

# **M. Butterfly Study Guide**

## **M. Butterfly by David Henry Hwang**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">M. Butterfly Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Act One, Scenes 1-4.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Act One, Scenes 5-7.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Act One, Scenes 8-13.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Act Two, Scenes 1-5.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Act Two, Scenes 6-7.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Act Two, Scenes 8-11.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Act Three, Scenes 1-3.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>



# Plot Summary

“M. Butterfly” is an award-winning play by David Henry Hwang. The drama, inspired by Puccini's opera “Madame Butterfly”, is loosely based on events surrounding a 1986 espionage trial in which a former French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer were imprisoned for passing information to China. The diplomat, Bernard Boursicot, believed his mistress of twenty years, Shi Pei Pu, to be a woman, when in actuality he was a male informant.

The play begins in the Paris prison cell of Rene Gallimard, 65, who has been arrested for espionage. Gallimard addresses the audience, telling them that he is not treated like an ordinary prisoner because he is a celebrity. He makes people laugh. In fact, he has become a societal joke. A flash to a contemporary party scene reveals that Gallimard has had a Chinese mistress for twenty years and it has only recently been revealed, much to Gallimard's astonishment, that Song Liling is actually a man.

Gallimard takes the audience through a series of flashbacks to explain his situation and his insistence that he has been loved by the Perfect Woman. In explaining his history, Gallimard asserts that the audience must first understand the Puccini opera, “Madame Butterfly”. In the opera's plot, a young Japanese girl, Cio-Cio-San, is sold in marriage to an American Navy Lieutenant, Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. Pinkerton marries Cio-Cio-San, or “Madame Butterfly”, without any intention of fulfilling his role as husband; Japan has lax divorce laws, and therefore Pinkerton is bound to Butterfly only as long as he remains in Japan.

Shortly after the marriage, Pinkerton deserts his wife, who has sacrificed everything for her American husband. Three years pass in which Butterfly pines away for Pinkerton while her servant and others try to convince her he is not returning. Finally, Pinkerton cowardly sends his friend and new wife to Butterfly to take her child by Pinkerton and to inform her that he is not coming back for her. Butterfly, in her devastation, commits suicide using her father's hara-kiri knife.

Gallimard meets Song Liling in 1960, when she performs the death scene of “Madame Butterfly” at a party at the German ambassador's home. Although he and Song do not immediately hit it off, Song intrigues him and he later goes to see her perform at the Peking Opera. Song and Gallimard begin an affair and even live together despite the fact that Gallimard is already married to Helga, an older woman he married for career connections and convenience.

The audience watches Song as she interacts with Comrade Chin and it is revealed that Song is both a male and is using Gallimard for information from the West to pass along to the Chinese government. Gallimard, however, is completely blinded by his infatuation with Song's submissive Oriental mystique, and in Act Two, Song joins him in France. Gallimard divorces his wife and supports Song and who he believes to be their son for the next fifteen years in Paris.



In Act Three, Gallimard is devastated by the loss of Song and the discovery of the truth, revealed publicly during Song's espionage trial. Having transformed from “Madame Butterfly”'s arrogant Pinkerton into the tragic heroine himself, Gallimard commits suicide in his cell as Song watches, smoking a cigarette.



# Act One, Scenes 1-4

## Summary

"M. Butterfly" is an award-winning play by David Henry Hwang. The drama, inspired by Puccini's opera "Madame Butterfly", is loosely based on events surrounding a 1986 espionage trial in which a former French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer carried on an affair for twenty years without the diplomat knowing that his mistress was actually a man.

Act One, Scene 1. The setting of "M. Butterfly" takes place in a Paris prison. The time period is simply listed as "the present," which based upon the publication of the play, can be discerned as the late 1980s. Flashbacks take place in the decade between 1960 and 1970 in Beijing, China. Flashbacks from 1966 to the present take place in Paris, France. The lights fade up in Scene 1 to reveal Rene Gallimard, age 65, wearing a bathrobe in his cell. The cell contains a wooden crate with a hot plate and kettle, and Gallimard sits staring at a portable tape recorder.

Upstage of Gallimard, in the world of Gallimard's mind, the image of Song can be seen, dressed in traditional Chinese garb and dancing to a piece from the Peking Opera. The music dissolves into the "Love Duet" from Puccini's "Madame Butterfly". Gallimard looks upon Song dancing, who does not acknowledge him, and he then turns to the audience and addresses them directly.

Gallimard describes the limits of his cell: "four-and-a-half meters by five" (Act One, Scene 1). Gallimard states when he wants to eat, he is marched to the dining room; when he wants to sleep, the light bulb turns itself off. Gallimard is not treated like an ordinary prisoner, though, because he is a celebrity. He makes people laugh. His reputation is not limited to Paris--people in Amsterdam and New York also talk about him and laugh. With a flourish, Gallimard directs the audience's attention to another area of the stage.

Act One, Scene 2. As Gallimard directs the audience's attention, the lights rise on a chic-looking parlor in the present. Two men and a woman are discussing Gallimard. The trio breaks into laughter as they contemplate how Gallimard was incapable of determining his lover was a man. Their conversation concludes with a toast, "Vive la difference!" and more laughter (Act One, Scene 2).

Act One, Scene 3. Scene 3 returns focus to Gallimard's cell. He smiles to the audience. "You see? They toast me. I've become patron saint of the socially inept..." (Act One, Scene 3). Gallimard continues, saying that those men who mock him should instead be knocking down his door to know his secrets. He has been loved by "the Perfect Woman" (Act One, Scene 3).



Gallimard turns on the tape recorder, and the opening phrases of “Madame Butterfly” can be heard over the speakers in the audience. Gallimard goes on, stating that in order for the audience to understand what he did and why, he must introduce them to his favorite opera: “Madame Butterfly”. Gallimard explains the heroine of the opera, Cio-Cio-San, also known as Butterfly, is a feminine ideal; the man for whom she sacrifices is more or less a wimp. When the play opens he's purchased the rights to marry Butterfly for a nominal fee.

At this point in the play, Marc, wearing a cap to designate he is playing Sharpless, enters. Gallimard plays the role of Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, a Lieutenant in the United States Navy. Pinkerton points out he's marrying but marriage laws in China mean if he disappears for one month the marriage is annulled. Sharpless asks if Pinkerton plans on taking his bride home with him, to which Pinkerton scoffs and tells him he's only a sailor in port. Gallimard, as Pinkerton, lip-syncs to the lines from the opera and then returns to his direct address to the audience. "I played Pinkerton, the womanizing cad, and my friend Marc from school . . . (Marc bows grandly for our benefit) played Sharpless, the sensitive soul of reason" (Act One, Scene 3).

Act One, Scene 4. Scene 4 takes place in flashback. The setting is Ecole Nationale in 1947. Gallimard and Marc are students, and Marc is astounded that Gallimard wants to stay home rather than go to his father's condo in Marseille. Marc is telling Gallimard the last time they went there were girls packed like sardines in trucks and they stripped and went swimming in the pool. Gallimard hesitates, telling his friend he can't, and he's afraid the girls will say no, so he never asks. Marc calls him a wimp and crosses to the other side of the stage, where he starts waving and smiling to women in the audience.

Gallimard speaks in direct address: "We now return to my version of “Madame Butterfly” and the events leading to my recent conviction for treason" (Act One, Scene 4). Gallimard notices Marc making lewd gestures at the audience and Marc states there are a "lotta great babes out there" (Act One, Scene 4). Gallimard pops the hat indicating the character of Sharpless on Marc's head and directs him offstage.

## Analysis

Act One, Scene 1 introduces the main setting of the drama. Gallimard's cell in the present is the audience's focal point, as Gallimard leads them through his memories and thoughts to explain how he got where he is. Gallimard establishes himself as the central character of the drama, but like Pinkerton from “Madame Butterfly”, he admits to being more or less a weakling. Gallimard was voted least likely to be invited to a party when in school, and he shows an obvious lack of self-esteem.

The style and the disordered and distorted presentation of the past events are also noted in this section. Different areas of the stage are used for different flashbacks in time and place. The upstage area is most often a performance area where Song and other Chinese dancers reenact scenes from “Madame Butterfly”. This staging technique further indicates the flashbacks are from the memories and point of view of Gallimard.



