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"*A Creature of American Bone*"

American Civil Religion and the Genealogy of Cultural Abstraction in *Appalachian Spring* Ballet

Stephen C. R. Holley

A Thesis in the Field of Religion

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

This thesis examines the cultural and symbolic formation of *Appalachian Spring*, situating the ballet within a broader framework of American civil religion and postcolonial theory. It traces how the collaborative work of Aaron Copland, Martha Graham, and Isamu Noguchi transformed national myths, religious idioms, and historical trauma into a high-modernist aesthetic via a mediating field of abstraction. Drawing on the ballet's early scripts, related political oratory, and contemporary literature, the study shows how marginalized figures—particularly Indigenous and African American presences—were progressively abstracted or muted in the construction of a unified national narrative. Engaging theories of hybridity and the "third space," the thesis investigates how *Appalachian Spring* negotiates the tension between democratic ideals and histories of dispossession, functioning as a paradigmatic site where civil religious logic is simultaneously realized and tested. It concludes by demonstrating that abstraction served as the primary cultural mechanism by which these discordant histories were condensed into archetypal figural and ritual containers, allowing affective historical pressure to persist below the threshold of explicit recognition—thereby symbolically reconstituting mid-twentieth-century American identity and collective memory in performance.

Frontispiece



Merce Cunningham in Appalachian Spring, Martha Graham Company, 1945. Photograph by Arnold Eagle (American, born Hungary, 1909–1992). Gelatin silver print, 33.4 × 27.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Arnold Eagle, New York, 1990 (1990.1116.2).

Dedication

For my father

Acknowledgments

My first and most sincere thanks go to my thesis advisors: Collier Brown, for his steady support and genial spirit as I worked through a weighty proposal; and especially Brian Sweeney, whose pointed critiques compelled me to improve at every turn, and whose patience endured no small surplus of verbiage. I am also deeply grateful to Harvard University and the many staff members whose work made both the intellectual and everyday machinery of learning so rewarding. Over this six-year journey, I have been fortunate to encounter an extraordinary group of educators: Peter Becker, Cassie Houtz, Jay Harris, George Soroka, Diane Moore, and John Camardella. I owe a particular debt to Stephen Shoemaker, whose critiques are as bracing as they are precise. I also wish to thank Todd Breyfogle, mentor to my intellectual life for almost two decades and a cherished friend, and Daniel Krugman for generously reading and responding to a section that, at the time, seemed far more daunting than it proved to be.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

To be hybrid anticipates the future.

This is America, the nation of all nationalities.

—Isamu Noguchi

Part and Parcel of our lives is that moment of Pennsylvania spring

where there was "a garden eastward in Eden."

—Martha Graham

On a cool spring Sunday in May of 1943, Martha Graham, the acclaimed dancer and choreographer, sat in her Greenwich Village studio—now the home of the Parsons School for Design—crafting a letter. With "fear and trembling," she addressed the composer Aaron Copland, the man she hoped to entice into scoring a ballet whose form and meaning remained elusive even to Graham herself.[1] It had been ten months since she received the commission from the Library of Congress; the expected premiere, just five months hence, was uncertain as Copland had only recently rejected her first attempt at a script. Now, she was trying again. Enclosed was her revised concept, tentatively titled "House of Victory," and with it, an admission: "I have really had a hard time with this, simple as it seems." The letter is at once an appeal and an offering, an artist's attempt to balance creative conviction with the vulnerability of collaboration with another artist

[1] All quotations within this and the following paragraph are taken from "Letter From Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, May 16, 1943," Box 255/22, Aaron Copland Collection, 1841–1991, Library of Congress.

whom she admired but had yet to work with. Graham, for all her stature, does not demand; she entreats, submitting her vision to Copland's scrutiny, asking whether it is "something you can work with." She acknowledges the uncertainty of structure, of final form, of whether the piece may be realized as she imagines it, submitting it unto Copland's hands in the hopes of it finding "favor in his sight." This uncertainty was foundational to Graham's desire for her work to be understood within a cultural space where artistic expression intersected with the nation's collective memory, to render visible the same ineffable Americanness that was audible to her in Copland's own works.

What the letter reveals is that Graham was attempting to capture a paradox, an American art form grounded in a common cultural memory yet unbounded by history, a ballet that might speak to all histories. "I have used the canvas of America without any historical relationship," she wrote. "I feel that all periods exist for us in any given instant if we think of them." Yet even as she sought to strip the rendering of historical specificity, Graham acknowledged that, in her dramaturgical choices, she invoked the language of the past, the cadences of the Bible, the echoes of sacrifice, faith, and struggle that she described as "the poetry of that type of mind." By conceding to Copland that "House of Victory" was outwardly a Civil War piece set within one of the most defining ideologically fraught conflicts in American history, Graham gave voice to a foundational tension within modernist artistic formation: the desire to reflect the situated reality of a people—their religion, culture, even trauma—balanced against the pull of abstraction, the stripping away of particularity to gesture toward a more universal vision. For Graham this abstraction was not an end in itself but a means of rendering history into myth: an attempt at a timeless metaphor through the use of concrete historical language, the creation of a

work whose narrative and symbolism could exist as an atemporal American mythos while inescapably tethered to a moment of profound national rupture: "It is so short and so telescoped and yet it must give the essential tragedy behind it all the same regardless of period."[2] And she knew Aaron Copland was capable of capturing this tension, struck as she was by the power of his *Lincoln Portrait* from the year before, its ability to sound "so just what is, American." That work, drawing on Lincoln's words, imbuing them with liturgical gravity, had, in Graham's mind, achieved what she was striving for, an abstracted national essence scaffolded by historical resonance.

In the end, Copland would embrace the task at hand, and over the following year "House of Victory" would undergo a transformation, emerging in its final form as *Appalachian Spring* ballet, arguably one of the most iconic artistic reflections of a mytho-American self-image, a mythos that Robert Bellah framed in 1967 as an American Civil Religion. This study argues that the ballet's creative arc, shaped by earlier works and drafts, reveals more than a simple artistic evolution; rather, at a deeper level, its cultural genealogy signals a more profound ideological negotiation between pluralistic identities

[2] The distinction between abstraction and myth has been theorized in multiple traditions. Ernst Cassirer situates myth as the original "fact of culture," a primordial symbolic consciousness from which more abstract forms of representation gradually develop, in other words, abstraction should be seen as the process through which fact becomes representation; see *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2: *Mythical Thought*. Graham's artistic task may be read as navigating this same dialectic: beginning with the affectively charged cultural memory of the Civil War as mythic but situated consciousness and abstracting from it a more universal, timeless form. In Roland Barthes's terms, such abstraction is then capable of becoming myth again—history transformed into nature; see *Mythologies*, esp. "Myth Today," 109–59. In essence, this is a two-step process. First, Graham performs a Cassirerean abstraction, moving from raw, affective experience to a universal symbolic form. Second, that universal form becomes the raw material for a Barthesian myth, where its historical origins are obscured and it is presented as a natural, self-evident truth, thereby achieving an "atemporal" status. This synthesis of Cassirer and Barthes aligns closely with Robert N. Bellah's conception of American Civil Religion outlined in "Civil Religion in America," in which moments of historical rupture are abstracted into symbols of collective meaning and then remythologized through civic ritual and discourse. In this process, contingent events are transformed into enduring narratives that appear timeless, embedding national history within an atemporal framework of belief and identity.

and the hegemonic rhetoric of American mythmaking within a time of trial. Refracting the ballet's formation through Bellah's framework locates it within a dual movement of American Civil Religion, simultaneously orienting the national community towards unity within the ongoing existential crisis of WWII, while establishing a "higher criterion" of moral purpose that deferred, yet preserved, the conditions for a future reckoning with the nation's developing internal crisis of racial inequality. Together, these artists forged a work that exists—to extend Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity—in a liminal "third space" of negotiation between artistic abstraction and social realism, between cultural mythology and historical specificity, coalescing an American narrative that is at once deeply familiar yet unsettled, institutionalized yet contested, reflecting the same tensions and contradictions that embody the fundamentals of Bellah's Civil Religion.[3] From this foundation, two determinative questions emerge. The first asks: if *Appalachian Spring* emerged from a process in which an affective cultural memory was distilled into symbolic form, capable of re-mythification as a timeless national narrative, then to what

[3] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 54. The framework adopted here inevitably recalls the "myth and symbol" school of American Studies that dominated in the Cold War period. As Bruce Kuklick observed in his cautionary critique, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," the movement often rested on a "crude Cartesian view of mind" in which myths and symbols were treated as autonomous, platonic entities rather than historically contingent processes of thought. This perspective exposes a potential danger in extending Cassirer's notion of archetypal forms: although Cassirer emphasizes the development of symbolic forms out of affective, mythical consciousness toward greater abstraction, he does not claim these forms to be timeless universals detached from context. Similarly, Barthes's analysis of myth as a "second-order semiological system" alerts us to how historical content is naturalized, yet his method, if handled uncritically, can fall into the same assumption of collective consciousness that Kuklick identified as problematic. In Bellah's account of American Civil Religion, these dynamics are fully on display: the Revolution and Civil War are abstracted into archetypal patterns and then re-mythified as enduring civil liturgies. While this aligns with the Cassirerean-Barthesian schema, Kuklick would caution against accepting Bellah's presentation of such forms as "deeply established in the American outlook" without empirical verification. To infer national consensus from elite texts—presidential addresses, ceremonial pronouncements, and institutionalized holidays—is to risk precisely the presentism and overreach Kuklick diagnosed in the myth and symbol approach. Thus, while the ballet's cultural genealogy can be read as negotiating between myth, abstraction, and national identity, such claims must remain attentive to the methodological dangers of imputing timeless, collective meaning to historically specific artistic acts.

extent does this process illuminate the tension Bellah observed in American Civil Religion, between its transcendent universality and the specificity which prevents it from collapsing into "empty formalism?"[4] The second, more elusive question concerns the ballet's ideological coherence. Why does *Appalachian Spring's* linkage with the normative deployment of American symbology under the rubric of Civil Religion's foundational rites and ideals appear to contrast so sharply with the identities and lived realities of both its creators and the traditions it draws upon? In answer, this thesis finds that the ballet achieves resonance through a mediating field of abstraction that transposes historically legible friction into a seemingly safe mythology. The act of condensing discordant histories, both national and personal, into archetypal figural and ritual containers, readable through a generalized grammar of civil-religious gesture, allows affective historical pressure to persist below the threshold of explicit recognition. Thus, the ballet, as an exemplar of American civil religion, mediates, rather than resolves, the tension between universality and particularity, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of empty formalism. Ultimately, the contrast between the work's mythic hegemony and the creators' lived realities may be understood as an extension of a necessary dialectic that facilitates national cohesion, providing the conditions for, but not requiring, historical reckoning.

Biographies

To more fully apprehend the ideological tensions at work in the ballet's construction and reception, it is necessary to consider the converging trajectories of its

[4] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 46.

principal artists: Martha Graham, Aaron Copland, and Isamu Noguchi. Each brought to the project a distinct formal idiom shaped by a complex personal and cultural inheritance, but situated collectively at the leading edge of a still-emergent American modernism. Martha Graham and Aaron Copland did not so much meet the twentieth century as interrogate it—each turning to their respective art forms not only for expression, but for clarity, consequence, and a means of engaging the historical present. Though they worked in different mediums, their trajectories traced parallel arcs: shaped by the moral sensibilities of their upbringings, each moved through formal experimentation toward a radical essentialism that redefined what dance and music could convey in the context of American modernism, a still-emergent formation.[5] Its development proceeded from a sustained dialogue with, and eventual differentiation from, the inherited authority of European tradition, a process that, for figures such as Copland, Graham, and Noguchi, took the form of a deliberate rupture rather than a gradual evolution. European art, long stabilized by institutional memory and canonical continuity, appeared to American practitioners as governed by what Copland described as a "law of tradition," a condition in which the accumulated harmonies of the past functioned less as generative resources than as constraining forms—"prison bars" that rendered the artist a custodian rather than a creator.[6] This tension was compounded by an American public that was viewed as "docile," preferring the "safe and unadventurous" repetition of European masterworks

[5] Essentialism may be defined as the doctrine that objects possess essential properties that make them what they are, distinct from accidental attributes. The interpretive phrase "radical essentialism" extends this premise to describe Graham, Copland, and Noguchi's shared pursuit of elemental truths within their respective mediums. It captures the profound, fundamental, and often rebellious nature of their artistic and philosophical approaches: they were not merely refining existing traditions but seeking to establish new, more authentic foundations for their art forms within the context of American modernism; see Robertson Ishii and Atkins, "Essential vs. Accidental Properties," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023.
[6] Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination* (New York: New American Library, 1952), 61.

over contemporary native compositions.[7] The American project, by contrast, sought release from this custodial role, redirecting artistic practice away from the museum culture of preservation toward an "energized and glamorized," idiom reflecting a youthful, material well-being that contrasted with the Old World's crisis of conscience brought on by world war.[8] This distinction manifested formally in the reconfiguration of rhythmic and material truth as seen in Graham's rejection of the "false, courtly gestures" of Russian and English ballet, insisting that choreography proceed from anatomical law rather than inherited convention.[9] Similarly, Copland and his contemporaries identified in American music a rhythmic disposition resistant to European symmetry, favoring unequal metric groupings drawn from vernacular and African American sources.[10] Noguchi's trajectory extended this divergence into the realm of material and artistic purpose: distancing himself from the European doctrine of art for art's sake, he pursued an idiom of invention grounded in industrial materials and functional integration, aligning the artist with the figure of the American inventor rather than the European aesthete. What resulted was not a simple rejection of Europe but a structural reorientation: American modernism defined itself through the transformation of inherited forms into a distinctly national expressive logic. The noted conductor Serge Koussevitzky cast this transformation in explicitly prophetic and messianic terms, declaring that the "Old World is troubled and shaken" and that America had been "singled out to carry forward the

[7] Aaron Copland, "The Composer and His Critic," *Modern Music* 9, no. 4 (May–June 1932): 143; Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination*, 17.
[8] Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination*, 55.
[9] Laurie Schwab, "Hawkins Defines Essence of Martha Graham Technique," *Vassar Miscellany News* 29, no. 18 (January 24, 1945): 1.
[10] Isamu Noguchi, "Oral History Interview with Isamu Noguchi, November 7–December 26, 1973," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

banner of musical progress."[11] For Koussevitzky, this was not merely the rise of a national school but a historical succession in which American culture assumed a redemptive role: "For as European culture once emerged from ancient Greece, so American culture has absorbed the old culture of Europe," such that "the musical future of the whole world is bound up with the musical future of America."[12] It is within this reoriented modernist horizon that Graham, Copland, and Noguchi each located their practice, though the paths by which they arrived, shaped by divergent inheritances of faith, displacement, and identity, were anything but parallel.[13]

The foundations of Graham's method lie not in early abstraction but in an exacting moral lineage. Raised in a Presbyterian household in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, she internalized early the idea that the body bore ethical weight.[14] Her father's dictum, "movement never lies," originated in the language of clinical observation but became, for Graham, a metaphysical proposition: the body as a register of interior states, a site where truth and will could be made legible.[15] This conviction, sharpened by loss and displacement, crystallized in adolescence when the family relocated to Santa Barbara, a move she later described as having a "liberating effect," turning her from religious rigidity toward a kind of moral paganism that would inflect the heroines of her

[11] Serge Koussevitzky, "Soaring Music," *New York Times*, March 5, 1939, 54.
[12] Koussevitzky, "Soaring Music," 54.
[13] This biographical study has drawn primarily from Howard Pollack's exhaustive study *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*; Elizabeth Crist's *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland During the Depression and War*; Neil Baldwin's *Martha Graham: When Dance Became Modern: A Life*; *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen; the transcript of an interview with Isamu Noguchi dated November 7, December 10, 18 and 26, 1973, conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and Amy Lyford's *Isamu Noguchi's Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and Nation, 1930–1950*.
[14] Neil Baldwin, *Martha Graham: When Dance Became Modern: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022), 28–29.
[15] Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 28–29.

choreography.[16] Copland's formative environment was shaped not by religious austerity but by the layered heterogeneity of early twentieth-century Brooklyn. Born in 1900 to Jewish immigrants from the Russian-Lithuanian borderlands, he grew up in a household that was traditional but not deeply religious, where Yiddish was spoken and holidays were observed, but where religious practice did not dictate public or aesthetic life. He received a bar mitzvah in 1913, but described himself in adulthood as spiritually agnostic, favoring a humanist reverence for scale and interconnectedness.[17] As Howard Pollack highlights, Copland retained an enduring respect for the "grandeur and mystery of the universe," describing religion as "the connection with something larger than oneself"—a phrase that recurs throughout his writings and public statements.[18]

Despite—or perhaps because of—these differing beginnings, both artists gravitated toward ritual form. Graham's early imaginative life was nourished by literature, poetry, and even homiletic language that would later resonate emotionally and thematically in her choreography. Her aesthetic epiphany came not through religious institutions but through performance. In 1911, her father took her to see Ruth St. Denis, whose works framed dance as "spiritual revelation," fusing Christian mysticism with stylized Orientalism.[19] That experience, and her parents' willingness to accept its legitimacy, set her on a trajectory that would lead through the Cumnock School of Expression in Los Angeles to the famed Denishawn School, where she studied under St. Denis and Ted Shawn. The school provided instruction on theatrical structure and

[16] Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 35.
[17] See Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 25–29.
[18] Arnold Dobrin, *Aaron Copland: His Life and Times* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967), 196, quoted in Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 28.
[19] Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 54.

technique, including ballet, Delsartian gesture, and a repertoire Graham would later dismiss as mere "transplanted orientalism," a decorative idiom she would trade for formal austerity and narrative abstraction.[20] Her first major role, *Xochitl* (1920), cast her as a Toltec maiden resisting conquest, and her own small, angular frame made her an instrument for portraying "othered" women in Japanese, Javanese, and Indian guises.[21] Yet it was precisely through these early roles—performing ritual as a decorative surface—that Graham recognized what she would spend her career reclaiming: performance as ritualized inquiry rather than exotic spectacle, though the formal vocabulary to realize that impulse would remain years away.

Aaron Copland's apprenticeship occurred under different pressures. His family was largely uncomprehending of both his musical ambitions and his sexuality—two features of his identity that, while unspoken at home, became subtly defining of his aesthetic orientation.[22] He absorbed the pluralist textures of Brooklyn life, augmented by summers spent in the rural Northeast, where the contrast between urban density and open countryside—between the clangor of city streets and the quieter rhythms of the

[20] As *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* explicates the Delsarte System of Expression, developed in nineteenth-century France by François Delsarte, sought to ground performance in empirical observation of physical and vocal behavior, later taking on a distinct American form through Steele MacKaye, Genevieve Stebbins, and others. Within this American Delsartism, Ruth St. Denis emerged as a pivotal figure: inspired by MacKaye's programs, she performed and adapted Delsartean statue posing and pantomime, promoted expressive movement outside the confines of ballet, and helped translate its ideals into modern dance. Her work, alongside other advocates, not only spread the system but also created space for women to claim public authority in dance, laying groundwork for the modernist turn represented by Graham; see Cohen, *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "Delsarte, François"; For "transplanted orientalism," see Martha Graham, "Seeking an American Art of the Dance," in *Revolt in the Arts,* ed. Oliver M. Sayler (New York: Brentano's, 1930), quoted in Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation, *International Encyclopedia of Dance: A Project of Dance Perspectives Foundation, Inc.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v. "Martha Graham."

[21] Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Dance, s*.v. "Martha Graham."

[22] For general overviews of Copland's sexuality see Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 18, 24; Elizabeth Bergman Crist, *Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland during the Depression and War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137.

countryside—imprinted itself on his sensibility. While Copland was not public about his sexuality, scholars have identified it as a discreet but persistent element of his work. His scores for *Of Mice and Men* and *The Tender Land* feature emotionally coded male bonding, while *The Second Hurricane* and *Something Wild* trace the inner life of the outsider—estrangement, emotional concealment, and the longing for acceptance.[23] For Copland, homosexuality was not a subject but a shaping perspective—what one friend described as part of the "breadth of outlook" that made his music capacious and generous in its humanism.[24]

If Graham and Copland both turned away from their initial training, they did so with different methods but parallel intent. In the late 1920s, Graham, under the artistic direction of Louis Horst, began to shift from theatrical spectacle to stark abstraction. By 1926, she had premiered her first solo concert; by 1927, she had choreographed *Revolt*, introducing the "angularity, starkness, and force" that would come to define her work.[25] Her technique—contraction and release, breath-bound muscularity, and a grounded sense of weight—was developed as both a formal innovation and a feminist intervention. She sought to "desentimentaliz[e] the female body and redefin[e] it in terms of rigor, power, and an alert, almost animal intensity."[26] From 1929 to 1938, she choreographed exclusively for an all-female company, producing works that, as Selma Jeann Cohn

[23] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 524–526.
[24] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 28. For general overviews of Copland's sexuality see Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 18–28, 39–40, 50–56, especially "Personal Affairs," 234–56, and "The Composer as Homosexual,"524–526. On Copland's central role among gay American composers and his influence on contemporaries see Howard Pollack, "The Dean of Gay American Composers," *American Music* 18, no. 1 (2000): 39–49. On the relationship of Copland's homosexuality to his works see David Metzer, "'Spurned Love': Eroticism and Abstraction in the Early Works of Aaron Copland," *The Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 4 (1997): 417–43.
[25] Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "Martha Graham"; Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 35.
[26] Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "Martha Graham."

rightly highlights, explore the act of solitary resistance in the face of social conformity. Copland, in the same decade, made a conscious pivot toward what he called "the simplest possible terms," crafting a musical idiom that abandoned academic complexity in favor of direct address.[27] This was not, as he later insisted, "mere opportunism," but a response to "the economic dislocation and ideological realignments of the Depression and wartime periods."[28] His aspiration to reach a "larger audience" found form in ballets like *Billy the Kid*, civic works like *Lincoln Portrait*, and film scores that drew from folk idioms and historical themes.[29] These works aligned with the progressive politics of the era, politics in which Copland directly participated and to which both Graham and Noguchi were sympathetic. Chief among these was the Popular Front, a broad left-wing coalition active in the 1930s and early 1940s that sought to unite artists, laborers, and progressive intellectuals around anti-fascism, racial justice, and democratic renewal. What amounted to an amorphous confederation whose vision of cultural democratization, as Michael Denning argues, sought to reclaim "America" for its racially and ethnically diverse publics and to position artists as agents of moral labor and public instruction.[30]

The effort to democratize art, to craft modernism as a language of shared meaning, shaped not only Graham and Copland's respective idioms but also the collaborative ground between them. In this context, Isamu Noguchi's contributions as Graham's principal set designer in the 1930s and 40s served as a sculptural extension of

[27] Aaron Copland, "Composer from Brooklyn," *Magazine of Art*, 1939, 160, quoted in Crist, *Common Man*, 5.
[28] Aaron Copland, "The Musical Scene Changes," *Twice a Year* 5–6 (1941): 342–43, quoted in Crist, *Common Man*, 8.
[29] Aaron Copland, letter to Arthur Berger, April 10, 1943, Aaron Copland Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, quoted in Crist, *Common Man*, 7.
[30] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Haymarket Series (London; New York: Verso, 1996), 4–21.

the same artistic logic. Noguchi's formal training began under Onorio Ruotolo at the Leonardo da Vinci Art School. Later, a 1927 Guggenheim Fellowship led him to Paris, where he apprenticed with Constantin Brancusi. While Brancusi's direct carving and distillation of form profoundly influenced him, Noguchi, like Graham, resisted the pull of stylistic allegiance, seeking to "be free," to move beyond his mentor toward a pragmatic and culturally hybrid modernism of his own.[31] His stage designs for works such as *Frontier*, *Appalachian Spring*, and *Hérodiade* were not ornamental additions but volumetric interventions, what he called "sculptural problem[s]." He designed structures with functional poeticism: a fragment of fencing summoning the image of a complete boundary or "a bed that looks like two people lying there," suggesting presence even in the absence of the dancers. These settings, like Copland's harmonic language and Graham's gestural vocabulary, operated through reduced means but invoked dense psychological worlds. That ethos extended beyond the proscenium. As Noguchi later reflected, "everything I do is linked to each other"—his gardens, furniture, playgrounds, and theatre works all derived from the same pursuit of relational space. Like Graham and Copland, Noguchi was drawn to ritual form, not as a reenactment, but as an inquiry. His early benefactor, Dr. Charles Mack, a Swedenborgian minister, encouraged a metaphysical orientation that would later reemerge in Noguchi's interest in the ceremonial uses of sculpture.[32] As Dore Ashton observes, Swedenborgian thought treated

[31] All quotations within this paragraph are from Noguchi, "Oral History Interview."
[32] Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was a Swedish Enlightenment polymath and scientist who, after experiencing a profound existential crisis, became a renowned mystic and theologian. His later writings, which describe the universe as a "Grand Man" and suggest that heaven is a state of mind "within ourselves," established him as an influential figure for many Romantic and Modernist artists. The relationship between Swedenborg and Zen Buddhism is mainly characterized by what scholars call "ideological symmetries" and a history of cross-cultural translation. D. T. Suzuki, the leading transmitter of Zen to the West who translated Swedenborg's major works into Japanese, echoed Honoré de Balzac's description of Swedenborg as the "Buddha of the North" to emphasize what he saw as deep similarities

the Bible as myth requiring interpretation; for Noguchi, this premise revealed the artistic potential of symbolic language as a vehicle for spiritual meaning.[33] Guided by this understanding, Noguchi traveled to Egypt and India, motivated by a desire to witness the functional incorporation of ritual objects within sacred contexts, in other words, art that mediated between human intention and cosmic order. It was this impulse, not formal exoticism, that informed his continuing effort to recover what he saw as a lost integration between art and human purpose.

Ritual and myth, as compositional structures, arose within Graham's work as well, allowing her to meld identity with belief. Earlier works, such as *Primitive Mysteries* (1931) and *Ceremonials* (1932), drew from Catholic and Indigenous rites, while the later work, *El Penitente* (1940), transformed Southwest Indian Christian traditions into stylized movement. These were not nostalgic reenactments but choreographic inquiries—modernist dramaturgies in which symbolic figures became vessels for internal conflict. Her later incorporation of Jungian psychology, Greek tragedy, and Asian theatrical forms further deepened this grammar, layering her work with formal and psychological density.[34] In a parallel register, Copland's music functioned as a space of symbolic negotiation. Critics like Virgil Thomson cast him as a rabbinical prophet of American sound, though others questioned whether a Jewish composer could credibly articulate "authentic" Americanness.[35] Copland himself

between Swedenborgian doctrines on time, consciousness, and correspondences and Zen concepts concerning karma and the nature of the self; see Devin Zuber, "The Buddha of the North: Swedenborg and Transpacific Zen," *Religion and the Arts* 14, nos. 1–2 (2010), 12, 10, 3.

[33] Dore Ashton, *Noguchi, East and West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 31.

[34] Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "Martha Graham."

[35] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 518–524; Edward T. Cone and Aaron Copland, "Conversation with Aaron Copland," *Perspectives of New Music* 6, no. 2 (1968): 64.

acknowledged a subtextual Hebraic influence in his work, referring to "the grandiose, the dramatic and the tragic" as tonal tendencies that informed his American idiom.[36]

Graham, Copland, and Noguchi each understood their work as ethically implicated in the events of their time, sharing a broader commitment to both the potential social impact and, by extension, the moral responsibilities of art. Graham declared choreography a civic and ethical act and contributed to leftist causes such as the American League Against Fascism (1935) and the International Labor Defense (1936).[37] Her artistic responses to the Spanish Civil War—*Chronicle* (1936), *Immediate Tragedy* (1936), and *Deep Song* (1937)—avoided literal narrative, instead abstracting suffering into muscular lament and symbolic resistance.[38] Copland's political commitments were similarly embedded in form. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, he participated actively in the cultural work of the Popular Front—an affiliation that, while not reducible to Communist Party membership, placed him within a leftist milieu that prized accessibility, civic engagement, and antifascist solidarity. In other words, Copland's association operated primarily at the level of cultural and political sympathy rather than doctrinal commitment to any party line. His political engagement was closer to what Denning describes as the role of the "fellow traveler"—an independent leftist working within a broader coalition for democratic and anti-fascist ends.[39] He supported unionization efforts, wrote for leftist publications, and pursued what he termed "imposed

[36] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 523.
[37] Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "Martha Graham."
[38] Cohen, *Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "Martha Graham."
[39] Denning, *Cultural Front*, xvii; Subsequently, under scrutiny during the McCarthy era, Copland distanced himself from these affiliations, describing his earlier activism as simply "the thing to do at the time"; Aaron Copland, quoted in Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1984), 218. However, it is clear that during the years of his deepest artistic development, he regarded the composer as a cultural worker—an artist responsible to a public, and to history—with deeply held progressive beliefs.

simplicity" in his compositions: a stylistic shift designed to reach new mass audiences emerging through radio, cinema, and education. This simplicity was itself overtly political; it embodied Copland's belief that composers could occupy "a first-line position on the cultural front," helping to define a distinctly American, socially resonant sound.[40] Works like *El Salón México*, *The Second Hurricane*, and *Our Town* embraced folk idioms, tonal clarity, and rhetorical immediacy, reflecting the Popular Front's goal of cultural democratization. Copland would have thus found companionship in his Popular Front affiliations, for his dual identities—Jewish and American, private and public—to be refracted through a shared symbolic architecture. His music, like Graham's choreography, aimed to be consumed, not simply admired. This ideological bent was echoed in Noguchi's conviction that art must participate in civic life, which emerged most visibly in his work from the 1930s and early 1940s. He created *Death* (1934), a sculpture protesting lynching; joined the Artists' Union and the American Artists' Congress, the former sympathetic to and the latter formally aligned with the Popular Front; and in 1942 voluntarily entered the Poston internment camp, despite his legal exemption. He did so, he wrote, to "willfully [become] a part of humanity uprooted," and to support the democratic ideals under assault.[41] Although the experience proved disillusioning, it shaped his understanding of civic participation and deepened his conviction that artists must engage directly with the world they inhabit.

