

Moving in the Myth:
**Modernism in Martha Graham's *Night Journey* and Hilda
Doolittle's *Helen in Egypt***

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I began dancing in a ballet class at the local YMCA in Escondido, California-my hometown. My mother, who started dancing in college, knew that I had the desire to express myself through movement. Before attending lessons, I had accompanied her to all of her dance classes, from ballet to modern to flamenco. I was most excited to begin ballet even though I already knew all of the positions from following along on the side at my mom's college courses. The YMCA lessons gave me the first foundation of the ballet technique, but I was still intrigued by the other forms of dance I had seen my mom enjoy in the past especially modern dance. I began modern dance courses, not in any particular technique or style or with particular teacher.

In my modern dance classes, I often heard quips from teachers alluding to existing modern dance techniques. When asked to contract, teachers sometimes stated, "Be dramatic with the contraction, think of Martha Graham." "Martha Graham?" I wondered. Who was this figure with whom drama and the curving of the center of the body were associated and why was there a slightly negative stigma surrounding her technique? I realized Graham was a modern dance technique and form, and from then I became intimidated about trying Graham dance course. It was not until this past summer in Paris, that I overtook my fear of the technique and took a two-week Graham technique course with Maggie Boogaart. The structure, the precision in the form and the pure rawness of the contraction exercises and stretches challenged me, but also gave way to more breath and freedom. My body felt open to express itself both in dramatic and joyous manners because the center of my body and my hips felt released and weightless. The Graham technique comes from a very different space of the connected core and the pelvis that gives the body power in vulnerability. There is room to be innovative and to affect the body and emotions

in differing ways. I was disappointed that I had not previously allowed myself to learn and become affected by the power of Martha Graham's way of moving.

Modern dance begins with a formal established foundation—as my love for it did at age eight. In the work Modernism's Mythic Pose, the roots of the Modernist movement of the twentieth century and the way it takes from traditional forms are described:

Early twentieth-century artists working in a variety of genres explored strategies designed to invoke a kinesthetic experience, a fact that highlights one of the central motifs of modernism: the desire to make sense of the body, to account for and somehow encompass bodily experiences in art, and to figure movement in words, sculpture, painting, and other media.¹

The experience and the emotional effect of a Modernist work on the individual are more important than the work of art itself. From the quotation, one can infer that Modernist artists seek to bring their audience, observer, reader or listener closer to the media itself through an emotional connection whether serious or comedic. I have experienced the goal of Modernism to incite a bodily experience in its experience of it and Martha Graham is merely one artist who has created a modernist technique. To understand the quotation more comprehensively a definition of “kinesthetic” itself is needed. Rudolf Laban states in his book *Modern Educational Dance* (1948) as quoted in Modernism's Mythic Pose: “‘kinesthesia’ as the sense by which we perceive muscular effort, movement, and position in space.”² Kinesthetic experiences are ones in which the whole body is involved in the resulting sensations and emotions of an individual's reaction.

Modernism also occurs in literature, art, and architecture and is “generally characterized by a deliberate break with classical and traditional forms or methods of expression and now often

¹ Preston, Carrie J.. Modernism's Mythic Pose, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

² Preston, 21.

used specifically with reference to the early twentieth century especially in the visual arts.”³

Among the writers involved in the Modernist movement in poetry was Hilda Doolittle, or H.D., a protégé of Ezra Pound, an important figure not only in the movement itself but also in Doolittle’s life. In the context of this definition and also the present discussion of the paper, which will compare the two modernist artists Martha Graham and Hilda Doolittle, the definition of classicism from the Oxford English Dictionary will be used. It states that classicism is “in language, literature, music, a classical idiom, form, or style; especially a linguistic or literary form derived from ancient Greek or Latin models.”⁴ The ancient world comes into the culture of the present world through this form of art.

Both Graham and H.D. take the format of the traditional Greek tragedy as outlined by Aristotle and use it to create a new tragedy that offers the perspective of the female gender. Both Barbara Sparti and Fiona Macintosh, two writers who have written about the impact of the classical world on later forms of dance, assert the value of ancient myth in dance. The myths of Ancient Greece are of most importance: “Ancient Greece has been an inspiration to dancers and choreographers throughout history. In this century alone, classical themes and attitudes influenced, among others, Isadora Duncan, Michel Fokine, Antony Tudor, and Martha Graham.”⁵

As the first literature created to answer the questions of ancient cultures, Greek myth serves as a rich source of inspiration to choreographers. It provides more possibilities for choreographers than other sources of inspiration. Meaning is already present in the language of movement, but myth can express what is either difficult or impossible to say or has simply furnished a space in

³ "Modernism," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. September 2012.

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/120622?redirectedFrom=Modernism>> (1 December 2012).

⁴ "Classicism," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. September 2012.

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/33888?redirectedFrom=Classicism>> (1 December 2012).

⁵ Barbara Sparti, “Antiquity as Inspiration in the Renaissance of Dance: The Classical Connection and Fifteenth-Century Italy” *Dance Chronicle* 16, no. 3 (1993), 373.

which to negotiate competing ideas or pressures.⁶ Myth serves as a source of inspiration in both creating movement material and infusing it with emotion and meaning. It provides the foundation for a Modernist aesthetic that audiences can experience.

Both Graham and H.D., found inspiration in Greek tragedies and mythology for their works *Night Journey* (1947) and *Helen in Egypt* (1952), respectively. Graham used Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as her inspiration and H.D. used various ancient sources including Euripides's play *Helen* along with a fifty-line poem by Greek poet Stesichorus of Sicily. These Modernist works aim to stimulate an emotional experience within the individual as a fulfillment of the Modernist desire in art. The innovations of the "vaginal cry fall" and the arabesque penchee in Graham's *Night Journey* parallel the innovations of the prose and stanza form and the repetition in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*. Although both works are innovative, create a Modernist subconscious space, and have a female lead, they each differ in the power and effectiveness of how the emotional character of the female protagonist is portrayed through the words and the movement of each work. Movement and words have the ability to convey character and emotion to an audience, but one is most effective in inciting a reaction and effect in the observer or the reader. Modernist work by both Graham and H.D. seeks to redefine classicism for a new period and break with traditional forms of expression through either movement or words. Modernist ideals strive to connect with the emotions of the body, and it is Graham who is most effective in fulfilling this stipulation of Modernism through her innovative approach. Graham shows that dance can be even more primitive and raw than words.

