



Summary



**Geschlechterkonstruktion im argentinischen Roman „El beso de la mujer araña“
(The Construction of Gender in the Argentinean novel „El beso de la mujer
araña“/“The Kiss of the Spiderwoman“), 2005**

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The paper *Geschlechterkonstruktion im argentinischen Roman „El beso de la mujer araña“* (*The Construction of Gender in the Argentinean novel „El beso de la mujer araña“/“The Kiss of the Spiderwoman“*) tries to interpret the Argentinean author Manuel Puig’s novel *El beso de la mujer araña* (*The Kiss of the Spiderwoman*) with regard to the construction of gender. Therefore the first part of the paper (cf. the table of contents, which is included at end of this summary) consists of a review of the literature in gender studies. This includes four different sections and starts with the theories of equality (e.g. Simone de Beauvoir) and difference, of which the main points are presented. After that the theories of constructionism (e.g. Candace West/Don H. Zimmerman and Carol Hagemann-White) and deconstruction (especially Judith Butler) are discussed. These four theories or currents of theories present the theoretical background for the interpretation of the novel and are supplemented by an interview with Dr. phil. Katrin Meyer. After that it is shown how gender is seen in Psychoanalysis and the last section of the first part looks at the theories about homosexuality in the novel, i.e. in the footnotes. While most of the authors presented there do exist, the psychoanalyst Anneli Taube is an invention by Manuel Puig, which makes her attitudes even more important. The footnotes question through their partial scientific inaccuracy and the insecurities expressed in the choice of words the objectivity of science as well as the content of the “quoted” theories, which reproduce and consolidate the binary sex system. The footnotes do not belong to the main text but are marginalised as is the topic of sex/gender or sexuality in society; however, they are there nevertheless. One also has to have in mind the historical background of the military dictatorship in Argentina and likewise regimes in general and the connected suppression and “marginalisation” of different social groups: Both Luis Alberto Molina and Valentín Arregui Paz are suppressed although for different reasons.

The next part of the paper takes a look at the two main characters, i.e. Molina and Valentín. For Molina the heroines in the films which he tells Valentín and with which he identifies are looked upon as they represent Molina's ideal of femininity, the cliché of beauty and submission. The woman is a willing victim for her beloved man and her life revolves round him. However, the men in the films are not strong or brave either; they do not represent the general cliché of masculinity. The last film shows a partial undermining of the gender roles: they move away from their respective extremes to come closer to each other although they are not dissolved. Yet, this socially not acknowledged behaviour is difficult to accept for the protagonists and the ending is once again a tragic one. The same holds true for Molina's love for Valentín, there is no hope for it. The analysis of the films is followed by a look at Molina's beliefs and behaviour. His cliché of femininity also shows in his language, which is very emotional. At first, he gives the impression of superficiality, fickleness and solicitude. Molina wants to pass the insurmountable frontier, he wants to be a woman, and therefore questions the social gender system. On the one hand he is very frank when talking about his sexuality and does not like to be categorised as this means degrading him to an object of scientific research, an abnormality. But on the other hand he is influenced by the negative social attitude, too, and cannot really escape it. Talking about his love to Gabriel it seems necessary to him to speak of himself as a woman whereas he does not see this need anymore when he and Valentín get close and have sex. He has discovered other ways to become a woman than adopting the fixed female role. Molina still likes to follow "his man's lead"; however, he also seeks his own satisfaction and shows a new self-confidence. The section about "marica and woman" puts these discoveries into a greater context. Homosexuality and machismo do not exclude each other as long as one takes the active "male" role. Only the passive "female" part, i.e. being penetrated, leads to a loss of one's masculinity. "Female" characteristics such as passivity, weakness and submission are adopted in order to imitate femininity. The classical couple is reproduced and the power structures are not questioned. Molina does not challenge the system; nevertheless, his very existence demonstrates alternative ways of life. Living outside the patriarchal system of values does not allow one to be happy but neither is one free by submitting without reservation to fixed (gender) roles. So death is the only solution as Molina does not want and is not capable to change (completely). This would mean to conform to the social norms and to betray his identity.

As to the chapter about Valentín the first section deals with the films as well as the delirium. In the beginning Valentín – i.e. the character with which he identifies – is rather narrow-

minded and egocentric, unable to broaden his horizons. Therefore he is not capable of realizing what is going on. He is fond of logic and exactitude but while the novel is progressing he becomes less sceptical about Molina's films and even considers the romantic and melancholic ending of the last one the best part of the whole film. Valentín has been caught in Molina's net and can now enjoy the moment's joy and stops living only for the future. This also shows in his thoughts. The delirium brings about the union of Valentín and (most probably) his love Marta, which is an overstepping of the material world, where this would not be possible. However, it is the gender frontiers, which are overstepped: Valentín stays a man and Marta a woman, even a very particular one. Valentín is not afraid of socially not accepted sexuality anymore but still prefers a "real" woman with a female body as defined by social norms. Neither Molina nor Valentín are bisexual nor do they want to be it. Valentín does not love Molina; yet, he likes him and therefore is able to behave independently of machismo. He accepts him and does not try to analyse him anymore. This section is followed by an interpretation of Valentín's beliefs and behaviour. Valentín hates the bourgeois values and norms that require the woman's submission but still thinks that sensibility and sensitivity are female characteristics whereas they would harm a man. He is cold and unfriendly, does not give in and is afraid of losing control. He becomes more "human" when he is ill but cannot accept his dependence, the loss of his self-determination and secure distance. He cannot help but react violently, losing his control once again when trying to restore it. He is not sure of himself and his beliefs anymore. Valentín is manically afraid of trans- and homosexuality as they are capable of endangering his masculinity. Even with regard to his attitude towards women it is clear that he did not internalise his ideal of equality. Gradually, he broadens his horizons: Molina brings him to think about things he once believed to be given, i.e. sexuality and gender, as well as about the conflict between his ideology and his feelings for a bourgeois woman, Marta, his education and background, of which he was not conscious before. Valentín stays true to his ideals and never gives up his struggle but realizes that the class structures, which he rejects, influence him, too. He begins to care for Molina and wants him to be happy, even if this means adapting and conforming to the social norms. Their last sexual encounter takes place in daylight, which means that there is no anonymity anymore, no secrecy but a complete acceptance by Valentín of the fact that he is sleeping with a man, of which he is always conscious though. The final section dealing with "macho and man" discusses the conflict between socialism and machismo. This conflict can also be observed in Valentín, who considers Molina's "female" characteristics, i.e. womanhood as it is socially constructed, as inferior. For him the binary gender system is

natural, which is why Molina's mixture of the sexes confuses him so much. When the novel progresses Valentín comes to value "female" characteristics and begins to question normative heterosexuality. It is exactly Valentín's previous machismo, his "classic" masculinity, and his subsequent opening to „female“ values that question the patriarchal system.

Molina and Valentín both change but both keep their identity. The gender system is questioned, however, not destroyed. Alternative ways of life are shown although they are not realized in the novel.

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