

DESPERATELY SEEKING STEREOTYPES:
DAVID HENRY HWANG AND *M.*
BUTTERFLY

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Elaine Kim, in *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context*, her critical study of one of the most vibrant literatures in America today, has stated that the task of Asian American writers is to “contribute to the total image and identity of America by depicting their own experience and by defining their own humanity as part of the composite image of the American people” (22). One of the major areas of conflict in this task of describing and presenting an accurate portrait of the Asian in America is the battle that has had to be fought against stereotypes. Caricatures of Asians have been part of American popular culture for generations: the power-hungry despot, the helpless heathen, the sensuous dragon lady, the comical loyal servant, and the pudgy, desexed detective who quotes Confucius are all part of the standard American image of the Asian (Kim 3). Anglo-American writers of some literary merit have used these popular models, and sketches of these Asian characters can be found in the works of Bret Harte, Jack London, John Steinbeck, Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris and other writers of the American West. Ostensibly intending to provide sympathetic views of the Chinese, these writers could offer little more than conventional characters consisting of fragments that articulated the most obvious aspects of difference. Knowing little about the realities of Asian life in America, these writers tended to depict the Chinese as “helpless or pathetic or enigmatic people, and (they) used Chinese characters primarily to expose the ignorance and follies of the white men who were their major concern” (Kim 14). Because of this, for over a hundred years, popular presentations of Asians in American literature has remained at a level perhaps best described as stereotypical.

This condition in the development of Anglo-American writing has its roots in all of Western literature's classic conception of the East. Confining Asian culture and personality to a cluster of easily recognizable and manageable characteristics is a phenomenon described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. The Orient, the mysterious land on the other side of the ocean, is, according to Said, almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences (1). It is at the same time, as seen through Western eyes, a land and a people that seek to be dominated and that permit, even desire, a molding according to the foreign standard. The encounter between the Westerner and the Oriental, as reflected in literature, is consequently presented as a series of possible dealings in which the former constantly demonstrates his superiority. As such, the interaction between the Occidental world and the Orient is habitually shown to be a relationship of power and domination, of varying degrees of a complex cultural hegemony. The key to such a phenomenon, according to Said, is that "the Orient was Orientalized, not only because it was discovered to be 'Oriental' ... but because it *could be* -that is, submitted to being -*made* Oriental" (227).

The resulting attitude towards the Oriental emphasized an insurmountable difference and a supposed inferiority of the Eastern culture. Only an Occidental, Said explains, could speak of Orientals just as it was the White Man who could designate and name the nonwhites; and every affirmation made by them regarding the Orientals served primarily to convey the sense of a distance, more irreducible than a merely physical one, separating the West from the East (229). A clear manifestation of this, for example, is the popular fact that distinctions among Asians by Caucasians are rare. Westerners have traditionally found it difficult to distinguish between the Asian nationalities, nor have they always made much effort to do so. The basis of this chasm is clearly the tradition of education and prejudice that has kept the Oriental in a position of object to be studied by the Occidental.

From this point of view, it may be observed that stereotypes of racial minorities in the West are a record of prejudices; they often serve as part of an attempt to justify various attitudes and practices. Kim has asserted that the function of stereotypes of Asians in Anglo-American literature has been to provide literary rituals through which the myths of white supremacy might be continually reaffirmed, to the everlasting detriment of the Asian (22). In the portrayal of the Asians, race has customarily been considered more significant than culture and cursory moral judgements were made on the basis of skin color and the shape of the eye. These racial stereotypes may therefore have been the principal impediment to the Westerner's ability to understand, interpret and accept the Asian.

Nonetheless, the constant use of the caricature or of the accepted model in literary representation points to a more complicated question. To stereotype, G. W. Allport in his *The Nature of Prejudice* tells us, is to place a newly encountered entity into a preestablished category to save oneself the effort and time of getting to know the

entity and having to think about it. Whether favorable or unfavorable, a stereotype can be considered an exaggerated belief associated with a category whose function is to justify or even rationalize our conduct in relation to that category (Allsport 191). Consequently, stereotypes tend to be self-reflexive, telling us more about the person holding the stereotype than the one being stereotyped. The truth behind the stereotype therefore, more than an observation and analysis of the other, is almost certainly the need to have a particular belief flatter the observer's vanity and give him a sense of power.

