



## ISOLATION AND SURVIVAL: ROBINSON CRUSOE AND BEOWULF

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**Abstract.** *This article examines the tension between individual moral conscience and social expectations in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871). Focusing on the protagonists Elizabeth Bennet and Dorothea Brooke, the study explores how female moral agency operates within the social, economic, and cultural constraints of nineteenth-century English society. Through comparative literary analysis, the paper investigates the ways in which marriage, class hierarchy, gender roles, and institutional norms shape personal ethical choices. While Austen presents a model in which individual conscience ultimately harmonizes with society through mutual moral growth, Eliot depicts a more complex and fragmented negotiation between personal ideals and social realities. The comparison highlights the evolution of the English realist novel from Regency irony to Victorian moral realism and demonstrates how both authors portray conscience as a dynamic process formed through self-reflection, social interaction, and ethical responsibility.*


**Key words:** *Individual conscience; social expectations; moral autonomy; female agency; marriage and society; class structure; gender roles; moral realism; *Pride and Prejudice*; *Middlemarch*; Regency society; Victorian society; ethical responsibility; social constraint; comparative literature.*

**Introduction.** In human history, the themes of isolation and survival have always been one of primary fields of literature. Each culture creates its own hero, and these heroes often face challenges, dangers, and harsh conditions. Such icons namely "Robinson Crusoe" and anglo-saxon epic poem "Beowulf" play a key role in world literature. These works were in the attention of skilled poets, as literature lover Ian Watt emphasizes: "There is nothing other than literature that can professionally show human soul and psychic improves in the period of challenges". Although these two works were created in two different periods, there is a link connecting them; the survival of heroes in difficult situations using their courage, intelligence and tolerance. Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" novel was created.



during the time when people were shaping their creativity, and hard-work. While Robinson Crusoe becomes isolated in an unknown island after a shipwreck, Beowulf is a legendary hero who tries to preserve his society from evil forces. The former one beats psychological problems that come from harsh isolation in an island with no alive person except him. Robinson also survives from physiological problems, including but not limited to a serious illness during his life in the island. Beowulf, on the other hand, fights against mythological evil forces, showing his heroism and courage. Isolation is the main thing that made all the difference in both of these heroes, marking a major change in their life. Robinson Crusoe becomes isolated in a physiological way; alone on the island with no other human-like creatures, and without any help and without anything that helps to communicate. Beowulf faces social and psychological isolation; even though he is accepted as a strong and legendary hero by his society, the fate of the hero excludes him from those in his community. These two isolation conditions showcase the personality, the decisions, and of course the survival skills of the heroes. How the heroes behave in these harsh situations, how they use their intelligence and how and what kind of decisions they make is professionally shown in the works. In addition, courage and cleverness of the heroes become a key tool of them. Robinson Crusoe's strategy that he creates, hard-work, planning skill, and intuitive encouragement save his life. Beowulf uses his strength, tolerance, values and cultural responsibility rise him to a level of legend. His main accountability is to be a hero and save his close-knits even if he dies. In this project work, the topics of isolation, survival, courage, and cleverness motives are actively analyzed. Furthermore, the heroes' personal values, psychological situations, problems, and the methods of fighting are compared mutually.

**Main part. Robinson Crusoe's experience of Isolation and Survival.**



**Robinson Crusoe's background and personal values.** Robinson Crusoe is a young man of English nationality who comes from a middle-class merchant family. From childhood he is portrayed as someone interested in the sea, adventure, and risk, with a strong sense of determination. Independence, creativity, enterprise, and diligence occupy an important place in his character. Despite his family members advising him to choose a peaceful, stable life, Crusoe sets off to explore the unknown. This decision becomes the foundation of all the challenges he will face later.

**Falling into Isolation and Psychological Experiences.** Robinson's life changes unexpectedly: after a shipwreck, he is left completely alone on an uninhabited island. In the first days, he struggles with deep fear, hopelessness, and a feeling of purposelessness. At this stage, the psychological weight of isolation becomes clearly visible. A person's detachment from society can seriously affect their emotional stability. Robinson's habit of keeping a journal helps him maintain his mental well-being. By managing his time, organizing plans, and setting goals, he gradually pulls himself out of internal isolation.

