



David Henry Hwangs Play M. Butterfly - A Fantasy of the Western Male

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Seminar paper from the year 2011 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 1,7, Humboldt-University of Berlin (Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik), course: Gender, Sexuality, 'Race' and Class in Contemporary American Drama, language: English, abstract: 1 Introduction Modern-day drama is often considered to be an effective means of expressing criticism. Numerous contemporary playwrights experiment freely with dramatic conventions, and most works overtly demonstrate to be a piece of performance, so that the audience is alerted not to view reality but a play. Thus, the boundaries between authenticity (the 'natural') and role playing (the 'artificial') are blurred "in order to address the construction of social and political identity." (Saddik 2007: 13). David Henry Hwang's play M. Butterfly (1988) can be regarded as one representative of that type of contemporary dramatic pieces. It demonstrates the construction of identity around the politics of gender, sexuality, power and race. In the course of the drama, the (biological male) character Song Liling constructs a female, Oriental fantasy for the French diplomat Rene Gallimard. By performing her 'race' and gender according to Gallimard's ideas about the Oriental, Song is able to disguise her male sex. For almost two decades, the French diplomat is not aware of the fact that his partner is not a woman but a man. (cf. Hwang 1988: 94ff.). The drama M. Butterfly - the first Asian American play to be produced on Broadway - has been introduced in the course of last summer semester's seminar Gender, Sexuality, 'Race' and Class in Contemporary American Drama. It aroused my interest not only due to its witty and provocative style, but also because of the drama's fascinating and powerful but rather bizarre story about the relationship of a Western man and a perceived Chinese woman. I could not understand how Gallimard neither was nor, in the course of all their years together, became aware of his partner'

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