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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Favorite quote: “…this dream is short but this dream is happy.”

I also found it funny that the last sentence of the book included “beloved” in it. Oh the things that amuse me.

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

¶ Before reading the ‘last’ section of the novel, in all honesty, I was sort of confused as to what the author’s actual PURPOSE was for writing the novel - I found the dynamic between Valentine and Molina intriguing, and the addition of Mol’s betrayal at the end of Chapter 8 really seemed accelerate the plot. However, details like the footnotes and Molina’s stereotypical feminine characteristics threw me for a loop, and I found myself having issues deciphering what exactly Puig wanted his audience to walk away from the novel with. Upon reading the last six chapters, I feel like I’ve finally had a chance to come to a relatively solid interpretation:

Kiss of the Spider Woman serves as a critique - specifically (though not only) of the rigid societal constructs that polarize society into opposite gender binaries (assuming my language is correct). Even today, there is a wide spread conviction that biological sex and social gender must be one and the same. The transition of Val from being the ‘dogmatic revolutionary’ to a caring and compassionate man who pursues relations with his cell-mate undoubtedly serves to disprove this notion. The continuous footnotes with no clear-cut answers to the sexuality question seem to serve this purpose too: Puig doesn’t want to define homosexuality, instead, he seems more intent on stripping the term from any culturally biased definitions it currently holds. The footnotes in chapter 11 frame sexuality as an act of revolution - and while this initially appeared to be an ATTEMPT to define homosexuality’s origins, I felt like it served more to denounce the link between biological sex and social gender: highlighting the extent to which our definitions of ‘gender’ have manifested themselves in our everyday lives (IE: raising children, choosing a spouse, religion in earlier footnotes, etc.)

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

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

I thought it was really important when valentin told Molina to stand up for himself and that he did not have to be submissive to his men and be scared because it rocked molina’s beliefs and some of the footnotes.
>All I have to say is “wow!” The end of this book was just full of sex, violence and government corruption. It was hard to not keep turning the page although I have to admit it was a little bit graphic. There is sexual tension surrounding Molina and Valentin. I wasn’t expecting Valentin to give into Molina because he was so in love with Marta but he did. On page 217 “…it’s so tight there, so tight…” How could a reader not think of sex when they read that? It’s obvious what they are leading to. I was also surprised that Molina was shot and killed; I wasn’t really expecting him to die. Also, what exactly do they do to Valentin at the end? One point I also want to bring up is the difference in Valentin and Molina’s opinions on how a man is in charge. I would have expected them to have the opposite opinions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the themes of the novel is fantasy and escapism. It is interesting to note that at the beginning it is Molina who, wanting to escape the boredom and oppression of his prison cell, liked to retell movies. He identified as the female characters in all of them. Valentin was at first disdainful. However, he ends up giving in to the escapism and fantasizing about romance with Marta after being tortured by the government officials. I think of Valentin as Odysseus, because he did not really love Molina. He just took advantage of his emotions to get him to do his bidding.

It is interesting that the story of the zombies on the island appear around a footnote about Freud and sublimation. Zombies, which is a term used to colloquially describe people walking through life "faking” a persona, fits nicely with the discussion on Freud. The zombies in the film are described as having no will beyond the witch doctors, all they do is “obey and suffer,” which obviously suggests a lack of independent thought and free will, which has been sublimated, if you will. This leads us
back to the prison cell to suggest that such sublimation only brings out the demons within us, as it
can cause homosexuality or at least obviate it.

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

Film:

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

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

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

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

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

In the final scenes, however, Molina decides to make use of the telephone number, and a meeting is arranged with someone from the revolutionary group. But the secret police have had Molina under surveillance, and a gun battle ensues, with the revolutionaries, assuming Molina has betrayed them on purpose, shooting him. As he wanders the streets wounded, the policemen catch up with him and demand that he disclose the telephone number to them in exchange for them taking him to the hospital for treatment, but Molina refuses and succumbs to his wounds.

On the orders of the homophobic police chief (Milton Gonçalves), the policemen dump Molina's body in a rubbish tip and fabricate a story about his death and involvement with the revolutionary group.

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