

# Henri Charrière, *Papillon* (1969)

2/2

FR325

Term 1, Week 5

# Today

- Charrière's self-presentation in the text (continued)
- student presentation: kinship and 'masculinities'
- mini-lecture:
  - the disputed ownership of the story
  - money and the economic dimension
- small group and plenary discussion:
  - what light does *Papillon* shed on *le bagne* as one instrument of colonization among others?
  - identify and discuss at least three of the principal techniques of coercive governance and prisoner resistance apparent in the text
- over Reading Week
- details of Week 7 session

# Charrière's self-presentation

- the motivation(s) for his escape attempts
- his relationships with other convicts
- his resilience and any other salient character traits

# motivation to escape?

## “I just want to be normal”

- ‘je dois revivre dans une société normalement civilisée et démontrer que je puis en faire partie sans être un danger pour elle. [...] Je dois arriver à prouver que je peux, que je suis – et je le serai – un être normal sinon meilleur que les autres individus d’une quelconque collectivité ou d’un quelconque pays.’ (211)
- ‘mon devoir est de partir en cavale et, une fois libre, d’être un homme normal vivant en société sans être un danger pour elle.’ (417)

# relationships with other convicts

- diminutive form of nickname, 'Papi'
- his inspirational Captain's speech (136)
- typically as leader (265)
- but always also exceptional?

# Student presentation and discussion

- kinship and ‘masculinities’ in *Papillon*, in light of Collier (1998), ch. 1, on the ‘masculinities turn’ in criminology

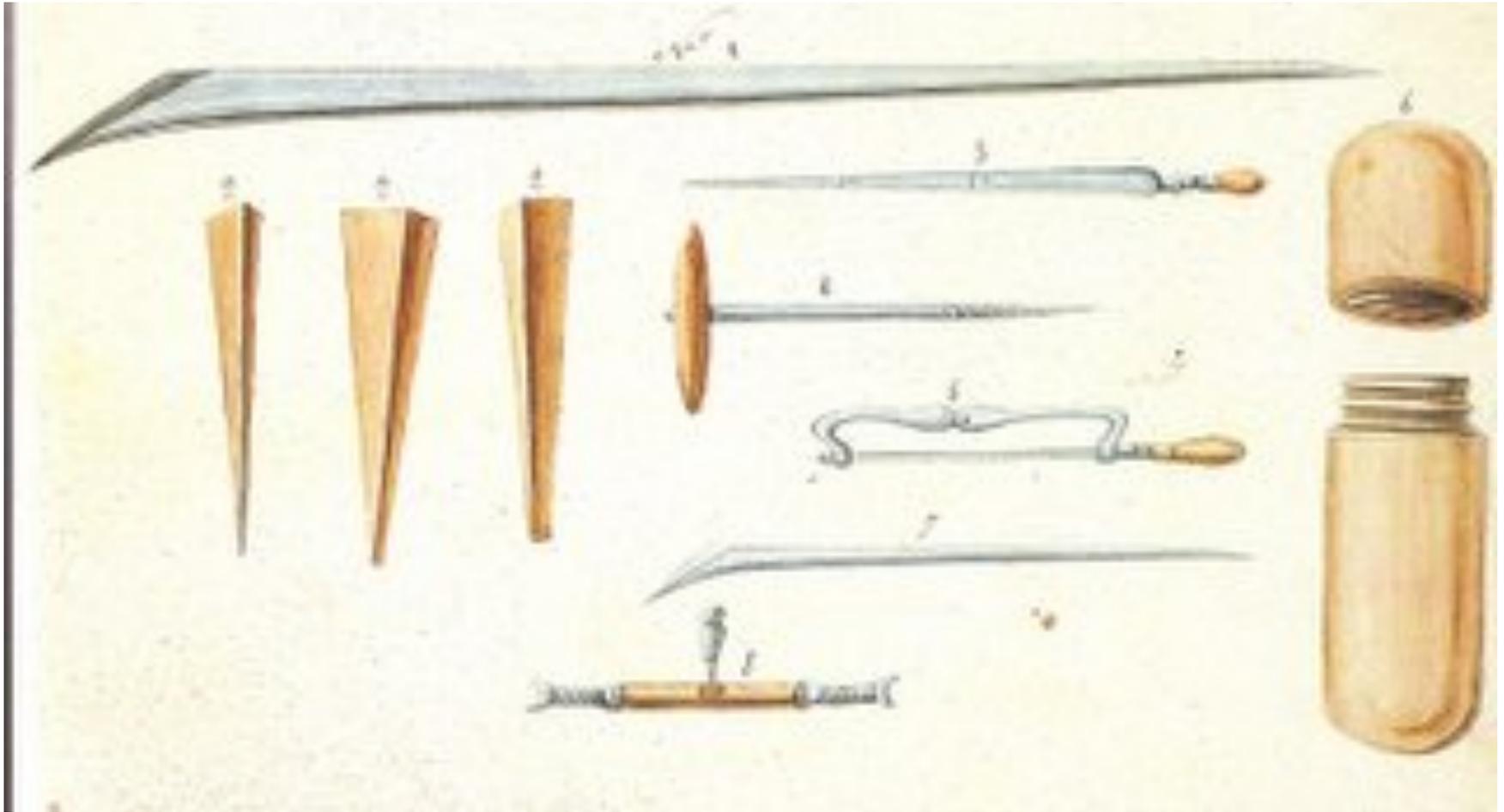
# kinship and 'masculinities'