Gallimard and Marc, his friend from school, take on secondary roles to illustrate the plot of "Madame Butterfly", with Song and Comrade Chin taking on the parts of Cio-Cio-San and Suzuki.

Stylistically, there are constant breaks in the "fourth wall" which separates the audience and the performers. Gallimard, as well as the other characters, speak in direct address, acknowledging the existence of the viewers. Marc takes this further when he begins interacting with the audience in Act One, Scene 4. In this way, the drama illustrates a certain immediacy and connection with the viewer as Gallimard draws the audience deeper into his world and the world of Song Liling.

## Vocabulary

sparsely, portable, traditional, Peking Opera, percussive, cross-fade, dissolves, accompaniment, balletic, acknowledging, autograph, responsible, enchanted, celebrity, informal, competition, flourish, chic, parlor, determined, modest, misidentified, equipment, compelling, ignorance, reputation, redeems, ideal, segues, heroine, feminine, consul, rickshaw, inscription, shoji, nylons, lip-syncs, translation, premises, womanizing, philosophy, sotto voice, offstage



# Act One, Scenes 5-7

## Summary

Act One, Scene 5. In Scene 5, the action resumes in Gallimard's cell. He tells the audience, that next in the opera, Butterfly makes her entrance. She is fifteen. The lights rise where Song was previously dancing at the beginning of the play. She appears again, now dressed as "Madame Butterfly". Gallimard describes her actions, as she lays all of her possessions for Pinkerton to do with as he pleases. The lights go out on Song's performance and focus returns to Gallimard sitting on his crate.

"In real life, women who put their total worth at less than sixty-six cents are quite hard to find," he says (Act One, Scene 5). The closest it comes are girlie magazines, which Gallimard takes out and begins thumbing through. He says he first discovered them in his uncle's house when he was twelve. He imagined the power of having all of these women who would do exactly as he wanted.

The lights rise upstage and reveal a pinup girl in a negligee facing away from the audience. The girl tells Gallimard she leaves her blinds open every night, knowing he is watching her. Gallimard is unable to move. The Girl continues her seduction as Gallimard struggles with his own internal guilt. The lights go down on the girl and Gallimard puts away the magazines. He resumes talking to the audience, and relates that Act Two of "Madame Butterfly" begins with Butterfly staring at the ocean as Pinkerton has been gone three years without a word.

Comrade Chin enters now, playing Suzuki, Butterfly's servant. Suzuki tells Butterfly Pinkerton is a loser and she should be glad he's gone. She suggests Butterfly forget Pinkerton and go for Yamadori, a prince, who says he'll die if Butterfly doesn't marry him. Suzuki stalks offstage.

Marc enters next, dressed as Sharpless. Sharpless has been sent to tell Butterfly her husband isn't returning, but before he can get the words out, she returns holding a baby. Sharpless exits and Butterfly spots an American ship in the harbor named the Abramo Lincoln. Butterfly changes into a wedding kimono and she and Suzuki fill the room with flowers.

Gallimard steps outside the action to discuss his own history, saying he married a woman older than himself--Helga. Helga enters and says, "My father was an ambassador to Australia. I grew up among criminals and kangaroos" (Act One, Scene 5). She exits. Gallimard continues, saying he went to the altar renouncing love. No fantasy woman would go for him so he married Helga to climb the career ladder. He married late, at thirty-one, and was faithful for ten years until as a junior-level diplomat in Peking, he "first saw her... singing the death scene from "Madame Butterfly"" (Act One, Scene 5).





Act One, Scene 6. Scene 6 takes place in flashback. The setting is the German ambassador's house in Beijing in 1960. The upstage area is transformed to a stage and "a few "diplomats"--Renee, Marc, Toulon--in formal dress enter and take seats" (Act One, Scene 6). The music picks up at the death scene of "Madame Butterfly" where Butterfly reveals the hara-kiri knife. Gallimard addresses the audience, saying the ending is pitiful. Pinkerton sends his wife to take Butterfly's child.

Song, playing Butterfly, sings the lines of the opera and Gallimard simultaneously translates the words to English. Gallimard returns to directly address the audience, saying that hearing this girl sing, he truly believed her suffering and wanted to protect her. Song walks up to Gallimard and introduces herself as Song Liling. Gallimard discusses the beauty of Song's performance, and she modestly defers his admiration.

Song takes offense when Gallimard says she was convincing, saying, "Convincing? As a Japanese woman? The Japanese used hundreds of our people for medical experiments during the

war, you know. But I gather such an irony is lost on you" (Act One, Scene 6). Gallimard tells her it was the first time he has seen beauty in the story, and Song's attitude quickly changes. Song still seems to believe in a divide between them, however, stating the beauty Gallimard sees is only so to a Westerner. "It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man" (Act One, scene 6).

Song continues her challenge, stating if the story were about a young blond who fell in love with a short Japanese man who was cruel to her, she would be seen as an idiot for killing herself—but because she's Oriental, it is perceived as a beautiful sacrifice. Song tells him she will never do Butterfly again, but if he wants to see some real theater, he should come to the Peking Opera sometime. Song then exits.

Act One, Scene 7. Scene 7, also in flashback, takes place in M. Gallimard's apartment in Beijing, 1960. As Gallimard changes from his tuxedo to a casual suit, Helga enters. Gallimard states the Chinese are "an incredibly arrogant people" to which Helga replies they'd been warned as much in Paris (Act One, Scene 7). Gallimard has just returned from Ambassador Koenig's party, and relates to his wife that he met "the Chinese equivalent of a diva" (Act One, Scene 7).

Gallimard relates that the singer sang the death scene from "Madame Butterfly", causing Helga to exclaim she indeed should have gone. Helga begins humming and floating around the room. Gallimard tells Helga the singer hated the opera and the Chinese hate it because the white man gets the girl. "Sour grapes if you ask me" (Act One, Scene 7).

## Analysis

In this section, Gallimard continues his reenactment of "Madame Butterfly" before turning to a discussion of girlie magazines. Gallimard uses these magazines to illustrate the author's message of male fantasy. Gallimard asserts that all men seek that which



they first found in pictures: a beautiful fantasy woman willing to do anything to please him. This theme of male fantasy plays out both in the opera “Madame Butterfly”, and in the narrative of “M. Butterfly”.

Next, Gallimard takes the audience to the night he met Song Liling. Song appears to be far from the stereotypical image of the meek and submissive Oriental girl when she takes offense at Gallimard's compliments of her performance. "Convincing? As a Japanese woman? The Japanese used hundreds of our people for medical experiments during the war, you know. But I gather such an irony is lost on you" (Act One, Scene 6). Song also calls out Gallimard on the Western image of the Orient with the line: "It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man" (Act One, scene 6).

Gallimard's relationship with his wife, Helga, is touched upon in this section as well. Helga appears to attend parties rarely with Gallimard, and she shows dislike for the Chinese culture and people. Helga, like Gallimard, does not see the sexism or stereotypes of “Madame Butterfly”, and wishes she had seen the performance.

## Vocabulary

entrance, upstage, transfixed, possessions, yen, magazines, necessity, pinup girl, negligee, nightdress, displaying, suspicions, geisha, prostitutes, slathering, figuratively, overlook, deflowered, abandoning, diplomat, taxpayer, ciao, kimono, trudges, enthusiasm, kangaroos, renouncing, practicality, adjustments, puritanical, hara-kiri knife, dishonor, abbreviated, mademoiselle, performance, experiments, unworthy, deranged, arrogant, civilization, synonymous, revolution

# Act One, Scenes 8-13

## Summary

Act One, Scene 8. Scene 8, in flashback, takes place at a Chinese opera house and the streets of Beijing in 1960. Gallimard addresses the audience, saying his wife's question of what the Chinese opera was like stuck in his head, and though he asked around, no one could tell him. Gallimard's curiosity finally won him over. He describes the setting at the opera as hot and full of smoke.

The upstage area of the stage is lit as the stage at the opera. Song glides amongst dancers and drums suddenly come to a halt. Song turns and looks directly at Gallimard, steps off the stage and walks up to him. She begins to remove her costume, wearing simple baggy clothes underneath. The show is over. Gallimard and Song talk. She discusses the fact that she loves her fans for being fans, but not necessarily the smell they leave behind. "'Art for the masses' is a shitty excuse to keep artists poor" (Act One, Scene 8).

