M Butterfly Essay, Research Paper

M Butterfly RIUve played out the events of my life night after night, always searching for a new ending to my story, one where I will leave this cell and return forever to my ButterflyUs arms.S (Hwang 3.3.1-4) With these words of David Henry HwangUs play M Butterfly, we realize that we have just been staring directly into the memories of Rene Gallimard. The fact that Rene Gallimard serves as the narrator of his memories in the play M Butterfly delivers an impression of the character behind Gallimard than could ever be achieved by the viewing of the screenplay. The existence of Marc in the play as seen from GallimardUs perspective, the fact that Gallimard serves as the main organizer of ideas in the play, and the differing roles of Helga in the two works all lead to very different impressions and interpretations by the reader or viewer. GallimardUs narration seems to be the most obvious difference between the movie and the play. While reading the play, the audience has an opportunity to get to know the personality of Rene Gallimard, as well as his feelings about certain topics. Such insight can be very crucial in the impression that a character makes on an audience. GallimardUs persona is very evident in the opening lines of the play. He remarks initially about the dimensions of the cell, the atmosphere, and the living conditions. Immediately, this paints a picture for the reader that is very accurate physically, and the reader sees that Gallimard is straightforward, and says what he means without very much preamble. As the opening scenes develop, we also see the side of Gallimard that is the dreamer. Rene definitely has visions of perfection, and they are demonstrated when he remarks RAlone in this cell, I sit night after night, watching our story play through my head, always searching for a new ending, one which redeems my honor , where she returns at last to my arms.S (1.3.7-11) Gallimard can be classified as a dreamer, and not only because he is confined to a prison cell for many years. He has a vision of how life is supposed to be, and feels rewarded when he conforms to a stereotype. For example, he says RI knew this little flower was waiting for me to call, and, as I wickedly refused to do so, I felt the first time that rush of power — the absolute power of a man.S (1.11. 8-10) Being Ra manS is important to Gallimard, and following the so called RWestern FantasyS of having an affair with an Eastern woman is tantalizing to him. Glimpses like these give the reader incredible insight into the mind of Gallimard, which are very useful to explain later actions in the story. A narrator builds a friendship with the reader, a person that the audience can trust. We see the events from GallimardUs side of things, which are much more distorted in the play than the events that occur in the movie. The removal of the narrator in the movie leaves the viewer to develop GallimardUs personality for themselves, rather than get to know how he thinks. This puts the viewer at an overall disadvantage for understanding the true meaning behind M Butterfly. Another significant part of the play that is omitted from the movie is GallimardUs best friend from school, Marc. Marc is described as a Rwomanizing cadS (1.3. 81) by Gallimard, giving the reader an obvious first impression. He is developed as a character that is there for Gallimard in times of need, and serves as someone that Gallimard can go to in times of need. A friend like this does not exist in the movie, and the viewer gets the sense that Gallimard is very quick in decision making and has little doubt about his actions. In the play, however, we know that this is not the case. There are several cases where Marc talks to Gallimard in his head, and reasoning for decisions is explained. For example, Marc says RAll your life youUve waited for a beautiful girl who would lay down for you…..As the years pass, your hair thins and you struggle to hold onto even your hopes. Stop struggling, Rene. The wait is over.S (1.9.62, 67-69) Marc could be called the devilUs advocate, as he seems to push Gallimard in the direction of pursuing his Butterfly. When Gallimard remarks that he is married and should not have an affair, Marc rebuts with RAnd an excellent one [married man] too. I cheated after……six months.S (1.9. 40-41) In the movie, Gallimard makes the

decision on his own and the viewer is never exposed to the thought process. Given that if every thought process was revealed the movie would run about six hours, it seems that the important decisions are not pondered. When the reader gets a chance to see these thought processes, it gives them a sense of who Gallimard is, how he was brought up, and how the people that he respects behave. On the other hand, the omission of this information gives the viewer of the movie no idea what Gallimard values, which in turn forces the viewer to believe that Gallimard had no trouble making these decisions and has no remorse or conscience. Both presentations create amazingly different pictures, and in turn create very different impressions. Once again, the narration in the play creates a very different image of Gallimard than the relative straight-forwardness of the movie. Another character who is very different between both the movie and the play is that of GallimardUs wife, Helga. Though a seemingly minor character in both works, her relevance is very important when discussing the character of Gallimard. In the play, the physical appearance of Helga not given, however one can only conclude that she is not particularly attractive, as the second scene of the first act describes. A woman remarks RWell, heUs not very good looking.S (1.2. 22) When immediately faced with these impressions, one can assume that a man who is fairly unattractive and has never had much with love with women would be married to a woman on similar terms. Also, there is no time at which Gallimard speaks openly about his wife, giving the reader a sense that she is not important to him. Thus, the picture of Helga is created. This picture is not shown in the movie, as Jeremy Irons does not show any type of misfortune with respect to his previous love life. In fact, the idea that Gallimard in the movie has a wife and eventually has two mistresses creates the image that Gallimard is a lady’s man, and might have had similar affairs previously. Strangely enough, these two conflicting interpretations are both acceptable within the context of each the movie and the play. Helga seems to show her face more in the play to inspire a small feeling that what Gallimard is doing is wrong. In the movie, Helga is hardly heard from, thus the viewer decides that they are married only by law, and therefore cheating on his wife is not terrible. At the end of the play, Gallimard tells Helga that he has been cheating, and her reaction is humorous. She accepts the fact that he has been cheating, and even mentions that she expected it when she says RI knew you would. I knew you would the day I married you.S (2.11.47-48) A comment like this proves the earlier impression that the reader achieved when they believed that ReneUs wife was far from important to him. Obviously, Helga was not in love with Gallimard just as he was not in love with her, and both finally understood each otherUs position. This final blow to GallimardUs credibility is only hinted at in the movie, with the depiction of Gallimard living by himself in an apartment until his Butterfly finds him in France. Again, the audienceUs perception of GallimardUs personality is different in both of these cases, with the reader of the play finding Gallimard with less and less credibility while the viewer of the movie sees the course of events as natural. This is another example of the mental creation necessary to construct the story of the play while the movie simply feeds the audience with information. In conclusion, the audienceUs perception of Rene Gallimard is much different in the play M Butterfly than in the movie of the same title. Although David Henry Hwang wrote both the play and the screenplay, the character development is far greater in the play. The reader must create a picture of Gallimard by his impressions, reactions, and interactions with characters from his past that simply do not exist in the movie. Marc, GallimardUs best friend from school, does not exist in the movie, but is the voice inside GallimardUs head throughout the play. Helga, who exists in both works, has much more bearing in the book, again shaping the readerUs impression of the kind of man that Gallimard really is. The fact that the play employs a narrator and the movie does not leads the reader down a different path, especially when the narrator is Rene Gallimard himself. The human mind is one that is capable of creating its own world. When viewing the movie, one sees a sense of Rene GallimardUs world. When reading the play, one understands his world.

31d