



## Robinson Crusoe's Illness: Literature and Medicine

Fernando Dias de Avila-Pires

**To cite this article:** Fernando Dias de Avila-Pires (2008) Robinson Crusoe's Illness: Literature and Medicine, *European Legacy*, 13:6, 715-724, DOI: [10.1080/10848770802358062](https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770802358062)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770802358062>



Published online: 26 Sep 2008.



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## Robinson Crusoe's Illness: Literature and Medicine

~ FERNANDO DIAS DE AVILA-PIRES ~

**ABSTRACT** *This essay originated from a re-reading of Umberto Eco's Six Walks in the Fictional Woods (1994) and from discussions of Charles Darwin's illnesses. The question of historical truth arises whenever we seek to validate a scientific analysis of a fictional incident. Whereas Darwin may actually have suffered from several health conditions, Robinson Crusoe's illness is the product of Daniel Defoe's imagination. But the search for a medical diagnosis must follow the same methods in both cases. After eight months as sole inhabitant of his island, Crusoe is taken ill. A detailed description of the symptoms is duly registered in his diary, along with his attempts at finding its possible nature and origin. The island, according to Crusoe, lies in the tropical waters of the Caribbean Sea, not far from the coast of Venezuela. From the standpoint of medical geography, his illness is a tropical disease that was prevalent in South and Central America in the seventeenth century. Five possible diseases are suggested and discussed.*

In *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (1994), Umberto Eco discusses the role of the reader as critic and the author's use of poetic license so as not to constrain his imagination by an excess of realism. At the same time, according to Eco, the reader of fiction must be aware of the unwritten agreement with the author, who must respect the limits of verisimilitude. Eco's explanation of the relationship between reader and author applies to our inquiry into medical narratives, factual or fictional, when we consider that Charles Darwin was a real suffering person, whereas Robinson Crusoe was a figment of his author's imagination.

When comparing Darwin's account of his own sufferings with Crusoe's, we are aware that in both cases the descriptions are subjective. Contrary to diagnostic signals, which are objective, symptoms are subjective. Patients may refer to feelings such as dread, malaise, apprehension, dizziness. This conundrum has led modern authors to diagnose Darwin's illnesses—brought about by chronic poisoning with preservatives that he used in his zoological collections and the use of drugs such as calomel—as agoraphobia, panic, hypochondria, lupus, and American trypanosomiasis or Chagas disease.<sup>1</sup> As to *Robinson Crusoe*, various critics have carried out detailed analyses of economic theory and the moral and religious aspects of the story, but so far no attempt has been made to diagnose Crusoe's disease, although as an exercise in epidemiology it is definitely valid and poses a most interesting challenge.



## ROBINSON CRUSOE

According to Petri Liukkonen Defoe was one of the first writers to publish realistic fiction, using the first person, as a diary.<sup>2</sup> Crusoe began his register twelve days after the loss of his ship in a thunderstorm: *And now it was when I began to keep a Journal of every Day's Employment, for indeed at first I was in too much Hurry, and not only Hurry as to Labour, but in too much Discomposure of Mind, and my Journal would ha' been full of many dull things.*

In *The Rise of the Novel* (2001) Ian Watt described the difficulties Daniel Defoe had in finding a publisher. Eventually, William Taylor of London acquired the manuscript for £10 and published it on 25 April 1719 as *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner. Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With an Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates. Written by Himself.*<sup>3</sup> Defoe's name did not appear as the author. The book was a success, and four editions appeared in four months.

## ROBINSON CRUSOE'S ILLNESS

During the twenty-eight years, two months and nineteen days of being stranded in a deserted tropical island, Robinson Crusoe had one single spell of sickness which occurred eight months after reaching it on 30 September 1659. This is the only mention of a disease in the novel.

