

Raging Mothers: Maternal Subjectivity and Desire in the Dance Theater of Martha Graham

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During the 1940s Martha Graham created the now familiar genre of large-scale dance dramas that defined her repertory in its so-called mature period and brought her both national and international acclaim. These dance dramas were the result of Graham's interest in translating the great tales of classical mythology, western literature, and the Judeo-Christian tradition into choreographic narratives that featured a female protagonist whose internal struggle determined the dramatic action. Dances such as *Errand into the Maze* (the tale of Ariadne's encounter with the Minotaur); *Seraphic Dialogue* (the story of Joan of Arc); and *Clytemnestra* (a dance version of the *Oresteia*)¹ exemplify Graham's reconfiguration of dramatic narrative structure into choreographic form. That these dance dramas have traditionally been interpreted through the framework of psychoanalytic theory is a function of the pervasive influence of both Freudian and Jungian ideas on postwar American art as well as Graham's own enthusiasm for a Jungian world-view, an enthusiasm inspired by, among others, her long-time friend and colleague, Joseph Campbell.²

Histories of Graham agree that the distinguishing feature of Graham's artistry at mid-century was her encounter with psychoanalytic theories prevalent and the influence of those theories on her choreographic process and attendant thematic concerns. What is proposed here, however, is that the dance dramas of Graham did *not* in fact serve as unmediated artistic renderings of current psychoanalytic thought, but instead contested the received discourses of Freud and Jung by challenging the very premises that structure discussions of female subjectivity and female desire, specifically with respect to the figure of the Mother.

To argue that Graham's encounter with psychoanalytic theory was a resistant one is to imply a far more radical and subversive Graham than traditional histories of dance allow. This is the Graham who, in several choreographies from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s, explored maternal subjectivity by positioning the figure of a dangerous and transgressive Mother at the very center of theatrical narrative. To demonstrate Graham's intervention in both Freudian and Jungian constructions of Mother, French feminist theory, with its interest in the maternal body as a potentially explosive site from which to subvert the structures of the Symbolic, is engaged as a critical strategy (or interpretive framework) for analysis.

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Although Graham denied any personal association with feminism, the reading of Graham's choreography in the context of French feminist theory releases Graham from the constraints of the psychoanalytic discourses of her day and positions her art as resistant rather than compliant.

By the 1940s, Freudian ideas having to do with the existence of an unconscious realm that functions as a repository of repressed wishes and desires, the importance of dreams as a key to that realm, and the force of the libido over the individual psyche were well embedded in American culture. It was also at this time that the writings of Carl Jung, most of which were translated into English by 1940, were beginning to generate avid interest among a prominent group of artists and intellectuals. That Graham had read Jung, as well as various Jung-inspired authors, is established in her choreographic notebooks, a portion of which was published in 1973.³ Jottings throughout *The Notebooks* make reference to such Jungian concepts as the collective unconscious, the existence of race memory, and the psychological force of archetypal figures who are accessible through both the dream and the art process. *The Notebooks* are, in fact, strewn with references to these archetypal forces, figured by Graham as the (mostly) female deities, goddesses, and personae of various mythological traditions. In a Jungian mix of psychology, mythology, and art, Graham claimed a definition of creativity that verged on the mystical. What *The Notebooks* make clear is that Graham understood the creative process as an inner journey, the mission of which was to explore the realm of the unconscious psyche where archetypal images might be encountered, embodied, and eventually given voice. In her autobiography, she described it thus:

You begin from the now, what you know, and move into the old, ancient ones that you did not know but which you find as you go along . . .⁴ There are always ancestral footsteps behind me, pushing me, when I am creating a new dance, and gestures are flowing through me. Whether good or bad, they are ancestral. You get to the point where your body is something else and it takes on a world of cultures from the past . . .⁵

The extent to which Graham also may have read Freud at the time has not been substantiated. Indeed, it is with Jungian theory that Graham's choreography of the 1940s and 1950s is most commonly associated. As early as 1949, Margaret Lloyd in *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* remarked on Graham's familiarity with Jung.⁶ Deborah Jowitt and Suzanne Shelton have more recently examined Jung's influence on Graham.⁷ Joseph Mazo, on the other hand, has read Graham's choreography through a Freudian lens.⁸ What has not been suggested in the literature on Graham (literature that explores either the Jungian or the Freudian

context) is the notion that Graham has offered anything other than a direct (and uncritical) translation of psychoanalytic theory into theatrical terms.

