman, “Notes on Seneca’s Tragedies,” CQ 17 (1923) 171.
2) B. Axelson, Korruptelenkult. Studien zur Textkritik der unechten Seneca-Tragödie Hercules Oetaeus (Lund 1967) 40f.
3) Housman, op. cit. His emendation Titana per is, as I hope to show, unnecessary.
(quando aliud mihi iam miserae nihil ipsa reliqui),
per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos,
si bene quid de te merui, fuit aut tibi quicquam
dulce meum, miserere domus labentis et istam,
oro, si quis adhuc precibus locus, exue mentem.

Both passages have the accusative te, then conditional clauses,
an imperative, and a verb of entreaty⁴). The repetition and emphatic position of te te is typically Senecan⁵). The presence of pater in 1696 and 1697 may seem unpleasant to our ears, but Seneca was not averse to such repetitions, nor were ancient poets in general. Furthermore, if Axelsson is right in maintaining that the Hercules Oetaeus should not be ascribed to Seneca and that its author was here influenced by Phaedra 661–64, si cum parente Creticum intrasses fretum, / tibi fila potius nostra nevisset soror. / te te, soror, quacumque siderei poli / in parte fulges, invoco ad causam parem, it may well be that the repetition of soror suggested to the poet the repetition of pater.

The second objection is the meaning of quem ... unus. The expression nocte commissa dies unus, although somewhat unusual, must in the context of Hercules' conception refer to the double night⁶). It denotes either a period of daylight and darkness to which a further period of darkness has been added (commissa) or more probably simply a period of darkness which instead of being followed by daylight is followed by an additional period of darkness. In either case nox has been added to nox, and it is this double night, with or without a period of daylight, which is denoted by nocte commissa dies unus. Housman's argument that "the object of quaesivit cannot be quem, i.e. Iovem, for then the subject must be caelum or the like" is surely wrong. The subject is dies unus and this single day "looked in vain" (quaesivit) for Jupiter because he was hidden from the day's view by the night which had been added. There is of course a certain illogicality in saying that "day looked for Jupiter", since if night were joined to night there would be no day, but poetry is not always strictly logical.

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⁴) Cf. also Aen. 12. 56–60.
⁵) Axelsson (pp. 16f.) compares HF 900, Phaedra 663, 888, Oed. 1042. He also defends A's te te precor in HO 541 against E's te deprecor.
⁶) Cf. Ovid, Amores 1.13.45f., ipsa demum genitore, ne te iam saepe videret, / commisit noctes in sua vota duas.