As each artist moved into the later decades of their careers, their practices shifted, but not in ways that betrayed the structures they had worked so deliberately to construct.

[40] Crist, *Common Man*, 8.
[41] Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 25, quoted in Amy Lyford, *Isamu Noguchi's Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and Nation, 1930–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 2.

Graham's choreographic style became less severe, her vocabulary modulated by arcs, spirals, and extended gesture. Copland's trajectory followed its own arc of transformation. Having pivoted in the 1930s and 40s toward "imposed simplicity," he later returned to a more austere idiom, distancing himself from the populist tonalities with which he had become most closely associated.[42] But this return was not a disavowal; rather, it reflected a recalibration of voice: the same formal restraint, redirected toward introspection. Neither Graham nor Copland conceived of their careers as the work of a solitary genius; their most enduring achievements arose in dialogue, sometimes direct, sometimes refracted, across artistic boundaries. What endures is not merely the accumulation of masterworks but the structural tension they exposed together: between inner discipline and outer context, between the particularities of personal inheritance and the figurative vocabularies of the nation. Each refused to resolve that tension. Instead, they staged it—in gesture, in sound, in silence, and in breath. Noguchi, too, entered and worked within that unresolved space. His bicultural inheritance—Japanese and American—was not a synthesis but an enduring dissonance, a position that shaped both his estrangement and his aesthetic reach. Like Graham and Copland, he sought not to escape the contradictions of modern identity, but to carve meaning through them.

Historiography

It is within this dynamic realm that *Appalachian Spring* warrants investigation, not as a static artifact of national mythology but as a site of cultural negotiation where political and artistic constructs unfold in parallel, each engaging with historical memory

[42] Crist, *Common Man*, 5–6.

to reflect and to shape the cultural landscape of their era. This study approaches the ballet as a crucible in which theories of civil religion, postcolonial paradigms of Orientalism and hybridity, and modernist aesthetics converge, not as discrete categories but as overlapping interpretive lenses that refract different facets of the same negotiation. Civil religion functions here as a unifying mechanism, sustaining a national mythos that stresses coherence through a shared representational lexicon, while Orientalism exposes the asymmetries of power embedded in cultural representation and the production of identity. Hybridity, by contrast, highlights the liminal zones where those asymmetries are unsettled, foregrounding cultural intermixture and the emergence of forms that are neither wholly one nor the other. Within the arts, these tensions surface most explicitly in the interpretive processes that mediate between historicity and abstraction, between the singular voice of the artist and the collective myths that their work both inherits and reshapes. To study *Appalachian Spring* from this perspective is to attend to the ways in which meaning itself is contested and re-articulated, suspended between the pressures of national cohesion and the persistence of plural, situated identities.

As framed by Annegret Fauser in her pithy survey, *Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring*, the creative formation of the ballet, from its inception in 1942 to its premiere in 1944, occurred at a pivotal moment when, within the crucible of war, American cultural consciousness shifted from regionalist specificity to abstract national regionalism.[43] That is to say, she is suggesting a departure from traditional modes of cultural identification that were localized and place-based toward a broader framing that reoriented specific regional heritages as emblems of a unifying national consciousness. In this formulation,

[43] Annegret Fauser, *Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4–15.

distinct cultural traditions, such as those of Appalachia, were no longer understood as geographically or historically constrained but were instead reimagined as symbols of an overarching American mythos. While it is entirely valid to consider this shift from the standpoint of taxonomy—the classification, or more precisely, the reclassification of particular cultures from marginal positions within the broader culture to the status of national archetypes—it is equally important to attend to the processes that such a taxonomy compresses. Thus, for example, Shaker culture, which even at its peak in the mid-nineteenth century encompassed barely a few thousand followers, is reclassified as the embodiment of the national ethos of simplicity, faith, family, and perseverance. What is eclipsed or elided in this reclassification are those elements less easily reconciled with a national self-image, such as the Shaker belief in celibacy and pacifism. Yet by merely cataloguing these instances of reclassification, the underlying mechanism through which they occur remains unarticulated. That mechanism, as discussed earlier, is one of abstraction: the regional and the particular undergo a process of abstraction toward a universal symbolic form understood as national hegemony, the resultant being an "abstract national regionalism" in which one region, or religion, or individual, stands for the consciousness of the multitude. This is then mythologized—or in Barthes's terms, re-mythologized—through performance, whether rhetorical or artistic.

However, the claim that this occurred solely within the crucible of war is, as will be shown, too limiting. The process of abstraction that Fauser identifies in relation to *Appalachian Spring* should be understood as embodying a continuing strand within the long-term modernist project, one that reconfigured cultural particularity into symbols of national essence. This has been previously hinted at through the biographical study and

will be further addressed through the case studies presented throughout this thesis. This passage through abstraction, from situated, regional, and affective into the register of national mythos, is consonant with the broader ideological tensions that underlie both civil religion and postcolonial critique: two frameworks that balance between homogeneity and pluralism, between national cohesion and cultural differentiation. Homi Bhabha's theorization of hybridity and the "third space" acquires its relevance here, offering a way to describe how abstraction does not merely subsume difference but also produces new cultural forms in the very act of translation. The absorption of Appalachia or Shakerism into a national mythos can thus be read alongside the dynamics of Orientalism, in which cultural "others" are refigured through similar acts of figural appropriation, yielding forms that are at once hegemonic and hybrid, familiar yet unsettled. The review that follows moves from scholarship on the ballet itself outward to the broader theoretical fields of American civil religion and postcolonial critique, concluding with their still-tentative convergence in the arts.

Appalachian Spring

Scholarship specific to *Appalachian Spring*, though limited, reflects an awareness of its competing narratives. Some emphasize its role in romanticizing American manifest destiny, while others critique its ideological and political implications. Copland biographer Elizabeth B. Crist calls out the "chauvinistic cultural desires" that romanticize western expansion, creating a "myth of the West . . . formulated by the Eastern establishment in the late nineteenth century to navigate the cultural crisis of

industrialization.[44] In kind, Philip Kennicott, writing for *Dance Magazine* in 1990, argues in his brief but pointed article "Aaron Copland: Mythical Americana" that Copland's signature expansionist or pastoral style carries an underlying "urban sentimentalism," reinforcing a mythologized American identity that is both evocative and deceptive, exposing tensions between the more cosmopolitan creatives and their rural subject matter.[45] Mark Franko, in *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work*, devotes a full chapter to decrypting the layers of political commentary within the ballet that reflect the progressive, leftist ideals of the Popular Front movement during that era. Victoria Geduld's well-researched article for *Dance Chronicle*, "Dancing Diplomacy: Martha Graham and the Strange Commodity of Cold-War Cultural Exchange in Asia, 1955 and 1974," highlights the ballet's diplomatic function during the Cold War, where it was framed as a symbol of American self-reliance and independence for emerging nations in the Americas and Eastern Europe, positioning the United States as an anti-colonial force rather than an imperial power. Other scholars focus on the ballet's ethnic tensions and religious borrowings. David Vanderhamm's "Simple Shaker Folk: Appropriation, American Identity, and *Appalachian Spring*" examines the religious and cultural dynamics inherent in the ballet's Shaker motifs, further complicating its relationship to the histories it claims to represent.[46] Meanwhile, Marta Robertson's recent Library of Congress lecture, "'A Gift to Be Simple': Japanese American Influence in

[44] Crist, *Common Man*, 111–112; Crist's analysis is based on David Hamilton Murdoch's *The American West: The Invention of a Myth*.
[45] Philip Kennicott, "Aaron Copland: Mythical Americana," *Dance Magazine* 64, no. 11 (1990), 64; see also Elizabeth B. Crist's "Copland and the Politics of Americanism" which ties these themes to Copland's political leanings in the context of the era.
[46] For a deep analysis of the tensions surrounding Copland's Jewish heritage from a religious as well as racialized standpoint see Beth E. Levy's "From Orient to Occident: Aaron Copland and the Sagas of the Prairie"; see also Howard Pollack's *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, esp. 24–29.

Appalachian Spring," examines the ballet's relationship to the wartime internment, suggesting that the experiences of set designer Isamu Noguchi and principal dancer Yuriko, both of whom were interned, subtly inform aspects of the ballet that complicate its Eurocentric narrative. These interpretations highlight *Appalachian Spring's* dual existence, both as a cultural artifact that reinforces national myth and as a site of historical and ideological tension, where artistic formation mediates the interplay between pluralism and homogeneity.

American Civil Religion

This and subsequent sections will privilege the foundational theories and current trends in related scholarship over work that incorporates either the ballet or its associated artists. The reasoning is straightforward: resources are sparse. Academic analysis of *Appalachian Spring* rarely engages civil religion directly, preferring instead broad descriptors such as "Americana." Post-colonial theory fares only marginally better; while it is largely absent in the ballet's reception, it appears more substantially in studies of Copland, Graham, and Noguchi's other work. This lacuna reflects more than a gap in the literature—it points to the broader problem of how American identity has been framed, through categories that seek to hold difference and cohesion in uneasy balance. In various ways, civil religion and post-colonial scholarship have grappled with this problem directly, offering a conceptual vocabulary for how the nation sacralizes unity while absorbing, and often effacing, internal diversity. Civil religion, in particular, emerges here as the central schema of interpretation, with post-colonial theory functioning in a complementary role.

Academic literature addressing American civil religion trends toward the apologetic, concerned most often with cultural taxonomy, particularly in the sense of naming, classifying, and delineating the boundaries, components, and functions of an essentially elastic phenomenon.[47] This inflection has shaped the field's debates, which, as the philosopher and religious scholar Richard Amesbury notes, often collapse into partisan corners between those "who find [the concept] morally objectionable" and those who "regard [it] as sociologically necessary."[48] While the term "civil religion" emerged in modern political discourse through Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical treatise *The Social Contract*, its application in a uniquely American context remained unsettled until a brief yet prolific period saw multiple formulations, including Herberg's "American way of life," Martin Marty's "religion-in-general," and Sidney Mead's "religion of the republic."[49] However, it was the sociologist Robert Bellah's seminal 1967 article "Civil Religion in America" that ultimately formalized the terminology, though without resolving its theoretical boundaries. It is Bellah's conception that has remained the lodestone for civil religious discourse, its influence so central that the distinction between Bellah and his construct is often blurred.[50]

[47] Taxonomy itself, of course, need not be apologetic, but among the more prolific authors on civil religion, the two often converge. Many of these writers are themselves believers who not only treat civil religion as a distinct category with various subcategories but also trust in its transcendent capacity to hold the Union together. In this respect, their work functions in the manner of apologetics: a verbal defense that seeks both to fortify the conviction of adherents and to persuade skeptics through appeals to history, philosophy, and theology.

[48] Richard Amesbury, "Religion and the Civic Imagination," SSRC The Immanent Frame, March 6, 2010. The full series of blog entries under The Immanent Frame's curated discussion, "Reconsidering Civil Religion," is an excellent source for a cursory overview of the various tensions within the civil religious debate.

[49] See Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*; Martin E. Marty, *Civil Religion, Church and State*; Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America*.

[50] This dynamic is rarely examined; however, Mateo Bortolini, in his 2012 article "The Trap of Intellectual Success: Robert N. Bellah, the American Civil Religion Debate, and the Sociology of Knowledge," applies a Mertonian approach to interrogate the entrenchment of Bellah's framework. More recently, Wendy

A productive starting point in examining American civil religion is to first consider its component parts, religion and civil religion. The foundational literature on American religious identity consistently returns to the dual themes of its entanglement in the nation's founding and the unprecedented experiment of church-state separation. Works such as Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Perry Miller's *Errand into the Wilderness*, and Sidney Mead's *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* provide critical structural footing for these debates, each tracing the complex interplay between religion and national identity that endures to today.[51] While these works engage primarily with American religiosity, the theoretical foundation of civil religion itself precedes the American context, finding its most direct articulation in the political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who conceived it as a mechanism for maintaining social and political order. His ideas build upon a lineage of thought traceable from Plato, through Augustine and Calvin, and extending through Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Spinoza.[52] Though recognizing religion as historically essential to maintaining social cohesion, Rousseau was deeply critical of institutionalized ecclesiastical authority, seeing it as an engine of discord, conflict, and repression. The concern for Rousseau, which Micah Watson terms "the damn neighbor problem," is intolerance between the civil and the sacred, exacerbating tensions between individual

Wall's chapter, "Civil Religion and the Problem of Origins," in *Civil Religion Today* offers a historical perspective on the same issue.

[51] See also Sacvan Bercovitch's *American Jeremiad* for a more contemporary analysis of these foundational themes.

[52] For Plato see Michael Angrosino, "Civil Religion Redux," esp. 245; for Augustine and Calvin see Glenn A. Moots, "The Protestant Roots of American Civil Religion," and for Machiavelli, Hobbes and Spinoza as well as others see Steven Frankel and Martin Yaffe's compendium *Civil Religion in Modern Political Philosophy: Machiavelli to Tocqueville*.

alienation and civic unity.[53] Watson argues that Rousseau identifies this tension as the fundamental obstacle to a stable political life for which civil religion provides the corrective through moral cohesion and shared meaning.

While Rousseau's civil religion may be understood as a prescriptive political device for the proper function of the state, early discourse on American civil religion undertook the examination of civil religion as a lived sociological phenomenon whose roots were traceable throughout American history. The most consequential, if not institutionally decisive, is Will Herberg's *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* from 1955, which lays out the framework for a shared American religion understood as the "American Way of Life." Pointedly, it is centered on democracy in a uniquely American sense, encompassing a sociocultural ethos that subordinates traditional religious distinctions to capitalist and nationalist ideals. The key for Herberg is that the mainline faiths had all but lost their distinctiveness; they had become Americanized, meaning democratized and secularized to an extent that negated their theological foundations. For Herberg, this process was reciprocal: as the influence of traditional religious institutions waned, adherence to the "American Way of Life" intensified.[54]

Twelve years later, two major responses to Herberg's approach emerged, each significantly reshaping the discourse. The first—and ultimately the most influential on contemporary discourse—came from the sociologist Robert Bellah, who codified "American civil religion" as a direct response to the "American way of life".[55] Bellah's

[53] Micah Watson, "The Damned Neighbors Problem: Rousseau's Civil Religion Revisited," *Religions* 10, no. 6 (2019), 349.
[54] A view shared by the likes of Winthrop S. Hudson in *American Protestantism* and, subsequently, Martin E. Marty in *Civil Religion, Church and State* under the rubric of post-Protestantism. See also Charles Taylor's excellent *A Secular Age*, esp. 505–535.
[55] It is interesting to note that Bellah references Herberg only once in the entire article, and that reference is made concerning a completely unrelated topic. That it was a direct response must be interpreted through

conception, though superficially similar in its proposal of an "elaborate and well-institutionalized" system, marked by a "definable set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" with its own prophets and martyrs, departed significantly from Herberg in situating civil religion as existing "alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches."[56] The issue for Bellah was that this independent construct, while historically, culturally, and theologically grounded, had, to date, lacked any serious investigation into its form or history. Framing it within a Judeo-Christian epochal structure, aligning the Revolutionary War with an Old Testament narrative and the Civil War with a New Testament sacrificial paradigm, his approach was sociological, emphasizing broad cultural patterns; textual in its reliance on key political documents; and rooted in a vein of presidential synthesis that privileged moments of crisis.[57]

The most pointedly consistent critique was provided by Sidney E. Mead through his 1967 article "The Nation with the Soul of a Church" and ultimately extended by his 1975 book of the same name. Mead forcefully rejects Herberg's version of civil religion as non-theological, arguing instead, in sympathy with Bellah, that, as Mead terms it, "the

Bellah's usage of the specific terminology deployed by Herberg. It is tempting to see this as not just circumspect in giving space to an interpretation he did not endorse, but also subtly dismissive.

[56] Bellah, "Civil Religion," 40.

[57] Regarding textuality, in cataloging references to God from the speeches and writings of Washington, Lincoln, and Kennedy, Bellah's article ultimately sacralizes a narrow cultural canon that underscores an assumption of cultural homogeneity. It should also be noted that over the arc of the essay, American Civil Religion gains a certain physicality, evolving from a subliminal, if culturally potent, dimension of civic life to a conscious actor with national agency, an entity that ultimately possesses an awareness of its involvement "in the most pressing moral and political issues of the day"; Bellah, "Civil Religion," 52; by attributing such agency to civil religion, Bellah concludes that civil religion, rather than a mere reflection of historically situated experiences, has matured into a determinative tool that is deployable in times of crisis. Bellah wrote extensively on civil religion throughout his academic life well into the 1990s. While his conception of the theory subtly evolved the academic debate has remained resolute in maintaining the originating article at the core of analysis. For more in-depth analysis of both Bellah's evolution as well as the relationship between his evolution and the stickiness of academia, see Matteo Bortolini's "The Trap of Intellectual Success: Robert N. Bellah, the American Civil Religion Debate, and the Sociology of Knowledge."

religion of the Republic" embodies a prophetic, transcendent dimension rooted in the Jewish-Christian tradition. This engagement with the theological dimensions of civil religion, particularly Mead's, has been effectively mapped by Daniel F. Rice in his 1980 *Journal of Church and State* article, "Sidney E. Mead and the Problem of 'Civil Religion.'" By emphasizing the disciplinary divide between theologians and scholars of religion, Mead critiques a prevailing academic tendency, post-Bellah, to dismiss the theological claims of American civil religion, suggesting that this misinterpretation has led to an impoverished understanding of its true nature.

Herberg, Bellah, and Mead each build upon Émile Durkheim's sociological methodology; Bellah most explicitly invokes Durkheim, aligning his analysis with the functionalist premise that "every group has a religious dimension," reinforcing his argument that civil religion operates as a structuring force within society.[58] However, recent scholarship has diversified methodologically, integrating Weberian, institutionalist, and cross-disciplinary approaches, marking a shift in the study of American civil religion, reflecting broader trends in religious studies and the sociology of religion. For example, Philip Gorski in his deeply researched 2017 monograph, *American Covenant*, deploys a Weberian ideal-typical analysis to distinguish between religious

[58] Bellah, "Civil Religion," 40. For Durkheim, religion was not merely doctrinal belief: "Religion exists; it is a system of given facts; in short, it is a reality," Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 325. As Mark Cladis observes in his introduction to Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, these "elementary forms," the skeletal structure of religious life, extend beyond church-centered institutions, permeating "modern societies"; Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, vii. Even within a secularizing world, Durkheim maintains that the moral and communal functions of religion persist, "the totem—or what one might think of as divinity—is in fact society itself conceived symbolically," that "no society can exist that does not feel the need at regular intervals to sustain and reaffirm the collective feelings and ideas that constitute its unity and its personality"; Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, viii, 322. Bellah provides a deeply reasoned contextualization to his alignment with Durkheim in his 1970 article "Christianity and Symbolic Realism," stating outright "that, as Durkheim said of society, religion is a reality sui generis," fundamentally inseparable from the human condition; Robert N. Bellah, "Christianity and Symbolic Realism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1970), 93.

nationalism, radical secularism, and civil religion as three distinct but interrelated approaches to the relationship between religion and politics in the United States. Gorski positions civil religion as a mediating force between religious and political spheres, reinforcing American pluralism. Expanding the analytical scope, Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, in *Religion and Politics in the United States*, blend aspects of Durkheim and Weber. Their predominantly functionalist approach analyzes civil religion as a socially cohesive force leaning more towards Durkheim, however, in proposing a bifurcation of civil religious influence into two distinct spheres: the "priestly" dimension, which serves to legitimate and reinforce patriotism, and the "prophetic" dimension, which calls Americans to moral accountability in light of the nation's founding ideals, they engage in a more Weberian analysis.[59] Building on these two distinct dimensions of civil religion, Abigail Vegter, Andrew R. Lewis, and Cammie Jo Bolin's "Which Civil Religion?" examines the partisan dimensions of American civil religion, using survey data to demonstrate that civil religion, rather than transcending political divisions, is increasingly interpreted through partisan lenses, limiting its integrative potential.[60]

Additional recent manifestations of civil religious analysis have worked to further soften disciplinary boundaries while also, like Vegter et al., engaging with the more problematic dimensions of civil religion. Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence's *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* examines the pervasive use of civil religious language in American culture, particularly in moments of crisis. They argue that biblical imagery of holy war resurfaces to justify

[59] Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 8th ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 53–55.
[60] See also Andrew R. Murphy, "Civil Religion for a Diverse Polity," which addresses civil religion in an increasingly polarized political theatre, engaging with George Bush and Barack Obama.

military interventions, reinforcing a national "monomyth" of America as a selfless, redeemer nation rescuing the oppressed through righteous violence. Kenneth D. Wald and David Leege, in *Culture, Religion, and American Political Life*, examine American civil religion through the lens of civic integration. In contrast, other scholars have incorporated more anthropological studies reminiscent of Geertz, as well as cultural history, in assessing the development of American exceptionalism and its theological dimensions in accord with civil religion.[61] More recently, John W. Compton takes a political science approach in his 2019 article "Why the Covenant Worked: On the Institutional Foundations of the American Civil Religion," which explores the relationship between civil religion and organized religion, pushing back on Bellah's more divisional approach to provide a context in which the distinctiveness between civil religion and the church is more nuanced.

Lastly, pluralism and multiculturalism have been taken up as complicating lenses through which to view civil religion. Marcela Cristi argues in *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics*, that American civil religion is not merely a product of organic social cohesion but involves an element of deliberate political manipulation. Rather than promoting inclusion, it necessarily excludes "religious or ethnic minorities" due to "the structural characteristics of civil religion itself, and of the pluralist nature of modern nation-states."[62] Recently, Leilah Danielson, in "Civil

[61] See also Peter Gardella's *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred,* which surveys the shifting cultural landscape at a societal level, methodologically akin to Geertzian thick description and John D. Wilsey's *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea*, which traces the historical development of American exceptionalism, attending both to its theological function within American civil religion and to the tension it generates with the core claims of the Christian gospel, through a cultural history lens.

[62] Marcela Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 216.

Religion as Myth, Not History," has argued that civil religion functions more as a nationalist myth than as a historical reality. She contends that Bellah and others' view of American civil religion as a unifying moral force obscures the role of power, exclusion, and coercion in shaping American identity. However, there has also been a move, though limited, to address the possibilities of multiple civil religions within the diverse populace, as in Jane Naomi Iwamura's "Critical Faith: Japanese Americans and the Birth of a New Civil Religion," and Charles H. Long's "Civil Rights-Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible People." Long critiques the dominant narratives of American civil religion, arguing that they have historically centered on the experiences and ideology of European immigrants while rendering non-European groups, particularly African Americans and Indigenous peoples, invisible in the construction of American religious identity. He challenges historiographical methods that obscure these perspectives and calls for a reexamination of American religious and civil religious history that fully integrates the voices and lived experiences of marginalized communities. These ongoing debates underscore that American civil religion, far from being a fixed or monolithic construct, continues to be shaped by broader cultural, political, and historical forces. While Bellah's framework remains central, contemporary scholarship increasingly critiques its assumptions, particularly regarding its capacity for cohesion and universality. As methodological approaches diversify, new inquiries into the intersection of religion, nationalism, and civic identity will be critical in assessing whether civil religion retains its integrative potential or serves primarily as a rhetorical tool for competing political agendas.

The Postcolonial Lens

This next section, though primarily concerned with the concept of hybridity, remains in dialogue with the broader issues of identity, exclusion, and national myth that animate debates over American civil religion. It also engages the critical legacy of Orientalism, through which representations of cultural difference were structured and politicized.[63] Understanding the deeper theoretical positioning of these critiques requires a broader genealogical account than may be afforded within the limits of this study. Most simply, their emergence from postcolonial studies should be understood as a response to the epistemic and material legacies of colonialism. Distinct from the sociological foundations of civil religion, grounded in Durkheimian functionalism and Weberian legitimation, postcolonial theory developed from a philosophical trajectory shaped by Sartrean existentialism, Foucauldian discourse theory, and Derridean deconstruction. As Robert J. C. Young observes, its foundational insight lies in recognizing how Western knowledge systems have historically rendered the non-Western subject marginal, objectified, and spoken for within liberal or universalist frameworks.[64] While yielding new analytical vocabularies, it has also produced a recursive critical ecology in which theory responds more often to itself than to material history. Critics such as Benita Parry and Aijaz Ahmad have expressed concern that privileging discourse risks displacing the realities of economic, political, and institutional conditions of colonial power. As Parry cautions, the field too often offers "the World according to the Word," neglecting labor,

[63] As with Civil Religion, direct engagement with the concepts of Orientalism and hybridity within literature specific to the ballet is sparse, primarily hinting at the concept from around the edges. Beth E. Levy, however, in "From Orient to Occident: Aaron Copland and the Sagas of the Prairie" takes up both, from a more racialized standpoint, though without grounding them in their respective conceptual frameworks.