*June 16 [1660]. Going down to the Sea-side, I found a large Tortoise or Turtle; this was the first I had seen, which it seems was only my Misfortune, not any Defect of the Place, or Scarcity; for had I happen'd to be on the other Side of the Island, I might have had Hundreds of them every Day, as I found afterwards; but perhaps had paid dear enough for them.*

*June 17. I spent in cooking the Turtle; I found in her threescore Eggs; and her Flesh was to me at that Time the most savoury and pleasant that ever I tasted in my Life, having had no Flesh, but of Goats and Fowls, since I landed in this horrid Place.*

*June 18. Rain'd all Day, and I stay'd within. I thought at this Time the Rain felt Cold, and I was something chilly, which I knew was not usual in that Latitude.*

*June 19. Very ill, and shivering, as if the Weather had been cold.*

*June 20. No Rest all Night, violent Pains in my Head, and feverish.*

*June 21. Very ill, frighted almost to Death with the Apprehensions of my sad Condition, to be sick, and no Help: Pray'd to GOD for the first Time since the Storm off of Hull, but scarce knew what I said, or why; my Thoughts being all confused.*

*June 22. A little better, but under dreadful Apprehensions of Sickness.*

*June 23. Very bad again, cold and shivering, and then a violent Head-ach.*

*June 24. Much better.*

*June 25. An Ague very violent; the Fit held me seven Hours, cold Fit and hot, with faint Sweats after it.*

June 26. Better; and having no Victuals to eat, took my Gun, but found my self very weak; however I kill'd a She-Goat, and with much Difficulty got it Home, and broil'd some of it, and eat; I wou'd fain have stew'd it, and made some Broath, but had no Pot.

June 27. The Ague again so violent, that I lay a-Bed all Day, and neither eat or drank. I was ready to perish for Thirst, but so weak, I had not Strength to stand up, or to get my self any Water to drink: Pray'd to God again, but was light-headed, and when I was not, I was so ignorant, that I knew not what to say; only I lay and cry'd, Lord look upon me, Lord pity me, Lord have Mercy upon me: I suppose I did nothing else for two or three Hours, till the Fit wearing off, I fell asleep, and did not wake till far in the Night; when I wak'd, I found my self much refresh'd, but weak, and exceeding thirsty: However, as I had no Water bin my whole Habitation, I was forc'd to lie till Morning, and went to sleep again: In this second Sleep, I had this terrible Dream.

[. . .]

June 28. Having been somewhat refresh'd with the Sleep I had had, and the Fit being entirely off, I got up; and tho' the Fright and Terror of my Dream was very great, yet I consider'd, that the Fit of the Ague wou'd return again the next Day, and now was my Time to get something to refresh and support my self when I should be ill; and the first Thing I did, I fill'd a large square Case Bottle with Water, and set it upon my Table, in Reach of my Bed; and to take off the chill or aguish Disposition of the Water, I put about a Quarter of a Pint of Rum into it, and mix'd them together; then I got me a Piece of the Goat's Flesh, and broil'd it on the Coals, but could eat very little; I walk'd about, but was very weak, and withal very sad and heavy-hearted in the Sense of my miserable Condition; dreading the Return of my Distemper the next Day; at Night I made my Supper of three of the Turtle's Eggs, which I roasted in the Ashes, and eat, as we call it, in the Shell; and this was the first Bit of Meat I had ever ask'd God's Blessing to, even as I cou'd remember, in my whole Life.

After I had eaten, I try'd to walk, but found my self so weak, that I cou'd hardly carry the Gun, (for I never went out without that) so I went but a little Way, and sat down upon the Ground, looking out upon the Sea, which was just before me, and very calm and smooth: As I sat here, some such Thoughts as these occurred to me.

[. . .]

Now as the Apprehension of the Return of my Distemper terrify'd me very much, it occur'd to my Thought, that the Brasilians take no Physick but their Tobacco, for almost all Distempers; and I had a Piece of a Roll of Tobacco in one of the Chests, which was quite cur'd, and some also that was green and not quite cur'd.

