

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF FEMININITY AND FEMINISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG BALLERINAS

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### ABSTRACT

*Many young ballerinas at the beginning of their adolescence and during the adolescence pass through physical changes. These changes in many cases come as a result of weight and body shape changes. Because they do not have a good support in managing these changes, they end up having mental or physical problems trying to maintain their weight by means of unhealthy methods. I propose that teachers come up with healthy solutions for the delicate period they are going through, not just with superficial pressures. I think that the two books "My Life" by Isadora Duncan and "The Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir should be mandatory reading for teenage ballerinas for a better knowledge of the development of a woman's body. The last part of this paper contains role building methods based on the information from the first two parts of this article combined with precious pieces of advice of the famous stage director Stanislavski.*

### Keywords

*Acceptance; rational behavior; awareness; emotions; transformation; motivation; internal monologue; characters; mise en scène.*

### INTRODUCTION

During their adolescence most of the young ballerinas experience their body changes in a very unhealthy way. The majority do not get a healthy supervision, only a superficial one without instruction, embodied just by comments about their shape during dance lessons. As their image is of great importance, the young ballerinas do not have enough information to make rational decisions and react emotionally to this problem. The biggest problem is that because of the mental pressure they are under they usually end up starving themselves, they lose weight suddenly and this leads to physical and mental problems such as: lack of vitamins and minerals, slow bone and muscle development, amenorrhea, anorexia and many others.

It is very important for students to benefit from guidance from professionals such as nutritionists, psychologists, and for ballet teachers to give proper advice during adolescence. Unfounded pressure can lead to lack of motivation, thus hindering the progress of students.

I propose that students have an extra course about feminism and femininity from a general perspective and from the perspective of the world of ballet, with the aim of developing general culture and a form of self-knowledge. I will divide this course into three parts. The first part will contain general information about feminism and femininity. The second part will refer to Isadora Duncan's experiences as a woman described in her book *"My life"*. And the last part of this paper will offer students a starting point for building their stage characters. I wish that this optional can also be considered a starting point in the construction of female roles as: *Juliet* or *Carmen* in the established ballets.

### **Short introduction into feminism and femininity**

*"The dispute of feminism caused a lot of ink to flow..."* (Beauvoir, 1998: pag.24) as Simone de Beauvoir specified in her book. *Feminism is a social movement that seeks to obtain equal rights for women and men, in all fields of activity; a doctrine that advocates for the emancipation of women and the extension of their rights.* (DEX, 2016).

Representatives of feminism around the world have different principles and interests that depended on the period, culture, country, etc. The current can chronologically divide its manifestations into three periods. The first period includes the elimination of inequalities from a legal point of view, with the issue of women's right to vote in the center of attention. The second phase unfolds between 1960-1980 and its main interests are cultural inequality, the norms imposed by society regarding biological sex and the role of women in society. In the third period, the movements of the current take place between the years 1990 and 2000, having as their main goals the continuation of the principles of the second wave and the perseverance in the failures of revolutionary ideas due to the fact that the society will hardly get out of the old principles/limits of thinking about taboo subjects, which have as their starting point sex and the power struggle between the two sexes.

Since the creation of the world, women have been considered the other half of man. In Judeo-Christian anthropogenesis, the woman's role is negatively charged. His creation represents the fall into sin, a damnation that must be redeemed.

Another version of the appearance of women in the world is the mythological one. The myth of Pandora appears in *Theogony* and *Works and Days* by Hesiod (9th-7th century BC). In both writings the woman appears as a negative. In the first writing, Pandora is evil through her sexual power, as men are subjugated and die because of her seed. In

the second writing, Pandora brings evil by colluding with the gods, which leads to the punishment of men. Thus, the woman is associated with destabilization, chaos, evil, and due to this fact, she must remain subordinate to the man in order to preserve the balance in the world.

