MYTH AND PHILOSOPHY: THE GREAT SINNERS' *TOPOS* IN OVID, LUCRETIUS AND SENECA[*]

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Abstract: In my paper I examine the occurrence of a repeated pattern, namely the catalogue of the so-called Great Sinners, in the work of three Latin authors: Ovid, Lucretius and Seneca. Through the hermeneutical category of (external) intertextuality, the paper explores how the same *Leitmotiv* is profitably employed by different authors across diverse genres and contexts, changing certain features while retaining the same core. Specifically, it will be shown that these Latin writers drew the list of the Great Sinners from previous sources, but that they also adapted the catalogue to the content and patterns of their own works. Finally, it is noted that these three occurrences of the catalogue should be seen more generally as a *specimen* for the process of *imitatio/aemulatio* of previous traditions brought forth by classical writers.

Keywords: Great Sinners, intertextuality, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*

Introduction

This paper deals with a recurrent pattern in classical literature, the catalogue of the so-called "Great Sinners", which is very often employed as a programmatic feature in the descriptions of the Hades by both Greek and Latin authors. Specifically, I will analyse this catalogue as an example of external intertextuality within the work of three Latin writers, Lucretius, Ovid and Seneca.[1] Each of

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[1] It is possible to talk about the existence of an intertextual link between two or more texts when they share a connection because of linguistic, metrical or contextual similarities. The role of the reader, both ancient and modern, is central in the acknowledgement and/or awareness of these similarities. Cf. Wills 1996, esp. 18-23, for more specific definitions. See also Barchiesi 2001, 142: "The relation that joins a text to a model involves the interpretation not of one text but of two. Both these interpretations are ever on trial, in process, and continually influencing one another. The new text rereads its model, while the model in turn influences the reading of the new text – indeed when recognised, it often has the power to do so". For a definition of external

these authors rearranges the catalogue of the Sinners according to the particular context in which it occurs, and to the specific meaning – as well as communication needs – that it implies.

In order to make this analysis, I will demonstrate how a standard, recurring element (i.e. the catalogue) can be adapted to a specific literary situation. While certain features are changed, it retains the same core, thus fulfilling the communication aims of the author with regard to the specific literary context in which the catalogue is found.

In this way, the catalogue clearly serves as an expression of a *variatio* on the same theme which, as Pasquali[2] has noted, was a highly effective way for classical authors to both share their message and accomplish artistic excellence.

Finally, this essay will demonstrate how this *variatio* on the same theme, clearly expressed within the catalogue of the Great Sinners occurring in the three Latin authors mentioned above, should be understood as a programmatic and constant feature of the *modus operandi* of classical writers.

1. The Great Sinners: a short presentation

Following their first occurrence in *Odyssey*'s *nekyia* (Hom., *Od*. XI 578-600), the canonical Sinners themselves represent a *Leitmotiv* in descriptions of the Underworld.[3] As previously mentioned, in most cases the Great Sinners' *topos* is expressed in the form of a systematic catalogue. While the poets recall this from previous sources (especially, as noted, the archetypical model of *Od*. XI 578-600), they also modify certain features according to the context in which they appear. But who are the Great Sinners?

Originating in Greek mythology, Ixion, Sisyphus, Tantalus, Tityos and the Danaides represent the traditional – or rather the canonical – characters from the catalogue (though the Danaides are not always present in the list: see below, 5). Being guilty of terrible acts against men or deities, each of them is punished by torture in the Underworld. Three of them, Tityos, Tantalus and Sisyphus, appear for the first time in the *Odyssey*'s *nekyia* (XI 576-600); the other two, Ixion and the Danaides (which is in fact a group of women), were added over

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intertextuality and the distinction between internal and external intertextuality, see, e.g., Jenny 1976, 257-281; Cappello 1998, 36-41.