I went, directed by Heaven no doubt; for in this Chest I found a Cure, both for Soul and Body, I open'd the Chest, and found what I look'd for, viz. the Tobacco; and as the few Books, I had sav'd, lay there too, I took out one of the Bibles which I mention'd before, and which to this Time I had not found Leisure, or so much as Inclination to look into; I say, I took it out, and brought both that and the Tobacco with me to the Table.

What Use to make of the Tobacco, I knew not, as to my Distemper, or whether it was good for it or no; but I try'd several Experiments with it, as if I was resolv'd it should hit one Way or other: I first took a Piece of a Leaf, and chew'd it in my Mouth, which indeed at first almost stupify'd my Brain, the Tobacco being green and strong, and that I had not been much us'd to it; then I took some and steeped it an Hour or two in some Rum, and resolv'd to take a Dose of it when I lay down; and

lastly, I burnt some upon a Pan of Coals, and held my Nose close over the Smoke of it as long as I could bear it, as well for the Heat as almost for Suffocation.

[. . .]

It grew now late, and the Tobacco had, as I said, doz'd my Head so much, that I inclin'd to sleep; so I left my Lamp burning in the Cave, lest I should want any Thing in the Night, and went to Bed; but before I lay down, I did what I never had done in all my Life, I kneel'd down and pray'd to God to fulfil the Promise to me, that if I call'd upon him in the Day of Trouble, he would deliver me; after my broken and imperfect Prayer was over, I drunk the Rum in which I had steep'd the Tobacco, which was so strong and rank of the Tobacco, that indeed I could scarce get it down; immediately upon this I went to Bed, I found presently it flew up in my Head violently, but I fell into a sound Sleep, and wak'd no more 'till by the Sun it must necessarily be near Three a-Clock in the Afternoon the next Day; nay, to this Hour, I'm partly of the Opinion, that I slept all the next Day and Night, and 'till almost Three that Day after; for otherwise I knew not how I should lose a Day out of my Reckoning in the Days of the Week, as it appear'd some Years after I had done: for I had lost it by crossing and re-crossing the Line, I should have lost more than one Day: But certainly I lost a Day in my Accompt, and never knew which Way.

Be that however one Way or th' other, when I awak'd I found my self exceedingly refresh'd, and my Spirits lively and chearful; when I got up, I was stronger than I was the Day before, and my Stomach better, for I was hungry; and in short, I had no Fit the next Day, but continu'd much alter'd for the better; this was the 29th.

The 30th was my well Day of Course, and I went abroad with my Gun, but did not care to travel too far, I kill'd a Sea Fowl or two, something like a brand Goose, and brought them Home, but was not very forward to eat them; so I ate some more of the Turtle's Eggs, which were very good: This Evening I renew'd the Medicine which I had suppos'd did me good the Day before, viz. the Tobacco steep'd in Rum, only I did not take so much as before, nor did I chew any of the Leaf, or hold my Head over the Smoke; however, I was not so well the next Day, which was the first of July, as I hop'd I shou'd have been; for I had a little Spice of the cold Fit, but it was not much.

July 2. I renew'd the Medicine all the three Ways, and doz'd my self with it as at first; and doubled the Quantity which I drank.

[. . .]

July 4. [. . .]

But leaving this Part, I return to my Journal.

My Condition began now to be, tho' not less miserable as my Way of living, yet much easier to my Mind; and my Thoughts being directed, by a constant reading the Scripture, and praying to God, to things of a higher Nature: I ad a great deal of Comfort within, which till now I knew nothing of; also, as my Health and Strength returned, I bestirr'd my self to furnish my self with every thing that I anted, and make my Way of living as regular as I could.

