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## The Ordinary Odyssey: Female Embodiment and the Politics of Walking in Claudia Piñeiro's *Elena Knows*

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### ABSTRACT

In Claudia Piñeiro's *Elena Knows*, the simple act of walking is transformed into a complex corporeal language of dissent. This paper argues that the novel portrays the female body in motion as a direct site of resistance against the political, social, and medical forces that seek to discipline and immobilise it. Through a close examination of three critical journeys: Elena's Parkinson's-affected pilgrimage across the city, Rita's fatal walk to the church belfry and Isabel's intercepted path to the abortion clinic, this work uncovers a spectrum of defiance articulated through movement. Framed by the theoretical lenses of Michel de Certeau's everyday tactics, Simone de Beauvoir's situated body and Michel Foucault's biopolitics, it reveals how Elena's stunted steps reclaim agency, how Rita's final walk refuses a future of exhaustive care and how Isabel's interrupted travel underscores the violent denial of bodily autonomy. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that *Elena Knows* locates the most potent politics of resistance not in grand gestures, but in the mundane, ordinary and deeply embodied determination to move through the world on one's own terms.

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## Introduction

Within the architecture of patriarchy, the female body is often positioned as a territory to be controlled, regulated and subdued. Its movements, both literal and metaphorical, are frequently restricted by societal, religious and political structures. Yet resistance to these structures often manifests in quiet and imperceptible ways. Claudia Piñeiro's novel *Elena Knows* transposes this struggle into the very act of walking, transforming it from a mundane biological function to a potent site of resistance and a desperate attempt to reclaim agency. As Seamon observes, walking is "an intentional bodily force which manifests itself automatically and yet also sensitively" (40). This paper argues that the arduous and painstaking walks undertaken by the novel's central women: Elena, her daughter Rita and Isabel Mansila, represent critical moments of sheer helplessness that are simultaneously profound assertions of the will. Through a close reading of these journeys the paper analyses how the female body, even in its most constrained and situated state, through walking, resists the biopolitical forces that seek to define its purpose and limit its autonomy.

Building on this, the inquiry draws on Michel de Certeau's notion of everyday tactics as tools for resistance, Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics understood as the modern state's regulation of bodies and life and Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the body as a situation involving the lived, gendered reality of embodiment. Through these intersecting lenses the paper situates the walks in *Elena Knows* as acts that challenge the mechanisms through which power governs the female body. The control over reproduction (Isabel's body), the management of disability (Elena's body) and the exploitations of care (Rita's body) emerge as biopolitical sites of struggle where each woman's movement becomes a quiet yet radical assertion of autonomy against regulatory authority.

By juxtaposing Elena's Parkinson-hindered walk with Rita's final, fatal walk born from the crushing pressures of a future of unrelenting caregiving and Isabel's thwarted walk to an abortion clinic two decades prior, the novel constructs a powerful triptych of female experience. As Riza notes, walking "is an art of expression and it is to the urban system what the speech act is to language" (62). This paper contends that the walks in *Elena Knows* are precisely such speech acts: embodied utterances articulating a radical self-definition. Through the analysis of these distinct yet interconnected journeys, this paper demonstrates how the feminine movement in the novel, perpetually caught in a crossfire of moral, religious and social expectations, becomes a powerful articulation of vulnerability and a quiet, yet radical, reclamation of autonomy against overarching regulatory authority.

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it highlights an underexplored form of resistance in contemporary Latin American literature: the subversive potential of everyday movement of women. De Certeau reminds us that even mundane acts like walking can serve as "tactics" through which ordinary people subvert the rituals and representations that institutions seek to impose. By applying this insight to Piñeiro's novel, the research shows how *Elena Knows* transforms routine movement into a form of feminist agency. Secondly, the project brings attention to often-ignored voices in fiction: an elderly woman with a disability, a middle-aged daughter worn down by caregiving and a young woman denied autonomy over her body's reproductive rights. Examining their walks addresses intersections of age, illness and gender and in doing so, it engages with prevalent issues of bodily autonomy and care. Piñeiro herself has described women's bodies and abortion rights as "one of my obsessions" (Riddle) and indeed *Elena Knows* grapples with both. Finally, by bridging literary analysis and social theory, this study addresses a critical gap in feminist criticism, which has often privileged explicit resistance over the nuanced politics of everyday, embodied practices by responding to the following questions:

