

**“Cave of the Heart,” The Medea of Martha Graham and Isamu Noguchi:  
Twentieth-Century Classical Reception in the Visual and Performance Arts**

© Ronnie Ancona (Hunter College and The Graduate Center, CUNY)

INTRODUCTION

Martha Graham, dancer and choreographer, dominated the modern dance scene for much of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Many of her pieces were inspired by Greek myth.<sup>2</sup> This article will discuss Graham's interpretation of one such figure, Medea, in her 1947 dance piece “Cave of the Heart,” with the aim of introducing classicists to a compelling version of Medea that demands our attention in its own right, and also forces us to rethink, upon reflection, earlier Medeas. While some classicists working in Reception Studies are already aware of “Cave of the Heart,” most classicists I have encountered are not familiar with this piece at all. One of my aims in this article is to remedy that situation.

Graham's interpretation of Medea cannot be looked at apart from her collaboration with her fellow artist, the sculptor and set designer, Isamu Noguchi, whose contributions to this dance piece are central. His piece called “Cave of the Heart: Serpent and Spider Dress,” [Figures 1 and 2] which functions as both set and costume, is especially engaging for its blurring of the division between sculpture (which one generally expects to be static, except for mobiles) and movement (in this case, dance). Indeed, much of the power of “Cave of the Heart” comes from its status as joint product of the visual and performance arts.

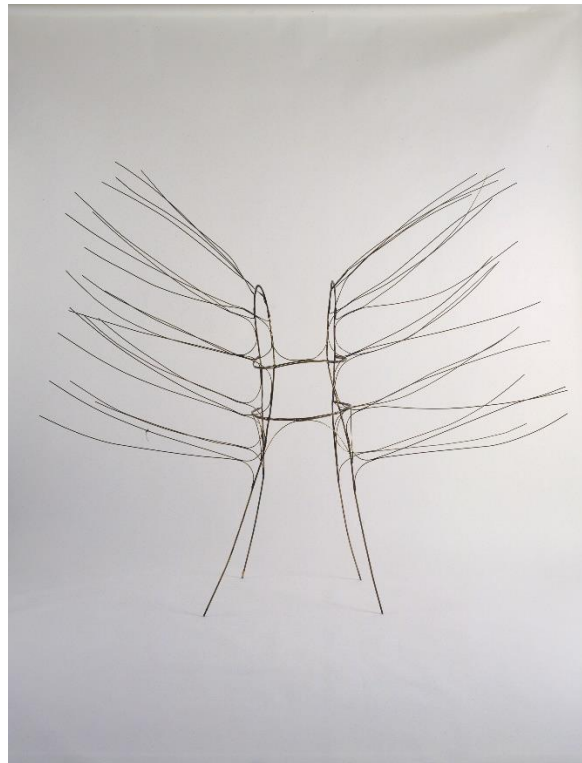


Figure 1: Isamu Noguchi. *Cave of the Heart: Spider Dress [Performance Copy]*, 1946 (fabricated 1983). Brass wire. Collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Kevin Noble.



Figure 2: Martha Graham with Isamu Noguchi's set design for her dance "Cave of the Heart", 1946. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Cris Alexander.

I will first offer background on the lives and careers of Martha Graham and Isamu Noguchi and on their long and well-documented collaboration. My aim in this first section is to provide an artistic and historical context for the dance piece, something that many, if not most, readers will not already have. In studying this dance piece, I have become as interested in the contexts from which it emerged as I am in the piece itself. I think classicists will benefit from learning about who created the work and how it came to be before I move on to a discussion of the piece itself. Next, I will proceed to the more specific topic of the Medea created jointly by these two artists. I will first discuss "Cave of the Heart" as a whole; then I will proceed to focus, in particular, on two specific features of the dance that have dramatic visual effect as well as powerful symbolic / allusive potential, (1) the Serpent and Spider Dress designed by Noguchi, and (2) a red ribbon utilized by the Medea dancer.

The "Graham-Noguchi" version of Medea is a striking instantiation of this figure who has been so popular over time and in different places. Just as Medea can be seen as a transformative figure within her own myth itself, so too she has undergone dramatic transformations from one artistic version to the next. She is a mix of universal and specific, seemingly belonging to all of us, yet also rooted in a specific time and place. Part of the power of this mid-twentieth century "Graham-Noguchi Medea," I would argue, is found

in the crucible of artistic and cultural collaboration. The worlds of Noguchi and Graham are inextricably mingled in this "new" Medea.

Medea is one of the most widely known figures from classical antiquity. She appears in numerous literary and visual sources. In addition, the reception of Medea beyond classical antiquity is extensive.<sup>3</sup> Borrowing the terms of Fritz Graf in "Medea, the Enchantress from Afar: Remarks on a Well-Known Myth," there are two traditions for her myth, the vertical and the horizontal. The horizontal creates a "running biography" of her, the vertical includes "different versions of the same mythic episode." (1997: 21). Thus, the great variety found in different versions of the Medea myth is based both on what specific moments from her myth are covered as well as on what interpretation that coverage entails. For example, this image of Medea escaping on a dragon-driven chariot enclosed in a sun [Figure 3], from a c. 400 BCE Lucanian Calyx-Krater, depicts the end of Medea's time with Jason (horizontal). Further, it contains an image of her departure, specifically, without her children, who lie depicted as dead elsewhere on the vase, while other versions have them depicted with her (vertical). According to Sourvinou-Inwood (1997: 269), "there is no Attic representation on a surviving classical vase of Medea killing her children...." I provide this statement to show how little any one element of the Medea myth can be counted on to be present, even Medea's infanticide. In some versions, Medea does not kill her children.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 3: The Flight of Medea, Lucanian Calyx-Krater, Policoro Painter (Italian) Cleveland Museum of Art, accession No.: 1991.1

While Euripides' play *Medea* is certainly the best-known literary version, others from antiquity and beyond are important to mention, as well, for their contributions to the image of Medea Martha Graham would have inherited, as well as for defining the expectations we as classicists may bring to the Medea of Noguchi-Graham. Here, I very briefly mention, in chronological order, the ancient Medeas of Pindar, Euripides, Apollonius of Rhodes, Ovid, Seneca, and the modern one of Jeffers<sup>5</sup> so that the reader will have a capsule overview of them in mind before considering the Noguchi-Graham Medea.

Pindar's Medea appears in *Pythian* 4, the epinician (or victory) ode written in honor of Arcesilas of Cyrene, upon his chariot-race victory in 462 BCE at Delphi. Here, Medea is part of the journey of Jason and the Argonauts, an event in the myth prior to her time in Corinth. She functions as a muse-like, oracular figure as she prophesies the founding of Cyrene. Included, too, are elements of her early time with Jason when he comes to Colchis to get the golden fleece with her help. Euripides' play *Medea* (431 BCE) takes place in Corinth after Jason has left her for a new bride, the local king's daughter. After much agonizing self-debate, Medea kills the new bride (and indirectly the king) as well as the two children she has had with Jason. The second half of Apollonius' third century BCE epic *The Argonautica* begins in Colchis, Medea's home, and it ends with the successful conclusion of the Argonauts' quest, in which Medea plays an important role. Ovid (first century BCE-first century CE) treats Medea in his extant work both in the epic *Metamorphoses* (7.7-424) and the verse epistle *Heroides* 12. The focus in *Heroides* 12 is primarily on Medea as abandoned woman, while the *Metamorphoses* contains both the sympathetic

young Medea and the rather scary witchy one. Seneca's first century CE play *Medea* resembles Euripides' play at first glance, but it presents a rather different Medea, less sympathetic and conflicted, and more magical, passionate, and even cosmic in scope. She is also more starkly portrayed as an outsider. Finally, Jeffers' twentieth-century *Medea* (1946), although based on Euripides' play, is noteworthy for its emphasis on Medea's foreignness, perhaps picking up on Seneca, with numerous references, specifically, to her being "Asian." It also utilizes repeated images in a fashion different from that found in Euripides, one of which is the image of stones. (Jeffers was a naturalist and built a home for himself from stone.<sup>6</sup>) This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of these earlier Medeas, but brief mention of them will hopefully remind the reader that anyone dealing with this figure artistically is part of a tradition. I will return to some of these Medeas later.