The process of comparison begins with an analysis of the inspirations for Graham and

⁶ Fiona Macintosh, *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World: Responses to Greek and Roman Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

H.D. and will move into a comparison of the lives of the artists. *Oedipus Rex* exemplifies the traditional form of classical literature and heroic tragedy. Sophocles writes his heroic tragedy during the Classical Period of Greek culture (480 to 323 B.C.E) when art, literature, and thought flourished and laid the foundation for Greece and western culture. Aristotle describes tragedy in his *Poetics*: “The main tenets of the theory of tragedy, therefore—the stress on unity of action, on pity and fear, and on the nature of the complex plot—confirm the characterization should be integrally involved in the composition of the ideal tragedy.”⁷ Aristotle then delineates the traits of the tragic hero who by definition was male:

The tragic hero is "a [great] man who is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but because of some mistake. a great man: "one of those who stand in great repute and prosperity, like Oedipus and Thyestes: conspicuous men from families of that kind." The hero is neither a villain nor a model of perfection but is basically good and decent."⁸

The focus of Greek tragedy was the fall of the male hero. Oedipus in Sophocles’ work and Achilles and Paris in *The Iliad* are heroic characters replaced in Graham and Doolittle’s modernist works by the women Jocasta and Helen. The main characters in Graham and H.D.’s poem become the tragic hero.

In his article “Dance, Gender and Psychoanalysis: Martha Graham's *Night Journey*,” Burt Ramsay gives a succinct summary of the tragedy of Oedipus Rex that will serve as a point of comparison with Graham’s life. The following summary begins and is cited. The Theban King Laius consulted the Delphic Oracle about the child his wife Jocasta was carrying. The reply came that the child, when born, would grow up to kill his father and marry his mother. Consequently, as soon as the child Oedipus was born, Laius had him expose on a mountain and left to die. A

⁷ Aristotle. *Poetics*, translated by Stephen Halliwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 164.

⁸ Aristotle, 166.

shepherd, however, took the baby, to the city of Corinth. There he was adopted and brought up by the Corinthian king, Polybus, who was childless. Oedipus grew up, unaware of his adopted status. When as a young man he was teased by a courtier because he didn't resemble Polybus, Oedipus went to consult the Oracle at Delphi, only to be told by the priestess, "Away from the shrine, wretch! You will kill your father and marry your mother." Leaving Corinth, at a crossroads he met Laius who, unbeknownst to him was his real father. Both assumed they had right of way and refused to give way to the other. This resulted in a fight in which Oedipus killed his father. He then proceeded to Thebes, outside whose walls he met the Sphinx, who was menacing and threatening the city's inhabitants, strangling and devouring everyone who was unable to answer her riddle. He was hailed as the king of Savior of Thebes once he answered the riddle, and he married the previous king's widow, Jocasta, not realizing she was his mother. All seemed to go well for a number of years—long enough for the couple to have four children---until Thebes was infested with a plague. Sophocles' play opens with Oedipus sending for the Oracle at Delphi to find the cause of the plague and being told to expel the murderer of Laius. The blind poet Tiresias announces that it is Oedipus who is the murderer. Jocasta hangs herself, while Oedipus takes a broach from her dress and tears out his eyes.⁹

H.D.'s sources are a fifty-line fragment by Stesichorus of Sicily (circa 640-555 B.C.) and Euripides' drama *Helen*, which claim that Helen of Troy was a phantom and that "the real Helen" was transported by the Gods from Greece to Egypt where she spent the duration of the Trojan War waiting chastely for her husband Menelaus. To provide a foundation from which to build interpretations and discussion of the works, a condensed description of these sources is given

⁹ Burt Ramsay, "Dance, Gender and Psychoanalysis: Martha Graham's *Night Journey* Dance Research Journal, 30 (1998), 38.

from Alicia Suskin Ostriker's Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America: "These texts are themselves revisionist in that they propose a virtuous Helen instead of Homer's wanton adulteress. But in H.D.'s version Menelaus is a trivial figure, and the poet makes clear that sexual chastity—or any conventional morality—is no more to be expected of an epic heroine than of an epic hero."¹⁰

Luke Mastin writes on the variation of the myth. Euripides's work, Helen, is based on a story first suggested by the Greek historian Herodotus, some thirty years before the play was written. Paris never carried off Helen of Sparta herself to Troy. According to this tradition, only her "eidolon" (a phantom look-alike or simulacrum created by Hermes on Hera's orders) was moved. The real Helen was actually whisked away to Egypt by the gods where she languished throughout the years of the Trojan War, under the protection of King Proteus of Egypt. There she remained ever loyal to her husband King Menelaus, despite the curses on her from the Greeks and Trojans alike for her supposed infidelity and for sparking the war in the first place. It is essential to know that H.D. saw herself as a Hellenic figure and that she immersed herself life in the literature about Helen, especially literature written by Euripides. His Helen is a distinctly light play with little of traditional tragedy about it; it sometimes classified as a romance or melodrama, or even as a tragi-comedy (even though in ancient Greece there was really no overlap between tragedy and comedy, and the play was certainly presented as a tragedy). It does however contain many of the plot elements that defined a tragedy in Aristotelian terms: reversal (the real and the false Helens), discovery (Menelaus' discovery that his wife is alive and that the Trojan War had been fought for little or no reason) and calamity (Theoclymenus' threat to kill

¹⁰ Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America. (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 223.

his sister, even if unrealized).¹¹ H.D. identifies most with this figure of Helen rather than the commonly presented figure that is depicted as the scapegoat for the fighting of the Trojan War without a complete emotional identity and character.

Classical mythology was Graham's present as she lived and adored the ideals of the canon of mythological tales and the meanings of rising above struggle placed before the hero. It was her goal to make her life and belief in myth real for her audiences. Eileen Or describes *Night Journey* as "a dance based on the Greek myth of Oedipus and his incestuous love for his mother, Jocasta. The supporting cast includes the blind seer, Tiresias, the female leader of the Chorus, and the six members of the Chorus known as the Daughters of the Night."¹² The choreographer embodied ideals of Greek mythology and tragedy in her thoughts and her actions. She read, "works such as J.A. Stewart's Myths of Plato," showing her respect for classical modes of thought.¹³ She cared about the history and accuracy of the myths themselves and also the ideas behind the myths. For Graham, the movement was central and important, but the thoughts and the narratives behind those movements were also important in making the dance more emotionally effective and profound.

That classical narratives were sacred to Graham can be seen their large presence in her life, and they connected her to the ideals of the past. Thus, these works that were based on Greek tragedies and mythologies gained the power of unifying an older classical world with the newer Modernist world of Graham's choreography. Creating dance was not just work for Graham; it was a calling that she felt fortunate to fulfill and that she embraced so much that "she identified

¹¹ Luke Mastin, "Ancient Greece-Euripides-Helen," *Classical Literature*, < http://www.ancient-literature.com/greece_euripides_helen.html > (2 December 2012).