[64] Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Second edition, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

land, and violence in favor of textual play, while Ahmad warns that a shift from political to literary usage of the term *postcolonial* has yielded a conceptual system in which decolonization is lived as an "infinite aftermath."[65]

The earliest articulations of postcolonial critique were forged from within the colonized world itself, particularly by thinkers situated in the French imperial sphere. In *Discourse on Colonialism*, first published in 1950, Martinican surrealist poet and politician Aimé Césaire crafted a polemic against the moral pretenses of empire, declaring that not one "human value" could emerge from the colonial project.[66] Following suit, Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1957, grounded as it is in his experience in Tunisia, offers an introspective analysis of the colonial relationship, describing the beating "heart of the colonial relationship" as one of economic privilege.[67] However, it is in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* that anticolonial theory reached its most radical and systematic form. Building on the insights of his book *Black Skin, White Masks* from 1952, Fanon developed a vision of decolonization rooted in the psychic and political effects of colonial violence. There, he defended the proposition that national culture and political consciousness emerge through collective struggle, even violence.[68]

[65] Benita Parry, "The Postcolonial: Conceptual Category or Chimera?," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 27 (1997), 12; Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," *Race & Class* 36, no. 3 (1995), 6–7; see also Parry's "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse."
[66] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 34.
[67] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, expanded ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), xii. Jean Paul Sartre extends this understanding in his foreword from the original publication, noting the "relentless reciprocity" between oppressor and oppressed. Memmi, *Colonizer*, xxviii. For Memmi, the work was also a mode of existential positioning, an effort "to identify [his] place in the society of other men." Memmi, *Colonizer*, viii.
[68] In later critical responses, this radical call has been both challenged and reframed. Hannah Arendt, in an influential critique, "Reflections on Violence," distinguishes between coercive violence and the generative power of political action, arguing that true liberation must rest on the latter rather than on destruction. Judith Butler extends this critique in her reading of Sartre's preface to Fanon's work, suggesting that Sartre's embrace of violence is more direct than Fanon's and that *The Wretched of the Earth* ultimately

The substantive development of the discipline of postcolonial theory occurred in the late twentieth century, marking the field's establishment within academia. The works of literary critics Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak turn away from anticolonial analysis centered on political activism and material realities and toward the critical interrogation of colonialism's discursive afterlives through the tools of literary theory, philosophy, and discourse analysis. Edward Said's 1978 *Orientalism* is widely regarded as the formal inauguration of postcolonial studies as an academic field. Drawing on Foucault, Said analyzes how the West constructed the "Orient" as exotic, backward, and inferior, reinforcing its own image as rational, modern, and civilized. Through concepts such as "imaginative geography," latent and manifest Orientalism, and the "textual attitude," Said exposed the deep entanglement between imperial domination and scholarly production.[69] Homi K. Bhabha, whose 1994 compendium of essays, *The Location of Culture*, extended the field through key concepts such as mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity. Building on, yet diverging from, the work of both Said and Spivak, Bhabha critiques liberal humanist assumptions by locating cultural meaning in marginal and liminal spaces, where colonial authority reveals its own instability and incompleteness. While respectful of Said's foundational contribution, Bhabha argues that *Orientalism* ultimately relies on a unified and totalizing model of colonial discourse, one

invites a more nuanced reconsideration of violence and nonviolence in political life. Judith Butler, "Violence, Nonviolence: Sartre on Fanon," in *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

[69] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 49. Though his public commitments aligned with liberation struggles like Palestinian nationalism, critics have noted that *Orientalism* ultimately privileges a poststructuralist model of discourse over a historical-materialist framework, resulting in what Neil Larsen calls "a 'globalism' without space and time." This paradox—between political alignment and theoretical abstraction—highlights the ambivalence at the heart of Said's project and opens the door for further critique. Neil Larsen, *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative, and Nation in the Americas* (London; New York: Verso, 2001), 27.

that underplays contradiction, performativity, and anxieties that undermine hegemonic power from within. As he writes in *The Other Question*, Said's analysis tends to read colonial discourse in terms of the intentionality and totality of its ideological construction. Instead, Bhabha emphasizes a field of multiple, asymmetrical relations where representation is unstable and authority incomplete—formulations that have been enormously influential, not only in postcolonial theory but across fields such as cultural studies, political theory, and art history. While critics like David Huddart and Eleanore Byrne have sought to clarify his contributions, Bhabha's abstract constructions have drawn sustained critique.[70] Anne McClintock, for example, in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, argues that his theorizations obscure class and gender, with masculinity operating as an unspoken norm.[71] Neil Larsen likewise contends that Bhabha's concept of hybridity risks substituting symbolic instability for material transformation, displacing the emancipatory project of anticolonial nationalism in favor of a theoretical recasting of agency.[72] Despite these critiques, Bhabha's work remains central to postcolonial theory, particularly for foregrounding the discursive contradictions at the heart of colonial authority.

It is within this paradigm that the concept of hybridity may be more fully examined. Though now central to postcolonial theory, it emerged from a far older and more fraught genealogy. As Robert J. C. Young traces in *Colonial Desire*, the term originates in 19th-century biological and racial discourse, where it was associated with

[70] See David Huddart's *Homi K. Bhabha* and Eleanor Byrne's *Homi K. Bhabha*.
[71] See Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. 62–65 and 362–363.
[72] See Neil Larsen, *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative, and Nation in the Americas*, esp. Chapter 2: "DetermiNation: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism and the Problem of Ideology."

anxieties over fertility, degeneration, and miscegenation. Its early usage encoded fears of racial and cultural contamination, often couched in sexualized metaphors, before being rearticulated by thinkers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it to describe the linguistic and dialogic layering of heteroglossia.[73] Young outlines how Bhabha's theoretical reformulation of hybridity draws on this legacy while inverting its implications, transforming it from a marker of degeneration into a space of productive contradiction and resistance. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha integrates Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction to articulate hybridity not as a blending of discrete elements but as a third space of negotiation and ambivalence in which meaning is never fixed and colonial authority is continually undermined.[74] "When I talk of negotiation rather than negation," he writes, "it is to convey a temporality... that opens up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle."[75] For Bhabha, hybridity functions as a mode of translation, disrupting binaries and "alienating our political expectations" by giving rise to cultural and political forms that are "neither the one nor the other."[76] However, hybridity's uptake has not been without contest. Deepika Bahri, in "Hybridity, Redux," cautions against readings that flatten Bhabha's work into a celebratory gesture of cultural mixing. Instead, she insists on returning hybridity to the "scene" of its enunciation in colonial and racial

[73] See M. M. (Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich) Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.
[74] For a range of disciplinary engagements with the Third Space concept, see Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner's *Communicating in the Third Space* (New York: Routledge, 2009). The volume explores the methodological potentials of the Third Space in contexts spanning literature, cosmopolitanism, and intercultural communication.
[75] Bhabha, *Location*, 37–38.
[76] Bhabha, *Location*, 37. On translation and hybridity, see Harish Trivedi, who critiques cultural translation as a hegemonic imposition under Anglo-American norms; Kathryn Batchelor, who explores Bhabha's contributions to translation theory through a focus on temporality and ambivalence; Sarah Maitland, who warns against metaphoric overuse of "Third Space" in translation studies; and the prolific Robert J. C. Young, "The Dislocations of Cultural Translation," who positions Bhabha as a cultural translator mediating monocultural English contexts.

histories, highlighting its affective and political stakes—particularly for those "who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement."[77] Anthony Easthope offers a more critical reading, arguing in "Bhabha, Hybridity and Identity" that Bhabha's conceptual architecture leans too heavily on Derridean *différance*, privileging indeterminacy without adequately accounting for the subjectivity or situated details it aims to disrupt. Easthope notes that Bhabha's theory risks presenting hybridity as a kind of "transcendental signified," treating all identity as inherently unstable without distinguishing between relative and absolute forms.[78] This, he warns, risks rendering every cultural expression hybrid, thereby diluting the term's analytical utility and political traction.[79]

The critical function of hybridity as a "third space" of negotiation for those subjected to diaspora and displacement provides a conceptual bridge to analyses that place racial and ethnic marginality at the center of American cultural politics. Wilfrid Mellers's *Music in a New Found Land* describes "both [the] Negro and Jew [as] dispossessed people who have become, in a cosmopolitan urban society, representatives of modern man's uprootedness," while Eric Sundquist, in *Strangers in the Land*, extends this insight to show how blacks and Jews embodied a shared yet divergent outsider status

[77] Deepika Bahri, "Hybridity, Redux," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 132, no. 1 (2017), 146. Bahri situates Bhabha's hybridity within a lineage of thinkers, including Stuart Hall and James Baldwin, drawing attention to how hybrid identity emerges not from abstract difference but from embodied, racialized experience. In this light, hybridity becomes "a form of social and psychic recognition," rather than a "jejune postmodern lark," recentered as a strategy of resistance within conditions of dispossession. Bahri, "Hybridity," 146.
[78] Antony Easthope, "Bhabha, Hybridity and Identity," *Textual Practice* 12, no. 2 (1998), 345.
[79] Easthope's warning is paralleled in Wendy Wall's critique of Civil Religion—following Jonathan Herzog—that the very expansiveness, the "definitional fuzziness" of the concept diminishes its utility as an analytical category; Wendy Wall, "Civil Religion and the Problem of Origins," in *Civil Religion Today*, ed. Philip Goff and Raymond Haberski Jr. (New York: NYU Press, 2021), 121. For Easthope, Bhabha's privileging of the interstitial space, what Bhabha describes as "the intervening space" where cultural meaning is negotiated, may inadvertently romanticize fragmentation and instability without fully addressing the material contexts in which hybridity is lived. Bhabha, *Location*, 10.

within American life.[80] Against this backdrop, Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* offers the most incisive theoretical lens by reframing race itself as the indispensable measure of American identity. Her pointed question—"In what public discourse does the reference to black people not exist?"—foregrounds the pervasive structuring role of race in American letters, underscoring her broader claim that "race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising" institutionalized structures "of social decay and economic division."[81] For Morrison, the central mechanism in this dynamic is the fabrication of an "Africanist persona," a literary construct that is "reflexive," serving as both surrogate and enabler for the white imagination.[82] The Africanist character thus functions as antipode, enabling the "white American self" to know itself as free, desirable, influential, historical, innocent, and progressive—precisely by positioning blackness as enslaved, repulsive, helpless, ahistorical, guilty, and regressive. Morrison insists that such Africanist idioms are not peripheral but constitutive, providing the vehicle by which whiteness itself is defined, legitimated, and perpetuated. In this sense, her intervention situates hybridity's "third space" not only in moments of negotiation between marginalized groups and dominant structures but also in the very constitution of the American self, where blackness operates as the indispensable mirror image against which white subjectivity is forged.

If Morrison's analysis exposes how racial difference structures the imaginative foundations of American identity, it also gestures toward the political implications of

[80] Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music* (New York: Hillstone, 1975), 85.
[81] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 65, 63.
[82] Morrison, *Playing*, 17.

such constructions. The same logic that defines the American self through exclusionary contrast also underwrites the nation's democratic ideal, where universal claims to freedom and equality are shadowed by histories of dispossession. This contradiction becomes a central concern in recent scholarship that approaches democracy as a landscape upon which the logics of colonial domination often linger beneath claims of universality. For instance, Ferit Güven in *Decolonizing Democracy: Intersections of Philosophy and Postcolonial Theory* argues that appeals to democratic ideals can end up reinforcing neocolonial authority when they erase the particular histories and knowledges of formerly colonized peoples. In contrast, Bhabha in "Democracy De-realized" insists on looking from the margins—from the standpoint of those shaped by slavery, displacement, and colonization—as a way of unsettling the dominant narratives of modern political life. This kind of reframing also appears in current discussions of civil religion. Andrew R. Murphy, Leilah Danielson, and C. Travis Webb each interrogate how civil religion might accommodate an expanding array of pluralisms.[83] Webb, in particular, calls for what might be termed an imaginative pluralism, a willingness to hold competing moral and historical narratives in tension. In this way, both Orientalism and hybridity offer a critical lens through which to interrogate the tension between a desire for democratic belonging through cultural legibility and managed difference, and the overwriting of historical particularity that such legibility often requires.

[83] See Andrew R. Murphy's "Civil Religion for a Diverse Polity," *Political Power and Social Theory*; Leilah Danielson, "Civil Religion as Myth, Not History"; and C. Travis Webb, "'Otherworldly' States: Reimagining the Study of (Civil) 'Religion.'"

Civil Religion, Postcolonial Critique, and the Arts

This final section considers literature addressing artistic expression and reception within the nexus of civil religion and postcolonial discourse. Similar to these concepts, art theory, specifically the cultural and political dynamics of aesthetics, has a history in the Western context that can be traced back to at least the ancient Greeks, with concepts of mimesis and beauty found in works such as Plato's *Republic* and Plotinus' *The Enneads*. Continuing through the Middle Ages, Augustine and Aquinas both contributed substantive writings on the relationship between beauty and God.[84] Likewise, early non-Western traditions present foundational theories in which aesthetic expression is inseparable from moral, spiritual, and political life, as seen in such works as the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *Liji* (Book of Rites), and the Yoruba *Ifá* corpus. Throughout classical antiquity and into early modernity, Confucius and Bharata, as well as Islamic philosophers such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Hazm, articulated complex schemata for the relationship between beauty, sacred order, and ethical formation.[85] However, much of contemporary aesthetic discourse continues to rest on conceptual foundations laid during the Enlightenment and reshaped by post-Enlightenment secularization theory as well as Marxist-inflected critical paradigms.[86] This inheritance is not merely intellectual but

[84] See Augustine's *De Musica* esp. Book VI, *Confessions* esp. Book X, and Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, esp. I.5.4, I.39.8, and 2.145.2.
[85] For Confucius, see *Analects*; for Bharata, see *Nāṭya Shāstra*; for Al-Ghazali, see *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn)*; and for Ibn Hazm, see *The Ring of the Dove (Tawq al-Hamama)*.
[86] On secularization, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity,* Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.," and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. In §§2–5 and §§16–17 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant asserts that aesthetic pleasure arises from the form of an object alone, independent of its function or meaning. This foundational concept of disinterestedness would later inform Clement Greenberg's call for modernist painting to eliminate all extrinsic content in favor of medium-specific purity. Countercurrents emerge in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, which grounds aesthetic experience in myth, suffering, and metaphysical intensity, and in the writings of Benjamin and Adorno, both of whom reject pure autonomy in favor of art's historical and political entanglement: Benjamin through the lens of reproducibility and revolutionary potential, Adorno through a negative dialectics of form and historical

methodological, shaping the epistemic priorities through which adjacent fields—particularly religious studies and art history—have approached the relation between image, meaning, and the sacred. On the one hand, religious history scholar John Dillenberger identifies a disciplinary tendency within religious studies to subordinate the visual to the realm of objecthood, fit only for "recognition and not transformation," while on the other, art historian Sally Promey argues that prevailing twentieth-century models ensured religious significance was "misconstrued, marginalized, and underestimated" in the canonical narrative of American art history.[87]

It is important to note that there have been works that seek to incorporate visual and religious aspects into interpretive methodologies in ways that resist such reduction. Erika Doss's recent *Spiritual Moderns: Twentieth-Century American Artists & Religion* challenges critical orthodoxy by foregrounding religion as a constitutive, and often suppressed, dimension of modernist American art; arguing that artists whose work was grounded in religious belief were often marginalized precisely because their content disrupted the art world's preference for autonomy and secular masculinity. Among the earliest to frame modern art in relation to the sacred was the Christian existentialist philosopher Paul Tillich, whose approach, as John Dillenberger notes, does not subordinate the visual to theology but regards it as constitutive of theological reflection

catastrophe. See Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," and Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*.

[87] John Dillenberger, "The Diversity of Disciplines as a Theological Question: The Visual Arts as Paradigm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no. 2 (1980): 240; Sally M. Promey, "The 'Return' of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art," *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 3 (2003), 584; Additionally, Philip Gorski's use of paintings as metaphors for stasis in his comparative account of competing civil religious traditions, namely "static" and "dusty portraits," is a particularly striking example of the visual's diminished status; Philip S. Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present*, with a new preface (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 34–35.

itself.[88] This insistence on the visual as a medium of religious meaning, even when the content appears outwardly secular, anticipates later inquiries into the paradoxes of American civil religion, in which national forms accrue sacred significance while traditional religious symbols are repurposed within secularized cultural frameworks. Dillenberger, in his substantial monograph, *The Visual Arts and Christianity in America: From the Colonial Period through the Nineteenth Century*, devotes an entire chapter titled "Civil Religion in the Visual Arts" to the intersection of visual culture and religious meaning. Yet despite this framing, he never invokes the theory of civil religion directly, instead exploring themes that parallel its concerns, leaving the titular reference unexplored within the body of his analysis. Extending this theoretical foundation, Sally Promey and John Davis each examine how religious meaning is historically embedded in specifically American visual practices. Promey's *Spiritual Spectacles* focuses on Shaker visual culture, interpreting images not as static artifacts but as dynamic instruments of communal spiritual expression, "[un]divorced from [their] broader American context."[89] Similarly, Davis's *The Landscape of Belief* examines nineteenth-century American depictions of the Holy Land to reveal how sacred geography shaped national imagination. In both cases, religious visuality is not isolated but functions rhetorically within the wider cultural logic of legitimacy, inheritance, and transformation. Taken together, these works resist the dominant secular hermeneutics of American art criticism; however, it is critical to note that none of these three authors, though engaging in overtly civil religious themes, situate their analyses within the theoretical discourse of civil religion.

[88] See Paul Tillich, "Art and Ultimate Reality" and John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 28–30.
[89] Sally M. Promey, *Spiritual Spectacles: Vision and Image in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Shakerism*, Religion in North America (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 6.

Integrative cultural framing is more explicitly developed by David Morgan, Alison D. Howard, and Donna R. Hoffman. Morgan, whose *The Sacred Gaze* avoids the binary between textual and visual meaning and instead interrogates the cultural mechanisms that condition visual reception, gives ample space to the linkages between visual media, religion, and American national identity through the lens of Christianity and civil religion. Likewise, Howard and Hoffman's account of post-revolutionary civic imagery, "A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words: Building American National Identity Through Art," emphasizes visual expressions of transcendence that, while often interpreted as secular, echo theological and mythic structures, even as their analysis paradoxically frames these as foundations of a non-religious national tradition. In other words, though considered through the lens of civil religion, they avoid any connection to the theological, aligning more with a Rousseauian vision over Bellah or Mead.

In parallel with the reentry of religion into visual analysis, recent scholarship has begun to emphasize postcolonial theory as a critical lens for interpreting artistic expression. Edward Said's "The Art of Displacement," an introductory reflection on the Palestinian exilic artist Mona Hatoum, offers an emblematic starting point defining how her work registers the visual intensity of diasporic rupture. Further illuminating these generative tensions through concepts such as creolization, diasporic double-consciousness, and critical ambivalence, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Nikos Papastergiadis each offer distinct yet interrelated approaches to theorizing cultural hybridity through both the plastic and performative arts. Hall, in "Créolité and the Process of Creolization," identifies a process of cultural mixture distinct from biological essentialism or the homogenizing forces of globalization, extending his analysis into

visual culture through Caribbean art and diaspora aesthetics, where the visual becomes a site for expressing layered, non-essentialist identities that resist both colonial legibility and postmodern flattening. Commenting on Hall, Nikos Papastergiadis notes that his generalized typology of hybridity "is neither bound to the 'specific historical circumstances' of colonialism nor linked to the migration patterns of a particular community."[90] In *Small Acts*, a companion publication to *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy foregrounds Black expressive forms, treating them as spaces where aesthetic autonomy and political critique coalesce within a diasporic context emphasizing that cultural expression must be read politically but not reduced to political intent, in other words, whatever the creative intent, to read Black cultural production apolitically is to erase the structural conditions that shape it. Nikos Papastergiadis' "Hybridity and Ambivalence" focuses on installations and urban aesthetics that visually articulate cultural disjunction and layered identity, distinguishing between hybridity as a visible manifestation of cultural mixture within host cultures and a critical consciousness emergent from diasporic displacement. This critical and reflexive modality resonates in García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures* through discussions of Latin American contemporary art, particularly museum practices and popular media, examining how hybrid forms are situated within circuits of cultural consumption and state-sponsored modernization, warning that hybridity may be "tranquillized" when artistic and popular forms are co-opted as instruments of consumer integration and cultural pacification.[91]

[90] Nikos Papastergiadis, "Hybridity and Ambivalence: Places and Flows in Contemporary Art and Culture," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 4 (2005), 56.
[91] The term "tranquilized" is a summarization by Nikos Papastergiadis; see "Hybridity and Ambivalence: Places and Flows in Contemporary Art and Culture," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 4 (2005), 56.

If generative artistic articulations of hybridity and Orientalism emerge in contexts marked by dislocation and contradiction, then Gannit Ankori's study of Palestinian art and artists makes a meaningful contribution to this broader discourse. In dialogue with Edward Said, she articulates a "dis-Orientalist" aesthetic in a space of radical dislocation grounded in rupture. Extending Bhabha's notion of the space of enunciation, she "theoriz[es] a 'Third-Space' of hybrid creativity" that draws its force from layered and unstable cultural positions.[92] For Ankori, hybridity reveals its most powerful potential: not in resolving contradiction but in holding it open as the very site of aesthetic negotiation. However, Ankori surprisingly eschews all but the most cursory examination of religion, privileging performative expression while overlooking the theological dimensions embedded in the intertwined histories of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Taken in toto, the referenced works reveal that explicit connections between aesthetic abstraction, postcolonial theory, and civil religion remain sparse and tentative. This unresolved space presents an opportunity to reimagine the relationship between sacred and civic meaning and art's ability to hold their contradictions in suspension, offering critical insights into the figurative architecture of American identity.

Methodological Road Map

Appalachian Spring is treated here as a symbolic and performative site in which American civil religion takes shape through the convergence of artistic, religious, and political forms. Rather than separating these registers, the study approaches them as

[92] Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 22; see Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, esp. Chapter 1: "Introduction: Broken Narratives and 'dis-Orientalism'"; Ankori frames her concept of dis-Orientalism as an intentionally multivariate neologism suggesting "the dismantling of an exclusively Western perspective or 'scopic regime', and the alternative, self-empowerment of oriental artists"; Ankori, *Art*, 22.

interwoven modes of expression, each contributing to the construction of national meaning. Primary sources—including archival correspondence, scripts, design sketches, reviews, and political oratory—are organized around the cultural genealogy of *Appalachian Spring* and its thematic engagements with identity, ritual, and representation. Particular attention is given to materials that signal a meta-awareness of audience—moments in which the act of communication reflects on its own symbolic form. Rather than unfolding linearly, these materials function as thematic loops that interrupt the surface narrative, deepening its symbolic and historical resonance. This structure, adapted from Tim Bascom's notion of a recursive or "dipping" essay, allows for continuity while also enabling vertical passages into meaning.[93] The goal is not to collapse aesthetic, religious, and political modes into one another, but to read their interaction as layered returns that inform the symbolic lexicon of American civil religion.

This approach is supported by an interpretive methodology grounded in cultural history and discursive analysis, which, taken together, provide the means to examine how meaning is produced, circulated, and embedded through symbol, performance, and representation.[94] Cultural history, as Peter Burke has noted, concerns itself with "the symbolic, whether conscious or unconscious, "and its interpretation," particularly as embodied in rituals, narratives, and representational forms.[95] Robert Bellah's definition of American civil religion as a system of "beliefs, symbols, and rituals" provides a functional corollary, positioning it as an active cultural language rather than a fixed

[93] Tim Bascom, "Picturing the Personal Essay: A Visual Guide," Creative Nonfiction, September 6, 2015.
[94] Peter Burke's *What is Cultural History?* has been particularly influential in shaping the methodological approach of this section. Its concise articulation of the foundations and development of cultural history makes it a consistently valuable point of reference.
[95] Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, 3rd ed., What Is History? (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 3.

ideological structure.[96] Drawing on Rhys Isaac's notion of the "dramaturgical kit," the distinctive artistic, religious, and political strands will be approached collectively as performative texts whose meanings lie not merely in what is stated or staged but in the underlying conventions and symbolic gestures embedded within them.[97] The artistic genealogy of *Appalachian Spring* and the political theatre of mid-century presidential address are thus treated as stylized enactments—formal representations of vernacular ritual—that render visible the symbolic grammar of American civil religious life.[98] As such, choreographic choices and turns of political phrasing are not treated as ornamental but as a concentrated enunciation of cultural meaning.

The interpretive structure of the thesis is organized into three analytical chapters, each addressing a different aspect of *Appalachian Spring's* symbolic formation and cultural reception through distinct yet interrelated registers of American civil religious expression. Chapter II, "This American Canvas: Portraits, Documents, and the Voice of Lincoln," establishes a three-part typology of civil religion—the reliquary, the agitprop, and the canonical—through a comparative analysis of Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, Franklin D. Roosevelt's wartime rhetoric, and Graham's *American Document*. These works are examined as formal strategies for sanctifying language, mobilizing national

[96] Bellah, "Civil Religion," 42.
[97] Peter Burke, *Cultural History*, 41; Burke, here, outlines the theoretical lineage for Isaac's work from Kenneth Burke's "'dramatistic' approach to culture" through Clifford Geertz and Erving Goffman. See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740—1790*, specifically "A Discourse on the Method: Action, Structure, and Meaning," which is an exceptional explication of his methodological approach through theory applied to textual case study.
[98] This approach follows Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description," which makes clear that even the smallest gestures may reflect densely layered cultural systems, as well as Kenneth Burke's concept of "equipment for living," which suggests how such gestures help communities navigate complexity by embodying shared values and interpretive habits. See Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, esp. Chapter 1, and Kenneth Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, esp. "Literature as Equipment for Living."

memory, and integrating civic texts into a performative national canon. Together, they delineate an evolving national lexicon of memory, voice, and representational authority. Chapter III, "Scripting the Nation: Abstraction, Idealization, and the Shape of American Memory," focuses on the early and intermediate scripts of *Appalachian Spring* as an autonomous textual archive shaped by literary modernism and mediated voices. The chapter opens by juxtaposing the disembodied forms of Roosevelt's political address and Graham's literary voice. Early drafts are read through the lens of American Gothic literature, while later scripts are situated within modernist poetics, particularly in the symbolic treatment of Indigenous presence as a figuration of the land rather than through characters with distinctive human agency. Across these iterations, abstraction emerges as a strategy that consolidates national meaning while displacing historical specificity. Chapter IV, "Revisions and Remains: Aesthetic Negotiation and the Civil Religious Frame," examines the ballet's final evolution between late 1943 and its 1944 premiere, situating abstraction within a convergence of musical, spatial, and political pressures that produced a work consonant with American civil religion through the selective foreclosure of certain historical and cultural voices. The chapter analyzes how Copland's continuous musical architecture—grounded in Shaker aesthetics—compelled Graham to abandon episodic scripting in favor of choreographic continuity, while Noguchi's skeletal set designs, considered in relation to his wartime internment, function as spatial forms that contain historical tension without literal depiction. These aesthetic negotiations are read alongside Roosevelt's October 1944 Wilmington address, whose strategic invocation of Lincoln provides a contemporaneous political analogue for the ballet's abstraction of historical particularity into civil religious form. The chapter ultimately locates in the

ballet's ritualized gestures a corporeal grammar through which civil religious meaning is stabilized and remythologized. The Conclusion briefly extends the analysis beyond the premiere, examining *Appalachian Spring*'s afterlife while tracing the persistence of abstractionist logic in the cultural production of national identity.

Taken together, these chapters approach American civil religion not as a fixed system but as a discursive field—one that reflects and shapes the conditions under which national meaning is constructed and disseminated. However, caution is essential as cultural productions, particularly those institutionalized as representations of national identity, often work by effacing the very subjects they purport to reflect. This tension between symbolic representation and subjective erasure informs a secondary level of interpretation based on Michel Foucault's conception of discourse as not merely "groups of signs," but, as distilled by Peter Burke, that which "systematically construct (*forment*) the objects of which they speak."[99] This guides the strategy for examining national identity, religiosity, and regionalism within both the artistic and political registers, with the understanding that these discourses are not neutral; that they both reflect and constitute power. This insight informs the study's engagement with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which draws explicitly on Foucault to expose the representational mechanisms by which dominant regimes produce and fix the "Other." While Said's focus is the colonial East, the logic of exoticization and symbolic abstraction extends to domestic cultural terrains, including Appalachia and Shakerism, where the rural or devotional subject is refigured through the lens of elite, high-cultural representation. Similarly, Homi Bhabha's framing of a "third space" of cultural enunciation, a hybrid

[99] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 49; Burke, *Cultural History*, 80.

locus in which dominant and subordinate meanings are not resolved but held in productive tension, offers a useful lens through which *Appalachian Spring* may be approached not as a closed aesthetic artifact but as an ongoing negotiation over the rendering of national identity.[100] Of particular relevance is Mikhail Bakhtin's recognition of the ways in which "high" cultural forms are penetrated by "low" or vernacular voices, often in modes that re-accent or unsettle the authority of the dominant register.[101] In *Appalachian Spring*, this dynamic is evident in the ballet's symbolic deployment of rural, religious, and folk imagery. These voices—official, vernacular, sacred, aesthetic—operate in tension. The task ahead is to render that tension audible and to trace how certain registers are amplified while others are dampened or muted.

[100] Mikhail Bakhtin, in a parallel register, provides a model of dialogism that likewise attends to cultural productions as sites of discursive layering. His concepts of polyglossia and heteroglossia, describing the coexistence of multiple socially inflected voices within a single utterance, resonate with both Bhabha's hybridization and Foucault's discursive formations; see Bakhtin's "Discourse on the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

[101] See Peter Burke's distillation in *What is Cultural History?* of Bakhtin's concept formulated in *Rabelais and His World*, 54–55.

Chapter II.

