The Metamorphosis of *M. Butterfly*: Reflecting Varying Ideas of Positionality & Intersectional Identity from the 1980s to the Present

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When considering literary text and visual media as cultural artifacts rather than productions existing in isolation or for the purpose of propagating an individual objective, we see that they “tell us something about the interplay of discoveries.”¹ This project examines three iterations of David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*—the original Broadway production, the film adaptation, and the recent Broadway revival—produced between the years of 1988 and 2017. As three productions with similar foundational backbones, these iterations of *M. Butterfly* show the ways in which one production can be recreated and reinterpreted over the course of time as concepts of identity are redefined, reevaluated, and better articulated within American society. My study is an attempt to evaluate the ways shifting ideas about race, sexuality, and gender in America inform and are informed by these three productions.

I present my argument using the theoretical framework of cultural criticism, which evaluates culture as a changing product of “interactive cultures, … each of which is constituted at any given moment in time by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, occupation, and similar factors that contribute to the experience of its members.” Each production, I argue, privileges one of three positionalities—race, sexuality, or gender—over other elements of intersectional identity in response to the discourse of its time. I first and foremost evaluate the 1988 production of *M. Butterfly* as an intended subversion of the feminized weakness associated with Asian culture that in turn perpetuates anti-feminist and homophobic ideologies at the close of the Cold War era.² I then evaluate the 1993 film adaptation of *M. Butterfly* as a lamentation of a cisgender and heteronormative society at the cost of Asianness and womanhood in response to queer critiques of the 1988 play and the rising visibility and audibility of gay and queer communities in America.³ Finally, I evaluate the 2017 revival of *M. Butterfly* as a focused portrayal of non-binary Asian identity in a moment where transgender issues and the fight for transgender justice are at the fore.⁴ Altogether, the three iterations borne from one literary text prove to be reflections of the contexts in which they were produced.