

1 Dec. 14: *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, finish

2

3 >The change in stylistic structure when they are tracking Molina brings a new element to this
4 novel. In a way, it gives the reader a very nice background on Molina before his imprisonment.
5 Furthermore, the entrance of the outside world into the picture introduces an interesting twist,
6 especially concerning Gabriel. However small this portion of this book, I found myself
7 pondering how Molina had changed Gabriel and how Valentin had changed Molina. Why did
8 Molina choose to ignore Gabriel? Had Valentin truly changed Molina? The most striking point
9 occurred when Gabriel looks out the restaurant window towards the prison. For me, it served
10 as the final turning point. Suddenly, the Molina we knew at the beginning of the novel was
11 different and never turned back.

12 ¶I found the last few chapters to be clear and unclear. In certain sections I found myself lost
13 and in others I knew exactly where it was heading. Overall, it is an interesting novel that shows
14 human emotions in a different light than I have ever read previously.

15

16 >I'm not sure how I feel about the ending. But I wanted to make the connection between the
17 movies and the characters, particularly the zombie movie and Molina. I noted that the zombie
18 woman in the end dies in a fire set by her own hand, and though a seemingly painful way to
19 die, it is a release for her, a way to be at peace. This is similar to Molina's death, a death he was
20 prepared for. Which made me think of scripture when during the blessing of the Eucharist the
21 priest says, "Before His death, a death that Jesus willingly and freely accepted," something along
22 those lines; but I am not making any comparison to Jesus but I don't know.

23 ¶Also the incident of sexual frustration, just like in the cat people movie, emerges again when
24 Valentin knocks over the stove, and then the next chapter they have sex for the first time.

25 ¶Finally, the theme of forgetting appears quite often, even in the movies. It seems as every
26 character has a particular thing that they use to forget: in the movies it seems to most frequently be
27 alcohol, and in the prison cell its these movies or studying.

28

29 >At first I was inclined to think that only Valentin was getting what he wants in chapter 14
30 when Molina agrees to do whatever he wants. However, considering that Molina wants to be
31 the "submissive female" in the relationship, submitting himself to Valentin gives him the
32 gender role he wants and he makes Valentin happy also. While Valentin claims to be as
33 opposed to gender oppression as class oppression, I can't help but think that he took advantage
34 of Molina in this situation.

35 Molina's death is a sacrifice or act of love from a romantic point of view, but politically he's just
36 being used. Valentin's comrades kill him to prevent a confession, and the state was going to
37 interrogate him. The fact that he was killed by Valentin's comrades just seems like an act of
38 betrayal; or as Valentin always believed, the political trumps the romantic. Molina still doesn't
39 think so, since he seems to know he might die...as the interior monologue at the end suggests,
40 he probably died to be like a "heroine in a movie," not for a "just cause."

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41 The end is definitely enigmatic. I really don't understand who is with him and where he is and
42 what happened to him. He seems to be telling Marta about his guilt and justify it, and also tells
43 her about the "spider woman."

44 Favorite quote: "...this dream is short but this dream is happy."

45 I also found it funny that the last sentence of the book included "beloved" in it. Oh the things
46 that amuse me.

47

48 >Gotta say, I absolutely loved this novel - I felt like the ending tied up a lot
49 of loose ends (especially with respect to the footnotes and 'inner dialogues', which seemed to
50 come full circle and wrap up nicely at the conclusion). I need to start a paper for Global Politics
51 of Gender (lord help me) so I'll try to keep things relatively short:

