

The isolated hero vs. the deserted heroine or Is there a Female Robinsonade in Ancient Literature?

Aeschylus fr. 250 Henderson (Philoctetes speaking?)

ἔνθ' οὔτε μίμνειν ἄνεμος οὔτ' ἐκπλεῖν ἔῃ

“where the wind allows one neither to remain nor to sail out”

T1 Schnabel 1731 (*Preface to the Readers*): the imaginative readers address the author:

“Can I trust you that your stories do not contain mere fictional poetry, Lucian-like pranks, or snippets that were cobbled together from *Robinsonades* and the like?” [*“Lucianische Spaas=Streiche, zusammen geraspelte Robinsonaden-Späne und dergleichen”*]

T2 Modern definition of the term ‘Robinsonade’:

Oxford English Dictionary, vol. 14, 2nd ed. (1989), p. 6: “**Robinsonade** [...] ad[aption] G[erman] *Robinsonade* (coined by J. G. Schnabel, *Die Insel Felsenburg* (1731), Preface): [...] A novel with a subject similar to that of *Robinson Crusoe*; a story about shipwreck on a desert island.”

T3 C. Fisher, Innovation and Imitation in the Eighteenth-Century Robinsonade

(in: RICHETTI 2018, *The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe*, p. 101):

“The Robinsonade became so popular in the eighteenth century because it fulfilled a number of expectations for the growing reading public. The main character had to live by his or her wits, working indefatigably to survive in a world in which they were the agents of their own survival. Despite Crusoe’s self-sufficiency, with which a reader might identify, there was always a tension with the environment and a sense that isolation was cruel and unusual. Crusoe and his successors in the genre would learn to make the best of that bad situation, but would always long for a more recognizable, more connected, more comforting reality. [Crusoe] controls what he can of his environment”.

T4 James Joyce called Robinson Crusoe “the true prototype of the British colonist” [JOYCE 1964].

“**The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe**, who, cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella-maker, and a clergyman. **He is the true prototype of the British colonist**, as Friday [...] is the symbol of the subject races.”

A) Sophocles, *Philoctetes* (transl. H. Lloyd-Jones)

T5 Dio or. 52.15 (= Eur. *Philoct. Test.* ivd COLLARD/CROPP): comparison of the three *Philoctetes* plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides:

“Sophocles composed his chorus not from the inhabitants (of Lemnos), as did Aeschylus and Euripides, but from those who sailed on shipboard with Odysseus and Neoptolemus”

T6 Soph. *Philoct.* 676-718 (stasimon): the chorus of sailors on Philoctetes’ *conditio Robinsoniana*

{CHORUS} “there is none other among mortals whom I have heard of or have looked upon who has met with a more hateful destiny than this man [...]. But at this I wonder, how, how did he listen alone to the waves that beat the shore around him, and endure a life so full of tears? Where he was alone, having no one walking near him, nor any inhabitant, a neighbor in his troubles, beside whom he could have lamented the sickness that cruelly devoured him, with groans inviting a response [...]. He never gathered food from the sowing of the sacred earth, never the other things that we men who earn our living dispose of, except when with the winged arrows from his swift-shooting bow he could acquire the food he needed. Poor soul, who for ten whole years lacked even the pleasure of the wine cup”.

T7 Soph. *Philoct.* 300-304: topography of the island

<p>Φέρ', ὦ τέκνον, νῦν καὶ τὸ τῆς νήσου μάθηρ. 300 Ταύτη πελάζει ναυβάτης οὐδεὶς ἐκῶν· οὐ γάρ τις ὄρμος ἔστιν, οὐδ' ὅποι πλέων ἐξεμπολήσει κέρδος ἢ ξενώσεται. Οὐκ ἐνθάδ' οἱ πλοῖ τοῖσι σῶφροσιν βροτῶν.</p>	<p>Listen, my son, now you must learn about the island! No sailor comes near here if he can help it; for there is no harbour, or anywhere where one can sail and trade, or get hospitality. This is not a place for men of sense to sail to.</p>
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T8 Soph. *Philoct.* 219-227, 261-278: Philoctetes’ ἐρημία: loneliness, wildness & madness

