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Dire Straits: The Perils of Writing the Early Modern English Coastline from Leland to Milton

Elizabeth Jane Bellamy

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England became a centrally important maritime power in the early modern period, and its writers – acutely aware of their inhabiting an island – often depicted the coastline as a major topic of their works. However, early modern English versifiers had to reconcile this reality with the classical tradition, in which the British Isles were seen as culturally remote compared to the centrally important Mediterranean of antiquity. This was a struggle for writers not only because they used the classical tradition to legitimate their authority, but also because this image dominated cognitive maps of the oceanic world.

As the first study of coastlines and early modern English literature, *Dire Straits* investigates the tensions of the classical tradition's isolation of the British Isles from the domain of poetry. By illustrating how early modern English writers created their works in the context of a longstanding cultural inheritance from antiquity, Elizabeth Jane Bellamy offers a new approach to the history of early modern cartography and its influences on literature.

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