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The Father-Daughter Relationship in Claudia Piñeiro's Novel of Formation, *Un comunista en calzoncillos*

Abstract

Un comunista en calzoncillos (2013) is a novel by Claudia Piñeiro that does not belong to the crime genre. This autobiographical text that mainly centers on the writer when she was an adolescent is quite distinct within Piñeiro's work. In two previous studies of this text, I have examined both the adolescent as an enigmatic child—and the female gender roles available to her—and the figure of the father, touching on his manliness and his performance of a non-hegemonic masculinity in a patriarchal society. I build on these pieces to analyze the father-daughter relationship in *Un comunista en calzoncillos*. The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, drawing on insights from psychoanalysis, I explore the father-daughter relationship in Piñeiro's novel. In the second part, I suggest that this text is a novel of formation. It is my contention that the author's relationship with her father constitutes a vital aspect of her formation as a future writer.

Keywords

Claudia Piñeiro, novel of formation, *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, father-daughter

The Father-Daughter Relationship in Claudia Piñeiro's Novel of Formation,
Un comunista en calzoncillos

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In an interview with María Celina Bortolotto, Claudia Piñeiro stated that *Un comunista en calzoncillos* ('A Communist in Underwear') "no tiene línea policial" (56) 'is not a crime novel.' This 2013 autobiographical text that mainly centers on the writer's adolescence is quite distinct within Piñeiro's work. My previous work on this text has examined the adolescent as an enigmatic child—along with the female gender roles available to her—and the figure of the father, touching on his manliness and his performance of a non-hegemonic masculinity in a patriarchal society. I build on these two pieces to analyze the father-daughter relationship in *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, a text that can either be seen as a novel of autobiographical development (*entwicklungsroman*), which "stresses the hero's psychological development, concentrating on personality formation" (Seret 6), or a work of autofiction, which Cecilia Esparza describes as "an account revealing the author's genealogy, or rather an intimist narrative examining personal processes" (486). The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, drawing on insights from psychoanalysis, in particular the concept of intersubjectivity, I explore the father-daughter relationship in a patriarchal society. In Piñeiro's text, intersubjectivity makes the narrator conscious of her family's class standing. In the second part, I suggest that because of the special bonds between father and daughter, this text is a novel of formation. It is my contention that the author's relationship with her father constitutes a vital aspect of her formation as a future writer.

To understand the father-daughter relationship in *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, it is germane to rely on psychoanalytical insights. Jessica Benjamin characterizes intersubjectivity as a crucial factor in the formation of the self, given that assertion and recognition are two complementary processes for any individual to establish intersubjective bonds with other human beings. Benjamin defines recognition as "the response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self" (12). Therefore, intersubjectivity refers to special bonds between two people. Benjamin also adds that "the intersubjective view maintains that the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects" (20). Intersubjective attachment to others is beneficial for the development of human beings. For her part, Julia Kristeva explains that "a given subject will find different occurrences to be more or less traumatic according to the type of relation to the other that has marked his [or her] life since his [or her] early years" (45). This assertion holds that strong ties with others may help mitigate trauma for some people. In *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, the protagonist describes

her intersubjective bonds with her father and her interactions with him at a crucial period in her life (during her adolescence), when she was developing her identity. This period coincided with her realization about the interconnectedness of social relations in the small town of Burzaco where she grew up. At times, the narrating daughter of Piñeiro's novel appears torn between father and community but displays her intersubjectivity by examining her father's humanity. Because intersubjectivity entails awareness, Benjamin holds that "recognition is, thus, reflexive" (21). The protagonist displays gestures of love and appreciation towards her father as she contemplates his triumphs and trials.

