

## The I Is Never Alone

by Marcel Marien

Albert Huang, 26 August 2020

Annotate for repetition + things that catch your eye.

Suna Siriak had just turned fifteen when he was hired as a cabin boy on board the SS Max Havelaar, a barge of light tonnage, which navigated among the islands of the Sonde. The ship had just left Makassar for the isle of Timor when an atrocious drama completely changed the fate of its crew.

Siriak replaced Morok at the helm while he had his evening meal with the three other mates and the captain. Generally, he was never gone for more than fifteen minutes. But after an hour he still hadn't come back, so Siriak went down to the mess to see what was going on. He found his five companions crippled with pain, poisoned by some preserved meat. They all died together before sunset.

The adolescent was too inexperienced to steer the ship. During the night, he vainly tried to fight against sleep, but by the next day he passed Timor, and the ship headed out into the Indian Ocean. Three days passed. He had to get rid of the cadavers, which were putrefying in the heat. Then, in the middle of the fifth night, while he was sleeping, the little boat hit a reef. A jet of water shot into it and the condemned vessel soon sank. Siriak threw himself into the ocean and floated on a trunk, which he hastily filled with various tools.

At dawn he set foot on the isle. It didn't take long for him to see that it was deserted. Twenty minutes was enough to walk to the other side. There was no trace of human habitation that could let him hope the isle was known to sailors. On the other hand, he did find a spring, and coconut, mango, and banana trees grew in abundance and would make it possible for him to survive.

Siriak hadn't read *Robinson Crusoe*, but there aren't very many ways to make do after a shipwreck. He took an inventory of his trunk and gathered up the bits of flotsam, which the sea had thrown up on the sand. This harvest was meager except for a large box which contained nothing but mirrors. Siriak sat down on the shore and began to organize his life.

A few days had to pass before he truly understood the depth of his solitude to which he was condemned. Except for birds and insects there were no animals on the island. Siriak managed to capture several parrots, which he tied to a branch with some rope. He let them struggle there until evening. As the sun was setting, he went up to them, stared at them with insistence, and pronounced his name, "Siriak" a great number of times in a clear voice. Attentive, the parrots looked and listened without moving. Siriak gave them a few seeds and the next day repeated the lesson. After he had pronounced his name fifty times, he fed them again and let them go.

different

Nothing happened for a few days, then one beautiful morning Siriak woke up, surprised to have heard himself called by his name. Perched on a branch a few meters away, one of the parrots called out the boy's name several times. As one might guess, the outcome was everything Siriak might have hoped for, if not foreseen. By instructing one another, soon all the parrots on the isle were repeating Siriak's name from dawn to dusk.

In spite of the continual presence of his self which he was confined to by solitude, he struggled to remember that he also existed outside of his self, even though this might be as a mere object on the island.

but "mirror" is the same

And so the weeks and months flew by. Nothing came to trouble his solitary life. Sometimes in the distance, he thought he saw a passing ship or an airplane, but these were nothing but mirages. Then one day he noticed the useless trunk that had floated onto the island, the one that contained only mirrors. There had to be a thousand of them, all cut up in the same shape. According to the barely legible words on the lid, they were being shipped to a framing shop called Welsh. Siriak took out a half dozen and leaned them against some coconut trees. He saw himself reflected six times. Partly out of despair and partly out of boredom, he scattered them about the entire island. Leaning them against whatever he could, against trees, against rocks, between branches and leaves, he told himself that these mirrors might perchance be seen in the distance and catch the attention of a boat. Of course, nothing of the kind occurred.

Time passed and each day Siriak walked about his miniscule empire and saw in passing his omnipresent reflection at every turn in the path. Meanwhile, his parrots proclaimed his name in the perfumed breeze and the hot scent of the sun.

Wordplay:

parrots are good, portrayed as keeping him sane, while mirrors are bad? Thus, he owns the parrots but not the mirrors?

He died a few years later, perhaps out of boredom. The mirrors that multiplied the island and its sole inhabitant had little time to reflect. But even when his body had entirely decomposed, and his bones mixed with the sand on the beach, for a long time afterwards on the entire island, generations and generations of parrots continued to cry out his name, and it reverberated forever.

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