**Rebuilding Life through Intelligence.** Robinson's greatest weapon is his reasoning and intellect. To survive, he develops the following approaches:






1. Using the remains of the ship: He salvages nearly everything useful—tools, nails, wood, fabric, and weapons.
2. Building shelter: Crusoe studies the island’s landscape, selects a naturally protected place, and builds a strong fort and a living area.
3. Creating a food source: He practices agriculture—plants barley and wheat, grows beans, and raises goats.
4. Crafting tools: He makes clay pots, wooden furniture, and improves his hunting instruments.

Every task he performs is conscious, carefully planned, and based on a long-term strategy. The literary scholar *Moorman* also says about Crusoe: “*He is not merely a survivor—he is a builder who created his own small civilization.*” This idea shows how Robinson succeeds in surviving real-life conditions through intelligence.

**Struggles, dangers, and spiritual growth.** During his 28 years, 2 months, and 19 days on the island, Crusoe faces various trials. Robinson Crusoe faced a long series of difficult and life-changing challenges that tested both his physical strength and his inner character. After the violent storm that destroyed his ship, he found himself completely alone on an uninhabited island, with no companions, no shelter, no food sources, and very few tools. The shock of the shipwreck and the fear of suddenly being isolated from the world were his first and most overwhelming challenges. He had to force himself to stay calm and focus on survival, even when everything around him felt hopeless. In the early days, Robinson struggled with the most basic needs: finding clean water, securing food, and protecting himself from the environment. He had no house to sleep in, no weapons to defend himself, and no fire to keep warm or cook. Using whatever he could rescue from the wrecked ship, he slowly learned to build a shelter, make tools, and find stable food sources. He started hunting, fishing, and discovering edible plants. Most importantly, he learned to grow crops, although even that came with hardships—rats, bad weather, and unsuccessful attempts often destroyed his early efforts. Illness was another challenge that nearly killed him. At one point, Robinson suffered severe fever and weakness, and with no doctor, medicine, or help, he came close to death. He treated himself with simple herbs and rest, relying on prayer and faith to survive. This period of sickness also pushed him into a deep spiritual reflection, making him rethink his past mistakes, his disobedience to his parents, and the choices that brought him to the island. Perhaps the most painful struggle he faced was loneliness. Living in complete isolation for years affected him emotionally and mentally. With no human voices, no conversation, and no sense of time passing, he worried about losing his sanity. To fight this psychological pressure, he created routines, kept a journal, talked to himself, and focused on work to keep his mind active. His spiritual growth also helped him overcome despair, giving him a sense of purpose and hope. Robinson also had to face the dangers of nature. Violent storms, extreme heat, heavy rains, and sometimes wild animals forced him to constantly adapt and protect himself. Just when he thought he had achieved some peace, he discovered a single human footprint in the sand. This shocking discovery





revealed that cannibals occasionally visited the island. For many years, he lived in fear of being found and killed, strengthening his defenses and watching the island constantly. The fear of human danger was just as powerful as the fear of nature. When Robinson saved Friday from the cannibals, he faced a new set of challenges—teaching him English, building trust, and learning to live together. At first, he was cautious and unsure, but eventually Friday became his loyal friend and companion, easing years of loneliness. Later, Robinson confronted a group of mutineers who arrived on the island. He carefully planned strategies to protect himself and Friday, eventually helping the rightful captain regain control of the ship. This final challenge was both dangerous and life-changing, because it finally led to Robinson’s rescue after twenty-eight years of struggle. Through all these hardships—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—Robinson Crusoe transformed from an impulsive young man into a patient, skilled, and wise survivor. Each challenge shaped his character and taught him resilience, resourcefulness, and faith, proving that survival is not only about strength but also about courage, intelligence, and determination.