52 ¶Before reading the 'last' section of the novel, in all honesty, I was sort of confused as to what
53 the author's actual PURPOSE was for writing the novel - I found the dynamic between
54 Valentine and Molina intriguing, and the addition of Mol's betrayal at the end of Chapter 8
55 really seemed accelerate the plot. However, details like the footnotes and Molina's stereotypical
56 feminine characteristics threw me for a loop, and I found myself having issues deciphering
57 what exactly Puig wanted his audience to walk away from the novel with. Upon reading the
58 last six chapters, I feel like I've finally had a chance to come to a relatively solid interpretation:
59 Kiss of the Spider Woman serves as a critique - specifically (though not only) of the rigid
60 societal constructs that polarize society into opposite gender binaries (assuming my language is
61 correct). Even today, there is a wide spread conviction that biological sex and social gender
62 must be one and the same. The transition of Val from being the 'dogmatic revolutionary' to a
63 caring and compassionate man who pursues relations with his cell-mate undoubtedly serves to
64 disprove this notion. The continuous footnotes with no clear-cut answers to the sexuality
65 question seem to serve this purpose too: Puig doesn't want to define homosexuality, instead, he
66 seems more intent on stripping the term from any culturally biased definitions it currently
67 holds. The footnotes in chapter 11 frame sexuality as an act of revolution - and while this
68 initially appeared to be an ATTEMPT to define homosexuality's origins, I felt like it served more
69 to denounce the link between biological sex and social gender: highlighting the extent to which
70 our definitions of 'gender' have manifested themselves in our everyday lives (IE: raising
71 children, choosing a spouse, religion in earlier footnotes, etc.)

72 ¶Crap! I still need to make you a puppet!

73

74 > So that's why the book was banned, haha. The ending was good. It all flowed through well. I
75 am still curious as to why he didn't talk to his mother or Gabriel more. I liked valentin's dream
76 at the end. It was a really good abstract summary of what happened to him throughout the
77 novel I thought. The symbolism was very interesting.

78 I thought it was really important when valentin told Molina to stand up for himself and that he
79 did not have to be submissive to his men and be scared because it rocked molina's beliefs and
80 some of the footnotes.

81 >All I have to say is "wow!" The end of this book was just full of sex, violence and government
82 corruption. It was hard to not keep turning the page although I have to admit it was a little bit
83 graphic. There is sexual tension surrounding Molina and Valentin. I wasn't expecting Valentin to
84 give into Molina because he was so in love with Marta but he did. On page 217 "...it's so tight there,
85 so tight..." How could a reader not think of sex when they read that? It's obvious what they are
86 leading to. I was also surprised that Molina was shot and killed; I wasn't really expecting him to die.
87 Also, what exactly do they do to Valentin at the end? One point I also want to bring up is the
88 difference in Valentin and Molina's opinions on how a man is in charge. I would have expected them
89 to have the opposite opinions.

90

91 >So we finally find out the meaning of the title and we even get some insight on the purpose of
92 telling certain films. I was hoping that Valentin would not crack and become obsessed with
93 emotions, as Molina is, but he becomes less of "a man". I just didn't like how the ending was
94 predictable. I thought I would have been surprised. What I did like was when Valentin told
95 Molina not to let anyone take advantage of him. I thought that was a commendable gesture and
96 it showed that he has a heart, although it would have been better if he didn't give into his sexual
97 desires. This was an interesting read.

98

99 >This book was a little strange, so I have a few questions.

100 1). We all know that Molina was homosexual, but Valentin, out of loneliness, was very intimate
101 with him. Could he too have been gay or was he just projecting his feelings for Marta on
102 Molina?

103 2). Although Molina was the so-called "woman" of the two, I feel that he was much more heroic
104 than Val was. Valentin seemed extremely helpless throughout the novel, and in the end, he
105 remained contently stuck in his dream world (dreamers = stereotypically women). Meanwhile,
106 Molina had sacrificed himself like a CHAMP. Was this intentional?

107 3). What specifically happened to Valentin in the end? I realize he was tortured, but who exactly
108 did the torturing?

109

110 >For me, the hallucinatory ramblings of Valentin in the last chapter were more tragic than the
111 death of Molina in the chapter before. This could be for a couple of reasons. It certainly has
112 something to do with the One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest-reminiscent sorrow at the mental
113 death of a once-radical and active mind. I felt allied to Valentin's revolution in the beginning of
114 the book, and wanted to see him die not only for that cause, but with that cause central in his
115 mind. I at least wanted to see more of Molina, certainly not that cowardly Marta and the
116 heteronormativity that she represents. But Valentin's decay was also very romantic, that it's
117 hard to not feel for the guy, and what might be a genuine love.