Graham's early explorations of the maternal dancing Subject were expressed in a series of portraits of the Christian Madonna, the most celebrated of which is the 1931 *Primitive Mysteries*, an all-female ritual inspired by the Hispanic-Indian ceremonies of the American southwest. However, during the mid 1940s, Graham abandoned the benevolent Christian Madonna for a more ancient—and more dangerous—Mother. Two dances which she choreographed at that time (*Cave of the Heart* in 1946 and *Night Journey* in 1947)⁹ aggressively claim the plot space as maternal space in a rescripting of two classical Greek tragedies (*The Medea* and *Oedipus Rex* respectively) into the feminine—indeed into the maternal—mode. *Cave of the Heart* and *Night Journey* issue a clear challenge to the story of who owns desire—a story which is at the heart of both psychoanalytic theory and the western humanist tradition. Graham constructs Medea and Jocasta as lawless, archaic forces who erupt into civilized order (or in psychoanalytic terms, the Symbolic) to threaten its very foundations. By endowing the erotic and transgressive Mother with dramatic and textual authority, Graham gives voice to a potent maternal Subject who wrecks havoc with the laws that would contain her.

The “French feminists”—Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, and Julia Kristeva—have each explored the notion that the maternal feminine offers a discursive position that is inherently subversive to patriarchal Law, a position from which one might successfully disrupt the symbolic systems which operate to contain the female voice (and body). Although their theories diverge in significant ways, the three writers share common strategies: a critique of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic theories; an interrogation of Woman as “Other;” and an articulation of a new—and subversive—female subjectivity closely aligned with issues of language.¹⁰

To this end, Irigaray calls for the creation of a new Woman's language (*parler femme*) that will speak the intensely physical and sensuous pre-verbal experience of the mother-infant dyad. Irigaray claims that such a language will finally construct the desiring female Subject whose absence from patriarchal tradition is linked, she contends, to the murder of Mother. Helene Cixous, also concerned with the conjunction of subjectivity and language, envisions a new mode of writing (*l'écriture féminine*) to be penned in the white ink of Mother's milk. Cixous seeks to inscribe the feminine in a new and transgressive text bursting with maternal desire, a text that will serve to release the mother's song—a song before the law—“before the Symbolic took one's breath away”¹¹

Although both Irigaray's and Cixous's interest in the maternal body as an alternative source of text is relevant here, Graham's raging mothers are perhaps most closely aligned with Julia Kristeva's notion of the “abject,” an interior space

defined as the very “place where meaning collapses.”¹² According to Kristeva, abjection occurs as a result of our violent severing from the mother-body, and, insofar as abjection “preserves what existed in the archaicism of (this) pre-objectal relationship . . . ,”¹³ it is intimately connected with the unconscious realm. Kristeva’s abject is, in fact, “a deep well of memory”¹⁴ that “simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject,”¹⁵ plays on our desire to fuse with the archaic maternal, and functions to undermine the subject’s claim to coherent identity. Because the abject “disturbs identity, system, order . . . does not respect borders, positions, rules”¹⁶ and is vehemently opposed to the “I” or the superego, it represents the dangerous underside of the symbolic order. Ultimately, the abject is a space where laws break down and unspeakable desires hold sway—a space where Graham’s transgressive Mothers might feel right at home. Choreographed one year apart, *Cave of the Heart* and *Night Journey* represent Graham’s first forays into the terrain of the abject maternal. Now regarded as seminal works in the Graham repertory, both dances offer exemplary illustrations of choreographed dramatic action driven by the raging desires of Graham’s dark Mothers.

Medea as Terrible Mother

In *Cave of the Heart*, Graham constructs Medea as a vengeful, dangerous woman who is betrayed by her lover Jason and, in return, poisons the young bride who has taken her place. In the version of the myth passed down by the playwright Euripides, Medea exacts a final, more devastating revenge: she kills her two young sons, taking back from Jason what she had once given him.¹⁷ Although Graham’s *Cave of the Heart* does not stage infanticide, the gestural text of the dance presents a Medea who so thoroughly embraces a wrathful, angry maternal that the threat to her sons—and indeed to anyone else in her path—is unmistakably clear.

