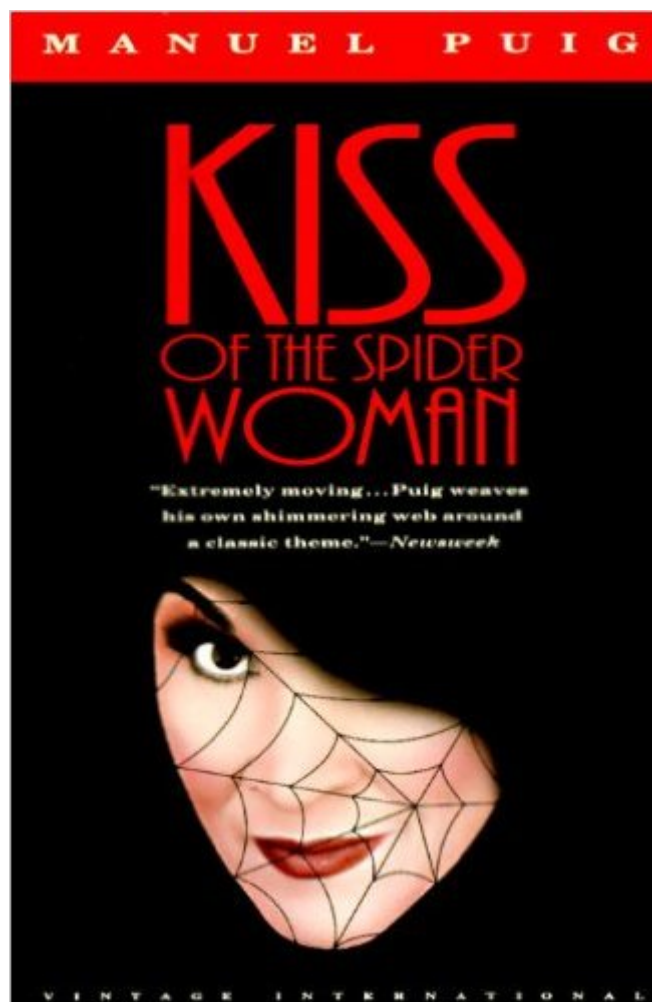


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Kiss Of The Spider Woman



Synopsis

Translation of: Beso de la mujer araña.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Since there are already so many reviews for this excellent book, I will limit my contribution to a few comments on the footnotes. They are not mere postmodern flourish, nor are they superfluous. They function in several ways. First, they mark a certain reception of psychoanalytic theory in Argentina. Secondly, although in the beginning they correspond to the story (in the tradition way that footnotes do -- as elaboration on a point that cannot be contained in the narrative) they begin to lose their direct correspondence as the story continues. This "unraveling" corresponds to the unraveling of the framing device (most importantly the telling of stories), which traditionally is a narrative structure that functions to hold sexual desire at bay. In other words, the footnotes lose their hold as the characters become closer, sharing more personal facets of their lives, and eventually becoming sexual. In this way the footnotes subtend the narrative in such a way as to track sexual desire and the confusing and contradictory aspects (and theories) that attend to it. I think it is essential to read the footnotes along with the narrative since they add to Puig's experimental narrative style. If they are confusing, that is the point. Unexpected desire, like love, always is.

This book was recommended to me by a very enthusiastic friend, and I must say, having finished the book, I understand why. Roughly, the story is about two men in prison: Luis Molina, the

homosexual window dresser, and Valentin Arruiga Paz. That, however, only begins to describe it. It's also about movies: Molina tells the plots of movies, partially to pass the time, partially because these movies -- living these movies -- is his escape. He prefers the movies from the forties and fifties, with the real divas, short hair, lots of blood-red lipstick . . . The movies aren't just time-passers, either: they reflect the events of the book. The style is one of the most outstanding features of the book. It is almost entirely in dialogue, with some brief spates into play-format and a couple of police reports. It varies with the setting. There are also a couple of sections in stream-of-consciousness, where one receives Molina's movies as he thinks of them, no bothering with sentences. It all contributes to a wonderful effect. I have, however, heard, that although this is the only translation available, it isn't the best. For example, Molina refers to himself as a woman throughout the book in the Spanish version. Although this isn't as possible in English, one could have made more of an effort, to preserve the feel of the original. So go learn Spanish (if you don't know it already) -- but read this first!

We tend to divide ourselves into groups: male, female, gay, straight, conservative, liberal... KOTSW reminds us that, underneath all of the labels, we are all human, and we can all change for the better when we want to. The simple power and beauty of this story overwhelms me each time I re-read it. Puig created a pure microcosmos with his tale, and let it develop beautifully. I've gone through two copies in English, and my Spanish copy is in tatters. KOTSW is one of the most important stories of the latter half of the century, and should not go ignored.

This is a beautiful book, and I must say that it is much better than the movie. From watching the movie, you get the sense that Molina tells the movies only to pass the time and entertain himself, while the fact that Molina IS the movies that he relates - that he lives the movies in his mind, that they have always been an escape for him, an escape from the prison in which he always finds himself, whether physical or societal - is emphasized much more significantly in the novel. This is a story of immediate feeling and passion, of the harshness and smallness of life, the desire for transcendence through the love of and for another, and the power that the imagination ultimately has over reality. In the end, Valentin gives in to Molina's philosophy, unable to stand the cruelty and torture that he undergoes as a jailed revolutionary. And for Molina, you feel that even though his one true experience of love was momentary, it was enough to give his life meaning.

This book was written in 1978 and subsequently became a movie which I will never forget. And now,

reading the book after all these years, I can even appreciate it more. It is set in an jail in Argentina in a time of political upheaval Two men share a jail cell. Valentin is a revolutionary. Molina is a gay window dresser who has been jailed for seducing a young boy and he is obsessed with movies. To fight boredom, Molina tells Valenin detailed stories of romantic movies. They go through a lot together including food poisoning and their friendship grows. But all is not as it seems as they live their fantasy lives and we are soon surprised to discover that one of the men is working for the government. How this all turns out is the stuff of good literature. It is hard to put the book, which is more than the sum of its parts, down as the extensive footnotes as well as the movie plots are part of the magic that the author has created. There are surprises and twists and turns of the plot and it all ends badly. But the story is a small work of art and will continue to haunt the consciousness of everyone who reads it..

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