Charles Martindale, in his 1993 book, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and The Hermeneutics of Reception*, claims that "Meaning...is always realized at the point of reception." (Martindale 1993: 3). His statement has become among classicists an often-cited version of a central notion that underlies reception studies in its widest sense: reception is essential to the production of meaning and each time a work is "received," meanings are formed.<sup>7</sup> Countering the positivistic attention to the moment and circumstances of initial production, reception shifts the focus forward to audiences over time, while looking backward again, as well. The following reception study seeks to explore the meaning of Medea as simultaneously "received by" and "created by" Martha Graham and Isamu Noguchi in the middle of the twentieth century. My method draws upon a variety of sources and perspectives, including the historical record, critical reviews, authorial (artistic) intention as expressed by Graham and Noguchi, scholarly interpretations by scholars of classics and of dance, interpretation by other dancers, audience interpretation, and my own response and interpretation as developed through my own specific sensibilities as classicist and as viewer of dance and modern art.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON GRAHAM AND NOGUCHI

Martha Graham is recognized, according to Anna Kisselgoff, former chief dance critic of *The New York Times*, as "the most honored figure in American dance."<sup>8</sup> Ranked by Kisselgoff, among others, along with Modernists like Picasso, Stravinsky, and James Joyce, she developed a new kind of expression as dancer and choreographer that provided an alternative to traditional ballet. Sharing the Modernist interest in abstraction as opposed to literal imagery, she created pieces for herself as dancer and for her company that attempted to dance the thing itself rather than about the thing.<sup>9</sup> She made dances in which she frequently cast herself in the central role. It is impossible to separate at times her interests as dancer and choreographer because she was drawn to choreographing roles that she would dance. According to Nurit Yaari (2003: 229), "The decision to shift the mythical narrative from the male to the female point of view was no disjointed, purely intellectual choice but a result of Graham's dance praxis. A crucial fact to remember in this regard is that Graham's choreography was created first and foremost for Graham herself." In the dance piece "Cave of the Heart," Graham created a role for herself, the role of Medea. The Graham technique, in the words of Kisselgoff (1991) "became the first enduring alternative to the idiom of classical ballet. It is [P]owerful, dynamic, jagged and filled with tension." Based on breathing, the technique's signature moves are contraction (originating in the pelvic area) and release. The terms contraction and release correlate to exhalation and inhalation. The body contracts as the air goes out and releases as air is inhaled. Graham's dance school was somewhat humorously called the "house of the pelvic truth."<sup>10</sup>

Graham was born in Pennsylvania in 1894 and moved to California in 1908, where she started her dance training in 1916, at the late age of 22 at the Denishawn school in Los Angeles. By the 1920s she was working on the East Coast. Having started with a group of dancers that was all female, by the late 1930s she had added men to her troupe. Mark Franko's recent book, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (2012), explores, among other things, the effect upon Graham of her artistic and personal relationship with the dancer and choreographer, Erick Hawkins, who studied Greek literature while at Harvard.<sup>11</sup> He was the first male dancer in Graham's company, joining in 1939, and plays the role of

Jason in "Cave of the Heart." Their complicated relationship, which included separations and marriage for a time, includes the period in which this piece was created.

Graham's early themes were American. *Frontier* (1935), one of her American-themed pieces, inaugurated her use of stage sets for her dance pieces. Isamu Noguchi designed this first set for her (Rychlak, Printz, and Eilber 2004: 48-49). While her interest in American themes continued (cf. *American Document* [1938] and the well-known *Appalachian Spring* [1944]), in the mid-1940s she started working extensively with themes from Greek mythology and produced pieces looking at Greek myth from the female protagonist's perspective, focusing, for example, on Jocasta in the Oedipus myth in the piece, "Night Journey." Her Greek-inspired pieces include: *Fragments: Tragedy, Comedy* (1928); *Bacchanale and Dithyrambic* (1931); *Bacchanale No.2 and Choric Dance for an Antique Greek Tragedy* (1932); *Tragic Patterns* (1933); *Immediate Tragedy* (1937); *Cave of the Heart* (1946/7); *Errand into the Maze* (1947); *Night Journey* (1947); *Clytemnestra* (1958); *Alcestis* (1960); *Phaedra* (1962); *Circe* (1963); *Cortege of Eagles* (1967); *Myth of a Voyage* (1973); *Andromache's Lament* (1982); *Phaedra's Dream* (1983); and *Persephone* (1987).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, Graham has been seen variously as feminist for, among other things, the central role she gives to empowered female figures (Bannerman 2010a: 41,43) and for her personal artistic prominence, and, contrarily, as reflecting patriarchal law and ideology through depiction of emotional, out-of-control female figures.<sup>13</sup> Graham had a longstanding interest in the ancient Greek world from the very beginning of her career,<sup>14</sup> but according to Mark Franko (2012: 112) "...when it came to Greek myth and culture, Graham the autodidact gained much from Hawkins the classics scholar." Both were thoroughly familiar with the Cambridge School and the work of Jane Harrison and others on Greek myth and ritual (Franko 2012: 112). Another important influence on Graham was that of Noh drama.<sup>15</sup> Graham retired from the stage in 1969 at the age of 75, but she continued her choreography and touring with her company. She died in 1991 at age 96.

Isamu Noguchi was one of the twentieth century's major sculptors and designers.<sup>16</sup> His dates are close to those of Graham. He was born in 1904, ten years after she was, and died three years earlier, in 1988. The son of a Japanese father and an American mother, he was born in Los Angeles, but lived in Japan until the age of 13, when he moved to the United States.<sup>17</sup> While attending Columbia University, pursuing a pre-medicine curriculum, he started taking sculpture classes in the evening, returning to an earlier interest of his. He then left school to become a sculptor. In 1926, he saw an exhibition by the sculptor Constantin Brancusi. Having won a Guggenheim Fellowship, he went to Paris, and from 1927-1929 worked in Brancusi's studio. "In Brancusi's studio he found modernist justification for the aesthetic dispositions that he had developed as a youth in Japan – an orientation toward simplicity of form and structure, a love of natural materials and hand tools, and a sense that art should be integrated with the lived environment." (Apostolos-Cappadona and Altshuler 1994: 14). His work ranged from furniture and lighting design, to sculpture, gardens, and set designs. In 1938, he completed a large sculpture, commissioned for the building that housed the Associated Press in Rockefeller Center in New York City. This stainless-steel bas-relief, symbolizing freedom of the press, brought him his first recognition in the United States. To many today, he may be familiar for his 1944 Coffee Table, made of glass and wood, produced by Herman Miller, and still for sale.<sup>18</sup> His Akari light sculptures are also still being sold. These items for the home are testimony to Noguchi's interest in art in "the lived environment."

During World War II, Noguchi became a political activist and in 1942 started a group called Nisei Writers and Artists Mobilization for Democracy, dedicated to making known the patriotism of Japanese-Americans. He asked to be placed in an internment camp in Arizona, where he stayed for seven months.<sup>19</sup> In 1946 he was included in an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, called "Fourteen Americans."<sup>20</sup> His inclusion in this exhibit is noteworthy in light of his war-time experience. Noguchi's self-consciousness of his double status as American and "Other," his frequent journeying between Japan and the United States, and his relocation during World War II may have made him especially attuned to the figure of Medea, who leaves her home and is the subject of suspicion as an Outsider or non-Greek. His first retrospective exhibit came in 1968 at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City. In 1985 the museum now called The Noguchi Museum, opened in Long Island City, New York. Just as Noguchi, as a

set designer, was interested in the placement of his sets on the stage, so in his development of his museum he was interested in placing his artwork on another "stage."<sup>21</sup>

Noguchi and Graham met in the 1920s and in 1935 started their collaboration, which lasted more than four decades and entailed the design of about twenty dance sets (Rychlak, Printz, and Eilber 2004: 8).<sup>22</sup> In the words of Martha Graham dancer Takako Asakawa (Tracy 1997: 273), "Martha Graham was lucky to have Noguchi's imagination. Noguchi was also lucky to have Martha Graham's space."<sup>23</sup> According to Graham (Rychlak, Printz, and Eilber 2004: 10) "He gave me a sense of inhabited space, space that is vibrant and living, not just empty." According to Noguchi, "My interest was to see how sculpture might be in the hypothetical space of theater a living part of human relationships." (Rychlak, Printz, and Eilber 2004: 10) These two artists shared a modernist sensibility, an interest in abstraction, and a commitment to animating space. The exhibition, *Noguchi and Graham: Selected Works for Dance*, 2004-2005, curated by Bonnie Rychlak, is well documented in Rychlak, Printz, and Eilber (2004).