Song leads Gallimard out of the theater as she smokes a cigarette. It is a summer night in the Beijing streets. Their conversation again revolves around the Imperialism of the West and the Revolution in China. Song subtly flirts with Gallimard, saying, "We have always held a certain fascination for you Caucasian men, have we not?" (Act One, Scene 8).

Gallimard and Song arrive at Song's flat, and she tells him to come another time and they will further expand his mind. She exits, and Gallimard continues roaming the streets as he speaks in direct address to the audience. "Women do not flirt with me," he marvels, obviously intrigued by Song and his own ability to communicate with her.

Act One, Scene 9. The setting of Scene 9 is Gallimard's bedroom in Beijing, 1960. Helga enters, questioning Gallimard as to why he is home late. He explains he went to the Dutch ambassador's home again for a reception for a visiting scholar. Helga relates she had a good night too, having gone with the ladies to a martial arts demonstration. She exits.

Gallimard addresses the audience: "I lied to my wife. Why?" (Act One, Scene 9). He reasons he didn't do anything wrong. That night, he had a dream in which Marc from school appeared. Marc enters in a nightshirt and cap, exclaiming Gallimard has met a girl. Gallimard and Marc stumble down the Beijing streets, talking. Marc tells him he's come across time to congratulate Gallimard and hands him a bottle of expensive wine. When Gallimard protests he is a married man, Marc responds, "And an excellent one too. I cheated after . . . six months. Then again and again, until now-three hundred girls in twelve years" (Act One, Scene 9).



They spot a light in a window, and Marc points upward. It is Song's window. Song enters in the window in a sheer robe and sings "One Fine Day" as the robe loosens, revealing her shoulders (Act One, Scene 9). Marc tells Gallimard to stop struggling against his desires, and he exits. At that moment, Song drops her robe in the window. The sound of a phone ringing is heard and then a blackout. Lights come up on the bedroom area where a phone sits. Gallimard picks up the phone. It is the following morning.

Gallimard answers and Song asks if it is early. Gallimard responds it is 5:30. Song says she waited until she saw the sun, and then asks him if he is really interested in the opera. She tells him to come again next Thursday, when she will be playing *The Drunken Beauty*. Gallimard assures her he will be there, and Song says goodbye and hangs up.

Act One, Scene 10. Scene 10 is set in Song Liling's apartment in Beijing, 1960. Gallimard addresses the audience, saying he returned to the opera that week and the week after. He says Song keeps their meetings short--fifteen or twenty minutes at most. In this way, fifteen weeks have passed, and although Gallimard knows Song has an interest in him, she remains shy. "It is the Oriental in her at war with her Western education" (Act One, Scene 10).

Tonight, Gallimard has finally been invited to enter her apartment. He looks around the room and Song enters, dressed in a black gown from the 1920s. She tells Gallimard the photograph he is looking at is her father. She is happy he died before the Revolution, because he'd have been tortured. Song calls her servant to bring tea for Gallimard, and Shu-Fang enters with a tea tray and starts to pour before Song insists she will pour for the gentleman.

Song says there is an element of danger in her entertaining Gallimard in her parlor. Song says China is a country that lives a thousand years in the past. She wavers between flirting with Gallimard and shy reservation, finally asking him to leave. "Monsieur Gallimard, I'm a Chinese girl. I've never ... never invited a man up to my flat before. The forwardness of my actions makes my skin burn" (Act One, Scene 10). Song assures Gallimard she will be herself again when he next sees her, and he leaves, marveling that she appears to feel inferior to Western women and, in fact, to him.

Act One, Scene 11. Scene 11 takes place in the French embassy in Beijing, 1960. Gallimard moves towards a desk, speaking to the audience. He relates that he decided to conduct an experiment; in "*Madame Butterfly*", the heroine fears the Western man who catches a butterfly will pierce its heart and leave it to perish. Gallimard wonders if he too has caught a butterfly. Marc enters and explains he is living vicariously through Gallimard. Although he was the most popular kid in school, somehow he knew he'd end up in the suburbs and Gallimard would be finding exotic women in the Orient.

Gallimard and Marc discuss Isabelle, a girl Marc set up to be Gallimard's "first." Gallimard thanks him, Marc exits, and Gallimard once again addresses the audience. After six weeks, he says, the letters began to arrive. Gallimard has not attended the



opera or seen Song in as much time, and in conducting his "experiment," he is testing Song's ability to write on a needle, like the helpless butterfly.

Song appears and speaks aloud the words of her letters as Gallimard reads. After over seven weeks, Song's letters have become desperate. "I am out of words. I can hide behind dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my shame" (Act One, Scene 11). Reading it, Gallimard says he suddenly felt ashamed. His experiment had been a success but the victory seemed hollow. He had to attend a reception that evening, and left feeling the axe was about to fall.

Act One, Scene 12. The setting of Scene 12 is Ambassador Toulon's residence in Beijing, 1960. Toulon is the French ambassador. He taps Gallimard on the shoulder and asks to have a word with him. Toulon tells Gallimard the French needs in China are changing. It is embarrassing to them that they lost Indochina, and they will need a lot more information gathering in the future. He is letting Gallimard go. Vice-Consul LeBon is being transferred to the position, who is Gallimard's immediate supervisor. Most of his department will also be transferred, but not Gallimard.

As Gallimard declaims his fate, Toulon suddenly says "Scare you? I think I did. Cheer up, Gallimard. I want you to replace LeBon as vice-consul" (Act One, Scene 12). Toulon goes on, telling Gallimard he will be coordinating the revamped intelligence division. They shake hands and Toulon exits. Gallimard addresses the audience, incredulous of his newfound fate. "At age thirty-nine, I was suddenly initiated into the way of the world" (Act One, Scene 12).

Act One, Scene 13. Scene 13 is set in Song Liling's apartment, 1960. Song enters in a sheer dressing gown and asks "Are you crazy?" (Act One, Scene 13). She lambasts Gallimard for coming at a late hour after eight weeks. Gallimard asks her, "Are you my Butterfly?" (Act One, Scene 13). Song refuses to answer, but finally relents, saying "Yes, I am. I am your Butterfly" (Act One, Scene 13).

Gallimard tells Song that the reason he's been promoted is because of her, and that she's changed him forever. Gallimard tells Song he loves her and kisses her roughly. Song protests, telling him no, and then begins to relent as Gallimard begins to undress her. She pleads with him to keep her clothes on. She tells him to turn off the lights and come to the bed. Blackout.

## Analysis

In the final scenes of Act One, Gallimard's intrigue of the mysterious Song Liling grows. The entrance of Marc indicates another element of the play's nonlinear format. Marc appears as a figment of Gallimard's mind, encouraging him to explore further the decadence that he fears.

Gallimard's experiment in Act One, Scene 11, shows him to be both as arrogant and cruel as Pinkerton from "Madame Butterfly". Gallimard is essentially playing "hard to get" in order to win over Song and to break down her esteem and adherence to societal



standards. Gallimard is successful, but only from his own perspective, because he is unaware that Song is, in fact, playing him to a greater extent than he is manipulating her.

Ambassador Toulon is introduced in Act One, Scene 12, when he promotes Gallimard to vice-consul. This is an important element of the plot, as it is through Gallimard's work in this position that Song is able to pass along information to the Chinese regarding the Vietnam War. Toulon's discussion of the rumors that Gallimard has acquired an Asian mistress further illustrates the stereotypes of men of the West regarding Asian women.

## Vocabulary

gongs, clanging, innocent, curiosity, gracefully, backstage, imperialist, undervalued, objectively, cappuccinos, expatriate, fascination, mutual, treatise, sympathies, demonstration, monumental, expensive, embarrass, disgusting, foreigner, respectful, intensified, elegantly, lightheaded, composes, forwardness, experiment, peruses, underscored, bureaucrat, vice-consul, revamped, intelligence, blackout



# Act Two, Scenes 1-5

## Summary

Act Two, Scene 1. The first scene of Act Two opens to Gallimard in his cell, reading from a leaflet. He informs the audience this is from a critic's commentary on "Madame Butterfly". The review describes Pinkerton as an obnoxious bounder, and Butterfly as the most "irresistibly appealing of Puccini's 'Little Women.'" (Act Two, Scene 1).