1. How does Piñeiro use the specific spatial practices of her female characters to critique the biopolitical control of female bodies?
2. In what ways does the novel portray walking as a double-edged tool, used both for female emancipation and for the imposition of one woman's will upon another?
3. Collectively, what do these three walks reveal about the paradoxical nature of female agency which often emerges from the very depths of helplessness?

### **Female Embodiment, Institutional Control and the Uncharted Politics of Walking**

The relationship between the female body and the regulatory mechanisms of power has long been a critical site for scholarly inquiry. While extensive research has documented the structures that discipline, medicalise and politicise women's corporeality, the specific modes through which this body resists, particularly through the mundane and ordinary acts, remains a relatively unexplored avenue. This review outlines scholarship in two key domains: the regulation of female bodies through power and walking as a practice of embodied resistance. It traces a trajectory from the macro-level operations of power on the body to the micro-level everyday practices of resistance, ultimately positioning Claudia Piñeiro's *Elena Knows* as a pivotal text for examining this intersection and identifying a significant gap in the existing scholarship.

The analysis of how modern power operates directly upon the body finds its cornerstone in the work of Michel Foucault. His concept of biopolitics introduced in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* and later expanded in his lecture series, fundamentally reconceptualised power by arguing that modern states achieve control not merely through ideology but by managing biological life itself (Foucault, History 137). This biopolitical framework, as Eduardo Mendieta elaborates reveals how systems like capitalism are "able to use, harness, control, subjugate, and exploit bodies" (38) transforming them into sites of regulatory intervention. However, this foundational theory is not without its blind spots. As Patricia Ki critically notes, there is a "seeming invisibility of women and disabled people in its discussion of docile bodies and disciplinary power" (191). This omission creates a theoretical vacuum, particularly when examining bodies that are simultaneously subjected to multiple overlapping regimes of control by the virtue of being a woman. The lived feminine experience therefore, becomes essential in the regard.

It is precisely this aspect that Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism addresses with her concept of the body as a situation. Her discourse on female embodiment has been widely misunderstood due to the assumption that, "her negative portrayals of female...represented her final view rather than a social construction of which she was profoundly critical" (Card 5). This concept moves beyond a purely biological or socially constructed view to posit that the body is the lived context from which one experiences and engages with the world. As Sara Heinämaa clarifies, for de Beauvoir, "the body is described as a subject of perception, not as a bioscientific object" (67). This perspective is crucial for understanding how social inequality, as Penelope Deutscher notes in her analysis of de Beauvoir's *Old Age*, "produces a body experienced as limiting" (290). Barbara S. Andrew further emphasises that de Beauvoir makes "situation and embodiment central to philosophical questions" (34) allowing for an analysis of how gender, age, and ability are not essential traits but lived realities that shape one's agency. This understanding of the body as a situation i.e. a lived reality shaped by social constraints, does not merely describe a state of being; it inherently contains the seeds of a response. A situated body is not a passive object but an active, experiencing subject. Simone de Beauvoir's framework thus provides more than a description of limitation; it establishes the precondition for agency. When the body is experienced as a limiting situation, the impulse to push against those limits, to renegotiate one's being in the world, becomes a fundamental

aspect of embodiment itself. The situated body, by virtue of its subjective experience of constraint, is always already a potential body in resistance.