In this sense, Anglo-American literature that deals with Asians does not tell us about Asians. It tells us about the Westerners' opinion of themselves, in relation to their opinions of Asians. As such, it is useful primarily in that it illustrates how racism reflects culture. The Anglo-American portrayal of the Asian serves as a foil to describe the Occidental as "not-Asian": when the Asian is heartless and treacherous, the Anglo is shown indirectly as imbued with integrity and humanity; when the Asian is a cheerful and docile inferior, he projects the Anglo's benevolence and importance (Kim 4). The assumption that attitudes and behavior patterns are racially inherited is clearly demonstrated, and the emphasis is always on the permanent differences and the establishment of a series of beliefs that define the Westerner as superior physically, spiritually, and morally.

One of the most interesting illustrations on the nature of the stereotypes is the portrayal of Asian women. Just as Asians in general are depicted as helpless, ignorant and easily vanquished by the Westerner's obvious superiority, the combination of the cultural and gender stereotype in the Asian woman makes her an especially attractive target for the Western man. She is therefore, for the most part, portrayed in relation to the white man as a foil for his virility and magnetism; this man is traditionally the source of the liberation she seeks from her own culture and promises a new and better life.

It is easy to define the range of the stereotypes that persist for the Asian woman in Anglo-American literature. All are effortlessly identifiable, and Amy Ling explains that they can be summarized into polar extremes, roughly parallel to the whore/madonna or to the "madwoman in the attic"/ "angel in the house" dichotomies for white women.

At one end of the spectrum is the Dragon Lady, a female counterpart to the diabolical Fu Manchu. With her talon-like six-inch fingernails, her skin-tight satin dress slit to the thigh, she can poison a man as easily as she seductively smiles and puffs on her foot-long cigarette holder. An "Oriental" Circe, she is as desirable as she is dangerous. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the Shy Lotus Blossom or China Doll: demure, diminutive, and deferential. She is modest, tittering behind her delicate ivory hand, eyes downcast, always walking 10 steps behind her man, and, best of all, devoted body and soul to serving him (11).

While these recognizable versions have flourished in Western literature for over a century, it was the creation of the character known to the world as *Madama Butterfly* that conclusively defined the Asian woman's stereotypical model. Inspired by the success of John Luther Long's short story *Madame Butterfly* (1898), New York director David Belasco in 1900 collaborated with Long to produce the mythic stage representation of *Madame Butterfly*. While these early projects enjoyed some success, it was the operatic production that ultimately consecrated the stereotype. *Madama Butterfly*, a cultural "classic" - music by Giacomo Puccini, libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica that debuted at La Scala in 1904 - remains a staple of contemporary opera repertoire, still one of the most performed operas around the world.

The tragic heroine of this opera is arguably the most recognizable and popular stereotypical representation of the ideal of the Asian woman. The plot of the opera is well known. Pinkerton, a bored navy captain stationed in Nagasaki, fakes a wedding to develop a liason with a young Japanese woman. After he departs, she gives birth to his child and then awaits his return, faithful to him and trusting in his promise. Pinkerton does return, accompanied by his American wife, but only to claim his child. As "death with honor is better than life with dishonor," the only recourse left to Cho-cho san is suicide.

Madama Butterfly draws on and recirculates familiar orientalist models. It harnesses and elaborates on the various traditionally acknowledged emblems of Japanese identity: Cho-cho san is a *geisha*, that quintessential Western paragon of Japanese women; the manner of her death is the form of suicide conventionally associated in the West with Japan; and the construction of the Japanese as a "people accustomed to little things, humble and silent". In this story, Asianness was reconstituted as an object to be looked at, pinned to a board with a precisely placed needle through its heart. The beauty and the tragedy of the opera, as seen through Western eyes, is that the Asian woman is ultimately condemned to die, as her identity as a Japanese *geisha* demands. Butterfly sacrifices everything: her "husband", her religion, her people, her son and, ultimately, her very life, for the love of a Westerner. The opera achieves its success in this sense principally because it caters to the Occidentals' expectations. In Puccini's portrayal, "men are men, women women, Japanese Japanese, Americans Americans, as defined by familiar narrative conventions. And the predictable happens: West wins over East, Man over Woman, White Man over Asian Woman" (Kondo 10).

