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**Identity in Rhythm: The Question of Dance When It
Comes to One's Identity**

Bakalářská práce

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PROHLÁŠENÍ

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem v ní všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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1 Introduction

Among the intricacies of human experience, the question of identity emerges and is shaped by various influences, experiences, and interactions. Within the diverse modern environment, the realm of dance stands as a unique challenge, where movement becomes a language through which individuals express, explore, and embody their sense of self. Ballet, among all forms of dance, occupies the leading position, blending grace, discipline, and artistry into a transcendent expression of the human spirit. This thesis explores the significant influence of dance on the formation and evolution of an individual's identity. There are two key research questions, to which the thesis is seeking the answer: How does dance shape the development of identity, and what factors play essential roles in shaping this influence throughout their lives. By investigating these questions, the aim is to uncover the intricate relationship between dance and identity, providing insights into the diverse aspects of this phenomenon as depicted in modern literature.

The research of understanding what dance is and studying the relationship between dance and literature can provide context into diverse perceptions of dance within literary contexts, pointing out the role of dance as a thematic element in literature. Along with cultural and historical background, it describes a comprehensive overview of individuals' attitudes toward ballet in both Russia and the US. These two nations define the context in the three modern literary works used in this thesis. Despite the books being fiction, this thesis argues about factors which may be influential during the development of one's identity connected to dance which is discussed by offering an analysis of the main characters' behaviour development in these three novels.

In order to present the research, there will first be a discussion of the theoretical part, namely the connection between dance and literature, the importance of dance in general and cultural and historical background on ballet, including a brief history of ballet and approach to it in the US and Russia. In the analysis part, the thesis will present the three themes that can be found in these texts – the role of family relationships, followed by the romantic partnerships' impact on identity and a further depiction of the influence of the environment around individuals. The analysis will be concluded by a discussion to provide answers to research questions which are stated above.

2 Profiles of Authors: Biographical Background and Literary Works

Zadie Smith was born in 1975 in London to a Jamaican mother and English father. Her mother emigrated from Jamaica as a teenager. During her childhood, Smith had a passion for tap dancing and a love for reading. She set out on a path to follow her dreams, aiming for success in musical theatre. She was involved in jazz singing and wanted to be a journalist. In the end she realized that literature held a special place in her heart, and it became her main focus. Smith attended University of Cambridge and while studying there, started to write her very first short stories. In her final year at Cambridge, she finished her first novel *White Teeth* which became an international bestseller. Her works are mostly provocative as she explores identity through the lenses of race, class, and identity.

The book *Swing Time* tells the story about friendship between two young women from childhood to adulthood. The unnamed narrator and Tracey share one similarity – having one black parent and therefore having a different kind of skin than other kids in their neighbourhood. Growing up in London, both are interested in the world of dance and dancers. Only Tracey, however, has a talent to achieve the goal to be a dancer as a career while the narrator is swept up in the world of a narcissistic singer Aimee. The novel moves through time as each part shifts back and forth between the narrator’s past and present.

Maggie Shipstead was born in 1983 in California. She is an American novelist, short story writer, essayist, and travel writer. She attended Harvard University and while she was studying there, considered becoming a writer for the first time after taking Zadie Smith’s course of creative writing. She claims that Smith was “strict, rigorous, and inspiring, taking her students and their work seriously”¹ in an event she attended virtually at Suffield Academy. She extensively travels and writes articles detailing her experiences. Shipstead, like the other authors, has no experience with dance herself. Her novel *Astonish Me* is a fictional account about a ballet world and there is no reflection of the author’s own experience.

Astonish Me is set in the ballet world and depicts a story involving Joan, a young American dancer who helps a superstar Arslan Rusakov, a Soviet ballet dancer defect in 1975. They have a short love affair, but deep inside herself Joan knows that this was not her destiny. She would never be Arslan’s wife, and she will never be a prima ballerina. She was destined to be one of the many dancers in the corps. A turn in the plot happens when she quits ballet,

¹ “Maggie Shipstead Visits.” 2022. Suffield Academy. <https://www.suffieldacademy.org/campuslife/news-events/post/~board/current-news/post/maggie-shipstead>.

marries her childhood friend Jacob, and settles in California with him and their son Harry. As the years pass and Harry becomes a grown-up man interested in ballet, it all comes back to Joan. Through her son, she is driven back to a ballet world full of dangerous secrets and back to Arslan. This thrilling and stunning novel has it all – ballet, intrigues, and the search for one’s identity.

Terez Mertes Rose, unlike the other authors mentioned above, is a former professional dancer and her experience is strongly reflected in her works. She divides her writing time between fiction and nonfiction, she also contributes to her blog *The Classical Girl*, where one can find information about ballet, classical music, the arts, and life. Rose is the author of *Ballet Theatre Chronicles - Off Balance* (May 2015), *Outside the Limelight* (Oct 2016), *Ballet Orphans* (Jan 2021) and *Other Stages* (late 2023). She lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains with her husband and son.

Her novel *Off Balance* is the first of the Ballet Theatre Chronicles which takes a reader into the sophisticated world of ballet. The protagonist Alice loses her ballet career due to an injury and she is forced to give up her dream to be a prima ballerina. She stays working within the company and is asked one day to befriend Lana. Lana is a new member, and she represents everything Alice has lost. Hand in hand, these two women set off on an adventure that will reveal painful revelations, not only about the triumphs and failures in their careers but also the truth about their mothers they thought they knew. The novel takes the reader on a journey full of both good and struggles, which reveals the world of ballet in a different light that one may know.

3 Dance and Literature

3.1 Definition of Dance

Dance has been a part of human life for such a long time. Reflecting many centuries back, individuals were unaware of their actions, not considering them as a dance like the world has nowadays. Movements as such have been part of their ceremonies, rituals, and entertainment. It has been used to communicate ideas, to express emotions and to tell stories for other generations.

One possible definition is that it is a set of movements through which people communicate ideas or express themselves. According to Zoe Hester, “Before the development of syllabaries enabled the creation of written records, performances composed of oral storytelling and movement passed down the tales and traditions of cultures around the

globe.”² This cultural heritage from previous generations holds significance, establishing a connection between the past and the present.

“Dance, the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself.”³ is a general definition from Britannica written by Judith R. Mackrell which includes other type of art, music, connected to dance. Carefully chosen music enhances the impact of dance, allowing skilled performers to create masterpieces that deeply move spectators who may not have desire to dance themselves.

Literature has a connection with movement. Not only is it considered as an art form, but it can also leave a reader with an unforgettable message. Another feature shared by both, dance, and literature, is communication. Hester continues to explain that “We began to dance to express and to communicate, to worship and to feel. We began to tell stories for the same reasons: to learn from the past and to be able to communicate in the present.”⁴ She argues that resemblances exist between these two artforms.

The two art forms are also different in many ways. Literature is permanent and well preserved because it involves the use of written or spoken language to create a narrative or tell a story. It can be a book, e-book or even audiobook, which is a recent new form of literature. All these forms are helpful for future generations to learn about the past. Dance, on the other hand, is a physical art form that uses body movements, different kinds of gestures and music to express ideas and emotions without the use of words. This makes dance momentary rather than stable.⁵ Although they are distinct forms of expression, they can complement each other. Storytelling serves as an illustration of the compatibility between these two. Literature uses dance as a motif or theme to enhance the emotional impact of a story, and dance can tell a story entirely through movement and choreography.

3.2 Dance as a Motif in Literature

It can be seen that dance is used as a common motif in literature to represent a wide range of themes, such as love, freedom, celebration, self-expression. Love or romance is expressed often through dance to represent romantic attraction and courtship in literature. For

² Hester, Zoe, "Storytelling through Movement: An Analysis of the Connections between Dance & Literature" (2018). Undergraduate Honors Theses. Paper 470. <https://dc.etsu.edu/honors/470>, p. 2

³ Mackrell, J. R.. "dance." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 29, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/art/dance>.