Graham’s Medea is a possessed and violent figure, and, as such, is unmistakably linked to the archetype which Jung identified as the Terrible Mother. In *Psychology of the Unconscious* (which is extensively quoted by Graham throughout *The Notebooks*), Jung traced the Terrible Mother archetype through various mythological traditions, theorizing that it is She who must be confronted in order for the Self to fully awaken, or to be re-born.¹⁸ Although Jung recognized the hold of the Terrible Mother over our internal psychic lives, he insisted on the need to eventually relinquish or overcome this dark and ancient realm of the maternal lest one succumb to what he called “the chaos of the maternal womb.”¹⁹ Thus, according to Jung, the rebirth of the Self occurs only when the archaic maternal has been successfully vanquished. The archetypal image of the Terrible Mother is in Jungian terms: “. . . anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.”²⁰ She is Medusa the Gorgon with snakes for hair; she is the seductive goddess Kali who devours her off-spring; and she manifests as the merciless Errinyes of

archaic Greece who pursue their victims with furious vengeance. Her realm, which fascinates at the same time that it repels, is located in the hidden recesses of our unconscious, where it lures us, seduces us, and threatens to undermine the coherence of conscious identity. To go there is to risk all. Being the risk-taker that she was, Graham indeed embraced the terrain of the Terrible Mother. *The Notebooks* throughout reveal an almost obsessive interest in the dark aspects of the Mother goddess.

Cave of the Heart was originally titled *Serpent Heart*, and the symbol of the serpent—specifically Woman as serpent—is significant to a reading of the text. Although the serpent is sometimes identified as a phallic symbol, studies of its various representations within mythological tradition place it primarily on the side of the feminine. Philip Slater, in *The Glory of Hera*, argues that the snake figure of classical mythology “appears far more as devouring than as a penetrating being”; and he asserts that in psychoanalytic terms, fear of the snake is, in fact, fear of the devouring Mother.²¹ Jung also identified the serpent with the dark Mother noting that the “motive of encoiling” in mythological tradition functions as “mother symbolism.”²² The serpent, a creature which sheds its skin and is, in a sense, born again, is linked to both birth and dying, and thus functions in various mythologies as a symbol of transformation. In Slater’s terms, the serpent is a bridge to the Mother, to non-being and to the unconscious—a sort of umbilical cord to both womb and tomb.²³

Interestingly, the issue of transformation, the symbolic equation of serpent as umbilicus, and the re-emergence of the Terrible Mother, all figure prominently in Graham’s re-telling of the Medea myth. Medea’s final solo dance, a dance in which she embodies the very process of becoming the ancient serpent-mother, is surely one of the most riveting moments of theater Graham ever composed. Indeed, Medea’s final embodiment of the sinister dark power of the archaic maternal unleashes a violent force that threatens to take revenge on the very foundations of civilized order. In this context, the infanticide of her sons (the destruction of patrilineal succession) may be seen as Medea’s logical first step.

One of the major works of the Graham repertory, *Cave of the Heart* has been widely performed over the years. In 1984, the dance was staged for video by the Martha Graham Dance Company with Takako Asakawa dancing the part of Medea.²⁴ Asakawa’s Medea is a near maniacal figure whose glee at the destruction she has wrought (the young bride murdered, Jason mad with grief) climaxes in a terrifying—and triumphant—transformation. The final solo dance begins as Medea (in a slinky black dress complete with sequined tentacles draped down the front) slyly pulls a long red, glittery strip of fabric from her bodice. She coils and uncoils it in the palm of her hand, provocatively dangles it in the air, wraps it possessively around her torso, and stretches it out high above her head as she races about the stage. Her cunning smile threatens at any moment to break into an evil

laugh. At one point, she seems to engorge the snaky strip, her mouth gaping wide as she mimes it slithering down her throat, her eyes darting madly from side to side. All of Medea's frenzied gestures encircle, or encoil, the space around her. She is particularly adept on the floor where she slithers and writhes, rotates her head wildly, and seems to spew venom from the very core of her being. Medea, increasingly at one with the serpent, eagerly revels in the ancient powers of the dark Mother. Finally, her jealous rampage spent, she encases herself in a large golden cage of shimmering, spiky coils (designed by Isamu Noguchi) to mount a small pedestal, and, in a burst of red light, Medea takes flight. In the final image she is seen atop the pedestal, one leg circling round and round triumphantly propelling her away from the scene of her revenge.