This American Canvas:

Portraits, Documents, and the Voice of Lincoln

Since Abraham Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865, his memory has been cultivated within American consciousness through a process of civil sanctification informed by commemorative ritual and rhetoric.[102] In myriad ways, whether merely invoked or consciously deployed, across generations and ideologies, Lincoln's voice has remained ever-present. For an indication of Lincoln's apotheosis one need look no further than his Memorial, which, upon its dedication in 1922, was hailed by the Associated Press as a "Shrine" over which the "people's homage poured out," with Chief Justice William Howard Taft further eulogizing it as a place before "which all can worship, an altar upon which the supreme sacrifice was made for liberty, a sacred religious refuge."[103]

[102] The term "American consciousness" is fraught, too easily interpreted as implying a homogeneous, reified mindset. This interpretation has a solid and traceable historical lineage: whether it is Louis Brandeis discussing "True Americanism" in 1915 in terms of the "possess[ion] of national consciousness" as a reward for the immigrant "brought into complete harmony with our ideals and aspirations"; or Gunnar Myrdal, in 1944's *An American Dilemma*, framing an "American Creed" as having been made conscious to everyone in American society"—all the populace, no matter the background, "under the spell of the great national suggestion"; or, more recently, Samuel Huntington, who framed much of the history of the U.S.—tracing from Westphalian sovereignty, through the Great Awakening and Revolutionary War, to contemporary, in his view, civil fragmentation brought on by multiculturalism—around the development of a uniquely American "national consciousness" over and above regional, racial, ethnic, or gender consciousness. However, few, if any, other terms evoke the presence of a broad awareness, what Bellah termed "national self-understanding," of the "American experience." The use here is not meant to imply homogeneity of thought, much less consensus, but rather a historically contingent awareness of participation in a common, if deeply contested, narrative of national meaning. Louis D. Brandeis, "True Americanism – Address of Louis D. Brandeis (1915)," *Social Welfare History Project*, July 30, 2017; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, with Richard Sterner et al. (Harper & Brothers, 1944), 3–4; Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, (Simon & Schuster, 2005). Bellah, "Civil Religion," 46, 47, 54.

[103] "All Nation Can Worship in Lincoln," *Cincinnati Enquirer* (1872–1922), May 31, 1922.

This consecration of Lincoln's memory provided a rhetorical touchstone for artists and politicians alike, the early twentieth century proving to be particularly fertile ground as "the economic welfare of the individual became a concern of the state," a moment shaped by the alignment of progressive politics and social movements.[104] Within this milieu, Lincoln, having been enshrined as a "symbol of the people's dignity" over the last years of the nineteenth century, became "a symbol of the people's rights" in the formative stages of the following century.[105] Thus, well before the time of *Appalachian Spring's* creation, the martyred president's words and image had become a lingua franca in the semi-conscious liturgy of an American civil religion, institutionalized across parties, platforms, and public rhetoric. Franklin D. Roosevelt drew repeatedly on this reservoir, while poets such as Carl Sandburg and artists across media mythologized Lincoln anew. Even the Communist Party of the United States, in their 1936 election platform, invoked the "revolutionary Lincoln" as a rallying call for "the future of peace, freedom, and security for all."[106] These actors, along with countless others, fused the memory of Lincoln and emancipation with the prospect of New Deal economic renewal.[107]

Couched in terms of both sacrifice and emancipation, Lincoln's personage has been variously framed through the lens of American self-formation, his words canonized to the point of deification and, as Nina Silber suggests, transformed into an "imaginative

[104] Barry Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II," *American Sociological Review* (Washington) 61, no. 5 (1996): 912.
[105] Schwartz, "Memory," 912.
[106] Communist Party USA, *Communist Election Platform*, August 1936, PDF, Marxists Internet Archive.
[107] On the linkages of Lincoln with New Deal economics and progressive politics, see Crist, *Common Man*, 81–93, 147–154; see also Kaylyn Sawyer's "Belonging to the Ages: The Enduring Relevance of Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*," 26–31; for fuller explorations see Barry Schwartz's "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II" which extends a Geertzian approach to investigate the cultural memory of Lincoln across multiple cases as well as Nina Silber's excellent survey "Abraham Lincoln and the Political Culture of New Deal America."

repository" for the hopes of recovery from the socio-economic upheavals of the 1930s.[108] This national identification, this "understanding of the American experience," constitutes a foundational element of Bellah's American civil religion.[109] This chapter undertakes a brief genealogical study through three works of artistic and political theatre, initiated by Graham's nod to *Lincoln Portrait* in her letter of May 16, 1943. Across these works, civil religion can be seen to take on three distinct, yet interrelated, forms: the reliquary, the agitprop, and the canonical. Applied in turn, we find the reliquary form of Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, which sacralizes Lincoln's words as a unified object of devotion; the agitprop of Roosevelt, who pressed Lincoln into immediate political service; and Graham's *American Document*, which reframes fragments of civic and sacred tradition—the scripture of American civil religion—as an integrated canonical record. These works are framed within the broader stream of American cultural production and collective performance in order to bring into relief the evidentiary traces of Lincoln's symbolic authority. Following Peter Burke's attention to the symbolic and its interpretation, this chapter traces, through example, how a national collective memory, understood as that "sense of tradition consciously transmitted from one generation to another," centered on the signification of Abraham Lincoln has been constructed and sustained across the cultural domains of art and politics.[110]

[108] Nina Silber, "Abraham Lincoln and the Political Culture of New Deal America," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 5, no. 3 (2015): 348.
[109] Bellah, "Civil Religion," 54.
[110] Burke, *What Is Cultural History?,* 133; A full explication of Signification as it relates to President Lincoln lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Here, the term draws on and extends the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, specifically his notion that the invocation of "Abraham Lincoln" or simply "Lincoln" as a sound-image united with a concept can accrue multiple layers of meaning. Over time, these have come to encompass not only the historical figure but also a range of culturally significant, evolving concepts—emancipation, sacrifice, leadership, and national unity; for Saussure's original conceptualization, see *Course in General Linguistics*; for a succinct summary, see D'Alleva's *Methods & Theories of Art History*, esp. 27–33; on the applicability to Lincoln, see Christian Ewert and Marion

Sacred Cadence:

Unpacking Copland's Portraiture

Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* emerged from a wartime commission but quickly transcended the occasion of its premiere, becoming, in Kaylyn Sawyer's words, a "musical memorial" for the ages—in form, a reliquary that enshrined Lincoln's words for veneration rather than mere quotation.[111] Conceived in the wake of Pearl Harbor at the request of noted conductor André Kostelanetz, the piece was commissioned as part of a "musical portrait gallery" of great Americans intended to fortify morale, grounded in his conviction that "music could be employed to mirror the magnificent spirit of our country."[112] May 14, 1942, marked the opening of the gallery as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra premiered *Lincoln Portrait* together with Jerome Kern's *Portrait for Orchestra: Mark Twain*, and Virgil Thomson's *The Mayor La Guardia Waltzes*. Copland's accompanying program note outlines his rationale for choosing Lincoln, an "inevitable" choice in his own account, together with details of his compositional approach, which integrated excerpts from Lincoln's writings into a musical structure designed to evoke both personal character and historical circumstance, a "portrait in which the sitter himself might speak."[113] He further emphasized both the musical composition's triadic arc—suggestions as he put it of "the mysterious sense of fatality

Repetti, "Democratic Theory as Social Codification," which examines how the fluidity of signification plays out across cultural contexts through the lens of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

[111] Kaylyn Sawyer, "Belonging to the Ages: The Enduring Relevance of Aaron Copland's '*Lincoln Portrait*,'" *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* (Champaign) 40, no. 1 (2019): 45.

[112] Andre Kostelanetz to Virgil Thomson, December 18, 1941, Andre Kostelanetz Collection, 1922–1984, Box 1157, Folder 16, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Kostelanetz, in a typed letter to Virgil Thomson indicates that he has reached out in a similar manner to Aaron Copland and Jerome Kern. Crist, *Common Man*, 149; Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 357; Sawyer, "Belonging," 27; Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, *Concert Program, May 14, 1942,* Andre Kostelanetz Collection, 1922–1984, Box 1157, Folder 12, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 4.

[113] Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, *Concert Program*, 8.

that surrounds Lincoln's personality" tempered by his gentleness, the historical background of his era, and finally "a simple but impressive frame about the words of Lincoln himself"—and its interpretive methodology, favoring thematic gestures over literal quotation.[114]

Analyzed in turn, the music and oration reveal an intricate interplay, one that proves initially problematic yet yields to a redemptive resolution. Within the compositional fabric, a textural background binds the spoken fragments as responsive counterpoint punctuates them, a layering that variously complicates and reconciles the work. It is the background that initially concerns us, woven as it is with American folk precedent, quoting first the eighteenth-century ballad "Springfield Mountain" and later Stephen Foster's "Camptown Races." Each tune carries its own layers of cultural memory, shifting from rural archetype to minstrel parody.[115] Yet their treatment is distinctly different; the former, while reinterpreted, retains a clear continuity with its original form, whereas "Camptown" is fractured and attenuated—though, as will be shown, not beyond recognition.[116] "Springfield Mountain," among the earliest American ballads, recounts the 1761 death of a farmer's son from a rattlesnake bite and appears here in its elegiac form, memorializing loss and fatality rather than the comic "Yankee" parodies that later circulated on the minstrel stage.[117] This variant, consistent in tone with

[114] The general historical details for this section are drawn primarily from the overlapping narrative information provided in Crist, *Common Man*, 147–65; Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 357–62; and Sawyer, "Belonging."
[115] Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, *Concert Program*, 8; Crist, *Common Man*, 106; Sawyer, "Belonging," 34–35.
[116] Crist, *Common Man*, 109–11. On campaign nostalgia see William E. Studwell, *The Americana Song Reader* (New York: Haworth Press, 1997), 63. On minstrel parody see "Springfield Mountain," in *Sing Out! The Folk Song Magazine*, 32; also Albert B. Friedman's *The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World*, 302–7.
[117] Friedman, *Folk Ballads*, 195–96; "Springfield Mountain," *Sing Out! The Folk Song Magazine* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 32; Crist, *Common Man*, 107, 115; Richard Dorson observes that the stage Yankee was a

the *Portrait's* commemorative ethos, anchors Lincoln within a nostalgic rural landscape marked by tragedy and sacrifice.[118] In contrast, "Camptown Races" brings with it a dense history of racial caricature and political parody.[119] The minstrel associations of "Camptown Races" were, and remain, widely known: William Studwell notes that the Christy Minstrels first introduced the song, which was written in exaggerated dialect, part of Stephen Foster's repertoire of "nonsense lyrics" that veiled racial caricature under comic absurdity.[120] This history made it both recognizable and deeply problematic as a musical symbol of American popular culture.

The treatment of these two songs fuses questions of musical style with broader cultural consequences. What is retained and what is obscured through their abstracted presence marks a divide that signals normative inclusion and subaltern absence: the African American bodies who animated minstrelsy remain unheard, effaced from the cultural register of the classical concert hall. Elizabeth Crist makes the claim that while Copland quotes the unobjectionable variation of "Springfield Mountain" almost exactly, "he fragments the minstrel tune. As a result, the borrowing calls up its original cultural context—the antebellum South and blackface minstrelsy—but not its problematic lyrics."[121] She further argues that "it is easy enough to recognize the quotation or at least

"country bumpkin" who spoke in "homely vernacular" and "vaunted his American independence," but even he occasionally invoked African American caricatures, using racial slurs as part of his theatrical persona; Richard M. Dorson, "The Yankee on the Stage—A Folk Hero of American Drama," *The New England Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1940): 468, 485, 469.

[118] Crist, *Common Man*, 158.

[119] Studwell, *Song Reader*, 63; Crist, *Common Man*, 109–11; The song's history reflects repeated reuse across disparate contexts, including its appearance as a pro-Lincoln campaign song in 1860—"The Democrats, we'll put to rout, Du dah! du dah! For their game is now play'd out, Du dah! du dah! Dah!"—its persistence in minstrel and popular entertainment, including its later satirical treatment in Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* (1974); *Republican Campaign Song: Lincoln & Hamlin* (Philadelphia: H. De Marsan, n.d.), Library Company of Philadelphia, Print and Photograph Department.

[120] Studwell, *Song Reader*, 63.

[121] Crist, *Common Man*, 159.

sense its familiarity, but the melody is so changed that it is difficult, if not impossible, to hear the actual song or its derogatory dialect," such that Copland is able "to exploit the song's connotations without becoming complicit in its offensive racial politics."[122] Crist's claim is persuasive, as *Lincoln Portrait* was a response to a specific wartime commission; a literal rendering of a minstrel tune would have exposed internal racial friction that a burgeoning war effort could not afford. Yet the musical evidence suggests a more complicated dynamic: the tune is indeed altered, but not to the degree her interpretation would suggest. Sufficient melodic contour and temporal continuity remain at key moments for the associated words to surface—not in literal audibility, but in the listener's internal recollection, the almost involuntary mental act of "singing along" that occurs when a familiar tune crosses the threshold of recognition. In those passages, the audience is placed in a position where the recognizability of the melody implicates them—however subtly—in the very act of racial effacement that the orchestra enacts onstage. Together, these contrasting treatments reveal a pattern: Copland presents rural whiteness, embodied in the Yankee ballad, with solemnity and fullness, while Black-coded cultural material is disassembled and repackaged, displacing its vernacular voice and dialect. The convergence of these stage types—Yankee and minstrel—makes their selective invocation in *Lincoln Portrait* all the more revealing. The partial recognizability of the minstrel tune only reinforces this contrast, allowing its associations to linger despite its altered form. What emerges is not just musical abstraction, but cultural abstraction: an act of aesthetic selection that erases Black presence while recoding American folk idioms as white, rural, and safe for national commemoration. In *Lincoln Portrait*, the American

[122] Crist, *Common Man*, 159.

vernacular becomes audible only in sanitized or reframed form, mirroring the broader exclusions of mid-twentieth-century artistic culture even as Lincoln's words proclaim democratic universality.

If the music problematizes the work, the oration provides a redemptive counterweight that has allowed *Lincoln Portrait* to transcend the ages. First voiced by radio personality William Adams and most memorably by poet and Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg, the role of narrator has, over time, produced an impressive gallery of great American figures. Spanning from Eleanor Roosevelt to James Earl Jones, from Coretta Scott King and Marian Anderson to Barack Obama, this evolving tradition reveals how Copland sought to reanimate Lincoln's words in ways that were at once historically grounded, theologically conceived, and transcendently contemporary.[123] This effort is most fully revealed in the oration itself, whose content is sourced directly from Lincoln's speeches and letters. It first turns to his 1862 Annual Message to Congress, citing its warning that "the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present" and its exhortation that "we must disenthrall ourselves," before its declaration that "as our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew"—a pointed call for the nation to cast off inherited assumptions in order to meet the moral demands of war and imagine a different future.[124] Continuing, Copland draws on the seventh Lincoln–Douglas debate, casting politics as an "eternal struggle between two principles—right and wrong" and

[123] This is but a very short list of narrators who have tackled Copland's portrait. Others include General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Margaret Thatcher, Alec Baldwin, Henry Fonda, William Warfield, and Tom Hanks. Unfortunately, however, there is no comprehensive listing, only partial listings scattered throughout various literature; Crist, *Common Man*, 162–63; Sawyer, "Belonging," 43–45.
[124] Abraham Lincoln, "Second Annual Message," The American Presidency Project. For clarity, while this and the following three excerpts of Lincoln's words are drawn from the published script for Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, the source material for the segments will also be cited for reference. Unlike, as will be seen, in Graham's *American Document*, Copland has taken no liberties with the original texts; they are transcribed and orated per the originating sources.

Lincoln's private notations on the definition of democracy, contrasting democratic equality with tyranny through the personal exhortation that "as I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master."[125] The oration concludes with the Gettysburg Address, reciting its words of hope that "this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom."[126] Through this ordering, Copland shapes more than patriotic exhortation: he constructs a historical arc, laden with cultural and religious resonances. Its sequencing of statements—framed by quotations selected respectively from the period just after Antietam, the bloodiest single day in American history, and from Gettysburg, the battle with the heaviest overall casualties—registers not just the extremes of national crisis but also shadings of social consciousness.[127] Set within a work first performed as Allied victory remained far from certain, Lincoln's words were transformed into a meditation on endurance and loss as much as on the hope of triumph. Heard before audiences at a moment when American forces faced repeated defeats and the prospect of drawn-out conflict, Lincoln's words, refracting Civil War sacrifice through the demands of the Second World War, became a medium for collective moral reflection and a reminder that democracy requires perseverance amid devastation.[128]

[125] Abraham Lincoln, "Seventh Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Alton, Illinois, October 15, 1858," in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 3:315; Abraham Lincoln, "Definition of Democracy," Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.
[126] Abraham Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address Delivered at Gettysburg, Pa., November 19, 1863,* Library of Congress.
[127] For a comprehensive treatment of the battle at Antietam, see James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam*; of particular note is McPherson's framing of the battle in the introductory chapter, "Death in September." For the battle at Gettysburg, see *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* by Edwin B. Coddington, considered by many to be the seminal treatment of the battle; see also Alan C. Guelzo's 2013 *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*, which foregrounds the experiences of ordinary soldiers.
[128] Crist, *Common Man*, 164. For a narrowly focused understanding of the dynamics of the American entry into World War II, covering only the six months after Pearl Harbor, see Lee Kennett's *For the Duration: The United States Goes to War, Pearl Harbor—1942*.

While scholarship has examined the link between these textual selections and Copland's political and social ideology, less attention has been given to the narration's religiously suggestive dimension.[129] That quality emerges in a rhetoric akin to cantorial recitation, evoking his Jewish heritage and endowing Lincoln's voice with biblical solemnity. As Elizabeth Crist notes, in what amounts to a brief aside, Copland's "simple, even folksy, descriptions of what Lincoln looked like, of where he was born and raised" are set against "more stately and formal declaration[s]" that introduce the president's words with the repetitive refrain "This is what he said, he said," which "recalls a similar formulation—'And God said, saying…'—that appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible"[130] This seemingly incidental observation underscores how Copland's textual framing simultaneously domesticates Lincoln through plain description and elevates him through a syntax that resonates with biblical cadences, producing an effect at once intimate and sacralizing. Where Crist offers only a tangential observation, Kaylyn Sawyer lingers slightly longer, emphasizing that in "employ[ing] the redundancy of Hebrew syntax," the work "would be appreciated by a wide audience as a reflection of their common religious language."[131] Taking a more interpretive risk, she also suggests that Copland "at the very least . . . may have viewed Lincoln in Biblical or God-like ways, thus casting his words as timeless exhortations suited not only to the nineteenth-century crisis of slavery but also to the twentieth-century struggle for freedom, justice, and democracy."[132] Yet even here, the observation remains so concise as to be incidental to her larger analysis. However

[129] See especially Sawyer, "Belonging to the Ages: The Enduring Relevance of Aaron Copland's '*Lincoln Portrait*'" and Crist, *Common Man*, 154–162 for deeper analysis and context of each quotation in relationship to Copland's artistic intentions.
[130] Crist, *Common Man*, 160; Crist notes that this concept did not originate with her but rather credits the observations of musicologist Kristen M. Knittel.
[131] Sawyer, "Belonging," 34.
[132] Sawyer, "Belonging," 34.

brief, these readings of the interlacing of liturgical cadence with presidential oratory attest to how Copland fashioned not a mere curation of Lincoln's words but a reliquary-like form, transforming scattered utterances into a liturgical whole that exemplifies the institutionalizing dynamics of America's civil religious dimension.

To appreciate the proposed theological depth of Copland's construct, it is necessary to situate it alongside the rituals of Jewish and Protestant worship as they had consolidated by the mid–twentieth century, each tradition marked by distinctive emphases yet ordered around a stable and broadly recognizable progression. Their alignment lay less in specific content than in a shared structural logic: a movement from invocation through proclamation to communal response. Within Judaism, rabbinic sources describe the morning service as a series of sections that later tradition stabilized into as many as six parts, of which there are three core and enduring movements: *Pesukei de-Zimra* or verses of praise, the *Shema* and its blessings, and the *Amidah* or standing prayer.[133] On the Sabbath, these elements are expanded with the Torah service, additional psalmody, and concluding prayers, making the Shabbat morning liturgy the fullest picture in practice of the structure that has governed Jewish worship for centuries.[134] Protestant worship exhibited a comparable coherence. Across traditions such as Anglicanism and

[133] The general discussion in this and the following paragraphs draws on a range of sources concerning Jewish liturgy and worship practices, including Cyrus Adler et al., "Ḳaddish," *JewishEncyclopedia.com*; *Britannica* s.v. "Jewish Religious Year*"*; "The Torah Reading," *Chabad.org*; Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993); Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994); Jules Harlow, "Introducing 'Siddur Sim Shalom,'" *Conservative Judaism* 37, no. 4 (1984): 5–17; Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); "Kedusha," *Jewish Music Research Centre*; Reuven Kimelman, "Blessing Formulae and Divine Sovereignty in Rabbinic Liturgy," in *Liturgy in the Life of the Synagogue,* ed. Ruth Langer and Steven Fine (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 1–39; and Rabbi Mordechai Levin, "This Is the Torah That Moses Set Before the People Israel," December 23, 2012.

[134] While Reuven Hammer emphasizes that the order is both ancient and flexible, a combination of fixed texts, biblical passages, and responsorial elements that together frame the worshipper's encounter with the divine word, Joseph Heinemann cautions that "the service itself . . . is, for all intents and purposes, uniform"; Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer*, 160; Heinemann, *Prayer*, 8.

Presbyterianism, the Sunday liturgy coalesced around what scholars describe as the "fourfold ordo": Gathering, Word, Table, and Sending.[135] James F. White's *Introduction to Christian Worship* makes the point succinctly: even where sacramental frequency varied, the shape of the service provided a common ritual grammar through which Protestant congregations enacted the drama of Word and sacrament within the rhythm of music and proclamation.[136] In both Jewish and Protestant contexts, then, the early to mid–twentieth century witnessed the consolidation of patterns that were at once historically grounded and ritually performative, each giving a distinctive yet kindred form to the interplay of invocation, scripture, proclamation, and response.

The opening sections of worship illustrate the shared reliance on rhythmic invocation. The synagogue's *Pesukei de-Zimra* strings together psalms and hymnic texts, the leader's blessings answered by congregational response, establishing a posture of praise. Here, the recitative character of the service is readily visible. The pattern is not ornamental but constitutive; it signals that the words recited are not the invention of the leader, but the eternal speech of Scripture reframed for communal devotion.[137] Patterns such as this would have been internalized by Copland in his youth and help account for the "latent Jewishness" interpreted by Howard Pollack—an impression echoed by music critic and Copland contemporary Paul Rosenfeld, who described portions of his work as

[135] Peter C. Bower, *The Companion to the Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press; Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2003) 73; *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), xiii–xxxiv.
[136] See James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), chap. 5, "The Service of the Word," 141–60. Frank Senn has shown how this ordo reflected not only ecumenical convergence but also a retrieval of earlier Reformation patterns that had been obscured by 19th-century revivalism and rationalism; Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 584–601; see also *Book of Common Worship,* xiii–xxxiv.
[137] See Heinemann, *Prayer*, esp. Introduction and Harlow, "Introducing," 1, also 6, in which he underscores the linkage to "Jews of centuries past who have used the same liturgical formulations in addressing our Creator."

"fine Hebraic, harsh and solemn, like the sentences of brooding rabbis."[138] Protestant worship follows a parallel pattern. In Anglican usage, the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* provided the normative structure for parishes well into the mid–century, where the Collect for Purity, the Decalogue, or a Call to Worship is followed by hymn and confession, setting the tone for the hearing of scripture.[139] In both synagogue and church, then, praise and invocation framed the movement into scripture, establishing a liturgical rhythm that placed divine or authoritative speech at the center of communal gathering.

Copland adopts this same ritual grammar in *Lincoln Portrait*. His orchestral introduction, which he described as evoking "something of the mysterious sense of fatality that surrounds Lincoln's personality,"[140] functions like a musical *Pesukei de-Zimra*, gathering the audience into readiness. When the narrator breaks the silence with the solemn address "Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history," the effect is akin to the synagogue's opening call to worship or the Protestant minister's liturgical summons.[141] By grounding the audience first in the egalitarian address "Fellow citizens," Copland extends Lincoln's words, directed initially to Congress, into an inclusive summons, positioning speaker and listeners alike as members of a civic congregation poised to receive a national scripture. This solemn opening, with its implication of collective

[138] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 621; Paul Rosenfeld, *Discoveries of a Music Critic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 334.
[139] Massey Shepherd's *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* from 1950 explains in detail the choreography of this order, beginning with the Collect for Purity and Decalogue, moving through Epistle and Gospel readings, and centering on the sermon as the interpretive hinge; see especially pages 449 and 451. Hymns, psalms, and choral settings punctuated these spoken elements, while set prayers and responses provided a liturgical cadence. Presbyterian practice showed parallel features, though with a distinctive accent. The 1946 *Book of Common Worship* standardized an order in which the proclamation of scripture and preaching carried theological primacy, but always in rhythmic interplay with prayer, psalmody, and congregational song. A typical order began with Call to Worship, hymn, and confession, proceeded through lessons and sermon, and concluded with intercessory prayers, offering, and benediction; *Book of Common Worship,* xiii–xxxiv.
[140] Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, *Concert Program*, 8.
[141] Copland, *Lincoln Portrait*.

judgment and an inescapable historical destiny, parallels the liturgical call that compels a congregation to confront its moral state and shared spiritual journey before engaging with sacred texts.

At the center of each tradition stands the authoritative word itself. The *Shema* section of the Jewish service makes this logic explicit. The formulaic *Vayomer* (ויאמר), which introduces scriptural passages through the repetitive phrase "And God said, saying…" (*vayomer… lemor*), functions liturgically, demarcating the boundary between divine speech and human recitation.[142] Protestant liturgy accomplishes something similar by moving from initial prayers into the proclamation of scripture and its interpretation through preaching.[143] In each case, ritual structure ensures that words read and preached are received as more than narration: they are framed as revelation, endowed with authority through repetition, proclamation, and communal response. In this sense, *Portrait* provides a strikingly direct analogue. Copland's "this is what he said, this is what Abe Lincoln said" serves as a recurring frame, a *Vayomer* that marks the transition into Lincoln's words, just as aspects of the liturgy signal the movement from human voice to divine speech.[144] The phrase reappears four more times, preceding each subsequent quotation. In this way, Copland establishes a fivefold pattern that mirrors the

[142] See Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 16–24 and Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer*, esp. "The Shema," 121–155.
[143] Although Eucharist was less frequently celebrated in many Episcopal congregations of the period, its normative shape remained clear: the Nicene Creed, intercessions, confession, consecration, and communion, all leading toward a final blessing. Hatchett's later commentary on the 1979 Prayer Book makes plain how this basic sequence was preserved even as the balance between Morning Prayer and Eucharist shifted. Presbyterian worship of the same era kept Communion infrequent, but as Peter Bower's *Companion to the Book of Common Worship* (2003) underscores, the Reformed liturgy increasingly aligned with the ecumenical fourfold ordo, making explicit what had long been implicit: the integration of music, proclamation, and sacrament in a sequence oriented toward communal sending; Bower, *Companion to the Book of Common Worship*, 16–18; see also White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 151.
[144] Aaron Copland, *Lincoln Portrait for Speaker and Orchestra*, orchestral score (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1942).

repeated summons of liturgical recitation, guiding the audience through successive portions of the work as though through stages of a service.

The dynamics of repetition and response continue in the prayerful core. The *Amidah*, recited standing and traditionally in silence before being repeated aloud by the leader, amplifies this pattern. Each blessing begins with the same formula—*Barukh atah Adonai* ("Blessed are You, Lord")—so that the worshipper moves through a sequence of petitions and thanksgivings by means of rhythmic repetition.[145] After the silent *Amidah*, the leader repeats the entire prayer aloud, and at that point, the congregation punctuates each blessing with "Amen," creating an antiphonal texture that binds the community to the text.[146] Protestant worship generates a parallel interplay between leader and congregation. In both Anglican and Presbyterian settings, the sermon and lessons were embedded within a structure of rhythmic dialogue. Thus the theological primacy of proclamation did not stand alone but was constantly reinforced by alternating voices, wherein the preacher's interpretive authority was repeatedly reinforced by the congregation's vocal assent, creating a parallel oscillation between individual hearing and collective affirmation.

In *Lincoln Portrait*, the orchestral accompaniment functions as this essential antiphonal counterpart, an instrumental "Amen" to the speaker's proclamation.[147] For instance, after the speaker articulates Lincoln's condemnation of exploitation and slavery, derived from the Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate—

> It is the same spirit that says, 'You toil and work and earn bread—and I'll eat it. No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of

[145] See Kimelman, "Blessings," esp. 17–22.
[146] Heinemann, *Prayer*, 16; Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 16–24; Hammer, *Jewish Prayer*, 51, 244.
[147] For antiphon in Protestant worship see Shepherd, *Commentary*, 7–11.

> their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle!'[148]

—the orchestra responds with a musical motif first heard in the opening notes. The softer, more restrained textural background that accompanied the narration gives way to forceful percussion, quickly taken up and expanded by the winds, brass, and strings.[149] The music does not sound triumphant, as Crist characterizes it, so much as emphatic, pressing its point before shifting into a darker, heavier mood as Lincoln's next quotation is introduced.[150] This is the third of five such punctuations, each a variation on the same motif that marks the words with musical weight. Through repeated musical reinforcement emulating a congregational response, Lincoln's historical critique is transformed into a shared and imminent communal lament, inviting the audience to respond with inward, prayerful reflection to fundamental moral and theological principles of human dignity.