From the 4th of July to the 24th, I was chiefly employ'd walking about with my Gun in my Hand, a little and a little, at a Time, as a Man that was gathering up his Strength after a Fit of Sickness: For it is hardly to be imagin'd, how low I was, and to what Weakness I was reduc'd. The Application which I made Use of was perfectly new, and perhaps what had never cur'd an Ague

before, neither can recommend it to any one to practise, by this Experiment; and tho' it did carry off the Fit, yet it rather contributed to weakening me; for I had frequent Convulsions in my Nerves and Limbs for some Time.

I learn'd from it also this in particular, that being abroad the rainy Season was the most pernicious thing to my Health that could be, especially in those Rains which came ended with Storms and Hurricanes of Wind; for as the [ra]in which came in the dry Season was always most accompany'd with such Storms, so I found that Rain was much more dangerous than the Rain which fell in September and October.

Mollaret, an epidemiologist at the Pasteur Institute, wrote the preface to the 1982 French edition of Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, also written as a diary and published in 1722, three years after *Robinson Crusoe*. According to Mollaret, Defoe's clinical descriptions are the most exact, detailed, and complete descriptions of the epidemic at the time. The realism is outstanding, as well as the references to discoveries concerning healthy carriers of disease and asymptomatic incubation, dating from 1714.

#### GEOGRAPHY AND DISEASE

Robinson Crusoe traveled extensively as a sailor. In Africa he was captured and enslaved. He managed to escape and later established himself in Bahia, Brazil, where he bought and worked on a plantation. Upon his decision to return to Europe, he embarked on a ship which headed north and then NNE. At 7° 22' Lat N, the ship met with bad weather. At 11° Lat N the captain [. . .] found he was gotten upon the Coast of Guinea, or the North Part of Brasil, beyond the River Amozones, toward that of the River Oronoque, commonly call'd the Great River, and began to consult with me what Course he should take, for the Ship leaky and very much disabled, and he was going directly back to the Coast of Brasil.

Defoe misspelled Guinea for Guiana. The narrative goes on with Crusoe saying: *I was positively against that, and looking over the Charts the Sea-Coast of America with him, we concluded the as no inhabited Country for us to had recourse to, till we came within the Circle of the Carribbe-Islands, and therefore resolved to stand away for Barbados [. . .]. With this Design we chang'd our Course and steer'd away N. W. by W. in order to reach some of our English Islands, where I hoped for Relief; but our Voyage was otherwise determined, for being in the Latitude of Deg. 18 Min. a second Storm came upon us, which carry'd us away with the same Impetuosity Westward, and drove us so out of the very Way of all humane Commerce, that had all our Lives been saved, as to the Sea, we were rather in Danger of being devoured by Savages than ever returning to our own Country.*

The ship hit a sandbar, the whole crew was lost, the only survivor being Robinson Crusoe.

According to the original title of the novel, the island, referred to as the *Island of Despair* by Crusoe, lies on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oronoque. In chapter 14 Crusoe decides to build a canoe and sail in search of the continent, though afraid [. . .] *for I had heard that the People of the Carribbean Coast were Canibals, or Man-eaters; and I knew by the Latitude that I could not be far off from that Shore.* In chapter 23 he gives further details: *This I understood to be no more than the Sets of the Tide, as going out, or coming in; but I afterwards understood, it was occasion'd by the great Draft and Reflux*

*of the mighty River Oroonooko; in the Mouth, or the Gulph of which River, as I found afterwards, our Island lay; and this Land which I perceiv'd to the W. and N. W. was the great Island Trinidad, on the North Point of the Mouth of the River. Several chapters later his native companion Friday mentions the Caribs as inhabiting nearby lands or islands, from whence I easily understood, that these were the Caribbees, which our Maps place on the Part of America, which reaches from the Mouth of the River Oroonooko to Guiana, and onwards to St. Martha.*

