M. Butterfly Essay, Research Paper

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Act 1, scene 11, Gallimard, the love stricken French Diplomat in China announces his decision to try an experiment. (Act 1, Scene 11). Upon thinking up this experiment, he reverts back to a memory of Madame Butterfly where Cio-Cio-San fears that the western man who catches a butterfly will pierce its heart with a needle, then leave it to perish. (Act 1, Scene 11). He too feels that he has caught a butterfly who will writhe on a needle (Act 1, Scene 11). This butterfly is his mistress, Chinese opera singer, Song. Up to this point, there had been a series of visits to Song s opera performances on Gallimard s behalf. Gallimard s experiment was set up in order to essentially play hard to get, and to have Song do the work to initiate a relationship. Gallimard s decision to run this experiment exposed Song s desire for a relationship, which eventually lead to his downfall.

Leading up to this point, the story is as follows. Rene Gallimard is a French Diplomat serving in China, and living with his wife. Up until this point in his life, he has not had extramarital affairs, which is quite the opposite for his colleagues. Song is the first woman outside of his fantasies of magazine women with whom he has actively pursued a relationship. Gallimard first sees Song perform a piece from Madame Butterfly one night, and continues to visit her performances week after week. One night, after a rough visit to Song s apartment, Gallimard decides to start his experiment. In this experiment he is to cut off all ties to her. [He] stopped going to the opera, [he] didn t phone or write her (Act 1, Scene 11). Gallimard admits that this gives him a rush of power – the absolute power of a man (Act 1, Scene 11). As for Song, she is unaware of this decision for the very reason that she is the center of this experiment.

The placement of this decision also bares significance. The decision takes place close to the beginning of the story. Prior to this point, the story was mainly giving background information and developing characters. Gallimard had been attending the opera a few weeks and then decides to go ahead with this experiment. It can be assumed that this decision is in the middle of the rising action. This decision essentially initializes one of the major conflicts of the story (Gallimard vs. Song). This scenario could not be placed anywhere else in the story because it is actually what the relationship is based upon from this point on: Song s apparent submission to Gallimard.

Gallimard was never the typical strong male type. This is displayed in his conversation with his friend Marc regarding their pasts with women. Also, in a flashback to 1974, Gallimard turns down an offer to go to Marc s father s condo with a group of his university friends and a group of girls. This incident provides the information that Gallimard is not after what most men are stereotypically after- women. Because his background is not filled with numerous affairs, the fact that he considers one with Song is a major issue. This is also a reason for which the experiment takes place. Gallimard is not a strong man when it comes to women. When he initiates his experiment, it sends him on a power trip. [He] felt for the first time that rush of power – the absolute power of a man (Act 1, Scene 11). Deciding to conduct this experiment revealed that Gallimard was a weak man, but it also revealed that he yearned to be powerful or in a situation of power rather. His relationship with Song provides exactly this for him. It gives him a sense of strength and superiority. Song mentions that it is due to the western view on easterners. As much as this may hold true, his relationship with Song held deeper meaning for Gallimard. He gained a false sense of inner strength by courting Song, and this ended up ruining him.

Gallimard s actions brought about several consequences. First and foremost was that his experiment was successful. Song noticed that Gallimard was not attending the opera and ceased to call and visit. She started writing Gallimard on a weekly basis. Each letter would sound more and more desperate for Gallimard s attention. Gallimard was of course reveling in the success of his plan. That is until the last letter, which proved his ultimate victory. In this letter Song says the following. I am out of words. I can hide behind dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my shame (Act 1, Scene 12). Reading this, Gallimard suddenly became ashamed. She was turning on [his] needle (Act 1, Scene 12). Although he had won, Gallimard s victory felt empty. The main reason for this is that Gallimard is an innately decent man. The fact that he has taken the shame of a woman is too much to bare for him. He gained power over a woman but did not know his limits and felt that he abused the power he had attained.

Ultimately, the decision is not what actually led to the unfortunate downfall of Gallimard and the destruction of the relationship thereof. The experiment was merely a catalyst that pushed the relationship of Song Liling and Rene Gallimard to new heights. After the experiment, Song showed more desperation towards Gallimard, and Gallimard realized the power he had over such a beautiful eastern woman.

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