[2] See Pasquali 1968, 275-282. For issues concerning literary memory and allusivity, see also Conte 1985[2], 35-39: the scholar claims that the poetic technique of classical poets was in fact based on the *aemulatio*/*imitatio* of previous authors, which led to a conscious recollection of preceding texts and sources, while adapting them to a new context.

[3] See, e.g., Zingerle 1877, 69; Petrone 1986-7, 131-142; Sourvinou-Inwood 1986, 37-58, Pattenò 2004.

the course of time by Greek or Latin authors to become typical residents of Hades.[4]

The punishments are varied: the Danaides, the daughters of Danaos who killed their husbands, are condemned to carry a jug to fill a bathtub (*pithos*) without a bottom (or with a leak) to wash their sins away;[5] Ixion, who fell in love with Juno, is bound to a burning solar wheel for eternity on the orders of Jupiter, at first spinning across the heavens, then in later myths transferred to Tartarus; Sisyphus, who deceived the Gods, is made to endlessly roll a huge boulder up a steep hill; Tantalus, who killed his son and offered his flesh to the Gods, stands in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches, unable to reach them; and finally Tityos, who committed impiety, is picked apart by two vultures that consume his liver, which grows back each night.

Among all the Greek and Latin sources in which they occur,[6] I deal with their significant appearances within the works of the three authors mentioned above (1): Lucretius (III 978-1010), Ovid (*Met*. IV 455-471) and Seneca (*Ep*. 24, 18). Two of these, Lucretius and Seneca, are tied to a wider philosophical context and function as a metaphorical transposition of the authors' theoretical reflections on reality.[7] By contrast, the mention of Ov., *Met*. IV is embedded in a somewhat mythological context, and serves a primarily narrative function.

For this reason, I will focus first on the Ovidian quote, in order to demonstrate the principal features and general patterns of the Sinners as purely mythological characters, rather than their embodiment as other allegorical and/or symbolical meanings. Following this primary analysis, I will shift to the Lucre-

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[4] See, respectively, Roscher 1884–1937, I 1. 949-952, s.v. "Danaides"; II 1766-1772, s.v. "Ixion"; IV 1909–1915, s.v. "Sisyphos"; V 75-85, s.v. "Tantalos"; V 1916–1924, s.v. "Tityos". For artistic references, see *LIMC* III 1. 337-341; VI 857-862; VII 1. 781-787; VII 2, 839-843; VIII 37-41.

[5] Paus. X 31, 9-11.

[6] It is crucial to note the large number of occurrences of the Sinners in Senecan dramas (*Her. F*. 750-759, *Med*. 743-749, *Phaed*. 1229-1237, *Ag*. 15-22, *Thy*. 1-13, *Her. O*. 942-948, *Her. O*. 1068-1982, *Octavia* 619-622). This reoccurrence has not yet been analysed in-depth, except for an essay written by Mantovanelli 1993, 135-147, and reworked later (Mantovanelli 2014, 127-139). In this essay, all the quotes in which the Great Sinners ("dannati del mito") feature are gathered according to their genre (typology) and divided into three categories: epic, narrative and *defixio*. The first refers to the catalogue as part of the general description of the Hades, in the context of the katabasis of an epic hero (see, e.g., Hom., *Od*. XI 578-600; Verg., *A*. VI 595-615). The narrative category designates the moment in which Great Sinners' punishments cease due to Orpheus' song (see Verg., *G*. IV 484). Finally, the last category belongs to the frame of infernal *devotio*, i.e. a kind of invective developed by Augustan poets within the elegiac genre (see, e.g., Ov., *Ib*. 173-192; Tib. I 3).

[7] For the reception of previous – especially Augustan – mythological poetry in Seneca's philosophical works, see Trinacty 2014, 9-16.

tian and Senecan appearances in order to show how the catalogue – which is primarily a mythological pattern – may also be profitably employed to explain philosophical concepts.

