

## The Isolated Hero vs. the Deserted Heroine or Is There a Female Robinsonade in Ancient Literature?

This paper compares the theme of the isolated hero in Sophocles' play *Philoctetes* with that of the deserted heroine Ariadne in the work of Catullus and Ovid, and proposes to categorize both as early examples of what would later be called, after the character Robinson Crusoe, a "robinsonade" [Reid & Reid 2015]. This generic affiliation allows us to ask whether there are fundamental differences between men's and women's experiences of being cast away on an island, and whether their coping skills in this situation are specifically gendered.

Only a decade after the publication of Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 [Richetti 2018], the travelogue had found such a multitude of imitators that the German writer Johann G. Schnabel coined the term 'robinsonade' in his own 1731 castaway narrative [Schnabel 2017]. The popularity of these adventure narratives coincided with the expansion of European sea travel and colonization during the 18<sup>th</sup> century; in fact, James Joyce called Robinson "the true prototype of the British colonist" [Joyce 1964].

Robinsonades usually involved manly adventures, and the female, if present at all, remained a subplot on the male's island: we grasp the theme of the 'isolated hero' [Barnard 2015], mastering various hardships and thus proving his masculinity, already in Sophocles' play *Philoctetes* (first performed in 409 BC) where the protagonist is marooned on the uninhabited island of Lemnos.

Between 1720 and 1800, however, several female castaways appeared on the literary scene [Blackwell 1985]: in 1767, Unca Eliza Wickfield reported her story of living in the hostile wilderness (*The Female American*), and in 1837, Lucy Ford published her *Female Robinson*

*Crusoe. A Tale of the American Wilderness*. In both books, the heroines escape from conventional hierarchies and establish an egalitarian world without violence.

Are there female robinsonades in antiquity? The figure of Ariadne on Naxos represents the archetypal ‘deserted heroine’ who is left behind on a secluded island [Webster 1966]. It is my aim in this paper to analyze how both Philoctetes (in Soph. *Philoct.* Vv. 254–316, 676–718, 927–962, 1081–1162, 1452–1460, and in the fragmentary plays by Aeschylus and Euripides) and Ariadne (in Cat. *carm.* 64.52–75, 116–201, Ovid, *Her.* 10, and Euripides’ lost *Theseus*) deal with the forced isolation in their monologues and laments. Which coping strategies do these humans develop to survive the liminal solitude of the island? Are there significant differences between Philoctetes and Ariadne? Can we consider Ariadne’s tale an ancient female robinsonade?

#### Bibliography

- Barnard, Scott A. 2015: “The Isolated Hero: *Papillon* (1973), *Cast Away* (2000), and the Myth of *Philoctetes*,” in: Monica S. Cyrino & Meredith E. Safran (eds.), *Classical Myth on Screen*, London, pp. 27–36.
- Blackwell, Jeannine 1985: “An Island of Her Own: Heroines of the German Robinsonades from 1720 to 1800.: *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 58/1, pp. 5–26.
- Joyce, James. 1964: “Daniel Defoe, transl. from Italian manuscript and edited by Joseph Prescott.” *Buffalo Studies*, Vol. 1., pp. 24–25.
- Reid, Susan and David S Reid 2015: *Men as Islands: Robinsonades from Sophocles to Margaret Atwood*. Palo Alto, CA.
- Richetti, John 2018: (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe*, Cambridge

Schnabel 2017: Johann G. Schnabel, Palisades Island: A Translation of *Insel Felsenburg* (1731)

by Johann G. Schnabel, transl. by John W. Van Cleve, Mellen, WI 2017.

Webster 1966: Thomas B. L. Webster, The Myth of Ariadne from Homer to Catullus, *Greece &*

*Rome*, Vol. 13/1, 1966, pp. 22–31.