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Petting the Fetish

For centuries, literature has been a medium for the expression of fantasies; this in mind, it would seem only natural that literature would also explore existing fetishized fantasies. Some would argue that the expressed ideas are merely romanticizations but the complex textual evidence bolsters that these romanticized ideas are indeed fetishized ideas—after all, a fetish simply explained is a concentrated hyper-romanticization. The following pages will analyze Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* and Ernest Hemmingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, baring this lens in mind. My posited argument presents that animalistic “terms of endearment” applied to women in Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* and Ernest Hemmingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are discursive tools used to oppress, objectify, and dehumanize women in order to satisfy the main character’s fetishized ideas. In both cases, fetishism is driven by the need to express “the dominate masculine stereotype” (Glover, Kaplan 83).

Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* can be interpreted as a satirical stab at Western fetishizations of Orientalism. As described by Edward Said, “in short, Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, reconstructing, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). The play’s man character Monsieur Rene Gallimard is constructed from a both a fictitious and real muse. The real Monsieur Renee Gallimard will not be discussed in this essay. In the opening act of *M.*

Butterfly, Hwang overtly writes Monsieur Gallimard as identifying with the fictitious muse Pinkerton of Puccini's "Madame Butterfly." Gallimard reenacts the play for those unfamiliar but prerequisites the play and Pinkerton's introduction stating, "[a]s the curtain rises, he just closed on two great bargains: one on a house, the other on a woman—call it a package deal" (Hwang 5). Gallimard's crass remarks about Puccini's *Butterfly* sets the tone for Gallimard's portrayed regard for women—commodities for men's pleasure. Further bolstering this assertion is the fact that Gallimard initially identifies himself with the hyper-masculine dominantly barbaric Pinkerton who claims (in regard to *Butterfly* and other "Oriental" women), "They want to be treated bad!" (Hwang 6).

Identifying himself akin to Pinkerton, Gallimard must have his own "Butterfly." Though Gallimard is already married in the beginning of the play, it is quite clear that he has not found his "Butterfly." Regarding his marriage Gallimard states, "No fantasy woman would ever want me, so yes, I would settle for a quick leap up the career ladder...The sad truth is that all men want a beautiful woman, and the uglier the man, the greater the want" (Hwang 14). Echoing Coventry Patmore's, frivolous ideas based on aesthetics and submission in "The Paragon"¹, Gallimard's quote above details that the ideal fantasy woman validating his masculinity can only be beautiful; anything less, is but a weak substitution.

Gallimard's fetishized idea of submission can be clearly seen in his fictitious interaction with pornography model. Act one, scene five depicts Gallimard's childhood introduction to pornography. The imaged dialogue of the pornographic girl asks Gallimard, "What would you like me to do...next?" (Hwang 12) exemplifying the idea of submission. Later Gallimard's

¹ Lines 30 until the end are empty praises about his wife. In particular, he says her "worth s Maid and Wife" and "by her gentleness made great" illustrates a praise based only on empty submission.

introduction of Song makes an overt connection to his perceived idea of submission. Gallimard: “[H]ere was a Butterfly with little or no voice—but she had the grace, the delicacy...I believed this girl. I believed her suffering. I wanted to take her in my arms—so delicate, even I could protect her, take her home, pamper her until she smiled” (Hwang 15-14). The definite article ‘a’ before Butterfly mirrors that idea that women are not special because the definite article ‘the’ or the omission of the definite article would have completely altered the gravity of the statement. Furthermore, Gallimard states the reason for his attraction is largely owed to her lack of voice; though this comment does describe Song’s physical vocal quality, the irony of the lead ‘female’ character named Song with “no voice” should not be lost. Her lack of voice, metaphorically her lack of assertion, is what facilitates Gallimard to transpose his fetishized ideas to Song. Gallimard solidifies his fetishized fixation of Song when he overtly renames her as Butterfly in scene thirteen. Renaming Song as Butterfly allows Gallimard to define Song’s identity, value, and function—dehumanizing Song to fulfill his fantasy. Towards the end of the play Gallimard acknowledges his constructed fetish stating, “I’m a man who loved a woman created by a man. Everything else—simply falls short” (Hwang 90).

Gallimard’s fetish focuses on submission but this idea of submission stems from the ‘rape mentality of the West,’ Song outlines as “The West thinks of itself as masculine—big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine—weak, delicate, poor”(Hwang 83). In a very similar sense, Ernest Hemmingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* also mirrors this mentality. Though *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is set in the mountains of Spain, superior rape mentality can still be applied. Robert Jordan the main character is an American who symbolizes the ultimate strength of the West. Maria symbolizes Spain and though Spain is not the East, it is still portrayed in a lesser feminine—weak, delicate, and poor—manner. Robert Jordan is the only

character that is given a full name thus giving him the most importance and development for identity. Not only is the reader only given Maria's first name but Robert Jordan eventually renames her little rabbit further stripping her of her identity. The name 'little rabbit' may seem endearing but "[i]n Spanish, rabbit is conejo, also the common Spanish slang term for cono, or cunt, a fact that Robert Jordan, as a college instructor of Spanish, should certainly have known, in Spanish is also slang for cunt" (Eby 1). Also having a decent knowledge of Spanish, Hemmingway's word choice is certainly deliberate. If Maria symbolizes femininity then the ultimate connection would be to have her also be the symbol of the female reproductive genitalia—but the connection based on a derogatory term emphasis the lack of value placed on this femininity. The sole purpose of Maria's femininity is only so that she can satisfy Robert Jordan's sexual desires.

Much like Gallimard's fetish constructed woman, Robert Jordan does the same. Robert Jordan's fetish stems more-so from ideas of narcissism than Gallimard's idea of total submission. Robert Jordan fixates on Maria's cropped hair and the fact that visually "[they] could be brother and sister by the look" (Ernest 72). Robert Jordan relishes in this visual symmetry, he redefines Maria as his and a part of him. By doing so, Robert Jordan remains true to his statement that "I (Robert Jordan) have not given them (women) much importance" (Ernest 101) because he is not loving a woman but is actually loving himself. Robert Jordan furthers his desire to alter Maria to mirror him in his statement that he would like to take Maria to Madrid "to the coiffeur's and they could cut it neatly on the sides and in the back as they cut mine and that way it would look better in the town while it is growing out...Where [she] (Maria) can have her hair cut like his" (Ernest 345). Eby connects this idea asserting, "Jordan's merger with Maria...testifies to his fluid ego boundaries and satisfies his narcissistic desire to recapture the world of primary identification

and blissful twinship”(Eby 2). Maria’s acceptance of these proposed physical alterations is possible due to the false sense of caring supplemented through Robert Jordan’s use of ‘little rabbit’ as a term of endearment. Maria believes Robert Jordan loves her but the repeated references of killing and consuming rabbits throughout the novel illumines Robert Jordan’s true regard towards Maria “[a]s love object and object of projection, Maria represents both the self and the other; existing in a fetishized transitional space, she is both and neither and a bridge separating and joining the two” (Eby 3). Maria is hyper-sexualized and phallicized in order to satisfy Robert Jordan’s narcissistic fetish.

In both pieces of literature, “endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects” (Freud 843) bolsters the facilitation of their constructed ideal fetishized woman. Butterfly metamorphosis into what Gallimard perceives as the perfect fetishized woman; Little Rabbit is procreated into Robert Jordan’s fetishized female self. In both cases terms of endearment are used to dehumanize the fixated individual in order to construct the fetishized ideal woman. The preceding pages supplement evidence undergirding animalistic endearments facilitating the female dehumanization in order to satisfy negative male fetishes.

Works Cited

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