In *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, the intimate reflections about the narrator's father hark back to the protagonist's adolescence and come to light once she has grown up (and possibly because of her literary success). In the novel, the father-daughter relationship is dialogical, that is to say, based on several anecdotes involving these characters during a crucial six-month period (December 1975-June 1976) that took place during the narrator's passage from childhood to adolescence. As she reflects on her younger self, she pens her recollections of this consequential stage in her life, shedding light on an underexplored pair: the father and daughter. In her feminist study focusing on contemporary Anglophone literature, Barbara Sheldon notes that "while much research on the family has been conducted in recent years, most of it has centered around the mother-child, mother-son, or father-son dyads, making fathers the 'forgotten parents' and daughters 'the forgotten offspring'" (8). Guided by her memories, Piñeiro rescues her "forgotten father" as she believes that her significant standing as an acclaimed writer encompasses a duty to represent others. As she states in an interview, "A veces tenés la obligación de representar una voz que no es solamente tuya sino que es de varias personas y si no tomás ese lugar, queda vacío" (n.p.) 'Sometimes you have the responsibility to represent a voice other than your own one, that belongs to different people and if you do not occupy that place, it remains empty.'¹ Among the voices that she represents is the paternal one. The successful adult daughter contemplates the challenges that her father faced, and using her platform as an intellectual, reclaims him in an act of recognition and love. I will expand on this in the second part of this piece, but now I continue addressing the setting of Piñeiro's reflection about her father.

The narrator's love and concern for her father activate a deep exploration of his identity. The text of *Un comunista en calzoncillos* meticulously dissects the father and his position in society. On one hand, this exploration is part of the writer's broader endeavor of analyzing the adults in her life. As an adolescent, she seeks to understand who they really are, what they represent, what they hide, and

¹ All translations are mine.

what their motives are for doing so. However, among the grownups, the father appears as the most intriguing: “la altura del propio padre marca un límite, una cota, para bien o mal, con las que se mide a todos los hombres, los que ya conocemos y los que aparecerán en la vida futura” (40) ‘the height of one’s own father marks a limit, a stature, that for better or worse, is used to measure all men, those whom we already know and those who will appear later in life.’ Sheldon explains the father’s role in assessing other men: “the father transports culturally determined concepts of masculinity and femininity” (29). On the other hand, the adult narrator appreciates her father as a crucial influence on her formation as an independent thinker even though during her youth, she sometimes resented her father’s idiosyncrasies and suggestions. Nonetheless, she pays homage to this significant progenitor who motivated her to be different and to stand her ground, both habits that would later contribute to her finding her voice as a writer and a feminist activist.

Un comunista en calzoncillos presents the daughter and her father in a patriarchal society. The narrator’s memories take readers back to the mid-1970s in Argentina, a patriarchy in which “women are weak, and men are strong” (Johnson 30). In Piñeiro’s text, the father-daughter relationship is shaped by and within a patriarchal society (Rocha, “Claudia Piñeiro” 3). Here the importance of patriarchy is worth taking into account, as Pauline Palmer holds that “concepts of patriarchy and patriarchal relations hold an immense appeal for writers of fiction” (69). Female writers from different patriarchal societies have examined these topics and the father-daughter relationship in their literary writings. As a text penned by a feminist writer, *Un comunista en calzoncillos* unflinchingly addresses the gender dynamics of Argentina in the 1970s and the narrator’s father’s social standing. By immersing herself in such an investigation of her past and that of the community in which she was raised, Piñeiro experiments with a genre that has recently been cultivated, mainly since the 1970s, by women writers from different geographical areas who are interested in scrutinizing patriarchy and the gender dynamics of their societies. This type of writing reveals that some female adolescents, conscious of their unequal relationship with their fathers, see the authority of their progenitors as desirable. In these cases, the psychoanalytical concept of the phallus helps clarify these adolescents’ attraction to influence. As Craig Owens explains, “the phallus is the signifier” (489): it is “the privileged signifier, the signifier of privilege, of power and prestige that accrue to the male in our society” (490). In patriarchy, men are possessors of the phallus and benefit from its power, a sway that is coveted by both boys and girls, albeit in different degrees. But this psychoanalytical dynamic does not apply equally to all father-daughter relationships, as each possesses different features, ranging from authoritarian to more lenient ones. Benjamin provides another interpretation of the phallus: “the father and his phallus come to symbolize the child’s whole sense of difference between himself and adults, as well as

between men and women” (150). This perception of difference points to the power imbalance between male adults and children.