In 1988, David Henry Hwang, son of first-generation Chinese immigrants, wrote *M. Butterfly*, an award-winning play that was to be a rejection of the stereotype of the Asian woman. Inspired by international newspaper accounts of an espionage trial in 1986, in which a French diplomat was accused of passing information to a Chinese spy, the lover whom he believed for twenty years to be a woman, Hwang created a drama that demonstrates the extent of the Westerner's desire - his desperate need - to believe in the Oriental stereotype. For the playwright, the "impossible" story

of a Frenchman duped by a Chinese man masquerading as a woman seemed perfectly explicable; given the degree of misunderstanding between men and women and also between East and West, he saw as inevitable that a mistake of this magnitude would one day take place (Hwang 1988, 98). The playwright himself, when he began to work on the play, had not seen nor read the opera, although he was familiar with the stereotype. He has stated that part of the appeal for him in working on this play was the idea of doing a “deconstructivist *Madama Butterfly*” (Hwang 1988, 95). The resulting drama intrigues by its sheer improbability and captivates by its truth, as the playwright engages the audience in a discussion of cultural and gender issues that has at its heart a self-reflexive statement about the relationship between love and fantasy.

M. Butterfly clearly challenges Anglo-American representations of Asians, and has as its aim to dispel stereotypical perceptions of Asians, especially of Asian women. The play can only be fully understood as a set of layered meanings constructed over or according to a central or key metaphorical figure - that of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Hwang obviously considers the Puccini opera as a paradigm of East-West relations and Western biases in its romantic sentimentalization of Oriental docility and submissiveness and through his play questions traditional cultural and gender assumptions. Its technique is principally the systematic disruption of accepted belief: seeing how “typical” *Madama Butterfly* is, we appreciate its complexity as narrative foil to *M. Butterfly*. Hwang tried to deal with a certain discomfort in the perceived “exotic” elements of his work by facing it squarely. “In effect,” he has written,

I'd like to think *Butterfly* says to an audience, ‘All right, we'll give you the orientalia you seem to desire, but then we're also going to talk about why you're so attracted to this, and how that attachment to stereotype blinds you to the truth of your own experience’ - in the case of my play's deceived Frenchman, even to the extent of being unable to tell the true gender of his lover (Hwang 1989, 18).

The action of *M. Butterfly* takes place in a Paris prison in the present, where Rene Gallimard awaits trial and sentence for espionage. He is accused of passing government information to his lover, Song Liling, the Chinese opera singer with whom he has maintained a relationship for twenty years and who turns out to be not only a spy but also a man. The events leading up to his arrest and the revelation of the truth are told in flashback. Filtered through the memories, the prejudices, the longings and the dreams of the French diplomat, the narrative convention of “submissive Oriental woman and cruel white man” is played out in many different arenas, including, perhaps most importantly, the space of fantasy created and reproduced by Gallimard himself.

The creative subversiveness of Hwang's play emerges most clearly in contrast with the conventions of the opera *Madama Butterfly*, to which it provides ironic counterpoint. Hwang reappropriates the conventional narrative of the pitiful Butterfly

and the trope of the submissive Oriental woman, rupturing the perfect climax and the dramatic inevitability of the storyline (Kondo 7). The formal idea behind the play is found in the presentation of opposing social and psychological forces in their struggle for power over the imagination of the French diplomat René Gallimard. Robert Skloot has pointed out that Hwang creates the dynamic clash of these opposites on many levels. Moreover, he asserts, the images of binary opposition (East/West, Communism/Capitalism, Male/Female, Body/Mind, Reality/Fantasy) are graphically presented in performance through the permanent spatial image of a long and tipped curved ramp which serves to define an enclosure where the sharply angular interior scenes of the play - Gallimard's jail cell, Song's apartment - take place (60).

The play's attack on the stereotype is centered principally on the idea of how gender and race are mutually implicated in the construction of identity, and the insidiousness of gender and racial stereotypes. The character Song Liling is given the task of exposing the desires and interests that underlie Occidental conceptions of the "Orient" and "Oriental," as (s)he takes advantage of these delusions to control and manipulate Gallimard, the prototypical Western character. From his first appearance on stage, Song's dialogue and actions are characterized by their irony, and a careful analysis of this role demonstrates Hwang's constant attack against the stereotype. At their first meeting, after Gallimard has praised his performance as *Madama Butterfly* and sighed over the tragic beauty of the opera, Song's reply, true to his mission, is:

Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years, during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage from a young Kennedy. Then, when she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct? But because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner - ah!- you find it beautiful (17).