The climactic moment of scriptural display further underscores the correspondence. In the Sabbath Torah service, the elevation of the scroll elicits the congregational acclamation "*Vezot ha-Torah asher sam Moshe*" ("This is the Torah which Moses presented"), a declarative that binds what is being read with what was once spoken.[151] The Gospel reading within Anglican and Presbyterian liturgies operated in an analogous fashion: introduced by formal cues, framed by choral or congregational responses, and given interpretive weight through the sermon. In each case, what is read is marked as what was once spoken, and what was once spoken is rendered as a living word

[148] Copland, *Lincoln Portrait for Speaker and Orchestra*; Abraham Lincoln, "Seventh Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Alton, Illinois, October 15, 1858," in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 3:315.
[149] Aaron Copland, *Lincoln Portrait*, narrated by James Earl Jones, performed by Seattle Symphony and Chorale, conducted by Gerard Schwarz, on *Portraits of Freedom: Music of Aaron Copland and Roy Harris* (Delos, 1992), track 2, 10:48.
[150] Crist, *Common Man*, 160.
[151] "The Torah Reading," *Chabad.org*; Levin, "This is the Torah."

for the present. In *Lincoln Portrait*, this moment is undoubtedly the majestic proclamation of the Gettysburg Address, which Copland deliberately reserved for a singular appearance, stating, "I avoided the temptation to use only well-known passages, permitting myself the luxury of quoting only once from a world-famous speech."[152] Introduced by the familiar framing,

> For on the battleground at Gettysburg, *this is what he said: He said:* '...that from these honored dead *we take* increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; *that we here* highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.'[153]

Lincoln's words are transfigured from historical text to an immanent summons, challenging the audience to a renewed moral and spiritual commitment to the nation's foundational ideals of liberty and equality under God, akin to a final benediction that sends the congregation forth with a renewed sense of sacred purpose.

Placed in this comparative context, the Jewish and Protestant liturgies illuminate a shared architecture of proclamation, repetition, and response, even as they preserve distinct idioms of chant, silence, and sacrament. For Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, the significance lies precisely in this convergence. The repeated phrase "This is what he said, he said" thus resonates across both traditions. Like the Torah lifted before the people or the Gospel proclaimed within the Eucharistic liturgy, Lincoln's words are re-sounded not as artifacts of the past but as an authoritative address to the present. That address has proven both durable and redemptive. At its Cincinnati premiere in May 1942, Goddard Lieberson called the work "one of the most masterful" by any American composer, praising the way Copland's score enclosed Lincoln's utterances in a "powerfully

[152] Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, *Concert Program*, 8.
[153] Copland, *Lincoln Portrait for Speaker and Orchestra,* emphasis my own; Lincoln, "Gettysburg."

compressed" frame that gave them a natural place and power.[154] Only months later, Carl Sandburg's national broadcast brought the same effect to millions, its "lofty simplicity" revealing a common denominator of emotional appeal.[155] A decade and a half later, Howard Taubman would describe its "magical impact" abroad, when *Portrait* spoke, through the "honesty of its feeling[s]," to democratic ideals in Caracas in the face of dictatorship, its performance before a crowd of 6,000, "inspiring," in the assessment of an American foreign service officer, "the first public demonstrations . . . that, in effect . . . started a revolution."[156] Such moments underscored how Copland's framing enabled Lincoln's words to move fluidly between domestic affirmation and international provocation, between consecration and agitation. When Coretta Scott King narrated in 1969 for a performance at Constitution Hall, not a full year after the assassination of her husband, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Paul Hume heard a "moment of immeasurable intensity," as Lincoln's words, voiced through King's moral authority, became a national sermon linking Civil War sacrifice to the civil rights struggle.[157] That sermon did not stand in isolation: it reverberated with other moments when excluded voices re-entered the nation's symbolic stage. The congruity of King's oration with her husband's most famous speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, in the shadow of

[154] Goddard Lieberson, "3 U. S. Works Are Presented by Kostelanetz: Kern," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 15, 1942, 12.
[155] Robert Lawrence, "Aaron Copland Symphony on Lincoln Heard," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 17, 1942, 8.
[156] Howard Taubman, "Music: Magical Impact: Copland's '*Lincoln Portrait'* Makes Vivid Impression at Fete in Caracas," *New York Times*, March 30, 1957, 12; Crist, *Common Man*, 163. The Caracas performance occurred during the final phase of the authoritarian regime of Venezuelan ruler Marcos Pérez Jiménez. A military strongman and president (1952–58), Pérez Jiménez governed through oil-funded modernization alongside censorship, secret police repression, and widespread opposition, conditions that culminated in his overthrow in January 1958; Britannica, s.v. "Marcos Pérez Jiménez."
[157] Paul Hume, "Strong Words, Music: Postlude Significant Words and Music," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, February 12, 1969, D1.

the "Great Emancipator" himself, found a poignant historical echo seven years later, when Marian Anderson, the world-renowned contralto, performed *Lincoln Portrait* before the General Assembly of the United Nations on the occasion of its thirty-first birthday. Anderson's appearance itself carried the sedimented memory of the historic moment when Franklin Roosevelt had enabled her, banned from playing at Constitution Hall in 1939 due to its segregationist policies, to sing before a crowd of almost 77,000 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.[158] If Copland's folk borrowings once stirred controversy, the afterlife of *Lincoln Portrait* shows how his careful framing has endured as a civic reliquary, its liturgical cadence redeeming the music by inviting each generation to hear Lincoln's voice anew as voices and bodies of color, previously made invisible, reemerge into the light.

Beyond Sacred:
Roosevelt's Pragmatic Deployment

A liturgical architecture—shared across Jewish and Protestant traditions—offers one framework for transposing presidential oratory into civic ritual, where Lincoln's voice resounds with sacred cadence and communal force, anchoring collective memory across generations. By contrast, Franklin D. Roosevelt's turn to Lincoln only a year before Copland composed *Lincoln Portrait* demonstrates a strikingly different deployment of memory. Where Copland abstracted Lincoln's words into a civic liturgy

[158] *United Nations Day Concert 1976*, concert program, October 24, 1976, Marian Anderson Papers, Ms. Coll. 200, box 191, folder 8771, item 2, University of Pennsylvania. For an extended history of the context surrounding Anderson's concert before the Lincoln Memorial see Allan Keiler, *Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey* (New York: Scribner, 2000), Chapter 10, "The Concert at the Lincoln Memorial (Easter Sunday 1939)."

meant to transcend the moment, Roosevelt deployed them for immediate political and ideological promulgation, pressing the sanctified voice of the martyred president into the service of contemporary policy and wartime positioning—an approach that resonates with the agitprop inflection of civil religion articulated at the outset of this chapter.[159] The juxtaposition highlights the dual capacities of Lincoln's memory: to function as both a timeless scripture for national reflection and as a sharp instrument of persuasion in the contingencies of political struggle. The section that follows examines this deployment of Lincoln's memory by tracing how political rhetoric, media manipulation, and cultural authority intersected in Roosevelt's handling of a single Lincoln anecdote—the discussion proceeds in four nested stages. First, the strategic context and substance of Roosevelt's 1941 press conference are outlined, showing how he leveraged a specific Lincoln anecdote for contemporary wartime positioning. Second, the administration's meticulous control of the ensuing press coverage is assessed. Third, the quotation's authority is traced to the cultural weight and narrative influence of Carl Sandburg's Pulitzer Prize–winning biography of Lincoln, the source Roosevelt cited. Finally, the origins of Sandburg's anecdote in a diaristic account by Mary Livermore, a Civil War-era organizer and relief worker, are examined, demonstrating how processes of cultural transmission subtly recast Lincoln's character from martyr to embattled leader. Taken together, these steps show how Lincoln's sanctified voice was transformed into an

[159] It may be observed that *Lincoln Portrait*, in connecting the Civil War to World War II, or more pointedly when Coretta Scott King narrated it in 1969, linking Civil War sacrifice to the civil rights struggle, engages in political and ideological promulgation as well. However, there is a distinction in transcendence—one might say, in temporal focus. Whereas Copland created a durable, canonical framework capable of housing such subsequent political movements, Roosevelt's deployment, as will be shown, is tied directly to a specific 1941 policy goal (challenging isolationism), which does not extend beyond its immediate historical moment or invite the kind of later political rearticulation that *Lincoln Portrait* eventually accommodated.

instrument of persuasion for immediate political ends. Within this frame, Roosevelt's invocation of Lincoln during a 1941 press conference emerges as a calculated, if ironic, rhetorical act, one that blended historical narrative with political strategy.

Late into the August exchange, Roosevelt quoted verbatim from Carl Sandburg's Pulitzer Prize-winning multi-volume biography, *Lincoln: The War Years*, published just three years earlier. Reading directly from a prepared folio—dramatically pulled from his desk with a show of spontaneous discovery after telling the reporters he had "dug out . . . the other day" a passage from "Carl Sandburg's Lincoln (The War Years)"—Roosevelt highlighted an episode from the formative years of the Civil War.[160] Shortly after the Battle of Antietam in September of 1862, Northern Union troops under the command of General George McClellan met the forces of the South under Robert E. Lee, outnumbering the Confederates two to one. Infamous as the bloodiest day of the Civil War, with over twenty-two thousand casualties, the bloodshed and ultimate victory by the North at Antietam laid the foundation for Lincoln's issuance of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation just five days later, with the formal proclamation following on January 1, 1863. What may be less well-known, however, is that McClellan failed to recognize the immense tactical advantage he held over Lee. Believing that the North was

[160] Roosevelt, *Press Conference #762*, 91–92; The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, in collaboration with Marist College, offers a comprehensive digital collection of President Roosevelt's press conference transcripts, which were microfilmed by the National Archives in 1956. The stenographic transcripts from which this episode is drawn, preserved in their unedited form, reveal how this mediation process unfolded in real-time, offering a lens through which to analyze the dynamics of a cultural memory strategically deployed. These documents represent, barring Scrivener's error, as close to an unfiltered record of real-time interactions between Roosevelt and the press as is feasible. Each transcript contains both the banter and questioning of individual reporters and the responses and promptings of the president. Also included are descriptive asides regarding moments of laughter as well as moments in which the president develops his statements on the fly; the pauses mid-sentence for time to gather his thoughts are recorded as visual breaks in the typographic stream. Specific examples of typography indicating nonverbal communication and pauses in the dialogue may be found in *Press Conference #762,* pages 86, 88, 90–91, and 96. For a list of the transcripts, see Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum's "Press Conferences of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933-1945."

outnumbered, McClellan allowed the Southern troops to retreat unhindered, fearing that pursuit would result in greater losses. In the days that followed, as the magnitude of the missed opportunity became evident, Lincoln's despair and frustration over McClellan's cautious approach surfaced in a pointed interaction with a group of visiting women from Chicago. Importantly, Roosevelt drew attention to this particular episode in Sandburg's biography, noting that when the women asked Lincoln for words of encouragement, he bluntly replied that neither his general nor the nation itself had "buckled down to the determination to fight this war through; for they have got the idea into their heads that we are going to get out of this fix somehow by strategy! That's the word – STRATEGY."[161] While drawing a parallel between the historical contexts of the Civil War and the war raging in Europe, Roosevelt, knowingly and with a certain playfulness, given the noted laughter, strategically contextualized Lincoln's legacy to communicate his political frustrations.[162]

In the shadow of a secretive meeting with Prime Minister Winston Churchill and widespread isolationist sentiment at home, Roosevelt invoked Lincoln not only to challenge America's reliance on diplomatic maneuvering over decisive action but also to present himself, like Lincoln, as a resolute commander-in-chief. As of August 1941, the United States was not yet actively engaged in the war in Europe. In fact, there was a significant strand of isolationism that held any notion of direct action in check. While the Lend-Lease Act, allowing aid to the European allies, had been passed in March, it was

[161] Roosevelt, *Press Conference #762*, 92.
[162] On the relationship between the victory at Antietam and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and for discussions on the influence of intelligence on McClellan's decision-making and broader aspects of his leadership style, consult Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh's "Military Strategy in the Civil War" and Adam Rothman, Rebecca Edwards, and Michael Kazin's *The Princeton Encyclopedia of American Political History*, esp. 147–48.

accomplished despite a nearly forty percent oppositional tally. Further, just a day before the press conference, Congress had approved an extension of the required length of service under the Selective Training and Service Act, which passed by a solitary vote. A questioner at the conference pointedly brought this fact to the fore, observing that "perhaps there are others who hadn't waked up to the war."[163] Drawing on the subcurrent of American cultural memory linking Lincoln with leadership in a time of war and national sacrifice, Roosevelt leveraged this comparison to underscore his own decisive leadership at a moment of mounting global conflict.[164] His dramatic engagement with the press, including the deliberate reading of Sandburg's passage, ensured that this parallel and its attendant critique were unmistakably conveyed.[165]

To achieve this effect of strategic communication, Roosevelt relied on a collegial atmosphere cultivated over the course of his presidency, not merely to channel information but to actively shape and direct the public narrative, grounding his message

[163] Roosevelt, *Press Conference #762*, 92.

[164] As noted in the Introduction, Barry Schwartz traces how Lincoln's symbolic role in American cultural memory shifted from the early twentieth century to a "symbol of the people's rights." Roosevelt's wartime appeals to Lincoln thus drew upon this evolving symbolic architecture, casting himself as a contemporary defender of those rights. Further, Roosevelt, in casting himself within a Lincolnian framework, engages with the idea, again from Schwartz, that "collective memory is a model *of* society—a reflection of its needs, problems, fears, mentality, and aspirations"; Schwartz, "Memory," 910.

[165] Roosevelt's secret meeting with Churchill resulted in the issuance of the Atlantic Charter, a statement of principles for a post-war world grounded in the defeat of fascism and the promotion of democracy. The Charter is considered a foundational step toward the creation of the United Nations and, as such, served as a significant rebuke to the isolationist strains of the time. For additional information regarding the Charter's transnational influences, see Rothman, Edwards, and Kazin, *Princeton Encyclopedia of American Political History*, 828–29; for its relationship to the founding of the United Nations, see Rothman, Edwards, and Kazin, *Princeton Encyclopedia*, 840; and for its context within Roosevelt's broader foreign policy, see Cross, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and US Foreign Relations." For a general survey of American isolationism, as well as isolationism in the context of the Atlantic Charter and the Lend-Lease Act, see Doenecke, "Isolationism," and Rothman, Edwards, and Kazin, *Princeton Encyclopedia*, 354, 384, 554. For the vote count on the Lend-Lease Act—formally named H.R. 1776 in a symbolic nod to America's founding ideals—see GovTrack.us, "To Pass H.R. 1776." For the vote record for the extension to the Selective Training and Service Act, see U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, "Tally Sheet."

in historical legitimacy and moral gravitas.[166] Though there is joviality in his exchanges with the press, most evident in the playful wordplay between the reporters and the president. One reporter, in response to Roosevelt, jokingly asking if anything had been happening while he was gone, exclaims "surmises," as in suppositions surrounding the secret meeting, to which the president responds, "(punning) Sir who?"[167] These and other examples of spirited wordplay are peppered throughout.[168] However, certain words are of particular note, such as the inclusion of "CONFIDENTIAL" in all capitals at the start of each transcript.[169] It was presumed that, unless noted otherwise, the entirety of the conference was to be off the record, thus making any portion of the conference explicitly placed on the record of particular and heightened interest as it pertains to the president's motivation, his agenda for speaking more broadly to the country on specific issues, not just providing a flavor of the general outlook of the times. Roosevelt framed his inclusion of Sandburg's quote with emphatic declarations that it was to be explicitly "on the record."[170] Prompted by the reporters, he further encouraged that it feature prominently in the lead to the entire reportage of the press conference, a directive the press corps readily obliged with multiple front page headlines: from *The Washington Post*, "President Quotes Lincoln's 'Somebody Is Going to Get Hurt' To Tell U. S. of Peril," and from the *New York Times*, "ROOSEVELT IS GRIM Quotes Lincoln to Show a Parallel Between Those Days and These."[171] The acquiescence of the reporters, combined with their relaxed and

[166] For a comprehensive treatment of Franklin D. Roosevelt's relationship with the press, see Graham J. White's *FDR and the Press*.
[167] Roosevelt, *Press Conference #762*, 85.
[168] Roosevelt, *Press Conference #762*, 94.
[169] Roosevelt, *Press Conference #762*, 85. For context regarding the inclusion of "CONFIDENTIAL," see *Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum,* "Press Conferences."
[170] Roosevelt, *Press Conference #762*, 92.
[171] George Bookman, "President Quotes Lincoln's 'Somebody Is Going to Get Hurt' to Tell U.S. of Peril: The President's Warning Roosevelt Tells U.S. to Expect Long, Hard War," *The Washington Post* (1923–

familiar rapport with the President, suggests a level of insider privilege that Roosevelt carefully cultivated to produce his intended results.

However, not all the reporting shared the congenial tone of the Washington press corps. In contrast, an editorial from *The Hartford Courant* offered a more jaundiced view of Roosevelt's layered comparison while still engaging with Lincoln's cultural signification, providing a counterpoint to the willing participation of other outlets in Roosevelt's messaging. The editorial reframes Roosevelt's invocation of Lincoln's frustration more observationally as a mere complaint. Pushing back against any direct parallel between the two men in their role as presidents—and the existential crisis they each faced—the board maintained that a people's failure to understand their situation "generally springs from ascertainable causes" and that the present moment, unlike Lincoln's, "may be one for which the administration itself is at least partially responsible."[172] Citing examples of contradictory messaging within Roosevelt's administration, the editorial criticized the muddled communication that left the public at cross-purposes. However, with its headline, "The People's Failure to Understand," and

1954), August 20, 1941; Frank L. Kluckhohn, "Roosevelt Is Grim: Quotes Lincoln to Show a Parallel Between Those Days and These; Tough Fighting Ahead; President Says the Struggle Against Hitlerism Will Go Through 1943 if Necessary," *New York Times* (1923–), August 20, 1941. While no direct evidence confirms either George Bookman's or Frank Kluckhohn's presence at the specific press conference in question, the first-person narration in their articles and their roles as regular members of the press corps suggest that these are primary accounts. As a staff writer at *The Washington Post* assigned to the White House, Bookman would have been the paper's Presidential correspondent. Kluckhohn, writing for the *New York Times*, covered Roosevelt regularly in the year prior to Pearl Harbor; his front-page, first-person coverage includes details not found in the official transcript, such as Roosevelt's attire and demeanor. Importantly, as Roberto Franzosi cautions regarding the use of the press as a source for historical data, one must consider whether such evidence captures the historical event itself or merely the patterns of its reporting, the latter being the concern of this paper. In light of this distinction, the perceived validity of their accounts remains inseparable from the institutional culture within which each operated. Their proximity to the event may suggest firsthand credibility and ultimately reflect journalistic practices and editorial intentions; however, the pattern of reporting must be viewed through the lens of proximity and familiarity with the President on a more intimate level, thus shaping how readers understand what transpired; Roberto Franzosi, "The Press as a Source of Socio-Historical Data: Issues in the Methodology of Data Collection from Newspapers," *Historical Methods* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 6.

[172] "The People's Failure," *The Hartford Courant*, August 21, 1941.

the invocation of Lincoln within the framework of emancipation, the board aligned itself with the moral imperative for action over strategy. Departing from the insular tone of the Washington press corps, the *Courant* employed Lincoln's cultural memory to critique the mechanics of Roosevelt's public messaging while maintaining the essence of the intended message.[173]

Although the headlines and leads of these articles, both critical and confirmational, addressed the Lincoln-Roosevelt parallel directly, the body of each, mirrored a critical aspect of Roosevelt's framing by including the attribution to Carl Sandburg. Thus, Roosevelt not only engaged with Lincoln's legacy but also drew on the cultural weight and influence of Sandburg, combining historical heritage with contemporaneous notoriety to deliver his intended rebuke more effectively. This argument unfolds through both the methodological approach taken by Sandburg, which influenced the public reception of his work, and the cultural signification of the man himself, a signification amplified when his voice, already familiar as Lincoln's interpreter on the page, would later carry Lincoln's words in performance to millions of listeners through Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*. Combined, these aspects influenced the specific strain of cultural memory Roosevelt employed.

Although Carl Sandburg was widely regarded as both a journalist and historian, a close examination of his methodological approach reveals a greater reliance on imaginative reconstruction than on historical rigor, a tendency unsurprising given his standing, foremost, as a poet. Liberally blending historical narrative with literary embellishment, Sandburg often draws, without attribution, on the primary accounts of

[173] "The People's Failure," *The Hartford Courant*.

others; this lends his writing an air of intimacy that foreshortens the past, drawing it into the present.[174] A clear example of this is encapsulated in one chapter from *The War Years*, "Bloody Antietam September '62," which begins with a bit of evocative foreshadowing: "The yellow corn stood ripe in the fields of Maryland" before delving into historical details of the famous battle.[175] Sandburg then transitions midway from factual accounting to an extended transcription culled from a solitary published work, Mary A. Livermore's *My Story of the War*, interspersed with figurative, even lyrical, commentary: "the women were silent . . . it was a silence of a moment, but 'deep and painful.'"[176] Although academics have taken a jaundiced view of Sandburg's methodological approach, there is no lack of praise for his style.[177] As another historian

[174] The methodological framework for this argument is indebted to Carl Becker's explication of the specious present in "Everyman his own Historian," succinctly defined as the "telescoping of successive events into a single instant"; Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (1932): 226; as Becker implies, the more of the past that is drawn into the present, the more likely that a "patterned future" will take the fore; Becker, "Everyman," 227. The coupling of memory with the present in order to project onto the future should not just be seen as a means of narrative engagement utilized by Sandburg but, more fundamentally—as an area of future investigation beyond the scope of this paper—constituting the conceptual foundation of Civil Religion, as proposed by Bellah, wherein cultural memory serves to inform the present and guide the future.

[175] Carl Sandburg, "Bloody Antietam September '62," in *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years, Volume 1*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), 549.

[176] Sandburg, "Bloody Antietam," 553.

[177] One historian of the time, J.G. Randall of the University of Illinois, observed in his review of Sandburg's biography for *The American Historical Review* that "in the multiplicity of inserted passages, we have not so much an interweaving as a throwing together." Continuing, Randall dryly notes, "one would hardly turn to Sandburg's pages for historical analysis"; J. G. Randall, "Abraham Lincoln: The War Years. By Carl Sandburg. In Four Volumes. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company. 1939. Pp. xxxi, 660; xii, 655; xiii, 673; xii, 515. $20.00.)," *The American Historical Review* 45, no. 4 (July 1, 1940): 919. Earlier in the century, upon the release of Sandburg's initial two-volume biography, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* in 1926, the historian William E. Barton, writing in the same journal, critiqued Sandburg's methodology, highlighting his inability to "confine himself to cold fact" or offer new insights beyond what other historians had already explored. However, like Randall and other critics, Barton conceded that it was "a piece of genuine literature, which will interest the people who love his poetry"; William E. Barton, "Abraham Lincoln, the Prairie Years, By Carl Sandburg, Two Volumes. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1926. Pp. xvi, 480; 482. $10.00)," *The American Historical Review* 31, no. 4 (July 1926): 809. These critiques should be read with an awareness that Sandburg was not a trained historian; his crossover from poetry and journalism into historical biography most certainly invited "skepticism" from those firmly grounded in traditional historical scholarship. This is especially true in light of David Paul Nord's observation that "the progressive faith in the authority of facts, held firmly by both journalists and reformers . . . permeated all of American social science, public policy, art, and literature in the second half of the nineteenth century" and continued on through the mid-twentieth century; David Paul Nord,

noted, Sandburg "has read more Lincoln material than any other man, living or dead," and the style with which he crafted his portrait of Lincoln produced an "American epic of the First American, a perfect blending of history and poetic imagination."[178] By interweaving historical narrative with lyrical embellishment, Sandburg fosters a sense of immediacy, transforming Lincoln's life into a mythic narrative that bridges the past and present for contemporary readers.

Sandburg, in crafting this suggestion of intimacy, built upon more proximate sources such as Mary Livermore; it is her original work that contains the extensive conversations from the meeting referenced by Roosevelt. The women with whom Lincoln met were volunteer members from the Northwest Branch of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a civilian-run agency under the auspices of the federal government tasked with the collection and distribution of food, clothing, and medicine, along with aiding in the organization of military camps and hospitals. Livermore, their co-leader, was at varying times an activist, organizer, speaker, and aid worker; however, a constant in her life was a journalistic self-image fostered by her work as a writer for and editor of a Universalist publication, the *New Covenant*.[179] Published in 1889, almost thirty years after the events described, *My Story of the War* is a first-person narrative by Livermore of her experiences during the Civil War. It is both visually and textually dramatic, giving the

Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 5.

[178] Emanuel Hertz, "Review of *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, by Carl Sandburg," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 26, no. 4 (1940): 582–85.

[179] For a general overview of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, see the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center's website entry of the same name. For a deeply researched history of the Commission within the broader context of the late nineteenth-century women's movement, see Judith Ann Giesberg's *Civil War Sisterhood : The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition*. Giesberg's work examines Mary A. Livermore's contributions to the Commission and her efforts on behalf of women's and immigrant rights. For a brief introduction to Livermore's involvement with the *New Covenant,* see Illinois Newspaper Project, "The Universalist."

impression that she was taking dictation and that her account of Lincoln's words may be taken as a formal record, paving the way for Sandburg, and ultimately Roosevelt, to draw on these recollections as authoritative elements of a shared cultural memory.[180]

Foreshadowing the clubby atmosphere within which Roosevelt's press corps operated, Livermore presents herself in her interactions with the president as a privileged insider to the happenings behind the curtain, so to speak, of which the public, heretofore, remained unaware. However, there is nothing in Livermore's description of the meetings that suggests she took notes; rather, the narrative unfolds in a worshipful tone, one in which she and her cohorts exhort the President for comfort. While there is no reason to doubt that she was a primary witness to the events that are described, there is reason to be cautious in accepting at face value the specific details, especially those quotations that are presented with an almost journalistic authority. According to her introduction, the narrative is not solely based on memory but rather on a significant trove of letters, unpublished drafts for independent newspaper and magazine articles, and, most tellingly, her journals and diaries.[181] To her credit, Livermore is forthright in the preface, stating

[180] These are evidenced in the title page with a layout more akin to the carnival advertisements of the time and the subtitling of the chapters, for example: "My Reminiscences of President Lincoln - Experiences in the 'Wigwam' - Exciting Scenes - My Interviews with the President at the White House"; Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as Nurse in the Union Army, and in Relief Work at Home, in Hospitals, Camps, and at the Front, during the War of Rebellion*, (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington, 1889), 566. For a very brief comparison of typographic styles of the era, refer to the plates contained in Edmund Gress's *The Art and Practice of Typography*, specifically the chapter devoted to books, pages 67–75. These rather staid examples may be contrasted with the more sensational broadsides of P. T. Barnum, aligning visually with Livermore's publication, as exemplified by the February 1862 advertisement for the exhibition of Aztec children (*Massachusetts Historical Society*, "Extraordinary Living Wonders!").

[181] Livermore, *My Story of the War*, 7–12. In considering journals and diaries, the work of Irina Paperno is especially illuminating, given her observation of the "special relationship" that diaries share with "privacy, intimacy, and secrecy"; Irina Paperno, "What Can Be Done with Diaries?" *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004): 562; The throughline of intimacy extending from Livermore to Sandburg and, ultimately, from Roosevelt to his press corps is of particular relevance in assessing how intent is conveyed to the reader. As with Franzosi's caution regarding the validity of factual reporting, Paperno's reminder that diaries remain fully mediated—subject to both their author's conscious aims and subconscious inclinations—underscores

that her book is not a history but rather a compilation of reflections on experiences from a significant time in her life and the nation's.[182] As such, her predilection for ruminations on the suffering of the common soldier, to whom her book is dedicated, is overlaid upon President Lincoln, resulting in language that elevates the encounter to a more mythopoetic level. The extensive runs of quoted dialogue, covering multiple pages and roughly an hour in time, are interspersed with haunting descriptions of the President. Opening the narration of their first meeting with the shock of seeing Lincoln as "ghastly or rigid . . . as [if] he lay in his coffin," following up with their meeting the following day in which "the broad light of day revealed the ravages which . . . had [been] wrought" upon his physical person, "the look of pain and weariness stereotyped on his face."[183] Livermore thus intermixes the aura of authoritative quotations with a heady degree of exposition that serves to underscore the exclusivity of her insider perspective.

