

## OVID, *TRISTIA* 1.2: HIGH DRAMA ON THE HIGH SEAS

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In the first poem of *Tristia* 1, Ovid claims *me mare, me uenti, me fera iactat hiems* ('the sea, the winds, the savage winter storm harass me repeatedly', 1.1.42).<sup>1</sup> This is no mere rhetorical flourish: the immediacy of the present tense becomes apparent in the second poem in the collection, which purports to be the poet's words as he faces a storm at sea. Critics tend to treat this poem as a literary exercise,<sup>2</sup> focusing upon Ovid's exploitation of epic descriptions of the sea as a vast elemental force, subject to the machinations of the gods. In particular, interest has centred upon Ovid's debt to the storms which face Aeneas and Odysseus in *Aeneid* 1, 3, and 5 and *Odyssey* 5, as well as the relationship between this poem and Ovid's own version of an 'epic' storm in the story of Ceyx and Alcyone at *Metamorphoses* 11.410–748.<sup>3</sup>

However, this poem contains much more than the sum of its various epic models: 1.2 is programmatic for the rest of *Tristia* 1, not least because it can be seen as the first 'proper' poem of the collection, given that 1.1 is addressed to Ovid's new book of poetry as he sends it to Rome, and as such, self-consciously stands apart from the rest of the book.<sup>4</sup> The second poem is more obviously integrated: it is the first of three storm-at-sea poems (1.4 and 1.11 pick up the theme), 1.10 expands upon the picture of Ovid travelling into exile by sea, providing an itinerary for the voyage, and 1.11 claims that the

<sup>1</sup> All references are to the *Tristia* unless specified otherwise. All translations are my own. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Sub-Faculty Seminar on the Sea in Oxford in early 2002. My thanks are due to Matthew Leigh for the invitation to speak, and to all those present for their stimulating suggestions. I would also like to thank Stephen Heyworth for reading and making helpful comments on earlier drafts. Any errors and infelicities are entirely my own responsibility. The AHRB of the British Academy provided financial support during the period in which the original paper was written; their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. 'Our poet knew the sea and sailing, but not as well as he knew his authors' (J.-M. Claassen, 'Ovid's Poetic Pontus', *PLLS* 6 [1990], 65–94).

<sup>3</sup> See H. B. Evans, *Publica Carmina: Ovid's Books from Exile* (Lincoln and London, 1983), 34–6, J. Gonzalez-Vazquez, 'En torno a la retractatio de un pasaje virgiliano en *Tristia* 1.2', *Latomus* 52 (1993), 75–83, and P. Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge, 2002), 285–6.

<sup>4</sup> See Hor., *C.* 1.1 and *Epist.* 1.1, dedicatory opening poems which appear distinct from the collections that they introduce.

entire book was written on Ovid's journey, often in stormy weather. In addition to storms and seafaring, *Tristia* 1.2 emphasizes – and, in some cases, introduces for the first time – many of the other thematic concerns that dominate the book, such as the anger of the gods, Ovid's wife, mythological parallels for Ovid's plight, and the necessity of reading between the lines in the *Tristia*. The most important – and overlooked – programmatic element in our poem, however, is the political aspect which recent critical studies have emphasized elsewhere in *Tristia* 1.<sup>5</sup> Here too, politics seem to play a large part; these are, after all, verses in which the foremost poet of Augustan Rome details the tribulations of his forced flight from Rome, persistently emphasizing that he is journeying into exile. In this paper, I explore the political implications of *Tristia* 1.2 by examining three important elements of the poem: (a) exploitation of the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*; (b) allusions to Ovid's previous career as a love elegist; and (c) the possibility of allegorical readings. We shall see that in *Tristia* 1.2 there are more dangers than those which the poet faces at sea.

### 1. Ovid's epic models

Critics have identified many similarities between *Tristia* 1.2 and its epic models. In this section, I pinpoint several more debts which Ovid owes to Homer and Virgil, but my focus will be upon the way in which Ovid emphasizes the differences between his journey and those found in his models, stressing the horrors of being an exile under Augustus.

*Tristia* 1.2's programmatic use of the two epic heroes who most famously wandered the seas as 'exiles' in the aftermath of the Trojan war is explicit at lines 5ff. and thereafter features throughout the entire poem, which, couched in the form of a prayer to the gods from beginning to end, can be seen as an expanded version of the prayers of Aeneas and Odysseus in the midst of the storms that they face. The poem opens *in medias res*, with Ovid praying in a storm:

*Di maris et caeli –quid enim nisi uota supersunt? –  
soluere quassatae parcite membra ratis,  
neue, precor, magni subscribite Caesaris irae!*

<sup>5</sup> See S. E. Hinds, 'Booking the Return Trip: Ovid and *Tristia* 1', *PCPhS* 31 (1985), 13–32, and S. E. Casali, 'Quaerenti plura legendum: on the Necessity of "Reading More" in Ovid's Exile Poetry', *Ramus* 26.1 (1997), 80–112.

Gods of the sea and sky<sup>6</sup> – for what remains except prayers? –  
 refrain from loosening the parts of my battered craft,  
 and do not, I pray, second the anger of great Caesar!

As early as the opening couplet, there is a hint that Ovid sees himself as a latter-day Aeneas or Odysseus: *soluere . . . membra* (2) recalls Aeneas' reaction to the storm of *Aeneid* 1 (*soluuntur frigore membra*, *Aeneid* 1.92), which is itself an adaptation of Odysseus' reaction to the storm at *Odyssey* 5.297: 'Ὀδυσσεύης λύτο γούνατα. The Virgilian phrase suggests Aeneas' physical fear, and also evokes death: in a famous piece of ring-composition, these words describe the dying Turnus at *Aeneid* 12.951. Here, the transfer of the phrase from the man facing the storm to the ship itself expresses Ovid's fears that the components of his ship will literally break up, which would of course mean death for the poet.