### **Beowulf: Epic poem, the topics of Isolation and Challenges**

**Beowulf’s origin and being shaped as a hero.** Beowulf is a renowned warrior from the Geat tribe. From a young age, he was known for his great strength and courage. His upbringing, the customs of his society, and the warriors’ pursuit of glory prepared Beowulf for the path of heroism. He was recognized in his community as a strong and responsible young man.

**The Dangers Faced by the Hero.** Beowulf’s heroic journey is closely linked with several life-and-death challenges. First, he encounters a terrifying creature named Grendel. This being disrupts the peace of King Hrothgar’s kingdom, killing people at night. Beowulf comes to help the kingdom and demonstrates unprecedented bravery in his battle against Grendel: he fights without any weapons, relying solely on his strength and skill. After defeating Grendel, Beowulf faces a new danger—Grendel’s mother. She hides in her lair following her son’s death and engages Beowulf in a relentless battle. This fight is even more complex than the previous one, and Beowulf defeats his enemy using a magical sword found inside the lair. Years later, even in old age, the hero must face a dragon. This final battle is the most tragic and ultimate test of his life, where Beowulf sacrifices himself to protect his homeland.

**Isolation in Beowulf — The Hero’s Spiritual Loneliness.** Beowulf is never physically alone like Crusoe, but throughout the story, he is a spiritual solitary warrior. His strength and courage set him apart, earning him the respect of society, yet his duty constantly forces him to face death alone. In the fight against Grendel, he asks for no help; in the battle with Grendel’s mother, he enters the lair alone. Even the final battle with the dragon appears as a solitary struggle: though some warriors accompany him, only Wiglaf joins him in the true battlefield. This underscores Beowulf’s spiritual isolation: he is the hero of his people, yet he faces the path of heroism alone.



**The Highest Form of Courage.** Beowulf's courage embodies the ideal warrior figure in Anglo-Saxon literature. In the fight with Grendel, he engages without weapons, relying on his full strength. This decision is not driven by a desire for fame but by principles of honesty and fairness. His battle with Grendel's mother further demonstrates his determination and fearlessness in the face of death. In the encounter with the dragon, Beowulf's heroism reaches its peak: despite his old age, he takes on the fight to ensure his homeland's safety. J. R. R. Tolkien comments on Beowulf: "Beowulf's greatness lies not only in battles but also in his acceptance of death as duty." This insight highlights the hero's moral and spiritual heroism.

**Intelligence and Tactical Approach.** Beowulf is not only strong but also a strategic thinker:

1. Knowing Grendel is impervious to weapons, he fights him hand-to-hand.
2. In Grendel's mother's lair, he uses a magical sword.
3. In the fight against the dragon, he positions his warriors skillfully.


His victories are not accidental—they result from carefully considered decisions.

**The Hero's Tragic End.** Beowulf defeats the dragon but dies in the process. This marks the conclusion of his heroic journey. His death is glorious but lonely, representing the ultimate point of the hero's isolation.

### **Comparison analysis of Robinson Crusoe and Beowulf**


Both *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe and the epic poem *Beowulf* center on protagonists who embody courage, intelligence, and resilience, yet they approach heroism in very different ways shaped by their contexts. Beowulf, a legendary Geatish warrior, is defined from his youth by physical strength, bravery, and a sense of honor. His life revolves around facing external threats—monsters like Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon—requiring him to confront danger directly and publicly. His heroism is closely tied to societal values: fame, loyalty, and the protection of his people. Beowulf's isolation is often social and situational; when he battles monsters, he stands alone, relying on his skill and courage to achieve glory. Scholars, such as J.R.R. Tolkien, have emphasized that Beowulf represents the ideal warrior-hero whose identity is inseparable from the deeds he performs and the reputation he earns. The poem explores themes of mortality, legacy, and the inevitable decline of human strength, highlighting heroism as both action and moral fortitude. In contrast, Robinson Crusoe's heroism is rooted in survival and practical intelligence rather than martial valor. Shipwrecked on an uninhabited island, Crusoe faces isolation not as a social construct but as a physical and psychological challenge. His survival depends on ingenuity, resourcefulness, and perseverance over a prolonged period. He cultivates food, builds shelter, and creates a micro-society in collaboration with Friday, demonstrating adaptability and self-reliance. Critics such as Ian Watt have noted that *Robinson Crusoe* marks a shift in literature toward the modern individual, emphasizing personal responsibility and rational problem-solving as central to heroism. Crusoe's courage is subtle, measured, and introspective, contrasting with Beowulf's overt and public bravery.





