M. Butterfly

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID HENRY HWANG

David Henry Hwang was born in Los Angeles, California in 1957. He was the oldest of three children, and the only boy in his family. Hwang received his undergraduate degree at Stanford University, where he majored in English and produced his first-ever play. Hwang attended, but did not graduate from, the Yale School of Drama. His first play, *FOB*, premiered in 1980. He went on to write many other plays, including *The Dance and the Railroad* (1981), which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and the Tony Award-winning *M. Butterfly* (1988). Hwang has also built a career writing for opera and musical theater, and worked on adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, among other projects. His most recent plays, *Kung-Fu* and *Cain and Abel*, premiered in 2014, the same year Hwang began working as director of the playwriting concentration at Columbia University School of the Arts.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1949, a civil war between the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party, also known as Kuomintang, led to the installation of a Communist government led by Chairman Mao Zedong. The frequent references to "the Revolution" that characters like Song make throughout the play refer to that period of political upheaval. The events of *M. Butterfly*, which begins in 1960, take place shortly after the Indochina War, in which France fought unsuccessfully to maintain control of its colonies in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The Vietnamese forces that led the resistance against France were aided by the Communist government in neighboring China, who supplied modern weapons from the Soviet Union that helped the Vietnamese to match and eventually defeat what might otherwise have been overwhelming French forces. Other Western nations, including the United States, refused to intervene to help France hold onto their colonies, and so the war was lost. The Indochina War ended in 1954, and in 1960, when the action of the play begins, American military forces are preparing to send thousands of troops into Vietnam and seize control of the country in France's place — this invasion is an early initiative in what Americans will come to know as the Vietnam War. The Cultural Revolution, a violent, decade-long effort by the Communist government under Mao to purge remnants of Western capitalist influence from Chinese culture and enforce Communist ideology across the nation, also provides a backdrop from the events of the play. As an opera singer — a profession that caters to bourgeois values —Song is considered criminal by the Communist government, and is consequently sent to work on a commune in rural China to be "reeducated" in the political ideology of his country.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though not a work of literature, Edward Said's *Orientalism* is an academic exploration of many of the same political and cultural questions Hwang examines through drama in *M. Butterfly*. Other extremely popular works of Asian-American literature, such as Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, are often grouped with *M. Butterfly* as texts that formed a foundation for an Asian-American literary tradition. As a work of post-colonial literature, M. Butterfly has elements in common with the novels of Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Amitav Ghosh, among many others. As a dramatic work based on true events, which deals with political issues as well as interpersonal relationships, *M. Butterfly* bears some resemblance to Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, though these plays differ from Hwang's in many significant regards.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *M. Butterfly*
- **When Written:** 1988
- **When Published:** Debuted on Broadway March 20, 1988
- **Literary Period:** Post-Modernism, Post-Colonialism
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** Beijing, 1960-1966 and Paris, 1968-70 and 1986-1988
- **Climax:** Song strips naked in front of Gallimard for the first time, and Gallimard rejects Song in favor of the fantasy of Butterfly.
- **Antagonist:** The question of antagonists is a complex one in*M. Butterfly*. In some ways, Song is the antagonist, since he is responsible for Gallimard's imprisonment and spends much of the play tormenting Gallimard. In some important ways, Gallimard himself is the villain — he embodies the destructive ignorance and prejudice the play condemns. Both characters are victims of the racist and sexist social context in which they live, and of the legacy of Western imperialism that precedes them: Gallimard inherits his terrible ideas from other Westerners eager to justify the exploitation of Asia, and Song becomes entangled with a political movement that arises in response to that exploitation.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Real "M. Butterfly". David Henry Hwang was inspired to write *M. Butterfly* after reading about the real case of Bernard Bouriscot, a French diplomat who, while stationed in China in his early twenties, fell in love with the male opera singer Shi Pei Pu, whom he believed throughout their twenty-year relationship (which, like the affair between Song and Gallimard, included the "birth" of a son) to be a woman. Shi was imprisoned during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and Bouriscot collaborated with the Chinese Secret Service to guarantee his lover's safety, passing classified information from the French embassy. Hwang refrained from researching Bouriscot's case in depth while writing *M. Butterfly* because, according to his Author's Notes, he "didn't want the 'truth' to interfere with my own speculations." However, journalist Joyce Wadler published an account of the affair between Shi and Bouriscot, and of their ensuing court trials, in her book *Liaison*.

Butterfly Up Close. In 1993, direct David Cronenberg adapted M. Butterfly into a film starring Jeremy Irons as Rene Gallimard and John Lone as Song Liling. While Hwang's play received tremendous acclaim after its 1988 debut, reactions to the film were lukewarm. In his review, Roger Ebert suggested that film was too "cruelly realistic" a medium for the story; while actors playing Song onstage can create a convincing illusion of femininity and so make Song's disguise seem plausible, the close-up shots used in the film betrayed Lone as looking undeniably masculine even when dressed in elaborate feminine costumes. Ebert even suggested that he could see Lone's five o'clock shadow in some shots.

PLOT SUMMARY

In a prison on the outskirts of Paris, Rene Gallimard is serving a sentence for treason. It is 1988, and Gallimard introduces himself to his audience as a "celebrity" — a man who is known and laughed about all over the world. Though he embraces his status as an object of ridicule, Gallimard confesses that he has been searching desperately for a way to tell his story that will redeem its pathetic ending, reunite him with the woman he has lost, and teach those people who laugh at him to understand him. Gallimard tells his audience that he has loved "the Perfect Woman."

Through a series of flashbacks and imagined conversations, Gallimard tells audience his story. The narrative begins in 1960, when he is thirty-nine years old. He is a junior diplomat living in Beijing, China — a tenuous situation, given the increasing extremism of the Chinese Communist Party. He is hapless, awkward, and unimpressive. Convinced no woman could ever love him, Gallimard has resigned himself to a passionless marriage of convenience with his wife, Helga.

Attending a performance at the German ambassador's house one night, he meets a Chinese opera star named Song Liling. Song is performing the final scene from Giacomo Puccini's **Madame Butterfly**, playing the title heroine as she commits suicide after the white man she adores abandons her. Gallimard is moved by Song's feminine grace, and after the performance showers her with compliments. Gallimard tells Song he finds the opera's story "beautiful," and Song tells him *Madame Butterfly* is an imperialist fantasy — a reflection of Westerners' perverse desire to dominate Asian people. Coolly but flirtatiously, Song invites Gallimard to come and watch her at the Peking Opera. She leaves Gallimard stunned, but intrigued.

For several weeks, Song's invitation tugs at Gallimard. Four weeks after meeting her, he finds the courage to attend one of her performances at the Peking Opera. After the show, he and Song walk along the streets of Beijing. She is sophisticated and confident, more like a liberated Western woman than the mild-mannered Asian woman he initially expected she would be.

For fifteen weeks after their initial meeting, Gallimard continues to attend Song's performances every week. Finally, after months of these encounters, Song invites Gallimard to her apartment. She seems anxious and flustered; she admits that she has never invited a man into her home, and that Gallimard's presence makes her nervous.

Intrigued by Song's uncharacteristic vulnerability, and goaded by the memory of his womanizing friend Marc, Gallimard devises an "experiment" to test the limits of Song's pride. For weeks, he refrains from going to the Peking Opera or calling on Song. Finally, after nine weeks of silence, she sends Gallimard a heartbroken letter that makes it clear she has lost all sense of dignity. Gallimard is ashamed at having treated Song so badly, and believes he will face divine punishment for his cruelty. That same day, however, the French ambassador to China —Manuel Toulon — informs Gallimard that he has been chosen for a major promotion. Stunned, it occurs to Gallimard that he is not being punished, but rewarded, for exercising his masculine power over a woman. Later that night, he declares his love for Song and the two begin an affair.

As the relationship between Gallimard and Song develops, Song seems to fit perfectly into Gallimard's ideal of womanhood: she is modest, gentle, and adores Gallimard. He calls her "Butterfly," a reference to the heroine of Puccini's opera. At work, Gallimard begins advising American military leaders who are beginning to wage a war against Communists in Vietnam. He assures Toulon that American troops will be welcome in Vietnam, basing this prediction on impressions of the "Oriental" disposition he has gained from Song, who plays into all his assumptions about Asian people: their passivity, weakness, and admiration for the strength of Western nations.

Though Gallimard seems to be living a charmed life, disaster is brewing. Song is not who she claims to be; it is revealed that she has been acting as a spy for the Chinese government, subtly coaxing military secrets out of Gallimard and telling

them to Comrade Chin — a leader in the Red Guard, a Communist paramilitary group. It is also revealed that, though she plays female roles in the Peking Opera, Song is actually a man. He has disguised himself as a woman to seduce Gallimard and extract information from him, and keeps his secret by making sure Gallimard never sees his naked body.

Song and Gallimard carry on their affair for twenty years, throughout periods of political and personal turmoil. They are separated for four years after the Vietnam War takes a disastrous turn and Gallimard is transferred back to Paris. During his absence, the Chinese Communist Party becomes increasingly violent and extreme, and Song is sent to a forced labor camp to atone for his "crimes" of being an artist and a homosexual man. Gallimard leaves Helga, too obsessed with longing for his lover to participate in the ruse of their marriage any longer. Gallimard and Song are finally reunited after the Communist Party sends Song to Paris to resume the affair and the accompanying espionage. The two live in harmony for fifteen years; Gallimard, understanding that Song is in trouble with the Communists, helps her access sensitive documents, which she passes on to the Chinese embassy. Eventually, though, Song and Gallimard are caught and charged with treason. Song's gender is exposed, making Gallimard a laughingstock throughout France, and Song turns on Gallimard in court, testifying against him to guarantee a pardon for himself.

In his prison cell, Gallimard is visited by Song, dressed in men's clothing. He torments Gallimard, insisting Gallimard adores him. This is true — Gallimard has said in previous conversations with his visions of Song that he would forgive everything, if Song would only agree to come back and resume their life together. Song strips off his clothes and exposes his naked body, telling Gallimard it is time for him to confront the truth. Though Song expects this will be a moment of surrender for Gallimard, it actually turns Gallimard against him. Seeing Song for what he really is, Gallimard says, destroys the fantasy of "Butterfly" that was all he ever really loved. Gallimard throws Song out of the prison cell, saying it is time for him to return to Butterfly. In the play's final scene, Gallimard dresses in a woman's kimono, wig, and makeup – Song's costume as Butterfly. He introduces himself to the audience as "Rene Gallimard — also known as Madame Butterfly." Then, just as the heroine of Puccini's opera does, he commits suicide with a hara-kiri knife. As Gallimard lies dead, Song appears onstage smoking a cigarette and staring at Gallimard's fallen body.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Rene Gallimard – A former French diplomat who relates the story of his passionate, disastrous affair with Song Liling from his cell in a Paris prison, where he is serving a long sentence for treason. Gallimard falls in love with Song, whom he believes to be a woman, during his tenure as a diplomat in Beijing. Hapless and awkward, Gallimard is an unlikely candidate for the attentions of a beautiful woman. Knowing this, he treasures Song's love and submissiveness, and the feeling of masculine power and pride it gives him. Gallimard has an attitude of benevolent condescension toward Asians, and particularly Asian women. He is not arrogant or sexually aggressive, as are many of the Western men around him, but he is heavily influenced by the orientalist and imperialist ideas that pervade his culture. He is particularly attached to a vision of Asian women as being modest, submissive, and unfalteringly devoted to their men.

Song Liling – A male, homosexual Chinese opera singer who masquerades as a woman to gain access to Gallimard, then exploits their intimacy to collect classified information for agents of the Chinese Communist Party. Tremendously perceptive and intelligent, Song develops a profound understanding of Gallimard's psychology that allows him to deceive and manipulate Gallimard. Specifically, he understands Gallimard's desire for a particular kind of woman: beautiful, submissive, and unquestionably devoted to him. He performs the role of that fantasy woman, and in doing so possesses Gallimard's love completely. Song serves the Communist Party mostly out of necessity; as an actor and a homosexual man, he is considered criminal by the Party's doctrine and needs to ingratiate himself with Communist officials to prevent devastating punishment for his "crimes." However, he also resents Westerners for their systemic abuse of Asian nations and people, and has no regrets about undermining the work of Western governments.

Marc – A friend from Gallimard's youth. Marc is unapologetically lascivious and encourages Gallimard to take sexual advantage of the women around him without regard for their feelings or even their consent. Marc represents unfettered masculine sexuality in Gallimard's mind, and Gallimard thinks of him whenever he struggles with questions of sexual ethics and desire. Marc plays Sharpless, a sensitive American diplomat, in the reenactment of Puccini's **Madame Butterfly**.

Manuel Toulon – The French ambassador to China, and Gallimard's superior at the embassy in Beijing. Toulon promotes Gallimard to vice-consul and charges him with collecting information to aid the American war in Vietnam. He shares Gallimard's belief that the "natural" relationship between Asia and the West is one of humble submission and benevolent domination. Toulon also plays the judge who hears Song's testimony at Gallimard's trial.

Comrade Chin – A member of the Red Guards, a paramilitary arm of the Communist Party in China. Song communicates with Comrade Chin often, to pass on the classified information he

gathers from Gallimard. Chin is severe and unfeminine, and Song derides her for her lack of womanly charm. She also plays Suzuki, a down-to-earth servant, in the reenactment of Puccini's **Madame Butterfly**.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Renee – A young, sexually liberated Danish woman with whom Gallimard as an affair. Renee's boldness presents a stark contrast to Song's modesty, which Gallimard finds both exciting and obnoxious.

Helga – Gallimard's wife, who is older than Gallimard. The pair married as a matter of convenience; Helga's father had diplomatic connections that helped Gallimard ascend in his career.

Isabelle – The schoolgirl with whom Gallimard shares his first, disappointing sexual experience when he is a young man.

Song Peepee – Song and Gallimard's son.

Shu-Fang – Song's servant.

Vice-Consul LeBon – Once Gallimard's superior at the French embassy, to whose position Gallimard is promoted.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

ORIENTALISM, IMPERIALISM, AND CULTURAL CONFLICT

The events of *M. Butterfly* occur during a time of turmoil in Southeast Asia, as imperialist European nations that had established colonies throughout Southeast Asia were facing threats to their imperial control by native uprisings. As a French diplomat living in China in the 1960s, Gallimard lives in the shadow of the Indochina War. During this war, Vietnamese military forces under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh successfully fought for independence from the French, who had installed a colonialist government in Vietnam in the late nineteenth century. By the time the Indochina War ended in 1954, the French had maintained colonies in Vietnam, and the neighboring nations of Laos and Cambodia, for almost seventy years. The three nations together were known as French Indochina. The Chinese government assisted the Vietnamese in their struggle for independence, supplying modern weapons from the Soviet Union that helped the Vietnamese resist the French more effectively. China was a Communist nation by this time, and invested in helping the Vietnamese partially because independence would lead to the installation of a Communist government in Vietnam.

Toulon, Gallimard's superior at the embassy, describes the loss of French Indochina as a national embarrassment for France. As the Vietnam War begins, Toulon asks Gallimard to advise American military officials about the disposition of Asian people toward Western military and government power. Gallimard's involvement with the war in Vietnam seems to be an effort to redeem this embarrassment and promote Western dominance in this former French colony. Gallimard's job is to predict how the Chinese will react to an American invasion in Vietnam, and suggest ways for the American military to win public support among the Vietnamese people. Yet the advice Gallimard offers is disastrous and misguided, based on ignorant stereotypes about "Orientals" rather than real understanding of the Chinese or other Asian cultures. His diplomatic analysis is heavily influenced by what the literary theorist Edward Said termed "Orientalism" — the tendency of Western people to depict Asian and Middle Eastern countries as being underdeveloped, backward, exotic, passive, and feminine compared to the supposedly enlightened and powerful Western nations that seek to colonize them. Gallimard believes that Asians are passive and unable to protect themselves, and simply "want to be associated with whoever shows the most strength and power." This Orientalist mindset is not unique to Gallimard. In fact, it influences nearly every Western character in *M. Butterfly*, as shown in Toulon and Marc's willingness to support Gallimard's oversimplified characterizations of Asian people and cultures.

These stereotypes originate in some of the most famous Western representations of Asians — most notably, for the purposes of this play, Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera **Madame Butterfly**, in which a beautiful Japanese woman throws her life away for love of an unworthy white sailor. As its title suggests, *M. Butterfly* tells a story that both references and revises *Madame Butterfly* and the Orientalist ideas it embodies. M. Butterfly critiques Orientalist stereotypes as pernicious lies used by Westerners to justify the exploitation and oppression of Asian people. By playing with the tropes exemplified in *Madame Butterfly* — for instance, the stereotype of the submissive Asian woman — *M. Butterfly* illustrates how these simplistic, demeaning ideas are destructive for both Asians and Westerners. Gallimard, in particular, is rendered weak and manipulable: he believes even the most implausible aspects of Song's deception because they fit with his image of Asian women as being modest, obedient, and undiscerning in their adoration of their men, especially when those men are white. Gallimard's personal obsession with *Madame Butterfly* illustrates how his attachment to these misguided ideas are products of his culture, which tends to fetishize and demean Asian people. He cannot see that Song is a man, or that their affair is politically motivated, because he has been raised to believe that Asian people are so passive as to make this kind of

subversion totally unthinkable. Ultimately, rather than face the truth after Song's deception is revealed, Gallimard chooses to adopt the persona of Butterfly and commit suicide in the same way Puccini's heroine does. This final act suggests how Orientalist fantasy can become fatally all-consuming —just as it leads Gallimard to offer terrible political analysis to the Americans, it leads him to personal destruction.