¹² Eileen Or, *Martha Graham's Night Journey: A Study of the Portrayal of Jocasta as the Archetypal Heroine*. (Toronto: York University, 1987), 2.

¹³ Or, 9.

with her research material, the archetypal women-goddesses, to the extent that she became inseparable from them.”¹⁴ In allowing herself to become one with the mythological subjects, Graham was able to make her works more effective in conveying the classical emotions of the gods and the experiences and emotions of humans. The myths of ancient times could be used by Graham to unlock “the legends of the soul’s journey” that were running through her. In her autobiography, Martha Graham writes about “the blood memory that speaks to us.” Everyone has received blood from past generations, and this blood carries a “deep memory” that gives us the “gestures” and “thoughts” that we all carry. Graham completely let her body and her identity be consumed by the world of mythology to help her in her creation of new works.¹⁵

Along with her continual literary connection with mythology, Graham also “read literary critics and historians of comparative religion who adopted Carl Jung’s approach to examine the mythic foundations of literature.”¹⁶ Graham subscribed to Carl Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious. She saw herself as someone who brings things back from the past, retrieving them “from our common blood memory.”¹⁷ Her desire to bring the past into the present in her modernist works has its foundations in her obsession with the expression of humanity. The ideals of Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology, concerned the extroverted and introverted personality, archetypes, and the collective unconscious. Also, the issues that he dealt with arose from his personal experiences. This interplay resulted in his study of integration and wholeness of the body.¹⁸ The drive to create art for Graham came from this connection to the past through mythology. She states: “There are always ancestral footsteps

¹⁴ Or, 55.

¹⁵ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory*. (New York: Doubleday Press, 1991), 5, 9-10.

¹⁶ Agnes De Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham*, (New York: Random House, 1991), 121.

¹⁷ Graham, 16.

¹⁸ Charles Cowgil, “Carl Jung” *History of Psychology Archives*, May 1997

<<http://www.muskingum.edu/~psych/psycweb/history/jung.htm>.> May 1997. (2 December 2012).

behind me, pushing me, when I am creating a new dance, and gestures are flowing through me. You get to a point where your body is something else, and it takes on a world of cultures from the past.”¹⁹ The body not only has the responsibility of communicating and causing a lasting response in its viewers, but it is also the connecting force for Graham to the past. She sees the body as a possible connection to the past for all individuals.

Graham initially created the protagonist role of Jocasta for herself and the role of Oedipus for the dancer Erick Hawkins. Graham and Hawkins began an intimate relationship before the creation of *Night Journey*, and they married one year after its premiere. However, the relationship, like that of Oedipus and Jocasta, was extremely a distressing one for Graham. Graham’s biographer Don McDonagh asserts that “For nearly twelve months in 1945 Hawkins moved out of their shared apartment and went to an analyst, and that it was at this time that Graham started going to one also.”²⁰ The analyst she consulted was Frances Wickes (1875-1967), and Hawkins consulted her as well.²¹ Hawkins and Graham did not find happiness in their relationship and sought to find a solution by analyzing the mind and their emotional states. Her personal life with Hawkins and the turmoil of being artistically and romantically involved with the lead male dancer of her works led to the need to release the negativity through movement.

The roles Graham created for herself beginning with *Night Journey* in 1947 became a way for Graham to channel her reactions to the failings of her relationship with Hawkins. Jocasta is the most distinct figure because of her movement (which will be discussed later), but also her agency in taking her life within the work. Martha Siegel supports the strength of the character

¹⁹ Graham, 13.

²⁰ Don McDonagh, *Martha Graham: A Biography*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 183.

²¹ Ramsay, 4.

Jocasta: “What Graham constructed for herself over the ruins of Hawkins idyll, re-imagined through dreams, myth, and an assiduously cultivated unconscious, was a series of central roles in a series of remarkable dances. The vengeful Jocasta wasn’t the first but it was probably the most striking.”²² With the suicide, Jocasta takes complete control of her life and the effect of Oedipus upon it. It is the ultimate demonstration of her acceptance of her situation and detachment from wrongdoing. Just as her suicide shows the feeling of no longer living or needing anything, the language Graham uses in correspondence also presents that feeling of finality. A Letter from Graham to Wickes on July 12, 1959 talks of finally getting a divorce from Hawkins “I am not depressed or sad. I am just through.”²³ The relationship had caused pain during its existence, but the creation of the female heroines in her work allowed Graham to find a mental space where she no longer felt the need to express the negative emotions prompted by the separation, movement provided the release.

Greek myth also became central to the life and ideas of Hilda Doolittle. She associated the people in her life with the individual characters of Euripides’s classical works.

It was Ezra Pound who named H.D. Helen, identifying her beauty with that of the legendary Helen of Homer’s *Iliad*. Pound thought of himself as Homer, recording from a decent literary perspective the fall of Troy (which H.D. understood as a symbol for her marriage). Within this poetic context, H.D. identified Pound as Menelaus, the first husband of Helen, whom Paris (Aldington) snatched away.²⁴

In Greek legends of the Trojan War, Helen was the muse of the men of Troy and Sparta and was considered the very symbol of beauty and female perfection. H.D., similarly, became Ezra Pound’s poetic muse within the circle of his Modernist peers. He promised her marriage and mentored her writing. As the wife of the king of Sparta, Menelaus, Helen became influential due

²² Marcia B. Siegel, “Marthology.” *The Hudson Review* 46, no. 1, 1993, 188.

²³ Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work*, (New York: Oxford University Press 2012), 211.

²⁴ Janice S. Robinson, *H.D., The Life and Work of an American Poet*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 363.

to the men in her life. Pound was H.D.'s Menelaus because he gave her a new name—a new identity. Pound “exercised the strongest influence upon her development as a poet” in addition to “encouraging her classical studies and commenting upon her earliest writing.”²⁵ The effect of this guidance from an already established poetic figure is observed in her work in its Classical foundations drawn from Euripides and Stesichorus. At an early point in her poetic career, H.D. associated herself with the Greek tragic tradition and allowed it to equally consume her mind and her work.

From 1915-1952, H.D.'s interactions with Greek mythology as read in the letters during these years to the individuals in her life offer a relationship based on interactions with others. Janice Robinson quotes one such letter from H.D.'s correspondence with Norman Holmes Pearson:

It was my first summer of freedom from the overwhelming drive that had forced me through, yet sustained me, in the writing of the three novels. The prose phase was finished, you might say, the story was recorded. But there was still poetry I discovered to my surprise.²⁶

In her letters to Pearson, H.D. was open about her emotions concerning the creation of *Helen in Egypt*. Pearson, who was twenty-three years younger than H.D. when they met in 1937 after he was sent to interview Doolittle, responded with encouragement and urged her to continue writing works based on the life of Helen.²⁷ Their relationship was based on friendship and support as H.D. wrote to Pearson about using the Euripides myth of *Helen*. Pearson praises Doolittle, whom he addresses as “Hilda” in all his letters: “But in any event, these are what mark my 1952! I asked for poems, and I got a masterpiece. This is really one of the finest things you have done. This diction is simply superb in its clarity. It is true classicism, what Ezra would call “making it

²⁵ Vincent Quinn, *Hilda Doolittle (H. D.)* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), 17-18.

