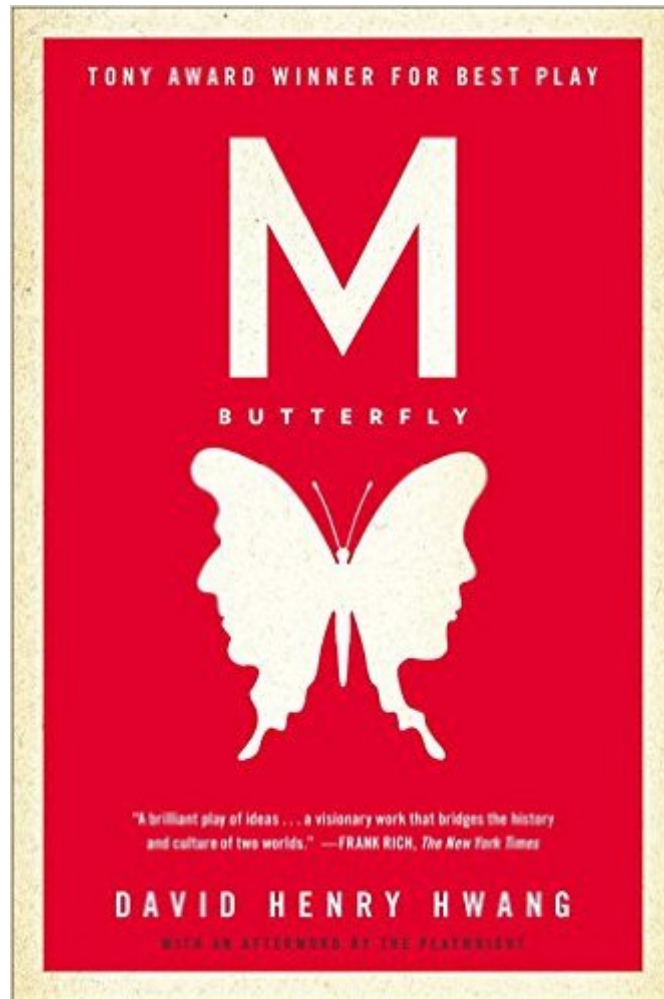


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M. Butterfly: With An Afterword By The Playwright



Synopsis

David Henry Hwang's beautiful, heartrending play featuring an afterword by the author is a winner of a 1988 Tony Award for Best Play and nominated for the 1989 Pulitzer Prize. Based on a true story that stunned the world, *M. Butterfly* opens in the cramped prison cell where diplomat Rene Gallimard is being held captive by the French government and by his own illusions. In the darkness of his cell he recalls a time when desire seemed to give him wings. A time when Song Liling, the beautiful Chinese diva, touched him with a love as vivid, as seductive and as elusive as a butterfly. How could he have known, then, that his ideal woman was, in fact, a spy for the Chinese government and a man disguised as a woman? In a series of flashbacks, the diplomat relives the twenty-year affair from the temptation to the seduction, from its consummation to the scandal that ultimately consumed them both. But in the end, there remains only one truth: Whether or not Gallimard's passion was a flight of fancy, it sparked the most vigorous emotions of his life. Only in real life could love become so unreal. And only in such a dramatic tour de force do we learn how a fantasy can become a man's mistress as well as his jailer. *M. Butterfly* is one of the most compelling, explosive, and slyly humorous dramas ever to light the Broadway stage, a work of unrivaled brilliance, illuminating the conflict between men and women, the differences between East and West, racial stereotypes and the shadows we cast around our most cherished illusions. *M. Butterfly* remains one of the most influential romantic plays of contemporary literature, and in 1993 was made into a film by David Cronenberg starring Jeremy Irons and John Lone.

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Customer Reviews

Written by David Henry Hwang, *M. BUTTERFLY* opened on Broadway in 1988 and played over seven hundred performances before closing in 1990. Casting is demanding. The play requires four actors, one of whom must be Asian, sing well, and convincingly impersonate a woman; three women; and three male dancers who can perform traditional Chinese theatre dance. The Asian actor and one of the women appear nude in the play, and while the woman's nudity may be more implied than literal, it is difficult to imagine how the male nudity (which is briefly frontal) can be avoided. The set is equally demanding. The play is written in three acts. Each act contains multiple scenes that occur in different locations at different points between 1966 and 1988, and the set must be able to support rapid shifts in time and place. *M. BUTTERFLY* is an extremely complex script that operates on several different levels. In one sense, it is a view of the culture clash between east and west; in another sense, it makes a statement on gender roles and the perception of gender, and the multiple ways in which gender can be exploited. The play draws heavily from the Puccini opera *MADAME BUTTERFLY*, which tells the story of a Japanese geisha who commits suicide when her American husband abandons her, but the play ultimately inverts these roles. The play also draws heavily from the espionage scandal of real-life French diplomat Bernard Boursicot and his lover, Chinese opera singer Shi Pei Pu, who used their relationship to pass secret information to the Chinese government during the Vietnam War. It is difficult to discuss the play without revealing the plot devices which make the play so intriguing.

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