That Augustus is the ultimate cause of Ovid's fear that he might lose his life at sea is hardly in tune with the *princeps*' public image as a statesman who, at least after the conclusion of the civil wars, practised clemency. Yet the epic parallels introduced at lines 4ff. suggest that Augustus is far from merciful:

*saepe premente deo fert deus alter opem.*  
*Mulciber in Troiam, pro Troia stabat Apollo;* 5  
*aequa Venus Teucris, Pallas iniqua fuit.*  
*oderat Aenean propior Saturnia Turno:*  
*ille tamen Veneris numine tutus erat.*  
*saepe ferox cautum petiit Neptunus Ulixem:*  
*eripuit patruo saepe Minerua suo.* 10

Often when one god is oppressive, another brings help.  
 Mulciber stood against Troy, Apollo for Troy; 5  
 Venus was fair to the Teucrians, Pallas unfair.  
 Saturnia, closer to Turnus, hated Aeneas:  
 he however was safe thanks to the divine power of Venus.  
 Often cruel Neptune attacked prudent Ulysses:  
 Minerva often snatched him away from her uncle. 10

In particular, when Ovid mentions the enmity felt by Juno and Neptune towards Aeneas and Odysseus respectively, the reader recalls that the anger of these gods was responsible for the storms unleashed upon these epic heroes.<sup>7</sup> *irae* in line 3 hints that Augustus' anger too

<sup>6</sup> *caelum* covers 'heaven' as well as 'the sky': see J. Henderson, 'Not Wavering But Frowning: Ovid as Isopleth (*Tristia* 1 through 10)', *Ramus* 26.2 (1997), 138–71. Ovid thus appeals to all divinities, not just those who have responsibility for the storm.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Homer, *Od.* 5.287 and Virgil, *Aen.* 1.4, 35, 130, and 667–8.

has caused the storm of *Tristia* 1.2, painting him as a vengeful epic deity who implacably persecutes those who offend him.

However, Ovid acknowledges the gap between his own situation and the epic *exempla* of lines 4–10 at lines 11–12:

*et nobis aliquod, quamuis distamus ab illis,  
quid uetat irato numen adesse deo?*

And for me, although I am different from those famous men,  
what prevents some deity being here, despite a god being angry?

The primary sense is that Ovid – an elegiac poet of Augustan Rome – is no epic hero, but this couplet also invites us to look for further differences between Ovid and his models. A major difference between Ovid and Aeneas is that the latter was exiled from his homeland of Troy, but found a new home in Italy, as the reference to Turnus in line 7 implies. In contrast, Ovid has been exiled from Rome by Aeneas' descendant, Augustus. This is perhaps most clear at lines 85ff.:

*nescioquo uideam positos ut in orbe Tomitas,  
exposco facilem<sup>8</sup> per mea uota uiam.*

*seu me diligitis, tantos compescite fluctus,  
pronaque sint nostrae numina uestra rati;  
seu magis odistis, iussae me aduertite terrae:  
supplicii pars est in regione mei.*

*ferte –quid hic facio? –rapidi, mea carbasa, uenti!*

*Ausonios fines cur mea uela uident?<sup>9</sup>*

*noluit hoc Caesar: quid quem fugat ille tenetis?  
aspiciat uultus Pontica terra meos!*

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So I might see the Tomitans situated in I know not what part of the world,  
I demand an easy journey through my prayers.  
If you love me, check these huge waves,  
and let your divine powers be kindly to my craft;  
if, rather, you hate me, turn me to the ordered land:  
part of my punishment consists of this region.

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<sup>8</sup> The text of line 86 is disputed: the majority of MSS. contain *exilem facio*. However, critics rightly dispute that this can mean 'I make slender': see W. S. Watt, 'Notes on Ovid's Poems from Exile', *ICS* 13 (1988), 85–93. Hence the conjectures *en celerem facio* (Watt, op. cit., 85), *uelocem facio* (J. Diggle; recorded in J. B. Hall, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Tristia* [Stuttgart, 1995], 26), and *efficio facilem* (J. B. Hall, 'Problems in Ovid's *Tristia*', *PCPhS* Suppl. 15 [1989], 20–38; *facilem* appears as a variant already in P4). Stephen Heyworth conjectures *exposco facilem*, which best explains the vulgate, is well paralleled (cf. 1.11.22: [*gubernator*] *exposcit uotis* . . . *opem*), and makes good sense.

<sup>9</sup> I follow Hall 1995 (n. 8) in printing *uident* (the reading of several MSS.), which seems to anticipate *aspiciat* at 94, in preference to FGHPV's *uolunt* (preferred by a majority of modern editors, and which is arguably picked up by *noluit* in the next line); the play on sight seems more pointed than play on will.

Carry, swift winds, my canvases—what am I doing here?  
 Why do my sails see the borders of Ausonia?  
 Caesar did not want this: why do you detain a man he exiles?  
 Let the Pontic land see my face!

These lines provide an ironic commentary upon *Aeneid* 3.521ff., where the Trojans first catch sight of Italy, and Anchises prays:

*'di maris et terrae tempestatumque potentes,  
 ferte uiam uento facilem et spirate secundi.'*

'Gods of the sea, and the land and with power over storms,  
 bring an easy path with the wind and blow favouringly.'

At the start of the Ovidian passage, Ovid repeats the prayer of Anchises, and lines 91–2 show that his request has been only too successful, as the gods have granted winds that have carried Ovid, like Anchises, towards Italy. However, Ovid stresses that he has been exiled from Italy, in contrast to Anchises and the Trojans, for whom Italy is the desired goal. Like Anchises before him (who dies before the Trojans manage to reach their new homeland), Ovid will not reach Ausonia (the use of this strongly epic term for Italy seems a pointed reference to Ovid's exploitation of Virgil here),<sup>10</sup> but he is kept away from Italy through the will of Anchises' descendant, Augustus, who has decreed the death of exile for him.<sup>11</sup>

Another major difference between the storm in *Tristia* 1.2 and those found in Ovid's epic models can be detected in the simile of lines 47–8:

*nec leuius laterum tabulae feriuntur ab undis  
 quam graue ballistae moenia pulsat onus.*

No more lightly are the planks of the hull struck by the waves  
 than when the siege-engine's heavy burden pounds city walls.