FEMININITY AND MALE EGO

In a theme intimately tied up with that of Orientalism, in which Europeans often fetishize Asian cultures as not just exotic and passive but feminine, *M. Butterfly* explores the impact of such misogynist fetishization. Song constructs his female persona — who, though Song continues to use his real name while masquerading as a woman, Gallimard comes to call "Butterfly," after the heroine in Puccini's **Madame Butterfly**— to conform perfectly to the chauvinistic ideals of femininity Gallimard has inherited from Western culture. As Butterfly, Song sits at Gallimard's feet when they talk, offers exaggerated praise for his intellect and influence, and agrees to submit to his will even when she claims it violates her ethical code and makes her unhappy. In all their most intimate moments, Butterfly presents herself as being highly vulnerable: sexually inexperienced, protective of her modesty, and desperate for Gallimard's affection.

In these ways, Song feeds Gallimard's ego and makes him feel invincible. The life-altering power of this feeling — completely new to Gallimard, who before meeting Butterfly is passive and mild-mannered — becomes evidence on the night he declares his love for her, when Gallimard credits Butterfly with helping him win the major promotion just awarded to him at work. The unflagging and totally undeserved devotion she expresses in her pleas to see him, and the feeling of power her desperation gives him inspire an "aggressive" confidence in shy, awkward Gallimard that wins him the respect of his colleagues and soon prompts Toulon to promote him to a position of leadership and influence. Because Butterfly seems so weak and harmless, and Gallimard feels so powerful in her presence, it is easy for Song to coax military secrets out of him—secrets Song then passes along to the Chinese government.

The ethnic stereotypes that influence Gallimard in his diplomatic interactions with the Chinese are intimately connected with other destructive stereotypes about women. Gallimard and his European compatriots — most notably his friend Marc — treat women as objects who exist for the pleasure of men. To justify treating Butterfly this way, Gallimard convinces himself that all women want to be dominated by someone stronger, and that male supremacy is the natural order of the world. As Song points out during his court testimony, this sexist assumption is identical to the stereotypes Westerners use to justify their exploitation of Asian countries. He suggests men like Gallimard imagine interactions between the West and East in the same way they imagine interactions between men and women: as a meeting between a strong force that wants to exert power, and a weak one that wants to be controlled. Westerners see all Asian people as feminine — which is to say, passive and easily dominated — regardless of their actual sex or gender. Because of this, Song argues, it was impossible for Gallimard truly to believe he, Song, was a man.

Following the reenactment of his court testimony, Song shows Gallimard his naked body for the first time. Song, who in the course of his false relationship to Gallimard has come to love him, believes this will force Gallimard to accept that love, to embrace Song as the person he is and their homosexual intimacy as a replacement for the intimacy Gallimard shared with Butterfly. But the opposite occurs: Gallimard drives Song from the stage and commits himself more passionately than ever to the fantasy of Butterfly, adopting her identity himself and then committing suicide. This act, in which Gallimard "protects" both Butterfly and himself from reality, illustrates the intensity of his commitment, both to his ideals of womanhood and to his own ego. Gallimard would rather reject reality altogether than admit it was unrealistic to believe an actual woman would ever idolize him as Butterfly did.

MEMORY, IMAGINATION, AND SELF-DECEPTION

Gallimard presents his story to the audience as a memory, told from his prison cell — where he is sequestered following his very public conviction for treason — long after the affair with Song has ended. Song, in the form of a memory in Gallimard's mind, enters at regular intervals through the play to tell his version of events, or add information to which Gallimard was not privy when the events themselves were happening. Gallimard often tries to coopt these interjections and force Song to tell events as he remembers them. He urges Song to leave Comrade Chin out of the story, and hides when Chin appears onstage; he tries to prolong the story of his loving reunion with Butterfly in Paris, and to stop Song from removing his Butterfly costume at the end of Act Two. He never succeeds in masking the truth, however. The characters Gallimard encounters on the stage are figments of his imagination, and their interactions happen almost entirely in Gallimard's own or imagination, but he still cannot control any of them, and especially cannot control Song. This is a metaphor for the ways in which reality inevitably undermines the self-deceiving narratives human beings construct to comfort themselves.

During his court testimony, Song explains his belief that Gallimard never realized he was a man simply because Gallimard did not want to believe this was true. Song suggests men will always believe a person who tells them what they want

to hear, even if the things that person is saying are absurd lies. Time and time again during their relationship, Gallimard accepts his lover's suspicious "eccentricities" — like Song's insistence on remaining totally clothed while they have sex — without question, and avoids situations that might force him to sacrifice his illusions. Recounting the night he ordered Butterfly to strip naked for him and then rescinded that order, Gallimard confesses his fear that he may have known the truth about Butterfly all along and simply shielded himself from confrontation of that truth in order to protect his own happiness.

After Gallimard finally sees Song naked — another imaginary sequence that mirrors the internal process of recognizing truth for the first time — he is forced confronts all that has happened to him, and processes his thoughts in a conversation with Song and in a monologue just before committing suicide. In both these moments of reflection, Gallimard suggests that the great pain and disappointment of his relationship with Song was not simply the fact that Song was a man — in fact, he tells Song multiple times that he would gladly take him back if Song would simply agree to inhabit the role of Butterfly again, suggesting Gallimard is not troubled by Song's biological sex— but the fact that Song is an *ordinary* man. Butterfly, the fantasy he loved, was a product of Gallimard's imagination who fulfilled his needs and desires as no living person could have. Confronting the fact that the person he adored was not a miracle of beauty and devotion, but an ordinary person with faults and secrets of his own, is more devastating to Gallimard than realizing he has been duped.

Though Song commits himself to deceiving Gallimard, his final exchange with Gallimard reveals how the character of Butterfly has also been an instrument of *Song's* self-deception. Song comes to believe that Gallimard is fundamentally in love with the person who Song is—that Song and Gallimard share a love that transcends the "character" of Butterfly—and that Gallimard will continue to love Song even when Song reveals Butterfly to have been a fiction. When Gallimard elects instead to immerse himself in the world of fantasy — becoming Butterfly himself through the act of donning Song's costume and committing ritual suicide — it is the ultimate gesture of rejection. He refuses to love Song, despite all they have shared, and confirms through that refusal that his love was always based in ideals rather than interactions, that he loved Butterfly the character and not Song the person. In the final lines of the play, when Song can be heard calling out "Butterfly? Butterfly?" while Gallimard lies dead in Butterfly costume, Song appears destitute in the same way Gallimard does at other points in the play. It becomes clear that, though Song believed himself to be in control of Gallimard, he was every bit as delusional in his assumptions about what they shared.

LOVE AND CRUELTY

Gallimard is powerfully in love with Song, and reveals that enduring love over and over again as he narrates the events of the play from his prison cell. However, despite his absolute devotion — which possesses him almost immediately after meeting Song (who appears to him as the feminine character he will come to call "Butterfly) and persists even after the truth of Song's betrayal has been revealed — Gallimard often treats his lover cruelly during their twenty-year relationship. His abuses begin as experiments to test the limits of Butterfly's submissiveness to him. As their affair develops, however, he begins to mistreat his mistress simply for the pleasure of watching her accept the abuse and forgive him.

When Song and Gallimard are first introduced, Song presents as a bold, modern woman. When Gallimard praises her performance, she criticizes him for his imperialist aesthetics and flirts with him shamelessly. In the early days of their courtship, she refuses to indulge Gallimard, allowing him to meet with her only briefly after each of her performances at the Peking Opera. As he becomes better acquainted with her and begins to fall in love with her, however, Gallimard becomes convinced that Song is "afraid" of him. This is the foundation of his love for Butterfly: he believes himself to have complete mastery over her.

As their courtship develops Gallimard launches an "experiment" to test the limits of Butterfly's apparent confidence, ignoring her letters until her dignity falters and she begs for his attention. Explaining this experiment to his audience, he remembers a passage from Puccini's **Madame Butterfly** in which the heroine imagines herself as a captured butterfly whose heart has been pierced with a needle. As Butterfly's letters devolve into increasingly desperate accounts of suffering and shame, Gallimard describes her in the same terms. When Gallimard first receives Butterfly's heartbroken letter, it pains him to know that he has made her suffer. However, the combination of his unexpected professional success and Butterfly's unquestioning willingness to take him back into her life make Gallimard more confident in his right to abuse her. As their relationship develops, those abuses become more flagrant: he carries on an affair with Renee for the pleasure of tormenting his lover, and asserts aggressive sexual dominance over her when he orders her to strip naked for him. Dominating Butterfly gives Gallimard the sense of possessing "the absolute power of a man."

Gallimard makes it clear that the thing he loves most about Butterfly is her total acceptance of his superiority, and the confidence he feels that — despite the fact that he is not worthy of her — her devotion to him will continue no matter what terrible things he inflicts on her. Not incidentally, this inexplicable, unconditional love is also what Gallimard finds beautiful about *Madame Butterfly*. Puccini's heroine is

passionately in love with a man who is inferior to her in beauty, intelligence, and social position — "a sailor with dirty hands" who does not deserve the love of a woman like her. This, Gallimard tells Song in their very first meeting, is what makes the heroine's death at the end of the opera so glorious: it is "a pure sacrifice" of her own existence on behalf of an unworthy man.

Ultimately, *M. Butterfly* expresses a highly pessimistic view of love. For all its romantic crescendos, the relationship between Song and Gallimard emerges as a power play between people who must either lie to themselves and each other to maintain harmony, or splinter in the face of the truth. Whatever sincere affection or warmth may have existed between them is compromised by the destructive influence of racism and sexism; as Song's bitter testimony at Gallimard's trial reveals, the power imbalances between them bred resentment and scorn in him even while he continued to perform the role of the doting Butterfly. In a sexist society, the love between a woman and a man must always be either a struggle or a domination, and in a racist society, love between people of different races must always grapple with the influence of oppressive ideologies. Unfettered love is not available when one person has been raised to dominate and dehumanize the other.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MADAME BUTTERFLY

Madame Butterfly, Giacomo Puccini's celebrated 1904 opera, tells the story of a disastrous marriage between a beautiful, vulnerable Japanese woman named Cio-Cio-San —also called Butterfly —and a callow American sailor named Benjamin Pinkerton. *Madame Butterfly* is Gallimard's favorite opera, not only because he finds the tragic story profoundly compelling, but because the opera is inextricably intertwined with his relationship with Song. He sees Song for the first time playing the role of Cio-Cio-San, calls her by the pet name "Butterfly," and speaks to her in their most intimate moments using lines from the opera. *Madame Butterfly* becomes a shared language for Song and Gallimard. Song understands that Cio-Cio-San's gentleness and devotion to her husband represents a feminine ideal to Gallimard, and the two of them build their relationship around a mutual commitment to that ideal. However, as the narrative progresses and it becomes increasingly clear that the relationship between Song and Gallimard is founded on self-serving lies rather than sincere love, the centrality of the opera to their story becomes less romantic and more tragic. Like *Madame Butterfly*, the relationship Gallimard cherishes is only a story — it does not reflect reality. That he continues to return to the language and imagery of the opera regardless of this fact reveals Gallimard's enduring commitment to the fantasy he and Song have constructed together.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Plume edition of *M. Butterfly* published in 1989.

Act 1, Scene 3 Quotes

You see? They toast me. I've become patron saint of the socially inept. Can they really be so foolish? Men like that — they should be scratching at my door, begging to learn my secrets! For I, Rene Gallimard, you see, I have known, and been loved by ... the Perfect Woman.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Onstage, both a party and Gallimard alone in his cell are shown. At the party, guests marvel at the thought that Gallimard continues to claim that Song is a woman, and that Gallimard must be foolish and inept to have believed him to be a woman for twenty years. They mockingly toast Gallimard for his social and sexual inadequacies.

In this quote, Gallimard embraces the toast, and states that he believes that telling his story will absolve him of all his supposed crimes and foolishness. In fact, he believes that he will eventually be envied by men, since Gallimard believes he was loved by the Perfect Woman--Song, whom he continues to choose to believe is a woman.

Gallimard, as depicted by the various imagined scenes on the stage, is a man who firmly lives in his own fantasy land. By continuing to believe Song is a woman, he continues to play out the fantasy that attracted him to her in the first place--that he is a Western, dominant man who can control a submissive Eastern woman as he pleases. In fact, Hwang brilliantly subverts this stereotype by placing Song as the dominant man, and as a result, Gallimard is placed in the role of the submissive woman-figure. Like Madame Butterfly, he is now literally trapped in a jail of his own memories and fantasies, while Song is absolved of all crimes despite technically being the one to orchestrate the treason himself. By telling his story, Gallimard only serves to retreat

further into his delusions, rather than bring clarity to his situation, as he believes himself to do.

> It's true what they say about Oriental girls. They want to be treated bad!

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

To illustrate the plot of *Madame Butterfly*--the Puccini opera which the play, and Gallimard, are influenced by--Gallimard and his friend Marc do a quick, crude rendition of the opera in colloquial language, rather than turn-of-the-century elegant Italian. In this quote, Gallimard, portraying Pinkerton, says that "Oriental girls" want to "be treated bad," crudely summarizing the sexist and racist treatment of Eastern women by Western men.

In the summary of the opera, Pinkerton consistently treats his Japanese wife horribly, claiming that it's his right to do so, despite the fact that it brings his wife immense pain to the point that she commits suicide. Though Gallimard doesn't explicitly support the notion that Eastern women *want* to be treated badly, he does, in practice, exemplify these ideals: he ignores Song so that she reveres him even more highly, and projects all of his fantasies on a woman whom he believes is allowing him to assert his dominance in the way he deserves. Of course, at the same time it is Gallimard who is being tricked, just like Madame Butterfly. Hwang illustrates the opera in the play in Gallimard's terms to show how, by the end of the play, it is Gallimard who is Madame Butterfly, and Song who is more like Pinkerton, despite Gallimard's belief to the contrary.

Act 1, Scene 5 Quotes

> But as she glides past him, beautiful, laughing softly behind her fan, don't we who are men sigh with hope? We, who are not handsome, not brave, nor powerful, yet somehow believe, like Pinkerton, that we deserve a Butterfly.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In the retelling of *Madame Butterfly*, Song appears onstage to play Cio-Cio-San. In this quote, Gallimard revels at her beauty, and notes that she is a fantasy that every man believes he deserves.

Though Gallimard condemns Pinkerton's actions towards Cio-Cio-San, he does not condemn the idea that every man--no matter how mediocre--deserves to dominate his fantasy woman. In the case of Gallimard's story, and also in the case of the opera, this is deeply tied into the colonialist perspective, wherein the West is seen as intrinsically dominant over the submissive East. When coupled with sexual politics, it leads to this philosophy that even the least-assertive Western man has, and deserves, sexual and political dominance over an intrinsically submissive Eastern woman. This is the philosophy that Gallimard essentially lives by, and is the reason that he refuses to acknowledge Song is a man: she is the Eastern woman he was destined to call his own, and he cannot fathom the concept that he was not given the chance to play out his true fantasy.

> The sad truth is that all men want a beautiful woman, and the uglier the man, the greater the want.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Helga

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard marries Helga, whom he is fond of but who does not incite the passion that he has hoped for in a woman. He is faithful to her for the first eight years of their marriage, but in this quote, he expresses the desire of (supposedly) "all men"--and the uglier the man, the greater the desire--for a beautiful woman. Though Gallimard does not express this idea in the first person, it is clear that he, as a man who has not been considered particularly handsome or heroic, has a great desire for a beautiful woman.

Though Gallimard does not physically express the traditional masculine stereotypes (he is not handsome, aggressive, or assertive), he still internalizes these stereotypes as something that he, as a man, deserves and yet is lacking. He feels a kind of anger towards the world,

and sees a woman as his prize for all that he has been deprived of in his lifetime. He does not see Helga as an adequate prize, and continues to desire a woman for whom he can embody all of these masculine ideals and more. Song, who plays out his every fantasy, is his Perfect Woman because he can be the Perfect Man when they are together. By refusing to deny that Song is a man, Gallimard, in his own mind, maintains his masculinity.

they project their fantasies onto women they deem as interchangeable and their passing playthings. As a French man, Gallimard has never been challenged to this extent by a woman, let alone a Chinese woman, whom he implicitly believes to be inferior to him. It is this challenge--and yet her subsequent revelation that she is seemingly powerless to his charms--that makes him obsessed with the idea that Song is the Perfect Woman that he deserves.

Act 1, Scene 6 Quotes

❝ It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? the submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man … Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen feel 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.

Related Characters: Song Liling (speaker), Rene Gallimard

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

The fist time Gallimard meets Song, he mentions that he finds Cio-Cio-San's sacrifice for love at the end of *Madame Butterfly* to be beautiful. In this quote, Song vehemently disagrees, pointing out that he would find the plot to the opera completely ridiculous and implausible if the nationalities of Pinkerton and Madame Butterfly were reversed. Gallimard's belief that the sacrifice is beautiful, Song points out, is due to his racist and sexist Western viewpoint.

Gallimard, as a man who has not presented as a traditionally masculine Western man, does not believe himself to be racist or sexist since he has not reaped the rewards that someone like Pinkerton has. Here, however, Song points out that his point of view is intrinsically racist and sexist simply because he is Western, and the idea that Eastern women are submissive and powerless to the pull of a Western man is completely a Western invention. Song, like this "blond homecoming queen," has her own mind and ambitions, something that most Western men completely ignore as

Act 1, Scene 9 Quotes

❝ It's an old story. It's in our blood. They fear us, Rene. Their women fear us. And their men — their men hate us. And you know something? They are all correct.

Related Characters: Marc (speaker), Rene Gallimard, Song Liling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

After Gallimard first sees Song in performance at the opera, Marc visits him in a dream. In this dream, he encourages Gallimard to pursue Song, since she is the "prize" that he has supposedly deserved all of his life. In this quote, Marc emphasizes the idea that Song is powerless to Gallimard's desires because she is a Chinese woman and he is a French man.