### EPIDEMIOLOGICAL HYPOTHESES

Robinson Crusoe's disease episode lasted almost one month. The geographical location of the island and the period are suggestive of a disease endemic on the South and Central American tropics during the seventeenth century. The symptoms are those of an acute viral infection or food poisoning. His bouts of fever and malaise occurred at intervals, which is consistent with malaria: in his detailed description he talks about being *Very ill, and shivering, as if the Weather had been cold . . . No Rest all Night, violent Pains in my Head, and feaverish my Thoughts being all confused . . . Much better . . . An Ague very violent; the Fit held me seven Hours, cold Fit and hot, with faint Sweats . . . Very bad again, cold and shivering, and then a violent Head-ach. the The Ague again so violent, that I lay a-Bed all Day, and neither eat or drank . . . I was ready to perish for Thirst, but so weak, I had not Strength to stand up, or to get my self any Water to drink . . . After I had eaten, I try'd to walk, but found my self so weak, that I cou'd hardly carry the Gun, I awak'd I found my self exceedingly refresh'd, and my Spirits lively and chearful; when I got up, I was stronger than I was the Day before, and my Stomach better, for I was hungry.*

The following routes and sources of infection/contamination could conceivably be considered:

- (1) *a disease with a long-lasting period of incubation acquired before Robinson Crusoe embarked on the fatal voyage*

In this case, Robinson Crusoe would have been infected while in Africa, in Brazil, or on board the ship, after he left Bahia.

- (2) *food poisoning from eating a marine turtle*

Robinson Crusoe does not list diarrhea or vomiting among the symptoms, except in a passing reference to an upset stomach. Janet Raloff reports:

Many people who have been stricken by a turtle-transmitted microbe may develop food poisoning but not realize the turtle connection. Sometimes, doctors or scientists reviewing cases of infection may suspect turtle meat but are unable to prove that it is the culprit because stool or blood samples from the sick person were not inspected and their microbes compared to those in local turtles. That was the case with Aguirre's mother, who 15 years ago developed gastrointestinal illness after eating sea turtle meat. "I think it was from *Salmonella*," he says, "but we weren't able to identify [the agent]."

[. . .]

A June 2005 alert on ProMED, an online service to track emerging diseases, noted a 2001 poisoning outbreak in the Solomon Islands that reinforces the wisdom of such a policy, if sea turtle meat is to be eaten at all. In that incident, "6 people (all children between 3



months - 11 years old) out of the 28 [affected] people died within 5 days" after eating sea turtle meat. There was no doubt as to the source of the illnesses because people became sick 4 to 6 hours after eating meat from a sick turtle and no other protein. "Those who did not consume turtle meat did not experience the symptoms," the ProMED editors reported.<sup>4</sup>

(3) *a zoonotic disease acquired from wild or domestic animals, including marine turtles*

The bout of illness occurred eight months after Crusoe's arrival at the island. At the time, he had contact with few animals. In chapter 7 he mentions the domestic animals he managed to bring from the stranded ship and when describing his predicament he reports eating *goats and fowls*. In the relevant diary entry we read:

*In the next place we are to observe, that among the many things which I brought out of the Ship in the several Voyages, which, as above mention'd, I made to it, I got several things of less Value, but not all less useful to me, which I omitted setting down before; as in particular, . . . And I must not forget, that we had in the Ship a Dog and two Cats, of whose eminent History I may have occasion to say something in its place; for I carry'd both the Cats with me, and as for the Dog, he jump'd out of the Ship of himself and swam on Shore to me the Day after I went on Shore with my first Cargo, and was a trusty Servant to me many Years; I wanted nothing that he could fetch me, nor any Company that he could make up to me, I only wanted to have him talk to me, but that would not do:*

Healthy again, he writes

*In this Season I was much surpriz'd with the Increase of my Family; I had been concern'd for the Loss of one of my Cats, who run away from me, or as I thought had been dead, and I heard no more Tale or Tidings of her, till to my Astonishment she came Home about the End of August, with three Kittens; this was the more strange to me, because tho' I had kill'd a wild Cat, as I call'd it, with my Gun; yet I thought it was a quite differing Kind from our European Cats; yet the young Cats were the same Kind of House breed like the old one; and both my Cats being Females, I thought it very strange: But from these three Cats, I afterwards came to be so pester'd with Cats, that I was forc'd to kill them like Vermine, or wild Beasts, and to drive them from my House as much as possible.*

