Dec. 7: Kiss of the Spider Woman, chapters. 1-3

-This book starts off exactly how Beloved does, in the middle of all the drama.
-We don’t know who the characters are or how they got to that point.
-Just like Beloved we are given details but we have to piece the background of the story together.
-The story takes place in Argentina.
-If I didn’t read the back of the book I would have guessed that Molina was actually a woman.
-What is the relationship between Valentin and Molina?
-Where are they? Why are they in cellblock 7?
-Valentin and Molina have an 11 year age difference.
-I wonder if the movies Molina picks to tell have any relation to their situation in any way.
-Why doesn't Valentin like talking about his girlfriend unless he wants to?
-What's going on in Argentina during this time?

>So far this book is confusing in a refreshingly new way. Morrison in Beloved was very complicated and convoluted in her story telling which had many speakers, some unknown speakers, tense shifts constantly, confusing images, and style that created a very layered through its lack of given information or misunderstood info. Puig is at least more straightforward with the plot when he decides to make things difficult for the readers to handle. He just has his characters not talk at all about certain things, names of significant others, or the character's abrupt start and finishes to conversations. Puig has Molina sometimes just forget what exactly happens in the stories, leaving the whole thing up to his and Valentine's own interpretation, sometimes seemingly influenced by their own lives. It is interesting to note the different technique employed by Puig to keep readers guessing or scratching their heads, or in a way, leaving them grasping for a sense of reality.

>In this novel the movies Molina recount foreshadow or allude to the plot. May I point out that creating a movie from a novel never quite works out. At this point I'm not too sure the reverse is going to work out too well either. I do find your comment on censorship interesting. I feel that Valentin censors Molina more than Molina censors Valentin. (so far at least) Valentin is the typical macho man and dominates Molina and the conversation more than I would like. It is interesting that his role so far is the analyzer of the movies while Molina seems to be stuck in his own little dream world. The relationship with the waiter is quite strange. Why is Molina in love with a straight man? Is it love or more of a pet project?

>I like the way the novel proceeds -- it never gives more explanation than necessary. Yet at the same time it is confusing: the style. It could be my bad memory that keeps me from distinguishing the characters, but I feel that the (slight) confusion is Puig's intention to reveal the characters indirectly, as if the dim light in the cell was shed on them. I also really enjoy the
way Molina and Valentin talk to each other: it reminds me of the talk I always have with my
friends.

>I was quite surprised at how the format of the book is set up, but my original hesitation soon
disappeared once I discovered how relatively simple it is to follow. The different films that are
spoken of are rather interesting considering under normal circumstances films are formed from
stories; however, I’m not sure I understand the connection between the films. I understand the
idea of the films being dreams, in a sense, but is there a connection between movies that I
missed? The stringing out of these movies, in a way, gave them a reason to live each day. The
stories helped them to relate to their lives before prison, which gave them hope for tomorrow.
Furthermore, it was intriguing to discover the lives of these two men beyond the prison. The
fact that neither wanted to, at first, tell the other the name of their lovers raises an interesting
questions. Why is it that one gives in before the other concerning names?

Embroidery and a Turn:
In discussing the motives behind the architects staying out with his assistant every night,
Valentin asserts that if Molina can embroider the truth of the matter then he can too. To look on
this claim with gender stereotypes in mind we see that Valentin demonstrates a noticable
degree of feminine curiousity here. Embroidering is an activity more gender typical to women
and Valentin’s participating in the acticity, in any capacity, would suggest some form of
experimentation or curiousity with something that is gender atypical. This could suggest, and
forgive me if this is too far of a stretch, a possible turn in sexuality for Valentin. Apart from just
this quote, the first chapter ends in him telling Molina, in a way that could almost be flirting,
"You’ll pay for this" (p.26).The significance in even telling the story of the cat woman could
suggest a retelling of it’s plot, to some degree, in this book. Valentin may well play the role of
the architect while Molina his assistant, going behind the back of Valentin’s girlfriend. I admit
that these predictions rely heavily upon far too many loose assumptions but it will be
interesting to see if any or all of it plays out.

Upon reading the first part of the Kiss of The Spider Woman I was incredibly captivated. The
writing style is incredibly confusing, yet it is also enthralling. It appears to be written almost as
if it is a script to a movie just as it is describing a movie which makes the whole story suck the
reader in. I also liked how the writer slips in tiny pieces of information that alude to the idea
that the two men are in prison. On multiple occasions he throws out the term cell and talks
about how sexual scenes and descriptions of delicious foods would anger the other inmate
which would make sense from a prison setting. I also just really enjoyed the descriptions of the
panther like woman. Absolutely captivating.

December 7, 2010
I like this book a lot, more than White Tiger and much more than Beloved. Although I like the book I am thoroughly confused by the 7 page footnote on p59. Since there is no narrator who can be telling it? It doesn’t really give character development since we don’t know what character is talking about it. It’s kind of random and doesn’t seem to have much of an effect on anything. I don’t know why it is there but it must have some reason and that fact is really ruffling my feathers. I am at a loss, maybe the the class has a better reason for the footnote’s existence because I have nothing.

Really like this book so far. The dialog keeps it fast paced and the relationship between Val and Molina is an intriguing one to watch develop. As always, here’s what I got chapter-by-chapter:

Chapter One: "How are they each other’s prison keepers and potential liberators?” I felt like you sort of touched on the answer in your notes: The two characters obviously have very different values, Molina seems interested in the romantic nature of the stories, and seems to like applying them to his own life. Val, on the other hand, seems (at least initially) to listen to the stories with reluctance, and criticizes Molina for his ‘fantasies’. They limit each other by keeping the other one in check; Valentin wants no part with the sexually explicit parts of the stories, and Molina does not seem interested in hearing Val’s political idealism. However, both serve as liberators towards the other in that they introduce each other to concepts and thought-processes that they would have otherwise not known existed: Molina becomes more and more interested in Val’s biography (particularly his girlfriend), while Val seems to become more emotionally drawn to Molina: becoming more dependent on his stories as a means of passing the time.