Though Gallimard has been faithful to Helga thus far in their eight-year marriage, he actively notes that he "settled" for her, and still wishes he could have the woman of his fantasies. Song, it seems, could be just that woman--beautiful, and submissive to his whims and wants. Gallimard has felt cheated his entire life because he has not been the masculine, dominating person that stereotypically commands the attention and desires of beautiful women. In this quote, Marc (here representing Gallimard's subconscious, as he speaks to Gallimard in a dream) urges Gallimard to seize what is rightfully his: a beautiful woman. He justifies this sentiment by saying that as a Western man, he can take whatever he wants because he is intrinsically more powerful than Easterners, whether men or women--essentially, sexual colonialism. Just as in *Madame Butterfly*, Gallimard convinces himself that by pursuing and conquering Song, he is simply playing out a part written for him in the stars.

Act 1, Scene 10 Quotes

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.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

After their initial meeting at the opera, Gallimard attends the Peking opera fifteen weeks in a row. Each time, Song speaks to him for fifteen or twenty minutes after the show, but then cuts the conversation short. In this quote, Gallimard comforts himself that Song's coldness is a front to mask her intrinsic Eastern shyness.

Though Gallimard is taken with Song's boldness, this quote illustrates the fact that despite evidence to the contrary, he is firmly convinced that deep down she is a stereotypically shy and meek Chinese woman. Song has been educated in the West, which accounts for her challenging statements and excellent French language skills, but which Gallimard believes serves to exist at odds with her natural "Oriental" ways deep down. This is evidence of Gallimard's deep-seated racist and sexist beliefs, despite the ways in which he tries to depict himself as a sympathetic narrator. No matter how Song presents herself to him, he will never see her as the person she truly is, but rather as the person he most desires.

Please. 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.

Related Characters: Song Liling (speaker), Rene Gallimard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

When Gallimard first visits Song's apartment, she changes into a gown, which he compliments. Song blanches at his comment, and deems herself too shy to accept compliments from a strange man she has invited into her home. Gallimard contradicts her claim that she is shy, but in this quote, Song states what Gallimard has always assumed: that beneath her bravado, she is really a meek woman.

When Song confirms Gallimard's suspicions, he is not surprised, but is rather satisfied that he was correct in his assumptions--as the Western man seeking the affections of an Eastern woman, his racist and sexist perspectives mean that he does not doubt his power over Song. Of course, in this instance, Song is in fact playing into the very stereotypes that Gallimard wants her to in order to secure classified French information for the Communist Chinese government. Hwang's subversion of the Eastern/Western and male/female historical power structure serves to make Gallimard the inferior one in this situation, and Song the superior. Her supposed submissive nature is used not to fulfill Gallimard's desires, but rather to exploit the power he believes he wields.

Act 1, Scene 11 Quotes

I stopped going to the opera, I didn't phone or write her. I knew this little flower was waiting for me to call, and, as I wickedly refused to do so, I felt for the first time that rush of power — the absolute power of a man.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

After Gallimard visits Song's apartment, he purposefully ceases contact with her for eight weeks. Instead of going to the opera, he works late or finds excuses to stay at home. In this quote, Gallimard expresses his delight at being, for the first time in his life, able to assert the dominance and emotional violence that he associates with total masculinity.

Throughout his adolescent and adult life, Gallimard has felt an acute lacking in his manhood. With Song, however, he believes he is finally reaping the feminine reward he deserves, and is determined to assert his dominance over her to the fullest extent possible. Convinced that his Western masculinity renders her powerless to his charms, no matter how badly he behaves, he chooses to ignore Song in the belief that each passing week will make her more desperate for his company. Gallimard feels no qualms or worries about ignoring Song, and is completely confident that the silence will only boost his masculinity. Though Gallimard is timid and awkward in most aspects of his life,

this is the one area that he feels most confident, based on his internalized colonialist perspective: he sees absolutely no world in which Song would deny him, a powerful Western man, no matter how horribly he treats her. Gallimard is determined to become the ultimate Pinkerton to Song's Butterfly.

I am out of words. I can hide behind dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my shame.

Related Characters: Song Liling (speaker), Rene Gallimard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

After eight weeks of silence and ignored letters, Gallimard receives a note from Song with this quote. In this letter, she says that she no longer has any strength or dignity left--she is completely at Gallimard's mercy. This quote serves to show that Song now places her longing for Gallimard above her own self-respect, which is exactly what Gallimard hoped to result from this "experiment." She no longer has any of her "Western" bravado, only pure desire to be dominated by Gallimard. Thus she plays right into the stereotypes that Gallimard sees as intrinsic to Eastern women, and he believes that she is playing exactly into his powerful masculine pull. Of course, Gallimard does not know that *he* is the one being "played" by an Eastern man, completely subverting the stereotype with which he has governed this experiment. The Eastern man, who is believed to be "afraid" of Western men, uses the submissive feminine mystique to bring a Western man to his knees, showing the absolute artificiality of East/West and female/male stereotypes.

Act 1, Scene 13 Quotes

Are you my Butterfly?

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

After receiving a promotion, Gallimard heads to Song's apartment to see her after eight weeks. Though she at first seems angry at him, Gallimard reminds her of the words she wrote to him--that she has "given him her shame"--and in this quote, asks her if she will be the Madame Butterfly to his Pinkerton.

Despite the fact that Song previously scorned the story of *Madame Butterfly* as an East vs. West colonialist fantasy, both Song and Gallimard here play into their respective roles in the narrative--Gallimard as the egotistical Pinkerton, and Song as the sacrificial Butterfly. In asking Song if she is his Butterfly, Gallimard is asking her to sacrifice everything for him, despite the fact that he has treated her poorly. In asking her to play this role, Gallimard is implying that he will be her Pinkerton--her shining Western knight, yet also one who feels less than tethered to their "marriage." When Song agrees that she is Gallimard's Butterfly, Gallimard realizes that he has walked right into the fantasy he has always wanted.

Act 2, Scene 6 Quotes

Renee was picture perfect. With a body like those girls in the magazines. If I put a tissue paper over my eyes, I wouldn't have been able to tell the difference. And it was exciting to be with someone who wasn't afraid to be seen completely naked. But is it possible for a woman to be too uninhibited, too willing, so as to seem almost too ... masculine?

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Renee

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard begins an affair with a young Danish student who propositions him for sex during their first meeting at a party. Though Renee, the student, is sexually experienced, uninhibited, and as beautiful as the women Gallimard admired in magazines as a young boy, in this quote, he expresses his disdain for her boldness. Her confidence, he reasons, makes her too "masculine."

This quote illustrates the fact that Gallimard has formed a strong emotional attachment to Song and her demure, stereotypically feminine ways. Though Renee expresses her attraction to Gallimard from their first meeting, Gallimard is now more attracted to Song and her submissive nature. Renee's confidence and assertion somewhat frighten

Gallimard, who much prefers being the dominant man in his relationship with Song. Of course, ironically, Gallimard criticizes Renee for being too "masculine" when Song, the woman he prefers, is really a man. With this inclusion of Renee, and Gallimard's ultimate rejection of her, Hwang further reinforces the artificiality and fragility of masculinity.

> It was her tears and her silence that excited me, every time I visited Renee.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling, Renee

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard continues to keep up the affair with Renee, the young Danish student, while he still sees Song. He claims she did know of the affair, but does not confront him about it as a Western woman might. Instead, she weeps in silence. In this quote, Gallimard says that his affair with Renee's effect on Song was what actually excited him most.

At first, Gallimard's excitement with Song is based on her infatuation with him and her appearance as the "Perfect Woman." As time goes on, however, Gallimard becomes drunk with power as Song apparently continues to fall deeper in love with him the crueler he acts. This is an exhibition of the "rape mentality," where Gallimard's racist and sexist point of view make him think that Song, as an Eastern woman, *wants* to be treated badly. Gallimard is gleeful over how his treatment of her makes her feel, yet she does not leave him--proof, Gallimard believes, of the irresistible masculinity he has always wanted and now finally has.

> No, Rene. Don't couch your request in sweet words. Be yourself — a cad — and know that my love is enough, that I submit — submit to the worst you can give me ... Well, come. Strip me. Whatever happens, know that you have willed it. Our love, in your hands. I'm helpless before my man.

Related Characters: Song Liling (speaker), Rene Gallimard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard tells Song he wants to see her naked body, as he never has before, and she becomes distressed, citing her modesty and shame. In this quote, she tells Gallimard she is powerless to his wants and desires, and tells him to strip her. However, she is careful to note that "whatever happens, know that you have willed it." After this quote, Gallimard chooses to *not* strip Song, likely because of this line--deep down, Gallimard perhaps knows he will confront Song's maleness, and is not prepared to destroy his fantasy. He likes living in his world of illusions far too much to want to burst them on a whim of his own. This quote shows that the deception in their relationship was a product of both Song's cleverness and secret agenda and Gallimard's wish to continue living in his fantasy world with the Perfect Woman. Though Gallimard seeks to absolve himself in his jail cell testimony, it becomes clear throughout the course of the play that he and Song were often equally complicit in the charade.

> Did I not undress her because I knew, somewhere deep down, what I would find? Perhaps. Happiness is so rare that our mind can turn somersaults to protect it.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard ignores Song during his affair with Renee. When he finally goes to see her, she has been drinking to numb her pain in his absence. In her drunken state, she tells Gallimard to undress her, but Gallimard does not. In this quote, he acknowledges that perhaps he does not do so because, deep down, he suspected she was not the Perfect Woman.

By this point, Gallimard's entire world depends on his dominance of Song. For his whole life he has felt inadequate due to his perceived lack of masculine features and attitude. Song, however, seems powerless to his pull, and proves even more desperate to him when he is cruel to her. Gallimard himself then becomes drunk with this power, and refuses to believe that anything can get between him and his fantasy--even when he must know, somewhere inside, that his fantasy submissive woman is actually a manipulative man. Gallimard exhibits an extraordinary ability to play into an

illusion that everyone else can see is manipulation, just like Madame Butterfly. As the play progresses, Song plays more into the role of Pinkerton, as Gallimard himself transforms into his Butterfly.

Act 2, Scene 7 Quotes

❝ Miss Chin? Why, in the Peking Opera, are women's roles played by men? ... Because only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act.

Related Characters: Song Liling (speaker), Comrade Chin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Chin visits to follow up on Song's gathering of classified information from Gallimard. Before she leaves, Song asks her why she thinks the Peking Opera might cast men in all roles, including the roles of women. Miss Chin theorizes that it is a remnant of patriarchal China, but in this quote, Song refutes her guess and says it is because "only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act."

Song's seduction of Gallimard works because she acts as the Perfect Woman--that is, not a *real* woman. She is submissive to Gallimard's every whim, and grows only more attached to him the more cruelly he treats her. Few real women would act this way--hence the implausibility of *Madame Butterfly*--yet it is the masculine fantasy to have a woman who submits to these stereotypes, as the converse of such fantasies is the reinforcement of the cruel, dominant man as the Perfect Man. Here, Song reasons that men play the parts of women because they are not real women, but rather the fantasies of male composers and librettists, understood only by male actors who submit to the same stereotypes. Thus, Song, as a man, is perfectly cast for the role of the Perfect Woman.

Act 2, Scene 11 Quotes

❝ This is the ultimate cruelty, isn't it? That I can talk and talk and to anyone listening, it's only air — too rich a diet to be swallowed by a mundane world. Why can't anyone understand? That in China, I once loved, and was loved by, the Perfect Woman.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling, Marc

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

In Gallimard's fantasy, Marc and Gallimard share a drink in his cell. Gallimard complains to Marc of the inadequacies of the West compared to the East, and Marc tells him to stop complaining. In this quote, Gallimard tells the audience how difficult it is to have experienced something so profound, and to have no one to share it with.

Gallimard is so intent on making others see how special is his experience with Song--The Perfect Woman--because, by proxy, it means that he, too, is special. Marc, by contrast, is a womanizing playboy who has always seemed special in Gallimard's eyes because he seems to have conquered the masculine stereotypes, and by extension, women, without the agony that Gallimard has endured. Gallimard wants very badly for society to acknowledge his and Song's love, because it will serve to reinforce his participation in the masculinity he believes he is supposed to embody. By saying that Song is not who she claimed to be, Gallimard, by extension, is not who he believes himself to be.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

❝ Okay, Rule One is: Men always believe what they want to hear. So a girl can tell the most obnoxious lies and the guys will believe them every time — "This is my first time" — "That's the biggest I've ever seen" — or *both*, which, if you really think about it, is not possible in a single lifetime.

Related Characters: Song Liling (speaker), Rene Gallimard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

On the stand, Song tells the judge that he knew how to act as the "perfect woman" to seduce Gallimard. The judge asks him to elaborate on his techniques. In this quote, Song replies that he knew exactly what to tell a man to make him feel special.

In his testimony Song invokes his mother, who was a sex worker whose clients were often white men. From her, Song learned what to say to Gallimard to make him fall in love

with him (as evidenced in this quote). Thus, many of his tactics were rooted in colonialism--the submissive Eastern women sacrificing everything for the dominant Western man. Gallimard believed he had found the Perfect Woman because she subscribed to all of these stereotypes, but in reality, it was Gallimard who was the stereotype, because he fell for all of Song's tactics for manipulation. Thus, he was really the gullible Butterfly, rather than the assertive, dominant Pinkerton. Gallimard's quest to assert his masculinity ultimately only served, in terms of traditional stereotypes, to feminize him.

> The West has sort of an international rape mentality toward the East ... Basically, "Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes." 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. Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes. The West believes the East, deep down, *wants* to be dominated — because a woman can't think for herself.

Related Characters: Song Liling (speaker), Rene Gallimard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

In further explanation of the political and sexual relationship between the West and East, Song descibes a "rape mentality" in which Westerners pillage Eastern lands and people and claim that they *wanted* to be treated this way. This stems, Song summarizes, from a belief that the East, like a stereotypical woman, does not know how to think for itself and therefore wants and needs Western masculinity to take over and dominate it.

Hwang here summarizes the thesis of the play: that sexual and political stereotypes are dangerously linked, and that intimate relationships can represent larger cultural trends. Gallimard's treatment of Song, and Song's ultimate manipulation of Gallimard, becomes an allegory for the Vietnam War--a war in which the United States and other Western nations believed they were entering to fix a problem, and ended up losing thousands of men (and any sense of a moral "high ground") to Eastern Communists. Western stereotypes of Eastern men and women can become dangerous to the point of life and death.

> You, if anyone, should know — I am pure imagination.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

After Song taunts Gallimard, Gallimard orders Song to leave so that he can have a date with his "Butterfly." Song accuses Gallimard of subscribing to stereotypes of men and women, and therefore to be "lacking imagination." In this quote, Gallimard tells Song that he is "pure imagination."

Gallimard admits that he knows who Song truly is, and Song's nakedness in front of him represents his inability to deny Song's maleness any further. However, he still firmly maintains that he prefers his illusions of Song as the Perfect Woman, because in that fantasy, Gallimard remains the Perfect Man who has lived the Perfect Life. Thus, as he tells Song here, Gallimard himself is "pure imagination"--he convinces himself that he lives a life that doesn't exist, and that he is someone who in reality he is not. By telling Song he wants to have a date with his "Butterfly," he tells Song that he still prefers his idea of the woman he fell in love with, rather than the actual human who served as the vessel for this fantasy.

Act 3, Scene 3 Quotes

> There is a vision of the Orient that I have. 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. It is a vision that has become my life.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

After Song leaves the stage, dancers begin to dress Gallimard in the kimono left behind. He is transforming into Butterfly. In this quote, Gallimard echoes the themes of *Madame Butterfly*, explicitly stating that his fantasies and stereotypes of the East versus the West have consumed him to the point of becoming his entire life.

As Gallimard told Song more than twenty years before this moment, what he found most beautiful in *Madame Butterfly*

was Cio-Cio-San's sacrifice to atone for her love of Pinkerton. By dressing as Butterfly, Gallimard prepares himself to atone for his love of Song. In this quote, Gallimard is the "slender woman" who loved Song, a "foreign devil." The subversion of the stereotype is nearly complete: Gallimard is the submissive Eastern woman, Song is the Western oppressor. Yet, the incomplete correlation of the cultures remain--Gallimard is still French beneath his makeup, and Song is still Chinese. The inability for the stereotype to absolutely flip shows its implausibility and artificiality in real life. Thus, Gallimard, who is "pure imagination," lives in a fantasy land and never in true reality.

> 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 ... Love warped my judgment, blinded my eyes, rearranged the very lines on my face ... until I could look into the mirror and see nothing but ... a woman.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard continues to soliloquize while he is being transformed into Butterfly by the dancers. In this quote, he tells the audience that his blind love for Song ultimately transformed him into a woman.

Though Gallimard's transformation into Butterfly seems to suggest that he has developed empathy for the Eastern female experience, his words prove otherwise. He is still misogynistic in his view of others and even himself. For Gallimard, to have been manipulated is to be feminine, and to be dominant is to be masculine. Thus, because he proved to be the submissive one in his and Song's relationship, he is the "woman." This proves a stereotypical view of men and women deeply rooted in sexism and misogyny, one that not even deep reflection in a jail cell could root out of Gallimard.

> I have a vision. Of the Orient. That, deep within its almond eyes, there are still women. Women willing to sacrifice themselves for the love of a man. Even a man whose love is completely without worth.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard continues to speak about his "vision of the Orient" as he transforms into Butterfly. In this quote, he tells the audience that he still envisions a "perfect Orient" in which men and women are in their traditional places, according to the sentiments put forth by *Madame Butterfly*.

As previously stated, Gallimard now considers himself to be a woman, since his experience with Song has "feminized" him. In the fantasy world that he has chosen to live in, the men around Gallimard are woefully inadequate but desired by women, and the women choose to sacrifice their lives rather than sacrifice the illusions of their perfect men. Gallimard thus chooses a world in which illusions trump reality, and in which sexist and racist stereotypes are not the stuff of colonial politics but the fluff of dreams. This is the world that Gallimard wants to live in, and it is the world that will ultimately bring him to his death.

> 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? The devastating knowledge that, underneath it all, the object of her love was nothing more, nothing less than ... a man.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker), Song Liling

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Gallimard continues to soliloquize to the audience, wearing the Butterfly costume. In this quote, he posits that the most devastating thing a "Butterfly" can come to realize is that the person she loves is nothing more than a normal man.