Graham described Medea as "a very dangerous, very beautiful, very implacable woman" whose passion is "the untameable thing of fire that dominates when the laws of the heart and the body are interfered with."²⁵ For Graham, this untameable thing of fire issued forth from a realm of chaos and terror (in Graham's terms, "the ancient dark world from which Medea is"²⁶), a realm which Jung cast in direct opposition to what he called the paternal principle or Logos.²⁷ According to Jung, the Logos

. . . eternally struggles to extricate itself from the primal warmth and primal darkness of the maternal womb; in a word from unconsciousness Unconsciousness is the primal sin, evil itself, for the Logos. Therefore its first creative act of liberation is matricide²⁸

Graham's Medea, who inhabits—indeed, who embodies—this realm of the archaic maternal, refuses to submit to the matricide prescribed by Jung, and her defiance may be seen to shatter the authority of the paternal principle, the Logos, and the Law.

Insofar as Graham calls forth Jung's Terrible Mother from the depths of the unconscious and then stages her as art, Graham may be seen to adhere to the imperatives of Jungian theory. In Jungian terms, psychic healing (the goal of Jung's depth psychology) occurs when the individual explores and then integrates the contents of the unconscious realm with the conscious self. Psychic balance and wholeness are achieved as opposite forces (archetypes) meet to engage in creative interaction, and eventual symbolization (art being one such form of symbolization). Graham's Medea upsets the Jungian project of psychic balance in that she represents a negative unconscious force that is allowed to triumphantly conquer the landscape of the dance (read mind) utterly unopposed. The dark Mother is symbolized into art but her power is not countered by an integrating archetypal force. It is significant that Graham created a character in *Cave* who

functions as a one-woman chorus. Although she seems to know from the outset what Medea is up to, she is completely powerless to stop her. Unlike the Euripidean chorus who ultimately mediates the devastation wrought by Medea by invoking the omniscience of the gods in all things,²⁹ Graham's choral figure is, at the end, as impotent and vanquished as are Jason and his princess bride. There are no gods here to call upon. In Graham's version, Medea roams free of all restraints. Untamed by the Jungian process of integrative symbolization, Graham's Medea figure functions as the Kristevan abject, a dangerous threat to the Symbolic and all that is lawful and orderly. In other words, the Medea of Graham, embodied as dancing Subject, offers an explosive maternal site from which to resist the structures of the Symbolic, specifically the Jungian discourse which seeks to subdue her.

Jocasta's Desire

In 1947, Graham took on the myth of Oedipus, that tale of illicit desire which so captured Freud that he appropriated it to argue the universality of human psycho-sexual development. *Night Journey*, which positions an erotic Jocasta as the dramatic agent of the plot, may be read as a direct response to a Freudian psychoanalytic theory which foregrounds male desire at the expense of Mother. Graham's remake of the Oedipal myth spins a plot of incestuous maternal desire that inscribes the feminine in decidedly subversive terms. The protagonist of the original Greek myth is, of course, Oedipus himself: a proud young man who kills his father, marries his mother, suffers for his crimes, and is eventually redeemed by virtue of having uncovered the truth of his own identity. Dramatized by Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex* and subsequently marked by Aristotle as the model text of classical tragedy, the trials of Oedipus have traditionally been read as a drama of the Subject's search for self-realization and full human consciousness. *Oedipus Rex* has served not only as the cornerstone of western drama, but, according to Peter Rudnytsky's account in *Freud and Oedipus*, the Oedipal myth functions as the very foundational text for western humanism at large.³⁰ In this sense, the story of Oedipus comes to represent the story of Man's quest for knowledge and truth. Freud's "discovery" of the Oedipal drama as the organizing narrative of human psycho-sexual development is thus predetermined by the cultural hegemony of a myth that has long captured the western imagination in its ongoing search for Self. When the protagonist of the human drama is configured as the desiring Son, the effect is to theorize the Subject as male and subjectivity as a process which demands the renunciation of Mother as a means to selfhood. In Sophocles's terms, Jocasta (the object of a taboo desire) must die so that Oedipus may undergo transformation and redemption.³¹ In Freud's terms, the mother must be abandoned in favor of identification with the father as an imperative to normative psycho-sexual development.³² Thus Graham's narrative reversal—the Oedipal story retold