This passage sets the tone for the play and divulges how *M. Butterfly* will be characterized by ironic reversals that will painstakingly demolish a well-beloved stereotype. The two principal reversals are fully captured in the play's title. *M. Butterfly* alludes to its origin in Puccini's play, while at the same time altering and expanding gender reference. A Western reader might easily assume that the "M." before "Butterfly" in the title refers to "Madame," unconsciously clinging to something recognizable. Gender ambiguity is therefore present already in the title - is it Madame, Monsieur, Mr., Mrs., or Ms. Butterfly? An American might even read it as "Em Butterfly", further heightening confusion. The title thus points to the first important dramatic reversal in the play: the discovery that delicate opera singer with whom Gallimard has fallen in love is not a Madame, as everyone supposes, but a Monsieur.

This dramatic and painful gender reversal is the most intricately constructed

point of the play. Its credibility lies in the overwhelming power of the stereotype and the Westerner's attitude towards the Asian. The logic that might be expected to exist at the most superficial levels of plot and character consistency is undermined by Hwang's interest in portraying this exceptional and interested capacity for self-delusion (Pao 8). Gallimard falls into the trap of his own cultural and gender delusions as pointed out by Song Liling: "the West thinks of itself as masculine - big guns, big industry, big money - so the East is feminine - weak, delicate, poor... but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom - the feminine mystique... The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated - because a woman can't think for herself"(83). The only explanation for the diplomat's not knowing that Song Liling was actually a man is that he chose not to know anything that would interfere with his image of the ideal Asian woman who loved him completely and would give her life for him.

The opera *Madama Butterfly* is Hwang's touchstone for the destruction of the stereotype as it serves as the vantage point that provides Gallimard with his vision of the Orient and the women in it. The French diplomat sees Song Liling for the first time at a performance of the opera, and their relationship is to be constructed with the opera as background. Gallimard openly fancies himself to be Pinkerton and wants what he had, suggesting that "while we men may all want to kick Pinkerton, very few of us would pass up the opportunity to *be* Pinkerton"(42). His vision of the Orient is clouded by the rose-colored lenses of the myth of the docile Asian woman looking admiringly at the White man: "We, who are not handsome, nor brave, nor powerful, yet somehow believe, like Pinkerton, that we deserve a Butterfly"(10).

Once the Orientalist backdrop has been set, Gallimard will prefer fantasy to truth, the stereotype to the reality. Dorrine Kondo has written that Gallimard's problem is that "he will cling to an ideology of meaning as reference to notions of identity: for him, clichéd images of gender, race and geography unproblematically occupy the inner space of identity, enabling opera star Song Liling to seduce through the play of inner truth and outer appearance" (15). Gallimard adheres blindly to the stereotyped images of women and of the Orient, where he assumes a direct relationship between outward appearance and truth of self. The idea of oneness between the ideal he nurtures of the Asian woman and Song Liling is so steadfast that he is unable to see even the difference between a 1960s Chinese opera singer and a fictional Japanese tragic heroine. Gallimard's fantasy merges the Orient into one indistinguishable mass, eliminating the differences among Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese. His is a vision of "slender women in chong sams and kimonos who die for the love of unworthy foreign devils. Who are born and raised to be the perfect women. Who take whatever punishment we give them, and bounce back, strengthened by love, unconditionally" (91). Song is irrevocably transmuted into Gallimard's own *Madama Butterfly*, in spite of even the obvious difference of nationality and the absurdity of such an occurrence. The Frenchman's vanity is aroused when faced with the ideal, and the Pinkerton in him is unveiled: "Here... here was a Butterfly with little or no voice - but she had the grace,

the delicacy...I believed this girl. I believed her suffering. I wanted to take her in my arms - so delicate, even I could protect her, take her home, pamper her until she smiled” (16).

From the first moment, a series of stereotypes, explicit or not, will dominate Gallimard and Song’s relationship, and permit the latter’s absolute control. The idea of the Western man as the Asian woman’s deepest desire and destiny will make Gallimard fall irrevocably in love with Song, while believing that he has the upper hand and that it is (s)he who is being overcome by passion. The appearance of his friend Marc, in the dream scene in Act One, further confirms the illusions the Frenchman harbours in his heart: “She cannot love you, it is taboo, but something deep inside her heart...she cannot help herself...she must surrender to you. It is her destiny”(25). Gallimard parrots traditional Western conceptions of the East as he outlines the developing phases of their relationship: “Orientals will always submit to a greater force (46) ...In my heart, I know she has...an interest in me. I suspect this is her way. She is outwardly bold and outspoken, yet her heart is shy and afraid. It is the Oriental in her at war with her Western education” (27).