This is a striking image of violence, suggesting that the destruction of the ship is imminent, and it is an Ovidian innovation; no such simile features in the storm descriptions of *Odyssey* 5 or *Aeneid* 1 (although Ovid had used this image, along with other military similes, in the storm of *Metamorphoses* 11; cf. *Met.* 11.507–9). It is instructive to

<sup>10</sup> *Ausonia/ -us* occurs seventeen times in the *Aeneid*, five in Ovid's *Met.*; contrast its single appearance in both Horace's *Odes* and Propertius.

<sup>11</sup> For exile as death in Ovid's exile poetry, see B. R. Nagle, *The Poetics of Exile* (Brussels, 1980), 22–32.

consider here the similes for the action of the storm which we do find in these poems. *Odyssey* 5 has two: in the first, Odysseus' raft is driven over the sea by the winds like a ball of thistles at harvest-time (*Odyssey* 5.328–30). Then at lines 368–70 we read:

ὡς δ' ἄνεμος ζαῆς ἦων θημῶνα τινάξῃ  
καρφαλέων, τὰ μὲν ἄρ τε διεσκέδασ' ἄλλυδις ἄλλῃ,  
ὡς τῆς δούρατα μακρὰ διοσκέδασ'(ε).

As a strongly-blowing wind will strew a heap of dry chaff,  
and scatter it now in one way and now in another,  
so it [sc. the wave] scattered the long timbers of the ship.

These are both similes for the effect of the winds upon Odysseus' raft, and as such are similar in context to Ovid's simile. However, Homer softens the violence of the storm by comparing it with scenes of agriculture, the activity of peacetime rather than of war. Ovid's choice of a simile from siege warfare for the waves beating on the ship seems pointed in comparison: in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, such similes remind us of the existence of a normal, everyday world, in contrast with the heroic, martial world that is primarily the theme of the poems.<sup>12</sup> Ovid's choice of simile may conversely suggest that, in the new epic age of Augustus, there is no longer any place for peace.

Violence is also a feature of the *Aeneid's* only simile within descriptions of storms at sea: at lines 148–56 of the first book, as he calms the tempest, Neptune is likened to a statesman checking a riot. This famous simile evokes Republican disturbances in Rome,<sup>13</sup> but the figure of the statesman also suggests Augustus, who had saved Rome from the political storms of the civil wars. Might *Tristia* 1.2, where Augustus, far from quelling a storm, has stirred one up, therefore cause us to re-read the end of the storm in *Aeneid* 1 in an ironic light?

Critics have concentrated upon echoes of the *Aeneid* rather than of the *Odyssey* in *Tristia* 1.2; this is perhaps unsurprising, given that Ovid owes a noticeable debt to the description of the storm that Aeneas faces in the first book of the *Aeneid* throughout his 'epic' description of a storm in this poem, and the *Aeneid* seems to offer an important parallel for *Tristia* 1 as a whole. When we read the poems of *Tristia* 1 that follow 1.2, our poem seems to start an Ovidian, elegiac 're-run'

<sup>12</sup> See *Il.* 4.452–6 (a battle is compared with the mingling of mountain rivers) or 21.22ff. (the Trojans fleeing from Achilles' murderous onslaught are like small fish fleeing a dolphin).

<sup>13</sup> See S. J. Harrison, 'Virgil on kingship: the first simile of the *Aeneid*', *PCPhS* 34 (1988), 55–9.

of the *Aeneid*: in this, the first ‘proper’ poem of the collection, Ovid faces an epic storm similar to that faced by Aeneas in the first book of the *Aeneid*. Then in 1.3, Ovid draws heavily upon *Aeneid* 2’s depiction of Aeneas’ last night in Troy to describe his own departure from Rome.<sup>14</sup> It is no surprise, then, to the reader of the *Aeneid* that *Tristia* 1.4 recalls 1.2 by describing another storm at sea,<sup>15</sup> evoking *Aeneid* 3.192 ff.,<sup>16</sup> which in turn recalls the storm of *Aeneid* 1.<sup>17</sup> When we come to *Tristia* 1.5, we might therefore expect Ovid to produce a version of *Aeneid* 4: ‘adulterous’ love in a foreign land with a ‘married’ woman. Instead, Ovid disappoints the expectations raised by the programme hinted at in 1.2, by abandoning Aeneas as a parallel, and concentrating on the similarities and differences between himself and Odysseus/Ulysses, who is by far the more minor parallel in 1.2. Ovid draws up a lengthy list of similarities and differences between himself and Odysseus at 1.5.57–84, and when we finally get a love poem in *Tristia* 1, in the sixth poem, it is addressed to Ovid’s wife, who is compared with Penelope.<sup>18</sup> This casts Ovid as both another Odysseus, in his role as her absent husband, and also another Homer, in eulogizing her:<sup>19</sup> the parallel between himself and Aeneas in 1.2 is eventually shown to be misleading.

Ovid’s ultimate preference for Odysseus over Aeneas as a model in *Tristia* 1 is suggestive in several ways. First, it implies that Ovid may, like Odysseus, eventually return home to a peaceful existence with his beloved and faithful wife (in strong contrast with the end of Aeneas’ exilic wanderings, which bring turmoil to Italy). This may contain both an ironic comment on Augustus’ view of Ovid as the promoter of adultery,<sup>20</sup> and a hint to the *princeps* about a suitable resolution to Ovid’s exile. Secondly, Ovid may also comment upon the end of the storm scene in *Odyssey* 5, where Athene eventually calms the tempest (*Od.* 5.382–7). At *Tristia* 1.10.1ff., we learn that Minerva has protected Ovid throughout his voyage; the reference here is not just to

<sup>14</sup> On this, see Evans (n. 3), 37.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. 1.4.5–10 is based upon 1.2.19–22 and 47ff.; 1.4.11ff. recalls 1.2.31–2; 1.4.17ff. repeats the idea of 1.2.87ff.