*But these were not the two Cats which I brought on Shore at first, for they were both of them dead, and had been interr'd near my Habitation by my own Hand; but one of them having multiply'd by I know not what Kind of Creature, these were two which I had preserv'd tame, whereas the rest run wild in the Woods, and became indeed troublesom to me at last; for they would often come into my House, and plunder me too, till at last I was obliged to shoot them, and did kill a great many; at length they left me with this Attendance, and in this plentiful Manner I lived; neither could I be said to want any thing but Society, and of that in some time after this, I was like to have too much.*

*From the fourteenth of August to the twenty sixth, incessant Rain, so that I could not stir, and was now very careful not to be much wet. In this Confinement I began to be straitned for Food, but venturing out twice, I one Day kill'd a Goat, and the last Day, which was the twenty sixth, found a very large Tortoise, which was a Treat to me, and my Food was regulated thus; I eat a Bunch of Raisins for my Breakfast, a Piece of the Goat's Flesh, or of the Turtle for my Dinner broil'd; for to my great Misfortune, I had no Vessel to boil or stew any Thing; and two or three of the Turtle's Eggs for my Supper.*

[. . .]



*Then to see how like a King I din'd too all alone, attended by my Servants, Poll, as if he had been my Favourite, was the only Person permitted to talk to me. My Dog who was now grown very old and crazy, and had found no Species to multiply his Kind upon, sat always at my Right Hand, and two Cats, one on one Side the Table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a Bit from my Hand, as a Mark of special Favour.*

Concerning Crusoe's suspicion of having been poisoned by turtle meat, Janet Raloff describes the risks involved:

A new report points out myriad dangers—from bacteria and parasites to toxic pollutants—that have been found in sea turtles' tissues. Such contaminants appear to explain illnesses that in recent years have been linked to sea turtle consumption.

[. . .]

Many of the same germs that make people ill also harm wildlife. [. . .] This ability to spread diseases to other species also applies to turtles, notes Aguirre. In the September *EcoHealth*, he and his colleagues review a host of infections that not only affect sea turtles, but also can pose threats to the people eating them.

The various infectious agents include:

*Salmonella* bacteria, which are capable of causing headaches, nausea, vomiting, cramps, and diarrhea. At least one major outbreak of *Salmonella chester* sickened some 36 members of an aboriginal community in Australia's Northern Territory. A 1999 study found that more than 60 percent of surveyed victims said that they had eaten partially cooked, green sea turtle meat the day before they became ill. *Salmonella* bacteria were also found in 8 of 9 fecal samples that had been collected from some of these individuals.

*Mycobacteria*, including the species that causes tuberculosis in people and other animals. One unidentified species of these bacteria has been isolated from a loggerhead sea turtle that died after being stranded on an Italian beach. At least six sea turtle hatchlings captured around the northwestern Hawaiian Islands in the 1970s tested positive for tuberculosis. "Given these observations, the potential of acquiring a mycobacterial infection from a sea turtle by direct contact or consumption cannot be discounted," Aguirre's team says.

*Chlamydiaceae*, the same agents responsible for sexually transmitted chlamydia infections in people. When contracted through nonsexual contact, such as inhalation, the germs can cause pneumonialike diseases in mammals. Aguirre and other scientists have found antibodies to these germs in feces from sea turtles, indicating the animals' previous exposure to the bacteria. The likely source of the turtles' exposure is infected sea birds.