by Jocasta—may be seen to challenge a humanistic enterprise, with its accompanying psychoanalytic discourse, founded on the repression of the mother in favor of the son.

Night Journey is, in Graham's own terms, "a highly erotic dance."³³ Adhering to a narrative construction typical of Graham choreography, *Night Journey* begins at the very moment of dramatic climax: Jocasta poised to strangle herself in anguished remorse for the crime *she* has committed.³⁴ The dance occurs in the space of Jocasta's memory, a flashback (or "instant of agony,"³⁵ as Graham called it) which restages the incestuous scene of passion that leads inexorably to this climactic moment. It should be noted that in the Sophoclean version of the Oedipus tale, Jocasta, who seems to come to terms with Oedipus's true identity before he himself does, exits the stage to kill herself with remarkably little fanfare. Her parting lines to Oedipus are "Ah, miserable! That is the only word I have for you now. That is the only word I can ever have."³⁶ This short declaration (or condemnation) hardly constitutes a lament worthy of Jocasta's stature as Queen, the crime she has committed, or the deed she is about to undertake. In Sophocles's play, we do not hear from Jocasta again.

In 1961 *Night Journey* was filmed with Graham herself in the role of Jocasta.³⁷ The opening scene shows Graham gently swaying back and forth, eyes gazing up at the rope noose she dangles high overhead, a determined and resolute Jocasta. The blind seer Tiresias, played in the film by Paul Taylor, enters from upstage, travels on the diagonal towards Jocasta in a slow series of pivot turns, and thrusts his long staff decisively through the center of the noose. Thus begins Jocasta's journey back in time to relive the scene of incestuous desire between Mother and Son. The original program note to *Night Journey* states that, at the moment of her death, Jocasta "sees with double insight the triumphal entry of Oedipus, their meeting, courtship, marriage, their years of intimacy which were darkly crossed by the blind seer Tiresias."³⁸ The dramatic action of the dance narrative (the meeting and coupling of Jocasta and Oedipus) occurs in this tormented space of Jocasta's remembering effectively marking Jocasta as the protagonist of a tragic plot born of feminine desire.

"Desire," wrote Graham, "is a lovely thing, and that is where the dance [*Night Journey*] comes from, from desire."³⁹ That Graham viewed *Night Journey* as the story of the Mother's desire and not the Son's is made clear in a detailed description of the dance which she included in her autobiography. The following excerpts are revealing:

Now Jocasta kneels on the floor at the foot of the bed and then she rises to her leg held close to her breasts and to her head, and her foot way beyond her head, her body open in a deep contraction. I call this the vaginal cry . . .

. . . .

She drops into a wide split fall and puts one flower out tentatively toward him, sits back and crosses her knees, opening and closing, opening and closing . . . she is inviting him into the privacy of her body.⁴⁰

Certainly Graham's movement lexicon, sourced as it is in the propulsive, ecstatic contraction and release of the pelvis, provided the perfect vehicle for a dance predicated on female desire. And, of course, it is the dance itself, as the *scene* of Jocasta's desire, which offers the primary evidence of its intent; evidence that not only positions Jocasta as desiring Subject (Graham all but reduces Oedipus to a one dimensional, posturing "index" of phallic masculinity) but reveals her as erotic Mother, a dangerous figure who threatens patriarchal myths of idealized, desexualized motherhood.