⁴ Hester, "Storytelling through Movement", p. 3

⁵ Hester, "Storytelling through Movement", p. 6-7

example, in Jane Austen's "*Pride and Prejudice*," the ballroom scenes demonstrate the complex social dynamics between characters and the search for suitable marriage partners. Another motif which can be used throughout literature is celebration. Through movements celebrations and parties can be represented in literature too. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's "*The Great Gatsby*," the characters often dance at Gatsby's grand parties, which symbolize the excess and wealth of the Jazz Age era.

Dance and literature share a strong connection that has been present throughout history. Dance is often depicted as a common motif in literature because of its ability to convey complex emotions, experiences, and narratives through movement. It offers authors a unique tool to communicate themes of expression, freedom, and human connection. Karen Eli and Rosie Kay wrote in their article "Choreographing Lived Experience: Dance, Feelings and the Storytelling Body," that dance "constitutes lived experience in the here and now. As the dancer immerses herself in remembered spaces and times, she embodies these experiences in the moment."⁶ Whether it appears as a central plot device or is only referenced in passing, the inclusion of dance adds depth and symbolism to literary works. It serves as a visual representation of the characters' inner selves desires, aspirations, or struggles.

Dance can be seen as an embodiment of cultural traditions and values within literature, reflecting sociocultural contexts or representing the tensions between social norms and personal identity. Hester argues that when examining dance and literature, one can observe similarities between the two as both "have been parts of the same artistic movement or social environment and have evolved together. As cultures are affected, their artforms are affected, too."⁷ By incorporating movement as a motif in literature, authors can represent a range of emotions, themes, and ideas.

4 Importance of Dance in General

Dance, in its various forms and genres, holds immense importance in human society. Not only does it serve as a powerful mode of artistic expression, but it also plays a significant role in promoting physical and mental well-being of people. It allows individuals to explore their creativity while enhancing their self-confidence and self-esteem. Moreover, dance supports social interaction and community engagement through group performance. It

⁶ Karin Eli and Rosie Kay, „Choreographing lived experience: dance, feelings and the storytelling body", *Medical Humanities* 41, č. 1 (1. června 2015): 63, <https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2014-010602>.

⁷ Hester, "Storytelling through Movement", p. 43

promotes inclusivity by transcending cultural boundaries and enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to connect and communicate non-verbally.

Emotions can be seen as an important feature linked to the dance. Through mindful movement, dancers can connect with their innermost feelings like joy, sadness, anger, or fear. Dance becomes a channel through which an individual expresses and releases emotions. By embracing these emotions during the performance, dancers are able to fully embody the essence of the performance and convey their genuine feelings to the audience, creating a profound connection between performer and spectator. The physicality of dance, on the other hand, contributes to releasing endorphins that naturally boost mood and reduce stress levels which is valuable for an individual's well-being.

Dance is often used as means of preserving cultural heritage and tradition as movements are passed down through generations. Dance acts then as a universal language that enables people to express themselves and tell stories, which are saved for other generations. According to Hester, both, dance, and storytelling, are very essential aspects of cultures across the globe. Artists, in response to globalization, have embraced new circumstances by blending traditional elements with modern influences in their works because:⁸ “a dancer is as much a product of her past as she is a reflection of her times”⁹ It may have an impact on one's identity. Through the performance and presence of movements, personal growth, and fulfilment (or opposite) can be achieved. This matter will be discussed later in this thesis.

5 Cultural and Historical Background of Ballet

5.1 The Dawn of Ballet

Classical ballet and its traces dates back to the 15th century to Renaissance. A blend of French and Italian culture gave it the shape along with other events and movements such as revolutions and Romanticism, Expressionism and Bolshevism, modernism, and the Cold War. It started at European courts where the aristocrats used it as a way to demonstrate their power and make political moves. Ballet as such has always been connected to kings, courts, and countries. As the European aristocracy changed over time, ballet changed too, but in a different and complicated way. The dance moves were not just about dancing, they represented the beliefs and image of the noble people. To understand ballet to the full, one

⁸ Hester, "Storytelling through Movement", p. 43

⁹ Meduri, Avanthi. "Bharatha Natyam—What Are You?" Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader. Wesleyan; 1st Edition, 2001, Middletown, CT. Print., p. 111

would have to look at its history and how it was influenced by politics and major changes in society as mentioned above.¹⁰

At the very beginning back in Renaissance, humans' highest capacities and aspirations could be evoked through the influence of music and art. It was believed that the ballet is connected to God as "the Academicians saw in ballet a chance to take man's troublesome passions and physical desires and redirect them toward a transcendent love of God"¹¹ People used to think that our bodies held us back from reaching our full potential. It was commonly assumed that our physical needs and desires kept us from reaching higher spiritual levels. Humans were stuck in the middle, torn between their animal instincts and their desire to be more like angels. The Academicians, however, came up with a different idea. They held a belief that if human being danced, one could break free from these limitations and get closer to angels. They also thought that by moving our bodies in a disciplined and rhythmic way, following the rules of music and math, every individual then could connect with the heavenly world.¹²

Moving on through centuries, the Romantic period was the first time where a significant person made remarkable impact on the ballet environment. Marie Taglioni was born in 1804 into an Italian family of dancers, they showed exceptional talent in acrobatic and comic dancing.¹³ She was like the ultimate ballerina of every girl's dream, and she held great importance among women. Taglioni was highly significant and had a huge impact on ballet. She inspired a whole generation of dancers and even caught the attention of famous writers from all over Europe. Not only became she a famous celebrity, the very first in the world of ballet, but also set the standard for what a ballerina should be like for others to follow.¹⁴

5.2 Cultural and Historical Background of Ballet in Russia

It may come as a surprise, but ballet did not emerge in Russia until the 17th century. All the changes in the country, including the importance of ballet, had come to Russia with the domination of Peter the Great as he came to power in 1689. Until then, there were no universities and Russia did not have any literary tradition. Art, music, and dancing was something what peasants did, not the court.¹⁵

¹⁰ Homans, Jennifer. *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*, Unabridged (New York: Random House, 2013), xxiv

¹¹ Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, p. 5-6

¹² Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, p. 6

¹³ Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, p. 136

¹⁴ Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, p. 135-136

¹⁵ Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, p. 245

Classical ballet was not really seen as a form of art, it was rather thought as form of etiquette in Russia back in the day. It was about learning how to act properly within the society. The most important matter was how one carried himself and behaved. Later, it became more of a show, however, people still wanted to copy the French aristocracy and be all graceful and elegant. Ballet, among other things, was a major part of Peter's the Great plan to make Russia more like Europe. There have been many rulers throughout the century who contributed with their little bit to the culture of ballet. It was generally common that ballet masters and dancers were coming to Russia from other countries around Europe to teach and perform there. The fact that they were foreigners earned them better position and therefore really good pay than they would hope for in their homeland.¹⁶

Moving on through the centuries, Marius Petipa was a French choreographer who made remarkable impact on Russian classical ballet in the late of 19th century-early 20th century. Some of his notable works include *Sleeping Beauty*, which was the very first truly Russian ballet. Homans further clarifies that "It was an impressive act of cultural absorption: this was no longer Russians imitating the French but instead a pitch-perfect summation of the rules and forms that had shaped the Russian court since Peter the Great."¹⁷ Another works worth mentioning are *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*. All three can still be seen nowadays in theatres worldwide. Petipa cooperated with P.I. Tchaikovsky. The combination of Tchaikovsky's music and Petipa's choreography has resulted in some of the most enduring ballets in history.