<sup>16</sup> 1.4.3 evokes *Aen.* 3.211 and 671.

<sup>17</sup> *Aen.* 3.176 recalls *Aen.* 1.86, 3.197 evokes 1.118, 3.199 echoes 1.88–9, and 3.200 draws upon 1.115: see references ad loc. with R. D. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Tertius* (Oxford, 1962).

<sup>18</sup> 1.6.22.

<sup>19</sup> 1.6.21.

<sup>20</sup> See 2.211–12, where Ovid refers to one of the two charges on which Augustus relegated him, especially at 212: *arguor obsceni doctor adulterii* (‘I am shown to be the teacher of obscene adultery’).



the goddess who championed Odysseus, but also to Minerva's role as patron of art;<sup>21</sup> as such, she naturally takes the side of poets. Given hints in *Tristia* 1.2 that Venus has also taken up Ovid's cause (see section 2), Ovid may suggest to Augustus that he has powerful gods – those who are interested in poetry – on his side.

## 2. Ovid as elegiac lover

Despite the very obvious debt that *Tristia* 1.2 owes to epic models, Ovid is also keen to emphasize his credentials as an elegiac poet of love. This is a subversive stance. Augustus notoriously exiled Ovid on *duo crimina, carmen et error* ('two charges, a poem and a mistake', *Tristia* 2.207): the *carmen* was the elegiac *Ars amatoria*, which outraged the spirit – if not the letter – of Augustus' *Leges Juliae de maritandis ordinibus* and *de adulteriis coercendis*, pro-marriage and anti-adultery legislation of 18 BC, by purporting to teach the men and women of Rome how to conduct affairs with each other. Given this background, Ovid would have been wise to steer away as much as possible from erotic elegy in his post-exilic verse in order to avoid giving the emperor further offence. Let us now explore in some detail Ovid's elegiac provocations.

Love elegy is evoked as early as the third line, a prayer to the gods of sea and sky: *neue, precor, magni subscribite Caesaris irae!* ('And do not, I pray, second the anger of great Caesar'). The suggestion that the winds might take Caesar's side against Ovid recalls the opening of Propertius 1.17, where the shipwrecked elegist claims that the winds are taking Cynthia's side against him, because he has run away from her (see in particular 1.17.5–6). The Propertian allusion implicitly and comically equates Augustus with the angry *domina* of elegy, who punishes her lover, enlisting the help of the weather, for fleeing from her – a particularly incongruous image given the predominance of epic models for Augustus in this poem,<sup>22</sup> and, more importantly, his role in making Ovid flee from Rome.

After his prayer to the gods with responsibility for the weather not to aid Augustus, Ovid considers the possibility that the gods may rather help him in his plight at lines 4–12 (quoted in section 1).

<sup>21</sup> E.g. *Fast.* 3.816, where it is implied that she favours poets, and 883–4, where the impression is confirmed.

<sup>22</sup> For Augustus equated with the elegiac *domina* elsewhere in the exile poetry, see Nagle (n. 11), 43.



Although these lines primarily locate us in the world of Troy and epic, Ovid also uses them to hint at his previous guise as a love elegist. Since lines 11–12 make it explicit that these *exempla* are provided as parallels for Ovid’s own fate, it is suggestive that each of the gods evoked as protectors (Apollo, Venus, Minerva) has strong poetic connections. In particular, Venus, the only deity to feature twice here, is not just the patron of the Trojans and the divine mother and protectress of Aeneas, but also Ovid’s champion. The connection between Venus, goddess of love, and Ovid, her poet, is clear for example from *Amores* 3.15.1, Ovid’s ‘farewell’ to first-person love elegy (*Quaere nouum uatem, tenerorum mater amorum*; ‘Seek a new bard, mother of the tender loves/ *Amores*’), from *Fasti* 4.1ff., where the pair converse, or from *Ars* 3.43ff., where Ovid claims that Venus ordered him to teach women the art of love, and relates her gift of myrtle to him. The idea that Venus might take up the cause of her poet to protect him from the anger of Augustus is particularly subversive, not least because Augustan propaganda stressed Augustus’ claim on Venus as his ancestress.

The most sustained evocation of Ovid’s past as a love elegist in this poem is found at lines 75ff., which discuss the reasons for Ovid’s present voyage. He starts by listing various motives for seafaring, which he claims, with an emphatic negative at the start of each couplet, are *not* the purpose of his own journey:

*non ego diuitias auidus sine fine parandi  
 latum mutandis mercibus aequor aro,  
 nec peto, quas quondam petii studiosus, Athenas,  
 oppida non Asiae, non loca uisa prius,  
 non ut Alexandri claram delatus ad urbem  
 delicias uideam, Nile iocose, tuas.* 80

It’s not that, keen to amass riches without limit,  
 I plough the wide sea to trade merchandise,  
 nor that I seek Athens, which I once sought for study’s purpose,  
 nor the cities of Asia, nor places seen before,<sup>23</sup>  
 nor am I brought down to the shining city of Alexander  
 in order to see your delights, playful Nile. 80

<sup>23</sup> It is standard to supply *mihi* to *non loca uisa prius* and take in apposition to *oppida non Asiae*, given the supposedly autobiographical information elsewhere that Ovid had visited Asia (cf. n. 25), and the parallel of having visited Athens before (line 77). However, *non loca uisa prius* may also refer to the popularity of Asia as a tourist destination, and allude to Tomi, Ovid’s current destination, as a place unknown to the majority of Romans.