Gallimard concludes while most men may want to kick Pinkerton, few would pass up the opportunity to be him.

Act Two, Scene 2. Scene 2 returns to flashback, this time set in Gallimard and Butterfly's flat in Beijing, 1960. In the parlor, Gallimard sits on the sofa and Song curls up by his feet. Gallimard informs the audience he and Song have secured a flat on the outskirts of Peking. Song has continued her education, and tells Gallimard Chinese men keep women down, and that is part of the exciting things of loving a Western man: he is not intimidated by a woman's education.

Song asks Gallimard what is happening in Vietnam now, and he protests she wants him to bring home his work now. She tells him she simply wants to know what he knows and wants to enjoy being impressed by her man.

Act Two, Scene 3. Scene 3 is set in the French embassy in Beijing in 1961. Gallimard and Toulon are discussing the situation in Vietnam. Toulon informs Gallimard of the top secret information that the Americans plan to begin bombing. The U.S. doesn't have an embassy in China, so they are asking the French to be their eyes and ears.

Toulon and Gallimard begin a discussion of the Americans, with Toulon scoffing at their arrogance for trying to grab what was formerly a French territory for themselves, and Gallimard asking, "With all due respect, sir, why should the Americans have won our war for us back in '54 if we didn't have the will to win it ourselves?" (Act Two, Scene 3).

Toulon changes the subject to mention he's heard rumors that Gallimard is keeping a native mistress in China. As an insider, Toulon asks what Gallimard believes the Chinese think about the situation and what they should tell the Americans about Vietnam. Gallimard replies, "The Orientals are people too. They want the good things we can give them. If the Americans demonstrate the will to win, the Vietnamese will welcome them into a mutually beneficial union" Act Two, Scene 3).

Comrade Chin suddenly enters after Toulon's exit. He turns to Song and asks "Why does she have to come in?" and Song replies "How can they understand the story without her?" (Act Two, Scene 3). Gallimard addresses the audience, saying now they must see why his story is so amusing to people, and they must understand, "We are all prisoners of our time and place" (Act Two, Scene 3).



Act Two, Scene 4. Scene 4 takes place in Gallimard and Butterfly's flat, Beijing, 1961. Song speaks directly to the audience, stating, "1961. The flat Monsieur Gallimard rented for us. An evening after he has gone" (Act Two, Scene 4). Comrade Chin speaks to Song, asking if she can find out when the Americans plan to start bombing Vietnam and where. Song says she'll do her best, but doesn't want to rouse suspicions. She then relates the Americans will increase troops in Vietnam to 170,000 soldiers with 120,000 militia and 11,000 American advisors. Chin scrambles to take notes, asking how Song remembers so much. She replies she's an actor.

Chin asks if that is why Song is always wearing dresses, and that actors are always weirdoes. Chin asks if Song is violating Communist Party principles in gathering information, and then exits. On his way out, he reminds Song, "Don't forget: there is no homosexuality in China!" (Act Two, scene 4).

Act Two, Scene 5. The setting of Scene 5 is described in the stage directions as "Beijing. 1961-63" (Act Two, Scene 5). Gallimard lies down with his head in Song's lap on a couch. He speaks to the audience, relating that over the years of 1961, 1962, and 1963, he and Butterfly settled into a routine. Song would pleasure him in many ways, but more importantly to Gallimard, she would listen to him.

Song remains upstage as Helga enters and plays the following scene downstage. Helga tells Gallimard she's seen Dr. Bolleart this morning to discuss why she isn't getting pregnant. The doctor told Helga there was nothing wrong with her, and that he'd like Gallimard to take some tests. Gallimard resists and Helga exits.

Gallimard returns upstage to Song, telling her his situation. Song replies that in Imperial China, when a man found that his wife couldn't give him a child, he turned to another. Gallimard asks Song if she wants to have his child and she tells him that she does. She begs him to promise her not to go to the doctor. Gallimard addresses the audience, saying that of course he didn't go. "What man would?" (Act Two, Scene 5).

## Analysis

In Act Two, Scene 1, Gallimard's discussion of Lieutenant Pinkerton from "Madame Butterfly" relates closely to his own character. While Gallimard's actions are abominable, the audience questions whether Gallimard is right. Would most men give anything to be Pinkerton?

In Act Two, Scene 2, the audience sees the beginning of Song's manipulation of Gallimard in securing information from the French Embassy. Likewise in the following scene, Gallimard's position as one living amongst the Chinese is revealed in his conversation with Toulon. Gallimard, of course, will turn out to be incorrect in his predictions.

The entrance of Comrade Chin in Act Two, Scene 4 is important to the plot of the narrative, as indicated by Song when Gallimard protests. Comrade Chin represents the





opposite of Song: she is a woman, but she cannot understand the actions or the perversions of Song's mission.

Gallimard places great importance on the fact that Song listens to him. This is juxtaposed against his wife, who seems to have little regard for Gallimard or his job. Ironically, while Gallimard perceives Song as a submissive "wife" who cares about his work, in fact Song is collecting information for the government.

## Vocabulary

contemporary, commentary, obnoxious, bounder, appealing, humiliations, commenced, ignorant, progressive, particulars, downstage, troublesome, squawk, territory, associated, Communism, immune, beneficial, firepower, homosexuality, passionately, crapshoot, equality, incompetent, unnatural, quack



# Act Two, Scenes 6-7

## Summary

Act Two, Scene 6. The setting of Scene 6 is Beijing in 1963. Party noises are heard and Renee enters wearing a revealing gown. Gallimard addresses the audience, relating he is at a party at the Austrian embassy. Gallimard turns to Renee and discusses his work, then asks what she does. Renee replies she's a student. Her father exports useless stuff to the Third World, such as hoola hoops and sugar. Renee is there for two years to study Chinese.

Renee pointedly asks if Gallimard is married. When he replies that he is, she asks if he wants to fool around. She tells him she will wait for him outside. Gallimard addresses the audience. "And so, I embarked on my first extramarital affair" (Act Two, Scene 6). The scene returns to Renee as she enters toweling her hair. Renee tells Gallimard that he has a nice penis, and the two enter a discussion about the different terms of male genitalia.

Renee relates a monologue discussing how male genitalia is why wars are fought in "what we call a civilized society. The whole world run by a bunch of men with pricks the size of pins" (Act Two, Scene 6). A chime rings in the air as Renee exits, and Song appears in the upstage area of the stage. She is upset and arranging flowers in a vase. Gallimard relates to the audience that he kept the affair going for several months, he believes, because of Butterfly. Song never confronted him, and it was in her silent tears he imagined that he exalted in Renee's arms.

Toulon enters, and the scene shifts. Toulon offers Gallimard Champagne, and relates his secret news that the U.S. will allow the Vietnamese generals to stage a coup and assassinate President Diem. Gallimard believes this to be a wise move and the men toast. Toulon says, "To the test. Let's hope you pass" (Act Two, Scene 6). Gallimard asks if Toulon doesn't share the same opinions on the matter and he says personally, he does, but that only Gallimard's opinions are on the report.

Toulon fades as Gallimard turns downstage and addresses the audience, relating he shook as he left Toulard's house. He was enraged Toulard was too cowardly to put his name down for the report as well. Though he hadn't seen her for several weeks, he started toward Song's apartment.

Song is somewhat intoxicated, having imbibed to fall asleep, and questions Gallimard why he's been gone for three weeks. She then tells him something is wrong between them, and she doesn't know how to fix it. Gallimard tells her he has a suggestion, but that she won't like it. He tells her, "I want to see you... naked" (Act Two, Scene 6). Song immediately becomes defensive of her modesty, but Gallimard presses her.



Finally, Song tells him to come and strip her. "Whatever happens, know that you have willed it. Our love, in your hands. I'm helpless before my man" (Act Two, Scene 6). Gallimard tells the audience he wonders if he did not undress her sooner because he knew deep down what he would find. At the time, however, he claims that he was walking toward his Butterfly. Gallimard begs Song to forgive him and he embraces her as she finally reveals that she is pregnant. Gallimard exclaims that he wants to marry her.