Sandburg selectively drew verbatim from Livermore's purported transcriptions, imbued them with the weight of a direct and unimpeachable source while simultaneously refocusing Lincoln's cultural narrative away from martyrdom towards the more human emotion of frustration and the burdens of leadership. Despite the historiographical limitations, both Sandburg and his portrayal of Lincoln were widely celebrated. As Lyndon Johnson remarked upon his death, "Carl Sandburg was more than the voice of America . . . He was America."[184] Literary critics like Lewis Gannett extolled the

that the pattern of transmission, rather than strict historiographic fidelity, assumes primary importance in understanding the construction of cultural memory.

[182] Livermore, *My Story of the War*, 11.

[183] Livermore, *My Story of the War*, 555, 560.

[184] Roy Reed, "Johnson Eulogizes Sandburg as a 'Vital' American: Johnson Praises Sandburg's Work," *New York Times (1923-),* September 18, 1967.

biography's richness, describing it as a "visionary" interpretation of Lincoln's life.[185] The observational asides by Livermore are significantly tamped down by Sandburg and fully eliminated by Roosevelt, which has the effect of redirecting the cultural reading of Lincoln away from martyrdom and towards an embattled but potent leader. In reframing Mary Livermore's reflections as freshly unearthed insight—both novel and authoritative despite its basis in pre-published diaristic material—Sandburg imbued his portrayal of Lincoln with an immediacy and emotional depth that brought Lincoln's humanity to life, providing Roosevelt with a ready-made rhetorical arsenal.

Thus, by leveraging both the factual weight of historical events and the emotional resonance of Sandburg's poetics, Roosevelt effectively cloaked himself in Lincoln's cultural mantle. The effectiveness of this "agitprop" lay precisely in the already sanctified nature of Lincoln's voice, a sacralization evident in artistic deployments like Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*. By quoting Sandburg during his press conference, Roosevelt harnessed not just Lincoln's authority via the mythic quality that Sandburg imbued in his subject but also the gravitas of Sandburg himself. As even his contemporary critic J. G. Randall ultimately concluded, "there will be thousands who, in thinking of Lincoln, will inevitably think of Sandburg."[186] In this way, Roosevelt's rhetoric operates on multiple levels: it evokes Lincoln as a historical figure while simultaneously drawing on the cultural memory shaped by Sandburg's poetic narrative. By reframing historical anecdotes as literary narratives, Sandburg contributed to a broader cultural mythology that, while compelling, complicates efforts to distinguish historical fact from interpretive

[185] Lewis Gannett, "Books and Things: Pulitzer Prize Awards," *The Washington Post (1923-1954),* May 8, 1940.
[186] Randall, "Abraham Lincoln: The War Years. By Carl Sandburg," 922.

fiction. This tension underscores the dual-edged nature of cultural memory: it furnishes a shared contexture for national identity while simultaneously obscuring the complexities of historical truth. This dynamic is equally evident in Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, where the selective re-coding of American folk idioms quietly effaces Black presence even as the words of the "Great Emancipator" proclaimed democratic universality. For Roosevelt, this mythology was a potent rhetorical tool. His invocation of Lincoln, as filtered through Sandburg, exemplifies how cultural memory can be mobilized to serve immediate political ends. The very authority Roosevelt tapped in Sandburg's biography would later converge with Copland's sacralizing frame, as Sandburg's voice became the medium through which Lincoln's "lofty simplicity" reached the nation. In this convergence, Sandburg stood at the hinge of biography, politics, and ritual performance. In positioning the nation's involvement in World War II as a continuation of Lincoln's struggle for unity and justice, Roosevelt appealed to an institutionalized national cultural narrative of sacrifice and moral purpose to push for ethical action more globally. This strategic deployment exemplifies how the civil religious deification of Lincoln's personage and sanctification of his words may be mobilized for specific political ends within the "agitprop" framework.

The Integrated Canon:
Martha Graham and American Civil Religion

On July 3rd of 1938, three years prior to the press conference, Franklin Roosevelt dedicated the Eternal Light Peace Memorial at Gettysburg, invoking Lincoln's ethic of

"malice toward none, with charity for all" as a moral guide for national renewal.[187] The speech cast the legacy of the Civil War as a charter for progressive governance, explicitly linking Lincoln's call for unity to the social aims of the New Deal and aligning with a broader cultural moment in which Lincoln's legacy was being rearticulated across politics, the arts, and performance—including Graham's soon-to-premiere *American Document*. As Carl Sandburg argued in 1934, Roosevelt's administration stood in structural continuity with Lincoln's, each advancing bold proclamations that seemed "curious, contradictory, [even] preposterous" to their critics, each gaining traction by projecting new moral realities into being.[188] Just as Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation declared "a status to exist where he had no power to enforce it," Roosevelt's New Deal decrees, in Sandburg's apologetic telling, announced new rights for labor and welfare that exceeded immediate enforcement but would ultimately correct the nation's moral compass, Sandburg thus explicitly cast Roosevelt's social agenda within a Lincolnian ethical frame.[189] That symbolic continuity came vividly to the fore at Gettysburg, where Roosevelt's presence among Union and Confederate veterans framed him as Lincoln's inheritor. The *Chicago Tribune* encapsulated the moment with the headline "Roosevelt Dons Lincoln Armor," while the *New York Times* emphasized the reverent tenor of the proceedings, recounting the invocation by the chaplain J.J. Methvin that urged all present to "rededicate their lives that the teaching of the Prince of Peace might be established in the hearts of men" and describing the eternal flame as glowing in the beatific rays of the

[187] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at the Dedication of the Memorial at the Gettysburg Battlefield, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania," The American Presidency Project.
[188] Carl Sandburg, "Lincoln – Roosevelt," *Today* 1, no. 16 (February 10, 1934): 5.
[189] Sandburg, "Lincoln – Roosevelt," 5.

setting sun.[190] Roosevelt himself crystallized the parallel, declaring that the nation now faced "another conflict, a conflict as fundamental as Lincoln's, fought not with glint of steel, but with appeals to reason and justice on a thousand fronts—seeking to save for our common country opportunity and security for citizens in a free society."[191] Roosevelt's performance at Gettysburg was one instance of a wider reanimation of Lincoln's voice in the late 1930s, a symbolic field in which artists and intellectuals also staked their claims.

One month later, Martha Graham would premiere *American Document*, a theatrical dance in social dialogue with Roosevelt's Gettysburg rhetoric and the historical linkage Carl Sandburg had drawn—a linkage that Elizabeth Crist bluntly summarizes as going "so far as to describe the New Deal as the second emancipation."[192] If Roosevelt cloaked himself in Lincoln's mantel, framing them both as coequal guarantors of democratic and progressive reform, Graham wove fragments of civic and religious texts into a performative "documentary" that sought to canonize the nation's symbolic record in the service of the same democratic ideals.[193] Unlike Copland's later, more subtle allusions, Graham, at the time, with fascism on the rise in Europe, wore her ideological commitments on her sleeve.[194] *American Document*, in its original staging, was as

[190] Walter Trohan, "Roosevelt Dons Lincoln Armor at Gettysburg: Issues Remain Same, Says," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 4, 1938, 1; W. A. MacDonald, "150,000 Hear Him: He Declares Nation Is Dedicated to the 'Good of …,'" *New York Times*, July 4, 1938, 1.
[191] Roosevelt, "Gettysburg."
[192] Crist, *Common Man*, 152.
[193] Martha Graham, "Dance Libretto: *American Document*," *Theatre Arts Monthly*, September 1942, 566.
[194] Graham was explicit in linking *American Document* to the advance of fascism in Europe, situating the work within the 1938 crisis in Czechoslovakia. That confrontation arose when Hitler threatened military action to retake the Sudetenland, leading to the Munich Agreement, which forced the Czechoslovak government—under pressure from Britain and France—to cede the region, a decision widely seen as a betrayal that left the country to face Hitler alone. Though the agreement brought temporary relief to Roosevelt's administration, it also convinced him of the need for "unneutral rearmament," a policy that aligned the United States more closely with Britain and France. The urgency of this shift only intensified after Germany occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia and invaded Poland in 1939, laying the groundwork for measures such as the Lend-Lease Act; Marcia Minor, "Graham Interprets Democracy: Uses Militant Theme as Climax of Dance Presented in the Form of a Documentary Play," *Daily Worker* (New York),

forceful in its theatrical display as it was insistent on theologically grounded progressive social critique. Though its trajectory shifted over subsequent stagings—its social edge blunted amid the wartime exigencies of 1942, its reliance on minstrel tropes becoming so problematic by 1944 that they overwhelmed the work's underlying message, rendering it unsustainable within Graham's repertoire—*American Document*, at its inception, stands as an explicit enactment of civil religion, with all its problematics on display, an attempt—not wholly successful—to cast fragments of historical texts into an integrated national canon that aligned the symbolic authority of foundational American figures, including Lincoln, with a progressive proclamation of social commonality and economic renewal.[195]

Premiering at the Vermont campus of the Bennington School of Dance on August 6, *American Document* quickly emerged as a watershed for Graham, broadening her audience, introducing the first male dancer, Erick Hawkins, to her company, and inaugurating new theatrical ambitions that would bear upon *Appalachian Spring* years later. Yet the evidence for the piece is fragmentary: beyond oral testimony and a handful of reviews, it survives through brief silent film fragments, still photographs, and a solitary published libretto of the 1942 restaging—remnants that render the iterative nature of its six-year life span only partially visible.[196] Taken together, these traces suggest that *American Document* functioned less as a fixed composition than as a laboratory of Graham's evolving idiom, continually revised and highly experimental, a transitional

October 7, 1938, 7; Gregory F. Domber, "Eastern Europe–US Relations," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*.

[195] Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 126–28; Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 481–82; Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

[196] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 127–28.

work that marked a shift in both form and representation. Among these remains, the libretto provides the most stable record of Graham's dramaturgical method, documenting how she reworked foundational texts and performance conventions into a theatrical dance grounded in national narrative.[197] Its dramatic structure was explicitly modeled on a minstrel show, employing an interlocutor, walk-arounds, and cross-fire sequences to frame episodes that ranged from Puritan settlement and expansionism to emancipation, serving as commentary on contemporary political crises. Throughout, the piece integrated spoken word and movement, its orations drawing from American historical documents, including the Declaration of Independence, and speeches by Abraham Lincoln (including material later echoed in Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*), Jonathan Edwards, and Red Jacket of the Seneca Nation. Through the interplay of spoken word and dance, Graham's dramaturgical approach fashions a synoptic history of the United States, which she characterized in an interview for the Daily Worker as a response to "the peril to the principle of democracy in the world" and the need to restore meaning to words such as democracy that had become too familiar.[198] On this basis, *American Document* will be considered across three dimensions: first, briefly situating the work within its political context, particularly Graham's Popular Front sentiments and anti-Fascist pursuits; second, examining the seemingly paradoxical appropriation of minstrel-show conventions and representation of African American and Indigenous figures, addressing how Graham's dramaturgy both invoked and displaced subaltern voices; and finally,

[197] The libretto employed throughout this analysis reflects the version published for the 1942 revival and therefore incorporates revisions made after the original premiere. As a printed text, it is mediated through both Graham and the publisher, yet it provides a sufficiently stable basis for analysis; while the revisions are not insignificant, they do not materially affect the present argument.
[198] Minor, "Graham Interprets Democracy."

probing the religious components of the work, considering how Graham sought to reframe scripture, sermon, and ritual structure to propose democracy as an imperfect but noble, even utopian project with transcendent civil-religious implications.

Graham's most explicit political associations were tightly focused in the late 1930s, with her artistic practice merging with a widening sense of political responsibility to make her work publicly legible. Decisively shaped by anti-fascist politics, her motivations became increasingly evident, as with her decision to refuse an invitation to the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games on the grounds of Nazi persecution, marking an early moral stand and solidifying an alignment with the Popular Front through appearances at labor-sponsored benefits and her participation in the American Artists' Congress.[199] This political orientation was clearly communicated in the large-scale works Graham created during the period. *Panorama* (1935), with its mass-movement vocabulary and explicitly anti-fascist "Prelude to Action," and *Chronicle* (1936), framed against the rise of European fascism, signaled her conviction that dance could model collective vigilance. Works such as *Immediate Tragedy* and *Deep Song* (both 1937), rooted in the Spanish Civil War, further underscored her alignment with international anti-fascist struggle. The climate of solidarity within the more progressive community of artists and patrons provided Graham with both sympathetic collaborators and a receptive audience for aesthetic experimentation. She used that context to test how performance might function as a national wake-up call, underscoring the point when she remarked that "dance cannot exist in the vacuum . . . [it] is not an ivory-towered art. It is one of the arts of

[199] Franko, *Love and War*, 3–7, 150.

communication."[200] *American Document* reflected this conviction, extending the trajectory of her political repertoire, operating as a choreographic intervention that framed democracy as a communicative practice—something enacted in public, argued over, and defended through collective expression on the stage.

If Graham's politics shaped the conception of *American Document*, its reception revealed how those commitments were interpreted, contested, and refracted on the public stage, often in ways that divided attention between its aesthetic experimentation and its socio-political force. The press reviews provide an insightful reflection of the artistic and political tensions inherent in the work. The more commercially mainstream outlets, staffed by professional dance critics, focused on questions of aesthetic form and the mechanics of performance, issues highlighting the tensions between European classicism and American modernism. John Martin, the *New York Times'* first and most influential full-time dance critic, offered the most sustained formal evaluation. He described *American Document* as "highly experimental," praising its use of minstrel-show structure and its integration of the spoken word.[201] Over the course of two successive reviews for its premieres at Bennington and Carnegie Hall, Martin approvingly noted the work's episodic treatment of American history and Graham's theatrical borrowing from "show business," calling it a "naïve approach to subject matter" executed with clarity and dramatic force.[202] Margaret Lloyd, writing for the *Christian Science Monitor*, was far less

[200] Franko, *Love and War*, 14; Martha Graham quoted in Sali Ann Kriegsman, *Modern Dance in America—The Bennington Years* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 288.
[201] John Martin, "Weidman's 'Opus 51' a Dance Feature," *New York Times*, August 7, 1938, 5D.
[202] John Martin, "Martha Graham Offers New Dance: Feature of Program Opening the Season," *New York Times*, October 10, 1938, 14. Within the mid-20th-century modernist critical register, the term "naïve" functions as a strategic commendation of aesthetic directness over the perceived exhaustion of academic virtuosity. As Meyer Schapiro demonstrates through his analysis of popular imagery, this mode of simplicity serves as a restorative resource, in which artists deliberately adopt a synthetic vision to bypass the stagnant conventions of formal culture. Graham's integration of American "History" with the

enthusiastic, dismissing the work as "bizarre." While conceding its daring, she judged the spoken script so clear in its argument that much of the subsequent dancing appeared wholly unnecessary.[203] Lloyd was not alone in her evaluation, with some assessments bordering on the vitriolic. In the *Boston Herald*, Walter Terry wrote: "If *American Document* is the way Miss Graham sees America—bloodless, characterless, humorless—we have a right to feel insulted."[204] By contrast, and perhaps surprisingly, Lincoln Kirstein, cofounder along with George Balanchine of the New York City Ballet and a fierce defender of classical ballet, in writing for *The Nation*, provided an extended paean to Graham's endeavor, praising it as having "the sober, frank sincerity of a Thanksgiving hymn heard in the open air."[205] Taken together, the mainstream dance critics, though divergent in their appraisals—some decrying the work's departures as tasteless or unnecessary, others reading their very naïveté as a sign of modernist vitality—revealed a

vernacular of "show business" exemplifies the attempt to move beyond what Clement Greenberg identifies as "Alexandrian" stillness, seeking instead a movement-oriented avant-garde that maintains its vitality by drawing on the energy of non-academic forms. This "primitive" register is not a mark of incompetence but, as Peter Hohendahl explicates in his treatment of Adorno, a form of aesthetic violence utilized to expose the truths civilization has repressed through the intentional shock of the unrefined. In this modernist problem-space, naïveté serves as a critical instrument of anti-academic clarity, where the return to archaic or folk-coded modes provides a necessary friction against the mechanical formulas of the culture industry. Ultimately, the commendation of such a naïve approach recognizes it as a sophisticated distillation of historical weight into the visceral and dramatic immediacy of performance. See Meyer Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery"; Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"; Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Aesthetic Violence"; see also Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*.

[203] Margaret Lloyd, "Bennington Impressions," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 23, 1938, 6.

[204] Walter Terry, *Boston Herald*, October 16, 1938, quoted in Kriegsman, *Bennington*, 198.

[205] Lincoln Kirstein, "Dance: Martha Graham at Bennington," *The Nation* (New York), September 3, 1938, 230, reprinted in *Martha Graham and Company in American Document*, Martha Graham Collection, box 315, Music Division, Library of Congress; Kirstein extends this characterization in the following sentence of the same review, noting that the work's "surface finish resembled some useful Shaker wood-turning" and that its formal movement was "as proud and objective as a New Bedford whaler's figurehead." Within the modernist critical vocabulary already invoked, the reference to Shaker craft aligns Graham's form with a tradition of disciplined simplicity, functional clarity, and anti-ornamental austerity—an adjacent formulation to the commendation of naïveté discussed above. At the same time, the juxtaposition of Shaker design, sacred hymnody, and vernacular maritime carving may be situated within the previously noted dialogic framework outlined by Bakhtin, in which culturally distinct registers—sacred, functional, and folk—coexist within a single expressive field without full resolution.

shared tendency to bypass the work's political and social implications, privileging its formal risks and theatrical strategies instead.

By contrast, the *Daily Worker*, an organ of the Communist Party USA, wholeheartedly embraced the work as a triumph of politically engaged art. Across three reviews from October through December of 1938, Graham is portrayed as an ideologically minded artist whose choreography embodied collective democratic ideals and critiques of American injustice. The paper emphasized the ballet's alignment with anti-fascist politics, its frank depiction of "less savory aspects" of U.S. history, and its accessibility through the use of folk forms and direct address, proclaiming it "the greatest proof of a socially conscious artist" and a work "timely in expressing the needs of the masses of the . . . many millions of fearful and underprivileged Americans." [206] As the critical reception demonstrates, Graham's social messaging was bound to its political context, the reviews reflecting the broader Popular Front milieu in which progressive artists such as herself and Copland often shared platforms and ideals. This was a climate reinforced by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, which expanded federal support for the arts and encouraged democracy to be conceived not only as a political structure but also as a cultural imperative. For leftist commentators, the ballet signaled that Graham had definitively taken their side, aligning her art with a revolutionary lineage of struggle for freedom and justice tracing back through Roosevelt to Lincoln.[207] *New*

[206] Margery Dana, "Dance Notes: 'American Document' Repeated," *Daily Worker* (New York), December 28, 1938, 7; Margery Dana, "Martha Graham's 'American Document' at Carnegie," *Daily Worker* (New York), October 12, 1938, 7; Minor, "Graham Interprets Democracy."

[207] During the mid-twentieth century, Abraham Lincoln emerged as a powerful and versatile symbol of American ideals for both mainstream politicians and radical activists. President Franklin D. Roosevelt utilized Lincoln's image to provide moral authority for the New Deal and to unify a weary public during the struggles of World War II. Simultaneously, the Communist Party adopted Lincoln as a revolutionary icon, framing their fight for social democracy as a continuation of his battle against slavery. This leftist interpretation was bolstered by historical associations with Karl Marx, who regarded Lincoln as

Masses, a Marxist magazine closely aligned with the Communist Party, sponsored the New York City premiere of *American Document* at Carnegie Hall and subsequently devoted multiple reviews to the piece, even featuring Graham on its cover —an unprecedented endorsement of her leftist political credibility.[208] Just as the critical assessment was divided, one may reasonably extend this pattern to the broader audience, with some likely responding to the work's formal experimentation and others to its socio-political messaging.

This moment of convergence between artistic innovation, Popular Front politics, and critical reception positioned Graham as the emblematic figure of a left-inflected modernism, and it is in this context that her work must be considered, for, *American Document* bore markings of Roosevelt's rhetorical strategy: just as he assumed Lincoln's mantle before the press corps, anticipating that journalists would relay and interpret his words for a national audience, Graham staged her dance-documentary with the knowledge that critics and commentators would carry her message beyond the proscenium. As political theatre, neither addressed only the immediate audience before them; both calibrated their performances for the mediating presence of the press, which transformed their words and actions into widely circulating narratives. Just as Roosevelt was explicit in placing his words on the record, so too was Graham's intention of absolute clarity in her message, as Gervaise Bulter's review plainly stated, "There is no mystery in *American Document* between the dancer and her audience,"[209] even if the later reviews

a champion of the global working class. Ultimately, Lincoln's legacy served as a political tool to justify military mobilization, inspire international volunteer battalions, and promote a vision of economic liberation for all citizens. See Crist, *Common Man*, 150–151 and Crist, "Copland and the Politics of Americanism," 290.

[208] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 214–16.

[209] Gervaise Butler, "'American Document' Reviewed," *Dance Observer*, November 1938, Martha Graham Collection, Box 314, Music Division, Library of Congress.

make clear that such clarity was not uniformly achieved, and as Graham herself told the *Daily Worker*:

> I want the audience to feel no obscurity or doubt at any time about what is happening on the stage . . . This dance is supposed to bring back to its full meaning what has largely become meaningless in America through familiarity. I refer to such a word as democracy, that reminds us of rights we have but may not avail ourselves of.[210]

Words such as "freedom" and "justice," she argued, had become hollow through overuse, demanding reclamation through performance.[211] The dance functioned not simply as an archive of texts but as a medium through which words were reborn in the immediacy of live performance and disseminated to the masses through the apparatus of cultural mediation that surrounded its staging, a process that proved most effective for those already attuned to its ideological register.

Assessed from this vantage*, American Document* echoed Roosevelt's agitprop deployment of the civic canon for specific political ends, aided by a cooperative press corps. However, Graham's work was far more explicit in its reckoning with the nation's unresolved historical injustices, something even the more aesthetically oriented could not fail to perceive, and it is within the dance's friction between democratic aspiration and legacies of exclusion that her turn to the minstrel form becomes most telling. While Graham's decision to pattern *Document* on the structural bones of a minstrel show would, within six short years, provoke significant critical reassessment, at the time it offered her a performative toolkit for fusing fragmented episodes of spoken text and movement into a coherent and accessible theatrical form as the walk-arounds, cross-fire sequences, and the figure of the Interlocutor carried the performative lineage of a popular entertainment

[210] Minor, "Graham Interprets Democracy."
[211] Franko, *Love and War*, 23; Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 481.

tradition familiar and acceptable to her audiences.[212] Recent scholarly analysis has examined this structural choice not only as a pragmatic solution to the challenge of cohesion and reception but also as an index of the racial politics embedded within the popular forms Graham incorporated. Interpretations diverge sharply between those who see her use of minstrelsy as a mere reproduction of racial hierarchy and those who argue for its subversive intentionality.[213] Julia Foulkes and Halifu Osumare emphasize the dance's cultural appropriation, with Foulkes bluntly concluding that "Graham's view of the American past reflected contemporary racial segregation and appropriation."[214] In contrast, Maureen Costonis praises Graham's transformation of the minstrel format, arguing that it should be read as a parodic scaffolding reoriented in order to direct sympathy toward those once mocked: "she had taken a form that, for a hundred years, had been associated with racial insults and stereotypes and transformed it into a vehicle to

[212] By the 1920s, the minstrel show had congealed into a predictable three-part structure. It opened with the "walk around," where pairs of performers strutted in procession before forming a semicircle, setting the stage for the interlocutor's comic exchange with Tambo and Bones in the rapid-fire "crossfire." The program then transitioned into the "olio," a grab bag of short skits, songs, dances, and novelty acts, which emphasized variety and often concluded with a competitive cakewalk. A chorus might heighten the spectacle by miming reactions from bleachers at the back of the stage, pointing and laughing in unison to underscore the jokes. Each episode was kept brief, with six concise acts considered ideal, ensuring a brisk rhythm of entertainment. The evening culminated in the afterpiece, a parody or farce that escalated the humor through one-liners and slapstick, designed to leave the audience laughing to the point of exhaustion. During the early to mid-twentieth century, minstrel conventions remained widely recognizable, reinforced not only by popular national radio programs like the 1930s *Maxwell House Show Boat* but also by the proliferation of professional and amateur troupes across the country. Community-sponsored revues by groups such as the American Legion and Boy Scouts kept the form alive into the 1960s, ensuring that few Americans of the period were unfamiliar with its elements. See Costonis, "Graham, Martha: 'American Document,' a Minstrel Show in Modern Dance Dress," 299-300 and Manning, *Modern Dance*, 126, 251–52. For an excellent treatment of the origins of minstrelsy, see Eric Lott's *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & the American Working Class*, especially chapters one and two.

[213] The extensive exploration of the secondary literature over the following pages is in large part due to the dearth of theoretical explorations *of American Document* and even the broader corpus of Graham's work as the majority of academic literature is content to rehash variations focused narrowly on historicity and musicology. The subsequent deep dive into Susan Manning and Mark Franko's conceptual inquiries is an attempt to engage with and expand the limited conversation in some meaningful way.

[214] Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism From Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*, Cultural Studies of the United States (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 151. On Osumare see Manning, *Modern Dance*, 252, endnote 54.

portray instances of injustice and suffering."[215] Neither presents a wholly satisfying picture of Graham's aims. While her choreography confronted the nation's moral failings, her own attitudes and actions reveal a more unsettled terrain—one in which the ethical stance projected onstage did not always match the perspectives she voiced or the biases she retained. While she refused to perform in Nazi Germany out of solidarity with persecuted Jewish artists, she later suggested that Pearl Lang, a prominent figure within Graham's company and a trusted rehearsal assistant, would be unable to become a "true artist" because of her Jewish heritage.[216] She expressed a desire to appear Japanese on film, playing with orientalist markers of exoticism, and maintained social circles marked by casual anti-Semitism.[217] These contradictions reveal how her art could operate as camouflage: outwardly committed to democratic pluralism, inwardly shaped by biases that complicated the inclusivity she staged. As *American Document* composer Ray Green noted, "Martha; she played along with the currents," both political and social.[218] Accordingly, this chapter does not wholly refute the validity of appropriation critiques nor accept a fully apologetic reading; rather, it is the double-coded theatrical grammar identified by more nuanced scholarship that guides a deeper assessment of Graham's experimentation.

In this vein, Ellen Graff, offers a more productively ambivalent frame, situating *American Document* within the wartime project of national solidarity while presenting Graham as having successfully fashioned a "universal American body" that traversed

[215] Maureen Needham Costonis, "Graham, Martha: 'American Document,' a Minstrel Show in Modern Dance Dress," *American Music* 9, no. 3 (1991): 307.
[216] Franko, *Love and War*, 27–32.
[217] Franko, *Love and War*, 25–26, 30.
[218] Ray Green, Reminiscences of Ray Green, interview by Theresa Bowers, March 11, 1979, Bennington Summer School of the Dance Oral History Project, Oral History Archives, Columbia University, 47–48.

race, class, and history, even as that body inevitably bore the imprint of a white Protestant form, thus tempering her exculpatory stance[219] However, aligned with contemporaneous aesthetic critics who praised the broadened appeal produced by adding a male dancer "in the midst of what had previously been a bastion of female power and independence," Graff—whose remarks on this point are brief and observational, without the analytic elaboration the claim would seem to invite—treats this universality as fully realized, assuming that Graham's ability to embody "historical and universal forces" persisted even though the ensemble's altered structure materially changed the conditions for the work's reception.[220] Mark Franko and Susan Manning provide a conceptual apparatus for interrogating this assumption. Aligning with Costonis' parodic take, arguing that the minstrel deployment was "intentionally ironic and inherently critical of this aspect of American history," Franko clarifies the political aspirations that structured Graham's dramaturgy while acknowledging, as Graff does, the inherent problems of its appropriation.[221] Explicitly positioning his view against Foulkes, Franko interprets Graham's adoption of minstrel conventions as being in sympathy with Popular Front ideology.[222] Manning's critique, however, is methodological, attentive to the internal aesthetic mechanism of displacement. Considered together, Franko and Manning yield a more expansive understanding than either provides on their own. Franko identifies the

[219] Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928–1942* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 129–30.
[220] Graff, *Stepping Left*, 130.
[221] Franko, *Love and War*, 18.
[222] It must be noted that Franko aligns Manning and Foulkes as offering essentially the same conclusion, stating that "both . . . interpret Graham's borrowing of formal choreographic features of minstrelsy as well as the performance of Native Americans and emancipated slaves by Caucasian dancers as a reflection of policies of racial discrimination in the United States." As will be shown, this alignment disingenuously compresses the differences between the two scholars as their approaches are from different vantages; Franko, *Love and War*, 18.

ideological aim of the work: the effort to expose and contest the racialized scaffolding of national myth through a deliberate refunctioning of a popular entertainment form, with Manning illuminating the corporeal mechanism through which such an aim might be realized, as well as the structural instability introduced by the altered casting that ultimately limited its realization. Read in tandem, their analyses clarify both the political intention and the embodied conditions that enabled—and ultimately constrained—Graham's experiment with the "American body."