2. The Great Sinners in Ovid (*Met*. IV 455-471), Lucretius (III 978-1010) and Seneca (*Ep*. 24, 18)

As for Ovid, the first author I will take into account, the mention of the Great Sinners occurs in lines 455-463 of *Metamorphoses* Book IV, in the wider context of Juno's (*Saturnia torva*, 464) katabasis into the Hades (*Met*. IV 432-480).[8] After quoting the relevant lines below,[9] I will examine the passage in more detail.

> quam simul agnorunt inter caliginis umbras,   455
> surrexere deae. sedes Scelerata vocatur:
> **viscera praebebat** <u>Tityos</u> lanianda **novemque**
> **iugeribus** distractus erat; tibi, <u>Tantale</u>, nullae
> deprenduntur **aquae**, quaeque imminet, effugit **arbor**;
> aut petis aut urges **rediturum**, <u>Sisyphe</u>, **saxum**;   460
> **volvitur** <u>Ixion</u> et se sequiturque fugitque;
> molirique suis letum patruelibus ausae
> adsiduae repetunt, quas perdunt, <u>Belides</u> **undas**.

Following a somewhat brief description of certain features of the Underworld (IV 432-448), Juno is described as proceeding through the darkness of the Hades, where she encounters Cerberus and the Furies; after having acknowledged her (*quam simul agnorunt ...*, 455), the Furies leave.[10] The place that Juno reaches, known as "the seat of Crime" (*sedes Scelerata vocatur*, 456), hosts the Great Sinners.

The first Sinner quoted is Tityos, who attempted to rape Leto, the mother of Apollo and Diana, and for this reason was killed by Apollo himself. In Ovid, he is said to be spread across a giant space (*novemque / iugeribus distractus erat*, 457-458) and to have his limbs eaten by birds (*viscera ... lanianda*, 457). Traditionally, the specific part of the body involved in the punishment is the liver, and the birds mentioned are two or more vultures (in Vergil, however, it is only one[11]). His liver regenerates each night, thus making the punishment eternal.

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[8] This katabasis of Juno that occurs in the *Metamorphoses* is shaped mainly on *Aeneis* Book VI and *Georgics* Book IV. For a complete commentary of the episode, see Bömer 1976, Barchiesi, Rosati 2007, ad loc.

[9] For the text of *Metamorphoses* see Tarrant 2004.

[10] For this description, see also Tib. I 3, 67-80.

[11] See Verg., *A*. VI 595-600.

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The birds are not explicitly mentioned by Ovid, though the poet hints at this continuous process of disruption and regeneration through the employment of a gerundive, *lanianda*, in connection with *viscera* (457). Moreover, by choosing the form *praebebat* (457), Ovid gives the appearance of the Sinner as somewhat cooperating in the punishment, since he is said to literally "offer" his limbs to be devoured.[12]

The second Sinner mentioned is Tantalus, one of the most famous of the Sinners. According to the various versions of his myth that occur in ancient sources, he is responsible for having either stolen foods from the God's feast[13] or offering them the flesh of his son, Pelops.[14] For a form of *contrappasso*, Tantalus is condemned to be hungry and thirsty for eternity, since both the water surrounding him (*aquae*, 459) and the fruit hanging above him (*quaeque imminet, effugit arbor*, 459) cannot be reached. While the water[15] is a highly recurring element in Tantalus' punishment and appears in almost all the other sources, the food is not always mentioned; when it is,[16] however, it makes the description of the punishment more complex and complete. It is also worth observing that the word *arbor* is never quoted with reference to Tantalus in other catalogues, and is thus an *unicum* of Ovid.[17] In this case it also has a metonymic value, indicating the entirety (*arbor*) *pro* the part (*fruit*).[18]