In her text, Piñeiro analyzes her father’s influence on her own development. It is important to note that, as Nora Domínguez observes, “la hija que narra ha alcanzado la madurez” (20) ‘the daughter who narrates has reached maturity.’ While the narrator returns to her past, the novel is written from her adult perspective, focusing on her life, her father’s life, and that of Argentina. The blending of the personal with the political is typical of novels that examine the father-daughter relationship. In German novels of this type, Norgard Klages identifies that “the personal aspect on which writers concentrate, centers on the father, and the discussion of the older generation often includes their political past in accusatory terms” (41). Like the novels studied by Klages that revisit the traumatic Nazi period, Piñeiro’s text is set in a tumultuous time in Argentina: the final months of Isabel Perón’s presidential term (December 1975-June 1976) before a military *coup d’état* established a dictatorship that persecuted leftist dissidents. For Amisadai Cortés García, the rendition, in Piñeiro’s novel, of tense months due to a deteriorating political situation is crucial (136). Within this specific political context that polarized Argentina and the community in which the narrator grew up, *Un comunista* appears as an in-depth examination of her family life in which her father was a leader. The narrating voice seems to open up a debate about whether he was an authority figure or an authoritarian and whether he benefitted or not from patriarchy. Because of this exploration, Piñeiro, like other Argentine female writers, characterizes her family life as somewhat dysfunctional (Punte 238). Nevertheless, she focuses on her father and his lasting impact on her formation.

The female protagonist’s intersubjective recognition of her father entails understanding his struggles. She describes him as an ambitious man who became a selfless breadwinner: “mi padre que siempre creyó que estaba para hacer cosas mucho más importantes si el mundo no se hubiera confabulado en su contra, hizo lo mejor que pudo para cumplir con sus obligaciones: vender lo que fuera tocando el timbre de casa en casa” (23) ‘my father who always believed that he was destined for more important things if the world had not conspired against him, did his best to fulfill his obligations: selling whatever he could ringing doorbells from house to house.’ The paternal cost of renouncing his interests is unmistakable for his watchful daughter. If the previous quotation from the perspective of the adult narrator presents him as a dreamer, the adolescent, nonetheless, used to believe in his capacities: “Creía, como él, que estaba para otra cosa, que se merecía un trabajo mejor” (19) ‘Like him, I believed that he could do better, that he deserved a better job.’ In this statement, the narrator shows empathy towards her father as she expresses her belief that he was meant for greater things and admits that he undertook unskilled jobs and, at times, their family experienced downward social mobility, a development that deeply frustrated him. As head of the family, the father

prioritized his duty to provide for his household, greatly impacting the father-daughter bond.

One crucial aspect of Piñeiro's text that has not been analyzed yet, which explains much about the father-daughter bond, is the effect of the family's social class on the daughter. In *Daddy's Girl*, Valerie Walkerdine stresses the role of class in the formation of girls' identities in the UK. Class status is significant in *Un comunista en calzoncillos* and is mainly associated with the father's role as provider for a family tenaciously holding on to their middle-class status. The novel emphasizes this struggle in its opening sentence: "ese verano, el verano siguiente a que lo despidieran de su trabajo, mi padre sostuvo la economía familiar vendiendo turboventiladores" (17) 'that summer, the summer after he was laid off, my father supported our family by selling turbofans.' This sentence introduces a crucial dilemma of the female protagonist's narration: does her family belong to the middle class or not? The daughter's anxiety about her family's class status triggers feelings of shame and guilt, but also a deep connection with her father. Feminist scholar Sandy Brewer, who has studied the father-daughter relationship and class consciousness in the UK, holds that females raised in a working-class environment are aware of "their working-class father's subordinate position in the world outside the home" (405) and thus see their "father(s) as being vulnerable to the stresses and strain of the outside world" (406). Brewer argues persuasively that the conventional idea of adults protecting children from problems and negative life events, such as accidents, deaths, or changes in fortune, is only reserved for middle-class minors, because working-class and poor children usually have their lives upended by these occurrences that irremediably destroy their sense of security and stability. Unlike Benjamin, who states that "the father and his phallus come to symbolize the child's whole sense of difference between himself and adults, as well as between men and women" (150), Brewer suggests that the power imbalance between the genders is similar to the one between parents and children from different social classes: upper and upper-middle-class fathers stand for power, while lower-middle-class and working parents experience powerlessness, just as their children do (404-06).

