

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)

Stranded on a desert island (from p. 46 “I had a dismal ...” to p. 48 “... reckoning of Time.”)

Programme de spécialité de l'ENS de Lyon pour la session 2020

Norton Critical Edition (1994), ISBN-13: 9780393964523

Putting the passage in context: Just a dozen days after being shipwrecked and after dealing with the most pressing problems first – mostly retrieving all he could from the sinking wreck – this is the first time Crusoe has taken the time to ponder upon his new situation as a castaway on the desert island he will later call “the Island of Despair”.

Guiding thread: **Ambivalent conversion from desperation to life instincts / the will to survive, raising the question of God’s design and dramatized through the voicing of Crusoe’s conscience**

1. Staging the drama of the soul after the Puritan fashion of spiritual autobiographies

Robinson’s monologue takes the form of a **dialogue with himself**: “I would expostulate with my self” (8)

a) A dialogue endowed with novelistic verisimilitude

- Use of **direct speech**: “particularly, said I aloud” (30).
- Forms of **orality**: “Well, you are...” (16).
- **Rhetorical questions** all through.

b) A dialogue with himself

- “particularly, said I aloud (Tho to myself)” (30)
- Robinson thinks **against himself**: “Reason as it were expostulated with me t’other way” (16), “Something always return’d (...) to reprove me” (13-14). **Dialectic process**.
- Philosophical, **almost Socratic dialogue**: “’tis true, but pray remember” (17-18).
- Mental journey **towards a nuanced assessment of his situation**.
- **Language of meditation**: “consider it” (5), “made these Reflections” (8), “pensive upon the subject” (15).

- Not an external, divine voice telling the hero what to think, but Puritan tradition of introspection leads to embryonic, ground-breaking attempt to **realistically transcribe the workings of the thinking mind** = early stages of the novelistic technique.

2. A problematic allegory: damned or saved? Job or Jonah (/Daniel)?

a) From damnation...

- **Topos of the accursed hero**: “dismal” (1), parallelism “in this desolate place, and in this desolate manner” (6); **self-pity**: “Tears would run plentifully” (7). **A Job-like figure of dispossession uttering a jeremiad**.
- **Hyperbolic language/pathos**: “so absolutely miserable”, “so without help”... (10)
- Shipwreck read as a **religious allegory**: “a determination of Heaven”, “ruine its Creatures”: punishment for his past sins / original sin of disobedience, wanderlust / curiosity, and greed → a **spiritual wreck**. He has been “**driven**” “**out of his course**” (2-3) / out of his sinful ways, “out of the ordinary Course of the Trade of Mankind” (4) = of capitalistic pursuit and greed.

a) ...To “something” (cf. “But something always return’d swift upon me to check these Thoughts”, 13)

- In the depths of despair however, Crusoe also starts to perceive himself as **the chosen one** (one “out of eleven”, “singled out”), owing his survival to a **miraculous** event (“which was an hundred thousand to one that I had time to get all these things out of” the ship, 25-27) in a **land of plenty** (“clothes, tent, gun, ammunition...”, “all these to a sufficient quantity”, 33-4, “without any want as long as I lived” 36, and even beyond his death, 39-40) → **rhetoric of Election**
- HOWEVER, it is noticeable that his **reasoning at this point is not a religious, but a practical one**. Indeed:
 - “I had great reason to consider it as a determination of heaven” (5-6); “it could barely be rational to be thankful for such a life” (11-12), “Reason as it were expostulated with me th’ other way” (16) → reason, not faith tells him this can only be the hand of God (not so merciless of Him)
 - “all evils are to be considered with the good that is in them, and with what worse attends them” (21-22) → **good and evil** are only relative notions at this point, and understood in utilitarian terms of advantages and drawbacks
 - keeping track of the Sabbath days “from the working days” (55-56) → Sunday is not so much viewed as a day of worship / **the Lord’s day** following the Fourth Commandment (‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy’, Exodus) as merely a day of rest (≈ weekend)
 - setting up a **cross** where he landed to keep a calendar → not a marker of Calvary for Crusoe (onomastics = bearer of the Cross), but supposedly only meant for the practical purpose of marking time and the symbolical purpose of marking space. Reckoning of time, no time of reckoning yet.
 - starts heeding signs of God’s wrath like **lightning and thunder**, which he “confesses” he had ignored before (39-44) → but only for practical reasons as they may blow up his gunpowder stock.

- Crusoe keeps **following religious pointers almost unbeknownst to him**. Not a Protestant decipherer of signs. Seeds of faith come not from within but from without (pattern of “it came into my thoughts”, 53-54). The traditional pattern of the **spiritual autobiography** (sin / punishment / redemption) is somewhat **undermined by the rational process** of the thinking mind, which puts things into perspective and deflates the spiritual meaning of what he is doing.

However, Crusoe's coming to reason is a first step toward order, control, and restraint, which all pave the way for his religious conversion (VS his initial decision to leave the security of his home for no “Reasons more than a mere wandering inclination”, 4th paragraph into the novel).

3. A good head on his shoulders: Surviving skills within an adventure story / travel narrative

a) The power of Reason

- **Rational discourse** highlighted by link words: “So that”, “for as I” (1).
- A more rational, nuanced language starts **qualifying / checking his emphatic** tendency: “sufficient quantity”, tolerable View”. Moderation, **almost British phlegm**.
- Use of **hypotheses** (“What would have been my Case, if I had been ...”) helps Crusoe transcend his subjective observation / his individual experience and take distance / put things in perspective.
- **From oral impulses to organized written speech** (decision to write a diary a few pages later) = another way for the narrator to **get back control**. **Chronology** shall “continue in its Order”.

b) Homo economicus

- Almost **mathematical considerations**: eleven / where are the ten; “which was an Hundred Thousand to one” = probability. Calculating odds and measuring time.
- **Inventory** as a way for the mind to establish order and achieve control: “without a Gun, without Ammunition, without any tools to make any thing, or to work with, without clothes, Bedding, a Tent, or any manner of Covering”. **First step to become the master of the island** is to **name/register/record its components**. A surveyor of the land. Literally taking stock of his situation.
- Such a pragmatic vision prompts him into **action** (VS before: “walking, I was very pensive upon the subject of my present condition”, 14-15), drags him out of his “melancholy” and “silence” (44-5). On the path to **self-determination**.

- Crusoe's (British) pragmatism ensures his **resilience. Triumph of the individual / individualism** linked with 18th c. ideological environment (influence of 17th c. British philosopher John Locke's empiricism, which stressed individual experience and apprehension through the senses + Puritan stress on responsibility for one's own spiritual direction). Robinson appears to be **saved partly by God, partly by his own resourcefulness**, the two needing to be reconciled in the course of the novel.

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The allegorical and the realistic / pragmatic aspects of the novel create tension within the passage following the novel's **core conflict between religion and economics** (plot set in motion by sins of disobedience and greed).

This passage shows very well that **his economic mind is both what causes Crusoe's undoing** (as it keeps him on the temporal level) **AND constitutes his saving grace** (in the sense that this is how he will conquer the island and be able to recreate civilisation and avoid the risk of going native; economic endeavours will save Crusoe once they are checked by reason and faith).

Similarly, in the pattern of the novel / at the level of plot, the main deadly sin he has to atone for is greed AND his final reward for overcoming it will be a great fortune (with his capitalistic ventures yielding him great profit after his twenty-eight years' absence). The novel, written by a Puritan merchant, works on the **complex bridging between Puritanism and capitalism** / the capitalistic ethos / Puritan work ethics.