{PHILOCTETES} “Hail, strangers (ξένοι)! Who are you that with the seaman’s oar have put in to this land that lacks anchorages and inhabitants (οὐτ’ εὖορμον οὐτ’ οἰκουμένην)? [...] But I would like to hear a voice (φωνῆς δ’ ἀκούσαι βούλομαι)! Do not shrink from me in fear and be repelled at my wild state (ἀπηγριωμένον), but take pity on an unhappy man, alone (μόνον), afflicted like this without a companion or a friend (ἔρημον ὧδε κάφιλον), and speak, if indeed you have come as friends (ὡς φίλοι)! But answer me (Ἄλλ’ ἀνταμείψασθ’)! [...] I am [...] the son of Poetas, Philoctetes, whom the two generals [...] despicably threw out into this desolation (ἔρημον), perishing from a cruel (ἀγρία) malady, struck by the cruel (ἀγρίῳ) sting of the man-slaying serpent. In company with that, my son, they left me here desolate (ῥχοντ’ ἔρημον) when they went off [...]. Gladly then they saw me sleeping on the shore in a rocky cavern after much tossing from the waves, and went off, leaving me (λιπόντες ῥχονθ’)! [...]! What sort of an awakening from sleep do you think was mine, my son, when they were gone? What tears do you imagine I shed (ἐκδακρῦσαι), what sorrows I lamented (ἀπομιῶξαι)?”

T9 Soph. *Philoct.* 285-299: Philoctetes’ strategies to survive

<p>Ὁ μὲν χρόνος δὴ διὰ χρόνου προῦβαινέ μοι, 285 κάδει τι βαιᾶ τῆδ' ὑπὸ στέγη μόνον διακονεῖσθαι· γαστρὶ μὲν τὰ σύμφορα τόξον τόδ' ἐξηύρισκε, τὰς ὑποπτέρους βάλλον πελείας· πρὸς δὲ τοῦθ' ὁ μοι βάλοι νευροσπαδῆς ἄτρακτος, αὐτὸς ἂν τάλας 290 εἰλυόμεν, δύστηνον ἐξέλκων πόδα, πρὸς τοῦτ' ἂν· εἴ τ' ἔδει τι καὶ ποτὸν λαβεῖν, καὶ που πάγου χυθέντος, οἷα χεῖματι, ξύλον τι θραῦσαι, ταῦτ' ἂν ἐξέρπων τάλας</p>	<p>So one period of time after another went by for me, and I had to provide for myself alone under this poor roof. My stomach’s needs this bow found for me, shooting doves on the wing; and up to what the shaft sped by the bowstring shot for me, alone in my misery I would crawl, dragging my wretched foot, right up to that. And if I had to get some drink also, or perhaps to cut some wood, when ice was on the ground, as it is in winter, I would struggle along in misery and manage it; and then there would be no fire! But by rubbing one stone painfully against another I made the</p>
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<p>ἐμμηχανώμην· εἶτα πῦρ ἄν οὐ παρήν, ἀλλ' ἐν πέτροισι πέτρον ἐκτρίβων, μόλις ἔφην' ἄφαντον φῶς, ὃ καὶ σφίξει μ' αἰεὶ. Οἰκουμένη γὰρ οὖν στέγη πυρὸς μέτα πάντ' ἐκπορίζει πλὴν τὸ μὴ νοσεῖν ἐμέ.</p>	295	<p>hidden spark flash out, the thing that has always been my preservation. So, you see, the dwelling I live in, together with fire, provides everything, except a cure for my disease.</p>
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T10 Soph. *Philoct.* 936-940 and 952-958: dialogue with nature

{PHILOCTETES} “O harbours, O promontories, O society of mountain beasts, O jagged rocks, to you, for I know no other I can speak to, to my accustomed companions I address my lament [...]! O rock with double entrance, once again I shall enter you stripped, without the means of living; but I shall wither away alone in this bivouac, never killing a winged bird or a mountain beast with this bow, but I myself shall die and provide food for those off whom I used to live, and those I used to hunt will now hunt me!”

T11 Soph. *Philoct.* 1452-1460: farewell from the island

{PHILOCTETES} “Come now, as I depart I will call upon the land! Farewell, home that shared my watches, and water nymphs of the meadows, and strong sound of sea beating on the promontory, where often my head was drenched inside my cave by the battering of the wind, and often the mountain of Hermes brought back to me a groan answering (παρέπεμψεν ἔμοι στόνον ἀντίτυπον) my voice (φωνῆς) as the storm assailed me!”