In the film version, a chorus of women in a frenzy of motion (Graham's own Furies) replace the Theban elders of the Sophocles text. Witnesses to the action and embodiments of Jocasta's torment, these "Daughters of the Night" lead Oedipus, played here by Bertram Ross, onto the stage where Jocasta waits, seated on a small pedestal. Oedipus presents Jocasta with gilded laurel branches and proceeds to woo her, strutting and swaggering in haughty gestures which seem to say, "Look at me! Aren't I grand?" She sits composed and queenly, enjoying the show, but the small contractions which begin to shudder through her torso give her away. She rises from the pedestal, glides towards him with tiny, delicate steps and commences a seductive, coquettish display which leads inevitably to the transgressive coupling between Mother and Son—a coupling which, while it casts Oedipus in the familiar role of desiring Son, locates Jocasta in the more problematized space of the erotic maternal.

Graham effectively conflates the figures of mother and lover by creating a gestural text for Jocasta which merges the nurturant and the sexual in a provocative version of Mother-love clearly outside the confines of legitimized maternal affection. The passion between Jocasta and Oedipus is staged on and around Noguchi's famous set piece, an abstract representation of the marriage bed constructed from the skeletal shapes of male and female anatomy merged as one. Seized by an intensity of desire that borders on anguish, Jocasta yields willingly to Oedipus's aggressive advances, submitting to lie beneath him as they mate. In a smooth reversal of action, she stands over him, rocking and cradling his torso in her arms, Jocasta as the soothing, nurturing Mother. Back and forth the gestures alternate, dissolving the boundaries between maternal affection and sexual passion. At one point, Oedipus stands still, holding Jocasta upside down, pressed straight against his body: her head is to the floor, she faces front, her legs crossed tightly into her body. The image is one of Oedipus springing forth from Jocasta's womb in a bizarre upside down birth; at the same time, the pose suggests an erotic

moment worthy of the *Kama Sutra*.

The dance ends as it must: Oedipus grabs the brooch fastened to Jocasta's breasts, places it in front of his eyes, and now "blinded," makes his way off stage with surprisingly little flourish. In this way, Graham ensures that the tragic action belongs to Jocasta alone. Rising from the bed to walk slowly down stage, Jocasta disrobes and pauses to stare down at the coiled rope at her feet. By this point in the dance, the rope has clearly come to symbolize both the net which enmeshes them and the umbilical cord which unites them. In one swift gesture, she picks up the rope, lifts it high above her head (which returns us to the opening moment of the dance), winds it quickly around her neck, and falls backward to the floor. Jocasta thus pays for the crime of her illicit desire.

Claiming center stage as the desiring Subject—and thus the narrative agent—of the plot, Graham's Jocasta subverts the image of the Good Mother of patriarchal tradition; at the same time, she serves to herald the return of the so-called "maternal repressed." The imperative for the son to abandon incestuous Mother-desire in fear of a vengeful father and, thereby, to come to identify with the realm of the father, serves Freudian theory as the pivotal crisis on the road to normative psycho-sexual development. Additionally, the Oedipal myth forms the basis for Freud's notion that the evolution of human civilization itself rests upon the intersection between the incest taboo, father-son rivalry, and the inevitable suppression of an earlier matriarchal tradition in favor of patriarchal order.⁴¹ Thus for Freud, the repression of the archaic maternal or, in Freud's terms, the pre-Oedipal Mother, is crucial to both individual and social health.

Madelon Springnether's *The Spectral Mother* offers a detailed analysis of Freud's pre-Oedipal Mother who, it is argued, haunts psychoanalytic theory, threatening, at every turn, to unravel its construction.⁴² Springnether likens Freud's pre-Oedipal Mother to Medusa, a figure of such power that she cannot be looked at directly; to do so would be to threaten the very basis of masculine identity. According to Springnether, it is in her aggressive, erotic force that the pre-Oedipal Mother poses a danger to the Son who must struggle to rid himself of her hold. Her repression is necessary for his psychic survival; and, as Springnether demonstrates, it is equally necessary for the survival of a theoretical edifice built in large part on her suppression. In sum, the repression of the erotic maternal, the silencing of Jocasta, serves as a prerequisite for male subjectivity and provides the essential foundation for a psychoanalytic discourse which identifies the passage to selfhood as one of Mother renunciation and denial. Freud's Pre-Oedipal mother, like Jung's Terrible Mother, must be forcefully repressed lest she disrupt the symbolic systems that struggle to contain her. Graham's imprint on both Freudian and Jungian theory gives presence to a maternal Subject whose body erupts in rage and desire, and it is in this sense that Graham's choreographic constructions of Medea and Jocasta anticipate French feminist visions of the transgressive maternal body.