In 1909, a significant moment occurred with the establishment of the first Russian touring company, marking the onset of a new chapter in the evolution of dance. The company headquartered in Paris and performed the choreographic works by well-known choreographers such as Marius Petipa, Bronislava Nijanska, and George Balanchine. The company embarked on global tours, spreading the essence of ballet across continents. Ballet emerged as a pathway to attain swift recognition and acclaim on the international stage for young Russians. However, following the Russian revolution, the new ideology commanded that the new regime must be adapted in artistic expression. Companies like Bolshoi Ballet had to reflect the socialism in their ballet production to align with regulatory mandates. Individuals in the ballet field tried to cope with the new politics, but the inevitable was coming. During the 1960s, numerous dancers from the Bolshoi Ballet were looking for their

¹⁶ Homans, *Apollo's Angels.*, p. 247-250

¹⁷ Homans, *Apollo's Angels.*, p. 277

artistic autonomy and it resolved in defection to the Western world. Dance companies worldwide, nowadays, claim to teach ballet in the Russian tradition.¹⁸

An illustration of this matter can be found in the novel *Astonish Me*, where the narrative depicts a little the theme of defectors. One of the central characters, Arslan Rusakov, is characterized as a Russian defector fleeing from the oppressive regime of Soviet Russia. Facing the political situation in his homeland, Rusakov seeks alternative options to continue with his ballet career. He displays precise determination to escape and continue his artistic journey. Rusakov unleashes his full potential and becomes universally celebrated and esteemed ballet dancer within the narrative. More examples occur within the story such as his dance partner Ludmilla who is also described as defector or Mr. K, a recognized Russian teacher of ballet classes in the company.

The rise of Russian ballet to its present state has been a journey filled with obstacles and achievements. As the reign of the country was changing, the ballet has formed into its existence. It overcame obstacles of the centuries and became significant for Russian culture. The formation of present-day ballet and dance culture was heavily influenced by many notable figures such as Taglioni, Petipa or Tchaikovsky. Russian ballet has precise technical skills and has a sense of deliberateness and that makes it very special and recognized around the world.

5.3 Cultural and Historical Background of Ballet in the US

American culture adopted ballet as an art form because Homans claims in her book *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* that:

Classical ballet was everything America was against. It was a lavish, aristocratic court art, a high—and hierarchical—elite art with no pretense to egalitarianism. It had grown up in societies that believed in nobility, not only of birth but of carriage and character; societies in which artifice and fine manners—so different from America's plainspoken directness—were essential and admired attributes.¹⁹

Ballet first arrived in America predominantly from Europe. The level of training among American ballet dancers was notably poor. This deficiency could be attributed to highly unskilled teachers with inadequate dance technique. In 1839, Paul Taglioni, brother of the

¹⁸ Why is Russia the epicenter of Ballet? Online. Lansing State Journal. 2016. Dostupné z: <https://eu.lansingstatejournal.com/story/sponsor-story/wharton-center/2016/06/09/why-russia-epicenter-ballet/85493900/>.

¹⁹ Homans, *Apollo's Angels.*, p. 448

famed Marie Taglioni, travelled to America to perform *La Sylphide*. To his astonishment, when hiring local women for the corps de ballet, he discovered that they were inadequately trained, falling far short of the standards he was accustomed to. This situation persisted throughout the 19th century, with only little improvement in the quality of ballet training in America. Ballet did not come naturally to Americans, unlike to Russians where it evolved into a serious art form full of determination. The connection between these two nations in the realm of ballet is significant, as the Russian influence in the early 20th century triggered a transformative shift in the American ballet industry.²⁰

The bond between these two nations in the realm of ballet is straightforward: Russians played an essential role in cultivating ballet in America, much like they did in England. It was them who trained generation after generation, passing their tradition but “not only steps and techniques: they brought to their lessons the entire Imperial orthodoxy of Russian ballet”²¹ This comprehensive transmission of knowledge and tradition from one generation to the next significantly shaped the evolution of ballet in America.

History of ballet in both America and Russia holds significant relevance as it has shaped the experiences of dancers and ballet instructors who have passed down their knowledge through generations to the present day. This historical legacy carries a considerable impact on individuals’ identities, as one continues to be influenced by past events and practices. The presented choice is either adhering to traditional norms or adapting and innovating in response to historical events. The formation of identity, however, is also influenced by other factors, which will be further explored in the following chapter.

6 The Significance of Relationships in Identity Formation

Identity refers to the characteristics, values, beliefs, and experiences that make a person unique and recognizable from other individuals. There are many aspects such as cultural background, social roles, workplace, and self-perception which have an impact on one’s identity. It is shaped by both internal and external factors. Identity is a variable concept that evolves over time and can be influenced by a range of aspects, including upbringing, relationships, and life experiences.

Relationships play a fundamental role in shaping one’s identity as one is surrounded by them most of the lifetime. They provide the individual with opportunities for self-growth as

²⁰ Homans, *Apollo’s Angels.*, p. 449-450

²¹ Homans, *Apollo’s Angels.*, p. 451

well as new experiences. Interactions with family members, co-workers or romantic partners offer mirrors through which individuals can see a reflection of themselves, helping them understand their strengths, weaknesses, and values. Through the feedback and support of others, individuals develop a sense of belonging and connection, which contributes to their overall self-concept and understanding of who they are in relation to others and the world around them.

Dance background and relationships within it can also be connected to identity. The world of dance is not only a space for artistic expression and growth but also a community where both good and bad relationships influence the character of the individual. They are the bonds formed with dance partners, the mentorship of teachers and choreographers, or the support of friends and family. These relationships shape how dancers perceive themselves, influence their performance and give them the opportunity to find their place in the world. The connections cultivated within the dance community can extend into other areas of life, having impact on personal values, aspirations and even career choices. Although, not everybody becomes a professional in this field, the dance experience becomes an inseparable part of one's life.

7 The Role of Family Relationships

Childhood experiences often serve as common aspect that individuals frequently reflect upon in adulthood. It is the primary context after all within which individuals develop a sense of self and belonging. In Smith's *Swing Time*, the unnamed narrator describes the exact moment when she met her friend Tracey on one Saturday of 1982 and says that:

There were many other girls present but for obvious reasons we noticed each other, the similarities, and the differences, as girls will. Our shade of brown was exactly the same – as if one piece of tan material had been cut to make us both – and our freckles gathered in the same areas, we were of the same height.²²

It highlights the intricate process of identity formation, particularly in relation to childhood experiences and connections with others. The narrator's observation of her similarities with her friend Tracey underscores the significance of external similarities in shaping one's sense of self and belonging. This quote illustrates how early connections with others, even based on superficial similarities, may influence the development of identity.

²² Smith, Zadie. *Swing Time*. London: Penguin Books, 2017., p. 9

She further explains that their mothers, on the other hand, are very different in appearance as well as in personal characteristics. The narrator acknowledges that her mother was a feminist. She wore her hair as she liked, and makeup was not something she enjoyed. She comments on the fact that they did not have much money as her mother dressed them both in simple outfits.²³ Tracey's mother is described as white, obese, afflicted with acne. She wore her blond hair carelessly pulled back and her only pride in life is her talented daughter through which she sees the world in a better way.²⁴ Family support serves as one of the critical aspects that provides dancers with the strength for challenges they face during their life. Tracey continues to be more successful than the narrator not just because of her talent, but also through her mother's support.

The career of a dancer, especially ballet dancer, is demanding and uncertain at the same time. Success in the industry is not guaranteed, and even talented dancers may struggle to secure stable employment within a company or lucrative opportunities. It requires dedication and belief in oneself but also sacrifices come along the way. Physical demands could get overwhelming, emotions play a major role during the career. These reasons can lead to the fact that parents discourage their children from this pathway. Joan, the main character in *Astonish Me*, explains to her friend Jacob (later her husband):

“With my mom, it's like she's missed the whole point of my entire life. I work myself to death at something that's really actually important, and all she wants is for me to be a secretary. It's not like I know if ballet's going to work out, but I have to believe or else there's no point.”²⁵

Despite the challenge not being too good to be a soloist, she does not want to give up her career as she further emphasizes that “If I can't dance, I know I won't die, but it feels like I will.”²⁶ One's determination has a great power even if parents do not agree or approve. Joan is driven by a deep passion for her art and a sense of purpose that transcends material rewards. The motivation is within her, and it has a deeper meaning behind her pursuit of a career in ballet.