In this quote, Gallimard finally admits that the person he deemed to be his Perfect Woman was really a normal, and rather sinister, man. Song used Gallimard for French

political secrets, and in return, Gallimard believed he was reaping the rewards he always deserved as a Western man. Here, Gallimard posits that he believes one of the worst things a person can be is "nothing more, nothing less than...a man." Gallimard is coming to the realization that to be human is to err, and is to have wants and desires that are not fulfilled. Sometimes, a person is just a person--not someone to fulfill a destiny or a fantasy. Song was just a person, with faults and secrets like everyone else. Gallimard, too, is just a normal human being who has some successes and failures, but who lets his failures completely overcome him. He is nothing more or less than a man, a male human, just like Song. Neither of them are particularly special or star-crossed--they are just human. It is this lack of speciality in his life that emotionally and figuratively kills Gallimard.

> My name is Rene Gallimard — also known as Madame Butterfly.

Related Characters: Rene Gallimard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

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Explanation and Analysis

At the conclusion of the play, Gallimard is finally in full *Madame Butterfly* regalia. He is given a hara kiri knife by the dancers, and speaks this quote before plunging it into his body and killing himself.

Onstage, Song is depicted in men's clothing, while Gallimard is dressed as Butterfly, completing the reversal--Song as Pinkerton, Gallimard as Butterfly. The only world in which Gallimard is happy is one in which he is special according to the tenants of his fantasy, where he loved and is loved purely to the point that he is willing to sacrifice his life for love. Deep down he knows that his fantasy has been an illusion, as has the last two decades of his life. Unable to bear the truth, he decides to fulfill his sacrifice and complete his transformation into Butterfly, performing the end of the opera--this time in reality, not fantasy, by killing himself in ritual Japanese fashion. The suicide is the one aspect of his life Gallimard realizes he has complete control over, and he seizes this control to overcome the manipulations and realities that he can no longer bear.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The play opens on Rene Gallimard, alone in his prison cell in Paris. He is sitting on a crate, wearing a bathroom. He has only a few modest possessions, including a tape recorder. The year is 1988. Upstage, a beautiful woman wearing traditional Chinese clothing dances to traditional Chinese music of the kind that might be performed at the Peking Opera. This woman is Song Liling. As the dance continues, the music changes. The traditional Chinese song and instruments are replaced by European music: the famous "Love Duet" from Giacomo Puccini's celebrated 1904 opera, **Madame Butterfly**. Gallimard approaches Song, who dances on and does not notice him. He says two words:"Butterfly, Butterfly." Then, he forces himself to turn away from Song.

The opening moments of the play depict Orientalist fantasy in the making. The traditional Chinese music and clothing fulfills Western ideas of China as an ancient, exotic, and mysterious culture. Puccini's music represents a Westerner's misguided attempt to recreate that culture for the entertainment of other non-Asians like him — a practice that perpetuates and strengthens Orientalist stereotypes. When the Western music overwhelms the Chinese music, it evokes the long history of conflict between Asia and the Western nations that sought to exploit and dominate it.

Gallimard addresses the audience. He explains the layout of the cell, and the routines of eating and sleeping in the prison. He mentions that the door to his cell is very strong, because so many people want his autograph. Gallimard tells the audience he is not treated like an ordinary prisoner. This, he says, is because he is a celebrity.

Though Gallimard's audience has found him in extremely humble circumstances, he carries himself with pride. He even seems a bit arrogant. It is clear Gallimard sees himself as someone special, far from an "ordinary prisoner."

Gallimard tells his audience that he makes people laugh. Though nobody found him interesting or funny when he was a young man — in fact, he was voted "least likely to be invited to a party" when he was in grade school — the story of Gallimard's life now provides entertainment for fashionable, sophisticated people throughout Europe and the United States. Talking about him "lifts their spirits," Gallimard says.

Gallimard takes an ironic tone when discussing his situation, acknowledging that he is only famous because he is the butt of so many jokes. His irony seems designed to protect his pride and disguise his vulnerability from the audience.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Three well-dressed people, a woman and two men, appear onstage. They are guests at a chic, high-class party. Gallimard, still in his prison cell, watches them. They are talking about Gallimard, ridiculing him. Gallimard seems unfazed by their jokes, and remarks that they are "determined to say my name."

The partygoers represent the most elite members of Western society, and their mockery makes it clear that Gallimard is now a laughingstock and a pariah among these people. His isolation in prison mirrors his status as a social outsider.

The three partygoers' conversation makes reference to a trial, and to some "truth" Gallimard refuses to believe. One man, pretending to quote Gallimard, says: "[I]t was dark … and she was very modest!" The trio all laugh at Gallimard's expense. One of the men suggests Gallimard may have "misidentified the equipment." The woman laughs that his error is a compelling case for sex education in French schools.

The partygoers' comments reveal that Gallimard has been involved with a woman who turned out to be anatomically male; the "equipment" to which one of the men refers is the male genitalia. It seems that this relationship is part of the reason Gallimard has been imprisoned, and that he has made public statements which insist his lover is a woman.

The woman remarks that Gallimard is "not very good-looking" and says she feels sorry for him. One of the men recommends a toast in Gallimard's honor. He says, "Vive la différence!" The three laugh as they toast, and the lights go down on them.

"Vive la difference" is a French expression often used to remark on the differences between men and women. The man mocks Gallimard one last time with this toast, suggesting that Gallimard is stupid for mistaking something most people believe to be obvious and innate: who is a man and who is a woman.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

Gallimard, still in his cell, tells his audience he has become "the patron saint of the socially inept." He calls the party guests foolish, and says the men should be begging to learn his secrets. This is because he has known the love of "the Perfect Woman." Gallimard tells his audience that he spends his days in prison thinking about this woman, trying to imagine an alternate ending for their story: one where she returns to him, and where his audience comes not only to understand, but to envy him.

By declaring his male lover to be "the Perfect Woman," Gallimard introduces complex questions about womanhood: not only what makes a woman perfect, but what a "woman" really is. These lines also introduce the centrality of narrative and imagination to Gallimard's life. He believes that sharing his story will give him a chance to revise it in the most dramatic ways: to regain the love he has lost, and force those who mock him to feel as he does about the relationship.

Gallimard tells his audience they cannot understand his story until they understand the story of his favorite opera: Puccini's **Madame Butterfly**. He introduces the heroine of the opera, a Japanese woman named Cio-Cio-San, who also goes by the name Butterfly. Then, he introduces the opera's hero: a sailor in the United States Navy named Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. Gallimard describes Pinkerton as a stupid, cowardly "wimp." As the opera begins, he says, Pinkerton has just bought a house in Japan, and bought Cio-Cio-San as his wife — all for about sixty-six cents in US currency. As he speaks, Gallimard removes a navy cap from one of the crates in his cell and puts it on his head, becoming the character of Pinkerton. A man appears onstage to play the character of Sharpless, another American in Puccini's opera. Stage directions note that Sharpless should be played by the same actor who plays Marc, a character audiences have not yet met.

Though Puccini's heroine is the focus and namesake of the opera, the opening lines in Gallimard's reenactment reveal his personal fascination with Pinkerton. Although he is clearly not designed to be a sympathetic character, Gallimard clearly feels some affinity with the "wimp" sailor — he demonstrates this when he puts on Pinkerton's cap and assumes the role for himself in the reenactment. The deliberate use of people from Gallimard's own life in the reenactment — his decision to introduce Marc as himself, for example, rather than bringing him on as an anonymous actor — shows how Gallimard feels his own life entangled with the story of Madame Butterfly.

Playing the roles of Pinkerton and Sharpless, Gallimard and Marc paraphrase a conversation from Puccini's opera. While the opera is written in elegant, early twentieth-century Italian, the two men speak like crude, brutish modern Americans. Pinkerton refers to "impressing chicks," hanging a disco ball in his traditional Japanese house, and buying Cio-Cio-San "nylons" as consolation when he returns home to St. Louis. Pinkerton tells Sharpless he is only marrying Cio-Cio-San temporarily, and has no plans to bring her along when he leaves Japan. Sharpless disapproves, but Pinkerton dismisses his concerns.

Gallimard paraphrases Pinkerton's lines to highlight the sailor's lack of sophistication and respect. Pinkerton does not appreciate his new wife or his beautiful Japanese home, but he admires cheap trinkets like nylons and disco balls. Pinkerton clearly does not consider Cio-Cio-San to be a human being worthy of moral consideration; he plans to abandon her without regard for how this might affect her life. For this reason, he exemplifies the dehumanizing forces of sexism and racism.

Gallimard, speaking as himself again, introduces the actor playing Sharpless as Marc, his friend from school. In Puccini's opera, Gallimard notes, Sharpless provides a sensitive and level-headed contrast to Pinkerton's narcissistic womanizing. In life, however, Gallimard claims his friendship with Marc had the opposite dynamic: that he was the gentle one while Marc was the "cad."

Though Gallimard implicitly likens himself to Pinkerton by assuming his role, he does not want his audience to see him as crass and selfish in the way Pinkerton is. He introduces Marc as a foil, someone whose womanizing ways will make Gallimard look kind and sympathetic to his audience.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Gallimard flashes back to 1947, when he and Marc were still young men studying at the Ecole Nationale, a French university in Aix-en-Provence. Marc is trying to convince Gallimard to go with him to his father's condo in Marseilles. Gallimard insists he would rather stay home. Marc tries to tempt him with explicit stories of the sexual adventures he and other university boys have had with women they bring to the condo.

In this conversation, Marc appears lascivious and crude while Gallimard appears meek and harmless. Gallimard looks mature and sophisticated for the contrast, but he also seems like an awkward outsider —= that he chooses to stay home while his classmates have wild orgies shows that he is not one of them, for better or worse.

Gallimard tells Marc that making advances toward women always makes him nervous, because he is afraid of being rejected. Marc insists Gallimard does not have to ask these women's permission, and that the women don't have to say yes — he can have sex with them as he pleases. Gallimard demurs further. Marc calls him a wimp, then begins waving at women in the audience, leering and making lewd gestures. He tells Gallimard "there're are a lot of great babes out there." Gallimard ushers Marc offstage, and prepares to resume telling his story.

Marc reveals himself to be a revolting sexist in this part of the conversation: he advocates rape and targets women in the audience for unwanted sexual attention. Marc is a figure of male disregard for female humanity, and the sexist belief that women exist for the use and pleasure of men. Although Gallimard condescends to Marc, he never challenges his principles. At heart, he is just as sexist as his friend.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

Gallimard returns to Puccini's opera, now focusing on the heroine, whom he calls Butterfly rather than Cio-Cio-San. Song appears onstage in the Butterfly costume, dancing to the opera's "Love Duet." Gallimard imagines the sight of the young, beautiful heroine inspires hope in the men who watch her from the audience — men who are every bit as mediocre as Pinkerton, but still believe, as Pinkerton does, that they deserve the love of a magnificent woman. Gallimard describes Butterfly's adoring reception of her new husband, when she lays out her possessions before him and tells him that she is not even worth the tiny amount of money he paid for her.

Gallimard acknowledges the kind of masculine entitlement Pinkerton and Marc display as a fantasy — he realizes that most of the men who feel they deserve a woman's devotion have nothing special to recommend them. Gallimard does not condemn these men for their arrogance; instead, he sees their longing as being beautiful and tragic. He is not, it is clear, concerned with the morality of this situation — in fact, he does not seem to think there is a moral problem with this kind of entitlement at all.

Gallimard remarks that it is hard to find a woman who has as little regard for her own worth as Butterfly. The closest thing, he says, are pinup girls in pornographic magazines. He removes a stack of these magazines from one of the crates in his cell and recalls his first encounter with pornography, when he was twelve years old. The idea that so many women's bodies were available to him to do whatever he wanted filled Gallimard with an overwhelming sense of power that made his whole body shake, he remembers.

This anecdote draws direct connections between cultural objectification of women and the dehumanizing dynamics of individual relationships. Gallimard takes pleasure, not in the pornographic images themselves, but in the sense of power they give him. Western culture, his story illustrates, teaches young men to connect power with the subjugation of women. The easiest way to feel powerful is to dominate another person, and cultural artifacts such as pornography teach young men that women are the perfect targets for this kind of domination.

A woman wearing a sexy negligee appears onstage. She is a pinup girl, the kind of woman one might see in a pornographic magazine from the 1940s or 50s. Gallimard stares at her while she describes a sensual scene of undressing in front of her bedroom window. She is completely unashamed, and tells Gallimard she wants him to see her body. She takes off her negligee. Gallimard is amazed to realize that the woman is taking pleasure in the experience. He is paralyzed rather than sexually excited, but claims he doesn't understand why this is. He puts the magazines away and resumes his story.

Though he does not recognize the connection, Gallimard is repelled by the sexual freedom and unabashed desire the woman displays in this scene. He loses interest when he sees her taking pleasure in the act of exposing her body to him. Gallimard is not interested in simple sexual encounters with available women — he wants something more complicated. His lack of sexual excitement may also suggest Gallimard's unacknowledged homosexual inclinations.

Gallimard describes Puccini's Butterfly, abandoned by Pinkerton — who has gone home to the United States without mentioning that he has no plans to return — and waiting obsessively for him to come back. It has been three years since Pinkerton left her. Comrade Chin, a member of China's Red Guard who has not yet featured in Gallimard's story, appears onstage. She is playing the role of Butterfly's servant, Suzuki. Suzuki urges Butterfly to forget her "loser" husband and marry Yamadori: a handsome, wealthy Japanese prince who has fallen madly in love with her. She scoffs when Butterfly says she can't marry Yamadori because he is Japanese. "You think you've been touched by the whitey god?" Suzuki says in disbelief. "He was a sailor with dirty hands!"

Suzuki's pragmatism and her unpretentious way of speaking — both of which are visible when she mocks Butterfly for her overly romantic image of Pinkerton — are distinctly anti-imperialist. Butterfly seems to believe Asians are inferior to white people, which explains her insistence on remaining loyal to Pinkerton even though Yamadori, a prince, is a better and more worthy match for her. Suzuki mocks Butterfly's internalized racism, and in doing so rejects the power of Western nations, which have historically relied on assumptions of white supremacy to excuse the abuse of foreign countries through imperialism.

Marc reappears, playing the role of Sharpless. He has been sent to tell Butterfly that Pinkerton will never be returning. Gallimard describes Butterfly's insistence that she would rather kill herself than rejoin Japanese society. Butterfly presents Sharpless with Pinkerton's baby. Shocked by the news that Butterfly and Pinkerton have a child together, and unsure how to handle the situation, Sharpless runs offstage. Gallimard continues his narration, saying that after three years of waiting, Butterfly finally spots an American ship in the harbor, and dons her wedding dress, believing her husband will be returning to her soon.

Butterfly is hopeful against all odds: she believes Pinkerton will honor his commitment to her and return to care for their child, and trusts that he is a better man at heart than his actions suggest. Here the play presents the hallmark of an "ideal woman"—at least in Gallimard's eyes—as being that she continues to believe the best about her man, even when all evidence suggests her faith is misplaced.

Comrade Chin, still playing the role of Suzuki, helps Butterfly, played by Song, change into her wedding dress. At the same time, Gallimard's wife, Helga, enters and begins to help Gallimard change from his grim prison clothes into a tuxedo. As he changes, Gallimard explains to his audience that he married Helga, not out of love, but to advance his career. Knowing he would never win the love of a "fantasy woman," he says, he settled for an advantageous match with the daughter of a diplomat. Gallimard tells his audience that he was faithful to Helga for eight years after their marriage, but admits that he always wanted a beautiful woman. All men want this, he says, and ugly men want it most of all.

The history of Gallimard's relationship with Helga shows how disappointing and lonely his life was before meeting Song: certain he would never find real love, he settled for a passionless marriage that did nothing to sooth his desire for something grander. Though he is not someone who inspires great sympathy, Gallimard is clearly not a villain — he may espouse problematic ideas about, for example, the proper relationship between men and women, but he is not outright malicious.

Adjusting his tuxedo as Song finishes changing into her wedding dress, Gallimard tells the audience that his fidelity to Helga ended the day he saw "her" — by which he means Song — at the home of the German ambassador in Peking, singing the death scene from **Madame Butterfly**.

The conversation in Scene 2 has already revealed that Song — who in the last lines of this scene is revealed as the person with whom Gallimard had his notorious affair — is really a man. Still, Gallimard refers to Song as "she," and the stage directions for the majority of the play do the same. The audience is supposed to see Song the way Gallimard did (and still does) even as they maintain some critical distance from his story.

ACT 1, SCENE 6

When the scene opens, the year is 1960. Gallimard is in Beijing, sitting with several other diplomats in the home of the German ambassador to China. Chairs are gathered around a stage where Song, still dressed in the wedding costume from the previous scene, sings the death scene from **Madame Butterfly** — rather than playing the character, she now plays herself, an actress performing for Western diplomats. Song holds a hara-kiri knife, a traditional instrument of Japanese ritual suicide. Gallimard, still facing his audience and speaking to them while the show goes on behind him, explains the end of Puccini's opera: Pinkerton, too cowardly to face Butterfly, sends his new American wife to Japan to collect Butterfly's child. Devastated, Butterfly commits suicide. Song sings in Italian while Gallimard translates the lines: "Death with honor / Is better than life / Life with dishonor."

The reenactment of Puccini's opera blends seamlessly into the reenactment of the events of Gallimard's life, emphasizing once again how Gallimard has connected the two narratives in his memory. The crowd of Westerners who watch Song as she performs — acting out a European man's melodramatic, unrealistic idea of Asian womanhood — show the West's fascination with the kinds of Orientalist stereotypes that artists like Puccini use in their representations of Asian people and cultures. The lines Gallimard translates, about death and honor, illustrate how mistreatment at the hands of a lover may rob a woman, not only of her happiness, but of her self-respect.