These reasons for setting sail are worth exploring further. A variety of literary sources present greed as one of the primary motivations for seafaring,<sup>24</sup> and Ovid evokes this topos with the *avidus* merchant at 75–6, who seeks wealth *sine fine* (the phrase humorously suggests both that the merchant seeks ‘limitless wealth’, and ‘continually’ seeks wealth). The combination of the man *avidus* for wealth with the metaphor of ‘ploughing’ the sea (75–6) is found in an earlier Ovidian passage, *Amores* 2.10.33–6:

*quaerat auarus opes et, quae lassarit arando,  
aequora periuro naufragus ore bibat.  
at mihi contingat Veneris languescere motu,  
cum moriar, medium soluar et inter opus.*

Let the greedy man seek wealth, and let him drink with lying mouth  
the waters which he has worn down by ploughing.  
But may it befall me to swoon in the act of love  
when I die, and may I find release in the middle of the act.

Our passage, then, perhaps suggests that Ovid’s rejection of the life and death of a merchant is in favour of a life of, and death in, the act of love, marking him out as very much still a love elegist.

The next couplet evokes the notion of travel for study and sight-seeing, and purports to give us information about voyages that Ovid has previously undertaken: Ovid alleges that he has visited Athens for study (*studiosus*, 77), and elsewhere claims to have visited Asia, a tourist destination for wealthy Romans.<sup>25</sup> Despite the supposedly autobiographical nature of this couplet, its details and the ordering of material recall Propertius 1.6.13ff.:

*at mihi sit tanti doctas cognoscere Athenas  
atque Asiae ueteres cernere diuitias,  
ut mihi deducta faciat conuicia puppi  
Cynthia et insanis ora notet manibus . . .*

But is it worth so much to me to get to know learned Athens  
and to see the ancient riches of Asia,  
if Cynthia might accuse me when my ship is drawn down  
and mark my face with crazed hands . . .

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Hor., *Sat.* 1.4.29–32, Tib. 1.3.39–40 and Pliny, *N.H.* 2.125.

<sup>25</sup> For Ovid’s travels in the East, see *Pont.* 2.10.21ff., and *Fast.* 6.423. For the ‘grand tour’ in the East of wealthy young Romans, see Hor., *Epist.* 1.11.1ff., Cat. 46.6, and Prop. 3.22.

*doctas* . . . *Athenas* in the Propertian hexameter suggests Athens as a destination for study, and the pentameter's *cernere* sightseeing in Asia; Ovid alludes to this couplet by reflecting its order in lines 77–8. By recalling this passage, Ovid suggests both parallels and differences between himself and Propertius: Propertius did not journey to the East in order to study or see the sights because he was detained in Rome by elegiac love;<sup>26</sup> Ovid is now travelling East not for either of those reasons, but, in marked contrast with Propertius, his devotion to love elegy – in the form of the offensive *Ars amatoria* – has caused his exilic voyage.

Lines 79–80 imply travel undertaken for a slightly different purpose: not so much the pleasures of tourism as those of the flesh. Alexandria was a cultured city, but it and Egypt in general had a racy reputation in the ancient world.<sup>27</sup> Ovid's choice of vocabulary alludes to this: *delicias* can mean 'love affairs' or 'peccadilloes',<sup>28</sup> and *iocosus* has sexual overtones.<sup>29</sup> Thus Ovid may suggest that he could be going to Alexandria as a 'sex tourist'; something we might expect from the author of the *Ars amatoria*.

However, the abundance of negatives in lines 75–80 does not let us forget that Ovid's voyage is not a normal journey of the type any Roman might make, but instead, as he stresses at lines 81–2:

*quid faciles opto uentos –quis credere possit? –  
Sarmatis est tellus, quam mea uela petunt.*

The reason why I pray for favouring winds – who could believe it? –  
is the Sarmatian land, which my sails seek.

The undesirability of the place to which Ovid is travelling is stressed by the parenthetical question at the end of 81, and the contrast with lines 75–80 is clear: all of the reasons for undertaking sea voyages previously outlined were at least credible. The goal of Ovid's journey through this storm is, however, unbelievable. *Sarmatis est tellus* is the most definite information that Ovid's writing has given thus far about

<sup>26</sup> Contrast Prop. 3.21, where he claims that he is going to travel to Athens in order to escape love.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. Strabo 17.1.16ff., Juv. 15.44–6, and Mart. 4.42.1–4 (where Martial opts for a toy-boy from Egypt on the grounds that *nequitias tellus scit dare nulla magis*; 'no land knows better how to provide naughtiness').

<sup>28</sup> See 2.368, *Rem.* 154 and R. Pichon, *Index Verborum Amatoriorum* (Paris, 1902 = Hildesheim, 1966), 125–6.

<sup>29</sup> See 2.422, *Met.* 3.332, *Fast.* 5.183, 6.692, and *Ib.* 263.

the location of his exile. Ovid expands upon this in the lines that follow (83–4):

*obligor ut tangam laeui fera litora Ponti;  
quodque sit a patria tam fuga tarda, queror.*

I make vows in order to touch the savage shores of Pontus on the left;  
and I lament that my flight from my fatherland is slow.

With the first occurrence of the verb *queror* in the *Tristia* at line 84, Ovid makes a generic point with political overtones: although *queror* most often refers to erotic lament, the elegists self-consciously employ the verb to emphasize elegy's supposed origins in funeral lament,<sup>30</sup> and its use here in close conjunction with *fuga*, a synonym for 'exile',<sup>31</sup> stresses the point made at line 72 that exile spells death for Ovid. Ovid thus restores elegy to its original function by writing laments for his own death.<sup>32</sup> This shows the enormous effect that Augustus has had upon Ovid's elegies: by condemning him to the 'living death' of exile, he has changed the course of Ovid's elegies; once, Ovid's elegies had lamented his erotic circumstances,<sup>33</sup> but now he must mourn his own death.

### 3. So when you're near me, darling, can't you hear me, S.O.S.?

Allegory – a frequent feature of verse about the sea and seafaring, from archaic Greek lyric onwards<sup>34</sup> – is a persistent and unsettling presence in *Tristia* 1.2, which causes the reader to question the status of the poem: is this, as it purports to be, an autobiographical episode taken from Ovid's journey east from Rome into exile, or are there deeper and more treacherous currents?