As for Sisyphus, in most sources he is said to be responsible for having chained Thanatos and deceiving the Gods. For this reason, he was condemned to carry a *rediturum ... saxum* (460) to the top of a mountain: this *saxum*, however, rolls down as soon as Sisyphus has reached the top. In many sources, the stone[19] is said to have a tendency to slip or escape from his grasp,[20] though this is the only occurrence of the word *rediturum*. Thus, this punishment is characterised by two moments, namely the carrying of the *saxum* and its subsequent escape. Both are suggested by the poet through the employment of the verbs

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[12] As can clearly be seen, the description of Tityos is influenced by another famous literary character, Prometheus, who was sentenced to eternally suffer a similar torture. The coincidence between Prometheus and Tityos is rather frequent in classical tradition: the cause of this similarity in the punishment of the two characters is due to a contamination between the Homeric description of Tityos (Hom., *Od*. XI 578-600) and the Prometheus of Hesiod (*Theog*. 521-525) and Aeschylus. See *Roscher* 1884-1937 III 2. 3032-3110, s.v. "Prometheus".

[13] See Pind., *Ol*. I 60 ff.

[14] See Ov., *Met*. I 6, 407; Tib. I 3, 77-78.

[15] See *TLL* II 346.68-363.58, s.v. "aqua".

[16] See *Her. F*. 755, *poma ... famem*; *Thy*. 2, *fugaces ... cibos*; *Her. O*. 1078, *pomis*.

[17] This appears, however, in reference to Tantalus in *Thy*. 152.

[18] See *TLL* II 428.1-428.17, s.v. "arbor".

[19] See *OLD* 169, s.v. "saxum".

[20] See, e.g., Sen., *Med*. 747, *Ag*. 17.

petis and *urges* (460), which are in fact opposites, though complementary to each other.

The fourth Sinner mentioned is Ixion, who tried to rape Juno, and for this reason is condemned to be eternally rolled (*volvitur*, 461) on a fire-wheel in the Hades. This line appears to create a symmetry with that before it, where two active verbs, *petis* and *urges*, were placed at the beginning of the line; here, in contrast, the two verbs are passive, *sequiturque fugitque* (461), and are placed at the very end of the line, as a counterbalance. This verse is characterised predominantly by a verbal construction (see also *volvitur*, 461), conveying the idea of the speed of the wheel, which has no end.

Finally, the *Belides* (Danaides) – the granddaughters of Belos, father of Danaos – are quoted more widely, with two entire lines devoted to them. As punishment for having killed their husbands the first night after their wedding (*molirique suis letum patruelibus ausae*, 462), they are condemned to *repetere* the water (*undas*, 463), which flows away from their pierced vases. As noted, the Danaides are not always present in the catalogue, and indeed are absent in the Senecan quotation. However, as we are dealing in this case with a purely mythological catalogue, this mention of the Belides appears to stem from a demand for a complete account of the Underworld.

After this description of the Sinners, Juno looks at Ixion and Sisyphus in particular, since both have a specific, peculiar role in this Ovidian occurrence: the former attempted to rape Juno, while the latter is connected with the city of Corinth, recalling the narrative situation and the reason for the goddess to enter the Underworld (464-471).

This mention of the Great Sinners in the *Metamorphoses* appears to be highly artistically refined, entirely responding to a sort of mythological-narrative pattern or style. In the next few paragraphs, we will observe how this mention differs from those of Lucretius and Seneca.

The Great Sinners (III 978-1010) occur in Lucretius within the context of a more general reflection on the fear of death (830-1094), which occupies the very last part of *De Rerum Natura* Book III, while at the same time recalling a topic previously developed in the proem of the same Book (III 31-93), thus creating a ring-composition. This fear of death finds a solid embodiment in the punishments after death that occur in the Hades, which are symbolically represented by the tortures of the Great Sinners – Tantalus, Tityos, Sisyphus and the

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Danaides.[21] In this context, they become metaphorical transpositions of human fears, passions and mistakes, which are strongly stigmatised by Lucretius.