Song finishes the death scene. The diplomats applaud and flock to her with congratulations. Gallimard tells his audience that he never enjoyed opera before that night, but that Song's grace and delicacy — more than her voice, which is unconventional for a classical singer — transformed Butterfly into a believable character. Gallimard claims Song's fragile appearance made him want to take her in his arms and protect her.

Gallimard is attracted to those elements of Song which seem most conventionally feminine: her delicate features, slender body, and graceful movement. His desire to "protect" her is an expression of masculinity. Though Gallimard is not very masculine, Song's femininity makes him feel more manly.

Song breaks away from the diplomats and introduces herself to Gallimard. He is shocked to find himself the object of such a woman's attention. Gallimard praises Song's performance, and tells her she was "utterly convincing." Song expresses rueful surprise that she could be "convincing" as a Japanese woman, given the history of animosity between China and Japan — she points out that the Japanese military once used hundreds of Chinese people for medical experiments —but she suggests this irony must be lost on Gallimard.

Song's reply to Gallimard's compliment highlights the way Westerners tend to view Asian people as being homogenous, without national histories and cultural memories separate from the Western nations that colonized them. She asserts a rich, distinct Chinese identity over Gallimard's vague appreciation of an abstract Asian-ness, and immediately reveals herself as a bold, intelligent woman.

Gallimard rushes to justify his comment, saying Song has helped him see the beauty of Butterfly's death: that, though Pinkerton is not worthy of her, she loves him enough to make a "pure sacrifice" in his honor. Song sneers at this, telling Gallimard the story is only beautiful to Westerners, who delight in the fantasy of "the submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man."

Gallimard is clearly surprised by Song's sharp answer to his compliment, and his nervous, clumsy attempt to explain himself shows that he is eager to impress Song, or at least to save face in their conversation. Song is dismissive when she lumps Gallimard together with all other Westerners, reducing him to a stereotype as so many Westerners reduce Asians.

While Gallimard stumbles over himself trying to answer Song's accusatory comment, Song asks him to imagine his reaction if **Madame Butterfly** were about a "blonde homecoming queen" who falls in love with a "short Japanese businessman." If such a girl were to throw her life away the way Puccini's Butterfly does — rejecting a marriage proposal from a young Kennedy, praying to her lover's picture after he returns home to Japan, and finally killing herself when she learns he has married someone else — Song says Gallimard would call her a "deranged idiot." It is only because *Madame Butterfly* is an the story of an Asian woman who kills herself for love of a Western man that men like Gallimard find the story beautiful, Song says.

Song's alternative imagination of Madame Butterfly highlights the absurdities in the original story by drawing comparisons that a Western audience can understand intuitively. In addition to pointing out the strange, implausible elements of the story, her counterfactual also serves as a reminder of the fact that, despite the many ways in which Orientalist depictions like Puccini's reduce their complexity, Asian women have aspirations, needs, and self-respect just as much as Western women—and Western men, for that matter—do.

Song tells Gallimard she will never perform **Madame Butterfly** again. She suggests that if he wants to see "real theatre," he should attend a performance at the Peking Opera. She ends the conversation and walks away, leaving Gallimard stunned. He admits to his audience that his fantasy of "protecting [Song] in my big Western arms" has been totally upended.

Though Gallimard has made it abundantly clear that he is not typically successful with women, his surprise at Song's behavior suggests he expected her to be receptive to him. It may be that, because she is an Asian woman, he assumed she would be more modest and ingratiating than other women.

ACT 1, SCENE 7

At home with Helga later in the evening, Gallimard complains about the arrogance of the Chinese people. He and Helga mock the Chinese tendency to describe their civilization, proudly, as "old." Gallimard jokes that "old" can mean the same thing as "senile." Helga tells her husband that the East and West will always be different, and that he can do nothing to change that.

Gallimard and his wife have no patience for the ethnic pride of Chinese people; they do not see Chinese culture or history as being worthy of such pride, and they have no respect for the history and traditions that have produced the society around them.

Gallimard tells Helga about his conversation with Song, whom he calls "the Chinese equivalent of a diva." Helga is surprised to learn that the Chinese have opera of their own, and even more surprised to learn that Song was able to perform Puccini in Italian. Gallimard speculates that Song must have been educated in the West before the Communists came to power in China.

Helga has just expressed the belief that there are irreconcilable differences between Asian and European cultures — meaning, implicitly, that Asians will never be as sophisticated and advanced as Europeans. That the Chinese people can appreciate Western art and create art of their own in the same style surprises her; she seems to have assumed that Chinese culture is too primitive to see the value of high art.

Helga says she is sorry to have missed **Madame Butterfly** that night, and expresses her appreciation for Puccini's music. Gallimard tells her the Chinese hate *Madame Butterfly* "because the white man gets the girl." Helga is irritated by the infusion of politics into art, and wishes the Chinese could simply accept *Madame Butterfly* as a beautiful piece of music. She asks Gallimard what the Chinese opera is like. He has no answer, but jokes that he is sure the opera is "old" — like everything else in China.

For Helga to be able to ignore the political implications of a work of art is a testament to the racial privilege she enjoys. Because Madame Butterfly perpetuates a dehumanizing stereotype about Asians, people like Song have strong personal reasons to talk about its political content and point out its prejudices — to let the story exist unquestioned would be to accept the ways in which it undermines their humanity.

ACT 1, SCENE 8

Gallimard, addressing his audience, says he couldn't stop thinking of the Peking Opera for four weeks after his conversation with Helga. He wondered how Song became so "proud" —which is to say, confident and forthcoming about her opinions. Though cowardice kept him away at first, he says, curiosity eventually brought him to the theater. There, he found elderly and disfigured people smoking pipes, screaming and gawking at Song as she performed. As Gallimard finishes his account of the experience, Song appears onstage in the company of two dancers. They perform a graceful choreography while Gallimard watches.

The Peking Opera is far more populist than the performances Gallimard is used to attending. Song's audience is comprised of raucous common people, rather than elegant socialites. This is a manifestation of the Communist values governing China during the early 1960s. Communism celebrated the unpretentious commoner, and disparaged the decadence and haughtiness of high society — the things Western capitalism encouraged.

Song freezes, holding a pose, in the middle of her dance. The two dancers leave the stage and the scene shifts suddenly from a performance to a conversation backstage between Song and Gallimard. Song asks what has brought Gallimard to the opera so long after she invited him to attend. Gallimard says he hoped the opera would "further my education," but that he was too busy to come earlier. Song quips that education has always been undervalued in the West.

The sudden evaporation of all other action in the theater — the abrupt cessation of Song's performance, for instance — suggests that Song is just as excited to see Gallimard in her theater as he is to see her on the stage. She gives him her total attention, which makes their conversation intense and intimate, even though they do not talk about serious things.

When Gallimard objects, laughing, to Song's analysis of Western values, Song tells him he is too close to his own culture to judge it fairly. Gallimard insists it is possible to achieve some distance from one's own culture. Song suggests they leave the theater, telling him the place stinks. Gallimard points out that the smell comes from the audience members. Song tells him that while she loves her audience for being loyal to her, she has sufficient distance from her own people to feel comfortable criticizing them.

This is the first moment when Song says something negative about Chinese culture. Her many criticisms of Westerners have stung Gallimard, but her sudden willingness to criticize her own people makes her less intimidating. She seems more sympathetic to Gallimard's viewpoint than she did while challenging his opinions at the German ambassador's house. One might speculate that this is all part of Song's plan to seduce Gallimard; by appearing independent at first her future submissiveness will be all the more enticing for Gallimard.

As she and Gallimard walk through the streets of Beijing, Song wishes aloud that there were a café where they could drink cappuccinos and listen to "bad expatriate jazz," surrounded by men in tuxedos. Gallimard points out that Chinese people weren't allowed in these kinds of clubs when they existed — before the Communist Revolution of 1949 —but Song insists that Asian women "always go where we please." She tells him the pre-Revolution clubs would have been incomplete without beautiful Chinese women, whom she calls "slender lotus blossoms." These women, she implies, are superior to thick-bodied Western women in their elegance and beauty.

In her first conversation with Gallimard, Song talks about the ways in which Western fantasies about Asian women are foolish and Imperialist. In this conversation, though, she points out the privileges Asian women have enjoyed because of these fantasies — freedom and acceptance during a time when other Asian people were restricted and outcast from a society dominated by Western men. She seems to miss certain aspects of Western culture that came with imperialism: jazz, cappuccinos, elegant clothing. Song has not lost her penchant for anti-imperialist witticisms, but the resentment she expressed at the ambassador's house seems to have vanished.

Song says Caucasian men have always been fascinated with Asian women. Gallimard reminds her of the opinion she expressed during their first meeting, that such a fascination was "imperialist." Song assures him that, though white men's interest in Asian women is always imperialist, Asian women sometimes feel an equal interest in the white men. By this point, they have reached the door of Song's apartment building. She encourages Gallimard to come to the opera again and disappears inside. Gallimard continues to wander around outside, amazed that a women has been flirting with him.

Song flirts with Gallimard like a sexually liberated Western woman. Her sultry comments about white men's desire for Asian women, and her thinly veiled allusion to her own "fascination" with Gallimard make her seem modern and assertive.

ACT 1, SCENE 9

Gallimard returns home late. He lies to Helga when she asks where he has been all evening, telling her he attended a talk by a visiting scholar at the home of the Dutch ambassador. Gallimard tells his audience he was not sure why he lied to Helga, since he did not have an obvious reason to do so.

Though he has not technically been unfaithful to his wife, Gallimard's inclination to lie makes it clear that he feels an attraction to Song that might turn into infidelity given the opportunity. His meeting with Song was preparation for an affair, and so feels illicit even though nothing happened.

Marc appears in Gallimard's dreams that night. He is jubilant, toasting Gallimard with expensive wine and encouraging him to pursue an affair with Song. Gallimard balks at the idea, reminding Marc that he is a married man. Marc tells Gallimard that he began to cheat on his own wife after only six months, and has been with three hundred girls in his twelve years of marriage — compared to that, Gallimard's eight years of fidelity make him a model husband.

Gallimard's visions of Marc speak to the most aggressively masculine aspects of his mind. Through Marc, it becomes clear that Gallimard has long wanted to assert himself as an alpha-male, but never had the courage to do so. (Cowardice is one of Gallimard's defining characteristics.) An affair with Song would affirm Gallimard's manhood, as well as satisfying his lust.

Gallimard insists a romance with Song is impossible because he is a foreigner. Marc tells Gallimard that the taboo nature of the relationship will draw Song to him. He tells Gallimard this is a timeless story: that Asian women have always found Western men frightening and therefore sexually irresistible. Marc points to a light burning in a nearby window, and tells Gallimard that Song has left the light burning for him. Gallimard refuses to look through the window, saying it isn't respectful. Marc insists that, because they are "foreign devils" —Caucasian men —they have no obligation to be respectful.

In her first conversation with Gallimard, Song refers to the Western fantasy of "the submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man." Marc imagines this fantasy as a phenomenon among Asian women as well as white men. He sells Gallimard on the idea that Asian women find cruelty attractive, and that white men appeal to them because they are disrespectful. The fantasy Song points out can only work if the woman wants to be mistreated as much as the man wants to mistreat her; only this dynamic can spare a man like Gallimard the burden of guilt.

Song appears onstage, wearing a sheer robe. Marc says Gallimard has spent his entire life waiting for the love of a beautiful woman. He describes a long struggle, in which Gallimard feigns happiness when his friends find romantic success, and wonders what is wrong with him that nobody seems to want him. He tells Gallimard that the time has come to stop struggling, because his wait is over. As Marc exits, Song drops her robe to reveal her bare back to the audience.

Marc's parting words play into Gallimard's self-righteousness and sense of entitlement. He has waited all his life for love, and so believes he deserves a reward for his patience. He sees women as prizes he can claim, rather than people — this makes it possible for him to disregard Helga and pursue Song without fear of rejection.

The stage goes black and a phone rings next to Gallimard's bed. When the lights come on again, Song is sitting in a chair with the phone pressed to her ear, wearing a robe. Across the stage, Gallimard is also talking into a phone. It is 5:30 in the morning. Song tells Gallimard she waited as long as she could bear before calling, then asks him to come and watch her at the Peking Opera again on Thursday. Gallimard promises he will be there.

Song makes herself vulnerable when she tells Gallimard she couldn't "bear" to wait any longer before speaking to him. By showing him signs of her own intense desire, she creates a dynamic in which he may feel free to develop an increasingly intense desire for her without fear of being disappointed.

ACT 1, SCENE 10

As the scene opens, Gallimard recounts how he went to the Peking Opera every week for fifteen weeks in a row following that first encounter with Song. After each performance, he says, she would indulge him in fifteen or twenty minutes of conversation — but never anything more. Still, he felt confident that she had a special interest in him, and believed her boldness was just a mask for the characteristic "Oriental" shyness in her heart.

Gallimard constructs his idea of Song based, not on the evidence of her actions, but on his preconceived notions about how Asian women — and Song in particular, around whom he has built so many expectations — should feel in the presence of white men. Convinced he is entitled to Song's love, he is prepared to believe she loves him regardless of evidence.

On this night, Gallimard has finally been invited to Song's apartment. Waiting for Song to change her clothes, he picked up a framed photograph. Song appears behind him, dressed in a European-style evening gown from the 1920s. She tells him the man in the photograph was her father, who died before the Communists came to power. She adds that the timing of his death was good because, during the Revolution, Communists forced men like him to kneel on broken glass. He would have deserved such a punishment, she says, but it would have pained her to see him that way nonetheless.

Song's comments about her father allude to their difficult relationship and her fraught personal history. She refers to the troubles of the Communist Revolution, offering a glimpse into the hardship she suffered during that time, and when she remarks that her father would have deserved the punishment of the Communists, she hints that he was not a good person. Her emotional fragility comes out in these remarks as never before.

Song realizes that Gallimard has not been served tea. She calls her servant, Shu-Fang, to bring some out, apologizing unnecessarily profusely for the oversight. Song seems disoriented: she apologizes over and over, giggles inexplicably, and calls herself "silly." All this makes Gallimard laugh, and he scolds Song gently for acting so strangely. When the tea arrives, Song tells Shu-Fang that she will pour it herself. She admits to Gallimard that she is somewhat afraid of the scandal that could arise from her entertaining him in her home.

While Song has always been cool and collected — in command of herself and the situation — in their previous meetings, she now seems just as nervous and flustered as Gallimard was during their first conversation. This gives Gallimard control over their dynamic, which he has never had before. His laughter and mild scolding show that he is at ease in Song's home, that he enjoys this feeling of power.

Gallimard does not understand how his presence in Song's parlor, which would bother nobody in France, could cause a scandal in China. The difference, Song says, is that France is a modern country, ahead of the rest of the world, while China is stuck two thousands years in the past. Even pouring tea for Gallimard, she insists, has "implications."

Song criticizes China in the same terms Gallimard used in his conversation with Helga. She depicts Chinese society as being stifling and regressive, while subtly praising France for its progressive ideas. This cements her long transition from the rabid anti-imperialist to a woman who admires and envies the European lifestyle.

When Gallimard compliments her evening gown, Song gets flustered. She tells Gallimard she is not herself. Though she tries to behave like a modern Western woman, Song confesses, she is just a timid, modest Chinese girl in her heart. She tells Gallimard she has never invited a man into her home before, and begs him to leave her until she can compose herself.

When Song confesses that her boldness has been an act — that her natural inclination is to be modest and timid — she confirms all Gallimard's suspicions about her secret "Oriental" nature. Although she can disguise the influence of her race and culture, her confession seems to suggest, her personality has been pre-determined by these forces, and she cannot escape their influence.

Before he leaves, Gallimard tells Song that he likes her just as she is at that moment. To his audience, he notes how Song's way of talking about Western women has changed — whereas she once seemed dismissive of them, she now seems to feel inferior to both those women and Gallimard himself.

When Gallimard tells Song he likes her the way she is, he implies that he prefers this shy nervousness to the confident, sensual behavior Song usually displays. He would rather be with (and dominate) a meek girl than a self-possessed adult woman.

ACT 1, SCENE 11

In the wake of his surprising experience at Song's apartment, Gallimard tells his audience, he devised an experiment: he worked late hours instead of going to the Peking Opera, and refrained from calling Song or writing to her. He recalls an image from **Madame Butterfly**, in which Cio-Cio-San worries that a white man who catches a butterfly will pierce its hearts with a needle and leave it to die in agony. Gallimard says he wondered whether he had the power to make Song suffer in the same way. Knowing she was waiting for him to call, he says, and that he was refusing her that pleasure, gave him his first taste of what he calls "the absolute power of a man."

Gallimard has already drawn connections between masculinity and domination — using the bodies of women in pornographic magazines was his initiation into the world of adult men — but he now ties masculinity more explicitly to suffering. Rather than simply controlling Song, he needs to assert his masculinity further by causing her pain. Though Gallimard is only interested in causing Song emotional pain, the image of the Butterfly on the needle evokes the physical violence often associated with masculinity.

Marc, dressed as a bureaucrat, appears onstage next to Gallimard. He is holding a stack of papers, which he hands one-by-one to Gallimard, who peruses and stamps them, pantomiming office work. Marc catches Gallimard's attention. It is clear that he is not really in the office, but is rather a figment of Gallimard's imagination — a memory who continues to influence Gallimard's behavior. Gallimard says that he hears Marc's voice everywhere.

Marc acts as the voice of a patriarchal society, coaching Gallimard as he learns to act in conventionally masculine ways. The fact that he exists entirely in Gallimard's head—since the entire play in fact occurs in Gallimard's mind in his prison cell — shows he has harbored these beliefs for a long time, despite never acting on them. He does not need the influence of a chauvinist to convince him to behave the way he does.

