



Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources
(Themes)
Travel by Land and Sea



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*Sailing to Exile in
Tomis*

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate.

The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

The Teacher's Notes contain the following:

- An **Introduction** to the author and the text, although students will only be asked questions on the content of the source itself.
- **Notes** on the text to assist the teacher.
- **Suggested Questions for Comprehension, Content and Style** to be used with students.
- **Discussion** suggestions and questions for students, and overarching **Themes** which appear across more than one source.
- **Further Information and Reading** for teachers who wish to explore the topic and texts further.

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[Eduqas Latin GCSE \(2021-2023\)](#)

Information about several of the pictures in this booklet, together with useful additional material for the Theme, may be found in the support available online for **Cambridge Latin Course, Book III, Stage 24, pages 66-69.**

Ovid Sailing to Exile in Tomis (*Tristia* 1.2.1-2, 19-28 and 31-34)

Ovid describes a storm at sea as he travels into exile.

Publius Ovidius Naso (43BC – AD17) was born in Sulmo, inland from Rome, to a wealthy equestrian family. His works include the *Amores*, a collection of love poems, the *Ars Amatoria* (Art of Love) offering advice to men and women on relationships, and his most famous work, the *Metamorphoses* (a collection of myths around the theme of transformation) which was completed at about the time Ovid was suddenly banished from Rome by the emperor Augustus in 8BC. Ovid tells us that this was because of *carmen et error*: ‘a poem and a mistake’ (*Tristia* 2.207). The ‘poem’ which displeased Augustus was the *Ars Amatoria*, but scholars still debate what the mistake may have been. Ovid spent the rest of his days in exile at Tomis on the Black Sea (modern Romania), where he wrote the *Tristia* (laments), poems about his exile and the barbarity of his new surroundings, and *Epistulae ex Ponto* (letters from the Black Sea), letters to his friends and family urging them to advocate for his return to Rome. His wish was never granted. However, Rome city council finally revoked his exile in 2017, 2,000 years after Ovid’s death.

Some of Ovid’s journey east from Rome to Tomis was undertaken by ship and he tells us that he wrote the first volume of the *Tristia*, which includes the poem in this prescription, during the journey (*Tristia* 1.11). The lines in this extract are taken from poem 1.2 of the *Tristia* (1-2, 19-28 and 31-34) and describe a storm at sea. The tumult of the storm and the many contrasting extremes of height and depth and direction echo Ovid’s emotions as he is driven unwillingly between the poles of Rome and its highly developed culture and the depths of wildness of Tomis and its ‘barbaric’ Getae tribe.

This text is unadapted.

Notes

metre: elegiac couplets

- 1 The poem begins *in media res*, with the narrator, Ovid himself, calling on the gods to save him. The reader is suddenly thrust into the boat and the storm with him and experiences momentary disorientation. Ovid casts this poem as a prayer to the gods because, he implies, he has no other hope of rescue left than them.

With **maris** and **caeli** Ovid introduces the first of many extreme contrasts that convey the churn of his emotions and also suggest his perception of the extremes between which he is moving, extremes such as levels of cultural development, climate and the familiar and the unknown. It is also the gods of the sea and the sky who are most appropriate to help calm the violence of the water and the storm in the heavens, in which they themselves are likely to have had a part.

The *rhetorical question* '**quid enim nisi vota supersunt?**' tells us that he has no hope of rescue from his situation but through prayers. This may be understood to refer to the hopelessness of his situation in being exiled from Rome as well as to the real danger of the storm and travel at sea that he overtly describes.

- 2 **solvere quassatae parcite membra ratis**: the translation is: **parcite solvere** (please do not break up) **membra** (the limbs) **ratis quassatae** (of this battered ship). The *hyperbaton* (unusual positioning of words), with the separation of **parcite** from its infinitive, **solvere**, and **ratis** from its adjective **quassatae**, all suggest the confusion of the situation.

membra may mean the framework of a ship or the limbs of a body. Delaying **ratis** to the end of the line sustains the ambiguity that it may be Ovid himself, rather than the ship, that is in danger of being broken.

solvere ... parcite, a plural imperative addressed to the gods mentioned in line 1. Ovid asks the gods not to break up the ship, suggesting that it is the gods themselves controlling the storm and threatening to break it up.

- 3 **me miserum**: for the first time, Ovid brings attention to his own presence in the boat and his own feelings of wretchedness. The repeated m sounds through the line pick out an uneven rhythm suggesting the patter of waves breaking.

quanti montes volvuntur aquarum: translation is **quanti montes** (what great mountains) **aquarum** (of water) **volvuntur** (are stirred up).