This resistance, however, rarely manifests in grand, revolutionary gestures. For individuals enmeshed in the quotidian realities of their situations, defiance emerges in the everyday acts. It is here that Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday practice becomes essential. He distinguishes between the top-down "strategies" of institutions that create and control space and the bottom-up "tactics" employed by individuals to creatively use, manipulate and subvert that space for their own purposes. These tactics are as Junquilho et al. state, the "effective tricks" (qtd. in Morais and Santos 66) and "multiform, resistant, cunning, stubborn procedures" according to Machado et al. (qtd. in Morais and Santos 66) through which people reclaim a measure of autonomy. For de Certeau, walking is a primarily tactical practice; it is a process that "affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects etc. the trajectories it 'speaks'" (99).

Within this potential of everyday tactics, the act of walking emerges as a uniquely potent and fundamentally embodied form of enunciation. In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* de Certeau allocates a chapter to this discussion titled "Walking in the City". According to him it is an act that is not mere locomotion, but a way of inscribing one's story and will upon the urban text. Scholars like Riza affirm this by stating that, "Walking is characterized as a social activity, but at the same time it can be described as an isolated personal one, in the way that each walker unit has a personal character of tactile apprehension and kinaesthetic appropriation" (63). While Wunderlich describes it as "a way of at once discovering and transforming the city" (127). Therefore, walking constitutes a primary tactic through which the situated body: the body that has been disciplined, medicalised and marginalised can physically assert its presence.

This concept, which positions walking as a fundamental tactic of embodied resistance, provides a powerful and previously unapplied lens through which to examine the critical conversation around *Elena Knows*. Initial critiques, such as those by Mónica Flórez, have productively focused on the novel's deconstruction of genre, examining its "anti-detective and metaphysical elements" (39), while Patricia Varas has framed it as a feminist "parody of detective fiction" where the female body emerges "as the site where social crimes converge and multiple abuses take place" (162). This focus on structural subversion has been complemented by Spanish scholarship that pivots to the body itself. Scholars like Marina Bettaglio have explored the oppressive "sacralidad" (sacredness) of the maternal role (414) and María Celina Bortolotto, in "Los cuerpos de los otros," directly analyses the female body as an othered entity subjected to patriarchal mandates.

However, by stopping at the point of identifying the body as a site of control, this otherwise robust scholarship has overlooked the novel's deeper commentary on the body as an instrument of response. No study has yet undertaken a synthesised analysis that uses de Beauvoir's situation to ground Foucault's biopolitics and then apply de Certeau's tactics to explore how the novel's central walks constitute a walking rhetoric of defiance. Thus, the existing analysis successfully traces the elements of subjugation but fails to recognise the subtle, stubborn paths of resistance employed by the characters themselves. It is precisely within this gap: between the body as a regulated object and the body as a tactical agent, that this study will intervene, arguing that the mundane, physical act of walking in *Elena Knows* is the primary language through which Piñeiro's women reclaim their agency.

## Research Methodology

This paper will employ a qualitative textual analysis grounded in feminist and political theory. The primary focus will be on a close reading of *Elena Knows* focusing on passages that depict walking and bodily experiences. The narrative will be analysed in terms of theme, character and the interwoven timeline within which the three walks take place. Secondary sources will include scholarly writings on Piñeiro's works and on the relevant theoretical concepts. The approach is interdisciplinary; the text will be examined through the lens of de Certeau, Foucault and Beauvoir. It will systematically identify instances in the novel where walking or bodily struggle occur and then code those instances against the selected theories.

## The Body as Situation: Biopolitics and Everyday Resistance

The female body, in its manifold realities, has long been a central terrain for political and philosophical struggle. It is a site where external forces and internal experiences collide and where agency is both seized and subdued. The analysis of the fraught, deliberate walks of Elena, Rita and Isabel in Claudia Piñeiro's *Elena Knows* requires a theoretical lens that can account for three things: the body as a lived reality, the systematic powers that seek to control it and the mundane, yet radical, acts of resistance available within that constrained space. By putting Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the body as a situation, Michel Foucault's biopolitics and Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday practice into conversation, this paper creates a framework which posits that in a biopolitical order which administers and subdues female bodies, the act of walking becomes a critical tactical practice and a way to ascribe agency to a woman's situated existence.