*Leptospires*, corkscrew-shaped bacteria. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, some people who become infected show no symptoms. Others develop high fever, severe headache, chills, muscle aches, and vomiting. Jaundice, red eyes, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and a rash may follow. Left untreated, leptospirosis can cause kidney damage, meningitis (inflammation of the membrane around the brain and spinal cord), liver failure, respiratory distress, or death. The new review notes that blood analyses and field observations indicate that sea turtles can serve as a reservoir for the germs responsible for these outcomes. Aguirre's own data from 2003 and 2004

showed that 80 percent of a sample of green sea turtles in Baja California exhibited “high antibody [concentrations] against 8 of 10 [types] of *Leptospira interrogans*.”

*Parasites*, including *Entamoeba invadens*, *Cryptosporidium parvum*, and trematodes. Spirorchid trematodes, small flatworms, are a common parasite in sea turtles, especially those with disfiguring tumors known as fibropapillomas. Although trematodes live mostly in heart tissue, their eggs move through the blood to the liver and have been found in the fibropapillomas. Recently, spirorchid trematodes have also shown up in human feces of Australian aboriginal children whose culture values sea turtle meat.

To these we may add *Campylobacter*, a bacterium responsible for causing an acute infection with diarrhea, fever, cramps, and abdominal pain. Also, *Edwardiella tarda*, also a bacterium.

- (4) *indirect contamination or infection originating from the natives who sporadically visited the island*

In chapter 18 Robinson Crusoe reports the first encounter with evidence of the presence of human beings on the island. From this fact we may surmise the possibility of vectors and/or reservoirs of pathogenic organisms, including *Plasmodium* being introduced from the outside world, which could remain enzootic or contaminate the soil. The relevant entry in his diary is as follows:

*When I was come down the Hill, to the End of the Island, where indeed I had never been before, I was presently convinc'd, that the seeing the Print of a Man's Foot, was not such a strange Thing in the Island as I imagin'd; and but that it was a special Providence that I was cast upon the Side of the Island, where the Savages never came: I should easily have known, that nothing was more frequent than for the Canoes from the Main, when they happen'd to be a little too far out at Sea, to shoot over to that Side of the Island for Harbour; likewise as they often met, and fought in their Canoes, the Victors having taken any Prisoners, would bring them over to this Shore, where according to their dreadful Customs, being all Canibals, they would kill and eat them; of which hereafter.*

[. . .]

*When I was come down the Hill, to the Shore, as I said above, being the S.W. Point of the Island, I was perfectly confounded and amaz'd; nor is it possible for me to express the Horror of my Mind, at seeing the Shore spread with Skulls, Hands, Feet, and other Bones of humane Bodies; and particularly I observ'd a Place where there had been a Fire made, and a Circle dug in the Earth, like a Cockpit, where it is suppos'd the Savage Wretches had sat down to their inhumane Feastings upon the Bodies of their Fellow-Creatures.*

- (5) *a sexually transmitted disease from animals (the goats he raised, for instance)*

Robinson Crusoe discarded this possibility: *I had neither the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, or the Pride of Life*. But this possibility is not as outlandish as it may appear, if we take into account the episode recently published as one of the biggest hitting stories the BBC News website ever circulated, of a court sentence in Sudan condemning a certain Mr. Tombe to marry a goat to pay a dowry of US \$50 to Mr. Alifi, the owner of ‘the bride’. As a follow-up, on 3 May 2007, it was reported that the goat had died, possibly from eating a plastic bag.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Robinson Crusoe and his disease are the product of Defoe's imagination. Both are fictional, leaving the reader with the impression that the whole episode was imagined to justify Crusoe's religious conversion.

## NOTES

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2. Petri Liukkonen at [www.kirjasto.sci.fi/defoe.htm](http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/defoe.htm)
3. Readers who do not own a printed copy, can download the complete text at <http://www.deadmentellnoales.com/onlinetexts/robinson/crusoe.shtml>
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5. BBC News, 24 February 2006, at [www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4748292.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4748292.stm)