Un comunista en calzoncillos displays the ways in which the daughter perceives her father's different jobs and the link between his success at work and his moods at home. In working-class families, Brewer explains, the father must "work in order to maintain the family and sometime suffering—sacrificing himself—emotionally and physically as a result of that responsibility" (407). Aware of her father's sacrifice for their family and in an effort to shield him from feeling disappointed by the products he sells, the daughter secretly supports his work as a peddler of turbofans: "Al turbo que teníamos en casa yo misma, todos los días, le repasaba las varillas con una franela, una por una, para que él no notara la suciedad" (18) 'Every day I myself would dust with a rag, one by one, the rods of the turbo that we had at home so that he would not notice the dirt.' It is in the daughter's

protective role that the typical power difference between father and daughter is altered: in the usual narrative of the Oedipus complex, the father whose phallus is associated with hegemony and prestige, acts as guardian of and authority figure for his children, but in *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, the adolescent recognizes the weaknesses of paternal authority and protects her father from noticing the flaws in the items he sells. What is important to highlight here is that the daughter takes over the duty to prop up her father and his endeavors, covering up his weaknesses and his difference from other fathers.

Piñeiro's novel illustrates the tension generated by, on one hand, the protagonist's father's embodiment of Otherness, and, on the other, the daughter's desire to belong. The father's status as an Other in Argentine society is the result of his political sympathies which, though progressive for upper-middle-class citizens, were highly unusual in the tight-knit middle-class community of Burzaco, and thus had to be carefully guarded by family members and hidden from friends and neighbors.² While Piñeiro briefly mentions her father's activism as a union representative (18), she also depicts a private moment when he lets down the apolitical mask he wore in public. One night, she finds him listening to Gian Franco Pagliaro's rendition of Héctor Cabrera's song "Las cosas que me alejan de tí" 'The Things That Drive Me Away from You,' which in the 1970s became a well-known protest song in Latin America. She first interprets this episode as longing for a woman, but this anecdote clearly reveals the extent of the father's political stance: supporting dissident ideas alone, at night, and inside his house. For her, he is a communist wearing underwear, instead of fighting in the streets or raising the awareness of the poor of the continent. For the adolescent girl, on these occasions, he was emotionally absent, in a place where she could not reach him. Nonetheless, his underground rebellion spreads to a local matter, conflicting with his daughter's goal of being considered on equal footing with her friends. This topic is so significant for her that it appears as the title of the first chapter of the novel: "Mi padre y la bandera" 'My father and the flag.' Through her friends, she learns that a group of influential members of their town are planning to have a monument built to celebrate the Argentine flag recognized as the first of its kind. Although this project may seem trivial—in fact the writer's father, upon learning about it, expresses that the people behind the initiative "está muy al pedo" (35) 'are very bored'—, it shows his opposition to the norms, institutions, and activities of the inhabitants of Burzaco, his daughter's universe. In every culture, honoring the flag represents celebrating the cultural specificity of a given country, its past successes

² The former stance was epitomized by Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1928-1967), an Argentine medical student who witnessed extreme poverty upon traveling through South America. Guevara's awareness led him to abandon his bourgeois life and fight for revolutionary change in Cuba (1955-1959), Congo (1965), and finally in Bolivia (1967).

on battlefields as well as its painful and heroic defeats. It provides cultural continuity to the nation, bringing to the fore the valiant acts of founding fathers and national heroes. It also serves to ensure both loyalty to the nation and compliance with authorities. For the adolescent, her father's opposition to the monument conflicts with his paternal responsibilities. As scholar of father-daughter relationships Linda Nielsen states, good fathering provides "social capital. Social capital is any act that strengthens the children's connection to the community, to school, or to the workforce in ways that promote their well-being" (55). Following this definition, the father fails to provide his daughter with social capital. Consequently, the writer remembers herself learning about his lack of interest in the town's collective project and worrying about how her family's lack of participation may impact her standing among her friends: "¿Y qué les digo si me preguntan por qué no van a las reuniones?" (35) 'And what do I say if they ask me why you don't go to the meetings?' In this question, we see the anxiety that the daughter experiences when faced with her father's decision of not taking part in the town's patriotic undertaking of celebrating an important symbol of the Argentine nation. In this episode, she learns that nonconformism leads to loneliness. However, we also see her acceptance of her father's opinion, even though his distance from this civic project marks him again, and more evidently, as an outsider whose decisions affect his daughter's standing among her friends.³