Simone de Beauvoir's claim in her book *The Second Sex* that "All oppression creates a state of war" (849) provides the foundational and urgent premise for this conflict. The war she talks about is not a metaphor but a daily reality waged upon the body, which she defines not as a static object but as a dynamic "situation: it is our grasp on the world and our sketch of our project" (68). The body is our point of view and our means of engaging with and shaping our future. However, while Beauvoir names the conflict and its existential stakes, the specific mechanisms of this war require further mapping.

It is here that Michel Foucault's concept of biopower from his book *Society Must Be Defended* becomes essential. Biopower is the modern form of power that "manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile" (Foucault, *Society* 249). It doesn't just punish; it categorises and controls. All three women in the story occupy bodies that are in some way, shape, or form under biopolitical control against which they are waging a war. Yet a purely Foucauldian analysis will cast these women as mere products of an over determining power and passive recipients of a disciplinary society. That is not the case because despite the diverse controls over their body, be it disability, responsibility or the lack of reproductive rights each of these women in their own capacity resist.

In order to recognise this resistance this paper will utilise Michel de Certeau's political theory of everyday life from his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau provides the vocabulary for the everyday tactics of resistance. He talks about the power of the "Concept-city" (95) and the tactical practices of those who live "'downbelow,' beneath the thresholds at which visibility begins" (93). For these ordinary people, walking is not a mere movement; it is a space of enunciation that appropriates and subverts the urban system. Walking in this context, is a rhetoric, where a single painful step can stand for a whole struggle.

Together, these frameworks will enable a nuanced reading of *Elena Knows*. De Certeau's tactics will highlight the political meaning of movement, Foucault's biopolitics will uncover structures of bodily control and Beauvoir's existential phenomenology will centre the characters' lived femininity. Elena's, Rita's, and Isabel's bodies, each a specific "situation", entangled within biopolitical control, resist through their tactical everyday movement of walking. The walks are a direct corporeal challenge to the biopolitical administration that would prefer them to be static and managed. The analysis will thus reveal their walks as essential and embodied responses to the war declared upon their bodies.

### **Walking as Resistance: Embodied Agency in Three Women's Journeys**

The most radical acts are often the most mundane. Michel de Certeau's assertion that "To walk is to lack a place" (103) captures the relationship between the body in motion and the assertion of self. Walking in this context is far more than a means of getting from one point to another. It is a fundamental spatial practice through which individuals, particularly those whose bodies are disciplined or marginalised, can assert their presence on the world. This paper explores how in Claudia Piñeiro's *Elena Knows* the simple act of walking transforms into a critical form of resistance for its female characters, whose bodies are variously constrained by illness, patriarchal mandates and societal expectation.

In *Elena Knows*, the female body is perpetually inscribed by external powers, a condition Simone de Beauvoir encapsulates in her assertions that "The body...is our grasp of the world" (68). For the three central women this situation is one of constraint as their grasps are limited by intersecting regimes of control. The titular character Elena's body is disciplined by Parkinson's disease, a pathological authority that dictates her every movement. Her daughter Rita's able body is not free either; rather it is conscripted into the invisible labour of caregiving, its energies appropriated for the sustenance of another. Finally for Isabel, the reproductive rights of her body are forcibly seized by patriarchal and moralistic dictates. Together, their bodies exemplify the Foucauldian principle whereby power "manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile" (Foucault, *Society* 249). Their bodies are rendered useful for the needs of others and docile to the will of medical, familial and religious institutions. Consequently, when these disciplined and docile bodies elect to move, in moments of desperation, investigation or remembrance, their walks cease to be mere locomotion. Instead, they become a tactical refusal of docility.

