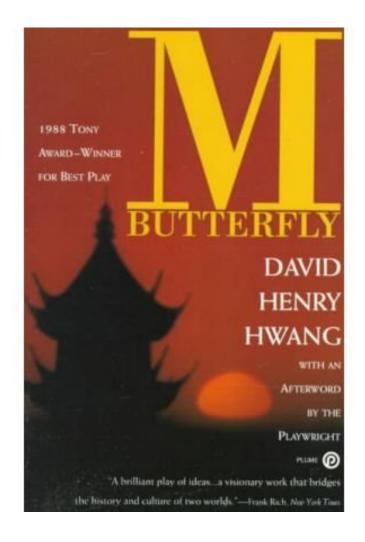


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Truth and Illusion By Gary F. Taylor

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 convincing 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. Although the espionage element drives the plot, the play is actually more concerned with the way in which people deceive themselves about each other, and how that delusion can operate in even the most physically intimate relationships. We are not always who we think we are, and the people around us are not always who they seem to be. Given the difficulties of casting and set, I think the play is very unlikely to be seen in a community theatre or educational (college, university) theatre; it requires access to a talent pool that few such theatres have.

Plays are written to be seen, not read, and M. BUTTERFLY is a case in point. It is very, very difficult to read this script and imagine how it was staged in your head. Act One reads rather slow, and Act Two and Three

seem better written in a literary sense, but this does not necessarily have a relation to how the script actually performs in front a live audience. I think this is a script best left to people who are knowledgeable about theatre. Recommended even so.

GFT, Amazon Reviewer

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Pained Love
By Ana Mardoll
M. Butterfly / 0-822-20712-5

No doubt you've heard the story of the man who was married to another man, but claimed to have mistakenly thought that his "wife" was a woman. In this incredible drama, Hwang takes this real life story, often distilled into a joke or a bit of trivia, and creates a compelling drama. He refuses easy answers here, noting that the thing people \*really\* want to ask is "Did he or didn't he know?" The novelty of the situation shocks us, and we want to hear the details - partly to satisfy a vicarious desire, and partly to reassure ourselves that such deception could not happen to us.

However, Hwang turns the question aside as meaningless and points out that the underlying deception - that of a false lover - is one that we've all seen countless times. The gender of the participants is less important than their feelings and motivations. Whatever else may have occurred, he argues, a human being was used in a terrible way, and his heart was destroyed in the process. Everything else in immaterial.

#### ~ Ana Mardoll

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Great!

By Vivienne Pettus

I am very pleased with the purchase and the timely manner in which the book came. It arrived just in time for the beginning of the semester and was in great condition. Also, I appreciated the fact that the book was as described.

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