#### "CAVE OF THE HEART": BACKGROUND

Having provided some background on these two artists and their collaboration, I will now turn to their Medea. "Cave of the Heart" (1947), Graham's Medea dance, was a slight revision of the dance piece called "Serpent Heart," first performed on May 10, 1946 at the McMillin Academic Theater of Columbia University. The 1946 performance was part of the Second Annual Festival of Contemporary Music and was funded by the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University. The performance was of interest to the music world as well as to the dance world, as evidenced, for example, by a review of it written by the music critic, Harriett Johnson, for the *New York Post* (May 11, 1946). The composer was Samuel Barber.

"Cave of the Heart" had its premiere at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York on February 27, 1947. In his February 28, 1947 *New York Times* review, "'Cave of the Heart' Danced by Graham," John Martin, an influential figure on the modern dance scene as the first full-time dance critic of a major publication, noted: "Originally [in 1946] it acknowledged the Medea Legend as its source, but now [in 1947] it is described merely as 'a dance of possessive and destroying love which...is fulfilled only in revenge.'" Martin served an important role in bringing modern dance into discourse about Modernism.<sup>24</sup> Walter Terry, in his February 28, 1947 review for the *New York Herald Tribune*, notes: "Miss Graham no longer terms her role 'One Like Medea' and now calls it 'The Sorceress,' and the other parts have been similarly altered in their appellations, but the changes are not important to the sense of the work." In 1946, the other dancers were called One Like Jason, Daughter of the King, and The Chorus. In 1947, they were Adventurer, Victim, and Chorus. The performers in both 1946 and 1947 were Medea, Martha Graham; Jason, Erick Hawkins, Princess, Yuriko; Chorus, May O'Donnell.

This early revision in program notes on Graham's part is indicative of Graham's shifting interest in how closely and literally to connect the dance to the Medea myth. More recently, in the program notes for the February 2013 season at the Joyce Theater in New York City, a short paragraph includes specific reference to the Medea myth and the character is identified as 'The Sorceress, Medea.'<sup>25</sup> This version combines parts of the 1946 and 1947 names for the dancer's role. The notes for the January 23, 2014 performance in the Graham/Deconstructed series at the Martha Graham Dance Company's home dance space on Bethune Street in New York City are the same.<sup>26</sup> Program notes serve as a guide of sorts to those who read them before viewing a dance piece. While Terry's point that such changes "are not important to the sense of the work," they can affect how the work is perceived. For that reason, they become a possible guide to interpretation, in much the same way a label for a painting in a museum can influence how one views it. They also become part of the piece's dance history.

I would suggest that the phrase 'One Like Medea,' itself, with its language of simile, already incorporates a potential distancing quality, perhaps suggesting Graham's own acknowledgement of complicated issues involved in reception of similarity and difference from a source. Regardless of the issue of how Graham chose to identify her, the figure of Medea was a very familiar one in the larger art world at this time.



Robinson Jeffers' *Medea* had been published in 1946 and was performed to critical acclaim in 1947, with Judith Anderson in the starring role. In fact, Walter Terry's May 11, 1946 review of "Serpent Heart" for the *New York Herald Tribune* is titled "Naked Heart" and begins with a quotation from Jeffers' play: "'I will show you my naked heart,' says Medea in Robinson Jeffers's adaptation of the great Greek play, and Martha Graham in her new dance work, 'Serpent Heart,' which is concerned with One Like Medea, fulfills that promise through the expressional magic of movement." The quotation comes from Act I of Jeffers' *Medea* and introduces Medea's explanation to Three Women of Jason's betrayal and her current situation (Jeffers 1970: 121).

Graham was making decisions up to the last minute about how to represent her dance piece. "Late Notice" in *The Christian Science Monitor* of May 10, 1946 relates that there was a title earlier than "Serpent Heart" for the piece: 'Too late for anything but the record (but the record is important for future reference) comes the announcement that the title of the Martha-Graham-Samuel Barber ballet, commissioned by Columbia University and having its premiere performance at the MacMillan [sic] Theater tonight, has been changed from 'Pain and Wrath are the Singers' (from a line by Robinson Jeffers) to 'Serpent Heart' (from a line by William Shakespeare – 'Romeo and Juliet,' to be exact)." (One scholar, Heyman, [1992: 273] states that in a program printed for the first performance, but apparently not used, the dancers were called Barbarian, Hero, King's Daughter, and Choragos.) The quotation from Jeffers, spoken by the First Woman about Medea in Act I, (Jeffers 1970: 118) would have made for an interesting and overt link between Graham's *Medea* and that of Jeffers.

The phrase from Shakespeare (Act III, Scene 2) is spoken about Romeo by Juliet after she learns that he has killed her cousin Tybalt: "O *serpent heart*, hid with a flowering face! / Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?" Juliet then reverses this characterization upon realizing that Romeo would have been killed if he had not killed. Graham was clearly taken with this image of two-facedness and betrayal by a lover, but also with a character for whom the act of killing was initially considered abhorrent, but later justified. Certainly, killing and its justification is a central theme for interpreting Medea's actions. It is interesting to note that "serpent heart," "dragon," and "cave," all feature in the Jason and Medea myth and that two appear in the 1946 and 1947 titles. The transposition of the language from *Romeo and Juliet* onto the context of Medea and Jason introduces an interesting questioning of and potential overlapping of roles. To whom does the serpent heart belong? To whom does the cave of the heart belong? Jason? Medea? Both? I think we can conclude that Graham, although a practitioner of performance art, was quite adept at using language, too. Her shifting choices of title for her work and for dancer roles show that she valued words and the literary arts and was continually engaged in thinking about how she wanted her work to relate to them.

The piece was set to a musical score, as mentioned above, by the composer Samuel Barber. Graham also choreographed to music by Barber in 1978 ("Frescoes") and 1982 ("Andromache's Lament") (Dickinson 2010: 113). Aaron Copland, who had recently composed the music for Graham's "Appalachian Spring," had been approached first by Graham and had turned her down. Carlos Chavez then supplied a score that Graham decided to use for another piece, "Dark Meadow" (Franko 2012: 79). In discussing this musical project, Barber wrote: "She [Graham] is our greatest dancer and it will be interesting to do..." (Heyman 1992: 265). Barber, who lived from 1910 to 1981, was a well-known composer of opera, among other musical genres. He had a life-long personal and professional relationship with the composer Gian Carlo Menotti, whom he met when they were students at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Menotti wrote the score for Graham's 1947 "Errand into the Maze." Barber's score for "Cave of the Heart" was well characterized by dance critic Jennifer Dunning, in a 1984 *New York Times* review of a revival of the piece, as "urgent." The piece's set was by Isamu Noguchi, whose artistic relationship with Martha Graham has been described as "one of the most important collaborations in twentieth century dance theater" by Robert Tracy in his book, *Spaces of the Mind* (Tracy 2001: 4). He adds: "Their collaborations expressed similar intentions and ultimately evoked timeless images of the majestic universal legends which Graham positioned from a woman's standpoint..." (Tracy 2001: 6) Included in Noguchi's sets was an object, identified in The Noguchi Museum, its current home, as "Cave of the Heart: Serpent and Spider Dress." It

functioned as both set and as item to be carried and "worn," thus destabilizing the standard boundaries between set and costume, what is fixed and moving, background and character. Recall Noguchi's interest, mentioned above, in how sculpture might be a living part of human relationships. Noguchi's art is deeply involved with landscape, not just with objects, no surprise to anyone who has had the good fortune to visit The Noguchi Museum, itself a work of art. Among his landscapes and gardens are the UNESCO Garden of Peace in Paris (1959) and the Billy Rose Sculpture Garden in Jerusalem (1965).<sup>27</sup> Noguchi's aesthetics work in tandem with Graham's in creating this new vision of Medea.

