

## The IMPetuous Sea: Storm and Sea Imagery in Ovid's *Tristia* 1.2 and Pliny's *Epistulae* 2.17

This paper presents the juxtaposition and comparison of two letters by Ovid and Pliny the Younger, *Tristia* 1.2 and *Epistulae* 2.17 respectively. Both of these correspondents demonstrate how the authors' mutual use of marine imagery allows for a subversive, yet subtle, discussion of their fragile political situations in dialogue with their internal emotions and anxieties. Pliny, concerned with his Laurentian estate, and Ovid, concerned with his ship bound for exile at Tomis, together demonstrate how physical structures and the surrounding environments relate to the author's epistolary persona and its relationship with empire. As the two authors build the architectural details of the ekphrastic structures in question, they also construct the architectural elements of their letters and subsequently the structures of their personas. That is to say, the epistolary genre allows for authorial control of the literary constructed environment presented to the reader.

Noted by Bate (2004) and Kenney (1986), the marine-scape was often used in epic to represent the violence and impulsiveness of divine will. This usually raging sea comes into direct contrast to the measured constitution of the hero in epic. If we accept the use of the sea as a reflective antithesis to the hero as a previously established paradigm in epic, then the decision to employ that particular paradigm in an epistolary medium suggests an intentional imitation, quotation, or reference of epic structure and a further evolution of the contentious relationship between the epic hero and divine villain in Imperial literature.

In this evolution, both authors demonstrate their problematic relations with their respective emperors (Augustus and Domitian). Ovid, on his exilic voyage to Tomis, likens his experience to a journey into death (Grebe 2010) and thus becomes an Odyssean hero as he calls out to the gods to save him from one deity, in particular, whose anger, though rightly deserved,

would not abate. Pliny, though traditionally marked a co-conspirator of Domitian's crimes, harbored deep-seated apprehensions concerning the extent of his involvement, concerns which he later published in the *Epistulae* (Strunk 2013). Pliny communicates these concerns in 2.17, expressing relief at the protection afforded by his villa and its distance from the imperial seat in Rome. Employing the marine-scape paradigm established in epic, both Ovid and Pliny predicate their personae on the paradigm of hero and subsequent victim of the imperial divine and tempestuous sea.

### Bibliography

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