Act Two, Scene 7. Scene 7 takes place in Gallimard and Butterfly's flat in Beijing, 1963. Song paces as Comrade Chin reads from her notepad. Song tells Chin that she needs a baby and to tell Comrade Kang the entire mission could have ended, as Gallimard asked her to strip that night. Chin protests, "The trading of babies has to be a counterrevolutionary act!" (Act Two, Scene 7).

Song asks Chin why she believes in the Peking Opera the women's roles are played by men. Song answers her question by saying "Because only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act" (Act Two, Scene 7). Chin exits, and Song returns to Gallimard. Gallimard calls out "Good riddance!" and tells Song he would forget everything if only she'd come back and be his Butterfly again (Act Two, Scene 7).

Song replies Gallimard is rotting in a cell and she is on a plane flying back to China because his President pardoned her of treason. Gallimard asks if there isn't some part of Song that wishes she were there with him, and Song replies she's an artist. It doesn't matter how awful her answer, Gallimard still loves her, and that's why she loves him. She indicates Gallimard resume his story of when she announced she was pregnant, and Gallimard and Song resume their positions from the end of Scene 6.

## Analysis

The introduction of Renee and Gallimard's subsequent affair with the young student further demonstrates his transformation into a "cad," much like Lieutenant Pinkerton from the opera. Gallimard shares no interests with Renee but maintains their relationship because she represents the same fantasy from the girlie magazines. She is a beautiful woman who is sexually open and willing to satisfy him. Ironically, Gallimard remarks in her candor, Renee often seemed too "masculine" for his tastes.

Gallimard's return to Song and his demand she reveal herself to him naked represents an apex of tension in the narrative. Song, terrified of being "found out" as a man, spontaneously reveals she is pregnant. This, as the audience is aware, is a lie. Gallimard, however, believes Song and expresses his will to marry her. The scene which immediately follows serves as an explanation for how Song acquires the "son" that she later presents to Gallimard.

One important line should be noted as well in Act Two, Scene 7. As Song discusses his role within the government and with Gallimard, he asks Comrade Chin, "Miss Chin? Why, in the Peking Opera, are women's roles played by men?" Chin replies she doesn't



know, and Song says, "Because only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act" (Act Two, Scene 7). This statement indicates while Song is playing a role for Gallimard, he too is critical of woman and her role in society.

## Vocabulary

revealing, appropriate, respected, seminarian, fanatic, campaigns, Christians, Third World, confectioner's sugar, primitive, farsighted, embassies, uninhibited, masculine, compliment, weeniehead, special, distressed, swoons, arranging, unfaithful, assassinate, coup, deliberately, advocating, unfreezing, repulsed, revolted, somersaults, counterrevolutionary



# Act Two, Scenes 8-11

## Summary

Act Two, Scene 8. Scene 8, as indicated, returns to the announcement of Song's pregnancy. Gallimard tells her he'll divorce his wife and they'll live together in China and later in France. When Gallimard asks Song again to marry him, she tells him no, claiming she is not worthy.

Gallimard addresses the audience, relating he and Song argued all night. In the end, he left knowing he would never be her husband. Song left for the countryside for several months until finally Gallimard received a phone call. Song enters, carrying a baby, and tells Gallimard on the phone the child looks like him. Song gives Gallimard her promise she will raise the child, but he will never leave China. Despite Gallimard's protestations, Song has decided to name the child Peepee. Gallimard concludes her stubbornness in the matter only made him want her more.

Act Two, Scene 9. Scene 9 is set in Beijing in the year 1966. Gallimard addresses the audience, saying, "And then, China began to change. Mao became very old, and his cult became very strong" (Act Two, Scene 9). During this time, contact between the Chinese and foreigners became impossible. Gallimard and Song's flat was confiscated and his money was now counted against them. The American war in Vietnam went badly as well. \$400,000 was being spent for every Viet Cong killed.

Toulon enters and congratulates Gallimard, telling him that he is going home. Toulon tells him it isn't about his predictions for Vietnam, because they don't care about the Americans, but because his predictions in general about the Chinese have been wrong. Meanwhile, "Song, wearing a Mao suit, is dragged in from the wings as part of the upstage dance. They "beat" her, then lampoon the acrobatics of the Chinese opera, as she is made to kneel onstage" (Act Two, Scene 9).

Gallimard considers perhaps it was better to end his affair with Song before it killed her. He exits and Comrade Chin crosses the stage carrying a banner that reads "The Actor Renounces His Decadent Profession!" Act Two, Scene 9). Chin reaches Song and chastises the life of the actor-oppressor, living above the common people and demanding a full confession. Song exclaims, "I engaged in the lowest perversions with China's enemies!" and "I let him put it up my ass!" (Act Two, Scene 9). When Chin asks Song what she wants to do now, Song asserts "I want to serve the people!!" as the dancers unveil a banner reading "The Actor Is Rehabilitated!" (Act Two, Scene 9).

Act Two, Scene 10. Scene 10 is set in a commune in the Hunan Province in 1970. Chin asks Song how long how long he plans on working in the fields and then inspects his hands, asking how long it takes actors to become good at anything. Chin tells Song he will serve the Revolution, but no longer with the Revolution's money. Rather than stinking up China with the perversion of homosexuality, Song will go to France, find the



consul's home, and make him pay for Song's expenses. Song refuses, saying it's been four years, but Chin insists the only other option is returning to the rehabilitation center. Chin and Song exit in different directions.

Act Two, Scene 11. Scene 11 is set in Paris, from 1968-1970. Gallimard enters, addressing the audience. Helga enters, soaking wet and claiming when she was returning from the grocer she was caught up in a group of students waving red flags and was shot at by police firing water cannons. Gallimard shocks Helga by telling her he wants a divorce. He tells her he's had a mistress for eight years, to which Helga is dismissive, claiming she knew he would, and why does it matter. Gallimard tells her the mistress is in China.

Marc enters with two drinks and offers one to Gallimard. Song appears, dressed as "Madame Butterfly" in a wedding kimono. Gallimard believes this is his imagination, but Song insists he touch her. Song asks where Gallimard's wife is, and he replies, "She's by my side. She's by my side at last" (Act Two, Scene 11). Gallimard exits as Song addresses the audience. Song goes to the mirror and begins removing her makeup as the lights go out.

## Analysis

The changes in China following the aging of Chairman Mao caused a greater gap in the separation between the East and West. Gallimard and Song's apartment was confiscated and the American war with Vietnam was also going badly. This downturn in the war is partly responsible for Gallimard's release from his position as vice-consul. Toulon has protected himself by not putting his name on the report, an action that merely reinforces the depiction of Western men as cowards and weaklings in the narrative.

In Act Two, Scene 9, Comrade Chin confronts Song about his life as an oppressor for the common man. Song renounces his life as an actor and goes to the fields to work at a commune in the Hunan Province. However, the government must have realized the usefulness of Song and the information he gained through Gallimard. Therefore, Chin meets with Song at the commune in Chapter 10 and tells him he will continue his mission in France, but without the comforts of the Revolution's funding.

Song arrives in Paris at the same time Gallimard is telling his wife he wants a divorce. Gallimard happily reunites with Song, telling her his wife is finally by his side. However, the playwright employs foreshadowing at the end of Act Two, as Song begins to remove his makeup and again transform into a man.

## Vocabulary

divorce, proposing, realists, skyrocketing, fortune cookie, rickshaw, prophetic, capitulation, caprice, anarchy, confiscated, agitprop, lampoon, renounces, decadent,

oppressor, exalted, corrupted, perversions, commune, pollution, sickening, accounting, indignity, water cannons, incense, pretense, mundane, stagelights, houselights



# Act Three, Scenes 1-3

## Summary

Act Three, Scene 1. Act Three, Scene 1 is set in a courthouse in Paris in 1986. Song has completed his transformation onstage, removing his wig and kimono. Underneath, he wears a tailored suit. Song addresses the audience, saying that he did his job better than he expected. It was 1970 when Song arrived in Paris. For the next fifteen years he lived comfortably, supported by Gallimard along with their son. And then, Song says, there was the spying.