²⁶ Robinson, 347.

²⁷ Donna Krolick Hollenberg, *Between History and Poetry- The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 1.

new.”²⁸ Ezra Pound served as the mentoring figure throughout H.D.’s development as a poet and innovative figure among other Modernist poets roughly between 1901-1939 such as T.S. Eliot and Williams Carlos Williams.

Pearson and, even more so, Pound’s approval guided H.D. in her development as a Modernist. Susan Stanford Friedman in a discussion of H.D. and the figure of Helen notes: “She was still primarily regarded as “The Perfect Imagist” whose early poems, signed “H.D., Imagiste,” were sent by Ezra Pound from London to Harriet Monroe in America to appear in the publication Poetry (1913) and that same year she married poet Richard Aldington.²⁹ Like Pound, Aldington also served as a source of conflict and stress for H.D. Aldington did not fulfill the role of husband well, and his adulterous relationships with other women beginning in 1916 caused H.D. to search for a remedy to the stress she experienced.³⁰ Aldington and H.D. divorced in 1937. She then instigated a relationship with Freud to assist in coping with her experience. After Freud, H.D. sought the Austrian psychoanalyst Walter Schmideberg, and Austrian psychoanalyst who was ““so good at re-threading and re-stitching,’ made H.D. feel ‘well-knitted’...”³¹ Bear, as H.D. called Schmideberg, gave her the freedom to channel her emotions into words and express them more fully through the stanzas of her poetry.

Both H.D. and Graham identified themselves with the main character of the works they created. They both experience of deeply influential and often negative relationships with men who served as inspirations and players in the works and who later were no longer part of their lives. The works were created after these periods of separation and/or distress. Euripides and

²⁸ Letter from 22 December 1952, Between History and Poetry- The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 131.

²⁹ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Penelope’s Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.’s Fiction. “Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture, vol. 48. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38.

³⁰ Friedman, 63.

³¹ Robinson, 339.

Sophocles served as the initial writers who gave the women a template with which to work. The artists were not re-writing the works; they were re-envisioning them with their lives as a large influence on the characters and players. It was revolutionary to have the female be the lead in both choreographic and written work *Night Journey* and *Helen in Egypt* especially with a Greek theme.

Art and life became one in *Night Journey* and *Helen in Egypt*. Mark Franko notes in his book about Graham that “Both *Night Journey* and *Voyage*, intertwined with Graham’s personal life, belong to a period extending from her first separation with Hawkins in 1946 to the couple’s decisive breakup in 1950 and its aftermath in Graham’s effort to come to terms through Jungian analysis with the deeply regretted loss of Hawkins.”³² The journey through Jocasta’s unconscious and the struggle she faces with life and the love for Oedipus is a journey through Graham’s emotional toil with love. Jocasta cannot decide whether or not to take her life after discovering the incestuous nature of her relationship. Yet, in taking her own life she is blaming herself for the action. H.D. also identifies with her main female protagonist. However, she does not blame herself for the emotional conflict or the results of the action—the end of the relationship with a lover. “By 1915 H.D. had come to see her marriage to Aldington in the context of the abduction of Helen by Paris. She presents this “image” as her understanding of the reality of her life.”³³ Helen does not want to be abducted from her home in Troy, but she is conflicted as to whether she loves Paris. Helen does not blame herself for the events in her life, but blames the male figures around her.

In *Night Journey*, there are two main male figures, but only one female figure, which further places focus on the movements and the struggle of Jocasta. Jocasta is the “hero,” and it is the

³² Franko, 97.

³³ Robinson, 101.

hero's struggle and challenge that one must observe rather than that of either of the two males.

The characters of the work correspond to individuals in Graham's life:

Graham makes Jocasta the analysand and also appears to cast Tiresias as her analyst. It is the latter that appears at the start of the piece and forces her to face up to her past. The fact that, when he reappears at the end of the piece, he no longer stops her from hanging herself suggests that she has now resolved whatever psychological conflict it is that they were working on.³⁴

Her life is directly represented in the work and the title, and Frances Wilkes becomes the Tiresias figure in her interactions with Erick Hawkins. Helen becomes a representative heroine for herself, for the poet, and also for all women through H.D.'s new form of poetic writing: "In presenting the story of the Trojan War in a new form, H.D. comes to terms with the ironic fact that she (Helen) is being blamed because the poets (the Greeks) are fighting over her... In presenting the lament of the Trojan maidens, H.D. is suggesting that all women, Trojan and Greek, are made to suffer for the warrior impulses of men."³⁵ The battle Helen faces as the hero of the work is not only her battle, but it is also representative of the battle H.D. feels all women face in their relations with men.

Graham's innovation in establishing a Modernist setting starts with the artistic environment created by Isamu Noguchi's set. It follows the same desire to connect the audience with the emotions and the culture of the past and "looks as if it has been constructed out of fossilized old bones. Both sculptor and choreographer surely saw this as a way of evoking the age-old, archetypal significance of the Oedipus myth."³⁶ *Night Journey*, which premiered in 1947 with music by William Schumann had the power to inspire emotions such as sadness or

³⁴ Ramsay, 44.

³⁵ Robinson, 102.

³⁶ Ramsay 41.

disappointment.³⁷ A rehearsal video from a rehearsal at Lake Placid, New York, in 1973 was viewed as well as a recording of the dance itself from 1960 on the video *Martha Graham-An American Original in Performance*.³⁸

Jocasta begins the work of *Night Journey* standing and swaying with a noose contemplating death. *Night Journey* begins in the present and reverts to Jocasta's memory of her past with Oedipus and their time together as lovers. Eileen Or summarizes the work: "Lasting thirty minutes, the dance unfolds in a series of flashbacks as Jocasta contemplates death."³⁹ Graham gestures in anguish toward her forehead for a moment, and then she falls to the ground with her legs outstretched in an almost walking position. Jocasta and the seven Chorus women hold their fingers in both a contracted manner with an open palmed gesture. This tension fully depicts the sadness and the grotesqueness of the incestuous events. The angularity of the jumps and their suddenness are matched by the angularity of the Chorus women and what looks like a scepter on Jocasta's head.