Marc asks whether Gallimard remembers a girl named Isabelle. It turns out that this girl was Gallimard's first sexual partner, and that Marc — who, it seems, was having sex with Isabelle himself during this period — arranged an encounter between her and Gallimard one night when they were still in high school. Gallimard remembers Isabelle's rough, dominant sexual style: she assumed the superior position, and screamed for no apparent reason throughout their encounter. On the whole, Gallimard remembers the experience as being underwhelming, and Marc admits that Isabelle was "kind of a lousy lay." Still, Gallimard thanks Marc for arranging it.

Gallimard's first sexual experience was disappointing because of Isabelle's antics — the unnecessary, ridiculous screaming — but also because their exchanged lacked intimacy, pleasure, or mutual consideration. Further, he lacked any sort of power, with Isabelle clearly the more dominant. Gallimard is grateful not to have been left behind by his more sexually experienced friends, but what he craved from women was clearly more emotional than physical, and connected to some kind of self-affirmation for him

Gallimard explains how, after he had been absent from the opera for six weeks, he began to receive letters from Song. In her first letter, she asks him to come back to the opera and jokes that her audience misses their "foreign devil." Gallimard dismisses the letter as being too "dignified," and does not answer. In her second letter, Song seems hurt and vulnerable; still Gallimard ignores her, because he does not like that she refers to him as her "friend" in the letter. In her third, after Gallimard has been absent from the opera for seven weeks, Song upbraids him for his rudeness and tells him she will have him turned away at the door if he tries to attend the opera. Gallimard does nothing.

Gallimard is clearly looking for something very specific in Song's reaction to his absence. He wants her to feel and think a certain way, not only about him, but about herself: to call him something more charged than a friend, and to desire his approval enough to appear humble rather than dignified. Gallimard is using negative reinforcement—his silence and implicit rejection — to groom Song into his perfect woman. (Of course, at the same time Song is in fact grooming Gallimard by playing this role that Gallimard wants)

After eight weeks of silence and absence, Gallimard receives a seemingly heartbroken letter from Song. In the letter, she writes: "I can hide behind dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my shame." Gallimard sees that his experiment has been a success — like the butterfly Cio-Cio-San imagines, Song is totally at his mercy — but he feels tremendously guilty for tormenting her. He feels certain that God will punish him for abusing his male power, and senses that the punishment will happen that very night.

Gallimard has big ideas about harnessing "the absolute power of a man," but he still believes in basic moral codes and consequences — unlike Marc, who encourages him to act with impunity wherever women are concerned. When Song says that she has given Gallimard her "shame," she speaks to an idea that her longing for Gallimard is stronger than her self-respect, which is exactly what Gallimard wants.

ACT 1, SCENE 12

The same day he receives Song's heartbroken letter, Gallimard attends a party at the home of Monsieur Toulon, another French diplomat and Gallimard's superior at the embassy. Toulon pulls Gallimard aside for a private conversation. He tells Gallimard that he always liked him because, although he was never a leader, he was always "tidy and efficient." Toulon then reveals that the French government is changing its approach to diplomacy with China; after the embarrassment of losing their colonies in Indochina, officials have decided to devote more effort to gathering information about the Chinese people.

Toulon's comments introduce the relationship between international political issues and the private dramas of ego, and self-presentation. Losing Indochina embarrasses France (or, rather, the people who represent France at the level of government), and Toulon makes it clear that the ego wounds those men suffer will influence major political decisions. Imperialism is a matter of pride and image as much as anything else, Toulon makes clear.

Toulon reveals that Gallimard's boss, Vice-Consul LeBon, will be transferred out of China as a result of this shift in the French government's diplomatic priorities. Gallimard is certain that Toulon is planning to transfer him as well, and thinks this must be God's way of punishing him for mistreating Song — taking away the woman he failed to appreciate. To his great surprise, however, Toulon announces that he wants Gallimard to take LeBon's place as vice-consul. Rather than being transferred, Gallimard is being promoted.

Being transferred out of China would likely mean Gallimard would never see Song again. Along with the surprise of his promotion, this exchange also brings to light the surprising degree of affection Gallimard has developed for Song. He assumes his punishment is the pain of losing the woman he cares for, rather than the shame and stress of losing a prestigious job — this shows that he values Song more highly than his elite position.

Toulon tells Gallimard that, had this shift happened a year earlier, he would have lost his job. The decision to promote him, Toulon says, is a result of a the unusual confidence and assertiveness Gallimard has displayed in recent months. He offers congratulations and walks offstage. Gallimard addresses his audience, telling them this was the night he realized that "God is a man." God has always allowed men to dominate women, and has excused sins in men while doling out horrible punishments to women. Toulon's admiration taught him that this was "the way of the world."

Toulon credits Gallimard's uncharacteristically masculine behavior with winning him the promotion to vice-consul, and in doing so draws a direct line between masculinity and authority. Gallimard has not talked much about God before this scene, so his sudden insistence that God is behind his triumph and wants him to succeed illustrates his new and growing conviction that male supremacy is the correct and natural order of the world.

ACT 1, SCENE 13

Gallimard arrives at Song's apartment, having just left Toulon's party. Song seems angry, but Gallimard pays no attention as she chastises him for arriving late and unannounced and scandalizing her neighbors. He tells Song he has been promoted, and asks her: "Are you my Butterfly?" Song demurs, insisting Gallimard already knows her answer. Gallimard tells her that he wants to hear her say the words aloud. He reminds her of the line from her earlier letter: "I have already given you my shame."

When Gallimard asks Song whether she is his "Butterfly," he is asking whether she will love and devote herself to him in the same way the heroine of Puccini's opera does for her husband. Given Song's professed disdain for Butterfly and her story, conceding that she is willing to fill the role of Butterfly in Gallimard's life would be a major change of heart, and a definitive victory for Gallimard in the power struggle of their relationship.

Gallimard asks Song again whether she is his "Butterfly." She tells him she doesn't want to answer. Gallimard strokes her hair and tells her there should be no false pride between them. Song relents, and tells Gallimard that she is his Butterfly.

This is the moment when Song fuses, in Gallimard's mind, with the image of perfect Asian womanhood he cherishes. Song ceases to be a real person, and instead becomes the fantasy of Butterfly.

Gallimard tells Song that she has changed his life, and that she is the reason for his promotion. He begins to kiss her, and she urges him to be gentle, confessing that she has never been intimate with a man. She asks him to let her wear her clothes while they make love, telling him she is "a modest Chinese girl." Gallimard is sympathetic. Song promises she will do all she can to please him, and tells him Chinese mothers teach their daughters how to satisfy a man. She asks him to turn off the lights and the two go to bed, quoting Puccini's opera to one another.

Song's modesty, inexperience, and humble, earnest desire to please her man represent the pinnacle of womanhood. Both totally chaste and perfectly knowledgeable about sex, the modest and submissive result of conservative culture who is as readily available to her lover as a progressive Western woman, Song unites masculine ideals that seem totally contradictory, and emerges as a perfect fantasy girl.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

Gallimard, in his cell again, reads from a review of **Madame Butterfly**. The reviewer writes that Pinkerton is obnoxious and deserves to be kicked, then adds that Butterfly is "irresistibly appealing" and that seeing her suffer is like watching a child being tortured. To all this, Gallimard adds that, although plenty of men would want to kick Pinkerton, very few would pass up the opportunity to be Pinkerton.

The reviewer's odd connection between Cio-Cio-San's appeal and her resemblance to a child in pain highlights how wide-spread the appreciation and even fetishization of female vulnerability is. As Gallimard points out, most men would love to be Pinkerton — his fantasies are more universal than many people would care to admit.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

The scene opens with Gallimard sitting on a couch with Song curled up at his feet. Gallimard explains to his audience how, shortly after beginning their affair, he and Song — who, by that time, he had taken to calling Butterfly — rented an apartment in Beijing where they would meet a few times each week. In these meetings, he says, Song pursued an "education."

The pose in which Song and Gallimard sit emphasizes their unequal power dynamic: Song sits at Gallimard's feet like a dog, showing her submissive position in their relationship. Gallimard calls her Butterfly as a further affirmation of their power dynamic: if she is the fantasy woman, then he is Pinkerton, to whom she is hopelessly devoted.

Song is telling Gallimard that Chinese men keep their women down, and that the Communist government in China works to keep its citizens ignorant. She praises Gallimard for his progressive ideas, and tells him how exciting she finds his work, making decisions that shape the world. Song asks Gallimard to tell her about the situation in Vietnam, insisting that she wants to learn more about his work so she can be impressed by his power and influence.

Song is totally sycophantic in this exchange, catering to her lover's ego to an absurd degree. While her adoration might seem totally insincere to the audience, Gallimard takes it in eagerly, without suspicion or hesitation. He has come to believe in his own splendor, and in her total innocence and harmlessness and natural devotion to him.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Toulon appears onstage, and Gallimard goes to meet him. Toulon is not in Gallimard and Song's apartment —the ensuing conversation takes place in the French embassy —but Song watches them from beside the couch while they speak, as though she is listening in on their private conversation.

The physical configuration of this scene is the first clear hint that Song is more shrewd and intelligent than Gallimard believes. He believes her to be blinded by admiration, but she is clearly observing him with her own purposes in mind. The scene implies that what Toulon is telling Gallimard, Song has manipulated Gallimard into telling her through her fawning proclamations of how impressed she is by his important job.

Toulon is telling Gallimard that the Americans have made plans to begin bombing Vietnam. Since there is no American embassy in China, Toulon says, military leaders have asked the French embassy to send reports on the Chinese people's opinions about the American government and their actions in Vietnam. Gallimard tells Toulon that the Chinese will protest if bombing begins, but assures him that, in their hearts, they don't support the Vietnamese president, Ho Chi Minh.

Gallimard's characterization of the Chinese is extremely patronizing — he believes they cannot be taken at their word regarding their own political opinions, assuring Toulon that their protests do not reflect their true feelings. He is willing to ignore all evidence to support his belief that the Chinese want Western rule as much as the Westerners want to exert their power. He sees the Chinese/Western dynamic as being the same as the Song/Gallimard dynamic (though of course his Orientalist viewpoint makes him misunderstand both dynamics disastrously).

Toulon complains about the American's swooping in to seize control over Vietnam, when they refused to help the French defend their colonial authority there during the Indochina War. Gallimard tells Toulon that the French lost in Indochina because they didn't have the will to win. He says the "Orientals" want to build connections with people who are strong and powerful.

Just as Toulon once connected leadership with displays of masculine self-confidence and aggression, Gallimard treats military action in Asia as an opportunity for Westerners to assert themselves as the strong — and therefore, masculine — leaders through a show of brute force.

Toulon makes a joke about Gallimard's intimate knowledge of the Chinese, and reveals that he has heard rumors about Gallimard and his "native mistress." He seems unperturbed, and even admits to being impressed by Gallimard's affair.

By making a joke about Gallimard's private life, Toulon invites him into a casual, friendly intimacy outside their professional relationship – they are two boys being boys.

Toulon asks Gallimard again for "inside" information about Chinese popular opinion of the West. Gallimard tells him that the Chinese miss the period of Western influence before the Revolution, and mentions their longing for "cappuccinos" and "men in tuxedos." Asian people want "the good things" Westerners can provide for them, he tells Toulon. He says Americans will gain Vietnamese support if they "demonstrate the will to win," and assures Toulon that "Orientals will always submit to a greater force."

Gallimard believes so ardently in the superiority of the West that he cannot imagine Asian people wanting anything other than to have a Western-style life. He repurposes comments Song made in one of their earliest conversations to make his point, illustrating how little he knows about the Chinese outside of their relationship. His characterization of Asian people as submissive, always ready to accept domination by a greater force, frames the relationships between Western and Asian nations in gendered terms, with Asia acting as the helpless woman and the West, as always, playing the role of the strong and forceful man.

As Toulon prepares to leave, Gallimard asks him how many people have heard the rumors about his affair. Toulon assures him nobody in the embassy will betray his secret, because they all have secrets of their own. After Toulon leaves, Gallimard tells his audience that he was learning, more and more, the benefits of being a man — one of which, he says, is the freedom to pal around with other men and "celebrate the fact that we're still boys."

Though men are given power to make decisions that change the world, Gallimard observes how they revel in acting like "boys," shirking responsibility in their personal lives and doing what they please without worrying about consequences. Though the patriarchal society assumes women are not smart or mature enough to lead, men are trusted with serious roles even when they prove that they are not smart or mature.

Comrade Chin appears onstage. Gallimard, distressed, turns to Song — who has been sitting quietly onstage this whole time — and asks why Chin has to come into the story. Song dismisses Gallimard's protests, saying the audience cannot understand the story without Chin. Gallimard tells his audience that they are about to learn the reason he has become an object of ridicule for so many people. He begs the audience to try and see things from his point of view, then exits the stage.

Song is not literally sitting in Gallimard's cell with him; she is a figment of his imagination. Still, he is forced to capitulate when she insists on bringing Comrade Chin into the story. Though Gallimard has maintained total control over his story until this point, he cannot hide from the truth — deceiving himself and his audience — indefinitely.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Song addresses the audience for the first time. She tells them the year is 1961, and Gallimard has just left their apartment for the evening. Comrade Chin tells Song to find out when the Americans plan to start bombing Vietnam, and which cities they intend to target. Chin takes notes while Song recites a list of numbers: Americans will increase troops in Vietnam to 170,000 soldiers, with 120,000 militia and 11,000 American advisors.

Comrade Chin is a member of the Red Guard, a paramilitary wing of China's Communist government. This scene reveals that Song has been passing the information she coaxes out of Gallimard onto the Chinese government, helping frustrate the American intervention in Vietnam.

Chin remarks on Song's ability to keep so much information in her head. Song reminds Chin that she is an actor. Chin asks whether being an actor requires Song to wear women's clothing. Song insists that her dress is simply a disguise to help her in her assignment. Chin asks whether Song has been gathering information in ways that violate "the Communist Party principles." Song casually assures her she is doing no such thing. Chin reminds Song that there is no homosexuality in China, to which Song answers ironically, "Yes, I've heard."

Song's conversation with Chin, reveals her extensive betrayal of Gallimard: the fact that she is actually a man, and seduced him — by making him think he was seducing her — under false pretenses to gain access to government secrets. At the same time, however, it reveals her dissatisfaction with China and its Communist regime. Chin's parting comment hints that Song is homosexual, and therefore criminal according to the government's values — making Song a pariah in the rigid Maoist regime. Song is not as blindly supportive of the West as Gallimard believes, but neither is she an ardent Chinese patriot. Like Gallimard, Song too is an outsider, and it may be that Song is engaged in this seduction of Gallimard simply to survive in a culture that demonizes him.

Chin leaves the stage. Gallimard peers out from the wings, confirming that she is gone. Song assures him that she is, and invites him to continue telling the story "in your own fashion."

Gallimard is ashamed of the truth and afraid to face it even in narrative. He hides from Chin because he cannot bear to recall his own foolishness.

ACT 2, SCENE 5

Gallimard begins the scene in his apartment with Song, his head in her lap. He explains how he and "Butterfly" passed three years of their affair in Beijing, meeting in the apartment to have sex and talk about his life. Butterfly was a passionate listener, he says, which is a rare quality in a woman.

Gallimard's relationship with Song, now Butterfly, is about his loneliness and shaky sense of self, as much as it is about lust or the desire to feel power over another person. His need to be listened to reveals his deeper need to feel valuable.

Helga appears onstage. She informs Gallimard that she has visited a doctor to talk about their difficulties conceiving a child, and that the doctor found "nothing wrong" with her. She asks Gallimard to see the doctor himself. Gallimard is insulted by the suggestion that he may be infertile, but Helga urges him to visit the doctor anyway. She reminds him that time is running out — soon, she will not be able to conceive a child.

Gallimard's cold response to Helga is a sign their marriage is suffering. Gallimard shows little concern for Helga's feelings, and seems to be more invested in protecting himself from insult than in conceiving a child — in fact, it is not even clear he wants to have a child with Helga.

Returning to Song, Gallimard complains about the humiliation of not being able to conceive a child with Helga. Song insists that the problem is with Helga, not Gallimard. Song tells Gallimard that she wants to bear his child. Gallimard tells his audience that he didn't see the doctor Helga recommended — no man would do such a thing under the circumstances.

Song implies that men who cannot conceive children are not real men. Her insistence that Gallimard cannot be the problem is both a way of stroking his ego — implying that he is too masculine to be infertile — and of making him fear the doctor's tests, lest the results prove he is not a real man. Song's comments also construct Helga as an enemy, determined to emasculate her husband.

ACT 2, SCENE 6

It is 1963, and Gallimard is at a party at the Austrian ambassador's house. He is talking to a young student named Renee. She tells him about her plans to spend the next two years in China, learning the Chinese language. Then she asks him bluntly whether he wants to "fool around." Gallimard agrees, and Renee walks offstage. Gallimard tells the audience this was the beginning of his first "extra-extramarital affair." He says Renee was beautiful, and that he found it exciting to have sex with someone who would let him see her naked body — but he adds that it is possible for a woman to be too sexually free and confident, so that she begins to seem like a man.

As far as Gallimard is concerned, Renee is the polar opposite of Song. Whereas he spends months wooing Song, Renee propositions him for sex after only a brief conversation. Renee is sexually experienced and uninhibited, and while Song appears to Gallimard to be the picture of delicate femininity, Renee's boldness makes her seem unbecomingly masculine. His liaison with Renee highlights the extent to which Gallimard has become emotionally invested in the dynamic he shares with Song, unable to appreciate women who do not conform to his idea of female perfection.

Renee returns to the stage, toweling her hair in what is clearly supposed to be a post-coital scene. She tells Gallimard he has a nice "weenie," her word for penis. Gallimard finds the childish slang distasteful, but Renee does not seem bothered by his disapproval. She goes on a long diatribe about men's insecurity around their penis size, which leaves Gallimard disgusted.

Renee's total disregard for Gallimard's opinion of her, even more than her crude and juvenile language, emphasizes her difference from Song. She seems to have no investment in pleasing Gallimard, and so gives him no power to reward her with approval or punish her with disdain.