- kinship: 'To an anthropologist, a kinship system is not a list of biological relatives. It is a system of categories and statuses which often contradict actual genetic relationships.' (Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women', *Deviations*, 41)
- resonance of shortened (diminutive) form of his nickname, 'Papi'
- 'Je suis anéanti et ne proteste pas ; j'essaye de me maintenir digne. Il y a pas à demander pitié ni pardon. Sois un homme et pense que jamais tu ne dois perdre l'espoir. Tout cela passe rapidement dans mon cerveau. Et quand je descends de la voiture, je suis si décidé à avoir l'air d'un homme et non d'une loque et je le réussis si bien que [...].' (204)
- *les gourbis* (= 'petites communautés', 315): 'les membres d'un gourbi mangent ensemble et l'argent de l'un est à tout le monde' (311) cf. 'familles' of Mettray (difference?)
- self-presentation as 'all-round great bloke' (see, for example, 312)
- 'cette loi d'homme' (328) & the 'duty' to escape ('la "belle"')
- striking fraternity/camaraderie/relationship of respect even with some senior prison officials: 'Tu méritais de réussir' (366)
- and criminology's interest in 'masculinities' (Collier)?

# Mini-lecture

- the controversy over the ‘ownership’ of the story
  - Charrière a polarizing figure
  - initial commercial success: 800,000 in 8 months
  - translated into Italian, Spanish, German, English
  - two contestatory accounts:
    - Gérard de Villiers, *Papillon épinglé* (Presses de la Cité, 1970)
      - months of investigative journalism in Guiana and Venezuela
      - argued that much of Charrière’s story was invented
    - Georges Ménager, *Les Quatre vérités de Papillon* (La Table Ronde, 1970)
      - revisits the criminal investigation of 1930
      - tried to show Charrière was guilty of the murder
      - Charrière tries to sue for invasion of privacy (1970) but fails
  - press conference on sale of millionth copy: HC claimed 75% true, 25% made up (Didier, 260)
- but is such ‘literary policing’ appropriate here?
  - see also Marie Darrieussecq, *Rapport de police: accusations de plagiat et autres modes de surveillance de la fiction* (Paris: POL, 2010)
  - narrative elements are arguably not the most significant

# the economic dimension



un 'plan' (*une planque*)

# le plan (planque)

- first introduced: 'mon coffre-fort' (20)
- Galgani gives Papillon his (46-7)
- removes before hospital X-ray (76-7)
- authorities clearly aware (62, 398)
  - so why no systematic searching?
  - paradoxical freedom afforded by a strong social taboo?
  - why so seldom discussed in work on *le bagne*?
- many prisoners carry (256)
- two make Papillon their 'héritier' (259) => kinship

# broader economic dimension

- black market economy (Godfroy, 93)
- church on Île Royale a particular focus (Godfroy, 96)
- alcohol trafficking networks (Pierre, 190)
- but also ‘economic policing’
  - control of freed convicts through crime of *le vagabondage* (Godfroy, 107) to force work

# Small-group work and plenary seminar discussion - questions

1. what light does *Papillon* shed on *le bagné* as one instrument of colonization among others?
2. identify and discuss three techniques of coercive governance apparent in the text. How do prisoners resist this coercion?

# Additional material

1. what light does *Papillon* shed on *le bagne* as one instrument of colonization among others?
  - penal colony to punish, rehabilitate through work and effect colonial expansion (Godfroy, 78)
  - *doublage* (1854) for *transportés* and *la Relégation* (1885) both instruments of colonization as well as punitive and preventative measures
  - note racialization
  - but (economic) tension between penal and colonial functions

# Techniques of coercive governance and prisoner resistance

- rigidly fixed and full timetable (35)
  - BUT possibility of transfer to other sites or duties
- hierarchical governance and discipline
  - exploitation of mental illness (36)
  - systemic violence
  - BUT competition for supervisory positions (39-40)
- architecture and design (35)
- ritualized humiliation
  - use of nakedness (37, 38)
  - BUT the 'plan'

- the rule of silence:
  - ‘Silence absolu obligatoire’ (46)
  - altercation with Tribouillard (38)
  - as particular feature of La Réclusion (280, 287)
    - obsessive aspect: guards and prisoners in slippers (281)
  - BUT the prisoners’ so called ‘téléphone’ (38-9)
- ‘side-punishments’ and punitive administrative measures, or omissions:
  - lack official status as punishments but punitive nonetheless
  - Julot to wait to see a doctor with broken arm (40)
  - poor conditions lead to deaths (45)
  - systematic production of mental illness (302-3) and suicide (294), especially in La Réclusion
  - systematic production of physical illness and malnutrition (300, 369)
  - BUT feigning of amnesia turns this to advantage (296-7)

- ‘Profiling’ of the ‘incorrigibles’
  - La Relégation as preventative measure
  - Sanchez, ‘Les “incorrigibles”’
  - critiqued in text (51)
  - as juridical concept developed 1881-5
    - qualified Third Republic’s belief in progress (Sanchez, 73)
  - note especially policing of petty theft and vagrancy (Sanchez, 73)
- ‘Inhuman and degrading treatment’
  - violence ubiquitous
  - 11 days handcuffed (41)
  - the poisonous centipedes
  - the use of La Réclusion especially to promote mental illness and physical weakness

# Module 'housekeeping'

- Reading Week
  - review all work so far, catch up if necessary on reading
  - read Ferrari
  - watch *Muriel*
- Week 7 session