<sup>30</sup> See *Am.* 1.1.21, 3.9.1–4, and *Her.* 1.8. See too S. E. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone* (Cambridge, 1987), 103–4, R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book 1* (Oxford, 1970) on Horace, C. 1.33.2, and C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Ars Poetica* (Cambridge, 1971) on *Hor. A. P.* 75–8.

<sup>31</sup> See 1.1.56, 1.3.50, 3.14.9, 4.10.89–90, *Pont.* 1.2.128, and *Met.* 10.232–3. Cf. also Cic., *Cat.* 2.14, Livy 5.53.5, Sen., *Med.* 948, and *TLL* 6.1.1465.74ff.

<sup>32</sup> See 1.8.50, 3.3 (*passim*) and Nagle (n. 11), 22ff.

<sup>33</sup> For *queror* in Ovid and love poetry more generally, see Pichon (n. 28), 248–9.

<sup>34</sup> See Alcaeus frs. 6 and 208 (following the numeration of D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Volume I* [Cambridge, Mass., 1990]), Archilochus 105 and 106 (following the numeration of M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* [Oxford, 1989–92]) and Nisbet and Hubbard (n. 30), on *Hor.*, C. 1.14.

Until we come to the detailed description of the storm at 13ff., the opening lines (for which, see section 1) may appear allegorical. Storms regularly act as a metaphor for powerful emotions: for example, Ovid had illustrated Althaea's mental turmoil by using the simile of a boat driven by storm winds at *Metamorphoses* 8.470–4.<sup>35</sup> More pertinently, ships are often used as a metaphor for the poetic 'craft';<sup>36</sup> Ovid had frequently employed this motif in his *Ars amatoria* to illustrate the progress of his poetry: for example, *Ars* 1 ends with an image of the safety of Ovid's ship of poetry, reflecting the accomplishment of the book so far:<sup>37</sup>

*pars superat coepti, pars est exhausta laboris.  
hic teneat nostras ancora iacta rates.*

Part of my undertaking remains, part of my task is finished.  
Let the cast anchor hold my craft here. (*Ars amatoria* 1.771–2)

In contrast with this positive image, the shattered ship as metaphor for the fate of Ovid and his poems is a recurring feature of the exile poetry,<sup>38</sup> found as early as the first poem of the *Tristia*:

*et mea cumba semel uasta percussa procella  
illum, quo laesa est, horret adire locum.*

And my skiff, once struck by a huge squall,  
shrinks from approaching that place, in which it was harmed.  
(*Tristia* 1.1.85–6)

That Ovid's ship is now 'battered' can be read as an ironic comment on Ovid's use of this metaphor in the *Ars amatoria*: in the *Ars*, Ovid had claimed that his poetic craft was making good progress, but the *Ars*, as we learn in *Tristia* 1.1, was one of the causes of his exile,<sup>39</sup> and thereafter causes Ovid's poetic craft to suffer a buffeting. An allegorical interpretation of the storm of 1.2 is also supported by the equation of the storm with the anger of Augustus at line 3, since Ovid repeatedly identifies Augustus with Jupiter in the exile poetry,<sup>40</sup> and portrays his punishment at the hands of the former as akin to Jove's

<sup>35</sup> See *Am.* 2.10.9–10 and *Sen.*, *Ag.* 138–44.

<sup>36</sup> See E. J. Kenney at N. I. Herescu, *Ovidiana* (Paris, 1958), 205–6.

<sup>37</sup> See *Ars* 2.9–10, 3.26, 99–100, 500, and 747–8.

<sup>38</sup> See 5.11.13–14, *Pont.* 2.3.58, and *Ibis* 17–18 with A. La Penna, *Ibis* (Florence, 1957), who complains that the constant use of the metaphor in the exile poetry is exasperating!

<sup>39</sup> As is clear at e.g. 1.1.67–8, and 2.207.

<sup>40</sup> See 1.1.81, K. Scott, 'Emperor Worship in Ovid', *TAPhA* 61 (1930), 43–69, and W. Warde Fowler, 'Note on Ovid, *Tr.* 3.6.8 (Augustus et Juppiter)', *CR* 29 (1915), 46–7.

thunderbolt.<sup>41</sup> He thereby equates the *princeps* with Jupiter Tonans, the weather god responsible for dispensing thunder and lightning – common elements in descriptions of storms,<sup>42</sup> which duly feature here at lines 45–6:

*ei mihi, quam celeri micuerunt nubila flamma!  
quantus ab aetherio personat axe fragor!*

Alas for me! How the clouds flash with speedy flame!  
What a huge crashing resounds from the pole above!

The reader may therefore suspect that Ovid here allegorizes his experience of exile at Augustus' hands. However, the hints of allegory in Ovid's opening soon appear teasing: at 13ff., we are treated to the spectacle of the waters spattering Ovid's mouth as he speaks, and the wind snatching away his words:

*uerba miser frustra non proficuenta perdo:  
ipsa graues spargunt ora loquentis aquae,  
terribilisque Notus iactat mea dicta, precesque  
ad quos mittuntur, non sinit ire deos.*

Poor wretch, I waste in vain words that achieve nothing:  
violent waters spatter my lips even as I speak,  
and the fearful South wind tosses about my words and does not allow  
my prayers to arrive at the gods to whom they are sent.

This may seem a strong evocation of an actual storm, but it too is open to a metaphorical reading: the reference to wind and water combining to render Ovid's words pointless may recall Catullus 70, the classic statement on the worthlessness of the words which lovers employ in pursuit of their goals:

*Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle  
quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat.  
dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,  
in uento et rapida scribere oportet aqua.*

My woman says that she would prefer to marry no one  
than me, not if Jupiter himself were to woo her.  
She says that: but what a woman says to an eager lover,  
should be written on wind and moving water.

<sup>41</sup> See 1.1.72, 81, and A. Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), 42–3.

<sup>42</sup> See *Aen.* 1.90 and *Met.* 11.496.

