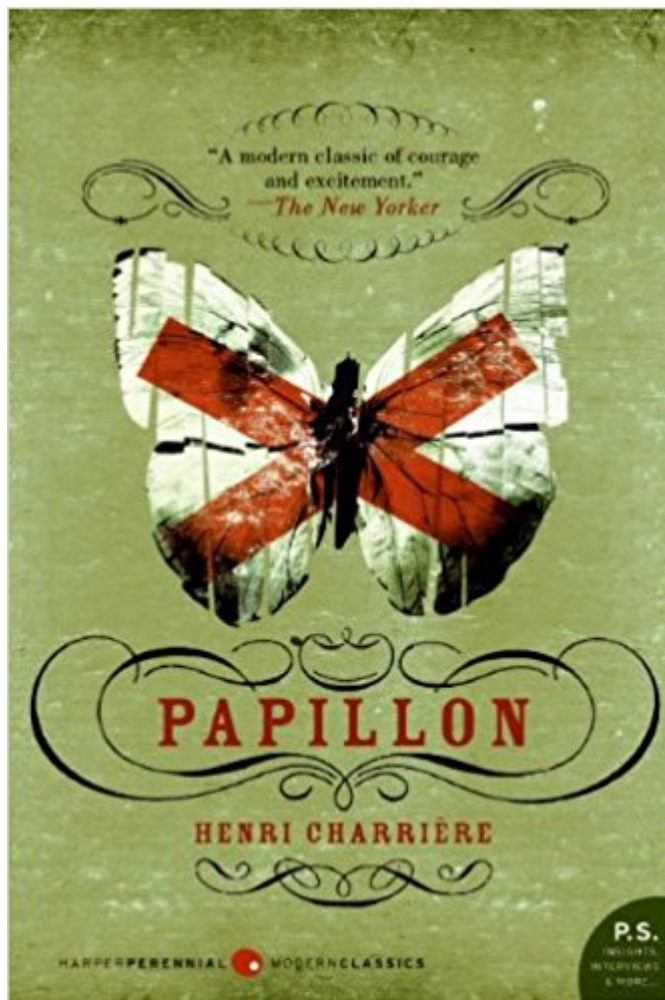


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# Papillon (P.S.)



## Synopsis

Henri Charrière, nicknamed "Papillon," for the butterfly tattoo on his chest, was convicted in Paris in 1931 of a murder he did not commit. Sentenced to life imprisonment in the penal colony of French Guiana, he became obsessed with one goal: to escape. After planning and executing a series of treacherous yet failed attempts over many years, he was eventually sent to the notorious prison, Devil's Island, a place from which no one had ever escaped . . . until Papillon. His flight to freedom remains one of the most incredible feats of human cunning, will, and endurance ever undertaken. Charrière's astonishing autobiography, *Papillon*, was first published in France to instant acclaim in 1968, more than twenty years after his final escape. Since then, it has become a treasured classic--the gripping, shocking, ultimately uplifting odyssey of an innocent man who would not be defeated.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A first-class adventure story." (New York Review of Books)  
"A modern classic of courage and excitement." (Janet Flanner (Gfnet), The New Yorker)  
"[Papillon] is the ultimate hero defying the ultimate system of oppression and succeeding by dint of will, optimism...[and] a sense of honor given only to West Point graduates and Paris thieves." (New York Times)  
"The greatest adventure story of all time." (Auguste Le Breton)

Text: English, French (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The book takes us through the daring adventures of Papillon (the author himself) as he makes nine death-defying escapes from the penal settlements of French Guiana in eleven years. The story that was penned down by Charrière in colloquial French after his final escape, acquired widespread fame and critical acclaim after being reprinted in an English translation in 1969. The English rendition (by Patrick O'Brian) avoids becoming a sketch through the translator's eyes. The emotions of the protagonist are explicit, the thrill of the story is resolute and the lessons from his life are succinct. This is not the book to be read with slumbering, tired eyes on a cushy couch. It engrosses, awakens and excites! The book (with the author's own emphasis) also explores the humane relations Papillon shared with his cell mates. He was heavy handed with sods but befriended his prison mates easily. He learned to live with the rogues, the dreaded convicts who hacked at moments of provocation but he never abandoned the meek and the suffering. Papillon made good friends with staff of the prisons where he was grounded (the warders and the gendarmes). They were never repulsed by his obstinacy to break, believed in his innocence and respected his dream to live as a free man. It was this trust that enlivened his spirits and increased his strength to keep his sanity in the lowest ebbs of confinement. Papillon for me has outlived its reputation. The book makes an appeal to a whole range of men. It cannot be merely looked as the story of the struggle of a convict for freedom.