The novel *Off Balance* represents a different overview of a family influence. The protagonist Lana, a twenty-two-year-old girl, comes from a big Catholic family and she is

²³ Smith, *Swing Time*., p. 9

²⁴ Smith, *Swing Time*., p. 10

²⁵ Shipstead, Maggie. *Astonish Me*. London: Blue Door, 2014., p. 6

²⁶ Shipstead, *Astonish Me*., p. 37

used to being around most of the time to help her mom in the household. She started to dance for a local company in Kansas City. Despite her parents being supportive, there is another issue in her way which can be referred to as financial instability. She claims that “They didn’t have money for pointe shoes at all. We weren’t poor, really, it was just considered an unnecessary expense, especially after my little brothers were born and there were six of us kids. So I had to earn it myself.”²⁷ Financial problems in the family may impact the identity of oneself in adulthood. This can be supported by Lana’s courage to consider a big challenge and move to San Francisco to follow her own dreams. Although she cannot afford a great living in a better neighbourhood, she fights her way.

The crucial moment in Lana’s self-discovery unfolds as she confronts her mother’s manipulative tendencies. Despite her mother’s demands to return home for Christmas, Lana decided to prioritize her performance commitments and found the courage to prove her independence. This act of resistance triggers a dark side of her mother’s character, revealing the power she had over Lana until now:

“And that’s how it’s going to be. You’re just going to have to live with that. [...]”

“Fine. You made your decision, Lana Marie Kessler. You’ll deal with the consequences.”²⁸

The reaction of her mother can be considered as another proof of a manipulation and the considerable influence family has on the individual. One can understand the matter that it is Lana’s family who held her back all the time. This significant point in the story presents the complex connection between family influence and manipulation within Lana’s personal evolution. It emphasizes the challenges and sacrifices involved in asserting independence and following one’s aspirations surrounded by the pressure of familial obligations.

7.1 Family Dynamics and Identity Construction

Family dynamics play a significant role in the construction of identity, shaping individuals’ behaviour, values and even beliefs from young age to adulthood. The person then sources from both bad and good experiences, gained during their childhood for the rest of their life.

²⁷ Rose, Terez Mertes. *Off Balance*. United States: Classical Girl Press, 2015., p. 122

²⁸ Rose, *Off Balance*., p. 290

Family role and expectations within the family is one of the matters which need to be discussed. Individuals often adopt specific roles and responsibilities that contribute to their sense of identity. The unnamed narrator's Mom in Zadie Smith's novel is a feminist who loves books and education as it is stated in the book:

The shelves in our lounge – which he built – filled up with second-hand books, Open University textbooks, political books, history books, books on race, books on gender, [...] Saturday was her 'day off'. Day off from what? From us. She needed to read up on her isms.”²⁹

The protagonist is an only child, and her mom is slowly trying to transform her into her own picture. From an early age, she talks to her daughter with respect and gives her the choice to make things her own way, making her read 'real books' and thus depriving her of a carefree childhood. She wants her to think about things and the impact they have on her personality. According to Tracey, “[...] the way she spoke to us with respect, as if we were adults, giving us choices about things Tracey felt we had no business at all choosing, [...]”³⁰ In making this comment, Tracey urges us to think that she was not used to this kind of behaviour at home. Despite her mom wanting her to stand out of the crowd, the narrator does the opposite – when grown-up she lives in the shadow of someone else, a famous singer Aimee, who she works for as her assistant.

Maggie Shipstead acknowledges in her book that Joan's mom was not very supportive to her daughter's dance career. Joan complains about that while talking to Jacob:

“The worst part about being injured is how smug my mom is about the whole thing.”

He closed his eyes against the glare of the sun. “Yeah?”

Joan nodded. “The other day she circled an ad for a typing course and left it on my pillow. I wanted to hit her.”³¹

There was never an assigned role for Joan in her family. All she did for her dance career was from her own determination as she emphasizes that “Her childhood was dominated by

²⁹ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 19-20

³⁰ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 62

³¹ Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p. 36

discipline, fear, repetition – her small self in an endless, tearful hurry to get better, to get good in time to have a career.”³²

Lana, on the other hand, played an essential role at home. When leaving for San Francisco her mom encouraged her to remember she can always come back home, there is no shame in it and her family loves her.³³ Lana supports this claim when she has the first conversation with Gil “[...] We’re a close family, we take care of each other.”³⁴ She is a good girl who helps her mother in the household a lot. Her mom then relies on her so much, once Lana is gone, she struggles without her help:

“Oh, Mom, it’s my being gone, isn’t it? Those afternoon breaks that you’re losing out on now.”

“Well, maybe so,” Mom admitted.

“I’m so sorry I’m not around to help out anymore. I feel awful. And I miss you guys so much.”³⁵

One can acknowledge the enormous pressure on Lana trying to succeed in her own life with her own career as ballet dancer. Family dynamics can occasionally hold back an individual’s personal growth. It is essential for individuals to prioritize their own aspirations and navigate their paths using the insights gained from their familial experiences. While parents can provide valuable insights on various aspects of life, it is important for them not to project their unresolved issues and conflicts onto their children.

The exploration of family roles and expectations within the context of identity formation is a central theme in literary works mentioned above. In Smith’s narrative, the protagonist’s mother, a feminist with a passion for education, exerts a strong influence on her daughter’s upbringing, shaping her worldview and aspirations. Despite her mother’s intentions to empower her, the protagonist finds herself living in the shadow of another figure, highlighting the complexities of family dynamics in shaping individual identity. Similarly, Shipstead portrays the strained relationship between Joan and her mother, who is unsupportive of her daughter’s dance career, reflecting the tension between family expectations and personal aspirations. In contrast, Lana’s narrative emphasizes the supportive

³² Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p. 92

³³ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 24

³⁴ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 30

³⁵ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 112

role of family in her pursuit of a ballet career, while also acknowledging the pressure and sacrifices involved. These narratives underscore the impact of family dynamics on identity construction, pointing out the significance of navigating personal aspirations in the middle of family expectations and support systems.

8 Romance and Impact on Identity

Romantic relationships are another influential factor in individuals' lives. They demonstrate a significant impact on the formation and evolution of one's identity, serving as key points for self-discovery, growth, and transformation. Individuals are given the opportunity to explore aspects of themselves, through intimate connections with romantic partners, that may otherwise remain undiscovered. The balance of love, trust, and vulnerability within romantic relationships fosters a deep sense of introspection, as individuals navigate the complexities of emotional intimacy and interpersonal dynamics. Romantic partnerships provide a reflective mirror through which individuals confront their values, beliefs, and desires and whether through shared experience or conflict resolution, these relationships become essential in shaping one's identity, offering both affirmation and challenge as individuals navigate the intricate world of love and self-discovery.

8.1 Impact of Romantic Partners on Self-Perception

"Love in a ballet is something that does not exist and then suddenly does, its beginning marked by pantomime, faces fixed in rapture, a dance."³⁶ demonstrates Shipstead in her novel *Astonish Me* which remarks the relationship between Arslan, the defector from Soviet Russia and Ludmilla, two main dancers of the company, not the protagonist and Arslan. Joan found herself in a situation of an unrequited love affair that completely shaped her sense of identity and purpose as she claims that "Arslan had been her lover."³⁷, but never intended to marry her. Her turbulent relationship with Arslan initially sparks hope and devotion as she aids him in his quest for freedom. His feelings, however, are different from hers, and he only used her to help him out of his difficult situation. Experiencing heartbreak can lead individuals to make impulsive decisions, and their mindset may swiftly shift upon considering a significant opportunity. This argument can be supported by Joan acknowledging that:

When she was that silly girl in Arslan's bed, she might have thought it would be romantic for their affair to produce another dancer. She had thought then that she had so

³⁶ Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p.8

³⁷ Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p. 8

much to lose – her place in the corps, the shape of her body – but really she had possessed nothing, no one.³⁸

It did happen and she kept it as a secret. The act prompts a reevaluation of her motivations and underscores the complex interplay between desire, destiny, and the pursuit of identity in the face of unrequited love.