Graham created a dance version of the Medea myth, approximately 25 minutes long, occurring in time and space, that highlights and expands upon certain features of Medea, de-emphasizes others, but also introduces new ones. What emerges is a distinct "re-vision" of this iconic figure from Greek myth. How we interpret this new Medea will be affected by many things, including our prior familiarity with Medeas, our prior knowledge of the works of Graham and Noguchi and their historical context, direction we may have received from program notes or from the words of the artists themselves, plus our own audience experience of the piece. My methodology here is to both inform and interpret in hopes of creating interest in this work and a context for the reader's eventual interpretation.

In Graham's own words from a 1984 videotape recording (and I caution that an artist's own description of his or her art need not be taken as authoritative), Medea's myth is one of passion. "...it's a passion we all understand...it's envy, it's covetousness, it's maliciousness, it's the untamable thing of fire that dominates when the laws of the heart and body are interfered with" (Graham 1984). These remarks show some of what Graham intended for the piece. Using only four dancers (Jason, Medea, The Princess, and The Chorus),<sup>28</sup> Graham focuses on Jason's new erotically charged relationship with the Princess, its disruption of and supplanting of his relationship with Medea, and the subsequent revenge exacted by her. This expands upon the themes of erotic betrayal and revenge familiar from earlier versions of Medea. The limited number of dancers helps to sharpen the focus on Medea's relationship with Jason and the impediment to that of his new bride. The singular figure of the Chorus, as she responds to and tries to resist unfolding events, is reminiscent of Euripides' Medea's internal struggles as she debates how to carry out her revenge.<sup>29</sup> There is no figure of the Nurse, as there is in Euripides, Seneca, and Jeffers. Seneca and Jeffers also rethought the Chorus of Euripides, with Seneca changing it from female to a mixed male / female group, and with Jeffers individualizing the Chorus members as First Woman, Second Woman, and Third Woman. Graham's Chorus is deeply engaged with Medea and takes on some of the traditional supportive role of both the Nurse and the Chorus from Euripides.

Gone, most prominently, is the centrality of Medea's role as mother, often seen as a canonical feature of her myth. The theme of children, so central to Euripides' play *Medea*, the best-known version of her myth, and to many other versions of her myth as well, is absent, at least at the overt level. No children are among the dancers / characters and there is no transparent killing of children. Frederick Corey notes the absence of the "tutor, the children, Creon, Aegeus, and all of the messengers, attendants, and servants," but does not single out the absence of the children, while Katharine Power acknowledges that "Cave of the Heart" does not stage infanticide, but insists that the gestural text (i.e. Euripides' play) makes her threat to her sons clear (Corey 1990: 214 and Power 1999: 68). In other words, for Power, if one knows the Medea myth from Euripides, Graham's model (or gestural text), one will read infanticide into the dance.

However, many viewers of Graham's piece will not be familiar with Euripides' play and therefore it cannot be assumed that viewers would or even should be incorporating infanticide into their understanding of this particular Medea. It is interesting, though, to see "the murder of her own two children" in the program notes mentioned above from the 2013 and 2014 performances, which suggests the current company's interest in keeping that gestural text alive, despite the children's literal absence from the dance. It is worth remembering, though, that not all Medeas commit infanticide.



However, Graham is primarily interested, I would suggest, in a "solo" Medea, in the effect upon Medea of Jason's abandonment, and in Medea's revenge upon Jason's new bride. One may miss the emphasis of Graham's vision by simply "assuming" the element of motherhood. The Medea who emerges in "Cave of the Heart" is passionate, sexual, jealous, calculating, magical, snake-like, terrifying, and ultimately triumphant. Her portrayal as infanticidal, in any overt sense, is gone, although I will argue below that Graham leaves room for that dimension of Medea through the polysemy of the red ribbon of cloth.

#### "CAVE OF THE HEART": THE DANCE ITSELF

Here is an overview of the whole dance piece. The stage at the beginning of the piece reveals Noguchi's set and all four dancers. At stage right, one sees a line of five stones [Figure 4], in the middle of the stage a platform sculpture that resembles an aorta [Figure 5], and at stage left, a green snake pad [Figures 6 and 7] with the Serpent/Spider Dress upon it. The piece begins with the Chorus figure alone (in black and red) standing upon the aorta piece, and with a triple shape in front of the snake pad and the Serpent and Spider sculpture consisting of Jason in front, the Princess (in yellow) soon revealed directly behind him, and Medea (in black) revealed directly behind her. Medea's entwining connection to Jason and the Princess (although her torso is behind them, her arms are seen reaching around and in front of them) continues through the piece in a variety of ways until she frees herself from them by the end through her vengeance. Rather than hiding behind them in mysterious, clandestine fashion, as she does at the very beginning of the dance, she becomes an actor, albeit one who seems alternately driven and driving. She appears as manipulator of events outside of herself, but also as embodiment of an almost uncontrollable force within her. The piece develops through solo dances as well as those that involve more than one dancer. At the end, Medea is the only one dancing.



Figure 4: Isamu Noguchi. Cave of the Heart: Islands [Original], 1946. Cement, burlap, wire mesh, and plywood. Collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Kevin Noble.



Figure 5: Isamu Noguchi. Cave of the Heart: Aorta [Performance Copy], 1946-1965. Paint on fabric over a wire and wood support. Collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Kevin Noble.



Figure 6: Isamu Noguchi. Cave of the Heart: Serpent [Original], 1946. Magnesite on fabric, wire mesh, plywood and wood. Collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Kevin Noble.



Figure 7: Isamu Noguchi. Cave of the Heart: Serpent [Second Version 1/2], 1946 (fabricated 1983). Bronze. Collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Kevin Noble

At the start of the piece, Medea dances around and near Jason and the Princess. After a while, Jason pushes Medea away with a dismissive outstretching of his arm and she retreats to the snake pad. He performs a dance of simulated copulation with his new love. The anguished Chorus attempts to keep Medea away from the couple and throughout shows her distress. Her movements and expression show continual disturbance with events around her. She frequently brings her hands to her face and then widely extends them left and right at shoulder height in her grief. Medea moves away from the snake pad and briefly interacts with Jason and the Princess, waving her arms at them as if casting a spell. She then dances a powerful solo in which she starts to have a somewhat crazed look and her body movements at times take on a jerkiness like those of a marionette. Flexes of the feet, convulsive contractions, and positioning the fingers, bent like claws, are some of the devices through which Medea's pain and scariness are conveyed. At one point in the solo, her head tilts back and forth rhythmically almost like a metronome. At another, she jerks her arm back repeatedly in front of her face. These mechanistic movements give the impression of something having overtaken her and the sense that something from within is in control. However, more lyrical movements are present as well, including the leg circles that reappear at the end of the whole dance, and sweeping turns and spirals. Towards the end of this solo, Medea crawls or slithers across the floor, rather snake-like, using her arms in alternation to propel her, Jason pushes her away again, her mechanistic movements re-appear, and she moves away to the aorta, where she finally stops. A joyful and light solo by the Princess follows, in which she dances for Jason. Her movements are graceful and fluid and provide a contrast to the more visceral, pelvic contract-and-release signature style of Graham just witnessed in Medea's first solo. A solo by Jason follows, characterized by large, walking moves, suggestive of a heroic journey, and firm turns. The position of his body at times resembles that of a weightlifter moving to different poses. His movements are graceful, if plodding. At the solo's end, he returns to the Princess. After a brief anguished response from Medea and the Chorus, and then from the Chorus alone moving throughout the stage with Medea having left the

aorta and returned to the snake pad, the Jason-Princess couple dance together. Jason carries the Princess on his shoulder after she has climbed up his leg and parades her around, walking and turning with straight leg, and then moves to the aorta, where he places her. He steps up to the aorta, too, and the two of them join hands. This takes us to a little past the halfway point in the piece.