These mythological figures thus acquire an allegorical meaning, and are used to express philosophical thought and the Epicurean doctrine. Tantalus represents a man tormented by fear of Gods and destiny; Tityos is devoured by love, and other passions; Sisyphus signifies political ambition that is never fulfilled; and the Danaides symbolise all those dissatisfied with the pleasures of life. Finally, although they are not included within the catalogue of the Great Sinners, Cerberus, Tartarus and other monsters from Acheron represent a more general fear of punishments after death, which affect guilty consciences more heavily (1011-1023).

This scorn of the legends of Acheron was not new to Epicurean teaching. In this respect, we find examples of the same treatment in Diogenes of Oenoanda (Diog. Oen., *Fr*. 16, Col. 1), Cicero's dialogues (see, e.g., *Tusc*. I 5, 10; I 21, 48; *N. D*. I 31, 86), Seneca's writings (including *Ep*. 24, 18, which will be dealt with further on) and Democritus (Democr. Diels B. 297). However, in Lucretius the mythological *exemplum* becomes a highly typical *modus operandi* for illustrating the 'proper' way to live. This allegory is fulfilled in agreement with Epicurean philosophy, according to which the only merit of mythology – held to be unreliable and false in itself – is that it can be effectively used as a means of teaching.

Below I will report lines 978-1010 of *De Rerum Natura* Book III, and then by outlining certain key points, I will demonstrate how a mythological frame can be profitably employed to aid philosophical argumentations.[22]

Atque ea nimirum quaecumque Acherunte profundo	
prodita sunt esse, in vita sunt omnia nobis.	
nec miser inpendens **magnum** timet aere **saxum**	980
Tantalus, ut famast, cassa formidine torpens;	
sed magis in vita divum metus urget inanis	
mortalis **casum**que timent quem cuique ferat fors.	
nec Tityon **volucres** ineunt Acherunte iacentem	
nec quod sub magno scrutentur pectore quicquam	985
perpetuam aetatem possunt reperire profecto.	

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[21] Ixion is absent from this catalogue, but it is highly likely that he would originally have been included (see Bailey 1947, 1162-1163). This hypothesis is confirmed by the commentary of Servius on *A*. VI 596, who with reference to the passage from Lucretius, observes: *per rotam autem ostendit negotiatores, qui semper tempestatibus turbinibusque volvuntur*. At the same time, the quotes from Sen., *Ep*. 24, 18, Verg., *A*. VI 601, Ov., *Met*. IV 465 and Tib. I 3, 73 also lead us to believe that Ixion should have been present.

[22] For the Latin text, see Bailey 1947. For a commentary, see also Ernout, Robin 1962²; for general remarks on Book III, see Heinze 1897, Krokiewicz 1921, Kenney 1971.

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quamlibet immani proiectu corporis exstet,
qui non sola novem dispessis iugera membris
optineat, sed qui terrai totius orbem,
non tamen aeternum poterit perferre dolorem          990
nec praebere cibum proprio de corpore semper.
sed Tityos nobis hic est, in amore iacentem
quem volucres lacerant atque exest anxius angor
aut alia quavis scindunt cuppedine curae.
Sisyphus in vita quoque nobis ante oculos est,       995
qui petere a populo fascis saevasque securis
imbibit et semper victus tristisque recedit.
nam petere imperium, quod inanest nec datur umquam,
atque in eo semper durum sufferre laborem,
hoc est adverso nixantem trudere monte               1000
saxum, quod tamen <e> summo iam vertice rusum
volvitur et plani raptim petit aequora campi.
deinde animi ingratam naturam pascere semper
atque explere bonis rebus satiareque numquam,
quod faciunt nobis annorum tempora, circum           1005
cum redeunt fetusque ferunt variosque lepores,
nec tamen explemur vitai fructibus umquam,
hoc, ut opinor, id est, aevo florente puellas
quod memorant laticem pertusum congerere in vas,
quod tamen expleri nulla ratione potestur.           1010
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According to Lucretius, the stories thus told in the Underworld (*quaecumque Acherunte profundo / prodita sunt esse*, 978-979), which are the subject of literary and artistic representations, are in fact a metaphorical translation of what occurs in human lives (*in vita sunt omnia nobis*, 979). Hence, if intended only as metaphors, they are reliable; otherwise, they must be considered as *fabulae*, or stories separate from reality.