A romantic relationship has the capacity to evolve. Despite loving the other person, one partner can be able to verbally manipulate the other. Manipulation can have effects on an individual's sense of self. When one partner manipulates the other, whether through various tactics or through words, it undermines the trust and mutual respect essential for a healthy relationship. The manipulated individual may experience feelings of confusion, doubt, and inadequacy as their confidence is shaken. Manipulation, additionally, can distort the individual's perception of reality, leading them to having second thoughts of their own thoughts and feelings, and their sense of identity. Individuals may find themselves entangled in a pattern characterized by seeking reassurance, making excuses, and defending their partner's actions in social settings.

Lana and Gil in *Off Balance* have a dynamic relationship full of everything, love, and support, but also lies and manipulation. Lana is striving to succeed in her career, but she finds it hard to connect with other people around her and establish friendships. She acknowledges that she has no friends in the very first conversation she had with Gil. The similarity between their families brings them closer together.³⁹ Lana experiences a profound moment of intimacy with Gil, triggering feelings of love and attachment. As their connection deepens, she grapples with the complexities of their dynamic because Gil maintains a romantic involvement with his girlfriend, Julia. He demonstrates that “[...] I'm being up front about it. It's a tricky situation, but it's all working out.”⁴⁰ Lana finds herself entangled in a relationship marked by secrets and that leaves her feeling undervalued, always being the second. The narrative underscores the intricate interplay of love, loyalty, and personal sacrifice within the context of a not fully committed relationship. A shift within Lana's identity happens later when she just had enough of Gil's manipulation and she argued that “she didn't have to meekly accept it, watch Gil conduct his flirtations, his manipulation as she crept away, letting it undermine her

³⁸ Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p. 266

³⁹ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 29-31

⁴⁰ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 276

confidence. Enough of playing victim.”⁴¹ The final tipping point in their relationship occurred when he crossed the line and called her overwrought. This initiated a realization within Lana’s consciousness that “She was overwrought. Not about her dance, her career, as she should be, but about a guy. Someone who couldn’t muster the courage to call her “my girlfriend” in public. The realization chilled her.”⁴² From a little shy girl in a new city, she becomes more courageous and finally stands up for herself when she insists that “I’m sick to death of these games. The others are welcome to you. I want out.”⁴³

Ballet dancers’ performances may be influenced by emotions of their personal lives, particularly within the context of romantic relationships. Negative emotions challenge the individual, potentially they become hard to control and therefore an unpredictable impact may occur during the dancers’ performance. Dancers are compelled to distinguish the balance between their emotional investments in relationships and their commitment to their career pursuit. Lana undergoes a transformation in her identity when she chose to create distance from Gil as she reminds herself that the ballet world “was the only world that mattered for her. Her place of safety.”⁴⁴ Ballet became the central point of her life.

9 Influence of the Environment Around Individuals

The work environment holds significant influence over the process of identity formation, serving as a crucial point within which individuals navigate a dynamic interaction of cultural expectations, organizational culture, and interpersonal relationships. Individuals are continually shaped by the values, behaviours, and expectations in their professional surroundings. Organizational values and norms, along with the behaviours exhibited by colleagues and supervisors, contribute to the development of beliefs and the cultivation of professional identity. Moreover, the opportunities for career advancement, recognition, and personal growth inherent in the workplace influence individuals’ perceptions of their own capacities and worth. The challenges one encounters in the work environment shape the resilience, coping strategies, and self-concept.

9.1 The Impact of the Workplace Environment on Individuals’ Development

The workplace environment significantly impacts individuals’ development within organizational contexts. It serves more than just a site for employment. It functions as a

⁴¹ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 264-265

⁴² Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 268

⁴³ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 268

⁴⁴ Rose, *Off Balance.*, p. 269

dynamic system where individuals navigate organizational structures, cultural norms, and social dynamics. Elements such as physical workspace, interpersonal relationships and leadership styles collectively shape individuals' behaviours, attitudes, and identity.

The environment around the narrator in *Swing Time* includes issues regarding gender, race, and class. She is in a constant search for her own identity. Her mother has been an influential element during her whole childhood, trying to help in her way by talking about her political and feminist views, giving her a different perspective of ideas, and making her read an adult literature when she was only eleven.⁴⁵ Natalia Rosenfeld in her review further explains that “Not much interested in her husband or in the business of mothering, she is possessed by her own striving to get an education and, through politics, improve the lives of the underserved people she sees as her constituency and community.”⁴⁶ She is pushing her daughter to high standards, and like so many working-class parents, she imagines a better life for her child. There is a rebellious moment of the narrator during a conversation with her mother where she stood up for herself and her dreams as she insisted that “I was not her and did not ever want to be her, that I didn't care about her books or her clothes or her ideas or any of it, I wanted to dance and live my own life.”⁴⁷ This argument between the narrator and her mother reveals a subtle transformation in the identity of a twelve-year-old girl, who was characterized by her obedience and compliance, now confronting her mother's authority by having her own thoughts and voice. Her mother, nevertheless, ended the conversation by acknowledging that:

“All that matters in this world... is what's written down. But what happens with this” — she gestured at my body — “that will never matter, not in this culture, not for these people, so all you're doing is playing the game by their rules, and if you play that game, I promise you, you'll end up a shade of yourself.”⁴⁸

The only character who did not succeed as a dancer is the unnamed narrator in Smith's novel and therefore, she found a job which is still connected with the world of art, working as an assistant for a famous singer she admired since her childhood. Dance remains present in her life, such as during moments of happiness after a work conference, where she would express her happy emotions through happy dance in the office as she acknowledges that “I

⁴⁵ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 100

⁴⁶ Rosenfeld, Natania, and Zadie Smith. “Failure to Launch.” *The Women's Review of Books* 34, no. 5 (2017): 22–23., p. 22

⁴⁷ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 187

⁴⁸ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 188

walked out of that conference room like Audrey Hepburn floating upstairs in *My Fair Lady*, on a cloud of swelling music, ready to dance the length of our open-plan office, spin and spin and spin out of the door and all the way home.”⁴⁹ The narrator’s transition from aspiring dancer to an assistant for a singer is an example of the continuity of her connection to the world of art. Despite not achieving success as a dancer, dance continues to hold significance in her life, serving as a means of expressing joy and fulfilment in moments of happiness.

The narrator does not seem confident with herself, unlike her mother. The matter is claimed by Aimee, her boss, when she acknowledges that the work between them is not working because she is not comfortable in herself and to work for Aimee, she needs to be.⁵⁰ The narrator’s identity can be described as a person who is lacking confidence and comfort at work, showing shyness, and often hiding in the background in between the presence of others. One may describe such an individual like the one who is always overshadowed by others in social and professional contexts. The realization of living constantly in the shadow of other people appeared to the narrator after she lost her job and returned to England in 2008. In the prologue, she claims that “I had always tried to attach myself to the light of other people, that I had never had any light of my own. I experienced myself as a kind of a shadow.”⁵¹

The narrator’s journey of self-discovery reveals a struggle with confidence and self-assurance, particularly in the professional world. Her acknowledgment of living in the shadow of others determines the need for her to find her own sense of identity. As she confronts these internal conflicts, the narrator embarks on a path of reclaiming her own light and asserting her presence in the world, signalling the beginning of a transformative journey towards self-empowerment and authenticity.