Another factor that impinges on the father's Otherness is his status as an immigrant. As a relative newcomer to Argentine culture, what is the father able to culturally bequeath to his daughter? Piñeiro also tackles this question in her discussion of her community's plans for a monument to the national flag. Her implicit inquiry in *Un comunista en calzoncillos* is how her father could be an authority within her family if he refused to socialize with those with social, political, and economic power. Where did his authority come from? Could there be a law of her—different, friendless—father (real) opposed to the (symbolic) Law of the Father? And more fundamentally, could her father's power be construed from the margins and through resistance? By implicitly posing these questions, the daughter points to one of the master plots of feminist novels about fathers identified by Sheldon: "the maturing daughter becomes aware of an 'element of lack' in her relation to her father" (24). The adult daughter of *Un comunista en calzoncillos* is conscious of her father's non-hegemonic position, which negatively affected her belonging in the local community. However, she also presents her strong connection with her father, whose non-hegemonic status she respects and admires.

In *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, the female protagonist reveals her admiration for her father's interest in teaching her the importance of sports and

³ Benjamin explains that "children no longer take their parents, especially their fathers, as their ideal, but distribute identificatory love promiscuously in the peer group and among the superstars of commodity culture" (139).

physical training, both associated with the middle class. She highlights her father's aptitude for playing tennis, portraying him as an outstanding sportsman. She also explains his willpower for daily physical training, even within the limited confines of their small house. His mantra "el deporte es salud" (61) 'training is health' was a non-negotiable, as he insisted that his family learn to play tennis and frequently exercise: "en mi calidad de hija fui entrenada por la fuerza durante varios años" (63) 'as a daughter, I was forced to train for years.' Although she mentions his criticism of her mediocre running, having her father supervise her physical training was an uncommon activity in the mid-1970s, but one that allowed the daughter to enjoy his attention. It is also in this leisure activity that the father asserts his talents and authority. As an expert, he passes on his knowledge to his daughter and instills in her notions of persistence and endurance, hence, the hobby becomes a learning opportunity for the adolescent. Curiously, in this shared hobby, father and daughter could claim belonging to the middle class, as training distracted both of them from concerns about the family's financial status. In addition, they saw training as a habit for self-improvement, one in which the father leads as a coach. In his instructional role, he pays individualized attention to his daughter and instills in her significant values related to her holistic education. According to the renowned sociologist Gino Germani, access to instruction was one of the key features of the Argentine middle class (Visacovsky and Garguin 8). Hence, the father's coaching reassures his daughter about her class belonging and his authority: he is in charge, and she can enjoy carefree moments, and these moments of leisure define their middle-class belonging. Speaking of the bonding between fathers and daughters in Japanese literature, Esperanza Ramírez-Christensen holds that "the father-daughter pair is at once the most superfluous and the most revealing. It is superfluous because the daughter's traditional structural role in the middle-class family has been negligible" (1). By focusing on her father, Piñeiro is also claiming a space for her younger self: she sheds light on both her own past and her father's, whose enduring teachings she values because they constituted a challenge to tradition and patriarchy.

Piñeiro expresses a formidable debt to her uncommon father for his unusual dedication to her. In *Creation of the Sacred*, Walter Burkert holds that in Greek tales paternal authority ensures continuity through the son: "the father-son relationship is the vehicle of many cultural traditions" (30). Nevertheless, in *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, even though the narrator mentions her younger brother, her father's male heir who in a patriarchal society stands as a nexus of continuity, the father privileges birth order. For him, his heir was his firstborn: his daughter. Sheldon holds that "the father usually chooses the eldest daughter, elevating her to what Irigaray calls Daddy's princess" (31). Given his choice, "the daughter was her father's valuable investment" (Ramírez-Christensen 4). The writer's father devotes his efforts to making his daughter a freethinker despite her desire to conform to Burzaco's mainstream mentality. Although he, mindful of gender roles under