The narrative architecture of *Elena Knows* is built upon a single, monumental act: the Parkinson's-afflicted walk of its protagonist. Elena's body, which she describes as a "walking purgatory, that sometimes, for brief periods, walks" (Piñeiro 76) is the central site of struggle. In this context, her movement is far more than simple travel. It is a Herculean exertion of will against the physical discipline imposed by her illness. Each step constitutes what Michel de Certeau theorises as the foundational practice of urban space: a "pedestrian speech act" (97). When de Certeau writes that walking "affirms, suspects, tries out transgresses, respects etc., the trajectories it 'speaks'" (99) he describes the precise nature of Elena's journey. Her body, in its halting and precarious progress, does exactly this. It suspects and questions the narrative of her daughter's death, it tries out paths of inquiry closed to the authorities and it transgresses the boundaries of her confined, medically managed existence. Thus, the fleeting moments where her "walking purgatory" mobilises are assertions of agency. It is a corporeal language of resistance spoken against the silencing forces of disease, patriarchy and institutional indifference.

Piñeiro painstakingly documents this process, “Standing in front of the chair she raises her right foot, she holds it up in the air, just a few centimetres, she moves it forward until it gets far enough past the left foot so that the movement can be called a step, then she lowers it...” (Piñeiro 14). This is not fluid mobility but a deliberate decomposition of movement into manageable units. It is here that de Certeau’s notion of walking as a process that “actualizes some of the spatial system’s possibilities” but also “moves about them and...invents others” (98) finds its expression. Elena’s body must invent a new painstaking relationship with space itself, transforming the simple act of stepping forward into a hard-won tactical victory.

Elena’s entire quest is, on one level, a stark admission of her body’s tactical limits. She possesses the lucid, painful awareness that “she won’t be able to uncover the truth unless she recruits another body to help her. A different body that can act in her place” (Piñeiro 56). Yet, in focusing on this ultimate dependency, she remains largely blind to the resistance her own body is enacting en route to that goal. While she may view her arduous locomotion as a mere, inefficient means to an end, it is, in fact, the very substance of her reclamation of agency. Each laborious step is an active rejection of the official, passive narrative offered by the police and an insistence on investigating her daughter’s death on her own terms.

This reclamation is physically manifested in her deliberate renegotiation of space. Her journey becomes an act of re-appropriating the very geography that was once policed by her daughter’s beliefs. The pivotal moment occurs when she comes across the black and white tiles outside the house of the midwife that performs abortions. Elena had long avoided stepping onto these tiles in order to “humour” Rita. However, now she “steps more confidently, calmly” (Piñeiro 24) onto the forbidden pavement. By consciously walking where she was once compelled to detour, she verbally dismantles Rita’s superstitions and spatially dismantles her control. In de Certeau’s terms, she seizes a spatial element; the tile, that was once a site of prohibition and transforms it through her practice, inventing a new, liberating meaning for it. This is walking not just as movement, but as the definitive rejection of an imposed path.

Similarly, Elena’s navigation is not merely a physical battle against her own body, but a conscious social strategy. Despite the immense difficulty of each movement, she continuously evaluates her potential routes, calculating the likelihood of encountering an acquaintance whose pity or unwanted condolences would undermine her autonomy. This meticulous pathfinding is a tactical effort to preserve the integrity of her mission from social interference. Her defiant independence is emphasised in a brief exchange with her daughter’s boyfriend, Roberto. When he expresses his surprise with the question, “You’re going to travel alone?” she responds by saying “I live alone, Roberto” (Piñeiro 28). Elena’s statement here shows how the condition of solitude which is so often pathologised for a woman of her age and physical condition is instead a sign of her personal capability and practical competence. Her journey is thus an extension of her life i.e. a deliberate, solitary practice in a world that expects her to be dependent. In choosing her path and walking it alone, Elena transforms what society views as a vulnerability into the very source of her strength and the precondition for her investigation.