The novel portrays isolation as a catalyst for moral and spiritual growth, exploring themes of human resilience, ingenuity, and the relationship between civilization and nature. While both works showcase heroism, the contrast lies in the nature and context of the protagonists' struggles. Beowulf's challenges are external and immediate, defined by physical danger and societal expectations, whereas Crusoe's obstacles are prolonged, psychological, and survival-oriented. Beowulf seeks honor and fame, with heroism measured in deeds and legacy, while Crusoe seeks mastery over his environment and self-sufficiency, with heroism measured in adaptability and moral development. Both figures demonstrate courage and intelligence, yet these traits manifest differently: Beowulf's intelligence is tactical and strategic in combat, while Crusoe's is inventive and reflective in the face of isolation.

**Conclusion.** When analyzing *Robinson Crusoe* and *Beowulf* through the lens of isolation and survival, it becomes evident that both works explore the human capacity to endure, adapt, and overcome extreme circumstances, though they do so in markedly different contexts and with distinct philosophical undertones. In *Robinson Crusoe*, isolation is literal and tangible. Crusoe finds himself stranded on a deserted island for 28 years, facing the immediate and persistent threats of nature—storms, wild animals, illness, and the unpredictability of the environment. This prolonged solitude forces him to rely entirely on his ingenuity, resourcefulness, and determination. Survival, in his case, is not only a matter of physical endurance but also of mental resilience. Crusoe's ability to build shelter, cultivate food, and tame the environment demonstrates an interplay between human intellect and the natural world, showing how isolation can both challenge and cultivate independence, self-discipline, and a reflective engagement with life itself. Critics such as Ian Watt have argued that Crusoe represents the archetype of the self-made man, whose survival is tied to rational planning, practical knowledge, and a steadfast will to assert order over chaos, reflecting the early modern ideals of individualism and human mastery over nature. In contrast, *Beowulf* presents isolation in a more symbolic and heroic sense. While Beowulf is not physically stranded in the same manner as Crusoe, he often faces solitude during his most critical trials: battling Grendel, Grendel's mother, and later, the dragon. These confrontations place him in extreme danger, requiring immense courage, physical strength, and strategic thinking. Unlike Crusoe, whose survival depends largely on ingenuity and endurance, Beowulf's survival—and indeed the survival of his community—depends on his heroic virtues and ability to act decisively in moments of existential threat. Isolation here is less about being physically alone and more about standing as the individual protector against forces of destruction, highlighting themes of responsibility, honor, and the ethical dimension of survival. Scholars like J.R.R. Tolkien have noted that *Beowulf* illustrates the hero's struggle against inevitable mortality, portraying isolation as a condition that tests moral courage as much as physical capability, emphasizing the social and ethical stakes of survival in a warrior culture. Comparing the two, both texts reveal that survival under isolation requires more than mere physical endurance; it demands intellectual and emotional strength. Crusoe's experience foregrounds self-reliance, rationality, and the



transformative potential of solitude, showing how humans can reshape their environment and themselves in the absence of society. Beowulf, on the other hand, highlights the existential and ethical dimensions of survival, where courage, honor, and action in the face of danger define human greatness. Together, these works suggest that isolation, whether enforced by circumstance or by heroic duty, exposes both the vulnerabilities and the profound capacities of individuals, illustrating survival not simply as a biological necessity but as a test of character, intellect, and moral fortitude. The comparison of Crusoe and Beowulf ultimately underscores a shared insight: whether in literal or symbolic isolation, human beings confront challenges that reveal the essential interplay between mind, courage, and circumstance in the pursuit of endurance and survival.

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