Any allusion to the untrustworthiness of the words of lovers must surely be felt to be troubling in the context of *Tristia* 1.2: for, as we have already seen in the second section, Ovid portrays himself as a lover in *Tristia* 1.2, a poem which proclaims his innocence of any guilt vis-à-vis his alleged offences against Augustus,<sup>43</sup> and moreover protests his devotion to the *princeps* and his house.<sup>44</sup> Ovid may therefore hint that the words of the poem as an entirety have deserved their buffeting from wind and water, since, like the words of lovers, they are far from sincere, and perhaps tell the *princeps* what he wants to hear, in pursuit of Ovid's own selfish goal: the lessening of Augustus' anger against him.

Metaphors with political implications also seem to play a part in Ovid's description of the prospect that faces him at lines 23–4:

*quocumque aspicio, nihil est, nisi pontus et aer,  
fluctibus hic tumidus, nubibus ille minax.*

In whatever direction I look, there is nothing except sea and the air above,  
the former swollen with waves, the latter threatening with clouds.

The hexameter recalls two scenes in the *Aeneid* where the hero faces a storm at sea (*caelum undique et undique pontus*;<sup>45</sup> 'sky everywhere and everywhere sea', 3.193 and *maria undique et undique caelum*; 'sea everywhere and everywhere sky', 5.9), but *quocumque aspicio* makes Ovid's plight more vivid than that of Aeneas, while acknowledging the subjectivity of his account. The description of the *pontus* as *tumidus* (24) draws attention to his epic model, since *tumidus* alludes to the 'swollen' size of epic elsewhere in Latin literature.<sup>46</sup> For example, Ovid had similarly marked the start of the 'epic' storm in the Ceyx and Alcyone episode at *Met.* 11.480–1:<sup>47</sup>

*cum mare sub noctem tumidis albescere coepit  
fluctibus . . .*

When the sea, towards night, began to grow white  
with swollen waves . . .

<sup>43</sup> Cf. 1.2.97ff.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 1.2.101ff.

<sup>45</sup> G. Luck, *P. Ovidius Naso: Tristia Band II: Kommentar* (Heidelberg, 1977) on 1.2.23, suggests that Virgil here perhaps draws upon Moschus, *Europa* 132–3.

<sup>46</sup> See Cat. 95.10, where the epic poet Antimachus is described as *tumidus*, *Met.* 1.460 (*tumidum Pythona*; 'swollen Python', in the first traditionally martial, 'epic' episode of the poem), and Hor., *Epist.* 2.2.201 (Horace is not carried *tumidis uelis*; 'on swollen sails').

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Aen.* 1.142, where Neptune soothes *tumida aequora* ('swollen waters'), marking the end of the epic storm, and *Fast.* 3.595, where Dido's sister Anna *iactatur tumidas . . . per undas* ('is tossed through the swollen [i.e. epic] waves').



The elegiac Ovid seems out of his depth in such a setting; this recalls Propertius' rejection of the swollen sea of epic at 3.9.35–6:

*non ego uelifera tumidum mare findo carina:  
tota sub exiguo flumine nostra mora est.*

I do not cleave the swollen sea with a sail-bearing ship:  
I delay continually in a small stream.

However, Ovid's brush with the vengeful Augustus, who could be one of the angry deities who populate epics (as lines 1–12 point out; see section 1), has led him to the swollen seas usually associated with that genre. Furthermore, a time will soon come when *pontus* (23) can be capitalized, as the region in which Ovid must spend his exile, where he will face suffering on land, and be forced to bear epic arms.<sup>48</sup>

The description of the *aer* as *nubibus . . . minax* can also be read as a metaphor for Ovid's clash with Augustus: for *aer* often stands for the heavens (the sphere from which we learn elsewhere in the *Tristia* that Augustus, a vengeful Jupiter, launches thunderbolts at Ovid), and *nubibus* perhaps suggests that Augustus is creating suitable weather conditions to launch yet another attack.

Lines 31–2 depict the helmsman losing control of the ship in these troubled waters:

*rector in incerto est, nec quid fugiatue petatue  
inuenit: ambiguus ars stupet ipsa malis.*

The helmsman is all at sea, and cannot find what he should flee or seek:  
his very art is stunned among unsettled evils.

This is a typical feature of descriptions of storms,<sup>49</sup> which Ovid had exploited in similar language at *Met.* 11.492–4:

*ipse pauet nec se, qui sit status, ipse fatetur  
scire ratis rector, nec quid iubeatue uetatue:  
tanta mali moles tantoque potentior arte est.*

Even the helmsman is afraid and confesses that he does not know  
the state of affairs, nor what he should order or forbid:  
so great the weight of misfortunes, and more powerful than his great skill.

<sup>48</sup> See 4.1.71ff.

<sup>49</sup> See 1.4.11–16, 1.11.21–2, *Fast.* 3.593–4, *Aen.* 1.115ff. (the helmsman of Orontes' ship is swept into the waves), 3.192ff. (especially 201–2) and 5.8ff. (especially 12ff., where Palinurus is reduced to praying to Neptune).

Despite the conventional nature of this topos, Ovid's vocabulary is suggestive in the context of his exile. The fact that the helmsman's *ars* is no use to him in such dangers and *stupet* surely calls to mind Ovid himself:<sup>50</sup> his *Ars (amatoria)* had led him to the epic storm he now faces, and he himself is stunned at this. Compare the description of his reaction to his punishment at 1.3.11–12:

*non aliter stupui, quam qui Iouis ignibus ictus  
uiuït et est uitae nescius ipse suae.*

I was dazed like when someone struck by the lightning of Jove  
lives and does not realize that he's still alive.

The failure of the helmsman's/Ovid's *ars* here is in ironic contrast to the start of the *Ars*, where Ovid had declared himself the *Tiphys* . . . *Amoris* ('the helmsman of Love', *Ars* 1.8).