Song makes a travesty of the same classic beliefs as (s)he feeds fuel to Gallimard’s delusions. (S)he plays to the diplomat’s romanticism, knowing exactly where his weak points are, and using them to his own advantage. One calculated exchange in Act One, when Gallimard goes to Song’s apartment for the first time, is paradigmatic of the Chinese spy’s caricature of the Western ideal. “Hard as I try to be modern, to speak like a man, to hold a Western woman’s strong face up to my own...in the end, I fail. A small, frightened heart beats too quickly and gives me away. Monsieur Gallimard, I’m a Chinese girl.” The Frenchman’s response is to be anticipated: “Did you hear the way she talked about Western women? Much differently than the first night. She does - she feels inferior to them - and to me” (31).

Gallimard is thus held captive by his own illusions. As he is drawn tighter into the web of idealism and sentimentalism, he is more blinded to the truth about the object of his love. For Gallimard does love, passionately and totally, as did *Madama Butterfly* before him. But the fundamental part of the relationship is the fantasy, and only through this can Gallimard’s love be understood. Without that it is no longer the same relationship. Gallimard is not in love with an Asian man, he desires *Madame Butterfly*. Hwang points to this as one of the central aspects of the drama:

The play is to some degree about the nature of seduction - in the sense that we seduce ourselves. Sometimes when you have the desire to fall in love or you desire to have someone to be some kind of ideal, you can make that person ideal in your own mind whether or not the actual the actual facts correspond to the reality. I think that it’s often true in a smaller, less extreme sense that we get involved with people and decide to blind ourselves to their faults so that they can be the perfect love that we’ve always wanted. And on some level we’re aware that

that is not the case. But we prefer the fantasy over the reality (DiGaetani, 143).

In his obsession with the Perfect Oriental Woman, Gallimard truly remains the prisoner and the willing sacrificial victim of his orientalist cultural clichés - a realm of pure imagination. Gallimard can only act the way he does because he knows and believes in the artistic structure of *Madama Butterfly*. In desperation he cries out: "Why can't anyone understand? That in China, I once loved, and was loved by, very simply, the Perfect Woman"(77). The ultimate irony is, of course, that the Perfect Woman is actually a man. Interestingly enough, this reversal has its roots in *kabuki*, the classic Japanese theater where men play the roles of women because it is believed that "a woman can only be a woman whereas a man can be the idealization of a woman" (DiGaetani 146). Song echoes this principle saying "... only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act"(63), referring to the unlikelihood of Gallimard's having fallen in love with a real Asian woman. This emphasizes the essential point of the play: Gallimard did not want a real woman. He sought an ideal and found, in Song Liling, *Madama Butterfly*.

Gallimard's deception because of preconception is not limited to the question of gender. Interestingly enough, the truth about Song Liling goes beyond gender to challenge the very nature of stereotypical beliefs even more. The doubt is no longer simply whether to ascribe to a stereotype or not, but centers on *which* stereotype is being regarded. The lack of a solid basis in fact forces an ambiguity in traditional classifications in such a way that the truth is blurred on all sides. In the creation of Song Liling, Hwang presents a character that not only demolishes the ideal of the Asian woman, but also hints up to what extent stereotypes can confuse. Throughout the play, Song is presented as demure and docile; "a modest Chinese girl"(40). The revelation of the truth of his sex shows furthermore how he moves from the image of the Lotus Blossom to Amy Ling's definition of its stereotypical opposite. The China doll is in reality the Dragon Lady, crafty and heartlessly cunning, to the point of causing Gallimard's suicide. Not only are stereotypes deceptive as to outward appearances but they deceive because of their ambiguity, as they can be confounded among themselves.

Nonetheless, Hwang's shrewd choice of title conceals more than simple gender misidentification. The true reversal of the title lies not in what the "M." refers to but to whom it refers. If in *Madama Butterfly* the tragic heroine is the Asian woman who dies for love of a Western man, the stereotype-destroying climax in *M. Butterfly* is that the tragic hero(ine) is a Frenchman who commits suicide for love of a Chinese (wo)man. "M. Butterfly" does not ultimately refer to Song Liling dressed as a woman, but points to the transformation Gallimard will undergo. Monsieur Gallimard is revealed to be the real "Monsieur" Butterfly. Furthermore, in this play, Butterfly, the consecrated model for the ideal Asian woman, is to be a man in every sense. Song, who acts like and pretends to be *Madama Butterfly* is proven to be a man, and the one who actually embodies the tragic fate of Butterfly to the point of dying like her, Gallimard, is a man.