Song is seated and Toulon enters dressed as a judge with wig and robes. Song is testifying in court. Song states he didn't have much to report at first, but then urged Gallimard to take a job as a courier handling sensitive documents. He would photograph them for Song, who would pass them to the Chinese embassy. Gallimard did not ask about the activity, but only knew Song needed the information.

The judge then states, "There is one thing that the court--indeed, all of France--would like to know" "Did Monsieur Gallimard know you were a man?" (Act Three, Scene 1). Song replies that Gallimard never saw him completely naked. Song goes on to describe the lovemaking between himself and Gallimard, saying he did all of the work, and that his mother had been a prostitute, leading him to a greater knowledge of Western men.

Song goes on to describe the "international rape mentality" which he claims the West has over the East, saying, "The West thinks of itself as masculine-big guns, big industry, big money--so the East is feminine-weak, delicate, poor . . . but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom--the feminine mystique." "... The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated because a woman can't think for herself" (Act Three, Scene 1).

Act Three, Scene 2. Scene 2 continues in the courtroom. "Music from the 'Death Scene' from Butterfly blares over the house speakers. It is the loudest thing we've heard in this play" (Act Two, Scene 2). Gallimard enters calling out for Butterfly and crawling toward the kimono and wig left behind by Song. Gallimard addresses the audience, saying in this moment of his greatest shame--with Song up there announcing to the world the truth--the thing that strikes him most is how shallow Song is.

Song sits up suddenly in the witness box, speaking directly to Gallimard as he did previously in the Peking Opera: "Yes. You. White man" (Act Three, Scene 2). Song asks Gallimard what took him so long to come back to the theater in China, and they are transported back in time. Song begins to perform, as he did the night they met. Song begins to taunt Gallimard, fluttering between enticement and insult. Gallimard asks why Song treats him so cruelly, and Song begins to undress. When Gallimard asks what Song is doing, he replies that he is helping Gallimard see through his act. Gallimard protests, but Song insists this is what he asked for, even years earlier.





Song is down to his briefs with Gallimard begging him to stop. Song drops his briefs. He is naked. Gallimard laughs hysterically, saying, "I just think it's ridiculously funny I've wasted so much time on just a man!" to which Song replies that he is not "just a man" (Act Three, Scene 2). Song begins to dance around with Butterfly's robes and extends his arm to Gallimard, telling him to touch it, "It's the same skin you've worshiped for years" (Act Three, Scene 2). Song covers Gallimard's eyes and draws Gallimard's hand to his face.

"I'm your Butterfly. Under the robes, beneath everything, it was always me. Now, open your eyes and admit it--you adore me," Song tells him (Act Three, Scene 2). Gallimard tells Song essentially what he loved was a lie. He then tells Song to leave his life. Gallimard says that he has a date with his Butterfly, and he doesn't want Song's body polluting the room. He's finally come to understand the difference between fantasy and reality, and he chooses fantasy. Gallimard forces Song off the stage. He holds the kimono, and realizes he himself has become the Butterfly.

Act Three, Scene 3. Scene 3 returns to Gallimard's prison cell in the present. Gallimard addresses the audience, saying he has played out the events of his life and affair with Butterfly. He is always searching for a new end to his story, one where he could leave and return to his Butterfly's arms. Now he returns to the fantasy where they first met.

In public, Gallimard has denied Song Liling is a man, which has brought him both headlines and embarrassment. Gallimard himself has come to face the truth: the man he loved was a cad and he gave him all his love. The Chinese dancers who have appeared help Gallimard put on the Butterfly wig and kimono as he continues. They hand him a knife. "In a prison on the outskirts of Paris. My name is Rene Gallimard—also known as "Madame Butterfly"" (Act Three, Scene 3). Gallimard turns from the audience and plunges the knife into his chest as the "Love Duet" from "Madame Butterfly" blares over the speakers. Song stands as a man, smoking a cigarette and staring at the dead Gallimard. His final words are, "Butterfly? Butterfly?" (Act Three, Scene 3).

## Analysis

Act Three begins in a Paris courthouse as Song is standing trial, dressed as a man in an expensive suit. During the course of the trial, the judge asks Song about the nature of his relationship with Gallimard and Song holds nothing back, relating his sexual exploits and his methods of hiding his gender from his unknowing lover. Song is concise and emotionless during the trial, which pains Gallimard even greater.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the theme of stereotypes is described in the court scene by Song Liling. "The West thinks of itself as masculine--big guns, big industry, big money--so the East is feminine--weak, delicate, poor . . . but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom--the feminine mystique. "... The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated because "a woman can't think for herself" (Act



Three, Scene 1). In this statement, Song is not only speaking about the stereotypes of men and women, but of the entire perspectives of the East and the West.

Another central theme is illuminated clearly in Act Three, Scene 2, when Gallimard states, "Tonight, I've finally learned to tell fantasy from reality. And, knowing the difference, I choose fantasy" (Act Three, Scene 2). In choosing fantasy over reality, Gallimard lets go of Song, who is "as real as hamburger" to him without the facade of "Madame Butterfly" (Act Three, Scene 2).

It is this choice of fantasy over reality propelling the action of the play to its final climactic moment: the death scene of Rene Gallimard. Gallimard has finally come to understand he is the tragic Cio-Cio-San of "Madame Butterfly". He has given his heart and love to a man who did not love him back. In his shame and his grief, Gallimard kills himself as Song merely watches.

## Vocabulary

groping, tailor, mascara, demonstrations, exchange, testifying, statistics, sensitive, photograph, classified, obnoxious, proceedings, international, delicate, mystique, submissive, armchair, theory, obsequious, medallion, arrogance, cacophony, accomplice, unconditionally, bounder, reverently



# Characters

## Rene Gallimard

Rene Gallimard is 65 years old and confined to a French prison when the play opens. The year is approximately 1988. Much of the action takes place in flashback, as seen through Gallimard's memories. These flashbacks take place during the decade from 1960 to 1970 in Beijing, China, and from 1966 to the present (late 1980s) in Paris, France. Gallimard describes himself as a celebrity, although he admits this fame comes as the result of being a societal joke. Gallimard gained international fame during a trial for espionage in which his lover, Song Liling, reveals she is actually a man and that Gallimard has remained ignorant of this knowledge for the past twenty years of their sexual affair.

Gallimard identifies himself with the character of Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton from the opera "Madame Butterfly". Pinkerton, a weakling and a cad, seduces the beautiful "Madame Butterfly" and then abandons her. Likewise, Gallimard falls in love with the beautiful Chinese opera singer, Song Liling. Gallimard eventually divorces his wife and marries Song, supporting her and their son in France. It is not until the trial that Gallimard discovers the truth: that Song is a male Chinese Communist spy who has been using him for access to sensitive information from the West.

The tables turn on Gallimard at this revelation by Song, and instead of symbolizing Pinkerton, Gallimard comes to understand he himself is the tragic "Madame Butterfly". Gallimard has given his heart to a false image, and in the conclusion of the play, he reenacts the death scene from the opera, committing suicide with a hara-kiri knife as Song watches from afar.

## Song Liling

Song Liling is introduced in Act One, Scene 6, at a party at the German ambassador's house in Beijing, China, in 1960. Song is an actor and opera singer and performs the death scene of "Madame Butterfly" at the party. Song and Gallimard meet and begin to see one another as he attends Song's performances at the Peking Opera. Gallimard falls in love with Song, living out his fantasy of "Madame Butterfly".

In reality, Song Liling is a male spy for the Chinese government. Song extracts information from Gallimard regarding international relations and particularly the American war with Vietnam, while impersonating a woman and maintaining a relationship with Gallimard. The affair between Gallimard and Song lasts nearly twenty years until Gallimard and Song are arrested by the French government for espionage. While on trial, Song reveals the truth about his gender and his role in obtaining secret documents to pass on to the Chinese, leaving Gallimard devastated and humiliated.



## Marc

Marc is Gallimard's friend and roommate from college. While Gallimard was always socially inept with girls and insecure about his appearance, Marc was the popular ladies' man. Marc appears both in flashbacks and as a figment of Gallimard's mind, telling him he has come through time to live vicariously through Gallimard's exploits in the Orient.