The first Sinner mentioned is Tantalus, who is motivated by a *magnum … saxum* that hangs over him. However, his fear – when compared to man's fear of Gods and Chance – seems less significant (*divum metus urget inanis / mortalis casumque timent quem cuique ferat fors*, 981-982). The mention of the *saxum*, instead of the water, or the tree hanging over the Sinner, is not very typical within the previous tradition: it occurs only in Cicero (*Tusc*. III 16, 35; *Fin*. I 18, 60). With other authors, such as Ovid (see above), the *saxum* is normally associated with another Sinner, Sisyphus. However, the use of the word *saxum* is intentional and well considered in this context, as it creates a thematic and lexical link with the following lines. Indeed, the text of 982 reports that "[mortals] fear the *casum* that destiny makes occur to each one". Here, the word *casum* represents both "chance" and "fall", thus creating a two-tiered allusion both to the Sinner's literary situation and man's true condition.

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The description of Tityos is rather long (984-991), and its length may be intended as a rhetorical *amplificatio*, signifying the sheer amount of irrational passion that torments man. The account of Lucretius shares certain features with other typical descriptions of the Sinners, such as the Ovidian: the presence of the *volucres* (984),[23] the iunctura *magno ... pectore* referring to the liver or viscera (985),[24] and the wide space covered by his body (*novem dispessis iugera membris*, 989). These features, which are drawn from previous literary traditions and would be reemployed by the authors that followed (among them Vergil and Ovid), appear to have been amplified to extend them "to all anxieties which arise out of desire".[25] By stating that the Sinner is neither able to bear the pain forever, nor to offer (*praebere*, the same verb is used by Ovid; see above, 3) food from his own body for eternity (990-991), the poet is referring to the excess of man's desire, which is bound to bring disruption to humanity. Tityos – *nobis hic est*, "he is among us" (992) – symbolises a man who is laid low by a desire for love (*in amore iacentem*, 992), devoured by the *volucres* of passion.

The next Sinner to be mentioned is Sisyphus, who serves as an allegory for the vanity of political ambition. In this case, however, in contrast to the first two Sinners, the metaphorical meaning of torture is explained before the actual description of punishment in the Hades (995-999), with a sort of *hysteron proteron*. Thus, whosoever seeks political success *in vita* (in reality), *semper victus tristisque recedit*, showing not only that the quest for power is futile and vane (*imperium quod inanest*, 998), but that dealing with political tasks is also difficult and oppressive (*durum sufferre laborem*, 999). This situation is similar to that of Sisyphus, who struggles to push the stone (*saxum*, 1001) to the peak of the mountain; as soon as he reaches the top, the rock *volvitur* and rolls back (*rursum*, 1001) to the bottom of the hill (1002). From a lexical point of view, it is worth noting how the passive form *volvitur* is often used to describe the punishment of Ixion, rather than Sisyphus, as can be seen in Ovid (see above: Ov., *Met*. IV 461); by contrast, *saxum* and *rursum* (or similar words that belong to the same semantic area, such as *rediturum*[26]) are very frequent in accounts that feature Sisyphus.

The last Sinners mentioned are the Danaides, although they are not named explicitly but rather indicated through a periphrasis, *aevo florente puellas* (1008). In this case, as with Sisyphus, the philosophical explanation anticipates the description of the punishment, which consists of an eternity attempting to fill a *pertusum ... vas* (1009), from which the water continuously drains. This

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[23] See Verg., *A*. VI 597, *immanis vultur*.
[24] See Verg., *A*. VI 599-600, *sub alto / pectore*.
[25] Bailey 1947, 1160.
[26] See above: Ov., *Met*. IV 460.

punishment of the Danaides is compared to insatiability in real life: *animi ingratam naturam pascere semper / atque explere bonis rebus satiareque numquam* (1003-1004). To indicate the liquid carried by the Danaides, the word *laticem*[27] is used here, instead of the more common *aqua* (see, e.g., Ov., *Met*. IV 463; above.).