What follows is the development of Medea's revenge and she takes the central role from here until the end of the piece. Operating from behind and then in front of the Serpent and Spider sculpture, she stoops down on the snake pad and grabs a narrow red cloth strip. She stuffs its end inside the top of her costume leaving the strip then hanging down from her breast. Next, she takes a crown and, with it raised over her own head, twists and turns against the Chorus, who tries to stop her. Medea places the crown on the head of the Princess and Jason gives a brief, naive, smile indicating his ignorance of the coming destruction Medea is initiating. The Chorus dances in anguish, yet again; Jason and the Princess dance and then the Princess starts to feel the deadly and agonizing pain from the poisonous crown. Medea again waves her outstretched arms with wiggling fingers towards the couple, as she did earlier before her first solo, in a gesture indicating her powers. The Princess moves to stage left, with Jason pursuing her. A brilliant (second) solo by Medea (about 4 minutes long) occurs at this point, featuring her and the red cloth strip.<sup>30</sup> She slowly and dramatically pulls the cloth strip out of her dress, her body trembling, and then holds it aloft stretched out between her hands. She dances with it in various ways, appearing to control it, but also to be controlled by it. At one point she twines it around her waist and pulls the ends very tight, giving the impression simultaneously of her controlling this magic strip, but it almost magically squeezing and constricting her. She jerks it, but it jerks her. She appears somewhat crazed, repeating some of the mechanistic motions mentioned earlier. The strip appears to be empowering, but to take over Medea as well. Her motions appear somewhat frantic, as she twists and moves one way and then back the same way. Shortly, she drops the strip to the floor and moves on the floor in front of it, almost as if showing it obeisance. She takes it, and as she holds it somewhat shortened, stretched at shoulder level, she folds it gradually up towards her mouth, and then looks as if she is spewing it / vomiting it forth onto the ground. After dancing more in front of it, she picks it up again, dances with it again, including while holding it aloft. Her movements include the leg circles mentioned earlier, which will end the whole piece. Very slowly and dramatically again she drops the strip to the ground, reaches for it again and twists it slowly in a circling motion, and then, finally, slips it back into her breast. A final chord and then momentary silence punctuate the end of this engrossing solo.

After an interlude from the Chorus, we next see a vertical draped purple shape slowly entering from stage left, with a horizontal draping like a train. Jason appears; Medea appears, peeking through an opening in the vertical purple cloth and then she drops the cloth. Jason uncovers the remaining horizontal draped figure and reveals the dead Princess. On the ground, he embraces her and rolls with her, then stops still. Medea gets into the Serpent and Spider set/dress and walks inside it triumphantly, holding it, away from the snake pad. Her heroic walk recalls that of Jason earlier, as she strides lifting each leg with unbent knee. She stops and bends over at the waist and turns from side to side and then spins around with the Dress moving with her and its tendrils or spikes radiating from her, vibrating and wiggling. She and the Dress seem to have become one and what we see is an enchanted creature with a human body and tentacles. She moves to the couple and bends over them at the waist with head down and bent over them; she wiggles her head and hands as if casting a final spell over them [Figure 8]. This movement is reminiscent of her earlier arm-waving magical moments. She then raises up the Spider Dress and flips it over 180 degrees [Figure 9]. She holds it over herself in this position, almost like a crown and walks confidently to the aorta, where she flips it over to its original position around her body and sets it down over herself inside. The Chorus is on the scene and aware of the circumstances. Medea moves her outstretched arms sinuously inside the Serpent and Spider Dress, lifts her leg up and around in a leg circle, a motif used in Medea's first solo as well as in her second, the background turns to red, she repeats the movement with her leg, the music ends, her mesmerizing leg motion continues. Here the dance ends.<sup>31</sup>





Figure 8: Martha Graham performs with Isamu Noguchi's set design for her dance "Cave of the Heart", 1946. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Martha Swope.



Figure 9: Martha Graham with Isamu Noguchi's set design for her dance "Cave of the Heart", 1946. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artist Rights Society. Photo by Cris Alexander.

## "CAVE OF THE HEART": RED STRIP AND SERPENT AND SPIDER DRESS OR SCULPTURE

Having given an overview of the whole dance, I would like to return to the narrow strip of red cloth and the Serpent and Spider Dress or Sculpture before drawing some final conclusions about "Cave of the Heart." These two objects and how they are deployed in the piece, I would argue, are central to the original contribution of Graham and Noguchi to the reception of the myth of Medea.

The red cloth strip is suggestive of snake, blood, spider, thread, innards, birth, afterbirth, heart, emotion, and magic. Like this cloth strip, Medea is often snake-like in her movements, slithering and wiggling. Her black dress has gold curving embroidery that picks up the wiggly quality of the cloth strip as well as the gold color of the Serpent and Spider Dress. She looks like a marionette at times, as if pulled by invisible strips and she pulls the strip itself around her with an almost suffocating result. The red cloth is outside of her, but it also encircles her. She puts it inside her, pulls it out, puts it back in, and in doing so even seems to be eating it and regurgitating it. Although overt reference to motherhood is absent from the piece, the strip's inside/outside transgressive quality has affinities to the fetus/mother bodily duality and joining of pregnancy. Those writing about "Cave of the Heart" and children have commented variously. Wood, a former soloist with the Martha Graham Company, refers to Medea murdering her children and sees the strip as a "snakelike umbilical chord [sic]" that Medea devours and then disgorges (2012: 5). Hodes, another Martha Graham dancer, focuses on the snake imagery alone: "In Martha Graham's portrayal, after she destroyed her rival, in an orgy of triumph she ate a snake and vomited it up again." (Hodes 2011: Loc 3893). Graham's "Night Journey" (1947), featuring the Oedipus story from the perspective of Jocasta, contains a rope with symbolic umbilical potential, which becomes the noose with which Jocasta commits suicide. While that dance piece is slightly later, the symbolism of the rope there may impact our interpretation of Graham's red cloth strip in "Cave of the Heart." Kisselgoff (1993) comments: "We do not see Medea kill her children..." but Bannerman (2010b: 270) specifies that "[i]n Graham's dance, this event [the killing of her children] takes place only in Medea's mind as symbolized in the dance of revenge." Noguchi (1987: 214) refers to the killing of the children. Interpreters of the Medea myth over time have been variously taken with the issue of children, focusing on living ones, those not yet born, and even perhaps on the mere notion of children as *potentially* transgressing a woman's body. In Seneca's *Medea*, killing her two children is not enough and Medea states that if she is pregnant, she will kill what is inside her, too (112-13). In a similar vein, in Jules Dassin's 1978 film, *A Dream of Passion*, which of course post-dates "Cave of the Heart," the childless Maia, who plays the role of Medea in the play-within-the-film and who has real-life connections to Medea's myth, performs a self-abortion in her youth in order to pursue her acting career unimpeded by children. Carol Sorgenfrei's 1975 Noh cycle about Medea makes clear that ridding herself of her children as well as Jason is essential for her rebirth and freedom. Ninagawa, also producing a 1970's Medea influenced by feminism, is interested in creating an empowered female hero who justifiably, in a blending of Japanese and Greek traditions, takes revenge.<sup>32</sup> Graham's use of a red strip of cloth may be influenced by Noh and kabuki traditions. In Ninagawa's production, Medea and the Chorus members draw red ribbons out of their mouths at the point where the Chorus speak of things changing direction and women becoming singers.<sup>33</sup> Smethurst (2002: 12-13, and 13n20) comments that such ribbons can signify blood in kabuki. She also notes that in kabuki tradition placing such ribbons into one's mouth can symbolize an expression of love and she sees Ninagawa subverting this kabuki tradition. Still further, in Ninagawa's production, the corpses of the dead children are replaced with dolls, which "have red ribbons hanging down from them; the dragons drawing the chariot now signify blood." (Smethurst 2002: 29). In Sorgenfrei's Noh Cycle version, red ribbons appear near the end. The stage directions read: "Over each arm is the robe of one of her CHILDREN. These empty costumes signify dead bodies. Red ribbons, representing blood, hang from them." (Sorgenfrei, 1975, 50). Bannerman's words (2010b, 269-70) perhaps best describe the power of Medea's solo dance of revenge, as well as its look both backward and forward: "[T]his work is a distillation of Euripides' play and is defined by Medea's dance of vengeance. In this extraordinary solo, the evil sorceress gloats over her murderous act, the poisoning of the young princess who had replaced her as Jason's wife. Her savage movement and violent gestures are chilling to behold, but there is little to



compare with the way she consumes, Kabuki-like, her own intestines, symbolized by a glittering thread which sparkles and quivers in her hands. With this snake-like cloth in her mouth, she shuffles sideways on her knees in a cataclysmic frenzy of jealousy. It is as though in this single instance, Graham encapsulates Medea's past crime as well as foreseeing her ultimate act of revenge, the slaughter of her children." I would suggest that Graham has utilized the deployment of this object, the red cloth strip, for its polyvalent symbolic potential.<sup>34</sup>