118

119 >Upon reading this week's assignment, two things made a huge impression on me. Firstly, the
120 graphic sex scenes that the foot notes had been alluding to all book seemed to come into play

121 and that was a bit of a shock to me. Somehow I just never thought that the relationship was
122 heading toward that despite all the hints throughout the previous readings. Additionally, I was
123 shocked at just how graphic the sex scenes seemed to be in description. I'm used to authors
124 simply alluding to such things. Secondly, I was very impressed by just how true Valentin
125 remained to his cause no matter what happened to him. That aspect of his character truly
126 impressed me and left a real impact on me.

127

128 >I was drawn in by Puig's narrative style in this novel mostly because it makes for an easy read,
129 but the further I got into the book, the more his technique captured my attention as something
130 not only engaging but meaningful on a deeper level. The novel is composed of a variety of
131 different styles: dialogue, monologue, stream-of-consciousness, embedded narrative, footnotes,
132 and even official reports, which the reader uses to construct a cohesive story-line. In this sense,
133 the way the novel is written serves to transcend its boundaries of genre. The interplay between
134 novel, film, play, musical, drama, and comedy in Puig's work, in a sense, breaks down the
135 meaningfulness of labels. When paired with the themes of the novel, his style serves the larger
136 goal of calling into question assumptions made about gender identity, sexuality, and politics.
137 His narrative technique mirrors reality in the sense that it makes labeling difficult. Molina is a
138 male homosexual who at times identifies himself as "this girl" or a "woman."

139

140 >How does the last film relate to the development of Valentin and Molina's relationship? The
141 film is about falling in love, then having people of power get in the way of that love, then
142 sacrificing oneself for that love (using one's body for prostitution or risking greater sickness).
143 Molina and Valentin have some sexual encounters, but do they really care for each other? It is
144 confusing; is Molina even really working for the warden, or is he a "double agent"? In the end,
145 Molina dies because the comrades are afraid he will spill their secrets, and in that way, he is
146 "sacrificing" himself for Valentin.....still very confused.

147

148 >One of the themes of the novel is fantasy and escapism. It is interesting to note that at the
149 beginning it is Molina who, wanting to escape the boredom and oppression of his prison cell,
150 liked to retell movies. He identified as the female characters in all of them. Valentin was at first
151 disdainful. However, he ends up giving in to the escapism and fantasizing about romance with
152 Marta after being tortured by the government officials.

153 I think of Valentin as Odysseus, because he did not really love Molina. He just took advantage
154 of his emotions to get him to do his bidding.

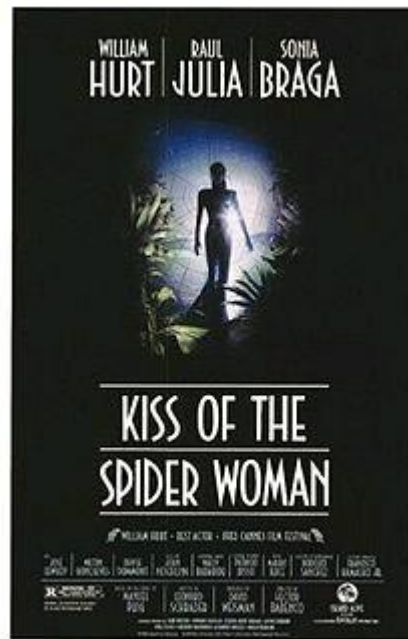
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156 >It is interesting that the story of the zombies on the island appear around a footnote about Freud
157 and sublimation. Zombies, which is a term used to colloquially describe people walking through life
158 "faking" a persona, fits nicely with the discussion on Freud. The zombies in the film are described as
159 having no will beyond the witch doctors, all they do is "obey and suffer," which obviously suggests
160 a lack of independent thought and free will, which has been sublimated, if you will. This leads us

161 back to the prison cell to suggest that such sublimation only brings out the demons within us, as it
162 can cause homosexuality or at least obviate it.