As may be noted, the occurrence of the Sinners in the Lucretian poem is handled in two different ways. On the one hand, it is very much influenced by features that occur in prior or subsequent literary and artistic traditions, to which Ovid's passage that is analysed above can be attributed. In this respect, the catalogue of the Sinners serves as a recurring *topos* in descriptions of the Underworld: this value is demonstrated by the lexical and thematic similarities outlined above. On the other hand (and simultaneously), the list of Sinners appears to have been strongly modified and enriched with various features in light of the message embedded in the passage, a philosophical message linked to the patterns that recur in philosophical writings.

The Lucretian Sinners within this passage should thus be seen not as mere fictional characters recalled from previous literary sources, but as a juxtaposition of mythological/artistic tradition and philosophical thought. Moreover, their description is also affected by the specific ways in which Lucretius deals with previous traditions to achieve his goal, namely to express Epicurean principles in the most effective, comprehensible way. The entire length of the quote is dedicated to this, with emphasis on the punishments, which represent real life.

Within the Senecan catalogue, the relevant passage occurs in *Ep*. 24, 18, in which Seneca warns Lucilius against fearing death: the Great Sinners' role is within the more general context of criticising negative thoughts on death and destiny in the Otherworld. As is the case in the passage from Lucretius, the catalogue of the Great Sinners from Seneca also serves as an *exemplum* of a philosophical argument, through which he is able to explain why man's fear of death and torture in the Afterlife is inconsistent with reality.

> [18] Non sum tam ineptus, ut Epicuream cantilenam hoc loco persequar et dicam vanos esse inferorum metus, nec Ixionem rota **volui** nec **saxum** umeris Sisyphi **trudi in adversum** nec ullius **viscera** et renasci posse **cotidie** et carpi; nemo tam puer est, ut Cerberum timeat et tenebras et larvalem habitum nudis ossibus cohaerentium. mors nos aut consumit aut exuit; emissis meliora restant onere detracto, consumptis nihil restat, bona pariter malaque summota sunt.[28]

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[27] This word recurs quite often in *De Rerum Natura*; see *TLL* VII 2. 1003.20-1004.30, s.v. "latex". In Vergil it occurs nine times, and has been addressed as "sinonimo poetico per designare liquidi nell'atto di sgorgare o essere versati, in genere acqua o vino"; see *Enc. Virg*. II 128.

[28] For the text, see Reynolds 1965. For a commentary, see Laudizi 2003.

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Seneca thus criticises, through a *praeteritio* (*non sum tam ineptus ut … persequar et dicam …*), the *inferorum metus* represented by a series of characters (among them the Great Sinners Ixion, Sisyphus and Tityos, as well as Cerberus).[29] As we know, these characters were considered canonical for a certain type of representation of the Underworld – literary or artistic representations of Hades.[30] The famous punishments occur once again, though here they are in philosophical prose instead, a context where human anxieties about death are minimised. The mythological features thus morph into a ridiculous *fabula*, a story separate from reality (as theatrical *fabulae*, for instance, were thought to be).[31] For this reason, the common elements we have seen in descriptions of the Sinners are reduced to an *exemplum* for simple men, who are shown to have a non-Stoic attitude, and thus an irrational fear of death.[32]