patriarchy, acknowledges the gender limitations that can constrain her future— “Si no fueras mujer, hasta podrías llegar a ser presidenta de la República” (93) ‘If you were not a woman, you could even end up being the president of the Republic’—, he persists in teaching her. Curiously, the previous statement was uttered when the first Argentine female president, Isabel Martínez de Perón, was in office (1974-1976), but perhaps the father discounted Ms. Perón, who was politically inexperienced and acceded to the presidency only because of her late husband’s passing. Contrary to the nepotism and political games of the Peróns, the narrator’s father expresses his belief in merit and in his daughter’s demonstrated capacity to achieve positive outcomes. This belief speaks of the robust bond between father and daughter that transcends the confines of the family as it involves considering the national community. Brewer asserts that “political involvement is firmly rooted in personal (childhood) experiences and in concerns which are viewed as part of a system of reciprocal relationships and collective struggle for social change: a system which is rooted in a sense of solidarity, itself founded not on a gendered but on a classed identity” (402). And closely related to social change, two British scholars have identified the pivotal role of girls in the twenty-first century. Catherine Driscoll states that “girls have also been crucial markers of cultural specificity and social change” (7). For the father in *Un comunista en calzoncillos*, his daughter embodies the promise of a brighter (less nepotistic) future. As such, she is a “project” in which he invests time and guidance, and years later, she recognizes his lasting influence. For her part, Anita Harris reminds us that “material investments in young women have also been deeply class and race stratified” (15). Indeed, the father’s attention to his daughter’s future refers to a certain cultural capital that is passed along, but it also creates a conundrum in him. What is he able to teach her about her native country when for him it was unknown? Nonetheless, aware of the challenges that her father had to overcome, the adult daughter wholeheartedly appreciates his mentoring. Her close relationship with her father inspires the daughter to identify with him, and he with her. Brewer sees that deep connection as one that encourages daughters’ efforts of “remembering and memorializing fathers” (409) to withdraw from the world or “go to war” (409), thus the political becomes personal and vice versa. To honor the father, the daughter is forced to abandon certain feminine traits such as silence and submissiveness, for, as Owens explains, “in order to speak, to represent herself, a woman assumes a masculine position” (489), a position left vacant by Piñeiro’s father’s powerlessness and one that the writer attained thanks to her own merit as a writer and an activist. And this brings us to explore the literary genre that best describes *Un comunista en calzoncillos*.

Un comunista en calzoncillos: A Novel of Formation

Un comunista en calzoncillos could be classified as a writer's novel of development. Roberta Seret explains that the *entwicklungsroman* 'autobiographical novel of development' focuses on the development of a personality (6). In her novel, Piñeiro discloses that in her teenage years, she sought to socially conform to her friends' opinions. As a "normal" female adolescent, she privileged connectedness with her peers over autonomy. Nonetheless, her father's expectations for her were many and revolved around his desire to make her an independent critical thinker who did not blindly follow the herd. Speaking about her dilemma of fitting in or being different, the narrator admits that "ir contra lo que debía ser, contra lo que los demás esperaban de mí, era algo que no me resultaba fácil" (103) 'going against what I had to be, against what others expected from me, was not easy for me.' With this confession, the daughter-narrator describes the arduous process of identity formation in which "adolescents begin to question their identifications, as well as their capacities to speak and symbolize" (Kristeva 136). What becomes clear in the pages of *Un comunista en calzoncillos* is the fact that the adolescent Piñeiro could not utter many of the thoughts related to her socio-emotional development. Years later, she writes in *Escribir un silencio* ('Write a silence') (2023): "Sospecho que lo que escribo nace del silencio. Porque así fue mi niñez, del silencio a la escritura. De la resistencia a hablar, al placer de construir un texto" (13) 'I suspect that what I write emerges from silence. Because that was my childhood: from silence to writing. From resistance to speech to the pleasure of building a text.' In Piñeiro's case, self-censorship seems to have sparked her creative writing. For Seret, the personality traits of sensitivity and introspection are key elements of the artist-protagonist (9). Nonetheless, the adolescent also takes measured risks.

The theme of challenging the existing order is also present in *Un comunista en calzoncillos*. Scholar María José Punte, who has analyzed the figure of girls in recent narratives by Argentine female narrators, holds that "todas las niñas se rebelan" (247) 'all girls rebel.' In Piñeiro's text, readers get a sense of the emotional and psychological cost of rebellion for the female adolescent. Curiously, the young protagonist of Piñeiro's novel associates standing up to her father's teachings with isolation. The torn adolescent, who wants to be happy and carefree like her brother and friends, but is attuned to both her father's and society's expectations, experiences emotional growing pains. That inner turmoil is part of her psychological development, particularly because her friends' universe clashes with her father's vision of what she should be. Yet, the laws of her father greatly differ from the Law of the Father. Thus, the tacit issue that the young Piñeiro has to solve in the months in which the novel takes place are: how can she rebel if her father encourages her to stand out, even though at that precise moment in time, he is

standing down, self-censoring his communist ideas? How can she be a dissident in her local community in the mid-1970s at a time when compliance with middle-class standards is expected?