Since Antiquity, the woman is considered as the property of the man, and with the appearance of private property and also the principle of inheritance, the woman is considered a property of the man. At first the woman is considered the property of the father, and in order to marry and become the property of the husband, an exchange takes place between the clans. From that moment on the woman is a means to multiply the clan. Motherhood was a sacred function which sustained the life of the tribe: *it was only revered in so far as the man made himself the slave of his own fears, the accomplice of his own impotence: the cult of woman rises on a ground of theory, and not of love.* (Beauvoir, 1998: pag.100)

The first attempts towards the emancipation of women appeared with the advent of Roman law, but this was a false emancipation. The woman becomes an heir, can make a will, divorce and remarry. She integrates more easily into society, becomes the center of the home, takes care of the children's education. But this Roman law appears only as a guarantee of women independence. The woman will remain for a long time even after the appearance of Roman law as the one who provides children for the man, as Napoleon believed.

Beginning with the 18th century, an era in which worldly life and culture developed, women came closer to independence/emancipation through the intellectual realm. Thanks to this culture and the prestige conferred by the culture, women end up asserting themselves in the male universe, starting from literature, from the casuistry of love, many ambitious ones move on to political intrigues. She asserts himself in society, she can make a career. The first appearance of an actress on stage takes place in 1545, and the life of the parlours takes a new shape. These were steps that led to the emancipation of women, and most importantly to her independence of spirit. The emancipation of women inevitably led to the emergence of a new era and the disintegration of the old, bourgeois society.

The 19th century brings another great revolution. The woman is also recognized economically due to the appearance of machines and as Bebel said: the woman and the worker have in common the fact that they are exploited. The emergence of associations, women's rights to work round off family incomes and offer them another important stage in their emancipation, and by the fact that they were integrated into unions, they began to have the opportunity to defend their rights.

The fact that they are beginning to move away from the image supported by Napoleon that they are providers of children, building their careers, taking part in the

labor force, means that conceiving children is no longer their first and main priority. New contraceptive methods appear, taking them away from the old life that was *an uninterrupted string of pregnancies*. (Beauvoir, 1998: pag.151) These new methods led to the separation of the sexual idea from that of reproduction. Thus, the socio-political status of woman becomes necessary in the evolution of the world, and she frees herself from being the slave of man to create heirs and acquires a new state through her participation in the production of work.

The absence of a man at home during the war causes women to take over many manly occupations. The emergence of nurseries and kindergartens make motherhood easier. All these aspects freed the woman from many social constraints, even more all this led to the emergence of sovereigns such as Catherine of Russia, Elizabeth of England and many other female characters who marked the evolution of history. The field in which they have managed to assert themselves best and create their careers has been the cultural one, due to the fact that women have become the muses of poets, they have influenced art and thought in general, as they would influence the field of art and dance particularly, Isadora Duncan.

“to the different women I've been”

### **Childhood**

With a childhood which matured her at an early age and with her dramatic experiences throughout her life, Isadora states that it is difficult to write about her own life, due to her own metamorphosis: *“The more I advance in the meaning of my memories, the more I understand the impossibility to write your own life or rather that of the various women I have been”*. (Duncan, 1993: pag.137)

She fought for the freedom of woman and her exit from the sphere of "servant" and child-bearer: *“So many women imagine that after forty years the dignity of life must exclude love. How wrong these women are! What an inexhaustible mystery to feel your body alive, living, along this strange journey I was making down here.”* (Duncan, 1993: pag.256)

From the first pages of her book readers can see that Isadora Duncan is describing every emotion and feeling for her every stage as a woman. These personal experiences described by Isadora can be a good start in discussions with students regarding the transition from childhood to adolescence in terms of bodily changes.

Isadora Duncan's book offers an overview of femininity, managing to convey the stages of a woman's evolution. Her personal life enrich us through her valuable writings about the transition from childhood to adolescence and beyond. Through the perspective of Isadora Duncan, readers can discover the experiences of a woman during the changes in her body and the emotional states due to these changes. The valuable text that

Isadora Duncan wrote continues to inspire until now and the next generations through personal development, passionate experiences and the desire to feel free.

## **Adolescence**

The condition of the woman's body and the changes it undergoes is another extraordinary vision that Isadora describes: "First, the fine, thin, shy, trembling body of the maiden I was, then its metamorphosis into the bold Amazon. Then the bacchante crowned with the vine, giddy with wine, falling powerless, without resistance, under the mouth of the satyr, then the blossoming, the development of sweet flesh, of voluptuous flesh, breasts that become so sensitive to the slightest amorous emotion that they send along nerves flowing with pleasure; the sex that turns into a blooming rose whose fleshy petals close violently over the prey. I live in my body like a spirit in a cloud - a cloud of rosy fires and voluptuous figures." (Duncan, 1993: pag.282)

I consider this passage in which Isadora talks about her body transformation a very important material to work with students. Surely every young ballerina going through the teenage period will find herself in those lines and they will empathize with the author.