If the red cloth strip is highly suggestive, the Serpent and Spider Dress sculpture is equally so. In the words of Graham (1989): "When I needed a place for Medea on stage, the heart of her being, he [that is, Noguchi] brought to me a snake. And when I brooded on what I felt was the unsolvable problem of representing Medea flying to return to her father [MG says father not grandfather] the Sun, Isamu devised a dress worked from vibrating brilliant pieces of bronze wire that became my garment as Medea and moved with me across the stage as my chariot of flames."<sup>35</sup> In the words of Noguchi (1987: 214): "This is a dance of transformation. Medea slays the offspring of her union with Jason and is transformed into, and then consumed by, the flaming aureole of the setting sun. I constructed a landscape that recalled the Greek islands. On the horizon was placed a volcanic shape, like a black aorta of the heart. Stepping-stone islands were positioned nearby. At the left was a coiled green serpent on whose back rested a dress of gold, which was meant to be the transformation dress."<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that the *deus ex machina* of Euripides, which functions by having Medea flown away in the chariot of the sun at the end of the play, has a counterpart in kabuki theater technique in which a crane allows actors to ride through the air (Smethurst 2002, 26). Graham and Noguchi may have had both Greek and Japanese traditions in mind as they sought the vehicle (literally) for Medea's transformation.

The Dress is made of brass wire and sits on a bronze base that is green, shaped like a snake or serpent, called the snake pad. The wires branch out from a central section. They are very thin and light and move easily with a little movement in the air. Even when it is not being touched by a dancer, it moves slightly during performance, just from the movement of the air. The arms can be slipped into the sculpture to "wear" it. The wiggly wires are snake-like; they radiate like the sun; they branch out like a tree. The object stands tree-like in one place on its own, on the snake pad, as a place of shelter and refuge for Medea through most of the dance until Medea removes it and walks it to the aorta. In addition, the snake-like character of its tendrils connects with the snake-like quality of the cloth strip and the slithering motions of Medea. Finally, Medea's grandfather is Helios, the sun, and thus her becoming one with the object in a kind of apotheosis at the end, and her using its seemingly divine magical powers to triumph over her adversaries, is appropriate. Its shining gold color – it shimmers like the sun – picks up the gold snake-like lines in Medea's black dress and in the arrangement of her hair. When she lifts it over her head, it is reminiscent of the gold poisonous crown that she places on the head of her rival. At times, its wires resemble prison bars, especially when Medea is seen passing behind it, suggesting perhaps that she becomes both free and imprisoned by her act of revenge. While Agnes De Mille (1991: 279) sees Medea as "entrapped" within the sculpture at the end, the Dress is equally seen (and this seems to be Graham's interpretation) as the vehicle of Medea's triumphing. The final hypnotic and repetitive movement of her leg within the golden Snake and Spider Dress, occurring in complete silence against the backdrop of the blood-red sky, suggests Medea's trans-historical and universal nature as well as her timeless appeal.

#### CONCLUSION

One of the enduring and captivating features of the figure of Medea is that she is "Other," and she is also "Same." Her actions are grand and unspeakable and yet she speaks to us and with our voice. I would suggest that the "Graham-Noguchi" figure of Medea is a product of two artists who may have had a distinct and nuanced vision of what was "Same" and "Other": Noguchi because of his bicultural personal background and bicultural artistic interests, and Graham because of her exploration of and affinity for certain Eastern artistic traditions. The result, paradoxically, may heighten Medea's "Otherness," while also making her seem more universal. In "Cave of the Heart," the highly stylized, non-literal, and almost ritualistic actions of Medea, especially in her dance of revenge with the red strip cloth and in her

interaction with the Snake and Spider Dress, take her out of any specific cultural context, even if influenced by Eastern art, and position her even more as a figure of interest to all. Still further, by stylizing and making more ambiguous Medea's connection with infanticide, Medea becomes simultaneously an even more mysterious, yet perhaps more relatable figure embodying jealousy and revenge. Graham and Noguchi have created a new haunting, yet familiar, Medea. She is the Same Medea, yet she is Other.

Especially for literary classicists, who may customarily be fixed on words as the sole conveyors of meaning, this non-verbal Medea from the performance and visual arts engages us and challenges us to experience Medea in new ways. Without depending on words, or even on the static image one might see on a vase from Greco-Roman antiquity (as in Figure 3), we become entranced by a red strip of cloth and a contraption of wires of glistening metal; they stand still, and they move, becoming almost animated. Choreography, sculpture, movement, stage, and landscape work together to form this exciting twentieth-century Medea from Martha Graham and Isamu Noguchi. One of the values of reception studies in classics is just this – to stretch the boundaries of time and medium for our field.<sup>37</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Altshuler, B. 1995. *Isamu Noguchi (Modern Masters)*. New York, NY: Abbeville Press, Inc.
- Ancona, R. 2015. "Introduction: Mighty Medea, or why female figures from Greco-Roman antiquity matter today," in A. K. Richards and L. Spira, (eds.). 2015. *Myths of Mighty Women: Their Application in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*. London, UK: Karnac Books Ltd., xxi-xxiv.
- Apostolos-Cappadona, D. and B. Altshuler, (eds.). 1994. *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.
- Ashton, D. 1993. *Noguchi East and West*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bannerman, H. 1999. "An Overview of the Development of Martha Graham's Movement System (1926-1991)," *Dance Research* 17.2, 9-46.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. "Martha Graham's House of the Pelvic Truth: The Figuration of Sexual Identities and Female Empowerment," *Dance Research Journal* 42.1, 30-46. [2010a]
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. "Greek-Inspired Dance Theater of Martha Graham," in F. Macintosh, (ed.). *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World: Responses to Greek and Roman Dance*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 255-76. [2010b]
- Classical Receptions Journal* 5, 2013. Oxford University Press.
- Clauss, J. J. and S. I. Johnston, (eds.). 1997. *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Corey, F. 1990. "Martha Graham's Re-Vision of Jocasta, Clytemnestra, and Medea," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 10, 204-17.
- Dassin, J. director, 1978. *A Dream of Passion*. Bren Films. Film.

- DeMille, A. 1991. *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Dickinson, P. 2010. *Samuel Barber Remembered: A Centenary Tribute*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Dunning, J. 1984. "Dance: Martha Graham Troupe Presents 'Cave of the Heart,'" *The New York Times* (March 10, 1984). <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/10/arts/dance-martha-graham-troupe-presents-cave-of-the-heart.html> Accessed 12 October, 2020.
- Duus, M. (trans.) P. Duus. 2006. *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey Without Borders*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Edelson, L. 2003. "The Trope of Transformation in *Medea: A Noh Cycle*," *Comparative Drama* 37.1, 59-74.
- Eilber, J. 2004. "A Dancer Speaks Out: The Untold Story of the Noguchi Sets," in B. Rychlak and N. Printz and J. Eilber, (eds.). *Noguchi / Graham: Selected Works for Dance*. Long Island City, NY: The Noguchi Museum, 59-60.
- Foley, H. 2012. *Reimagining Greek Tragedy on the American Stage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Franko, M. 1995. *Dancing Modernism / Performing Politics*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012. *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Freedman, R. 1998. *Martha Graham: A Dancer's Life*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Graf, Fritz. 1997. "Medea, the Enchantress from Afar: Remarks on a Well-Known Myth," in Clauss, J. J. and S. I. Johnston, (eds.). 1997. *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 21-43.
- Graham, M. 1973. *The Notebooks of Martha Graham*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1984. *Martha Graham: Three Contemporary Classics* (New York, New York: Video Artists International, 1984). VHS. Includes "Cave of the Heart" (1984) – with Introduction and Ending Comments by Martha Graham. Dancers: Medea, Takako Asakawa; Jason, Donlin

Foreman; Chorus, Jeanne Ruddy; Victim (Princess), Jacquelyn Buglisi.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1989. "From Collaboration, a Strange Beauty Emerged." *The New York Times* (January 8, 1989).

<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/08/arts/dance-from-collaboration-a-strange-beauty-emerged.html>

Accessed 12 October, 2020.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *Blood Memory*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Hall, Edith, Fiona Macintosh and Oliver Taplin, (eds.). *Medea in Performance, 1500-2000*. Oxford: Legenda, 2000.