Chapter Two: "Who cuts off the discussion at the end of this chapter?” In short, Val. Perhaps more interesting, is that this cut off seems to be the first of a "handing off of power" between the two (I’m opting not to say "power-struggle", because I feel that the ends of each dialog come up more as a result of mutual respect than competition). You had talked about the possibility of prejudices: I feel that this “handing-off” of power seems to prove the latter of your two theories - that Puig is simply showing how the spectrum of human qualities can be found in the human male. Neither one seems to consistently dominate over the other though out the first three chapters, and both seem to be presented by the author as likable characters.

Chapter Three: Footnotes footnotes footnotes. I was taken aback when I realized that the first first-note in this novel dealt with the subject matter it did. Are they current with the time the book was printed (’78 or ’79)? Val obviously seems to harbor nothing against Molina in regards to his sexuality. As for the footnotes being liberatory ("the truth shall set you free") I don’t see how they could - All three of the theories are stated as being 'refuted', offering no insight as to what the ‘truth’ actually is. In all honesty, the appearance of these footnotes had me completely stumped as to what their purpose could possible be. Class-discussion?
My first thought on Kiss of the Spider woman is that it is really confusing. Without names it is confusing to follow. Within the text, there are multiple sexual references due to the movie. There is a discussion between two characters involving whether "erotic descriptions" should be used. The discussion of the movie itself turns to the actress multiple times, however there are hints of homosexuality.

>From the very start I found this book fascinating. Not only did Valentin’s interjections crack me up, but the movies Molina tells are extremely interesting—he definitely bears resemblance to Scheherezade in Arabian Nights, leaving his audience in suspense, but he doesn’t need to distract Valentin necessarily…it’s just a way to pass the time. I actually didn’t find it very hard to figure out who was speaking—even when starting a new conversation Puig immediately mentions something to cue us in to the speaker. I like the idea of a book that reads like a play, yet incorporates narration in the description of movies. The footnotes are a bit strange in that they make such a pointed contrast to the dialogue—it is a very scientific study retold by the author, whereas the conversations are direct quotes and very casual and personal. When Valentin begins to talk about his girlfriend and Molina names her Jane Randolph after the actress who played the assistant, the line between illusion and reality blur: Molina is incorporating the film into Valentin’s reality, although admittedly a “real” aspect of film (the actors).

Something I found interesting was a comment made during the conversation about Gabriel—how Valentin and Molina will be free one day, but Gabriel is basically doomed to live out his life in ignorance with an inferior job, and how his inferiority complex is a sociological construction. Physical prison is not as bad as being a prisoner of your social status or situation. Valentin and Molina seem to be complete opposites—Valentin represents ideals (specifically political) and the willingness to do anything for these ideals, even give up love, shown in the conversation about his girlfriend. He also doesn’t believe in living for the present but for the future, to change the world. Molina, on the other hand, is an optimistic romantic who loves the simple pleasure of films, is completely devoted to Gabriel even if they shall never be together, and believes in enjoying the moment. Also, this may sound weird and be completely unfounded, but I feel like their names aren’t appropriate. Molina is a strong, masculine name and Valentin sounds more artistic and delicate. I’d have them trade names.

This novel is quite interesting. It has two polar personalities, Molina, a gay man, and Valentin, a revolutionary. With these interesting characters, the dialogue isn’t a bore. When Molina tells his stories he is constantly interrupted by Valentin and it’s quite comical. I thought it was the most interesting when Molina told him about the first film and the woman finally became a panther. Valentin said that she was a psychopathic killer rather than a panther woman. Valentin always rejects the fantasy and puts things in real life perspectives. His role is to revert us to realism, but then again, his hope to change the world can also be seen as fantastical. Molina is our window to fantasy, or hope.
At first I thought that we were reading this simply because it was going to be a story about two imprisoned men on their way to freedom. However, there are so many subplots in here that the stories of oppression are becoming quite numerous.

In the beginning, Molina and Valentin describe what one of the movie character’s mother would seem like, and at first they talk about her as if she were a typical woman, working in the home. Molina mentions how her husband keeps her "cooped" up in the house (possible reference to chicken coop?) and that she is treated like a slave.

The story of the panther woman was clearly another one, but this time the victim was trapped within her own body. She could really only find freedom in death, and even that didn't seem like an ideal way to achieve liberation.

The German movie is pretty self-explanatory for why it's a tale of oppression...I mean, come on; it's Nazi Germany!

Gabriel and Molina’s story line might also serve as an example, if only because Molina wants to be free with the love of his life, but because of unalterable barriers (i.e. Gabriel’s being a straight man), he may never attain the liberation he desires. It’s quite sad, and I think it’s why he lives vicariously through his films.

I find it interesting that Valentin tells Molina that he tries to avoid pleasures of the flesh, such as eating and enjoying wonderful food, because he is a political activist, struggling to make the world better. He says, "Social revolution, that's what's important, and gratifying the senses is only secondary." The importance is more emphasized when Valentin says that even her girlfriend is secondary to the cause of change. And he also says that she feels the same way about him. I am comparing it to Beloved which takes a different approach where the family is given pre-eminence and everything else revolves around it as opposed to Valentin's world where the revolution is pre-eminent and everything else including the family revolves around it.