H.D's innovation in joining stanza and prose form induces insight into Helen's mind, and Graham's choreographic unity of the classical past in a Modernist present induces insight into Jocasta's mind. Graham "reformulated ancient myth and used it as an organizing principle for her dances."⁴⁰ Graham realized the value of myth in helping her create choreography that reached her audience with its intense emotions. Her admiration for the myths themselves shows how deeply rooted in classicism and mythology she was:

³⁷ Zajko Vanda, *Dance Psychoanalysis, and Modernist Aesthetics: Martha Graham's Night Journey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 331.

³⁸ *Martha Graham An American Original in Performance*. Directed by Alexander Hammid. 93 min. Kultur International Films Ltd., 1960. Videocassette

³⁹ Or, 2.

⁴⁰ Henrietta Bannerman, "Ancient Myths and Modern Moves: The Greek Inspired Dance Theatre of Martha Graham," Macintosh, 256

Graham understood the relationship between Greek myth and the innermost reaches of the mind and heart, she grasped the principles that underpin Greek tragic theatre...the arousal of ‘pity’ and ‘fear’ and the subsequent purging of these emotions through catharsis.⁴¹

She wanted to create more than beauty and more than a narrative; she wanted to incite emotions whether they be passion or sadness or any other human emotion through the myth to her audiences.

The texts of Sophocles and Apollodorus give a more lengthy version of the story of Oedipus and Jocasta, but Graham uses her dance narrative to focus on Jocasta’s emotions and character rather than those of Oedipus: “This intensely private, erotic, perspective modernizes and feminizes the myth just as much as does the new centrality of Jocasta’s role in the tragedy.”⁴² Jocasta, is the central figure of *Night Journey*. Graham, naturally, found it easier to portray her gender as the central figure in each of her work. Helen’s relationship with men in Euripides’s *Helen*, and H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* is based initially in her physical beauty. The image of the beautiful female who is hated for her beauty in *Helen in Egypt* begins, like Euripides’ *Helen* with the questioning about the name or image, onoma or eidolon, of Helen “hated by all Greece.”⁴³

Movements such as a fall to the ground from a single leg balance or just lying down at a underscored the narrative of sadness. This sadness stems from Jocasta’s horror at taking part in such a grotesque event—a mother sleeping with her son. The repeated falls also represent Jocasta’s fall from an honorable state to a dishonorable one, which echoes the hero’s fall from a high to low status in a Greek tragedy. Thus, *Night Journey* is more effective in presenting the turmoil of the female characters than the written work itself. The movement language creates a

⁴¹ Bannerman, 270.

⁴² Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (London: Routledge, 1998), 158.

⁴³ Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 228.

greater emotional effect through Graham's desire to make her respect for the classical world the most emotional and tangible sensation for an audience in the theater.

In her autobiography Graham devotes time to explain the "vaginal cry." It is the main technique in the movement language that works to include the audience in the emotional action:

Now Jocasta kneels on the floor at the foot of the bed and then she rises with her leg close to her breast and her head, and her footway beyond her head, her body open in a deep contraction. I call this the vaginal cry; it is the cry from her vagina. It is either the cry for her lover, her husband, or the cry for her children. The dance proceeds but there are small intimacies that I have never revealed in words. All of these things mean a tremendous amount to me. I don't talk about them as much because people might think I'm a little cuckoo. But as other people took over the dance it seemed necessary to explain the certain small mysteries that animate the instant in the reliving of the tale.⁴⁴

Jocasta's movement allows Graham to feel connected to the classical past. It is the method she uses to draw the audience into that world and to express her inner emotions from the center of the body outward to others.

I had the opportunity to view the work this past March at the Joyce Theater downtown during the Graham Company's season. Jocasta was danced by Carrie Ellmore-Tallitsch with Tadej Brdnik as Oedipus. Before viewing the live performance of the work, I had viewed a video recording of Graham dancing the role of Jocasta herself. Martha Graham's recorded movement gave me the basis from which to see how the current female dancer would dance Jocasta. However, because the movements have retained their purity and power to express emotion, the conviction and commitment to each movement remain constant over time. Ellmore-Tallitsch danced the role as if she had been the only dancer to move through space as that character in that specific point in time. She also shared glimpses of the classical and traditional foundation of the

⁴⁴ Graham, 214.

movement language that Graham portrayed in her first presentations of her work. The movement language without changes in its original form serves as a bond between Graham herself and the female dancers who dance the role of Jocasta each performance of the work. The dancers become connected not only to Graham herself through the movement tale, but they also connect to Sophocles' written tale itself. The movement and the physical setting of the Graham work are two of the innovations that are used to fulfill the Modernist aesthetic, and "While Graham may have only privately called the action of kneeling stretched on the floor a vaginal cry the move itself, like much of Jocasta's choreographed movement in *Night Journey*, communicates an intimate visceral quality."⁴⁵

Not only did Martha Graham connect her movement language to that of Sophocles' written language and reinvent his work, but she also focused the work on Jocasta and the tensions of her mind. Sally Banes explains: "one important change from the Sophocles version is that sexual passion here becomes the crux of the relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta."⁴⁶ This change is experienced in the movements themselves. In the performance, the dancer Oedipus moved into a chair position to hold and cradled Jocasta as she swayed almost within a small chamber that he created within the space of his chest and legs. In this moment, the two dancers united as one being to express not only a tension that existed in their relationship, but also a unity in emotions of anguish and despair. Jocasta's movement in particular has its own distinct nature that sets her apart from the Chorus and Oedipus. There are many back hinges and back bends that end on the ground. Within the movement vocabulary of the work as a whole, Jocasta's bodily words create their own form of speech: "Jocasta's movement vocabulary in the dance is one that illustrates her orientation with the state of unconscious: there is a strong sense of wandering and a lack of

⁴⁵ Ramsay, 49.

⁴⁶ Banes, 163.

attention to space which gives her moments a general indecisiveness.”⁴⁷ The backbend is not only a movement that requires a lot of strength to execute with control, but it also portrays the anguish and the state of not feeling stable within oneself within space. Jocasta’s character is strong, but she is uncertain of how to proceed in life with the pains of knowing her negative actions.

Graham’s method of creating the audience’s journey in her work begins with this emotional center, while H.D uses her experience with mythology to take her reader on Helen’s journey through poetic form. She ends her obsession with the works of Euripides with *Helen in Egypt*. It is the culminating work in her Euripides series and the one in which her lyrical poetic style is most apparent like Graham’s Jocasta. H.D.’s Helen relives moments of her life in which she attempts to decipher her identity and her role in her current world. Helen remembers:

Achilles was the false bridegroom,
 Achilles was the hero promised
 To my sister’s child,

Promised to her,
 Promised to me,
 Promised to Iphigenia;⁴⁸

Parts of the poem are written in the conventional stanza form, but there are also commentaries following or preceding the stanzas that are italicized and stated in paragraph form. This is extremely similar to *Night Journey* in that the main female character calls upon memory to relive the moment of love between herself and the male character. Jocasta and Oedipus dance a duet upon the Noguchi stone bed just as Helen and Achilles speak to one another about the state of their relationship through the stanzas of the poem. The male figures in both of these cases

⁴⁷ Or, 79.