Hawkins, E. 1992. *The Body is a Clear Place and Other Statements on Dance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company, A Dance Horizons Book.

Heyman, B. 1992. *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music*. New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Hodes, Stuart. 2011. *Part Real, Part Dream: Dancing with Martha Graham, Agnes de Mille, Jack Cole, and others*. Concord, MA: Concord ePress.

Jeffers, R. 1970. *Cawdor and Medea*. New York, NY: New Directions.

Johnson, H. 1946. "Rhythm and Reason: 'Serpent Heart,' By Barber, Performed by Martha Graham," *The New York Post* (May 11, 1946). <http://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200153627/>

Accessed 12 October, 2020.

Kisselgoff, A. 1991. "Martha Graham Dies at 96; A Revolutionary in Dance," *The New York Times* (April 2, 1991).

<https://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/02/obituaries/martha-graham-dies-at-96-a-revolutionary-in-dance.html>

Accessed 12 October, 2020.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1993. "Dance in Review: 'Cave of the Heart' Martha Graham Dance Company City Center 131 West 55th Street Manhattan," *The New York Times* (October 11, 1993).

<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/11/arts/dance-in-review-342693.html>

Accessed 12 October, 2020.

LaMothe, K. 2006. *Nietzsche's Dancers: Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and the Revaluation of Christian Values*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

"Late Notice," 1946. *The Christian Science Monitor*, (May 10, 1946).

<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200153621/>

Accessed 12 October, 2020.

Lyford, A. 2003. "Noguchi, Sculptural Abstraction, and the Politics of Japanese American Internment." *The Art Bulletin*, 85, 137-51. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177330?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177330?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

Accessed 12 October, 2020.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2013. *Isamu Noguchi's Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and Nation, 1930-1950*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Martha Graham Dance Company. 2008. "Cave of the Heart/Medea Solo," rehearsal with Principal Dancer Miki Orihara for Spring 2008 performances. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtoALLAyMsA>

Accessed 12 October, 2020.

Martin, J. 1947. "'Cave of the Heart': Danced by Graham" *The New York Times* (February 28, 1947).

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihms/loc.natlib.ihms.200153677/default.html> Accessed 12 October, 2020.

Martindale, C. 1993. *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and The Hermeneutics of Reception*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. "Introduction: Thinking Through Reception," In C. Martindale and R. Thomas, (eds.). *Classics and the Uses of Reception*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1-13.

Marx, E. 2013. *Leonie Gilmour: When East Weds West*. Santa Barbara, CA: Botchan Books.

Mastrorade, Donald J. 2002. *Euripides: Medea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Matsui, H. director. 2010. *Leonie* (Kadokawa Pictures, 2010, Japan, Monterey Media, 2013, USA). Film.

McDonagh, D. 1973. *Martha Graham*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

Noguchi, I. 1968. *A Sculptor's World*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Playbill Joyce Theater, New York, NY, Spring/Summer 2013 Season, (February 2013).

Poetry Foundation website, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robinson-jeffers>. Accessed 12 October, 2020.

- Power, K. 1999. "Raging Mothers: Maternal Subjectivity and Desire in the Dance Theater of Martha Graham," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 14.1, 65-78.
- Program, 2014. "Graham / Deconstructed: Cave of the Heart" (January 21, 22, 23, 2014) Performances at Martha Graham Studio Theater, New York, NY.
- Rychlak, B., N. Printz and J. Eilber. 2004. *Noguchi and Graham: Selected Works for Dance*. Long Island City, NY: The Noguchi Museum.
- Schlapbach, K. 2018. *The Anatomy of Dance Discourse: Literary and Philosophical Approaches to Dance in the Later Graeco-Roman World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smethurst, M. 2002. "Ninagawa's Production of Euripides' *Medea*," *AJP* 123, 1-34.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 1997. "Medea at a Shifting Distance: Images and Euripidean Tragedy," in Clauss, J. J. and S. I. Johnston, (eds.). 1997. *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 253-96.
- Stodelle, E. 1984. *Deep Song: The Dance Story of Martha Graham*. New York, NY: Schirmer Books.
- Terry, W. 1946. "The Dance: Naked Heart," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 11, 1946.  
<http://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200153623> Accessed 12 October, 2020.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1947. "The Dance: Triumph," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 28, 1947.  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200153676/> Accessed 12 October, 2020.
- Thoms, V. 2012. "American Dance Pioneer Martha Graham and the Ghosts of Feminism," *Women: a Cultural Review* 23, 346-67.
- Tracy, R. 1997. *Goddess: Martha Graham's Dancers Remember*. New York, NY: Proscenium Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. *Spaces of the Mind: Isamu Noguchi's Dance Designs*. New York, NY: Proscenium Publishers.
- Wood, M.T. 2012. "Celebrating the Anti-Heroine: Championing the Fatal Flaw in Martha Graham's Female Protagonists."  
<https://marthagraham.org/downloads/anti-heroine.pdf>  
Accessed 12 October, 2020.

Yaari, N. 2003. "Myth into Dance: Martha Graham's Interpretation of the Classical Tradition," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 10, 221-42.

Zajko, V. 2010. "Dance, Psychoanalysis, and Modernist Aesthetics: Martha Graham's *Night Journey*," In F. Macintosh, (ed.), *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World: Responses to Greek and Roman Dance*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 330-46.

---

<sup>1</sup> I have long been interested in modern dance and modern art. I had the privilege of taking dance classes at the Martha Graham School when I was in high school in New York City. At a young age, I was introduced to modern art through museum visits with my father, who was an artist and later a video art critic, among other things. He was also a modern dance enthusiast. We saw many an art exhibit and dance performance together. I would have enjoyed sharing this project with him and finding out if he had ever seen "Cave of the Heart." This article emerges from the intersection of those early and sustained personal interests with my professional training and career in classics.

While teaching a course on "Medea: Ancient and Modern Figure in Literature and the Arts" in the Thomas Hunter Honors Program at Hunter College, I realized that I wanted to explore in an academic fashion the Graham-Noguchi version of Medea. I thank the THHP program for giving me the opportunity to expand my classics expertise into areas of personal interest, like the arts, and the students for their engagement. Without the program's interdisciplinary requirement for its courses, it is unlikely I would have entered upon this project at all.

Earlier versions of this work were presented at the CUNY Graduate Center Classics Colloquium (2012), a panel on Women and the Reception of the Classical World sponsored by the Women's Network of CAC, at the Classical Association of Canada Annual Meeting in London, Ontario (2012), the Bryn Mawr College Classics Colloquium (2013), and Visions: Feminism and Classics VII in Seattle, Washington (2016). The audiences at each of these venues helped me to continue thinking through this project. In addition, I would like to thank Sarah Pomeroy for reading portions of this work in progress in its early stages.

I am very grateful for a Hunter College Shuster Award, which covered the cost of permissions for the images included in this article. The following people were all extremely helpful with the permissions process: Janine Biunno, The Noguchi Museum, and earlier, Heidi Coleman; J'Aimee Cronin, Artists Rights Society, and earlier, Chelsea Rhadigan; and James Kohler, The Cleveland Museum of Art. Trevor Fear, Editor, was extremely gracious through the entire journal submission process.

Finally, I owe a great debt to the anonymous peer reviewer for this journal, whose insightful, learned, and generous comments made this a much better piece. All remaining faults are my own.

<sup>2</sup> For a list of these Greek-based pieces, see Yaari (2003: 221-23) and my discussion below. See Foley (2012: 92-96) on Graham's Greek tragedy-based dances in the context of the reception of Greek tragedy on the American stage. On Graham's Greek-inspired dance, see Bannerman (2010b)

<sup>3</sup> "New versions of Euripides' Medea were the only Greek tragedies to make a consistent mark on the nineteenth-century American professional stage, and in various incarnations the play has remained the most-performed Greek tragedy in the twentieth century." (Foley 2012 :190). For performances of various versions of Medea from 1500-2000, see Hall, Macintosh, and Taplin (2000). The fact that only a few sentences are devoted to Graham's "Cave of the Heart" (4, 143n8) provided me with added impetus to make this fascinating Medea better known to classicists. See Clauss and Johnston (1997) for a very useful collection of essays on various aspects of the figure of Medea. Mastronarde's 2002 "Green and Yellow" edition of Euripides' Medea has excellent background material on the figure of Medea, as well as



useful notes on the Greek text. See especially his chapters on "Euripides' Medea and the Medea-myth, "Neophron's Medea," and "Medea after Euripides and the influence of his Medea."