9.2 The Influence of the Ballet Company Environment

A ballet company is a unique environment that can be characterized by its blend of discipline, artistry, and tradition, which shapes the experiences and identities of those within it. The ballet company environment has hard training regimes, hierarchical structures (solo dancer and being a dancer in the corps in this case), and competitive dynamics. It makes a significant difference in the identities of those who are part of it. Every aspect of the ballet company environment influences dancers’ self-perception, beginning from their entry into the studio and extending through the culmination of their performances onstage. This part

⁴⁹ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 84

⁵⁰ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 103

⁵¹ Smith, *Swing Time.*, p. 4

explores the ways in which this environment influences the formation and evolution of individuals' identities. Dynamics like shaping their perceptions of talent and self-worth, bonds between dancers, and sometimes competitive tensions shape dancers' identities, aspirations, and their place within the ballet world. The aim is to unravel the complex interaction between the ballet company environment and the formation of individual identities within the intricate landscape of ballet.

The lack of talent may be one factor which is essential for dancers to succeed within the company and in the best likelihood to dance solo with a partner. Only the best dancers are given the opportunity as they represent the company at the same time. It is not the case of the protagonist in the novel *Astonish Me*. Joan is part of the corps as it is stated at the beginning of the book: "She falls into line with the others and is pulled out into the light"⁵² Despite her dedication to ballet, Joan finds herself trapped within the corps surrounded by more gifted dancers. She confronts the possibility that her aspirations for solo recognition may remain unfulfilled. The protagonist's placement within the corps highlights the inherent competitiveness of the ballet world, where talent serves as a significant determinant for progression. As she remains in a position among more skilled dancers, Joan is forced to come to terms with the possibility that her dreams of achieving solo roles may remain out of reach. An alternative notion emerges in the protagonist's thoughts: the possibility of leaving a legacy in the ballet world through her descendant. She considers the potential for her offspring to excel as dancer and fulfil the dreams she herself may not achieve. To accomplish this goal, Joan entertains the idea of using the exceptional talent of the company's top dancer, Arslan.

Many famous Russian dancers have been closely associated with the Mariinsky/Kirov company. A crucial moment occurred when the company dancers embarked on tours, as described in Chapter 5.2. These tours provided them with a new perspective on life in the West, prompting the desire of defection from their native Russia. Such a decision presented significant challenges, as it required breaking strict regime rules and permanently leaving their homeland. The influence of the company was significant, providing dancers with a transformative journey enriched by opportunities for success and extensive global exposure. In *Astonish Me*, the male protagonist experiences life in Soviet Russia and ultimately decides to not only change his identity, but also reshape the course of his entire life.

⁵² Shipstead, *Astonish Me*, p. 12

Arslan is a Russian defector known for his exceptional talent. He started his ballet journey in the esteemed Kirov company before seeking refuge in America. It may be seen that he only used Joan to help him escape and start a new life as the inability to dance together due to Joan's lack of talent led to Arslan's marriage to Ludmila, another Russian defector and his dance partner in the company. His strict training in Russia, influenced by the country's distinct ballet approach, shaped his aspirations upon arrival in the US, where he could achieve his dreams.

Joan's decision to conceive Harry with Arslan illustrates her resolve to perpetuate Arslan's legacy through their offspring. Harry emerges as a ballet talent inheriting Arslan's innate aptitude for ballet, not knowing he is his father. Despite being raised by Joan, who imparted her devotion to ballet to him, Harry's natural talent becomes apparent and admires Arslan as his role model. "He is mine, this boy."⁵³ claims Arslan about Harry in the story once he saw him dancing. The revelation of Arslan being Harry's father underscores the genetic inheritance of ballet skills and serves as a testament to Russia's enduring influence as a great power of ballet excellence.

Pregnancy may present another significant challenge when trying to navigate the expectations and dynamics of the dance world and ballet company environment. It signifies not only a personal milestone, but also a potential turning point in dancers' careers, as the physical demands and expectations of the baller world often conflict with the realities of pregnancy and motherhood. Ballet is dependent on certain proportions of a body, physical demand and discipline and therefore having a child is unthinkable. Joan agrees that she "has known plenty of pregnant dancers but only a handful who stayed that way and only who then returned to the company"⁵⁴ Formal ballet dancers, particularly those confined to corps roles, may find opportunities to transition into teaching positions within the company. It is, however, very common for dancers, especially women, to cease performing after childbirth. Furthermore, if a dancer lacked the talent to perform solo roles before becoming a parent, it may be unlikely that parenthood would alter this circumstance. Joan supports this argument by claiming that "She had never been that good, anyway, and to keep trying would be pathetic."⁵⁵ Pregnancy poses a challenge for dancers in the ballet world, where the physical

⁵³ Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p. 268

⁵⁴ Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p. 10

⁵⁵ Shipstead, *Astonish Me.*, p. 25

demands and expectations often clash with the realities of motherhood, leading to potential career transitions and shifts in professional identity within the company or out of it.

An opposite situation to Joan's occurs in the narrative of *Off Balance*. Lana relocates from her hometown to San Francisco in pursuit of her aspiration to become a professional ballet dancer. Her exceptional talent secures her a position as a new soloist with the West Coast Ballet Theatre. Her proficiency, however, triggers envy and competitiveness among the dancers within the company, and that makes it challenging for Lana to establish trust and to create genuine connections. Isolated at the beginning, Lana encounters individuals who pretend to be her friends only to undermine her behind her back, highlighting the superficiality and fake nature of the company environment. To find true friendship in such a competitive environment may be hard to come by, highlighting the tough truths associated with striving for artistic greatness. A realization and shift within Lana's inner self became clear at the end of the narrative:

Oh, the manipulators of the world. Mom and Gil, Charlotte and Courtney. How sad it was, and thank goodness for people like Alice and Dena, who cut through the bullshit, and told you things you didn't want to hear, doing it for your own good, not theirs.⁵⁶

Lana, being from a small town and heavily reliant on familial support, confronts the challenge of establishing her own place and identity navigating the unfamiliar company environment. Throughout the narrative, she is challenged by a spectrum of experiences, balancing between individuals whom she can trust and those who prove deceitful. She undergoes a transformation in her identity, emerging as a stronger individual who no longer depends on superficial friendships. Instead, she prioritizes authentic connections in the company, finding support in the companionship of individuals like Alice and Dena. Hard work may be what defines successful individuals. This claim can be supported by Montserrat, a friend of Alice, when she claims: "Working hard to support your craft is one of the most noble, powerful things you could have done. It will always define you and your artistry. [...]"⁵⁷

The ballet company environment serves as a unique place where dancers are shaped by a blend of discipline, artistry, and tradition. This setting can be characterized by demanding training regimes, hierarchical structures, and competitive dynamics. It has a significant

⁵⁶ Rose, *Off Balance*., p. 315

⁵⁷ Rose, *Off Balance*., p. 123

influence on the formation and evolution of individual identities within the ballet world. The experiences of characters such as Joan, Lana, and Arslan underscore the complexities inherent in navigating the demands and expectations of this environment. Through their narratives, one may witness the transformative power of persistence, resilience, and authentic connections between the intense competition and superficiality. This exploration explains the intricate connection between the ballet company environment and the construction of individual identities, illustrating the enduring impact of ballet as an art form and cultural institution.

10 Conclusion

The original objective of this thesis was to find and analyze factors which may be influential during the development of one's identity connected to dance. The following research concludes this exploration on the question of dance and its implications for one's identity. It is evident that dance serves as a medium through which individuals construct and express their sense of self. Through an analysis of the importance of dance being a motif in literature, cultural and historical contexts, and depicting three modern fiction books connected to dance, this thesis has presented the intricate connection between dance, relationships, environment, and personal development and its impact on individuals' identity.