⁴⁸ D. H., *Helen in Egypt* (New York: Grove, 1961), 84.

initially do not recognize the identities of the women—the women themselves don't even completely understand who they are in relation to the males (Achilles and Oedipus). However as the interactions continue in speech for Helen and Achilles and in movement for Jocasta and Oedipus, the identities of Helen as the Helen of Troy and Jocasta as Oedipus's mother are realized.

H.D. re-imagines the work of Euripides through the lyrical medium of a poem that is temporally unifying in a similar manner to Graham's approach in *Night Journey*. In the Introduction to *Helen in Egypt*, the poet Horace Gregory writes of this new type of poetic narrative as "One in which the arguments in prose act as a release from the scenes of highly emotional temper in the lyrical passages."⁴⁹ H.D.'s words join prose and poetry to create a language that comments both on the internal and the external action of the players in the work with a focus on the action of Helen, the protagonist. With the two worlds being conveyed, a full image of the character Helen is offered. Gregory also comments on H.D.'s intention in writing the work as "centered upon the nature of reality, or as she has said less abstractly, more modestly, 'a wish to make real to myself what is most real.' Her innovations are allied to that concern, to evoke the timeless moment in a brief lyrical movement and imagery of verse."⁵⁰ The complete image of Helen and her emotional state is more effectively conveyed through the words in both italicized and stanza forms. Sadness, conflict, indecisiveness, and disappointment are induced by the words of H.D.'s poem because the reader not only experiences Helen's actions and character through her present being but also through the past actions of individuals such as Paris and Achilles.

⁴⁹ D.H, x.

⁵⁰ D.H, ix.

H.D.'s undefined Modernist space for the poem is Egypt and Troy, which differs from the classical space with which Helen is most associated in mythologies of the Trojan War. The fifty-line poem by Stesichorus from which H.D. drew inspiration states: "According to the Pallinode, Helen was never in Troy. She had been transposed or translated from Greece into Egypt. Helen of Troy was a phantom, substituted for the real Helen, by jealous deities."⁵¹ H.D. wants to go against assumptions about Helen and her role in the Trojan War and give substance to the phantom figure. She wants to capture the voice of the woman for whom many fought. Her goal is to defend Helen and create the image of a figure with negative connotations. In the beginning of the work, H.D. writes:

old enchantment holds,
 here there is peace/ for Helena,
 Helen hated of all Greece.⁵²

H.D. wants those who assume Helen is the reason for the many deaths of the Trojan War within Sparta and Troy to be convinced otherwise. Helen is a figure who is often discussed, but her point of view is not often revealed. Throughout the whole of the poem, there is a sense of enchantment as H.D. attempts to create the vision of the true Helen for the reader to imagine with his or her mind. This veil of enchantment persists and becomes a literal motif, which will be discussed further.

In the Leuke portion of *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. uses the word "leuke" to signify a new state within Helen's being and consciousness. Leuke is "L'Isle Blanche" or "white island." The color white reflects the new state of rebirth upon which this part of the poem enters. It is a blank time and slate. Helen has regained an idea of her identity, and she begins to remember moments from Troy and the individuals with whom she interacted. In the middle portion of the work, she

⁵¹ D.H, 1.

⁵² D.H, 2.

begins to move from the present into remembrance. As the recipient of the action, the audience senses the poetic world only when Helen speaks. Toward the middle of the work, Helen answers the question, “Why Leuke? Because here, Achilles is said to have married Helen who bore him a son, Euphorion. Helen in Egypt did not taste of Lethe, forgetfulness, on the other hand; she was in an ecstatic or semi-trance state...Remembrance is taking its place.”⁵³ The dreamlike state of remembrance is difficult to describe fully in words, but H.D.’s imagery is highly effective since she is able to unite the words with imagery and lyricism. Nevertheless, Graham’s *Night Journey* offers more of an established environment through its movement vocabulary, theatrical setting and modernist use of space.

Graham creates Jocasta’s movement vocabulary to “have an internal logic that can be traced back to basic attitudes or mental states. This correlation between her movements (form) and her internal attitudes (content) is the choreographer’s major strategy in communicating to the observer Jocasta’s inner turmoil.”⁵⁴ Jocasta cannot believe that she has committed such an awful act with her son, but as she relives their coupling through memory she also accepts the fact that she enjoyed the passion of their time together. Isamu Noguchi’s set gives the narrative a theatrical element, which adds to the emotional effectiveness of the work. Noguchi’s set includes “furniture that looks as if it’s made from bones: pedestals and a rigid bed comprised of abstract male and female figures.”⁵⁵ In its totality of movement, music, narrative, and emotion, Martha Graham’s *Night Journey* is most effective in creating dramatic and emotional reactions in its observers.

⁵³ D.H., 113.

⁵⁴ Or, 90.

⁵⁵ Banes, 158.

An analysis of Graham's movement brings one closer to the subtleties of the work just as close readings of the poem and its words form an image of Helen. H.D.'s lyrical form and narrative become a reality like the movement-language Graham uses in her work, which allows the audience and those researching the work to see the centrality of Jocasta's character. Carrie Ellmore-Tallitsch, the dancer I watched as Jocasta in March 2012, embodied the released and emotive movement language, and I could see the words with each stab of the arm and the plié of the knees. Even the pupils of her eyes seem to radiate power and emotion in each movement whether small or large. As Oedipus, Tadej Brdnik's strength and emotional grace offered good contrast to Tallitsch's emotionally charged presence. One particularly striking image was when Oedipus performed an arabesque penchee on the "bed" over Jocasta.