B) Catullus’ *Ariadne on Naxos: carmen 64* (transl. F. W. Cornish)

T12 Cat. *carm.* 64.56-62, 124-133, 160-168: Ariadne’s madness & passion

“... now first wakened from treacherous sleep she sees herself, poor wretch, deserted on the lonely sand. Meanwhile the youth flies and strikes the waters with his oars, leaving unfulfilled his empty pledges to the gusty storm; at whom afar from the weedy beach with streaming eyes the daughter of Minos, **like a marble figure of a bacchanal, looks forth, alas!** looks forth tempest-tost with great tides of passion. [...] Often **in the madness of her burning heart** they say that she uttered piercing cries from her inmost breast; and now would she sadly climb the rugged mountains, thence to strain her eyes over the waste of ocean-tide; now run out to meet the waters of the rippling brine [...]. And thus said she mournfully in her last laments, uttering chilly sobs with tearful face: “Thus then, having borne me afar from my father’s home, thus hast thou left me, faithless, faithless Theseus [...]? And for this I shall be given to beasts and birds to tear as a prey; my corpse shall have no sepulture, shall be sprinkled with no earth. [...] [Y]et though couldst have led me into thy dwellings **to serve thee as a slave with labour of love** [...]. But why should I, distracted with woe, **cry in vain to the senseless airs—the airs that are endowed with no feeling, and can neither hear nor return the messages of my voice?** He meanwhile is now tossing almost in mid-sea, and no human being is seen on the waste and weedy shore.”

C) Ovid’s *Ariadne on Naxos – Heroides 10* (transl. G. Showerman)

T13 Ov. *Her.* 10.21-30, 47-50: humanization of nature & Ariadne’s metamorphosis into a natural object

“And all the while I cried out “Theseus!” along the entire shore, and the hollow rocks sent back your name to me; **as often as I called out for you, so often did the place itself call out your name** (*et quotiens ego te, totiens locus ipse vocabat*). The very place felt the will to aid me in my woe. There was a mountain, with bushes rising here and there upon its top; a cliff hangs over from it, gnawed into by deep-sounding waves. I climb its slope—my spirit gave me strength—and thus with prospect broad I scan the billowy deep. From there—for I found the winds cruel, too—I beheld your sails stretched full by the headlong southern gale. [...] Alone, with hair loose flying, I have either roamed about, **like to a Bacchant roused by the Ogygian god**, or, looking out upon the sea, I have sat all chilled upon the rock, **as much a stone myself as was the stone I sat upon** (*quamque lapis sedes, tam lapis ipsa fui*).

T14 Ov. Her. 10.51-66: coping strategies to overcome isolation

“Oft do I come again to the couch that once received us both, but was fated never to show us together again, and touch the imprint left by you—’tis all I can in place of you!—and the stuffs that once grew warm beneath your limbs. I lay me down upon my face, bedew the bed with pouring tears, and cry aloud: “We were two who pressed thee—give back two! We came to thee both together; why do we not depart the same? [...] What am I to do? [...] Of human traces I see none; of cattle, none. On every side the land is girt by sea; nowhere a sailor, no craft to make its way over the dubious paths. [...] My father’s realm forbids me to approach. Grant I do glide with fortunate keel over peaceful seas, that Aeolus tempers the winds—I still shall be an exile!”

T15 Ov. Her. 10.83-98: dangers & adventures on the island

<i>iam iam venturos aut hac aut suspicor illac, qui lanient avido viscera dente, lupos. quis scit an et fulvos tellus alat ista leones? 10.85 forsitan et saevas tigridas insula habet. et freta dicuntur magnas expellere phocas! quis vetat et gladios per latus ire meum? Tantum ne religer dura captiva catena, neve traham serva grandia pensa manu, 10.90 cui pater est Minos, cui mater filia Phoebi, quodque magis memini, quae tibi pacta fui! [...] destitutor rabidis praeda cibusque feris; 10.96 sive colunt habitantque viri, diffidimus illis – externos didici laesa timere viros.</i>	Each moment, now here, now there, I look to see wolves rush on me, to rend my vitals with their greedy fangs. Who knows but that this shore breeds, too, the tawny lion ? Perchance the island harbours the savage tiger as well. They say, too, that the waters of the deep cast up the mighty seal ! And who is to keep the swords of men from piercing my side? But I care not, if I am but not left captive in hard bonds, and not compelled to spin the long task with servile hand—I, whose father is Minos, whose mother the child of Phoebus, and who [...] was promised bride to you! [...] I am left helpless, a prey to the maws of ravening beasts; and if men dwell in the place and keep it, I put no trust in them—my hurts have taught me fear of stranger-men.
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T16 Blackwell (1985) 19 on modern female Robinsonades

“The women’s islands are more anarchistic and communal – a world where women are rich, strong, and free. The establishment of a [...] counterworld without coercion or violence seems thus to be a goal of these Robinsonade authors. [...] This literature provides escape from women’s severely restricted role in middle-European society of the eighteenth century [...].”

T17 Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *Herland*, New York 1979 (written 1915), p. 18-19

“Here was evidently a people highly skilled, efficient, caring for their country as a florist cares for his costliest orchids. Under the soft brilliant blue of that clear sky, in the pleasant shade of those endless rows of trees, we walked unharmed, the placid silence broken only by the birds. [...] Everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all.”

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