Here it is important to briefly pause to touch on the importance of Piñeiro's self-portrayal. Julia Kushigian, who has studied the Latin American *bildungsroman* or novel of education, states that "writing the story of one's own development in life is not a culturally neutral act" (18). More recently, Esparza uses the term autofiction, coined by Serge Doubrovsky in the 1970s, to refer to texts that provide insights about writers' lives. *Un comunista en calzoncillos* can certainly be classified as autofiction, especially when the dedication is considered: "A Hernán, mi hermano, único testigo. El sabe cuánto de ficción y cuánto de realidad hay en esta historia" 'To Hernán, my brother and sole witness. He knows how much fiction and how much truth there is in this story.' Penned in the second decade of twenty-first century, *Un comunista en calzoncillos* was published after Piñeiro quickly became a best-selling author and the recipient of the Clarín award for *Las viudas de los jueves* (*Thursday Night Widows*) (2005). Hence, this novel that uncovers intimate details about the writer's family constitutes a way for the celebrated writer to map her voyage from obedience to autonomy, a crucial feature for any artist and intellectual, especially for one, like Piñeiro, who offers a critical view of Argentine middle-class society in her *noir* fiction. From her successful present as an established author, Piñeiro rescues her young self and the difficult choices that she had to make during her teen years amid a repressive political, religious, and social environment that rewarded obedience over independence while middle-class status implied social belonging. Therefore, she chronicles how she honed her observation skills, learned about self-regulation, and relied on clues to put together the pieces of the oppressive political and tense familial contexts in which she was immersed. Thus, the novel gives voice to a previously silent adolescent subjectivity. More importantly, by highlighting her former silence, the daughter-narrator shows her transformation from reserved adolescent to her current position of expression that includes not only her fiction, but also her activism. Seret describes this self-representation in the novel of development: "the artist-author passes through realms of his [or her] own psyche and youth, reliving experiences and situations that he [or she] wishes to immortalize" (12). In Piñeiro's novel, the artist-narrator also memorializes her father and his role in her development.

Un comunista en calzoncillos also has elements of the *bildungsroman*. Whereas this novel does not present all the phases of the literary genre, it touches on the transitional state of adolescence, and the loss of innocence in that passage from girlhood to young adult is one of the features of the *bildungsroman*. Kushigian states that the Spanish American *bildungsroman* aims "to communicate human values in the endeavor to be the self beyond the self and to seek social justice" (19). Both traits are evident in Piñeiro's novel: she describes her father's values

(consistency, determination, critical thinking) and brings attention to the plight of immigrants, like her own father who managed to provide for his family despite several setbacks. The father's teachings resulted in his daughter's subtle personal and political rebellion. Piñeiro narrates that she was selected to be a standard-bearer, a merit-based honor, during a national holiday parade that, given the recently established military dictatorship, was an event for all civic-minded citizens to prove their loyalty to the Armed Forces as they celebrated the creation of a new national flag. The novel's plot turns to the celebration of flag day in June 1976 and the civic parade in which school children had to participate. While the adolescent's achievement is proudly celebrated within the family, her father reacts in a different way, admonishing her: "vas a tener que elegir" (105) 'you will have to choose.' This hefty command prompts the mother to intercede on her daughter's behalf: "Aflojá, Gumer, es una chica, llevar la bandera el día del desfile no la hace cómplice" (105) 'Loosen up, Gumer, she is a girl, carrying the flag the day of the parade does not make her an accomplice.' As a student, the daughter cannot refuse to take part in the parade; however, the paternal stance encourages her to resist authoritarianism and top-down dogma.