Graham continued to explore the dark Mother in three subsequent choreographies, each of which situated a violent, transgressive maternal Subject at the center of a dance narrative drawn from the themes of classical mythology: Graham, like other mid century artists, was fascinated by the convergence of archaic forces and mythological tradition. *Clytemnestra*, choreographed in 1958, took the form of a ritual blood-letting, the function of which was to let loose a maternal fury that was both lethal and absolute. Graham's *Phaedra* was a dance so erotic that its 1962 performance generated a complaint brought before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee.⁴³ And in 1967, Graham brought to a close her excursions into the realm of the dark maternal with *Cortege of Eagles*, the tale of Hecuba's murderous revenge and descent into madness.

Insofar as Graham chose the archaic Mother to stage again and again, granted free reign to her desires and to her rage, and endowed her with the will to transgress, Graham constructed female subjectivity in terms both potent and volatile. Graham's feminine issues directly from the dark—in Kristevan terms, *abject*—body of Mother to claim a discursive and theatrical space that is radically altered by her presence. Kristeva claims that the artistic experience is rooted in the abject it utters.⁴⁴ For Kristeva, art not only utters the abject, but purifies it in that familiar process known as catharsis. Kristeva's abject maternal body is contained by the act of symbolization and purified of its dangers by the process of catharsis. The dance theater of Martha Graham, which gives bodily presence to the archaic maternal (bodily utterance to the abject), may be seen to offer a catharsis of a different sort. By locating maternal desire and rage as the decisive impulses of tragic action, Graham beckons forth the dangerous and suppressed powers of the "old, ancient ones," the dark Mothers who inhabit our mythologies as well as our psychologies. Graham releases the dark Mother not to subdue her by the process of art symbolization but rather to embody and, thereby, to empower her. As Graham herself put it:

By recognizing the unconscious with its horror and fear and ugly strangeness, it can become a source of power—a beauty—it can confer sovereignty.⁴⁵

The catharsis offered by such a theater carries a risk: the "untameable fires" of Graham's dancing Mothers confer a sovereignty that is dangerously charged. In a direct challenge to the psychoanalytic narratives that seek to restrain her, Graham stages the "feminine" as the volatile maternal Subject whose desires are so insistent they cannot be contained. By telling the story of Mother's illicit passions, Graham opens a dangerous discursive space where the Furies roam freely and Medusa confronts us with the terror of her gaze.

Notes

1. *Errand into the Maze* was choreographed in 1947; *Seraphic Dialogue* in 1955; and *Clytemnestra* in 1958.

2. Graham and Campbell's long association began while both were teaching at Sarah Lawrence College in the 1930s. Campbell was in fact married to Graham company member Jean Erdman.

3. Martha Graham, *The Notebooks of Martha Graham* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).

4. Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1991) 11.

5. 13.

6. Margaret Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1974)

44. Originally published: (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949).

7. See Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (New York: William Morrow, 1988) 199-233; and Suzanne Shelton, "Jungian Roots of Martha Graham's Dance Imagery," *Dance History Scholars Proceedings* (Riverside: Dance History Scholars, 1983) 119-32.

8. Joseph Mazo, *Prime Movers* (New York: William Morrow, 1977) 153-196.

9. *Cave of the Heart* with music by Samuel Barber and stage design by Isamu Noguchi was first performed on May 10, 1946 at the McMillin Theatre at Columbia University; *Night Journey* with music by William Schuman and stage design by Noguchi was first performed May 3, 1947 at the Cambridge High and Latin School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Graham danced the leading role in both productions.

10. See Ann Rosalind Jones, "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine," *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (London: Methuan, 1985) 80-112; "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l'Ecriture feminine*," *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 361-377. Also, Donna Stanton, "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva," *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy Miller (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 157-182.

11. Helene Cixous, "Sorties," *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 93.

12. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 2.

13. 10.

14. 6.

15. 5.