Yet, even after the truth is revealed and the immediate necessity for her journey no longer exists, the practice of walking remains essential. Piñeiro writes, “she’ll have to walk back from the station to her house. Forwards and backwards and backwards and forwards, one, two, a hundred times” (Piñeiro 143). In this final, Sisyphean image, walking is stripped of its external goal and revealed as a fundamental mode of being. No longer a means to an end, it becomes an end in itself through which she can assert her presence and stubbornly inhabit a world designed for her docility. Her will to walk is synonymous with her will to live. Her motion is thus the purest expression of de Certeau’s concept of spatial practice.

If Elena's walk represents a tactical struggle against a body discipline by illness, her daughter Rita's relationship with walking reveals it as a pre-existing language of rebellion against the roles imposed upon her female able body. Long before her identity was consumed by the docile utility of a caregiver, Rita has appropriated locomotion as a tool of dissent in conflicts with her mother. Elena says that anytime she and Rita were in argument with each other, she would strategically accelerate "to walk several steps ahead, muttering angrily under her breath" (Piñeiro 17) to carve out a space of anger and autonomy. This subversive potential extended to her engagement with the geography of the town in terms of her morality. Rita weaponised her path, consciously refusing to tread on the black and white tiles before the midwife's house "as if just walking past the house were some sin" that could potentially "contaminate" (Piñeiro 24) her. Similarly, her refusal to walk to the church in the rain due to a fear of being struck by lightning was an act of bodily self-presentation that privileged her own safety over religious obligation. In these acts, Rita practiced what de Certeau identifies as a pedestrian rhetoric of *asyndeton* wherein she "selects and fragments the space traversed" (101). By omitting certain locations, she composes a map of her own.

However, this very self-assertion came at a cost, precisely as de Beauvoir theorises, "Any self-assertion will take away from her femininity and her seductiveness" (402). The novel meticulously documents this phenomenon. Elena confesses, "she could never imagine Rita as a mother" (Piñeiro 64) and openly questions her fertility. In societal norms, Rita's agency renders her progressively less legible as a woman. It is within this double bind; trapped between the self-negating role of a caregiver and desexualising penalty or self-assertion, that her final walk must be understood. In her moment of ultimate helplessness, Rita returns to the practice she knows best, pushing it to its absolute tragic limit. Her walk to the church in the rain is the ultimate transgressive trajectory and a dark perversion of her earlier cautious avoidance.

Hence, when Isabel questions Elena, "What could've been so terrible that she preferred to walk through the thunder and lightning she believed could kill her?" (Piñeiro 131) the answer does not lie in a single event but in the very anatomy of agency her walking embodies. By walking deliberately toward the lightning, she once fled, she inverts her earlier tactics of avoidance into a final, transcendent transgression. In this context, her death is not a passive succumbing to despair, but the definitive assertion of her will over a body and a destiny that societal, moral and familial dictates had cornered. In doing so Rita ensures that her final steps are not those of a docile caregiver.

Yet the very agency that Rita so fiercely cultivates possesses a terrible shadow; the propensity to misuse its power by scripting the lives of others. Her assertive walking through life pervades into a need to dictate the paths of those around her. As Elena observes, Rita believed she knew better about "how people should walk through life along the roads they'd walked down and the ones they hadn't, issuing decrees about what should and shouldn't be done" (Piñeiro 93). This audacity to command the moral and physical trajectories of others is what is responsible for the role she plays in Isabel's tragedy. In forcing Isabel to carry her pregnancy to term, Rita does not liberate; she imposes. She becomes an agent of the very patriarchal and moralistic systems she herself resists, enforcing a singular, rigid path upon another woman's body. "Women's mutual understanding comes from the fact that they identify themselves with each other; but for the same reason each is against the others" (Beauvoir 666). Rita, identifies with Isabel's female experience, yet simultaneously acts against her, transforming their potential alliance into a site of violent coercion.