Isadora has been loved and adored by many men, and each of them represents a stage, a passage, or the cause of each of Isadora's transformations. "*Thus, individual life thus consists of a succession of stages whose beginnings and ends form ensembles of the same order: birth, social puberty, marriage, paternity, class advancement, occupational specialization, death. And to each of these ensembles are related ceremonies whose object is identical: the realization of the transition of the individual from a determined situation to another determined situation.*" (Gennep, 1996: pag.16) The stage that Isadora avoided almost all her life was that of marriage.

Among Isadora's first loves was André, who, discovering that he would have been the first man in her life, did not want to take on this responsibility. "*You find me in his arms, overwhelmed by caresses, heart pounding, every nerve flooded with pleasure and my whole being floating in ecstatic joy. "I'm coming to life at last," I exulted, when suddenly he stood up and, falling on his knees at the edge of the bed, cried out with indescribable emotion, "Oh! why did not you tell me? What a crime to do. No, no, you must remain pure. Get dressed, get dressed now." These were my first youthful adventures, on the borders of that unknown realm, which was Love, where I was anxious to enter, and which had been denied me for many years because of the impression of religious respect I produced on those who loved me.*" (Duncan, 1993:pag.50)

Isadora's experiences describe with great emotion the sensitive period that young ballerinas go through during their teenage years. Each stage of the

transformation of girls from childhood to adulthood is reflected by the experience and emotions that shape the human being.

### **Pregnancy**

Another delicate period in the life of a ballerina is the period of pregnancy. I think it is important for teenage girls to be aware of this stage also. It is delicate because, in addition to the break she has to take, body changes are also a sensitive subject. From the experience between Isadora and Craig, Isadora wrote a few lines about this stage of pregnancy from a ballerina's point of view.

She will meet another important man in the artist's life in 1905, in Berlin, Gordon Craig. This was the first man she got pregnant with. Isadora gives us many descriptions of her own states while pregnant. The changes she goes through, her inner struggle, the states from enrichment to mutilation. As a dancer you take much more care of your own body, and at this stage of your life you are afraid of deforming your body. After a tournament, Isadora retired to a village on the shores of the North Sea. During this time that she could no longer dance due to pregnancy, Isadora wrote a series of dance exercises and references to her dance style. She also reflected on the changes in her body:

*“My beautiful marble body was stretching, crumbling, deforming. It is a strange revenge of nature that as the nerves are more refined, so the brain becomes more sensitive and the faculty of suffering greater. .... The moment a woman has a career, especially as a dancer, is a defining moment for the future of her career: Where was my ambition? My reputation? I often felt miserable and defeated. The struggle with life, this giantess, was unequal; but then I thought of the child that was to be born, and all the sadness dissipated.”* (Duncan, 1993: pag.145) In this paragraph Isadora highlights the changes of her body in the same time with the emotional sensitivity which probably comes from hormonal changes. These hormonal changes are present throughout a woman's life and it helps if girls are aware of these changes since their teenage years. This way many of her mental struggles would be avoided or they would no longer be experienced with the same intensity.

Even if Isadora goes through fears and difficult experiences during her pregnancy, she finds peace in writing and dancing, trying to channel her creativity towards new projects. She offers many insights about her challenges and also for her happy moments that womanhood offers in an inspirational way.

### **After giving birth**

After giving birth, she began to dance: Many times, while I was dancing, my milk flowed down my costume. *“Oh, how hard it is for a woman to pursue her career!”* (Duncan,

1993: pag.155) Separation from the father of her child was inevitable. Although she loved him dearly, if she had continued to live with him she would have had to give up her art.