Situating the work in a pointedly anti-Fascist frame, Franko marks the death of myth as an artistic convention in toto, having been compromised by its appropriation in Nazi aesthetics, where the "blood and soil" doctrine equated nationhood with race and land.[223] Against this ideological closure, he suggests, in a bit of an interpretive leap, that Graham fashioned a "national-utopian vision" in which the American past could be critically staged rather than unconditionally embraced.[224] However, Franko's focus on the anti-Fascist dichotomy between myth and utopia necessarily limits engagement with the work's foundational ritual structure. Graham's staging of the national past as a series of invocations, proclamations, and responses suggests that she was not rejecting communal symbolic narrative entirely, but rather directing a distinctly American civil-religious narrative—a civic liturgy of national identity—against Fascist ideology. This structural

[223] Franko, *Love and War*, 21.
[224] Franko, *Love and War*, 20. Franko aligns his understanding of Utopia with David Gross's Platonic extension of the theorist Georges Sorel's argument that "myth animates images but risks, in the process, confusing life with the image; utopia tempers this alchemy with critical thinking." In this sense utopia may be seen as breaking the Cassirerean-Barthesian cycle, providing a stop against the remythologization; Franko, *Love and War*, 24; see also David Gross, "Myth and Symbol in Georges Sorel"; this conception of utopia as oriented not toward an archaic origin but toward an unfinished democratic future resonates with Fred Polak's analysis of cultural formations of the future, where myth animates destiny but risks confusing life with what is imagined, while utopia introduces a necessary critical struggle; Fred Polak, *The Image of the Future*, trans. and abridged by Elise Boulding (Amsterdam: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1973), esp. 32–41 and Chapter 4.

reliance on ritual form complicates the strict intellectual definition of utopia, suggesting instead a form of secular mythologizing necessary for stirring the popular convictions about national identity that Graham sought to reinvigorate. The utopian frame, for Franko, positions the minstrel structure not as appropriation but as an ironic "foil against which democracy is sought."[225] With the walk-arounds and cross-fire patterns, coupled with episodes marking indigenous dislocations and the sins of slavery, the structure dramatizes the failures of American democracy rather than reaffirm some mythic caricature, making the ironic mode itself a condition for critical meaning.[226] However, for irony to succeed, as Linda Hutcheon argues, the interpretive community must come first: the audience must already share cultural knowledge that enables recognition of the form before it can apprehend its critical redirection. In the case of *American Document*, Graham's spectators were steeped in minstrel conventions as fixtures of popular culture and thus positioned to receive them as inverted or reoriented. In this sense, Franko's irony is not merely a reading of subversion but a communicative act whose success depended on the audience's cultural competency, grounding Graham's use of minstrelsy in an equivocal theatrical grammar that made critique possible precisely through familiarity, but only for those within the resonant interpretive community.

Given this emphasis on irony's communicative terms, the embodied means through which such an intention might be pursued are articulated through Susan Manning's *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*. Manning suggests that the modalities enabling

[225] Franko, *Love and War*, 34.
[226] This emphasis resonates strongly with Linda Hutcheon's model of ironic communication. Hutcheon defines irony as a semantically complex process in which "said" and "unsaid" meanings are held in tension, requiring interpretation to take place in an interstitial realm; Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 89.

Graham's experiments in multivalent embodiment depended on the microcosm of the all-female troupe in which white dancers' bodies became vehicles for nonwhite subjects, what she terms "metaphorical minstrelsy," a formulation that must be noted, risks neutralizing the political consequences of racial appropriation.[227] However, for Manning, this was not impersonation in the blackface sense but a process of displacement: dancers' bodies carried the "tenors of nonwhite subjects," whether "Oriental, Indian, Negro," or other culturally marked figures.[228] In this framework, whiteness was unmoored from its own specific identity, so that the white female body, in particular, could circulate multiple subjectivities. Such a strategy required a degree of disembodiment, a refusal of fixed femininities, that enabled Graham's traditionally all-female ensemble to function as abstract containers for the racialized other, allowing the dancers to take on any form of gender or race. This aesthetic mechanism of displacement and unmooring paradoxically provided the political camouflage Graham needed, permitting her to stage the American historical archive, including narratives of indigenous dispossession (Episode 2: Occupation) and the betrayal of formerly enslaved people (Episode 4: Emancipation). This satisfied the explicitly anti-racist sentiments of the Popular Front without needing to reckon with the actual exclusion of nonwhite bodies from her stage and company. However, while Manning's paradigm maps the mechanism of racial displacement, it requires supplementation by a moral critique—the successful metaphysical "disembodiment of femininity" inherently relies upon the continued physical disembodiment of nonwhite subjects from the stage through exclusion.

[227] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 10, 118, 125–26, 127.
[228] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 10.

This continued dependency on exclusion precipitated what Manning identifies as Graham's move toward "mythic abstraction," a mode that renounced explicit racial referents in favor of universal figures anchored in unmarked white bodies. While this turn promised universality, its very structure—which made the white body the sign of the universal—effectively instantiated racial hierarchy, ultimately mirroring the aesthetic politics of national mythology that Franko argues Graham sought to avoid. *American Document* sits at a critical inflection point where the transition between these two modes becomes structurally inevitable, precipitated by the re-gendering of the ensemble with the addition of Erick Hawkins, the first male to ever perform with Graham's dance company. Manning writes that "Hawkins's presence shifted not only Graham's staging of whiteness but also her staging of gender."[229] Here, Manning, perhaps unintentionally, implies that the two were concomitant; yet it is more convincing to see the gendering as the precipitating factor for the racial shift. In the Pilgrim episode, for example, staged as a duet, an overt heteroeroticism anchors the work in male-female polarity. Likewise, in the final episode, as three women proclaim:

> We are three women.
> We are three million women.
> We are the mothers of the hungry dead.
> We are the mothers of the hungry living.
> We are the mothers of those to be born.[230]

The disembodiment of femininity that had opened the possibility of metaphorical displacement gave way to an essentialized figure of "woman" and "mother," through which compassion and care are explicitly gendered and anchored in maternal responsibility. When Hawkins enters for a solo, displacing the women, he is introduced

[229] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 127.
[230] Graham, "Libretto," 573.

as “one man… one million men,” stabilizing, as Manning suggests, “the work after the disruption of the women’s trio.”[231] In his costuming, Hawkins is presented as a universalized “working man,” his dark leggings set against his bare chest, “recall[ing] the heroic imagery of WPA art—the broad-chested workers who exemplified American vigor.”[232] Hawkins’s working man plays against the domesticated women just as in the eroticized Pilgrim episode, his near-naked body, save only white shorts, complementing his bare torso, instantiates a universalized form of manliness, against the white-sheathed figure of Graham’s newly marked femininity. Graham’s preemptive gendering thus pierced the metaphorical veil, grounding the work in a way that then rendered race, specifically white bodies, legible, normative, and universal, in other words, mythically abstract. This shift was not merely an aesthetic effect but a dramaturgical necessity dictated by Graham’s project of secular mythologizing. The resulting universalized 'working man' and the essentialized figures of 'women' and 'mothers' served as both specific American archetypes and as the realization of a normative relational grammar. By representing the white body as transcending specific racial or class differences, to the exclusion of the metaphorically marked subaltern body, these figures projected the illusion of traditional civic cohesion necessary for constructing an integrated national canon that could be invoked and affirmed in ritual form.

Taken together, these readings show that Graham’s experiment rested on the interplay between the ironic structure Franko identified and the shifting capacities of embodiment that Manning traced, with metaphorical minstrelsy providing the conditions through which a politically charged reinterpretation of familiar forms could register. The

[231] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 137.
[232] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 137.

subsequent re-gendering of the ensemble proved destabilizing, drawing the work toward the consolidating figures that marked mythic abstraction and narrowed the interpretive openness on which Franko's utopian horizon depended. What emerged was not a linear movement from one representational mode to another but a field of competing pressures in which intention, embodiment, and inherited theatrical conventions pressed against one another without resolving their tensions. Graham's organization of the work as a sequence of structured ritual exchanges signaled a further layer of meaning, as the episodes increasingly took on the character of a hieratic national invocation rather than a repudiation of myth. The dance did not abandon communal symbolic narrative so much as recast it into a distinctly American civil-religious form, a secular mythologizing designed to stir popular convictions about what the nation was and might yet become. In this light, the minstrel scaffolding operated not only as a vehicle for critique but also as the hinge through which irony, embodiment, and this emerging civil-religious narrative were brought into an unstable alignment, one that could not ultimately sustain itself under the pressures of its own appropriative logic.

Out of this instability, one can discern a heightened visibility of the deeper symbolic and ritual strata embedded within the theatrical idiom through which the work moved. Perhaps counterintuitively, the shape of the ballet with its overt minstrel structure invites consideration of the work's theological or civil-religious dimension. Minstrelsy's opening "first part circle" and the cakewalk finale were themselves steeped in ritual, drawing on African American festival and spiritual traditions even as white performers later used them to craft an oppositional identity, one that elevated whiteness at the

expense of Black culture and humanity.[233] The interlocutor-endman dialogue frequently engaged with religious themes, featuring comedic interrogations where a formal figure questioned a seemingly naive character's spiritual knowledge, thereby highlighting spiritual deprivation or satirizing "pompous preachers."[234] Ultimately, these performance elements, despite their often parodic nature, drew heavily from "black musical gifts . . . born of the spiritual tradition," a part of what Nina Eidsheim calls a "phantom genealogy . . . constructed around othered visual traits and caricatured character associations," underscoring minstrelsy's complex and often contradictory relationship with the sacred.[235] This dynamic is evident in the framing devices and textual juxtapositions that shape the work: the "*Entrance: Walk Around; Cross-Fire*" functions as a Gathering, framing the audience as participants within the action. The Interlocutor's opening salutation

> Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening.
> This is a theatre.
> The place is here in the United States of America.
> The time is now — tonight.

established performance itself as the contested ground upon which the civil canon was not defined as fixed monuments but rather as "our legends—our poignantly near history—our folk tales."[236] Historical representation thus worked through the immediacy

[233] George K. Blake, "A Strictly American Institution: Neil O'Brien, Blackface Minstrelsy, and the Invention of White Catholic Identity," *Popular Music* (Cambridge, UK) 38, no. 3 (2019): 379–98.
[234] Sarah Meer, "Minstrelsy and Uncle Tom," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards and Heather S. Nathans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 90–91; Thomas L. Riis, "Minstrelsy and Theatre Miscegenation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 76, 72. See also Kathryn Lofton, "Gospel Minstrelsy," *American Religion* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2019); though anchored by a critique of Bob Dylan her article provides an excellent analysis of the relationship between religion, specifically gospel spirituals, minstrelsy, and performance.
[235] Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 80.
[236] Graham, "Libretto," 566.

of the stage, collapsing past and present so that "here" could mean both the theatre and the nation, and "now" could reach backward into history even as it pointed toward an evolving democratic future. Irony, in turn, mediated between the stage and the audience, opening an aperture, a "third space", where meaning could be negotiated in ambivalence.[237] It is upon this interstitial ground—between America's ongoing issues of dispossession and exclusion and democracy's highest aspirations—that Graham's theatrical experiment acquired its greatest critical force. The ballet's political and cultural strategies were inseparable, each amplifying and undermining the other. At the same time, the juxtapositions that defined its political theatre also pressed civic texts into ritual patterns, opening the work onto a theological terrain that exceeded mere politics.

Graham's welcoming "Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening" carries the cadence of civic address, a mode later echoed in Copland's "Fellow Citizens," each addressing those assembled as a congregational community.[238] In their respective final acts, both works send those gathered back into the world through Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address—"That government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth"—so that political speech assumes the force of collective affirmation, a civil turn echoing the liturgical dismissal, "Go forth in peace, to love and serve the Lord."[239] In *American Document*, this elevation of public language reaches its most concentrated form in the Puritan episode, which juxtaposes the homiletic severity of eighteenth-century theologian Jonathan Edwards with sensuous cadences from the Bible.

[237] Graham's use of minstrelsy is neither mere reproduction nor full subversion; it is an ambiguous, hybrid form where racial politics and theatrical cohesion are constantly negotiated. This ambiguity is the essence of Homi Bhabha's third space, allowing for critical resistance without negation.
[238] Graham, "Libretto," 566; Copland, *Lincoln Portrait for Speaker and Orchestra*.
[239] Graham, "Libretto," 566; Copland, *Lincoln Portrait for Speaker and Orchestra*.

Lincoln Kirstein called it "a statement of Puritan fury and tenderness," describing how Graham, "in severe white," danced against the voice of Edwards declaiming "terrible words on fornication and damnation" while parallel lines from Songs evoked longing and intimacy.[240] Joseph Arnold Kaye likewise recognized its daring range, calling the episode "a symphonic" duet whose biblical leitmotifs produced "beauty and power such as the modern dance has heretofore not known."[241] Margaret Lloyd, in her review, dismissed the section as shockingly tasteless.[242] These divergent responses suggest that the episode's interplay of judgment and desire disrupted audience expectations, its use of biblical language producing reactions that ranged from admiration to outright rejection.

The interplay of the scriptural passages warrants closer scrutiny, as it reveals Graham's keen theological understanding while also revealing how *American Document* comes close to the historical critique required of a utopian vision while ultimately slipping into mythic abstraction. Graham sets images of death "hissing like a fiery dragon" and of God "treading" the sinner beneath his feet from Edwards' 1741 sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* against verses from the Song of Songs, such as "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine" and "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death."[243] Theologian, Herbert Marks characterizes the Song of Songs as "arguably the finest and certainly the most influential work of erotic literature ever written," a sequence of poems whose "unabashedly temporal" passions celebrate mutual desire, lyrical exuberance, and

[240] Kirstein, "Dance: Martha Graham at Bennington," 230.
[241] *Dance* 5, no. 1 (October 1938): 11, qtd. in Kriegsman, *Bennington*, 197.
[242] Margaret Lloyd, "Bennington Impressions," 6.
[243] Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8, 1741," ed. Reiner Smolinski, *Electronic Texts in American Studies*, July 8, 1741; *Song of Solomon*, 1:2, 8:6, KJV; Song of Songs is the more modern name given to the Song of Solomon; in Catholicism, it is known as Canticles, or Canticle of Canticles.

the lovers' freedom from social constraint.[244] In its world of gardens, vineyards, and "Edenic" intimacy, the poem elevates sensual love as a force that transcends hierarchy and possession, opposing what Marks calls the "phallocratic institution" of marriage.[245] Graham's libretto draws directly on these verses to dramatize "the simple life" and "the tender creature" in deliberate counterpoint to Jonathan Edwards's portrait of humanity as damned and loathsome. In this juxtaposition, the Song's vision of love as "mutual render"—an equal, reciprocal exchange of affection rather than conquest or control—becomes an embodied challenge to the Puritan ethic of denial, highlighting the internal conflict between natural affection and religious severity.[246] The collision between Edwards's fiery homiletic and the sensual Song of Songs is an example of the near realization of Franko's anti-Fascist, utopian vision. By forcing this critical counterpoint, Graham staged the intellectual freedom required of democracy, demonstrating, through a "nondogmatic approach to history" that the foundational documents brought into dialogue were "not uniform in meaning".[247] As well, there is a level of irony at play in Graham's use of these dueling passages to fundamentally challenge the audience's preconceptions of the sanctity of religious canon.

The theological force of this polarity was not confined to textual citation but extended into choreography and performance. Susan Manning notes that the choreography of the Puritan duet was seamless, the separate bodies becoming "one new organism," much like Graham's oration in which the two disparate sources coalesce into

[244] *The English Bible, King James Version*, vol. 1, *The Old Testament*, ed. Herbert Marks (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 1174.
[245] Marks, *Old Testament*, 1176.
[246] Graham, "Libretto," 570, 569.
[247] Franko, *Love and War*, 22.

a singular and new poetics.[248] This layering of bodily union with textual synthesis reflects a long exegetical tradition in which the Song of Songs was understood allegorically as a figure of divine communion, an interpretive background that would have been familiar to Graham.[249] Just a year prior, Graham had stated that "Man used to dance to ally himself with the cosmic forces about him in a religious sense; man dances today in a social sense to ally himself with mankind."[250] Assuming a depth to Graham's scriptural knowledge, it is not a stretch to see this theological subtext as informing her work—not displacing her explicit framing but enriching it with an undercurrent of communion and ecstasy. In this sense, moving solidly into the realm of mythic abstraction, the duet registers as both an embodied enactment of biblical eros and a modern ritual binding individual experience to a shared national destiny.

Critical readings of the duet underscore how, beyond eros, American communal identity was read as central to Graham's broader democratic project, with Baldwin emphasizing its choreographic feminism, observing how Graham "does not concede womanly power; willing to be vulnerable, she seduces," a demonstration of union and equality through dance that left "no quarrel for dominance."[251] While Mark Franko suggests that the duet's private intensity became the grounds for civic identification, as

[248] Manning, *Modern Dance*, 133.
[249] Within the long Christian exegetical tradition, the Song of Songs was read not as erotic poetry but as a figure of spiritual communion. Augustine, summarizing this interpretation in *The City of God*, describes the text as celebrating the "spiritual pleasure" experienced by the saints in the mystical marriage of Christ and the Church, a meaning intentionally "shrouded in allegorical veils." See Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XVII.20.
[250] Martha Graham and Leah Plotkin, *Interview with Martha Graham and Leah Plotkin,* transcript from *Exploring the Seven Arts: The Modern Dance,* June 23, 1937, Federal Theatre Project Collection, C0002, Box 282, Folder 15, George Mason University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, quoted in Sali Ann Kriegsman, *Modern Dance in America—The Bennington Years,* 26.
[251] Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 484.

"Democracy becomes the Beloved" and "the audience coalesces its desire for community."[252] Within the immediacy of the times, Owen Burke, in *New Masses*, saw it as a "manifestation of the rebellion of reason against the tyranny of the church of Cotton Mather," casting the Puritan inheritance as a vehicle of repression rather than democracy.[253] Though their emphases differ, these interpretations highlight a common point: Graham's construction, however fragmented and experimental, was at its core a theologically grounded argument against fascist ascendancy enacted in dance. At its most decisive moments, the ballet renders biblical passages and Puritan oratory within a framing that, however problematically, recalls the architecture of Protestant worship, producing a subtextual ritual grammar that fills the structural bones of the minstrel form and establishes an intentionality that transcends pastiche. As with Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, Graham's ballet can be read as a dramatization of this ritual grammar, infusing the work with the cadence of proclamation and response—in the form of dance for Graham as it was music for Copland—with passages of invocation and dismissal framing a sermon-like core. Just as in ritual worship, the core function is not merely to cite scripture but to explain and apply it, drawing the congregation, or here, the audience, into reflection on their own lives and community. The aims are recognizably sermonic: to foster ethical orientation, to encourage communal solidarity, and to inspire renewed commitment—in Graham's case, by pressing the "forgotten" words of Democracy into immediate relevance for her contemporary world.[254] While the ironic critical structure sustained by a shared, critical "third space" between audience and stage yielded to a ritual

[252] Franko, *Love and War*, 35.
[253] Owen Burke, "An American Document," *New Masses* 29, no. 4 (October 18, 1938): 29.
[254] Minor, "Graham Interprets Democracy."

intentionality, what resulted was not a neutral compilation of documents but a staged homiletics of national identity, an oratorio, if you will, of motion that presses the American civil religious canon into service.

Convergences

Taken together, these case studies reveal the multivalent forms civil religion assumed in the early twentieth century, each mediating a set of inherited texts and symbols through distinct registers. For Copland, the focus rested squarely on Lincoln, whose words were gathered and framed within a musical reliquary, the frame and its contents elevated into a consecrated whole. Roosevelt likewise centered his appeals on Lincoln, drawing him repeatedly into speeches, addresses, and press conferences, not to preserve memory but to mobilize it, pressing the sanctified voice of the martyred president into the service of persuasion and policy. Graham's *American Document* engaged Lincoln as well, notably through the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address, but only as part of a broader civic canon that also included, among others, Paine's *Common Sense*, the Declaration of Independence, and biblical passages. The libretto itself framed these sources collectively as "our documents, our legends—our poignantly near history—our folk tales." Yet unlike Copland's reliquary unity, Graham's form remained episodic and fragmented, with each section operating as an individualized vignette. Only rarely, as in the Puritan episode, were the fragments integrated into a larger whole. Conceived to agitate, the ballet nevertheless pursued agitation through ritual cadence and introspection, producing what might be called a canonical testament: a performative scripture whose very discontinuities reflected the layered, sometimes discordant character of American identity.

The reception of *American Document*, however, proved far more contingent on historical circumstance. What resonated as innovative in 1938 appeared dated only six years later, as Graham's revival of the work encountered a transformed wartime culture less tolerant of irony and fragmentation. John Martin, who once praised the minstrel approximation, now condemned it as clichéd and regarded the "outmoded" movement of the "Negro slavery section" as evidence that the work was no longer among Graham's best.[255] Edna Ocko, once among her strongest supporters, accused her of abandoning progressive commitments for bourgeois abstraction, lamenting that "little remains of Martha Graham, the heretic and revolutionary."[256] Franko similarly observes that by 1942 the ballet had been "purged of its popular front critical barbs" and reoriented toward patriotic nationalism, its ironic edge blunted by the wartime demand for unity.[257] By contrast, Copland's reliquary has proven remarkably durable, its carefully framed liturgy of Lincoln's words still performed and reinterpreted decades later, while Roosevelt's appeals exemplify a more malleable mode, shifting with circumstances to harness Lincoln's voice for immediate needs. The very episodic structure that once allowed *Document* to juxtapose diverse voices and agitate through contrast now seemed antiquated, a liability even, beside calls for seamless patriotic affirmation under wartime mobilization. What had functioned as a critique of American failures was reconfigured as a liturgy of American perseverance, its fragments repurposed for cohesion. This shifting reception provides the hinge for the next chapter, which turns to Graham's "House of

[255] John Martin, "Ballet Theatre Does 'Barn Dance': Catherine Littlefield's Work Proves," *New York Times*, May 10, 1944, 17.
[256] Edna Ocko quoted in Manning, *Modern Dance*, 140.
[257] Franko, *Love and War*, 43.

Victory," the 1943 draft of *Appalachian Spring*, conceived in the wake of *Document*'s 1942 acclaim but preceding its 1944 revival and sharp critical reassessment.

Chapter III.

Scripting the Nation:

The Literary Voice of Abstraction

From 1933 to 1944, as economic depression and war reshaped the American landscape, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats" became a defining example of how radio could bridge the gap between political leadership and the public.[258] Framed as intimate conversations rather than formal addresses, Roosevelt's thirty-odd broadcasts used simple language, deliberate pacing, and direct explanation to foster trust and calm among listeners during moments of crisis. From the 1933 banking crisis through the shock of Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt's conversational tone, slow delivery, and focus on single issues made his voice feel personal and reassuring, helping him bypass hostile newspapers and communicate directly with millions of Americans. In deploying a cadence well below the political norm, he allowed for clarity and emphasis, giving his speech a measured rhythm ideally suited to radio. Each broadcast was carefully scripted to sound spontaneous, written in words drawn from ordinary American speech and shaped to convey a sense of individual connection. By referring to himself as "I" and to the public as "you," Roosevelt transformed the presidency into a presence that felt immediate and familiar, one that seemed to sit beside listeners in their own homes.[259] The impact of this approach was measurable. Ratings services estimated that his most widely

[258] Particulars of Roosevelt's Fireside Chats are drawn from the following: Franklin D. Roosevelt, *FDR's Fireside Chats*, ed. Russell D. Buhite and David W. Levy (University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), especially the "Introduction," ix–xx; Edward D. Miller, *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930s American Radio* (Temple University Press, 2003), especially "Radio and the Voice and Body of the President," 77–105; Christopher H. Sterling, "'The Fireside Chats' — President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933–1944)," *Library of Congress,* added to the National Recording Registry 2002.
[259] Roosevelt, *Fireside Chats*, xvii.

heard address, on May 27, 1941, in which he declared a state of "unlimited national emergency" in the face of German advances in Europe and beyond, reached nearly 54 million people—an extraordinary share of the adult population.[260] Even here, Roosevelt began his chat, perhaps a term too genial for what had become a ritual of national address, "MY FELLOW AMERICANS of all the Americas, my friends."[261] On the radio, he no longer needed to conceal the visible constraints of his polio, an obfuscation dependent on photographic illusion and journalistic discretion; the voice itself became the image of intimate vitality and command. Through this medium, as Edward Miller states, Roosevelt projected a confident, almost "magisterial" presence, one that hid, or "plac[ed] in a silent shadow," the physical reality of his disability while embodying the strength of the nation he spoke for.[262] The success of the series lay less in any single policy victory than in its cumulative effect: it gave the modern presidency a voice—steady, intimate, and seemingly disembodied—that could transcend the limitations of print and of Roosevelt's own body.

Just as Roosevelt's voice seemed to hover free of the body that produced it, Martha Graham's creative practice presents a related separation, though operating as an inversion in which her choreography, her body, diverged from her scriptural voice. In each case the voice and the body are never truly separated but rather create a site of enunciation, a third space, where meaning is produced through their displacement. Transparent about her process, she meant her developmental scripts to provide subtext for the musical compositions, but beyond the initial conception, for the choreography, she

[260] Sterling, "Fireside Chats."
[261] Roosevelt, *Fireside Chats*, 175.
[262] Edward D. Miller, "The Emergency Broadcast System: Panicked Bodies and Strange Voices in 30s America" (PhD diss., New York University, 1998), 174–75.

would begin anew. As she indicated to Aaron Copland in a 1943 letter, the script was but a "skeleton" from which she was "ready and willing to change when the music comes," allowing, as she put it, for "the inner life that emerges as the medium takes hold of the germ of the idea" and carries it forward.[263] While she was upfront with Copland, it still came as a shock to him when, upon seeing the ballet for the first time, at rehearsals just days prior to the premiere, he discovered that, as he wrote, "the choreography bore little relation to what [he] had imagined while composing it."[264] Even when Graham retained characters and elements from earlier scripts, "the choreographic action rarely corresponded to the music's designs," often inverting its intended structures.[265] In a comparable sense, rather than a voice transcending the body, Graham's body in motion hovered free of her textual voice. This inversion clarifies, rather than collapses, the analogy: Roosevelt's use of radio took place in a space where presidential authority became vocalized through disembodiment, producing a new mode of political intimacy, while Graham's choreography emerged in a space where her textual, authorial "voice" was a precursor to embodiment, generating a modernist idiom grounded in the potential of physical interpretation. In both cases, artistic displacement operates as a mechanism that enables a larger cultural negotiation, one in which abstraction and myth are fashioned through the very misalignment of medium and message. What results is a form of third space that holds the potential for unsettled, contested meaning, but whose ambiguities can also be absorbed into a stabilizing national narrative, resolving its frictions into a coherent, if artificially unified, cultural script. In Graham's case, this tension remains

[263] Martha Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, July 22, 1943," Aaron Copland Collection, Box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[264] Copland quoted in Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 393.
[265] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 402–403.

unresolved. The ballet's third space—produced through the noncoincidence of her scriptural voice and choreographic body—simultaneously opening a site of generative possibility aligned with Homi Bhabha's model of indeterminate meaning while participating in a cultural framework, akin to American Civil Religion, that can absorb plural voices into a pacifying national coherence. Both instances demonstrate how meaning is produced not through harmony between voice and body but through their deliberate and consequential divergence.