The initial discussion of the authors' background presents the quick overview of the literature used for the findings for the research questions. The following theory part is dedicated to understanding the connection between dance and literature which may help the reader to perceive a different spectrum of definitions and how dance contributes to human life and its culture. Dance is often depicted as a common motif in literature because of its ability to convey complex emotions, experiences, and narratives through movement. Along with cultural and historical background of ballet in both Russia and the US, it provides a comprehensive background of understanding the environment depicted in the three modern literature books, which refer to this information in their narratives.

The discussion in the analysis part revealed three main factors which influence the individual who is connected to the dance world – influence of the family relationships, romance and impact on identity, and the influence of the environment around individuals. They differ throughout the stories, and they are incorporated in a different manner in each of the narratives. They can be seen as themes which connect these narratives.

Further research revealed that relationships play a fundamental role in shaping one's identity as one is surrounded by people most of the time. Family relationships, specifically,

have a major impact on individuals throughout life. The analysis showed that family roles and expectations are projected from parents onto their children. The unnamed narrator's mother in *Swing Time* was trying to transform her daughter to her own picture and did not take ballet and dance career seriously. Another example to support this theory is presented in the novel *Off Balance*, where Lana played a significant role at home before she left it to follow her dreams. She is depicted as a good girl, who always helped her mother in the household. A shift within her identity occurred once she stood up against her mom. The character found the courage to claim her independence and the growth of her personality is evident. The novel *Astonish Me* presents an unsupportive type of mother who tried to change her daughter's mind from becoming a dancer. Dance, however, meant so much to the protagonist and her determination persisted.

Describing the impact of romantic partners on self-perception also provided important information for the research questions. Romantic partnerships play a significant role in shaping individuals' inner self. The findings of this study underscore multiple factors influencing identity formation. Through an exploration of romantic relationships, career pursuits, emotional investment, and experiences of adversity, it becomes evident that individuals' identities are shaped by a complex interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors. Romantic relationships serve as a significant element for self-discovery and growth, while career pursuit provides pathways for individuals to define their aspirations and priorities in life. Emotional investment in relationships and experiences of adversity, such as unrequited love and manipulation, compel individuals to confront their vulnerabilities and assert their personal opinion. These findings, overall, underline the dynamic and transformative process of identity formation, emphasizing the necessity of comprehending the diverse influences that contribute to individuals' self-perceptions.

Lastly, the thesis introduces the topic of the influence of the environment around individuals as one of the significant factors which have the potential impact on identity formation, specifically the workplace environment and ballet company environment. The analysis reveals that individuals navigate through cultural norms, organizational expectations, and social interactions within the workplace, which impact their beliefs, actions, and self-perception. Additionally, interpersonal connections play a vital role in identity formation, highlighting the importance of genuine relationships and support networks. These findings demonstrate the intricate nature of identity formation, emphasising the dynamic connection

between internal and external influences as individuals navigate their paths of self-discovery and growth.

Dance has a special place in human culture and in literature. The analyses of the chosen texts uncovered the possibility of dance having an impact on individuals' identity in its specific way. Influential factors were presented to describe the shift within the characters' inner self. As the work continues to unravel the complexities of these factors, one gains a deeper understanding of the significant role dance plays in shaping the essence of who we are.

11 Resumé

Otázka identity patří mezi jeden ze složitých aspektů lidského života. Identita jako taková je utvářena různými vlivy, zkušenostmi a interakcemi. V dnešním moderním prostředí představuje oblast tance jedinečnou výzvu, kdy se pohyb stává prostředkem komunikace jedince, který zkoumá a ztělesňuje své já. Balet zaujímá mezi všemi možnými formami tance pozici, v níž se setkává dohromady ladnost, disciplína a umění vyjádření svého vnitřního já. Spojení baletu a identity člověka se nabízí otázka, na kterou tahle práce hledá odpověď. A to konkrétně na to, jak souvisí tanec, zejména balet, s utvářením a vývojem identity člověka. Tato práce se zabývá zkoumáním třech podobných témat v knihách moderní literatury a analyzuje v nich odpověď na předem stanovené výzkumné otázky.

Průzkum zaměřený na pochopení toho, co je tanec a vztahu mezi tancem a literaturou poskytuje kontext pro rozdílné vnímání tance v literárním kontextu a může poukázat na roli tance jako tematického prvku v literatuře. Spolu s kulturními a historickými souvislostmi vytváří komplexní přehled postoje jednotlivců k baletu ve dvou zemích, konkrétně v Rusku a v USA. Tyto dva národy vymezují kontext ve třech moderních literárních dílech použitých v této práci. Přestože se jedná o beletrii, tato práce se zabývá následujícími výzkumnými otázkami: 1. Jaké faktory mohou mít vliv na identitu člověka ve spojení s tancem, 2. Jak ovlivňuje identitu člověka skutečnost, že v minulosti býval tanečníkem. Tyto otázky jsou analyzovány na základě analýzy vývoje chování hlavních postav ve třech románech: *Swing Time*, *Off Balance*, *Astonish Me*.

Pro představení výzkumu byla nejprve vymezena teoretická část, konkrétně vysvětlení vztahu mezi tancem a literaturou, významu tance obecně a také informace o kulturně-historickém pozadí baletu, včetně stručné historie baletu a přístupu k němu v USA a Rusku. V praktické části práce byla přestavena tři společná témata, která lze v textech uvedených výše nalézt a to: role rodinných vztahů na formování identity jedince, následovaná tématem

vlivu lásky na identitu, a posledním pak vyobrazení vlivu prostředí kolem jedince. Tato část bude zakončena diskusí, která bude zahrnovat odpovědi na výzkumné otázky.

Počáteční představení literární teorie, která se k tématu této práce vztahuje, popisuje různé definice tance, kde dochází k vymezení toho, co tanec vlastně je a jak k němu dnešní svět přistupuje. Na tanec může být nahlíženo dvěma způsoby, a to jako na umění nebo jako na prostředek komunikace mezi jedincem a jeho publikem. Zde se nabízí otázka, zda existuje spojitost mezi tancem a literaturou. Ta je následně rozebrána v kapitole Tanec a Literatura, kde si lze povšimnout určitých spojitostí, ale také rozdílů. Literatura, stejně jako tanec, je nejen považována za umění, ale také za formu média, prostřednictvím kterého může čtenáři předat důležité poselství. Dalším společným rysem tance a literatury je komunikace. Stejně jako v literatuře, i tancem jedinci komunikují své myšlenky a emoce skrz pohyby. Průzkum také poukazuje na to, že mezi těmito dvěma uměleckými formami existují značné rozdíly. Literatura je stálá a lépe se zachovává, protože využívá psaného nebo mluveného jazyka k vytvoření příběhu nebo vyprávění. Může se jednat například o knihu, elektronickou podobu knihy (E-book) nebo dokonce audioknihy, které jsou v poslední době novou formou literatury. Všechny tyto formy jsou užitečné pro budoucí generace, které se tímto učí a dozvědí o minulosti. Tanec je na rozdíl od literatury méně stálá forma umění, protože se jedná o fyzický projev, nikoli psaný nebo mluvený. Využívá pohyby těla, různá gesta a hudbu k vyjádření myšlenek a emocí bez použití slov. Literatura používá tanec jako motiv nebo téma k posílení emocionálního dopadu příběhu, kdy tanec může vyprávět příběh prostřednictvím pohybu a choreografie a dát tak knize jiný rozměr.