Lohengrin won her love through his love of children and because he helped Isadora in times of crisis." His generosity towards the children, his genuine anxiety and sorrow when faced with little Erica's illness, all these won my love to him." (Duncan, 1993: pag. 178) After a brief passage through Russia, she met Craig and Stanislavski again. Craig proposed to spend the rest of his life with her, but she refused. She returns to Paris where Lohengrin was waiting for her. He could provide for her and offer her the financial comfort needed. She got pregnant, but the child died at birth. Lohengrin proposed to her, however she refused. "Then for the hundredth time I made a firm resolution, that henceforth I would devote my whole life to art, which, with all its unyielding demands, is a hundred times more grateful than men." (Duncan, 1993: 195) At that time, she only had dancing as a refuge: "I was dancing like I had never danced before! I was no longer a woman, but a flame of joy, a fire!" (Duncan, 1993: pag. 207) After the terrible accident of her children, Isadora had the thought of suicide: "I sit with my eyes on the target before me." (Duncan, 1993: pag 215) I was not aware of the passage of time. All this time she traveled. Lohengrin helps her set up the dance school which turned out to be successful. "Days at Bellevue began with an explosion of joy. Little footsteps could be heard running down the corridors, children's voices singing along."; (Duncan, 1993: pag. 236) "My teaching power seemed to reach the limits of wonder. It was enough for me to stretch out my arms to the children for them to start dancing; I was opening a path in the spirit of the Dance, which was pouring out in waves over them." (Duncan, 1993: pag 237)

During the war Isadora offered her dance school to be used as a hospital for wounded soldiers. "Bellevue! My Acropolis that was supposed to be a source of inspiration, an Academy for improving life with the help of philosophy, poetry and music!" (Duncan, 1993: 242) Because of the war, she accepts a contract for South America and goes to Buenos Aires.

The tragedies she went through made her even think of suicide and stopped believing that she could be happy anymore: "Maybe, in this world, what is called happiness does not exist. There are only happy moments." (Duncan, 1993: pag.266) What remained constant in Isadora's life was her love of children and art: "Give beauty, freedom and strength to children. Give the people the art they demand." (Duncan, 1993: pag. 196) Isadora Duncan had difficult moments trying to balance motherhood with her career. She had physical challenges like dancing while lactating, and made many sacrifices in her personal life for her career. Among her most important relationships were the one with Craig and Lohengrin. They had many tense periods because Isadora preferred to

put her career first. Among the most dramatic experiences in her life there was the loss of her children. All these experiences led to the thought of killing herself but she found the strength to focus on the little girls from her school. Among the values that Isadora wanted to pass on to the pupils of her school were the good taste for beauty, freedom and power.

Therefore, starting from these examples for each stage as: childhood, adolescence, pregnancy, after giving birth, stages that are part of the life of a ballerina a ballet teacher can lead young ballerinas to a healthy way of thinking through acceptance and awareness. Many psychical struggles can be avoided if the ballet teacher is prepared for this sensitive stage in the life of ballerinas. Young ballerinas tend to punish themselves by starving or other ways to punish themselves for their body changes. They must accept that these changes are inevitable and learn to be patient with them. This can be possible with good guidance from the ballet teacher.

### **Starting points in the construction of roles**

Ballet dancers are not only athletes attentive to technique. The main goal of ballet dancers is to convey the story of the performance exclusively through gestures and mime. In addition to the work that the ballet dancer puts in to succeed from a technical point of view, they polished their role through their acting skills. These acting skills must be improved through a good research of the libretto.

Starting with the libretto, the ballet dancers must pay attention to the inner monologue of the character and of their interactions with other characters or groups. The main goal is to succeed in conveying to the public the emotions and the non-verbal text of the character through a good expression of the face and a clear development of the gestures. After finding out from the libretto in which period the action takes place and in which place, it is good for the research to develop outside the libretto and student must be curious and ask questions such as: What was the social condition in that period and country?, What was the social status of the character I am studying?, How old is my character when the action starts?, How old is my character when the action ends?, and so on.

After researching the libretto, the problem will be how to express these emotions and experiences only through gestures and expressions and how will these gestures be understood by the public. The inner monologue is the most important to be as credible as possible on the stage. As the ABC model of the REBT techniques (Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy) teaches us that: thoughts create feelings, feelings create behavior, and behavior reinforces thoughts students can use these examples in the construction of the internal monologue for their role. Another example in helping students or ballet dancers is Stanislavski's method of creating a good internal monologue. Stanislavski

suggests: the actor should express out loud all the thoughts that pass through his mind about the sequence he is performing accompanied by the actual text. In the female roles, it is often found that during the show characters pass from one stage to another, such as from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood. In these cases it is good for the dancer to take this into account and find a way with the director to convey this to the audience.