The ending of *Un comunista en calzoncillos* brings to the fore the writer's father's central role in her formation as well as his marginal status. When the writer's mother intercedes, stating that their daughter's participation does not make her an accomplice, he replies, "A ella sí, porque entiende" (105) 'She is because she understands.' This statement reveals the father's high bar for his only daughter, inciting her to reject complicity and submissiveness, as he had taught her, at a time when political dissidents were harshly repressed. The father's reply also exposes her difference: she is the one who understands what others do not. His confidence in her capacity to comprehend the stakes of her choice speaks of his robust knowledge of her, but he is unaware of the conflict that she experiences at age thirteen: should she be like her father and risk ostracism or be different from him and face his disapproval? What could be the consequences of her choice? Following her father's prompt, the daughter decides to rebel. As she publicly defies her teacher's instructions and expectations, *Un comunista en calzoncillos* gives the father a tiny victory. Almost forty years later, the daughter describes in meticulous detail the parade route in which she took part as a standard-bearer, the expected deportment of the local school students, and the importance of this civic event. She also recounts her silent yet visible act of resistance against all the authorities (school, local, and national). When her teacher orders the school group to march, looking at the box where the authorities are, Piñeiro states, "mis amigas miraron, supuse, ...yo no miré" (117) 'my friends looked, I supposed, ... I did not look'. Despite the directions to look to the left, the writer looks straight ahead, and when the teacher leading the school group realizes her disobedience or minor transgression, she compels her to follow the rehearsed steps, but to no avail. The

daughter who, throughout the pages of the novel, has resented her father's difference and lack of hegemonic power and courage takes a public stand: in front of numerous witnesses, she becomes "her father's daughter," choosing difference over compliance. While usually following the father's directives implies the insertion into the Law of the Father and patriarchal continuity, in this case, the writer's act of defiance precisely challenges the compliance expectations of her schoolteacher.

In this act of adolescent self-assertion, the father becomes a witness to her transgression: "Escondido detrás de ese árbol... tratando de pasar inadvertido. Vi a mi padre. ¿Era mi padre?" (117) 'Hidden behind that tree... trying to pass unnoticed. I saw my father. Was it my father?.' The question undermines the statement about the father's presence at a parade of which he disapproves, or at least introduces the doubt: was this fact or fiction? The final characterization also appears fictional: "¿Era? ... Se reía como un chico. Algo de ese chico se metió dentro de mí. Festejé con él" (118) 'Was it my father? ... He laughed like a child. Something of that child entered into me. I celebrated with him.' This joyful celebration in which father and daughter partake speaks of their complicity and the strong ties between them, similar to the ones they shared years before, as seen on the cover of the book, when they were happy and relaxed, unconstrained by customs and orders. At that time, they were having fun splashing in the sea and the father was protecting his daughter. The ending of *Un comunista en calzoncillos* equally reveals such a pure and genuine paternal pleasure that stands in stark contradiction to the writer's usual description of his gloomy behavior, perhaps indicating the possibility that his mischievous smile was imagined. And to stress that probability, Piñeiro writes, "en esa sombra que era, tal vez, mi padre" (188) 'in that shadow that was, perhaps, my father.' That ghostly quality may also signal that the father never attended the parade, missing his daughter's proudest moment of academic achievement. Nonetheless, shadows have the power to be remembered, called upon, and used for guidance. Throughout the novel, the father appears as a man who challenges himself by being physically fit and thinking critically about the political developments of Argentina in the mid-1970s. More importantly, he is an involved father to his only daughter whom he coaches and mentors, living in her lasting memories and strong moral values.

To conclude, *Un comunista en calzoncillos* is Piñeiro's most autobiographical work that also lends itself to be classified as autofiction, because the workings of memory blend fact and fiction. But above all, *Un comunista en calzoncillos* is a novel of autobiographical development which the acclaimed author centers on her father at a crucial period of her development: her transition to adolescence when she became aware of issues of power and social class that affected both her father's and her family's standing in the community. While at times, the narrator's views of her father appear judgmental, she evidently relies on

her bonds of love for him as she writes this text. Their intersubjective ties greatly influence her as she discovers her father's strengths and weaknesses. In critically examining him, the narrator pays him homage for inspiring her to be bold and different, characteristics that have proven to be crucial for her *métier* as a writer and a feminist activist. Because of the father's impact on the writer's personality, *Un comunista en calzoncillos* is the writer's novel of formation. Hence, father and daughter are inexorably united through lasting bonds of love. In the pages of the novel, Piñeiro celebrates her father's unique teachings that have allowed her to become a voice for those who have been silenced, challenging mainstream ideas and choosing an exceptional path as a writer.

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