The *hyperbaton* (separation of words usually placed together) of **montes ... aquarum**, with the positioning of **volvuntur** between them, suggests the turmoil and disorder of the water.

- 4 **iam iam** the repetition of the staccato words produces a feeling of immediacy and panic suggesting that the poet is urgently pointing out the imminent reaching of the highest stars by the mountainous waves. The *apostrophe* (speaking directly to the reader) of **putes** draws the reader into the scene looking up with the poet and foreseeing what is about to happen. The heaviness of the first half of the line (because of its many long syllables) suggests the watchers holding their breath as they look up.

3-4 this pair of lines (couplet) emphasises the height of waves. Describing the waves as **montes**, Ovid begins the recurring use of *hyperbole* throughout this extract, perhaps exaggerating physical extremes to match the extremes of his own emotions, for which the storm may be seen as a metaphor.

5 **quantae diducto subsidunt aequore valles!** the translation is **quantae ...vales** (what great valleys) **subsidunt** (sink down) **aequore diducto** (with the sea having been divided/torn apart).

The word order disorientates the reader and keeps them waiting to see what it is that has sunk down. The word **valles** finally appears in an emphatic position at the end of the line and is another example of *hyperbole* exaggerating the vertiginous depths between the waves. **aequore diducto** is an ablative absolute construction.

6 In Greek mythology, which would have been very familiar to a Roman audience, **Tartarus** was the underworld where wicked souls were punished. Here, for the sake of the metre, the variant **Tartara** (neuter plural) is used (**Tartarum** followed by the leading consonant of **nigra** would not have given the dactyl – one long syllable followed by two short – required at this position in the second line of an elegiac couplet). Now the reader's eyes are drawn down to the dark (**niger**) depths below even the bottom of the sea, another extreme example of *hyperbole*. Again, all the syllables in the first half of the line are spondees so that things move slowly before crashing on like a breaking wave with the following dactyls. **putes** again brings the reader into the picture looking down into the depths seeing how far they will sink.

5-6 this couplet echoes the structure of lines 3 and 4 but inverts their emphasis on height to focus on the depth to which the water sinks. The *juxtaposition* of these two pairs of lines makes an enormously exaggerated and dizzying contrast between height and depth.

7-8 **hic** refers to **pontus**, **ille** to **aer**. The word order of the two halves of the second line (ablative of means, pronoun, adjective) wrap the sea and the mist within the cause (**fluctibus** or **nubibus**) and effect (**tumidus** or **minax**) of their current conditions emphasising the overwhelming and ubiquitous presence of water below and above.

9 as in line 3, the letter m sound is repeated throughout the line (*assonance*), here suggesting the repetitive roaring of breaking waves.

10 **unda maris** is delayed till the end of the line sustaining briefly the possibility that it is a person, perhaps the poet, who is torn between two masters.

11-12 these two lines explain the conflicting winds driving the wave of line 10 in opposite directions so that it that does not know which of them to obey, another pair of conflicting forces acting on the sea, perhaps as a *metaphor* for the forces driving the poet from Rome while he strives to resist them. **Eurus** blows from the East, the direction of the rising sun and **Zephyrus** from the West, the direction in which the sun sets.

14 Ovid's word order has **ars stupet ipsa** surrounded by **ambiguus ... malis** so that, in written form, the bewildered skill of the helmsman is captured within the conflicting evils, a striking image of inescapable confusion.

13-14 The helmsman's skill in steering the boat is essential to its safety so these two lines emphasise the terrible danger threatening the craft and its passengers. **ars** may also be taken as a *metaphor* for the poet's skill. Throughout the *Tristia* Ovid frequently claims that his skill as a poet has been weakened by his exile. A further reading takes the **rector** as a *metaphor* for Augustus who, Ovid may be suggesting, is not able to steer the ship of state safely.