16. 4.

17. In one version of the Medea myth, the children survive Medea's wrath; in another, the children are murdered by the Corinthians to avenge the murder of their princess and their King. Euripides chose the most compelling of the available Medea myths, the tale of a mother's infanticide as a form of revenge.

18. C.G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

19. C.G. Jung, *Four Archetypes* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970) 32.
20. 16.
21. Philip Slater, *The Glory of Hera* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 87.
22. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious* 239.
23. Slater 95.
24. *Martha Graham: Three Contemporary Dances* (New York: Video Artists International, 1984).
25. Graham's introductory remarks to the video version of *Cave of the Heart*.
26. Graham, *The Notebooks* 60.
27. Jung, *Four Archetypes* 30.
28. 30.
29. *The Medea* of Euripides ends with the following lines spoken by the chorus:

Zeus in Olympus is the overseer
 Of many doings. Many things the gods
 Achieve beyond our judgement. What we thought
 Is not confirmed and what we thought not god
 Contrives. And so it happens in this story.

The Complete Greek Tragedies, trans. Rex Warner (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1955) 108.

30. Peter Rudnytsky, *Freud and Oedipus* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987). Rudnytsky persuasively argues that Freud was subject to a literary and philosophical heritage that had adopted the Oedipal myth as the fundamental paradigm for Self discovery as part of its humanist agenda. Further, Rudnytsky demonstrates the many parallels between Freud's and Oedipus's familial constellation to underscore the inevitability of Freud's identification with the Oedipus character.

31. Once Oedipus discovers who he really is (the son of Jocasta and Laius) he wanders in exile for many years. In the version of the myth dramatized by Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus, now an older and wiser man, at last finds favor with the gods who give him the gift of prophesy. He seeks shelter in Attica where he is protected by King Theseus; and he is finally put to rest in a sacred burial site after he bestows his blessing on Athens.

32. The terms of Freud's Oedipal complex are now familiar. The young male child, erotically attached to the mother figure, views his father as a rival. At some point, the male child "discovers" that women / girls lack a penis and he begins to fear the loss of his own. Because he is in a hostile relationship with his father, the child imagines that the father will castrate him as a form of punishment for his relationship with Mother. Out of fear of castration, the young boy gives up his attachment to Mother (or represses it) and comes to identify with Father. Once this process has been successfully negotiated—Mother has been abandoned—the boy child is on the road to normative heterosexuality.

33. Graham, *Blood Memory* 212.

34. Of Jocasta Graham wrote:

We find her standing at the foot of her bed with the cords raised high. The cords are silken cords, identifiable with the umbilical cord. The great sin of incest will dominate her later life. She had unwittingly met the young man who in time she accepted as her lover and her husband and as the father of her children. She did not realize until a great while later that she had committed the crime of incest, that she had married her own son And she rushed here to meet the final destiny of her life, her suicide. She carried in her hands the umbilical cord which was to her finally the symbol of her crime against civilization and life.

Blood Memory 213.

35. Quoted in Stodelle 148.

36. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex, Oedipus Cycle*, trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949).

37. Original film directed by Alexander Hammid (Kroll Productions, 1961).

38. Quoted in Stodelle 148.

39. Graham, *Blood Memory* 6.

40. 214.

41. See Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 1913 [1912-13]. SE 13: 1-161 and *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays*, 1939 [1934-38]. SE 23: 1-137.

42. Madelon Springnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990). Springnether offers a fascinating account of Freud's evasion (and disavowal) of the power of the pre-Oedipal mother. She also contends that the split between Freud and Jung was based in large part on their disagreement regarding the impact of the archaic or pre-Oedipal maternal on the human psyche and the significance of an early matriarchal culture subsequently vanquished by patriarchal forces.

43. House representatives Peter Freylinghuysen of New Jersey and Edna Kelley of New York attended a performance of *Phaedra* in Cologne during the Graham company's 1962 European tour. They were so offended by the explicit eroticism of the dance (and by the State Department sponsorship of the Graham company tours) that they sought to put an end to Graham's government support. The effort of the two representatives failed and Graham continued to receive state sponsorship.

44. Kristeva 17.

45. Graham, *The Notebooks* 198.