Renee walks offstage, leaving Gallimard behind. Song appears, shaking and distressed, in a different corner of the stage from Gallimard. Gallimard says that he kept up his affair with Renee mostly because of its effect on Song. He claims she knew about the affair, but did not confront him or complain as a Western woman might have — instead, she accepted his betrayal and suffered in silence. Her quiet pain was the thing that excited him about his affair with Renee, much more than Renee herself, Gallimard says.

Though Renee herself cannot be controlled, Gallimard appreciates her because she gives him a tool to exercise power over Song. Though they have spent years together and have discussed the possibility of having a child together, Gallimard still feels compelled to assert authority over Song. Dominating her was not just a way of winning her affection, but a major source of ongoing pleasure for Gallimard.

Toulon appears onstage. He tells Gallimard that the American military has plans to assassinate Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of South Vietnam. Gallimard has recommended this course of action, and Toulon tells him the outcome of the assassination will either make Gallimard's career or destroy his credibility. Toulon admits that he agrees with Gallimard's opinions, but says he would never risk his own career by supporting Gallimard's recommendations publicly. While they talk, Song dissolves into a fit in her corner of the stage. She throws a vase to the ground, then sits amid the broken shards singing to herself.

Gallimard's life seems to be coming apart at this moment. His career is in a precarious position, and his relationship with Song is crumbling. These are the fruits of Gallimard's hubris: intoxicated by the confidence his gained from his relationship with Song, he has taken her love for granted and made hasty recommendations informed more by his sense of personal infallibility and cultural or racial superiority than by any real information.

Gallimard is furious to learn that Toulon does not plan to stand beside him if the assassination yields bad results. After leaving Toulon, he tells his audience, he considered going to visit Renee. However, he decided in that moment that he needed an outlet for his anger and humiliation, and so he went to see Song for the first time in weeks.

Gallimard's decision to visit Song as a way of relieving his shame indicates his dismissive, abusive attitude toward her. Treating Song as an outlet for his negative feelings means treating her badly to restore his own sense of control; he plans to do something vicious.

Gallimard finds Song drunk and despairing. She says their problem is an old one: men grow tired of women they have been with too long, even if those women are beautiful. Gallimard tells her he has a solution to this problem, and asks Song to let him see her naked body. Song seems scandalized, but also distressed. She reminds Gallimard of her modesty and shame, and he dismisses these concerns. She tells Gallimard she was always disgusted by the fantasy of the passive Asian and the cruel white man, but that she now sees how she has become trapped in exactly that dynamic.

As far as Gallimard knows, Song's modesty is among her most prized virtues. Insisting she forsake that virtue to please him is a dramatic show of force — he wants to prove that he has the power to make Song do anything he wants. When Song points out that the dynamic between them mirrors the cliché she once claimed to hate, she subtly encourages Gallimard to think of her as being helpless, in need of his care and protection.

Gallimard tries to comfort Song by telling her that his seeing her naked will remove the last barrier between them. She brushes off his loving words, but tells him she can do nothing except submit to his will —she is helpless for love of him. Gallimard tells his audience that he did not undress Song that night. He suspects he may have known, in his heart, what he would find if he looked at her naked body. He says happiness is so rare that the mind will go to tremendous lengths to protect it once we feel it.

Gallimard's comment to his audience makes it clear that his belief that Song was a woman was not only the product of her clever deception. He depended on Song for his happiness, and had very little else in his life to fulfill him, and therefore subconsciously kept himself ignorant to make their romance possible. The imaginary world Song created for him was — and remains, as his prison testimony suggests — an easier and more beautiful one than his reality.

Gallimard says the thought of himself fulfilling the role of lecherous Pinkerton, abusing his loving Butterfly, made him sick. The confrontation with Song killed the last traces of Pinkerton in him, he says, and left behind a feeling of love that was totally unnatural to him. He crawls across the stage toward Song and throws his arms around her waist, begging her forgiveness. Song tells Gallimard she is pregnant. Gallimard exclaims that he wants to marry her.

Though Gallimard professes his love for Song on the night he receives his promotion, he claims this is the first moment he truly felt love for her. The relationship they have shared to this point has been defined by Gallimard's ego and his desire to have Song doting on him. Now, he feels concern for her and, with her (obviously false) announcement of her pregnancy, envisions a future they can share. That this moment of deep feeling should occur at the height of Song's deception — the moment she lies about being pregnant, partly in order to ensure her deception remains hidden — is an ironic example of the extent of Gallimard's self-deception, as well as the extent of Song's ruse. Gallimard reads his lover so poorly as not to perceive the most dramatic of lies.

ACT 2, SCENE 7

The night after her dramatic conversation with Gallimard, Song paces their apartment while Comrade Chin reads from a notepad. Gallimard is watching their dialogue from another part of the stage. Chin is trying to inform Song about Gallimard's affair with Renee, but Song interrupts to tell her that she needs a baby. Song narrates their encounter in frantic, ecstatic language: she explains how Gallimard ordered her to strip the night before, and how she was forced to take a gamble in a moment of panic, knowing her entire mission could have been upended if he had forced her to reveal her naked body.

Though her exchange with Gallimard put Song in a hard, dangerous position, she seems to enjoy a pleasurable rush of adrenaline as she describes their conversation to Chin. Song uses dramatic narration techniques that emphasize the psychological gameplay in her relationship with Gallimard: she sees a silent power play between them, in which she is always struggling to keep an upper hand while allowing him to believe he is in control.

Song, still recounting the events of the previous night, tells Comrade Chin about a revelation that struck her while she was trying to craft a response to Gallimard's order: that Gallimard did not care whether he saw her body, only whether she proved willing to submit to his will under any circumstances. Song says giving Gallimard a baby will guarantee his fidelity for life. Chin resists, calling the idea "counterrevolutionary" — contrary to the values of the Communist Party — but Song insists that it is necessary to guarantee the mission's success. She tells Chin to make sure the baby is a boy.

Though her mission is simply to collect information, Song has darker and more complex motivations. She wants to gain profound understanding of Gallimard, and then use that understanding to manipulate his emotions. She understands that the possibility of infertility threatens Gallimard's sense of masculinity, and wants to use the birth of a son — proof that he is virile and masculine— to make herself an indispensible part of his male identity. To Gallimard, being the father of a son — of implanting a son within Butterfly, to put it bluntly — is another emblem of his power. And Song wants him to feel that power, because it is through that feeling of power that she controls him.

As Comrade Chin prepares to leave, Song asks why, in her opinion, the Peking Opera always casts men in women's role. Chin guesses the tradition is a remnant of the patriarchal social structure that dominated China before the Communist Revolution. Song rejects this answer, and tells her the real reason is that "only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act."

Song understands that male fantasies of femininity bear no resemblance to womanhood as the vast majority of women experience and perform it in the real world. A real woman knows her own complexity and humanity, and cannot reduce womanhood to the tropes that persist in male fantasy. Only a man, who learns from a young age to see women as less than human, is able to dehumanize in this way.

Comrade Chin leaves the stage, and Gallimard calls out to Song. He tells her that he would forgive all her betrayals, if she would return to him and "become Butterfly again." Song scoffs at the idea, telling Gallimard she has a superior deal: she has been pardoned for her role in the treason she and Gallimard committed together, and is safely home in China. Gallimard insists that she must wish they could be together again, at least on some level. Song laughs, telling Gallimard he was just an artistic challenge — a way to prove her skills as an actress. Song mocks Gallimard gently. She says he will always adore her, no matter what terrible truths she tells him —this, she says, is the very reason she loves him.

This conversation reveals the official reason for Gallimard's imprisonment — he committed treason by passing government secrets to Song — but more importantly, it shows his deep commitment to the fantasy of Butterfly. Song, like all other characters, is only a memory; her speech is a reflection of Gallimard's mind. When she tells Gallimard he will always adore her, she is expressing a thought from Gallimard's own mind. He knows himself to be hopelessly devoted to his imaginary lover, whom he dominated and who was always using him.

Song points to the audience and reminds Gallimard where he left off his story: he was telling the audience about the night she announced she was pregnant. The two of them resume their positions from the end of the previous scene, and prepare to pick up where they left off, as though nothing had happened to interrupt them.

Gallimard is constantly losing and regaining control of his story. He wants to present an image of himself that an audience can "envy," but the sad realities of betrayal, self-deception, and love misused cannot be ignored indefinitely.

ACT 2, SCENE 8

Gallimard announces he will divorce his wife and live with Song, first in China and then in France. Song says she is ashamed by his generosity, and tells him she is not worthy of marriage. She insists she cannot ask Gallimard to give up his flourishing career for her sake. Gallimard swears his career is not so important as he made it seem, and that he doesn't care whether a scandal erupts into all the newspapers, but Song refuses to accept his proposal and leaves the stage. Gallimard tells the audience he and Song continued to argue all night, but that her refusal was final. He says she disappeared to the countryside, and returned several months later with a child.

Song uses flattery to misdirect Gallimard. She cannot allow herself to become the center of a scandal, because too much attention will surely bring her deception to light — she is, after all, famous in Beijing as a male opera singer who plays female roles. By framing her refusal to marry as concern for Gallimard's career, Song keeps him and his needs at the center of their shared world; a tactic that is above suspicion since she has emphasized him and minimized herself through their entire relationship.

Song returns to the stage holding a bundle in her arms. Gallimard examines the baby and makes a few critical, but lighthearted, comments about the child's looks. Song quotes lines from **Madame Butterfly**: "What baby, I wonder, was ever born in Japan ... With azure eyes ... And such lips! ... And such a head of golden curls." Gallimard observes that the boy's eyes are more brown than blue, and that his supposedly "golden" curls are "slightly patchy." Still, the couple seems happy.

As she did the first time they had sex, Song uses Puccini's words to enrapture Gallimard, trapping him in fantasy so he cannot see the gaps and flaws that would surely give Song away. Gallimard can see that his son is not the blue-eyed Western baby Song describes, but her fantasy is so complete as to prevent him from really registering that dissatisfying reality.

Song tells Gallimard she has named the baby Peepee. Gallimard urges her to consider a different name, and offers Michael, Stephen, and Adolph as alternatives. Song tells Gallimard that, while Peepee might make their son vulnerable to teasing in the West, it doesn't matter because he will never live in the West. She promises the child will never burden Gallimard in his home country — the two of them will stay in China, always.

Gallimard wants the baby to be his child: he wants to have a say in the boy's name, to educate him Western schools, and generally to feel some ownership over the child's life and upbringing. That Song denies him this ownership is a surprising twist, since she has already claimed that the baby is intended to create a lifelong tie between her and Gallimard. She denies him this control over the baby by giving it a non-Western name that will make it hard for the baby to thrive outside China. Yet note that the Western connotation of "Peepee" also subtly hints at the secret behind Gallimard and Song's relationship: that Song is a man.

Gallimard tells the audience that Song's stubbornness — her insistence on staying in China, on the fringes of his life where she would never cause a scandal or create a burden —made him love and desire her more than ever. He tells them her aloofness was brilliant manipulation; she seems to have known exactly how to hold onto his affections. However, he admits, he was so in love with her by this point that she could have done anything, and he would have continued to adore her.

The relationship between Song and Gallimard has been a long series of power plays. In their earliest meetings, she seemed especially elusive and prideful so that her submission would seem even more meaningful; once Gallimard became overly infatuated with his own power, Song needed to assert herself more forcefully. This was both a way of ensuring the success of her mission, and a way to make Gallimard feel safe — in his heart, he is still a coward, and does not have the strength to stand up for the woman he loves in difficult, public ways.

ACT 2, SCENE 9

It is 1966. Gallimard explains to his audience how a series of influential events completely altered the life of Westerners in Asia. As Chairman Mao grew older, he tells them, the Chinese Communist Party came under new leadership, and the government grew even more extreme and violent. He and Song were enemies of the state, because his wealth and her opera fame both ran counter to the values of the Communist Party. At the same time, the American war in Vietnam emerged as a startling failure: millions of dollars were being spent to kill Vietnamese Communists, but there was no sign that the Vietnamese would relent in their resistance to American invasion.

The turmoil in Vietnam and China is evidence of increasing anti-Western sentiment among Asian people. Gallimard predicted that the Vietnamese would welcome domination by stronger Western powers, but the failure of American troops to win Vietnamese cooperation or overpower guerilla forces shows that he dramatically overestimated both the West's appeal and its strength. The Cultural Revolution — an aggressive re-assertion of Communist values that began in the late 1960s and sought to cleanse China of the influence of Western capitalism and decadence — revealed hatred for the West and its values, which Gallimard and his peers never recognized.

Toulon appears onstage, and informs Gallimard he is being sent back to France because his poor predictions about the war in Vietnam are a sign of bad judgment. Gallimard tries to persuade Toulon to let him stay in China, insisting the situation in Vietnam will improve soon, but Toulon refuses to change his mind.

Gallimard clings to hope that the tide will turn in Vietnam, restoring him to a position of respect in the embassy, even when years of war have made it apparent that this will never happen. He deludes himself because the alternative is too deeply distressing to confront.

Two dancers drag Song onto the stage and mime beating her. She is wearing male clothing, distinctly Chinese in style. Gallimard tells his audience that they said a hurried goodbye before he returned to France, but that he doesn't want to talk about that parting. He leaves the stage. The dancers who beat Song mock the Chinese opera by caricaturing its characteristic acrobatics. Song kneels, watching them. Comrade Chin appears onstage holding a banner, which reads: "The Actor Renounces His Decadent Profession!"

The pantomime of the dancers communicates the hardship that Song endures as a result of the Cultural Revolution. As an actor, Song is an object of ridicule and target for abuse among the Communists who consider the arts unnecessary and immoral. The violence of the dancers suggests that Song does not renounce his life as an actor voluntarily, but must comply with Communist values under threat of physical harm.

Comrade Chin forces Song to respond to a series of humiliating questions. She claims that Song has been oppressing China's poor farmers, scorning their labor while living in luxury. Song confesses that her — or rather, his — decadent lifestyle was possible because Song made himself "a plaything for the imperialist." He admits to engaging in anal intercourse with one of China's enemies — Gallimard — and says his "perversions" brought shame to China. When Chin asks what Song wants to do next, Song cries out three times: "I want to serve the people!" The dancers now display a banner that reads: "The Actor is Re-Habilitated!" Song remains kneeling before Chin while the dancers perform a victory dance to Chinese music.

This dialogue makes it clear that Song did not seduce Gallimard out of a simple desire to help China by stealing secrets. Song is a homosexual man; this combined with the fact of his affair with a hated Western government official (even if he was put up to that affair by the Chinese security state), makes him despicable in the eyes of the Communists. Although Song's deception makes him seem like a staunch supporter of the Chinese government, in reality he is an outcast in his native society and doing what he must to survive. Renouncing his sexuality and profession is the only chance for Song to regain social acceptance and relief from the kind of physical abuse suggested by the "beating" he received from the dancers.

ACT 2, SCENE 10

It is 1970, four years after Gallimard's departure from China. Song is laboring on a commune in rural China, and has been for the past four years. When the scene opens, she is talking to Comrade Chin, apparently asking for permission to leave the commune and start a new life. Chin is scornful, telling Song he is useless to the Revolution. Song protests that he served the Revolution by collecting information from Gallimard, but Chin expresses furious disdain for these alleged contributions, calling Chin and Gallimard "homos."

During the Cultural Revolution, people whose lives did not reflect the values of the Communist Party were often sent to rural work camps where they would be forced to perform hard manual labor. These camps were intended to rid people of their indulgent, frivolous bourgeois habits and beliefs. They were notorious for being both physically and emotionally devastating.

Comrade Chin tells Song he can serve the people of China, but that he will not be permitted to pollute the country with his "pervert stuff." Chin orders Song to move to France and take up his affair with Gallimard again, in order to send secrets back to China. She tells Song he will have to make Gallimard pay his expenses — the government will not give him any money for this task.

Chin's decision to send Song to France seems to be a death sentence: unless Gallimard welcomes Song and agrees to support her completely, Song will be stranded without a way to support himself. Chin wants to punish Song as aggressively as possible (despite the "service" Song performed for China), and has no regard for his wellbeing.

Song insists Gallimard will never take him back, that he was only ever Gallimard's "plaything" and will not be able to command his loyalty in France. He reminds Comrade Chin that Gallimard is white, and tells Chin that she doesn't understand "the mind of a man." Chin responds furiously to this accusation. She reminds Song that she is considered smart and savvy by the Communist government, while he is thought a fool.

Song is clearly distressed by the notion of throwing himself on Gallimard's mercy after so many years apart. He sees the West as a dangerous place where he will be particularly vulnerable because of his race. Moreover, he believes the love of men to be fickle and fleeting — he cannot imagine Gallimard will still want him after such a long separation.

ACT 2, SCENE 11

Gallimard talks about the first years after his return to Paris. He describes a comfortable, predictable life — though he notes that Communist sentiments were spreading among French students. In the middle of his speech, Helga appears, wet and calling Gallimard's name. She tells him she was stopped in the street a Communist student protest, and that the police fired water cannons on the crowd. She asks him what is happening to France, and he says it is nothing that he cares to think about

Helga's sodden arrival in Gallimard's home shows that the political unrest sweeping through France has immediate consequences for Gallimard's life. Yet he remains detached from the world around him, showing both his longing for China and Song and his fear of confronting the disorder in his home country.

Helga remarks on the smell of the incense Gallimard is burning in the house. She begins talking about China, and the resemblance between the increasingly violent protests in France and those that heralded the Cultural Revolution in China. Gallimard insists Helga does not understand China, and rails against her notion that the West is crumbling under Asia's influence.

The threat that Communism poses to the established social order in Europe is profoundly difficult for Gallimard to face, both because the rise of European Communism would mean a cultural victory for the supposedly inferior Asian and Eurasian nations that are Communism's champions, and because his own life would be considered deviant according to Communist values. Note how the views expressed by Helga directly contradict Gallimard's earlier political advice that China was naturally weak and wanted only to be dominated.