## Consul Sharpless

In Puccini's opera, "Madame Butterfly", Consul Sharpless is an American consul and friend to Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. When Pinkerton is too cowardly to inform "Madame Butterfly" that has married an American and is not returning to her, he sends Sharpless to deliver the news.

## Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton

In the opera "Madame Butterfly", Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton is a Lieutenant in the United States Navy stationed in Nagasaki. Pinkerton purchases the beautiful "Madame Butterfly" as his wife, paying a nominal fee, and has no intention of staying with her because he can obtain an annulment once he departs. Pinkerton is described as a coward, and demonstrates his cowardice when he sends his wife and friend to inform "Madame Butterfly" he has remarried and will not return to her.

## "Madame Butterfly"

"Madame Butterfly", whose real name is Cio-Cio San, is the tragic heroine of Puccini's famous opera. Cio-Cio San is a fifteen-year-old Japanese girl who is sold in marriage to Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. Cio-Cio San sacrifices everything for her American husband, including her religion, but is abandoned when Pinkerton leaves on his ship with no plans for return. Three years later, Pinkerton arrives with Consul Sharpless, and his new American wife, Kate, as Kate has agreed to raise Cio-Cio San's child by Pinkerton. Upon discovering the elaborate decorations Cio-Cio San has arranged for Pinkerton's arrival, he cowardly sends the others to inform Cio-Cio San of the truth and his decision to leave her. Cio-Cio San then takes a hara-kiri knife and commits suicide from her heartbreak.

## Suzuki

When Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton disappears from Japan in the opera "Madame Butterfly", Cio-Cio San's loyal maid, Suzuki, tries to convince her mistress he has no intention of returning. Suzuki tries to get Cio-Cio San to listen to reason and accept one of the many marriage proposals Cio-Cio San has received.



## Renee

The character of Renee is introduced in Act Two, Scene 6. Renee meets Gallimard at a party at the Austrian embassy in 1963. Renee is a student studying Chinese in Beijing for two years. Her father exports useless stuff to the Third World. Gallimard has an affair with Renee for several months, despite the fact that she appears shallow and too “masculine” for his tastes.

## Comrade Chin

Comrade Chin is a Communist Party official for whom Song Liling works as an informer for the Chinese government. Chin, a woman, shows disdain and disgust at the homosexual behavior exhibited by Song in his dealings with Gallimard. In Act Two, Chin witnesses Song’s confession of sodomy and later meets Song at a commune in the Hunan Province, telling Song that he will continue his mission, but in France and with the financial support of Gallimard rather than the Revolution.

## Helga

Helga is the first wife of Rene Gallimard. Gallimard married Helga, an Australian ambassador’s daughter, a “quick leap up the career ladder,” having renounced love (Act One, Scene 5). Helga seems to understand that their marriage is one of convenience and is nonplused when Gallimard reveals his has had an affair. Helga is, however, surprised when Gallimard decides to divorce her to be with his mistress.

## M. Toulon

Manuel Toulon is the French Ambassador to China and a superior to Rene Gallimard. In Act One, Scene 12, Toulon invites Gallimard to his house and promotes him to vice-consul, telling Gallimard since losing Indochina, French intelligence will have a new focus in the administration. Toulon asks for Gallimard’s predictions for the Chinese response is the Americans proceed in attacking North Vietnam. When Gallimard’s opinions turn out to be wrong, Toulon has covered himself by leaving his own name off the reports.



# Objects/Places

## Paris Prison

This is the location where the audience first finds Rene Gallimard in his cell. Theoretically, the entire action of “M. Butterfly” takes place here, and in M. Gallimard’s mind as illustrated through flashback. “The sparsely furnished cell contains a wooden crate upon which sits a hot plate with a kettle, and a portable tape recorder” (Act One, Scene 1).

## Ecole Nationale

This is the location where Gallimard attended university along with Marc, his roommate and friend.

## Girlie Magazines

Gallimard uses pornographic magazines to illustrate the difference between fantasy and reality. In girlie magazines, the girl fulfills a fantasy, wherein real life, Gallimard has not yet found such satisfaction until he meets Song.

## Hara-kiri Knife

In the opera “Madame Butterfly”, Butterfly uses this knife to kill herself when she realizes she’s been abandoned by her lover, Pinkerton. Likewise, Gallimard uses a hara-kiri knife to commit suicide at the end of the play.

## “Madame Butterfly”

This opera by Giacomo Puccini acts as a motif throughout “M. Butterfly”. Gallimard first meets Song as she sings the suicide scene of the opera.

## German Ambassador's House

This is the location where Rene Gallimard first meets Song Liling. Song performs the death scene from “Madame Butterfly” for the ambassadors and diplomats at the party.

## Rene Gallimard's Apartment

This is where Gallimard lives with his wife, Helga, in Beijing, China, in 1960.



## **Beijing, China**

Much of the action of the play takes place in flashback at different locations in Beijing, China. Gallimard begins his work in China as a junior ambassador and is later promoted to the position of vice-consul.

## **Peking Opera**

This is where Song Liling performs regularly. She invites Gallimard to expand his mind and come see what real Chinese opera is about.

## **Song Liling's Apartment**

Song eventually invites Gallimard into her apartment in 1960, despite the scandal this means to both her and conservative Chinese society.

## **Ambassador Toulon's Residence**

Ambassador Toulon invites Gallimard to his home in Act One, Scene 12, where he promotes him to replace Gallimard's superior, LeBon, as vice-consul.

## **Gallimard and Butterfly's Flat**

This is where Gallimard lives with Song, on the outskirts of Peking.

## **French Courtroom**

This is where Song takes the witness stand and publicly confesses he is a man who has carried on an affair with the oblivious Gallimard.



# Themes

## Stereotypes

Stereotypes and their impact are central to the narrative of “M. Butterfly”. David Henry Hwang delves into the questions of male and female stereotypes, political stereotypes, and the evolution of stereotypes of the East and West in the narrative. As Hwang states in the Afterword discussing the Boursicot trial in 1986, “Bouriscot's assumption was consistent with a certain stereotyped view of Asians as bowing, blushing flowers. I therefore concluded that the diplomat must have fallen in love, not with a person, but with a fantasy stereotype” (Afterward).

The theme of stereotypes is likewise directly addressed in the narrative itself when Song takes the witness stand in Act Three and is asked to define what he terms “international rape mentality” (Act Three, Scene 2). Song explains both the reasons why Gallimard was easy to convince he was a woman, and the tragic error of the West in its perception of 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” (Act Three, Scene 2).

## Deception

Deception is another overarching theme in “M. Butterfly”, and in the opera “Madame Butterfly”. In “Madame Butterfly”, Cio-Cio-San is deceived by the cad Pinkerton to believe that he will be a faithful husband. However, Pinkerton has no intention of fulfilling his promise and abandons Cio-Cio-San when his ship soon departs after their wedding. Cio-Cio-San, who represents complete submission and personal sacrifice, pines away for a lover who cares little for her.

In mirroring the opera, Gallimard at first appears to be Pinkerton as he seduces the delicate Song Liling into a love affair and then conducts his “experiment” to test her devotion to him by abandoning her. Gallimard’s deception, however, proves to be miniscule in relation to the deception that Song has played on him. Gallimard’s revelation that Song is a man and a spy devastates him, just as Cio-Cio-San is devastated at the betrayal of Pinkerton. In the end of the play, Gallimard chooses to kill himself because he cannot bear the loss of his “Butterfly,” just as Cio-Cio-San does at the loss of Pinkerton.





## Fantasy versus Reality

The theme of Fantasy versus Reality is seen throughout the play “M. Butterfly”. Even as Gallimard begins his explanation to the audience of why he made the choices he did, he engages in fantasy by playing out the parts of the opera “Madame Butterfly”. “Madame Butterfly”, to Pinkerton, represents the same thing as the pinup girls in the magazines from his uncle’s closet: a beautiful woman willing to do anything in order to please him. This fantasy is revisited throughout the narrative, as Song Liling notes upon her first meeting with Gallimard: “It’s one of your favorite fantasies, isn’t it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man” (Act One, scene 6). Gallimard finally confronts the theme of Fantasy and Reality in Act Three, when he tells Song, “Tonight, I’ve finally learned to tell fantasy from reality. And, knowing the difference, I choose fantasy” (Act Three, Scene 2).