The transformation of Gallimard may also be hinted at by further name

ambiguity present in the play. His first name - Rene - which sounds the same in its masculine and feminine forms, permits traditional gender identification to remain undefined. The confusion is heightened when he begins to have an affair with a woman who is also named Renee, characterized as being the cultural and personality opposite of Song, with whom Gallimard is in love.

The role reversals of Gallimard and Song are the very essence of the play, the carefully elected dramatic structure that conveys the interworkings of delusion at various levels. Gallimard believes and wants to believe that he is superior and that Song is - and feels - inferior. The conflict of the play is revealed to be not only between Gallimard and Song, but principally between Gallimard and himself - his realism blinded by his idealism and incapacity to accept the truth. When Gallimard is cruelly stripped of his fantasy, of the "vision that has become my life (91)", he has no recourse but to fulfill his dream in the only way he sees possible: turning back to the original romantic ideal and escaping through death.

This is, in Hwang's opinion, the basic "arc" of the play: the Frenchman fantasizes that he is Pinkerton and his lover is Butterfly. By the end of the piece, he realizes that it is he who has been Butterfly, in that the Frenchman has been duped by love; the Chinese spy, who exploited that love, is therefore the real Pinkerton (Hwang 1988, 95-96). In the charged concluding dialogue, Gallimard recognizes himself guilty of the same sin as Madama Butterfly: that of having loved a mere man, not an ideal. His fantasy-strewn life interpenetrates that of his imaginary lover, and he realizes that the only curse open to him is the same as that chosen by Puccini's Cho-Cho san. Gallimard's collision with the reality parallels Madama Butterfly's: both loved a lie to such an extent that the discovery of the truth implied total destruction of the self. "And the truth demands a sacrifice. For mistakes made over the course of a lifetime. My mistakes were simple and absolute - the man I loved was a cad, a bounder. He deserved nothing but a kick in the behind, and instead I gave him...all my love" (92). At the moment Gallimard is able to tell the real from fantasy, he realizes that he cannot live without his ideal nor accept the crushing truth about his dream; knowing the difference, he chooses to take the fantasy to its inevitable end.

Death with honor is better than life...life with dishonor... The love of a Butterfly can withstand many things - unfaithfulness, loss, even abandonment. But how can it face the one sin that implies all others? That devastating knowledge that, underneath it all, the object of her love was nothing more, nothing less than...a man (92).

The Puccini score successfully dominates the final scene as, on one level, Gallimard's final transformation into his cultural and gender opposite is achieved through the appropriately performed ritual suicide. As the diplomat commits *seppuku*,

Song, making explicit the ironic role reversal, declares Gallimard his "Butterfly" as the lights fade to black. Thus, *M. Butterfly* concludes with the reaffirmation of a cultural myth while at the same time turning it inside out: Gallimard becomes absorbed into his own fantasy, one which originated for him in an early twentieth-century Italian opera and which is both re-validated and demolished in his death (Skloot, 60). Although he cannot deny the fact that the Madama Butterfly who entered his life is not what he imagined her to be, his need for the stereotype is such that he transforms himself into that ideal because his own romanticism cannot permit its destruction. "It is 19—. And I have found her at last. In a prison on the outskirts of Paris. My name is Rene Gallimard - also known as Madame Butterfly." (93)

Although *M. Butterfly* has sometimes been regarded as an anti-American play, a violent assault against the stereotyping of the East by the West and of women by men, Hwang's intention, and the resulting drama, is not principally destructive. On the contrary, the playwright considers his work an appeal to people everywhere to go beyond the facile categorizing of cultural and gender characteristics and seek not the stereotype but the truth about each one as a human being.

For the myths of the East, the myths of the West, the myths of men, and the myths of women - these have so saturated our consciousness that truthful contact between nations and lovers can only be the result of heroic effort. Those who prefer to bypass the work involved will remain in a world of surfaces, misperceptions running rampant. This is, to me, the convenient world in which the French diplomat and the Chinese spy lived. This is why, after twenty years, he had learned nothing about his lover, not even the truth of his sex" (Hwang 1988, 100).

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