Piñeiro's narration of the pivotal event from twenty years prior is framed through the raw, immediate collision of bodies in space. The memory unfolds as Rita arrives at Elena's home, first with "her body and then the other body, the one she was dragging" (Piñeiro 107), a chilling description that immediately establishes Isabel as a physical entity whose agency has been nullified. Rita explains she found Isabel vomiting on the black and white tiles in front of the midwife's house. Initially she feels concern, however, her subsequent intervention shifts from solidarity to coercion. When a weakened

Isabel refuses help, Rita's declaration "you can't even walk in the state you're in" (Piñeiro 109) is the foundational moment of stolen agency. Isabel's body is mid-movement, actively expelling the pregnancy and on the way to end it. Rita's intervention is a physical and ideological hijacking of Isabel's path. She does not see Isabel's journey for what it is; a desperate tactical act. Instead, she pathologises its physical aftermath, using the evidence of Isabel's struggle as justification to override her will, imposing her own religious and moral situation upon another woman's body in a clear exercise of biopower.

The tragedy of this encounter lies in the fact that Isabel's compromised state was the direct result of her most radical act of agency. It was her application of what de Certeau would call a tactical manoeuvre; a secret, oppositional use of the city to reclaim her body from an abusive husband and an unwanted pregnancy. As Isabel later confesses to Elena, "I've never been a strong woman, all the strength I'd mustered I lost that afternoon you and I first met" (Piñeiro 130). Her statement reveals the cruel paradox of the encounter: the very act of walking that constituted her most desperate bid for freedom was used by Rita as proof of her incapacity. Rita's rescue did not save Isabel's agency; it annihilated it revealing how the tactics of resistance can, unsettlingly, mirror the strategies of domination.

The annihilation of Isabel's agency is cemented through the literal control of her movement through space. She is not merely stopped; she is forcibly re-routed. Rita physically drags her from the tiles, then directs her to Elena's house and ultimately ensures she is returned to the home of the abusive husband she sought to escape. This series of forced relocations demonstrates how control over female reproduction is often exercised through the direct governance of mobility. Isabel's body is moved as an object, her own intended path erased and replaced with one that re-inscribes her into the roles of wife and mother against her will. In this way Piñeiro illustrates that the battle over a woman's body is fought not only ideologically but through the physical, tangible space she is permitted, or compelled, to walk.

The novel's strategies of domination consistently revolve around the dispossession of the female body, which becomes the site upon which external authority is violently imposed. Twenty years earlier, Rita and Elena, functioning as agents of Foucauldian biopolitics, disciplined Isabel's body to align it with a moral order that prioritised her reproductive usefulness. By forcibly redirecting her life, they demonstrate how power operates through the regulation of bodily movement itself. Yet the same logic ultimately turns against Rita. It is this terrifying absorption by "another person's body" (Piñeiro 144) as Isabel astutely observes, that Rita ultimately fears more than the lightning. Walking is thus utilised by all three women as a deliberate disruption of spatial order, embodying de Certeau's notion that walking generates "shadows and ambiguities" (101) within structured spaces. In completing this grim cycle, the novel reveals that within a system that relentlessly disciplines female bodies, the choice to direct one's own movement remains the most radical form of resistance.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that the novel *Elena Knows* recalibrates walking from a basic physiological function into a critical embodied language through which its female characters reclaim agency from the forces that seek to annul it. An in-depth analysis of three interconnected journeys displays that walking functions as the primary language of resistance in the novel. Elena, Rita and Isabel negotiate, defy and reclaim the agency from the biopolitical and patriarchal structures that seek to immobilise them. Elena's pilgrimage through the city transforms her debilitated body from a medicalised object into a subject that rebels against its erasure. Rita's final walk is a destructive self-reclamation in which she physically walks away from the future of self-effacing caregiving

prescribed to her, establishing her own sovereignty over her body. Conversely, Isabel's interrupted journey two decades prior illustrates the violent denial of the same sovereignty as her bodily autonomy is literally intercepted and rerouted according to another's dogma. Ultimately, Piñeiro's novel achieves a necessary reevaluation of the mundane. It posits that under regimes of power that discipline the female body through illness, duty and reproductive mandate, the simple act of determining one's own direction; whether successfully completed, fatally chosen or brutally denied, becomes a deeply political act.

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