V této práci byl dále popsán kulturně-historický kontext baletu obecně a následně ve dvou zemích, USA a Rusku, které tvoří kontext pro knihy rozebírané v praktické části této práce. V první části je popsána historie baletu obecně pro lepší porozumění historického kontextu ve dvou vybraných zemích. V další části dále následuje krátké představení historie baletu v Rusku, které je dnes velmocí tohoto druhu tance. Vzestup ruského baletu až na vrchol do dnešní podoby byl cestou plnou překážek a úspěchů. S měnící se vládou v zemi se formoval i tento druh umění. Skrz různé překážky se stal velmi významnou součástí ruské kultury. Na současný balet a taneční kulturu mělo velký vliv mnoho významných osobností, jako byli např. Taglioni, Petipa nebo Čajkovskij. Ruský balet se vyznačuje precizní technikou a smyslem pro promyšlenost a tím je významným a uznávaným po celém světě. Tento výzkum je důležitý k úplnému porozumění kontextu v knize *Astonish Me*, kde autorka zařadila jako jednu z hlavních postav Arslana Rusakova. Arslan je charakterizován jako ruský

přeběhlík prochající před represivním režimem sovětského Ruska. V rámci příběhu se objevují další příklady dokazující, že ruský balet je jediný svého druhu, například jeho taneční partnerka Ludmilla, která je rovněž popisována jako přeběhlík, nebo Mr.K, uznávaný ruský učitel hodin baletu v tanečním souboru. Pro srovnání tato kapitola obsahuje také kulturně-historický kontext baletu v USA, který byl silně ovlivněn Rusy a jejich přístupem k baletu. Byli to právě oni, kdo trénovali generaci za generací a předávali tak svou tradici a zkušenost do tanečních souborů po celém USA. Toto komplexní předávání znalostí a tradice z generace na generaci významně formovalo vývoj baletu v USA.

Další sekce se posouvá k diskusi týkající se odpovědi na otázku, jaké faktory ovlivňují identitu člověka v souvislosti s baletem. Rodinné vztahy a jejich vliv na identitu člověka je prvním faktorem, který je analyzován ve vybraných literárních dílech. Konkrétní příklady z knih poté poukazují na problematická místa. Román *Swing Time* zobrazuje matku feministku, která se snaží ovlivnit budoucnost své dcery a podstrkuje jí své názory, aby je přijala za vlastní. Hlavní hrdinka se však snaží prosadit si svou vlastní identitu. Maggie Shipstead popisuje vztah mezi Joan a její nepodporující matkou a tím zdůrazňuje rozpor mezi rodinnými očekáváními a osobními sny. Příběh Lany v románu *Off Balance* naopak vyzdvihuje rodinnou podporu v její cestě za baletní kariérou, zároveň ale popisuje tlak a oběti s tím spojené. Všechna tato vyprávění poukazují na to, jak rodinná dynamika utváří identitu jednotlivce, a zdůrazňují výzvu, ve které se hlavní hrdinky snaží skloubit osobní aspirace s rodinnými očekáváními.

Dalším důležitým faktorem, který je analyzován ve vybraných literárních dílech je vliv romantických partnerů na vnímání sebe sama. Partnerské vztahy hrají významnou roli při utváření vnitřního já každého jedince. Slouží jako klíčový bod pro sebepoznání, růst a transformaci. Jedinci mají díky intimním vztahům s romantickými partnery příležitost prozkoumat aspekty sebe sama, které by jinak mohly zůstat neobjeveny. Rovnováha mezi láskou, důvěrou a zranitelností v romantických vztazích podporuje hluboký smysl pro introspekci. Partnerství nastavuje jedinci zrcadlo, ve kterém se může konfrontovat se svými hodnotami, přesvědčeními a touhami, a to prostřednictvím sdílených zkušeností nebo řešením konfliktů. Tyto vztahy se stávají zásadními při utváření identity jedince a nabízejí mu utvrzení a výzvu zároveň v momentě, kdy se pohybuje ve složitém světě lásky a sebepoznání. Tato sekce poskytla rozšíření informací pro výzkumnou otázku práce. Prostřednictvím zkoumání romantických vztahů, kariérního růstu, emociálních investic a zkušeností s nepřízní osudu je zřejmé, že identita jednotlivců je utvářena složitou souhrou osobních, sociálních a

environmentálních faktorů. Romantické vztahy slouží jako významný bod pro sebepoznávání a růst, zatímco snaha o kariéru poskytuje jedincům možnost definování jejich aspirací a priorit v životě. Emocionální investice do vztahů a zkušenosti s nepřízní osudu, jako je neopětovaná láska a manipulace, nutí jedince čelit své zranitelnosti a prosazovat si svůj osobní názor. Tato zjištění celkově podtrhují dynamický a transformativní proces utváření identity a zdůrazňují nutnost pochopení různých vlivů, které přispívají k sebepojetí jedince.

Poslední sekce popisuje vliv prostředí okolo nás a jeho dopad na identitu člověka. Speciálně pracovní prostředí má významný vliv na proces utváření identity. Ovlivňuje je především dynamická interakce, kulturní očekávání, organizační kultura a mezilidské vztahy. Lidé jsou neustále formováni hodnotami, chováním a očekáváním ve svém profesním prostředí. Organizační hodnoty a normy spolu s chováním kolegů a nadřízených přispívají k rozvoji přesvědčení a kultivaci profesní identity. Příležitosti ke kariérenímu postupu, uznání a osobní růst také ovlivňují vnímání vlastních schopností a hodnoty jedinců. Výzvy, s nimiž se člověk v pracovním prostředí setkává, formují jeho odolnost, strategie zvládání a sebepojetí osobnosti. Analýza tohoto faktoru ukazuje, že jedinci se v pracovním prostředí orientují podle kulturních norem, organizačních očekávání a sociálních interakcí, které ovlivňují jejich přesvědčení, jednání a vnímání sebe sama. Kromě toho hrají při utváření identity zásadní roli mezilidské vztahy a vazby, které zdůrazňují význam skutečných vztahů. Tato zjištění poukazují na složitou povahu utváření identity a zdůrazňují dynamické propojení mezi vnitřními a vnějšími vlivy, které jednotlivec následuje na cestě sebepoznání a růstu. Tato poslední sekce zakončuje diskusi o faktorech ovlivňující identitu člověka v souvislosti s tancem.

Tanec má v lidské kultuře a literatuře speciální místo. Analýza vybraných textů odhalila potenciálnost tance, který svým specifickým způsobem ovlivňuje identitu jedince. V práci byly představeny vlivné faktory, které jsou vyobrazeny posunem chování postav a částečně popisují posun v porozumění svého vnitřního já postav ve vybraných románech. Tato práce rozebírá tyto faktory v souvislosti s tancem a vlivem na identitu člověka a pokračuje v rozkrývání složitosti těchto faktorů. Čtenář tím získává hlubší pochopení významné role, kterou tanec hraje při utváření podstaty toho, kým jsme.

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Annotations

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis is concerned with the question of dance when it comes to one's identity. It searches for answer for two main research questions related to influential factors in individuals' life and how being a dancer in the present or past impacts the formation of individual's self-perception. It is based on analyses of specific three modern novels related to dance, especially ballet with subsequent commentary on three similar themes depicted in these novels. Among the topics explored are the role of family relationships in identity formation, romance and impact on identity, influence of the environment around individuals.

Key words: Dance, Identity, Ballet, Relationships, Influence, Environment, Impact, Family, Dancer, Individual, Literature

Anotace

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Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá otázkou tance v souvislosti s identitou člověka. Je založena na analýze dvou hlavních výzkumných otázek týkajících se vlivných faktorů v životě jedince a také jak ovlivňuje identitu jedince skutečnost, že býval tanečníkem v minulosti. Odpovědi vychází z analýzy tří konkrétních moderních literárních děl souvisejících s tancem, zejména baletem, s následnou diskusí tří společných témat zobrazených v těchto dílech. Mezi tématy, kterým se práce věnuje, je role rodinných vztahů při formování identity jedince, vliv lásky na identitu a vliv prostředí kolem jedince.

Klíčové pojmy: Tanec, Identita, Balet, Vztahy, Vliv, Prostředí, Dopad, Rodina, Tanečník, Jedinec, Literatura