An even more political reading of these lines is possible: *rector* (31) may suggest Augustus as the helmsman of the state. This metaphor for political leadership had been explored at length in *Aeneid* 5,<sup>51</sup> and Augustus (along with other leaders) is frequently referred to as *rector* (vel sim.);<sup>52</sup> contemporary art also depicts the victor of Actium in this role.<sup>53</sup> If we take *rector* here as an allusion to Augustus and the ship of state, Ovid suggests that the *princeps* has lost sight of his role in guiding Rome; this seems appropriate, given that the first book of the *Tristia* was composed in AD 8–9,<sup>54</sup> a time of great political unrest in Rome,<sup>55</sup> during which period Pliny (*N.H.* 7.147–9) suggests that the *princeps* was driven by his many and various problems to contemplate suicide.

This interpretation receives some support at lines 49–50:

<sup>50</sup> For parallels for *stupet*, cf. 1.4.11–12 and 1.11.21–2. *ambiguus* (32) points to the ambiguous (or 'double') interpretation of words at *Met.* 7.821, and may hint at such a double reference to *ars/Ars* (i.e. the *Ars amatoria*) here.

<sup>51</sup> See A. Feldherr, 'Ships of State: *Aeneid* 5 and Augustan Circus Spectacle', *CLAnt* 14.2 (1995), 245–65.

<sup>52</sup> See *CIL* 12.4333.16 and Manil. 1.916. For *gubernator* ('helmsman') used metaphorically of political leaders, see *TLL* 6.2.2348.37ff.

<sup>53</sup> A cameo of the late 30s BC depicts Octavian as a Neptune-like figure, driving a chariot over the ocean (for slippage between boats and chariots in literary depictions, see e.g. Virgil, *Aen.* 5.144ff. and Feldherr [n. 51], 245, n.1 and *passim*). For more on this, see G. K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton, 1996), 21–2.

<sup>54</sup> Allegedly during Ovid's journey into exile (so 1.11.1–2), which can be dated to late AD 8–early AD 9, from the evidence of 1.11.3–4 (Ovid claims that he was in the Adriatic in December; an emotive claim, producing pity for the poet forced to sail into relegation from Rome well past the usual sailing season).

<sup>55</sup> See Dio 56.10.1 and Suet., *Aug.* 34.2, and T. Wiedemann, 'The Political Background to Ovid's *Tristia* 2', *CQ* 25 (1975), 264–71.

*qui uenit hic fluctus, fluctus supereminet omnes:  
posterior nono est undecimoque prior.*

Here comes a wave, that overtops all the waves:  
it is after the ninth wave and before the eleventh.

Line 49 is an adaptation of the opening of a poem which depicts Alcaeus as speaking on board a ship in the midst of a storm:

τὸδ' ἀδτε κῦμα τῷ προτέρῳ νέμω  
στείχει . . .

This wave comes higher than the one before . . . (fragment 6.1–2)

Ovid's use of Alcaeus fragment 6 here deserves further consideration. First, it introduces a close literary parallel of a different type to the epic echoes usually privileged in discussions of *Tristia* 1.2: as far as we can tell, fragment 6 purports to be the poet's own words as he faces a storm at sea. The reader who notes the allusion cannot fail to recall that Alcaeus was one of the most famous literary exiles before Ovid.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, Ovid's use of Alcaeus has a strongly political dimension: Heraclitus, *Hom. Alleg.* 5 quotes the first three lines of the fragment as an example of allegory, referring to the tyranny of Myrsilus; this interpretation is supported by the occurrence of the word *μοναρχίαν* later in the fragment (6.27),<sup>57</sup> and by the mention of Myrsilus' name in a marginal comment. The interpretation of Alcaeus fragment 6 as a poem about the 'ship of state' may further be confirmed by Horace, *Odes* 1.14, which has been seen as a Roman and updated version of the archaic Greek lyric poem.<sup>58</sup> Ovid's adaptation of Alcaeus therefore suggests that the storm of *Tristia* 1.2 can be read as a political allegory. This is supported by the fact that the storm seems to be caused by Augustus' anger at lines 3 and 108. Such a reading of *Tristia* 1.2 is extremely subversive: Ovid suggests not only that the ship of state faces a storm, but that its ruler, Augustus, has caused this tempest.<sup>59</sup> It is possible that Ovid thereby introduces a new element

<sup>56</sup> See test. 6, 7, 24 in Campbell (n. 34) and Hor., *C.* 2.13.27–8, where Alcaeus' output is summarized thus: *dura nauis, dura fugae mala, dura belli* ('the harshness of seafaring/ the awful harshness of exile, the harshness of war'). Alcaeus opposed the tyrants of his homeland (cf. e.g. test. 1 in Campbell [n. 34]); might Ovid's use of him suggest that Ovid too did this?

<sup>57</sup> See D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (London, 1982), 288.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Nisbet and Hubbard (n. 30) ad loc. Stephen Heyworth suggests that *C.* 1.14 simultaneously invites and resists allegorical interpretation; Ovid may play upon this in 1.2, as I suggest above.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. A. Cucchiarelli, 'La nave e l'esilio (allegorie dell'ultimo Ovidio)', *MD* 38 (1997), 215–24.

to the topoi; for it is uncertain that the storm of renewed civil strife in Alcaeus fragment 6 is actually caused by Myrsilus as ruler of Mytilene, and it is at any rate hard to see the poet of the *Odes* writing a ‘ship of state’ allegory in which Augustus is held responsible for disturbing the *status quo*.

All of these passages, if read as metaphorical rather than literal, serve to create the impression that *Tristia* 1.2 is an allegory which depicts Augustus not as the capable ruler of Rome and patron of poets that he was keen to be seen as, but rather as an enemy of art, an epic figure whose encounter with Ovid’s elegiac craft has blown it off course, and indeed who appears to be intent upon destroying Ovid – and possibly Rome itself.

In conclusion, then, *Tristia* 1.2 is much more than simply a poem about a storm at sea, complete with epic trappings. Rather, it plays an important role in establishing politics as a major concern of *Tristia* 1, and, indeed, the letters from exile as a whole.