From this point of view, a suitable starting point is from the preceding section of this article: "to the different women I've been". In parallel with this material, characters such as Juliet from the famous love story *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare, the volcanic *Carmen* that comes to life under Bizet's music, Swanilda from *Coppelia* ballet, Kitri from *Don Quixote* ballet and others can be discussed and analyzed from the point of view of their transformation from one stage to another as women during the action of the performance. The female role Giselle in the ballet with the same name is a test for ballerinas because of the transition from the girl in love then wounded by the one she loves to the enchanting role of the ghost after her death.

After the ballet dancers have done their role research for internal monologue, the next step is to identify the characters they will interact with. For each character ballet dancers will interact with, they must create for each of them the non-verbal text transmitted through gestures and the state they will transmit to the public. For example in the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet interacts the most with characters such as her mother, father, nurse, Paris, Romeo, the priest, and collective characters such as those who embody the Capulet or Montecchi family. For each interaction with the characters, the ballet dancer must think meticulously about the emotions they must convey to the audience and to the character they are interacting with. After establishing the emotions, clear and easy-to-understand gestures must be chosen for the non-verbal dialogue moments.

In most of the cases these dialogues of the dancers created through gestures can be found in the *mise en scène* moments. This is a French term that refers to the overall picture of a sequence. From the sets, lights, costumes and the arrangement of the characters on stage. In ballet, in most cases the stage director refers to this term when the dancers are not actually having the dancing moment. For example, as in the ballet *Giselle*, at the madness scene that was triggered by finding out the truth about the boy she loved, both the main characters and the collective character formed by the peasants and Giselle's friends have a very important role. After Bathilde tells her that Albrecht is actually her fiancé and leaves the village, Giselle's first moments of madness begin. The following characters are in the scene: Albrecht, Giselle's love and Bathilde's fiancé, Berthe, Giselle's mother, Hilarion, a peasant in love with Giselle, Wilfride, Albrecht's squire and the collective characters. Giselle interacts with each and every

one of them. She ignores Albrecht and dances alone the same dance they danced together when they met, she interacts with Hilarion when Hilarion snatches the sword from her hands before she wants to kill herself, at the sight of her worried mother she runs to her for the last hug, and after a few moments Giselle's heart stops and she dies. Giselle also interacts with the collective character trying to ask for their help.

During the main action between the main characters, the ballet ensemble that forms the collective character accompanies Giselle's movements, following her and experiencing the main character's moment of madness through feelings of worry and sadness. When Albrecht comes to them to ask for their help, the entire ballet ensemble turns their backs on him until he leaves the stage. As Stanislavski states, the scenes of the ensemble are important especially for creating the general atmosphere. It is very important for the characters in the ensemble to have their uniqueness even if they are part of the collective character. They also must research each scene and ask themselves essential things to identify the period, the place of the action and what does their role mean to the contribution of the play. For a better dynamic of the ensemble's action, it is important for the stage director to divide the large group into smaller groups, place them on the stage and give them indications regarding the monologue and dialogues that each small group must convey.

This article aims to help young ballerinas and teachers regarding the sensitive subject of the type of body shape that ballerinas must have and the difficulty of meeting the requirements due to the teenage period which includes the most changes in their bodies. These body changes can lead to emotional problems which in turn can lead to health problems. So these problems made this article take shape as an optional for young ballerinas. Based on Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*, Isadora Duncan's autobiography, *My Life*, and some of Konstantin Stanislavski principles in creating a role it is desired that the material of this work, gathered from the valuable books and experiences of the authors, come to the aid of students and teachers during their transformation into future adults and professional ballerinas.

The last part of this paper suggests methods of constructing roles in an effective way. It is highlighted the importance of the creation of the inner monologue and other details, based on a rigorous research of the character, political and economic context, and others details. For a better internal monologue it is suggested the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Stanislavski's method for creating authentic characters. Overall, the text aims to be educational in the field of dance, containing information about feminism, femininity, and methods for teenagers to maintain harmony and balance during the transformation of their bodies.

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