15-16 the final two lines seem to show Ovid dying with the waves smashing over over his face. The poet uses (as throughout this extract) the present tense to make it seem the action is happening in the moment as the reader looks on. Ovid may be equating his exile with death as he loses those things that have made his life worth living. It is common to use a plural noun instead of singular in poetry without any difference in meaning but **vultus ... meos** may suggest that Ovid sees himself looking in two directions (back to Rome and forward to Tomis), or even having two personae, as he leaves his old Rome-dwelling self behind to become an exile.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each line or couplet, asking leading questions so that the class comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

lines 1-2:

- To whom is Ovid calling for help? Why? Has he any other way of getting help?
- What is he afraid will happen to the ship? Who does Ovid imply might break up the ship? What two meanings might 'membra' have? Do you think Ovid is going to survive this storm at sea? Why?

lines 3-4:

- How does Ovid describe himself here? What are the mountains made of? What is happening to the water? What shape do you think the waves make? How high do you think the waves are?
- Why do you think Ovid repeats 'iam'? What does he say you might think the waves would touch? Which stars might they touch? Do you think this could really happen? Do you think Ovid is exaggerating about the height of the waves?

lines 5-6:

- Why are the valleys sinking down between the waves? Who might be dividing the waters?
- Why do you think Ovid repeats 'iam' again here? What is Tartarus? What does Ovid say you might think would touch Tartarus? What colour does Ovid say Tartarus is? Do you think the valleys could sink down so low? How deep do you think the troughs between the waves are? Why do you think Ovid is exaggerating?

lines 7-8:

- What can Ovid see when he looks around? Can he see anything else besides sea and mist?
- What is it that is swollen with waves? What is it that is threatening the clouds?

lines 9:

- Between what two elements are the winds roaring? What are they roaring with? How loud do you think the winds are?

line 10:

- What is it that does not know which master to obey? What might be the different masters that the wave could choose between?

lines 11-12:

- What colour is **purpureus**? Which wind is coming from the direction of the dark red sunrise? Is the wind growing stronger or weaker?
- Which wind was sent by the late evening? What effect do you think the two winds would have on the waves? Do you think these winds are the masters Ovid mentioned earlier?

lines 13-14:

- What is the helm of a boat? Where is the rudder of a boat? What do you think a helmsman might do? What does the English expression 'at the helm' mean? How does this helmsman feel? What can he not find? Is he being successful as a helmsman at the moment?
- What is it that has baffled the skill of the helmsman? What might these conflicting evils be? Do you think Ovid himself might also be baffled by conflicting evils? What was Ovid's skill? How might his exile affect that?

lines 15-16:

- What does Ovid say is going to happen to him? Why do you think he says that **we** are dying? Is there any hope of safety?
- What happens while the poet is speaking? Why might Ovid say faces instead of face? Do you think that Ovid really dies at this point? Why might he be exaggerating?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-2) How does Ovid draw the reader into his situation through his style of writing?
2. (lines 3-6)? How does Ovid, by his use of structure and vocabulary convey the extreme nature of the storm?
3. (lines 7-10) How does the poet, through his style, emphasise the overwhelming nature of the storm?
4. (lines 9-12) How does the poet by the content of these lines emphasise the idea of contrasting forces at work in the storm?
5. (lines 13-14) How does the poet, by his style convey the ideas of confusion and perplexity?
6. (lines 15-16) How does Ovid, through his style, convey the hopelessness of his situation?

Discussion

Themes: travel by ship, the dangers and difficulties of travel

This poem describes very vividly the perils of travelling by sea at the mercy of violent weather. In poetry (including previous epics by Virgil and Homer) travellers are often seen to be threatened by the gods who control the storms and who exert their power over humans, punishing them for hubris or disobeying the gods' will.

Ovid: the Poet and the Emperor (only clips from the original may be available at this time)
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09g0l2q>

General questions on the passage and theme

1. What role are the gods given in controlling the weather and the fate of the ship and its passengers?
2. Describe the different forces that threaten the ship.
3. What might be expected to happen to a ship in such a storm? What might be expected to happen to its passengers?
4. Do you think that this poem describes dangers for Ovid beyond the storm itself?
5. Why do you think the effects of the storm on the sea and on the people in the ship are exaggerated?
6. Ovid in exile has been called a 'poet between two worlds'. How is that situation reflected in the content and style of this extract?

Further Information and Reading

The dangers of sailing during bad weather can be inferred from the practice of restricting times during which sailing took place in certain part of the Mediterranean. See the *Introduction* to the Teacher Notes and the *Cambridge Latin Course Book III*, pages 68 to 69 for a brief introduction to travel by sea.

Further information about ships, shipbuilding and sailing in the ancient Mediterranean:
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/shipwrecks/0/steps/7964>

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Gareth Williams, "Ovid's Exile Poetry: Tristia, Epistulae ex Ponto and Ibis" in Philip Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp.253-245