Jocasta's extensions and other expansive movements are images that suggest her turmoil. In H.D.'s poem, Helen's anguished outbursts parallel these moments of strength and drama. At the beginning, Helen exudes a sense of confidence, even though she is uncertain—consistently maintaining the feeling of contradiction and conflict:

I am a woman of pleasure,
I spoke ironically into the night,
for he had built me a fire,
he, Achilles, piling brushwood,
finding an old flint in his pouch,
'I thought I had lost that'⁵⁶

Helen may be conflicted, but the reader gains an understanding of her perspective on the figure of Achilles. Helen's gaze and thoughts are emphasized just as Jocasta's movements emphasize her love for Oedipus and admiration for his body. Rather than the male gaze referring to the female body, it is the female gaze on the male body that empowers. Her confidence in being a

⁵⁶ D.H., 12.

woman of pleasure contrasts with later emotions of fear when Helen is conflicted about how others gaze upon her as Queen of Sparta. She is afraid of those who will blame her for the Fall of Troy:

O—no—but through eternity,
 she will be blamed for this and she feels it coming.⁵⁷

Helen's internal monologue is written in the italicized prologues to the parts of each section, but then her actions are also portrayed through the normal stanzas of the work. Her entire being—internal in italicized prose and external in stanzas—is the focus of the work.

Helen is the central force in her world in H.D.'s poem, even though she is wandering through her dreamlike state. The action of the poem is inflicted upon her or induced by her actions, and like a tragic hero she must overcome the destined fall or challenge as hero. It is assumed that she is the main speaker unless a different speaker is named:

Paris: you say you did not die on the stairs,
 that the love of Achilles sustained you;
 I say he never loved you.⁵⁸

It is assumed that the reader is constantly inside Helen receiving both her internal and external experiences. However even when other individuals speak in the work, it is to comment or add resonance to the conflicted nature of Helen's character as Paris does here. The veil of enchantment is the connecting element between Helen's inner world of indecisiveness and the outer world of Egypt and Troy—two separate worlds and roles. The veil in her mind distorts her judgment; however, she is able to place a veil of enchantment over others through her beauty.

⁵⁷ D.H., 15.

⁵⁸ D.H., 149.

Helen reflects upon her present and her past to gain an understanding of her place in her Egyptian and Greek world. Although she controls these two environments through her enchanting veil of beauty, she does not truly know who she is. Her state of mind is contradictory:

and do I care,
do I care greatly
to keep him eternally?

I was happier alone,
Why did I call him to me?
Must I forever look back?⁵⁹

Helen is conflicted as to where her feelings for Achilles will lead. She does not know whether to love him or to deny that she has called him to be with her in Egypt. His charm and enchanting attempts on her are stronger than her attempts to deflect them. Helen cannot lose herself or her identity in him. Achilles continually speaks her name, Helena. Each time the word leaves from his mouth, he gains a sense of ownership over it, and it loses its connection to her being.

H.D and Graham's involvement with psychoanalytic ideas influences how both reinterpret the mythology of their works. Graham's audience is taken "beyond the explicit narrative" of Sophocles and of Apollodorus into a more emotional and intense experience that told a larger and more personal narrative.⁶⁰ Graham used Modernism to create a new form of dance to present states and emotions. "She used myth and tragedy to construct an innovative artistic language that melded dance and theatre."⁶¹ This language was all her own not only in *Night Journey* but also in many of Graham's subsequent works such as *Clytemnestra* (1958). The audience feels the mind and its sensations.

⁵⁹ D.H., 38.

⁶⁰ Nurit Yaari, "Myth into Dance: Martha Graham's Interpretation of Classical Tradition," International Journal of the Classical Tradition 10, no. 2 (2003), 223.

⁶¹ Yaari, 231.

H.D. describes her vision of the poem as a product of both music and movement with the words of her work. In her vision of the poem, she sees it as a total art form that extends past the bounds of words; this supports the identity of the poem as a lyrical imagist poem. Just as the movements of Graham's *Jocasta* are the methods of presentation for the emotions of that particular female protagonist, the words and the imagined elements of a production are the methods of presentation for Helen's emotions.⁶² H.D.'s identification with the character Helen makes the descriptions of her actions and internal state more realistic. It is these thoughts that are the center and the focus of the work:

“I will encompass the infinite
in time, in the crystal,
in my thought here.”⁶³

Since H.D. is a reflection of Helen herself, the words and the emotional journey established in the work are a journey through H.D.'s psyche. The new lyrical form becomes an autobiographical form of poetry as well that completely entrances the reader with its musical language and nuanced imagery.

Eileen Or distinctly observes this matching quality in Graham's choreography. It is effective in establishing a state of high drama, “Graham's movement language is unabashedly emotional and contrasts with the objective of the intellectual language of the original play.”⁶⁴ The dancing of *Jocasta* and *Oedipus* ends in a tableau, creating an image that remains in the minds of its observers furthering the storytelling effect of the performance. The work comes back full circle from *Jocasta*'s beginning contemplation to the end of couple's love duet where: “*Jocasta* and *Oedipus* are entangled in the same rope that served *Jocasta* to commit suicide in the opening scene, a rope that symbolizes the love connecting woman to man as well as the umbilical cord

⁶² Robinson, 365.

⁶³ D.H., 209.

⁶⁴ Or, 3.

that binds mother to child.”⁶⁵ The audience as observers and Oedipus as a participant in the movement action become entwined and connected to the story of Jocasta and her strife through this connecting rope of the movement throughout the choreography.

The noose in Graham’s work is representative of Jocasta’s relationship and psychological struggle. The veil in H.D.’s work is representative of Helen’s conflict over her identity and her relationship to the individuals around her. In Egypt, Helen has difficulty understanding her state of mind and physicality:

which was the dream?
Was the dream, Helen upon the ramparts?
Was the veil, Helen in Egypt?

I wander alone and entranced,
Yet I wonder and ask
Numberless questions;⁶⁶

Helen’s dreamlike state is associated with a veil of enchantment that lies over Helen herself, as well as Achilles, Paris, and the readers. H.D. refers to this veil on several occasions, including, for example, “The veil? The dream? Paris would convince Helen that Achilles ‘was never your lover.’ Paris would ‘break this spell,’ and ‘enter into a circle of new enchantment.”⁶⁷ The flowing object is a symbol of Helen’s enchanting nature and conflict over her identity. Her mind is clouded by indecision, and she is working to unveil her role and physical place in her world. The noose is equally a symbol of Jocasta’s conflict over her identity as Oedipus’s mother and lover. She does not know whether to use the noose to take her life since she has filled these two different female roles of mother and lover. The noose symbolizes both the umbilical cord that connects Jocasta to her son and her desire to kill herself.

⁶⁵ Or, 239.

⁶⁶ D.H., 88.

⁶⁷ D.H., 143.

At one point Helen states: “ I wander alone and entranced”⁶⁸ Jocasta, too, is a wandering soul. She wanders through her memory and re-experiences the emotions of each pivotal moment of the time shared with Oedipus. Helen too wanders amid her questions and her identities in Troy and Egypt. It is uncertain who Helen is in Egypt because her move to a new environment leaves her without a true existence. She wants to hide her identity as Helen of Troy, but it is not possible. Helen is conflicted over who she is in this space of Egypt with Achilles by her side. Jocasta passes through her journey in movements and interactions with other dancers onstage—more specifically her duets with Oedipus. Her journey is “a night journey towards rebirth (through death).”⁶⁹ Jocasta travels through a mental state of the present into the past while questioning her identity.