Accordingly, in the Underworld there is no Ixion, who *volvitur* on the wheel (a verb that also occurs in Ov., *Met*. IV 461 and in Lucr. III 1002, as noted above). There is no Sisyphus pushing the stone (*trudi in adversum*: for this *iunctura* see Lucr. III 1000-1002); there is no Tityos, with *viscera* reborn each day to be devoured (*renasci posse cotidie et carpi*). For this reason, death either *consumit* or *exuit*: if it is true that the soul survives after the physical form is deceased, then through death, humans will be freed from the weight of their bodies and survive only in their best part (*meliora*), i.e. the spiritual; if everything is bound to disappear, both *bona* and *mala* will be removed. There is thus no reason to fear death, since it represents the natural conclusion of human life: *Quid? Tu nunc primum tibi mortem imminere scisti, nunc exilium, nunc dolorem? in haec natus es …* (*Ep*. 24, 15).

In some respects, Seneca's meditation appears to be very similar to the Lucretian: both authors adapt the mythological frame of the Sinners' punishments to the message they intend to convey. At the same time, they both reemploy

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[29] Apparently, this Senecan catalogue is not complete, since it lacks Tantalus and the Danaides. Their absence, however, does not harm the argument of the paper, which aims to discern a common pattern (the catalogue of the Great Sinners) and to analyse it in terms of intertextuality. Accordingly, the Great Sinners are not to be considered singularly, but seen as a whole, as part of the catalogue which reports them, regardless of the actual number of Sinners quoted. What is important is that the quotation from the list recalls a previously employed pattern, which can be acknowledged throughout different authors and genres.

[30] For instance, this allegoric interpretation can be found in Pl., *Grg*. 525 d; see Canali 1994, 319.

[31] For Seneca's re-employment of mythological patterns in philosophical writings, see Trinacty 2014: " … Seneca will subtly shift meanings from metaphoric to literal, or from literary critical to philosophical, in the course of his prose works …" (12).

[32] Concerning the development of irrational passions in the human mind, see Inwood 2005, 23-64. For the relationship between Senecan philosophy and death see, e.g., Mann 2006, 103-122.

certain forms or expressions that recur within the literary tradition that was first drawn from the epic model of *Odyssey*'s *nekyia* (to which both Verg., *A*. VI 595 ff. and the Ovidian passage analysed above can be attributed), with the aim of criticising the *fabulae* that are told by tradition. This process leads to a sort of code-switching, from the epic genre to the philosophical. While the latter retains certain repetitive features, the catalogue changes in respect to its primary function: from a typical pattern that describes the Underworld to an *exemplum* employed to express philosophical thought.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, I have considered several outcomes of a model when translated into different genres. Beginning with one of the most significant occurrences of the catalogue of the Great Sinners in a mythological or epic context, Ovid's passage of *Metamorphoses*,[33] I then shifted my attention to the philosophical genre.

I have thus examined the catalogue of the Great Sinners as an expression of external intertextuality within three Latin authors, since the similarities in lexical choices and themes noted demonstrate that the catalogue can be considered as a repeated pattern in terms of its principal structure, although it changes certain minor features according to its context. The stress on these patterns of the catalogue, thus, may be understood as a proof, as well as a consequence, of this intertext:

> "The signifier is so charged with an excess of energy that it generates further fictions, fictions which serve to answer unanswered questions, fill 'gaps', explain perceived 'contradictions', provide sequels and allow for appropriations in view of new circumstances".[34]

At the same time, this is a demonstration of the fact that the *variatio* on the same theme (see above, 1-2) functions not only in respect to different authors (which recall each other through literary allusivity, that is a widespread *modus operandi* in classical literature), but also when applied to different literary genres.

Finally, as we have seen, the mythological core of the catalogue remains the same across various authors and genres, but is in fact varied according to the needs of both the author who employs it and the genre in which it occurs.

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[33] As noted, another very important occurrence in an epic context is Verg., *A*. VI 595-603; however, the catalogue does not appear in its entirety here either, but gives accounts only of Tityos and Ixion. See Norden 1981, ad loc.

[34] Martindale 1993, 37.

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