<sup>4</sup> See Johnston (1997) 55-56, who quotes Pausanias 2.3.6-7 on the Corinthians killing Medea's children because of the gifts they have brought to Glaucus and the yearly sacrifices set up in their honor. See Mastronarde (2002) 50 ff. for other examples.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) was an American poet. See <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robinson-jeffers>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robinson-jeffers>, on Jeffers' interest in nature and his building of his house in California from stone.

<sup>7</sup> For the reception of and response to Martindale's book twenty years later, see *Classical Reception Journal* 5, 2013. See also Martindale's introductory chapter to Martindale and Thomas (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Kisselgoff (1991). For biographical material on Martha Graham, see DeMille (1991), Franko (2012), Freedman (1998), McDonagh (1973), Stodelle (1984), and Tracy (1997). For autobiography, see Graham (1973) and (1991).

<sup>9</sup> See Eilber's chapter, "A Dancer Speaks Out: The Untold Story of the Noguchi Sets" in Rychlak, Printz, and Eilber (2004) and Freedman (1998: 61). For Isadora Duncan's characterization of 'to dance the thing itself' as Dionysian as opposed to Apollonian, see Franko (1995: 18). Duncan, like Graham, was heavily influenced by the Greeks. For the influence of Nietzsche on both Duncan and Graham, see LaMothe (2006). On Modernism and Graham, see Franko (1995) and Zajko (2010), specifically, on Modernism and Graham's dance piece "Night Journey."

<sup>10</sup> See Bannerman (2010a), who takes her title from this phrase and cites Graham (1991: 211) for Graham's bemusement at this characterization. See also Bannerman (1999) *passim*, and esp. 36-38 on contraction and release.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick (Erick) Hawkins received his AB in 1932 with an undergraduate concentration in Classics. He was a member of the Class of 1930. Resources on Hawkins list variously 1930 and 1932 as his graduation date. This is likely due to the difference between the Class he entered with (Class of 1930) and his actual date of graduation (1932). His time at Harvard included leaves of absence because of financial difficulties, thus delaying his graduation. (Source: Harvard University Student Record Card [UAIII 15.75.12, Box 9], Harvard University Archives.) My thanks to Kathleen Coleman, the Registrar's Office, and the University Archives, all of Harvard University, for help in tracking down this definitive information. For Hawkins on dance, see Hawkins (1992).

<sup>12</sup> This list is based on Yaari (2003) 221-23.

<sup>13</sup> See Thoms (2012) for a discussion of Graham's complicated relationship to feminism as well as Franko (2012).

<sup>14</sup> See Bannerman (2010b) 255.

<sup>15</sup> See Franko (2012) 103-04 for background on Graham's knowledge of Noh and her connection with Michio Ito, through whom Graham met Isamu Noguchi. Yeats' and Pound's connections with Noh are discussed as well. See Edelson (2003) for a discussion of Carol Sorgenfrei's 1975 work *Medea: A Noh Cycle Based on the Greek Myth*. See also, Foley (2012: 217-20). This work, written in English, joins together features of Classical Greek myth with Japanese Noh drama. See Smethurst (2002) for a discussion of Yukio Ninagawa's Japanese production of Euripides' *Medea*, which incorporates many features of traditional Japanese kabuki theater and the puppet theater, bunraku. Ninagawa's production, performed from 1978 to 1999, appealed to audiences in Japan, in other parts of Asia, and in the West (1).

<sup>16</sup> For biographical information on Noguchi, see Altshuler (1995), Ashton (1993), Duus (2006), and Lyford (2013). For his autobiography, see Noguchi (1968).

---

<sup>17</sup> His father was the writer, Yone Noguchi, and his mother, the writer, educator, and editor, Léonie Gilmour.

<sup>18</sup> The Noguchi Museum sells the Table, which is currently made by the original manufacturer, Herman Miller.

<sup>19</sup> See Lyford (2003) for a useful discussion of the reasons for and circumstances of Noguchi's voluntary internment and his subsequent difficulties with leaving it. She provides useful remarks on Noguchi's Japanese and American double consciousness as well as on the racism he experienced.

<sup>20</sup> Lyford (2003) includes a discussion of Noguchi's *Kouros* sculpture in the MOMA exhibit. The portability of the sculpture (it has interlocking parts and can be broken down quickly) she connects in interesting ways to Noguchi's travels and war-time relocation. She calls it a "mobile monument" and discusses the ways in which this makes it differ from ancient Greek *kouroi* (137). See my remarks above on Noguchi's interest in movement.

<sup>21</sup> Conceived of and designed by the sculptor to house his own works, the museum is a wonderful exhibition space developed from a 1920s industrial building. The outdoor sculpture garden is a testament to Noguchi's interest in landscapes and public spaces.

<sup>22</sup> For disagreements about the exact date Graham and Noguchi met, see Marx 2013: 325-26. Noguchi's mother and sister also knew Graham. His sister, Ailes Gilmour, danced with Graham's company for a time. According to Graham, Léonie Gilmour, Noguchi's mother, "had helped with the costumes" for her company (Graham 1989). The film "Leonie," directed by H. Matsui, depicts the life of Noguchi's mother. It was released in Japan in 2010 and a shorter version opened in the United States in 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Tracy earned a bachelor's degree in classical studies and dance from Skidmore College. He danced and wrote on dance and other arts. He died in 2007.

<sup>24</sup> See Zajko (2010) 330-31. For a recent discussion adding to interdisciplinary approaches to dance and the Greco-Roman world, see Schlapbach (2018).

<sup>25</sup> Playbill, Joyce Theater, Spring/Summer 2013 Season, February 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Program, January 21, 22, and 23, 2014 performances.

<sup>27</sup> See Apostolos-Cappadona and Altshuler (1994) 56-71.

<sup>28</sup> See comments above on shifting terminology for the dancers' titles.

<sup>29</sup> I have had students watch "Cave of the Heart" and have found it interesting that a few of them have confused, at first, who was Medea and who was the Chorus. This highlighted for me how important Graham makes the Chorus. In some ways she has taken over the function of both the Nurse and the Chorus from Euripides' play.

<sup>30</sup> For a rehearsal version of this powerful solo, see Martha Graham Dance Company, "Cave of the Heart/Medea Solo," rehearsal with Principal Dancer Miki Orihara for Spring 2008 performances.

<sup>31</sup> In the words of Martha Graham (Graham 1984): "Medea is a symbol of that powerful never-ending curse of jealousy."

<sup>32</sup> See Smethurst (2002), especially 23-32. On kabuki traditions of avenging spirits of women being transformed by a change of costume into serpents or dragons, 28.

<sup>33</sup> See the Choral Ode in Euripides' *Medea* lines 410 ff.

---

<sup>34</sup> See Bannerman (2010b) 270 for this vivid description of what came to be called the "Cave turn," a move she notes was specifically designed for "Cave of the Heart": "This is a spectacular dive forwards into a pivot on one leg as the other shoots upwards in a split *arabesque*. Travelling across the stage with five of these vertiginous *pirouettes*, Medea slices into the surrounding space, her leg like the tail of some venomous creature thrashing the very air she breathes."

<sup>35</sup> The endings of the Seneca *Medea* and the Jeffers *Medea* also involve snakes/serpents. In Seneca, twin serpents are ready to take Medea away (1023-25) and in Jeffers, two lamps guarding the house door are called "two fire-snakes" and "serpents" and "their tongues are on fire" (188-89).

<sup>36</sup> Compare the sun and serpent motifs in the Cleveland vase in Figure 3 above.

<sup>37</sup> For continuing interest in the figure of Medea beyond the field of classics, see Ancona (2015). My current research project is an outgrowth and expansion of the work done for this article. I am writing a book tentatively titled, *Classical Reception of Greek Myth in Modern Dance and the Visual Arts: The Collaboration of Martha Graham and Isamu Noguchi*, to be published by Bloomsbury Academic.