163
164 >After finishing *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, I am still very confused by the spider imagery. I've
165 gotten as far as to acknowledge the spider as a representation of Molina and that Valentin's
166 compassion for him arose from an overwhelming sense of pity: "...poor creature...every minute
167 she seemed sadder and sadder...it's just that she was so sad, don't you see" (Puig 280). I also
168 understood that sadness as having manifested from societal repression and even Molina's
169 shame in being a disappointment. But what i do not understand is why he must be a spider.
170 Could it be that Valentin's disgust for those threads represents a historical misunderstanding of
171 homosexuality and that, by creating a larger web from those threads, Molina remedies this
172 unfortunate condition? How is he spinning this web, where else in the book is this
173 communicated to the reader?

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180 **Film:**

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Kiss of the Spider Woman ([Portuguese: *O Beijo da Mulher Aranha*](#)) is a 1985 Brazilian-American [drama film](#). It was [directed](#) by [Argentine](#)-born Brazilian director [Héctor Babenco](#)^[1], and adapted by [Leonard Schrader](#) from the [Manuel Puig](#) novel [of the same name](#). [William Hurt](#), [Raúl Juliá](#), [Sonia Braga](#), [José Lewgoy](#), and [Milton Gonçalves](#) star in the leading roles.

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183 The film tells of two very different men who are sharing a Brazilian prison cell: Valentin Arregui
184 ([Raúl Juliá](#)), who is imprisoned (and has been tortured) due to his activities on behalf of a leftist
185 revolutionary group, and Luis Molina ([William Hurt](#)) a homosexual in prison for having sex with
186 an underage boy.

187 Molina passes the time by recounting memories from one of his favorite films, a wartime
188 romantic thriller that's also a [Nazi propaganda film](#). He weaves the characters into a narrative
189 meant to comfort Arregui and distract him from the harsh realities of political imprisonment and
190 the separation from the woman he cares about.

191 Arregui allows Molina to penetrate some of his defensive self and opens up. Despite Arregui
192 occasionally snapping at Molina over his rather shallow views of political cinema, an unlikely
193 friendship develops between the two.

194 As the story develops, it becomes clear that Arregui is being poisoned by his jailers to provide
195 Molina with a chance to befriend him, and that Molina is spying on Arregui on behalf of the
196 Brazilian secret police. Molina has namely been promised a parole if he succeeds in obtaining
197 information that will allow the secret police to find the revolutionary group's members.

198 However, Molina falls in love with Arregui, and Arregui responds after a fashion. Molina is
199 granted parole in the hopes Arregui will reveal contact information when he knows Molina will
200 be out of the prison. Arregui reveals that he has been aware that Molina has been spying on him,
201 and then provides Molina with a telephone number in spite of that knowledge. Molina, fearing
202 the consequences of treason, refuses to use the number, and he and Arregui bid farewell with a
203 kiss.

204 In the final scenes, however, Molina decides to make use of the telephone number, and a meeting
205 is arranged with someone from the revolutionary group. But the secret police have had Molina
206 under surveillance, and a gun battle ensues, with the revolutionaries, assuming Molina has
207 betrayed them on purpose, shooting him. As he wanders the streets wounded, the policemen
208 catch up with him and demand that he disclose the telephone number to them in exchange for
209 them taking him to the hospital for treatment, but Molina refuses and succumbs to his wounds.
210 On the orders of the homophobic police chief ([Milton Gonçalves](#)), the policemen dump Molina's
211 body in a rubbish tip and fabricate a story about his death and involvement with the
212 revolutionary group.

213 Meanwhile, back in the prison Arregui is being treated (illegally) after being tortured once again.
214 As the doctor administers him morphine to help him sleep, he escapes into a dream where he is
215 on a tropical island with the woman he loves.