# Style

## Point of View

“M. Butterfly” is a dramatic work written in dialogue, or the exchange between actors onstage. In addition to dialogue, the author includes stage directions and notes regarding specific characters, the setting, and the general mood of the play. Unlike dramatic plays in the naturalist style, “M. Butterfly” has a surreal quality, blending reality and non-reality. Rene Gallimard uses direct address throughout the narrative to discuss his thoughts with the audience. In this way, the point of view of the play is almost entirely Gallimard’s—from his direct statements to the audience to the flashback scenes in which memories from Gallimard’s perspective are projected.

The character of Marc serves as an inner sounding board for the protagonist. Marc represents decadence and self-confidence, two qualities Gallimard is sorely lacking in the beginning of his story. However, as the narrative progresses, Gallimard begins to evolve into a character more like Marc: self assured with women and quite often, arrogant in behavior.

## Setting

The setting of “M. Butterfly” is that of a Paris prison cell in the present. From clues within the text, the time period of the play takes place in the late 1980s. From Gallimard’s sparse cell, he leads the audience through his past in Beijing, China, from 1960 to 1970. Flashbacks take place in Paris from 1966 to the present (late 1980s) in Paris, France.

In the flashbacks to Beijing, China, the audience is transported to a party at the German Ambassador’s house, Gallimard’s place of employment at the French Embassy, the home of the French Ambassador, Gallimard and Helga’s apartment, Song’s apartment, a Chinese opera house, the streets of Beijing, and to the flat belonging to Gallimard and Song.

In Paris, Gallimard’s apartment with Helga, the French courtroom, and Gallimard’s cell are the three principle settings. Additionally, as per the stage directions, Song often appears in an upstage area from which she performs and watches the actions of Gallimard below. In the ending of the play, Song watches from above as Gallimard kills himself before the audience.

## Language and Meaning

The language of “M. Butterfly” is a conglomeration of contemporary dialogue and more formal speech, often exhibited in the setting of Gallimard’s work and diplomatic relations. The playwright chooses to juxtapose these different styles, creating a work that illustrates the dichotomy between the East and West. One example of this



juxtaposition is in Gallimard's paraphrasing and performance of "Madame Butterfly". In this example, the character of Suzuki is attempting to convince Cio-Cio-San that Lieutenant Pinkerton has no intentions of returning: "Girl, he's a loser. What'd he ever give you? Nineteen cents and those ugly Day-Glo stockings? Look, it's finished! Kaput! Done! And you should be glad! I mean, the guy was a woofier!" (Act One, Scene 5).

David Henry Hwang also employs a great deal of symbolism and metaphor in the narrative. Just as Gallimard represents at first Pinkerton and later Cio-Cio-San from "Madame Butterfly", both narratives serve to expose the underlying stereotype of women and particularly women of the East. Another example of symbolism is described when Gallimard explains his experiment in Act One, Scene 11: "I determined to try an experiment. In "Madame Butterfly", Cio-Cio-San fears the Western man who catches a butterfly will pierce its heart with a needle then leave it to perish. I began to wonder: had I, too, caught a butterfly who would writhe on a needle?" (Act One, Scene 11). Song Liling is, of course, Gallimard's Butterfly. But, as illustrated in the ending of the narrative, it is actually Gallimard himself who ends up being pierced by the needle.

## Structure

"M. Butterfly" is structured in three acts. Although the narrative has a relatively traditional arc, with exposition, rising action, climax and denouement, the narrative itself is non-linear. Because the audience/reader is learning the story from the memories of Rene Gallimard, the scenes jump forward and back in time in an almost stream-of-consciousness style.

There are no clear distinctions between the many short scenes which comprise each act, except as denoted in the stage directions. Quite often, when Gallimard transitions from his prison cell into a flashback, there are indications of light and sound cues to highlight different areas of the stage. Gallimard's cell is always in view, reminding the audience we are simply looking back through Gallimard's mind.

Act One is comprised of thirteen scenes. Many of these scenes are very short vignettes and transition seamlessly into the next. Act Two contains eleven scenes, and Act Three is comprised of three scenes. There is a curtain or blackout between each act with the exception of the transition from Act Two to Act Three. Stage directions indicate that at the end of Act Two, "Song goes to a mirror in front of which is a wash basin of water. She starts to remove her makeup as stagelights go to half and houselights come up" (Act Two, Scene 11).



## Quotes

You see? They toast me. I've become patron saint of the socially inept. (Act One, Scene 3)

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. (Act One, Scene 3)

In real life, women who put their total worth at less than sixty-six cents are quite hard to find. (Act One, Scene 5)

My father was an ambassador to Australia. I grew up among criminals and kangaroos. (Act One, Scene 5)

Convincing? As a Japanese woman? The Japanese used hundreds of our people for medical experiments during the war, you know. But I gather such an irony is lost on you. (Act One, Scene 6)

It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man. (Act One, Scene 6)

Art for the masses' is a shitty excuse to keep artists poor. (Act One, Scene 8)

It is the Oriental in her at war with her Western education. (Act One, Scene 10)

Monsieur Gallimard, I'm a Chinese girl. I've never ... never invited a man up to my flat before. The forwardness of my actions makes my skin burn. (Act One, Scene 10)

I am out of words. I can hide behind dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my shame. (Act One, Scene 11)

At age thirty-nine, I was suddenly initiated into the way of the world. (Act One, Scene 12)

The Orientals are people too. They want the good things we can give them. If the Americans demonstrate the will to win, the Vietnamese will welcome them into a mutually beneficial union. (Act Two, Scene 3)

Don't forget: there is no homosexuality in China! (Act Two, Scene 4)

Whatever happens, know that you have willed it. Our love, in your hands. I'm helpless before my man. (Act Two, Scene 6)

The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated because a woman can't think for herself. (Act Three, Scene 1)

I'm your Butterfly. Under the robes, beneath everything, it was always me. Now, open your eyes and admit it--you adore me. (Act Three, Scene 2)



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

What were the inspirations for David Henry Hwang in writing “M. Butterfly”? How factual are the events in the play? What research did the author do in developing the story? In what ways does the character of Gallimard resemble Bernard Boursicot? How does he differ from this real-life individual? How traditionally is the play structured? How is this reflective of its inspiration?

## Topic 2

How does the character of Gallimard evolve throughout the story? How old is Gallimard when is introduced to the audience/reader? Where is he located? When do the flashbacks in the narrative take place? How is Gallimard described in the flashbacks? When did Gallimard first marry? What was the outcome of his marriage? What happens to Gallimard at the end of the play?

## Topic 3

How does the play mirror the plot of Puccini’s opera, “Madame Butterfly”? Who represents Pinkerton from “Madame Butterfly” in “M. Butterfly”? Who represents Cio-Cio San? How does this representation transform throughout the narrative? How does the author use music to reinforce this motif?

## Topic 4

What purpose does the character of Marc serve in the play? How does Gallimard know Marc? What is revealed about Gallimard's character in the flashbacks with Marc at school? How does Marc differ from Gallimard in his regard and treatment of women? How does Gallimard become more like Marc throughout the narrative?

## Topic 5

What political statements are made in the play? What historical allusions does the author use? What is the history of the United States and Vietnam during the 1960s? How did Song Liling’s actions affect the war in Vietnam? How did Gallimard’s? Of what significance is the character of Comrade Chin in the narrative?



## Topic 6

What leads Song to pursue Gallimard in the narrative? Does Song Liling have genuine feelings for Gallimard? Why or why not? How does Song go about obtaining a baby to present to Gallimard as his own? How does Song Liling reflect the historical individual Shi Pei Pu? What differences are there between Song and Shi Pei Pu?

## Topic 7

What is the author's moral statement regarding cultural and ethnic stereotypes in the play? What lines from the drama reflect this point of view? In what ways are Gallimard's feelings for Song based upon an archetypical ideal? How is this concept of stereotyping portrayed in Puccini's opera, "Madame Butterfly"? How does the opera relate differently to Asian audiences versus those in the West?