Papillon's struggle reveals much more than this character; it uncovers a whole process of catharsis. The book has become an obvious and useful addition to the library of many prisons since its printing. It implores people at large to never lose hope while facing an adversity; win or lose, the way of the warrior is the only way to survive. Charrière emphasises that his will to survive and make a new life for himself was the sole purpose he needed to carry on. During his first escape from the penal settlement, he comes across a Native American tribe on the Guajira Peninsula, Columbia. Initially he is treated as an outsider by the tribe, but over time he earns their trust and is able to connect and even bond with them. He spends only a brief time of six months there, but he later reflects that this simple way of life he participated in was one he would regret leaving for the rest of his life. This theme of civilisation vs.

savagery is constantly subverted, and at a time where capital punishment was still exercised without mercy, it makes sense that Charrière and others like him

found solace in the simpler things. This tale of one man and his struggle to escape a society that had rejected him is one of toil, and not for the faint hearted. However, it is also an uplifting story that shows the true power of the human spirit, and one that cannot be truly encapsulated in the written word.

Had seen the movie previously to reading the book. Both are great, but, as usual, the book gives so much more insight to the story. The feeling you get from the pages really inspire, disturb, and infect you with the feeling of what life was like in the French penal colony of Devil's Island.

This memoir, quasi-autobiographical fiction or whatever one wants to dub it, is, as almost all the reviewers here attest, a gripping narrative of the human condition and source of strength and hope for anyone, especially anyone undergoing the trials and tribulations of man's inhumanity to man. True, CharriÃ©re more often than not comes across as a bit of an incarcerated flÃ©neur with a sort of noblesse oblige toward everyone involved, from fellow prisoners to guards, wardens, administrators, the lot. But he has a sense of humour about his own hyperbolic amour-propre which makes it endurable. At one point, faced with a dilemma in this moral code of his, he writes: "I smiled at the prospect of having to search out an evil policeman with no family. How should I put it to him: 'If I kill you, are you sure no one will miss you?'" Very droll, Papi. All this aside, what marks this book out from other books of the sort is the detailed descriptions of the torrid conditions of the tropic zone where our hero spends his sentence. They are utterly convincing, and if there's one thing to which everyone agrees it's that, guilty or not, Henri CharriÃ©re did spend much of his life on penal colonies such as the Île-Royale, described thus: "The noon sun was leaden-a tropical sun to boil the brain in your skull; a sun that shrivelled the plants not yet grown strong enough to resist it; a sun that, in a few hours, dried up all but the deepest salt-water pools, leaving only a white film of salt; a sun that set the air to dancing-it literally moved before my eyes-its reflection on the water burning my pupils." In his second stay in solitary confinement, he pens - perhaps a bit too overtly - a passage worthy of France's greatest writer, who famously confined himself to a cork-lined closet during much of his latter years: "Such sharp recollections of moments and events fifteen years in the past, and the ability to relive them so intensely, can only be accomplished in a cell where you're cut off from all noise, in the most absolute silence. I can even see the yellow of Aunt Outine's dress. I could hear the wind in the chestnut trees, the dry noise a chestnut makes as it falls on the ground, or its soft thump when it hits a pile of leaves... And there was no one to stop me from rolling around in these memories and drinking in the peace so

necessary to my battered soul."Despite the nod Proust-wards here, there can be no doubt in the reader's mind after finishing the book, despite questions about specifics, that the writer has indeed been battered in soul and in body and seen the very best and the very worst of which humans are capable, and that the reader, vicariously, has done so as well.As Papillon says about the halfway fictitious explanation of an incident concocted, in order to save their skins and positions, by both guards and prisoners for the administration on one of the colonies:"It has since remained part legend, part true story."So with "Papillon" and his harrowing tale of hope amidst the darkest adversity.

I have not watched the movie yet. This book was a pleasure to read and filled with joy, hope, despair and so much adventure. I recommend this book to anybody. It has a clear message that all is not lost in the world, even if you are down there is still hope. I plan on watching the movie soon, but very glad I read the book first.

I never write reviews, mostly because if I am reading a good book usually people don't need me to tell them the book is a classic, if the book is bad or just a book layover until something better comes along, why write a review? What should I say? Predictable and so so, if you have a couple of hours to kill...read this.Papillon had me entranced, I can't explain in words the emotions I felt while reading Henri's story. The amount of detail and emotions he poured into his story literally makes you feel as if you're there, surviving, escaping, crying, loving, and living. I would recommend this story to anyone.

The amazing story of Henri Charierre, (- nicknamed Papillon) convicted of a murder he did not commit, sentenced to life in one of history's most brutal prison systems , would never give up in his bid for a decent life, this man who did not pretend innocence, would escape to freedom at even the cost of his own life. A richly told , absolutely engrossing story.

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