Gallimard tells Helga, suddenly, that he wants a divorce. He confesses that he has had a mistress. Helga is unmoved by this information — she tells Gallimard she has known since the day she married him that he would eventually have an affair. She asks whether he wants to marry his mistress. Gallimard admits he can do no such thing, since Song is in China. Helga is stunned to realize her husband would rather be alone than with her. She tells Gallimard she has enjoyed the pretense of being his wife; though she always had a feeling that he was not who he pretended to be, she found pleasure in the lies they created together. She leaves, telling Gallimard she hopes everyone is mean to him for the rest of his life.

It has been apparent for most of the play that Gallimard has lived for years in a world of fantasy, and longs to return to that life. When Helga reveals that she is in a similar position — that she has overlooked obvious lies so she can preserve a life that makes her happy — Gallimard begins to seem less like an overgrown child, ill-equipped to cope with the pressures of adult life, and more like an average person, struggling in the face of many disappointments. People deceive themselves, in small and large ways, all the time.

Marc appears onstage, holding two drinks. Gallimard begins to tell him about the magnificent life he had in China, where Song's love made him feel special and exalted. He says life in the West is a disappointment. Marc is clearly irritated by this sentimental rambling. He interrupts Gallimard multiple times, telling him he doesn't want to talk about the "Oriental love goddess" and would prefer to drink in peace. When Marc leaves the stage, Gallimard complains to his audience about the pain of talking to people who don't understand his experience. He has loved the Perfect Woman, but has nobody in his life who understands the magnitude of this experience.

Before Gallimard gained attention and respect among his peers at the embassy, he was a nobody who could not inspire interest or sympathy in anyone. Though he considers his affair with Song to be a profound experience — something that has changed him as a person and altered the course of his life — here with Marc he is once again caught in the role of the overbearing, boring friend. Gallimard tries to make his audience see Song in all her perfection, but that project is inextricably tied to his desire to be seen as a man who has lived a meaningful and worthwhile life. It is important that Song be a perfect woman, because that marks Gallimard as special for having had the love of a perfect woman.

Song appears onstage, wearing the wedding kimono from **Madame Butterfly**. Gallimard notices her, but is convinced for a moment that she is an illusion. When she touches his hand to prove that she is real, he says he never doubted she would return to him. Gallimard shows her the bedroom, which is already decorated according to her tastes, with her incense burner and a work of art she likes. He tells her that, since there was only so much room in his mind, he had to choose between remembering her and remembering the rest of the world — obviously, he chose her. Song asks Gallimard where his wife has gone, and Gallimard tells her that his wife is right beside him, at last.

The fantasy of Butterfly and the reality of life, with all its troubles, are completely incompatible. Gallimard had to detach himself from ordinary concerns in order to preserve his memories of Song, because the imperfections of the world compromise the believability of the fantasy she created for him. He cannot be powerful, happy and worthy of a perfect woman's love, while at the same time being mediocre and dissatisfied with his unimpressive life.

Gallimard reaches to embrace Song, but she steps out of his reach. Song begins talking to the audience, but Gallimard interrupts her, asking her to help him show the audience their joyful, loving reunion. Song tells Gallimard she is not bound to follow his orders, even though she is a figment of his imagination. She tells him to leave her alone, because the time has come for her to "change." Gallimard begs her not to change. Song insists she must, and tells Gallimard he cannot ignore the truth — he knows too much, at this point, to keep believing the lie. Gallimard exits the stage. Addressing the audience again, Song tells them her transformation will require about five minutes and invites them to take this opportunity to stretch their legs or have a drink. She sits down in front of a mirror and a water basin, and starts to remove her makeup.

The tussle between Gallimard and Song — his need to linger over moments of happiness, and her eagerness to move the story forward to its end — represents the struggle within Gallimard's own mind. He is obviously eager to stifle and minimize his most distressing memories, but Song's unsentimental insistence that he must confront the truth is a sign that he is losing touch with the fantasy he has defended throughout the play. Gallimard does not want to see Song for what she truly is, but he cannot remain willfully ignorant despite his best efforts.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Song's makeup is gone. He takes off his wig and steps out of his kimono, under which he wears a tailored business suit. Addressing the audience, he talks about his first days in Paris, sleeping in the doorways of Chinatown until a tailor agreed to make him a kimono on credit so he could present himself to Gallimard. In the fifteen years following their reunion, Song says, Gallimard provided "a very comfy life" for him and Peepee — welcome luxury after four years in a labor camp in rural China.

Song — who, now that he has permanently abandoned his disguise and appears as a man before the audience, is called "he" in stage directions —gives only a brief description of his arrival in Paris, but in doing so alerts the audience to the existence of an entirely different perspective on the story to which they have been listening, Song differentiates himself from Gallimard more completely than ever in these lines.

As Song tells his story, the scene changes. The same actor who plays Toulon appears onstage, wearing a judge's robe and wig. He and Song sit next to each other. They are in a courtroom, and the year is 1986. Song is describing his activities as a spy for China, and Gallimard's role in those activities. He tells the judge that he didn't do much spying when he first arrived in Paris, because Gallimard no longer held a powerful diplomatic position. Eventually, Song tells the judge, he convinced Gallimard to take a position as a courier — a messenger charged with delivering sensitive government documents. He allowed Song access to these documents, and Song would deliver copies to the Chinese embassy in Paris. The judge asks whether Gallimard understood the seriousness of what was happening, and Song replies that it was enough for Gallimard to know that he needed access to the documents; he didn't ask questions about what Song was doing with them.

That Toulon, whom Gallimard once trusted and felt respected by, plays the role of the judge in this exchange illustrates how the entire upper echelon on French society to which Gallimard once belonged has turned on him during his trial. While the partygoers at the start of the play represent his humiliation, the reappearance of Toulon in this guise speaks to his total social and political rejection. Song's testimony reveals both the reason for Gallimard's imprisonment, and his willful participation in the espionage of which he is accused. While Gallimard passed information about the Vietnam War out of naiveté, not believing Song savvy enough to misuse it, he gave Song sensitive documents without question, out of loyalty that surpassed his patriotism.

The judge asks Song whether Gallimard knew he was a man. Song answers that Gallimard never saw him completely naked, and that the nature of their sex life meant he seldom touched Song's body with his hands. More important than deception, however, Song says, was the thorough understanding of the male mind he gained from his mother, a sex worker who serviced white men. He tells the judge that men will always believe things that please them, even if those things are ridiculous lies.

The invocation of Song's mother, a member of an older generation who negotiated sexual encounters with white men during a period when Western colonialism in Asia was thriving, serves as a reminder of the long, troubled relationship between Asia and the West. While Song's story is unusual, it's only a small part of a sprawling narrative of contact and conflict between the two regions.

To his first claim, Song adds that Western men become "confused" when they come into contact with Asian people and cultures. He argues that Westerners have a "rape mentality" with regard to Asia. In ordinary relations between men and women, a man might attempt to excuse sexual violence by claiming the woman he abused secretly wanted him to treat her that way — even if she protests. Song explains this reasoning succinctly as: "Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes." In the same way men justify violent treatment of women, Western nations justify violence against Asian nations through stereotypes that suggest Asian people want to be dominated. Western men see Western countries as strong, powerful, and therefore masculine. By contrast, they see Asian countries as fragile, weak, and therefore feminine. They apply their beliefs about women to Asian people to excuse the gross exploitation of Asian countries.

Song describes connected systems of racism and sexism: because Western men disdain and mistreat women, they feel entitled to abuse nations they consider feminine. Stereotypes that emasculate Asian men are the foundation for justifying imperial violence against Asia, but these stereotypes wouldn't justify such violence if white men did not think of women as subhuman creatures who exist for their pleasure, and who do not deserve agency over their own lives and bodies. The notion that women are unable to think for themselves translates, in imperial politics, into ignorant paternalism that masks (even to themselves) the imperial countries' real, self-serving reasons for abusing and exploiting other nations.

Prompted by the judge, who does not understand how these comments relate to the success of the deception, Song offers a brief summary of his ideas: Gallimard convinced himself Song was a woman because he wanted to believe Song was a woman, and the fact that Song was Asian — a person whom stereotypes depict as feminine regardless of biological sex —he could not conceive of Song as a true man, even if he suspected Song may have had a male body. The judge dismisses these ideas as "armchair political theory." Song tells him Westerners will always suffer in their political relationships with Asia as long as they refuse to acknowledge the impact of their racism and sexism.

In the final moments of his testimony, Song expresses a deep anger toward Westerners that has not been apparent at any other point. Though he negotiated complicated relationships to both his home country and his foreign lover, and seems to have taken on the work of a spy mainly to protect his own material interests, it becomes clear at this moment that Song also feels resentment toward the Westerners for having exploited his country, and relishes the idea of their receiving punishment in future failed dealings with Asia.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

Gallimard appears onstage, crawling toward the wig and kimono Song abandoned in the previous scene. Song is still on the witness stand. Gallimard tells the audience how, watching Song deliver his testimony, he found him shallow and unsubstantial — nothing like "Butterfly," the woman he loved for twenty years.

Seeing Song testify in court is painful to Gallimard not only because it represents betrayal, but because it brings to light how little he really knew about the person who shared his life for two decades. Gallimard is closer to Song than he is to anyone else, and to recognize that this closeness has been predicated on false beliefs is devastating and isolating.

Song calls out to Gallimard from the witness stand, addressing him as "white man." The court scene fades away as Song walks across the stage to Gallimard, asking whether Gallimard remembers the night they met. Gallimard avoids answering the question. Song goads him, saying that Gallimard has been flattering him for the past twenty years, and shouldn't feel shy about flattering him a little more. Song admits he has always been arrogant — it was arrogant, for example, to believe that he could change Gallimard's destiny through the force of seduction.

When Song calls Gallimard by the generic and disdainful name "white man" (instead of using Gallimard's given name, as a friend or lover would), he reveals his true feelings for the first time. Song has no love or respect for Gallimard; though other moments in the play may have suggested some warmth between them, that has clearly vanished, at least as far as Gallimard can imagine. Now, Song only wants to torment and humiliate Gallimard.

Song taunts Gallimard, flirting with him aggressively but leaving him unsure of whether that flirtation is sincere. He tells Gallimard to admit that he still wants him, even when he is dressed like a man, and repeats lines from their earliest conversations — in which, as a woman, he claimed to long for the Western cafes and the pre-Revolution era — using the feminine voice he adopted to fool Gallimard. All this leaves Gallimard extremely distressed, uncertain of how to feel or what to do.

When Song combines a female voice and affect with male clothing, he forces Gallimard to see both the artificiality of their relationship and the latent homosexual desire that brought them together. While Song and Gallimard may not have discussed Song's gender, the incredulous comments of the judge and partygoers make it clear that Gallimard must have had some evidence that Song was not who he seemed to be. That Gallimard chose to maintain a relationship with Song regardless is evidence of unacknowledged homosexual inclinations, but also a testament to the overwhelming sense of power and safety that his relationship with Song gave him, such that he never wanted to question it.

Song begins to remove his clothing. Gallimard, in shock and horror, asks what he is doing. Song says he is helping Gallimard to see through his act. Gallimard urges Song to stop, telling him he doesn't want to see him naked. Song recalls the night Gallimard ordered him to strip. Though nothing happened on that night, Song says, it was inevitable that this moment would come. Gallimard begs and orders him to stop, to which Song answers: "Your mouth says no, but your eyes say yes."

Song replies to Gallimard's protests using the same words he used to describe the "rape mentality" Westerners have toward Asians. By exerting an abusive and sexually charged power over Gallimard, Song turns the tables and forces the Western man into the helpless, submissive position.

Gallimard insists he knows what Song is — a man — but Song says Gallimard doesn't really believe that. He takes off his briefs, and stands completely naked in front of Gallimard. Gallimard seems to be sobbing, but it slowly becomes apparent, to both the audience and Song, that he is actually laughing. He tells Song that he finds it ridiculous and hilarious to know he has wasted so much time on "just a man." Song insists he is not "just a man" —he is Gallimard's Butterfly. He covers Gallimard's eyes, and places Gallimard's hand on his cheek, reminding Gallimard that his is the same skin he has touched and adored for years. Gallimard seems entranced, and for a moment he appears to recognize Song as Butterfly. When Song uncovers his eyes, however, the intimacy between them evaporates.

For decades, Gallimard has thought of Song not only as a woman, but as "the Perfect Woman" — someone beyond compare, more precious than anyone or anything else. It is not the disruption of gender, but sudden realization that Song is no different from any other person that causes Gallimard to break down in laughter. He has begged Song to come back to him and play the role of Butterfly again, but in this moment he realizes that the fantasy of Butterfly does not depend on Song. Song is a disappointingly ordinary man, a vessel for an ideal that transcends him rather than a realization of that ideal.

Gallimard says Song was a fool to show him the truth, because all he loved was the lie Butterfly represented. Song seems surprised and hurt. He realizes, thinking aloud, that Gallimard never really loved him the way he believed he did. Gallimard tells Song: "I am a man who loved a woman created by a man. Everything else — simply falls short."

Just like Gallimard, Song (at least in Gallimard's imagination) has maintained illusions about the nature of their relationship. Though Gallimard only loved Song because he represented an unattainable ideal —a man's vision for a perfect woman — Song believed they shared a real, substantial relationship. In a way, he felt that Butterfly was a convenient mask hiding their real homosexual love, but here discovers that for Gallimard it was the other way around: he, Song, was merely an instrument for the creation of Butterfly

Gallimard says he has finally learned to tell the difference between fantasy and reality, and that he has chosen to commit himself to fantasy. Song insists that he is Gallimard's fantasy, but Gallimard scoffs at this, telling Song he is all too real. He orders Song to leave so that he can enjoy "a date with my Butterfly." Song angrily accuses Gallimard of being the same as every other man: infatuated with "we" women because of their clothing and makeup and feminine charm. He accuses Gallimard of lacking imagination, to which Gallimard replies scornfully: "I am pure imagination." Finally, Gallimard removes Song from the stage by force. He keeps Butterfly's kimono.

The final sequences in this scene show Gallimard taking power back from Song, a last victory in the long power struggle that has defined their life together. Song seems to be outraged on behalf of women, as he counts himself among the community of women when he uses the word "we" instead of "they." When Gallimard claims he is "pure imagination," he recalls the comment he made to Song on the night of their reunion in Paris: that he had to choose between her and the rest of the world, and chose the fantastic memory of her over everything real and immediate in his life.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

Back in his prison cell, Gallimard speaks again to his audience. He has searched a long time for an alternate ending to his story, he says — one that will bring him back to Butterfly. Finally, he has realized that the way to reunite with her, and to prove the legitimacy of his love for her, is to immerse himself in the same fantasy world that gave birth to her. He picks up the kimono left behind by Song, and two dancers appear onstage. They help Gallimard apply makeup to his face while he continues his monologue.

Now that Gallimard has come to understand Butterfly as a product of his imagination — not tied to Song, or any other person — he has gained total independence from the rest of the world. Though he thought he needed to maintain his relationship with Song to keep the fantasy alive, he now sees that there is no need to relate to the real world at all in order to be with his ideal.

Gallimard tells the audience that he has committed his life to a vision of the Orient as a land full of beautiful women who are born and raised to be perfect companions to the men they love, who live and die for those men even if the men do not deserve their devotion. Gallimard says he has known the truth about Song for a long time, and that he must now make a sacrifice for his mistake: namely, the mistake of loving an unworthy man.

In Gallimard's first meeting with Song, he marvels at the beauty of Madame Butterfly's suicide, which he considers a "pure sacrifice." Now, as he speaks about the "sacrifice" required to atone for his love of Song, Gallimard draws a connection between himself and Puccini's heroine.

Gallimard says again that he loved Song — though he pretended this wasn't the case —and that this love was the thing that eventually destroyed him. Too blinded by devotion to exercise good judgment, he became like a woman himself. As the dancers help him put on Butterfly's wig and kimono, Gallimard speaks again about his "vision of the Orient." In this place he imagines, Gallimard says, there are still women who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the men they love, even when those men return their devotion with worthless love. Though a "Butterfly" can endure the pain of a lover's disloyalty, Gallimard says, it is not possible to live with the knowledge that the person she loved was just an ordinary man — nothing more or less.

Gallimard maintains a sexist and deeply misguided idea of what women are and how they behave. He considers himself to have become like a woman because the love of a man has erased his sense of self and made him both helpless and stupid. Although his change of costume — donning women's clothing and makeup —seems to suggest he has developed a deeper understanding of and sympathy for women, his speech makes it clear that this transformation is just another manifestation of his misogyny.

Gallimard is now in full Butterfly costume, holding a hara-kiri knife like the one Song once used to perform the death scene from Puccini's opera. He sits in the center of the stage. He tells the audience that he has found his perfect woman, there in his prison on the outskirts of Paris. He announces his name to the audience: "Rene Gallimard — also known as Madame Butterfly." He plunges the hara-kiri knife into his body and collapses, dead, into the arms of the dancers who have dressed him. The dancers lay Gallimard's body on the floor. A light focuses on Song, standing nearby in men's clothing, smoking a cigarette and staring at Gallimard's body. As he smokes, he says the words: "Butterfly? Butterfly?" The lights fade to black.

The play ends precisely as it began: with a man looking at his lover, repeating the name "Butterfly" twice and hearing no response. Gallimard and Song have switched positions; it is clear that, though he was happy to think of himself as Pinkerton — in control of the person he loved — Gallimard was actually Butterfly, the one being manipulated, the one overcome by a false ideal. But although those dynamics play themselves out elegantly in the drama Gallimard creates for himself, the text condemns the very existence of these tropes. The emptiness that answers Song when he speaks Butterfly's name — like the emptiness Gallimard hears at the beginning of the play — is a symbol for the worthlessness of the sexist, Orientalist ideals that Puccini and so many others celebrate. Gallimard is destroyed by his misguided ideas, and Song is left bereft by them as well. Nobody — white or Asian, man or woman — can flourish amidst the power struggles and delusions these fantasies engender.

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