The space in which Jocasta and Helen struggle over their relationships with men links them in an unconscious Modernist environment. Graham’s work is more effective in presenting a visual space in which the female unconscious is exhibited in movement and a theatrical setting. H.D.’s language is dense in its imagery and use of italics and questioning vocabulary to establish the environment of Helen’s unconscious, but Graham’s work is able to visually create a more realistic space for the audience: “Yet even without a sufficient background to plumb the depths of the most complex references in her work, the audience could follow the story while maintaining an awareness that the actual task at hand was to contemplate the effects of the unconscious.”⁷⁰ The *Oedipus Rex* tragedy unites with the presentation of Jocasta’s unconscious in movement through Graham’s work. It is this union that makes the work more raw and relatable for audiences who experience the piece and its beauty. Martha Graham realized the

⁶⁸ D.H., 88.

⁶⁹ Or, 88.

⁷⁰ Franko, 99.

profound nature of the work even before its premiere. Her letters to Schuman (similar to H.D.'s letters to Pearson) are testaments to this realization: “ ‘ The dream can be her weakness, ‘ she wrote to Schuman in 1946, ‘very beautiful and very tragic, I think.’ ”⁷¹ Sophocles’ words provide the basis of the tragedy in literary form and Graham transforms these words into movement and dance. It is the space between tragedy and performance that is more defined in Graham’s choreographic world: “largely thanks to Noguchi’s set, which did not localize the action in a single representational space, thus contributing to the modernist aesthetic.”⁷² Helen is also between places in an unknown space of time and environment, but H.D.’s words do not completely present the world as Graham’s movements do.

The works of Graham and Sophocles were created for performance and each met its goal of portraying the emotions of the characters through movement and word. Yet, Graham’s movements are able to take the already established dramatic sentiments of the characters and transport them to a higher level of presentation. Jocasta is the central figure of the work; nevertheless, the viewer is able to experience the emotions of each character onstage through the backbends, leg extensions and falls. *Night Journey* uses the language of movement to create a version of the tragic play rather than a literal reading of it; “ it foregrounds the plight of Jocasta and skillfully condenses the complex plot of the drama, highlighting its main events.”⁷³ Dance serves as the mechanism for which emotion is more easily shared and presented to the audience.

Graham’s protagonist is more of a self-deprecating figure than H.D.’s Helen. However, Graham’s Jocasta remains a heroic female character. Martha Graham saw herself as a hero attempting to overcome the struggle of being in a tumultuous and emotionally taxing relationship

⁷¹ Franko, 199.

⁷² Franko, 108.

⁷³ Bannerman, 270.

with Hawkins. Other myth-inspired works of Graham such as *Clytemnestra* and *Voyage*: “projected a heroic image of herself. [Yet] This was particularly true of Jocasta in *Night Journey*, the only one of her roles she herself singled out as heroic.”⁷⁴ “I feel this character will be different from any other I have done,” she wrote to William Schuman, “because she is of heroic stature.”⁷⁵

Maggie Boogaart, the teacher with whom I studied Graham technique, spoke of the ideals of the Graham technique in a way that emphasizes the kinesthetic experience of the body. She said that in training and learning the repertoire she “felt a personal responsibility to allow the energy to sing through her body.” She became attracted to the technique because of its demands and the challenge of trying “to reach the extreme complex emotional depth of the works through movement. It is beyond the soul, and the soul is revealed to the audience in a controlled abandonment “As a dancer in the Chorus of *Night Journey*, Boogaart loved the sensation of knowing that her movements with the hands and the falls gave the audience a “guttural and raw impact” physically and mentally. Her words as a dancer and as a teacher in the Graham technique support the effectiveness of Graham’s work to influence individuals.⁷⁶

It is not the goal of Graham and H.D. to duplicate Sophocles and Euripides’s works. Using the latter as a foundation, these female artists re-establish a new artistic world that is linked to their personal lives and artistic forms. Horace Gregory notes: “H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* is no translation, but a re-creation in her own terms of the Helen-Achilles myth.”⁷⁷ H.D. aims to defend and prove the strength and the knowledge of Helen through a journey from conflict to realization in her book-length work. A 1956 letter to Norman Holmes Pearson underscored these

⁷⁴ Franko, 98.

⁷⁵ Franko, 200.

⁷⁶ Maggie Boogaart interview by Adrianna Aguilar, Paris, France, 20 June 2012.

⁷⁷ D.H., vii.

desires: “ ‘They always make H. of T. [Helen of Troy] a cutie—is it the Male Conception? She was a Spartan, a goddess etc. etc. Well—I suppose mere-men can not swallow that.’”⁷⁸ The similarities within H.D.’s life and Helen’s influenced H.D.’s desire to give Helen a distinct being with emotional facets since it was herself that she was giving to others in the poem. Helen changes from an image of beauty to a female with a character and identity. Helen is more than just the Eidolon or image for which men fought. H.D. believes that her identity transcends beauty and encompasses intellect and strength.

Graham does not see her work as storytelling, but as a reflection of life itself. Her intense belief in the power of emotion and dance pervade her work and make its ideas more apparent and tangible. In a letter to Erick Hawkins quoted by Franko, she expresses her views of the capabilities within dance and choreography: “In dancing it brings security to an audience to see a person possessed, integrated, impassioned, disciplined, beautiful with a radiance that belongs to integration—Humanity becomes potentially divine for an instant—that is enough...Choreography is secondary. The emergence of life, of personal is primal.”⁷⁹ The visual experience of seeing individuals move and emote in dancing, which Graham sees as a reflection of real life and humanity, gives the interpretation power to have a transformative effect on its viewers. Passing from the present into the past and into memory through words and telling brings confusion to the reader at various moments in H.D.’s work.

Graham takes the foundation of the myth and uses it to create a story that is both new and traditional: “Here was a dance that was not a mere re-telling of a famous Greek tragedy, but was a creation of a very different and important story, in the guise of a classical framework.”⁸⁰ *Night Journey* is a kinesthetic form of storytelling. Graham and H.D. are innovators in offering the

⁷⁸ Robinson, 364.

⁷⁹ Franko, 186.

⁸⁰ Yaari, 5

unusual perspective of the women protagonists and artists with their own personal perspectives and sentiments. But it is dance as communication that is most innovative. Dance has the power to connect the past to the present, the dancer to the dance, and the audience to the art.

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Boogaart, Maggie. Interview by Adrianna Aguilar. Paris, France, 20 June 2012.