

Night journey analysis essay sample

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Martha Graham's production of Night Journey is a unique and symbolic contemporary dance work. Graham bases many of her dance pieces on Greek myths and this is seen in her work Night Journey. Graham has manipulated elements of contemporary dance to communicate the emotion of the main character, Jocasta. Graham's previous work focuses on depicting both the power and struggle of female idols in history. Graham has choreographed Night Journey to explore the perspective of Queen Jocasta, the main protagonist in the piece rather than the story of Oedipus.

Graham has skilfully choreographed significant symbols and motifs to convey Jocasta's emotions of grief, pain confusion and love through the manipulation of motifs and non-movement components. Graham invites her audience throughout Night Journey to connect with the many emotions of the main character, Queen Jocasta through the effective use of motifs. One of the first motifs recognised in Graham's choreography is when Jocasta sharply throws one her of legs outward in a series of develope like movements to the side twisting her upper body in one direction then another.

This motif sequence is a symbolic representation of the confusion and pain she is feeling about the decisions she has to make. Throughout Graham's piece, another motif is recognised where Jocasta tosses her head and arms backwards so that her head is parallel to the sky in a high release. Graham's intention for the use of the high release in her choreography explicitly captures Jocasta's desperation as she seeks guidance from the God's. When the high release movement is performed after the first motif mentioned, it clearly indicates Jocasta's vulnerability when making a decision as she desires the assistance from higher power.

Jocasta executes many sharp and precise movements especially a motif of a contraction from her core afterward her arms quickly wrap around her waist. This movement is representative of Jocasta's anxiety and stress after the loss of her husband. During the course of the dance, Graham has choreographed a motif of Jocasta placing her hand next to the side of her face, as if it was covering her ear. This simple movement is choreographed by Graham to convey Jocasta's emotion that she refuses to hear the news about her husband's tragedy.

Graham has clearly choreographed and used a number of motifs, a manipulated element of contemporary dance, to explicitly represent emotions of grief, confusion, vulnerability and anxiety emitted by Jocasta. Graham has clearly put a considerable amount of thought into the movement components in the performance to convey the many emotions that Jocasta performs through the use of many motifs. Equally though, many emotions are expressed through the non-movement component of symbolism.

The olive branch symbolises strong emotions such as peace, victory or new life (Impelluso, 2004). The chorus and Jocasta dance with olive branches throughout the dance but particularly at the end of the piece. Jocasta uses the branches in such a way where she unsurely moves them back and forth between crossed and open shapes. This movement of the branches is a symbol choreographed by Graham to expressing Jocasta's emotion of confusion as she is undecided if she wants to be in a relationship with Oedipus.

Jocasta uses the olive leaves in relation with the motif of reaching up to God as a symbol of her asking for God's guidance in this situation. The rope is a non-movement component within the dance which is used as a vital symbol by Graham. The rope is used at the beginning and at the end of the dance as a hanging tool which is shown by Jocasta holding the rope in both of her hands above her head and swinging from side to side. This symbolic act is a representation of how the emotions conveyed within the motifs previously explained have overwhelmed Jocasta which resulted in her hanging herself.

Graham continues to use the rope in a symbolic way as a representation of an umbilical cord. Graham demonstrates this when Jocasta and Oedipus, her son and husband, each hold the rope at different ends in line with their waist and then wrap and intertwine themselves with the rope. The rope is connecting Jocasta to her son and husband, Oedipus and this symbol signifies the love that Jocasta has for her son and now husband. Graham has clearly used symbols in her choreography to exemplify Jocasta's emotions of her being overwhelmed, in love and confused.

The manipulated contemporary choreography constructed by Martha Graham has effectively communicated symbols and emotions of Jocasta in her work, Night Journey. The emotions and symbols are clearly executed in the sections through movement and non-movement components. Graham's clever and unique construction of Night Journey conveys her ideas and understanding of the Greek myth to her audience, whilst including exceptionally successful elements of contemporary dance to express the many emotions of love, grief, pain and confusion portrayed through Jocasta.

References

<http://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/NIGHTJ.pdf>