The connective tissue between Graham's skeleton and *Appalachian Spring*, the creative passage from script to performance, is an element that remains in the shadows. There are no records from which to trace it; the imprints, what Mark Franko calls the "ghostly presences," left by the scripts must instead be deciphered through comparative analysis grounded in implication and interpretation.[266] This inferential method has largely defined the way academic analysis approaches the work, supplemented most often with brief discursive forays into the background mechanics of the commission. This approach is reflected in the principal scholarship itself, in both the uneven attention given to the scripts and the differing decisions about which of them to include. Although Annegret Fauser and Elizabeth Crist treat the material with differing emphases, both approach the scripts largely as preparatory matter rather than as integral texts. Fauser bifurcates her analysis almost entirely, moving briskly through the lead-up to the commission and a general accounting of the versions presented to Copland for consideration before turning to the completed ballet. Crist follows a similar trajectory, offering a brief introduction that skims the scripts, noting their Civil War resonances, before engaging in a deep

[266] Franko, *Love and War*, 50.

analytical exploration of the final dance detached from the scripts. In contrast, Neil Baldwin devotes not even five pages of his six-hundred–page biography of Graham to the ballet. The chapter's title, "Interlude – *Appalachian Spring*," underscores his ambivalence, positioning the ballet as a pause between other performances that, it would appear, he felt were greater achievements.[267] Among scholars who treat the scripts as consequential to the final ballet, Jacqueline Shea Murphy provides the earliest sustained comparative reading. Her focus is on the figure of an Indian Girl, present in the final scenarios but absent from the staged work, reading this omission in the context of midcentury ideologies of indigeneity and disappearance. Her concern is with what the absence registers culturally, and how it aligns with contemporaneous state rhetoric supporting a broader pattern of representational disappearance within contemporary dance. Mark Franko widens the comparative frame by emphasizing that the Indian Girl is not the only figure lost in the passage from script to performance. He foregrounds the roles of an Escaped Slave and Abolitionist as equally formative erasures, arguing that despite their disappearance from the final ballet, their shadows carry forward the Popular Front politics embedded in Graham's earlier work. Howard Pollack, approaching from the musical side, examines the contours of Copland's score, especially the Shaker hymn so central to the ballet, and considers how, since Copland worked from the scripts, the music itself layers an additional shadow over the performance.[268]

[267] Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, 513.
[268] See Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*, esp. "Her Point of View: Martha Graham and Absent Indians," 148–68; Mark Franko, *Love and War*, esp. "Politics Under Erasure: Regionalism as Cryptology," 45–65; and Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, 393.

The divergence among these readings is shaped in no small part by which texts are treated as the operative body of material. For purposes of scholarly clarity, this study treats four discrete documents—titles assigned by Graham to successive working scripts—as the relevant corpus: "Daughter of Colchis" (7 July 1942), "House of Victory" (16 May 1943), "Name?" (10 July 1943), and "Name?" (5 September 1943).[269] It is against this fuller set of sources that the selectivity of prior scholarship becomes legible. Fauser centers "House of Victory," with only passing reference to supplementary iterations; Crist folds the two later scenarios together and omits "Daughter of Colchis" entirely; Baldwin confines his attention to the ballet, mentioning "Colchis" only in connection with a later work from 1946, *Cave of the Heart*; Murphy relies exclusively on the July and September "Name?" drafts; and Franko draws primarily on "House of Victory," implicitly conflating the two later drafts into a single scenario.[270] Pollack remains, however, among the few to acknowledge that the progression from inception to realization passed initially through what should be considered the first script, "Daughter of Colchis," delivered to Copland prior to the commission, and that its residue, though only lightly touching upon the three subsequent scripts, is an originating imprint within *Appalachian Spring's* compositional genealogy.[271]

[269] The final "Name?" script is miscatalogued by the Library of Congress as falling between 29 May 1943 and 10 July 1943, which has led prior scholarship to place it out of sequence. This incorrect dating situates the script before the properly dated 10 July 1943 draft, obscuring its status as the last scenario produced. Its expanded ending, addressed within Graham's correspondence to Copland, confirms a chronological placement as of 5 September 1943, matching the date of her final letter addressing the scripts.
[270] See Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, esp. "The Development of Graham's Scenario," 25–32; Crist, *Common Man*, 167–69; and Baldwin, *Martha Graham*, esp. "Interlude – *Appalachian Spring*," 513–19 and "Serpent Heart," 533–36. Because Jacqueline Shea Murphy, in *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing,* relies on the catalogue ordering rather than the true compositional timeline, she treats the September draft as earlier than the July version, resulting in an inverted script sequence. This misalignment, however, does not negate the efficacy of her broader arguments, though subtleties are to a certain extent lost.
[271] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 393–94.

It is in sympathy with these methodologies, but with a deliberate redirection of emphasis, that this chapter takes its form, treating the scenarios not as preparatory scaffolding but as an autonomous textual archive. Rather than skim past the scripts or fold them too quickly into the staged work, this chapter will linger on them as an independent corpus before engaging with the performance in the following chapter. What follows reads Graham's drafts as experiments in authorship of a cultural inheritance, mapping how her dramaturgical voice takes shape on the page before it ever reached the stage. Central to this approach is the recognition that Graham begins in a literary mode. All four scripts exhibit a heavy literary influence ranging from classical Greek tragedy, through American Gothic traditions, culminating in the modernist poetics that would anchor the work's final orientation. In doing so, this chapter attends not only to the textual substance of the drafts but also to the communicative and institutional conditions under which they were produced.[272] The intent is to situate these textual experiments within the literary idioms that inform them, tracing how biblical citation, Civil War motifs, and the treatment of Indigenous and African American figures were revised—and in many cases abstracted or excised—as the work moved toward its final shape.

[272] The two digital collections from which this derives contain extensive primary correspondence documenting the development of *Appalachian Spring*, including over forty letters and telegrams exchanged between Martha Graham and Aaron Copland, as well as communications involving Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, Harold Spivacke, and Erick Hawkins. While Copland's side of the correspondence was not preserved, Graham's letters trace the evolution of her conceptual vision, dramaturgical adjustments, and aesthetic priorities, while also conveying logistical challenges and interpersonal dynamics. Supplementary exchanges with other institutional figures offer insight into the role of commissioning bodies and federal support structures in shaping the ballet's trajectory, as well as occasional personal reflections on the ballet. As a body, the correspondence supplements and connects the chapter's other materials—scripts, promotional texts, performance history, and theoretical framing—by offering contemporaneous insight into the evolving creative arc of the work. Together, the letters allow for a granular reconstruction of the ballet's formation as both process and artifact, revealing how Graham and Copland's collaboration unfolded within a cultural field shaped by modernism, politics, and civil religious expression.

"Daughter of Colchis"

Martha Graham's first approach to Aaron Copland, communicated in a letter written on February 17, 1941, was unsolicited, undertaken on her own initiative, and already bearing the characteristic mixture of audacity and studied modesty that would mark their later exchanges. "At last I have my courage up," she began, admitting that she wrote "knowing you may be busy, or not interested in the subject," yet, disarmingly, "I would forgive you anything because you are a gifted composer."[273] Her proposed subject was "a 'Medea'," conceived "not with words or voice—not following the play—but, rather as a study" oriented toward the figure as an eternal type rather than a character bound to a particular narrative embodiment. Graham described her protagonist as "a barbarian princess—not Greek—who has intercourse with worlds outside the human area—animal and supernatural." The letter situates Graham within the modernist preoccupation with mythic archetype and psychological interiority, but it also reveals her sensitivity to form: she likened the project to "a Japanese Noh drama … a drama of Medea's mind," where movement, not narrative, conveys meaning. Even in this early appeal, the germ of *Appalachian Spring* is present—the search for a timeless myth rendered through minimalist theatrical means. Yet the absence of funding compelled Graham to end her plea on a pragmatic note, confessing that she had "no subsidy," a condition that would persist through the next two years, shaping her ability to secure his participation and determining both the tone and trajectory of the correspondence.

Copland's response is not preserved, but a subsequent letter from Graham confirms that he agreed in principle to collaborate and expressed delight at the prospect

[273] All quotations within this paragraph are taken from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, February 17, 1941, Aaron Copland Collection, box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.

of working together.[274] The partnership, however, remained dormant for over a year. When Graham wrote again on July 7, 1942, she enclosed her script, "Daughter of Colchis," and again adopted a tone of hopeful deference, writing, "Here I am again. … Of course when you read it you may not be drawn to the script either. But at least I am taking a chance."[275] Graham's scenario reimagines Euripides' *Medea* through a distinctly modern American lens, transforming the ancient myth of vengeance into an interior drama of psychological possession. Euripides' tragedy is fundamentally built upon physical, or material, oppositions: the polarity between the barbaric land of Colchis and the civilized Greek land of Corinth. Medea's actions are consistently linked to her foreign status, which results in her physical exile. Most importantly, the tragedy pivots on the destructive power of material objects, the poisoned "finely woven dress and a golden diadem," which Medea uses to bring about the agonizing death of Creon's daughter. In Graham's scenario, this polarity is largely internalized. Structured in a rondo form, alternating dramatic scenes with lyrical odes, the work retains the architecture of Greek tragedy—hewing closely to Aristotelian taxonomy with a Prologue, Parados, Odes, and an Exodos—but transplants the action to "a New England house," "about the time of a tale by Poe or Hawthorne."[276] Within this setting, Graham constructs a "legend

[274] Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, n.d., Aaron Copland Collection, box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[275] Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, July 7, 1942, Aaron Copland Collection, box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[276] Rondo, also known as sonata rondo, is a musical form characterized by the recurrent return of a principal theme (A) alternating with contrasting episodes (B, C, etc.), often producing patterns such as ABACA or ABACABA; see James Webster, "Sonata Form," *Grove Music Online*, published January 20, 2001; Martha Graham, "Daughter of Colchis [script for *Appalachian Spring*]," July 7, 1942, Aaron Copland Collection, box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress, 2, 3, 6–7; for the Aristotelian definitions of these quantitative parts, see Aristotle, *Poetics* XII; P. E. Easterling's "Form and Performance" further elaborates on how these formal patterns—specifically the "act-dividing lyrics"—mark the difference between theatrical and ordinary discourse, effectively "orchestrating" the intensity of the drama. Additionally, J. Richard Green, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics* entry, "Theatre Staging, Greek," provides context for the visual "scaffolding" Graham employs, such as the use of *kothornoi* (high-

concern[ing] a man and a woman," yet the true conflict, she clarifies, "takes place not between the man and her, but between the woman and her [embodied] Fury."[277] The Woman, who is the destructive "Daughter of Colchis," the Medea, and her inner aspect, the Fury, whose conflict drives the drama, are contrasted by The Man and his guiding Muse. The action builds through dances exploring the Woman's dark sorcery, the Fury's violent domination, and a duel wherein the Muse is vanquished by the Fury in an Amazon-like struggle, "not of human beings, but rather of forces."[278] In making this change, Graham replaces the ancient spectacle of murder with an allegory of psychological dominance, the triumph of chaotic desire over creative order. However, Medea's "barbaric" origins persist within "Colchis," though the barbarism now dwells within the domestic order of colonial era New England piety, where a "strangely passionate outward chastity" conceals the "fury whose madness [is] the fanatical domination of desire."[279] The Man, described as "the poet, the dreamer, the free masculine spirit," is not guilty of infidelity but of transcendence; he is "led by a dream in the guise of [the] Muse."[280] The man, like the woman, is bifurcated between his human form and an embodied psychological form, each given its own agency, transforming Euripides' material polarity into a metaphysical one where the motivating force of the Muse is opposed by the coercive force of the Fury.

soled boots) to establish a "heroic aspect" and the formal "distance" required of the tragic genre. Graham's specific structural mirroring of Euripides' *Medea* is reinforced by Easterling's analysis of that play's elaborate "alternation of voices"; P. E. Easterling, "Form and Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 160.
[277] Graham, "Colchis," 1, 5.
[278] Graham, "Colchis," 11.
[279] Graham, "Colchis," 1.
[280] Graham, "Colchis," 6, 1.

Graham's transposition of the myth reframes the tragedy as a cyclical drama inscribed in a New England moral order structured by domestic discipline, masking inwardly turned violence. Her invocation of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne frames "Daughter of Colchis" as a "portrait of the period" within an American Gothic tradition, where interiority becomes the vessel for crisis.[281] Poe supplies the grammar through which this transformation becomes legible as "Colchis's" central duet—"ecstatic, sensuous, at the same time, sinister," holding "no peace"—is invoked as "a scene Poe might have imagined … with his Ligeia."[282] Poe's tale centers on a narrator's passionate devotion to the willful Lady Ligeia, whose "raven-black . . . and naturally-curling tresses" endure through her unexpected illness and death.[283] Subsequently, the narrator, still grieving, marries "the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena"; however, she too falls mysteriously ill and dies.[284] As the narrator sits with Rowena's shrouded body, it undergoes several horrifying cycles of revivification and relapse into death until the final, vigorous reawakening reveals the black hair and wild eyes of Ligeia. Joan Dayan identifies in this metamorphosis what she calls "fantasies about secret histories and hidden taints," through which Rowena's surface innocence becomes the vessel for a repressed, racialized force whose ancestry is concealed, marking her as a 'lady' who exists in "a shadow" of unspoken origin—the uncanny double inside bourgeois femininity.[285] Graham's internalized dramaturgy turns on Poe's "gigantic volition," that "will which dieth not," translated into movement as the Woman's Fury, whose "fanatical

[281] Graham, "Colchis," 8.
[282] Graham, "Colchis," 11.
[283] Edgar Allan Poe, *Poe*, ed. Bliss Perry, vol. 4, pt. 1 of *The Pocket University* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), 39–40.
[284] Poe, *Poe*, 62.
[285] Joan Dayan, "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves," *American Literature* 66, no. 2 (June 1994): 261; Poe, *Poe*, 39.

domination of desire" is the kinetic analogue to Ligeia's "fierceness of resistance" and "wild desire for life."[286] Both figures are "beautiful and monstrous," speaking in a "low musical language" with an "almost magical melody" that seduces and consumes.[287] Dayan observes that "Ligeia's sirenlike voice, the reiterated 'strangeness' in her beauty, and her passion" echo racial taxonomies.[288] Graham's script operates in the same symbolic economy: she assigns the stage's only voice to the Fury, marked by an "unhuman quality" invoking "Negro, Indian, or gypsy voices" during moments of extreme stress—a recourse to extra-civic sound to figure an "outside unlawful force," invoking what Dayan observes as "the epistemology of whiteness," in an Africanist bent, "dependent for its effect on the detection of blackness."[289] Intensified by the Ligeia analogue, her voice of "almost magical melody" that enthralls and destabilizes the normative domestic center while concealing "the tumultuous vultures of stern passion"—the Fury, like Ligeia, is the latent subaltern energy of passion and rage that is eternally on the verge of disrobing the sanctioned feminine veneer under which she is permitted to appear.[290]

In Graham's staging, the danger is not merely the Fury's presence but her imminence—the pressure she exerts on the very structures meant to contain her—making the question of how the self is revealed as crucial as the question of what is repressed. It is in this vein that the New England frame and its ritualized exposures of identity invite Hawthornean comparison as a persuasive resonance that clarifies how Graham stages

[286] Poe, *Poe*, 43, 37; Graham, "Colchis," 1; Poe, *Poe*, 46.
[287] Graham, "Colchis," 5; Poe, *Poe*, 37, 44.
[288] Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," 261.
[289] Graham, "Colchis," 5, 4, 10; Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," 261.
[290] Poe, *Poe*, 44.

revelation within domestic constraint. While Graham made her debts to “Ligeia” explicit, her references to Hawthorne are strictly implied, operating through implication rather than explicit citation. Among the works that closely parallel the scenario she stages is “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” in which a woman is shaped by her environment in ways that make devotion indistinguishable from danger. Giovanni Guasconti, a young student in Padua, becomes enamored of Beatrice, the beautiful daughter of the scientist Dr. Rappaccini, only to discover that she has been raised among poisonous plants until her very breath has become lethal; in attempting to cure her with an antidote, Giovanni attempts to force her back "within the limits of ordinary nature," a restoration that proves fatal.[291] Hawthorne’s Beatrice embodies a paradox in which the conditions that nurture her also define the unnatural state she inhabits, and in which Giovanni’s devotion ultimately isolates her. Graham recasts that paradox through Medea’s legacy: the Woman’s beauty is “monstrous,” her desire possessive, and a cloak that ultimately ensnares the Muse recalls the poisoned gift motif from *Medea*.[292] Though Hawthorne’s tale is set in Padua, its psychology travels: Giovanni’s “wild offspring of both love and horror” toward Beatrice maps neatly onto an ecstatic, sinister duet between the Man and the Woman, that “holds no peace.”[293] In both, intimacy becomes the vehicle of harm, and the beloved’s aura, poison in Hawthorne and fury in Graham, renders human contact psychologically and physiologically perilous.

[291] Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” in *Rappaccini’s Daughter* (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), 34.
[292] Graham, “Colchis,” 5, 12; Euripides, *Medea*, trans. Rex Warner, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), lines 385, 634, 1201, and esp. line 789.
[293] Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” 19; Graham, “Colchis,” 11.

If Hawthorne's Padua offers one register of comparison, *The Scarlet Letter* offers another—less for its New England setting than for its ritualized exposure of interior life across the novel's three scaffold scenes.[294] The scaffold, the site of the protagonist Hester Prynne's public shaming, becomes the novel's fixed point of return, structuring three scenes in which hidden relationships and internal conflicts are successively exposed. In "Colchis," a cloak functions as a similar theatrical instrument of revelation, "when it is taken off at the various moments it reveals her in the three characterizations of herself — the sorceress, the Beloved, the Potential murderess," a sequence that mirrors the tripartite grammar of disclosure governing Hawthorne's staging of identity.[295] In both, female subjectivity is revealed through ritualized exposure, bound to an object—the cloak or scaffold—that mediates between inner truth and social appearance. Yet Graham disavows the religious foundation that shapes Hawthorne's moral order, insisting that her subject is "not Puritan or Christian" but "more universal."[296] The American Gothic setting, for Graham, frames Medea's barbaric inheritance as a pervasive and enduring psychological legacy of feminine repression. Within her New England portrait, the daughter of Colchis becomes the hidden soul of the American woman, her secret fury and cloaked desire, embodying a modern Medea whose tragedy is no longer exile or murder, but the endless inward return of passion upon itself. When read through this Gothic lens, Hawthorne

[294] The scaffold serves as the structural anchor of the narrative, acting as a recurring location for the public manifestation of private sin and hidden identity. Its first appearance in the marketplace establishes the platform as a symbolic space for communal exposure during Hester Prynne's initial period of shaming. At the narrative's midpoint, the minister attempts a private penance upon the same structure, creating a hidden connection with Hester and Pearl under the cover of night. The final scene concludes the series of disclosures when the minister publicly ascends the steps to reveal his own secret, thereby resolving the novel's cyclical tension. See Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1874), 74, 167, 286.
[295] Graham, "Colchis," 5.
[296] Graham, "Colchis," 4.

provides the atmospheric and structural pressure shaping Graham's dramaturgy, where repression turns inward, disclosure is staged through a tripartite unveiling, and beauty becomes the site of peril, while Poe furnishes the explicit engine of possession. In "Colchis," these two strains are fused with Euripides' *Medea* to relocate the center of tragic weight from the physicality of the civic plaza or the domestic chamber to the psyche.

This interiorization marks a decisive break from the civic dramaturgy of *American Document*. In "Colchis," Graham, refusing priestly or prophetic textual sacralization, routes meaning through subaltern timbres and nonverbal signaling. Where *American Document* absorbed the New England severity within a civic frame (the Puritan duet countering Jonathan Edwards's homiletic strictures with the Song of Songs, fusing eros and equality into a liturgical counter-claim), "Colchis" withholds that settlement, concluding in a "return to the human" that is psychological rather than covenantal.[297] In this way, "Colchis" becomes the negative image of Graham's earlier work: not a sacralized public ritual but a tragedy of interior possession and release, staged inside a New England shell and voiced through sounds the civic canon cannot absorb.

From Private Advocacy to Public Commission

As Graham forged ahead with her overtures to Copland, unbeknownst to her, a parallel effort was taking form that would shift Graham's fortunes and solidify the partnership that would follow. Just two months earlier, in mid-May, Erick Hawkins—though fifteen years her junior, now firmly established as her creative partner and lover

[297] Graham, "Colchis," 12.

for the previous four years—writing in secret, addressed one of the most influential arts patrons of the era, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, in an appeal to fund work for Graham.[298] Declaring her "one of the great creative artists of America," he appealed for patronage, noting that Graham had "maintained a performing company of some size all her creative life" with "remarkably little help from either private or public sources."[299] His letter, sent "without her knowledge," was an act of affection as much as advocacy, and it set in motion the commission that would eventually yield *Appalachian Spring*.[300] That commission, however, was not conceived as a single, closed undertaking. Over the subsequent two years, a combination of scheduling delays and the practical contingencies of long-distance collaboration would allow the original initiative to expand, ultimately resulting in three commissioned works for Graham realized with three different composers. In its earliest formulation, however, the proposal existed only as a general expression of interest rather than a defined program of works. In response to Hawkins outreach, Coolidge replied in due course, acknowledging the request and, while

[298] Erick Hawkins and Martha Graham later married in 1948 and divorced in 1954. The separation followed Hawkins's departure from the Graham Company in 1951 and coincided with both personal estrangement and increasing artistic divergence, after which Hawkins established his own school and choreographic practice independent of Graham. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (1864–1953) was an American pianist and philanthropist who was also an active composer and performer in her own right. The daughter of a prosperous Chicago family, she inherited a substantial fortune from her parents, which enabled her to become one of the most significant patrons of chamber music in the twentieth century, commissioning hundreds of works from contemporary composers in the United States and abroad, including Bartók, Stravinsky, and virtually every other major composer of her century. In 1925, she established the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in partnership with the Library of Congress to advance chamber music through public concerts and commissions. Further cementing her legacy, Coolidge provided a gift of $60,000 to build the Coolidge Auditorium in the Library of Congress's Jefferson Building, ensuring the continuance of high-quality performance to a vast musical public; see Gustave Reese, "Coolidge, Elizabeth (Penn) Sprague," rev. Cyrilla Barr, *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press); Ralph Kirkpatrick, *Ralph Kirkpatrick: Letters of the American Harpsichordist and Scholar*, ed. Meredith Kirkpatrick (University of Rochester Press, 2014), 86; Philip Tacka, "*Appalachian Spring's* 'Catalytic Agent': Harold Spivacke's Role in the Evolution of an American Classic," *International Journal of Musicology* 8 (1999): 321, 323–24.

[299] Erick Hawkins, "Letter from Erick Hawkins to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, May 21, 1942," *Erick Hawkins and Lucia Dlugoszewski Papers,* Box 56/4, Music Division, Library of Congress.

[300] Hawkins, "Letter to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, May 21, 1942."

expressing tentative interest, cited current financial obligations as an impediment to any formal engagement.[301] However, her interest piqued, by mid-June Coolidge was actively exploring possibilities with composers, writing again to Hawkins that she could offer only $500 and preferred "a lesser-known composer" who might benefit from Graham's artistic prominence.[302] As musicologist Philip Tacka points out, this would not have sat well with Hawkins' vision for a project that would be both "challenging and stimulating" for Graham, having initially suggested composers of the stature of Aaron Copland.[303] However, the commission's direction was shaped by Harold Spivacke, who administered Coolidge's granting through her foundation, a private music endowment established within the Library of Congress.[304] Spivacke "diplomatically urg[ed] her to rethink her choice of composers," leading to an expansion of the potential list of collaborators and a formal offer for the commission of work to Copland on July 23. In short order, Coolidge wrote personally to Copland, addressing him in a rather patrician tone that she was "allowing [herself] the pleasure of asking [him] to accept," with Copland quickly replying on the 31st that he was "*in principle* happy to accept," noting that he had "more

[301] Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, "Letter from Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge to Erick Hawkins, May 29, 1942," *Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation Collection,* Box 40/5, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[302] Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, "Letter from Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge to Erick Hawkins, June 16, 1942," *Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation Collection,* Box 40/5, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[303] Tacka, "Spivacke," 327.
[304] American music librarian and administrator Harold Spivacke (1904–1977) began his career having earned a BA (1923) and MA (1924) from New York University, followed by a PhD in musicology from the University of Berlin in 1933, writing a dissertation on aspects of tonal intensity. After working briefly for the New York Public Library's Music Division, he joined the Library of Congress in 1934, rising from Assistant Chief to Chief of the Music Division in 1937, a position he maintained until his retirement in 1972. In addition to this leadership role, Spivacke was the Chief Executive Officer of the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, successfully facilitating hundreds of concerts and commissions for contemporary composers like Aaron Copland, Walter Piston, and Paul Hindemith; see Carlton Sprague Smith, "Harold Spivacke (1904–1977)," *The Musical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (July 1977): 425–27; Paula Morgan, "Spivacke, Harold," *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Tacka, "Spivacke," 321, 325.

than once hoped that [he and Graham] might collaborate."[305] His phrasing betrayed some hesitation, although his admiration for Graham's work was sincere. Graham's own letter of acceptance, written just two days later, contrasts sharply with Copland's concise professionalism. In three exuberant pages, she conveyed gratitude and awe at the commission's significance: "To my knowledge, this is the first time that a commissioning of works for the American Dance has ever happened. … It makes me feel that the American dance has turned a corner; it has come of age."[306] Continuing, she outlined her working method—to submit "the idea and a detailed script … not of the dance steps … but of the ideas and the action."[307] This articulation of her process would define her approach to the collaboration, setting the dramaturgical logic for the creative process ahead.

Bare weeks later, she returned to Copland with renewed urgency. Acknowledging that her initial enticement, "Daughter of Colchis," had apparently failed to interest him, she committed herself to presenting "another idea … which might be more acceptable" and pressed for assurance that a completed score could be ready by the following summer.[308] Beneath the seemingly assertive tone lies a clear awareness on Graham's part that this collaboration was not just an artistic opportunity but a test of modern dance's institutional legitimacy, one that she dared not fail. Although Copland, preoccupied with

[305] Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge to Aaron Copland, July 23, 1942, quoted in Tacka, "Spivacke," 322; Aaron Copland, "Letter from Aaron Copland to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, July 31, 1942," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Music Division, Library of Congress (emphasis added).
[306] Martha Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Elizabeth Coolidge, August 2, 1942," Music Division, Library of Congress, in *Ballets for Martha: Coolidge and Graham* (exhibition), object 036.00.00.
[307] Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Elizabeth Coolidge, August 2, 1942."
[308] Martha Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, August 12, 1942," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress. The letter is as revealing for its economic candor as for its creative anxiety. She inquired forthrightly of his "performance fee," stating that she had "no subsidy whatever and never have had"; Graham, "Letter to Aaron Copland, August 12, 1942."

possible military service, suggested to Spivacke that they let the question of Graham's commission "ride" until his situation was clarified, he confirmed two weeks later that he would meet with her in New York.[309] Graham's subsequent letter to Copland acknowledged the reservations expressed at their meeting, that Colchis was too "severe" and took to heart his recommendation to explore some "combination of *Our Town* and the 'Daughter of Colchis'," the latter of which she hoped to rework for the Mexican composer and conductor Carlos Chávez.[310] The suggestion of Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer-winning play would not have been surprising to Graham, as Copland had written the musical score for the 1940 film adaptation. By year's end, the essential organizing structure of the collaboration was in place: Copland committed "in principle," Graham refining her script toward an American vernacular, and Coolidge underwriting what she recognized as a historic venture. What began in 1941 as a solitary dancer's tentative appeal had, through persistence and advocacy, become an institutionally supported project aimed at shaping a uniquely American artistic vernacular—a transition aligned with the civil-religious logic through which such entities endow cultural forms with national significance. Applied analogically beyond the political sphere, such institutional acts fold artistic projects into the nation's evolving civil-religious repertoire of collective

[309] An appointment that was likely on September 18 in Washington, D.C. at a Coolidge Foundation festival. The meeting was confirmed in a letter from Hawkins to Coolidge on October 7, stating that the collaboration with Copland was underway: "Martha saw Mr. Copland not long ago … it was all set between them to go ahead. She is already feeling her way – into the idea, I mean"; Aaron Copland, "Letter from Aaron Copland to Harold Spivacke, August 21, 1942," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Music Division, Library of Congress; see also Copland, "Letter from Aaron Copland to Harold Spivacke, September 3, 1942," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Music Division, Library of Congress; and Erick Hawkins, "Letter from Erick Hawkins to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, October 1942," *Old Music Division Correspondence,* Music Division, Library of Congress.

[310] Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, November 7, 1942, Aaron Copland Collection, box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.

“beliefs, symbols, and rituals," positioning Graham’s collaboration with Copland as part of that symbolic architecture.[311]

“House of Victory”

Over the next half year, Graham developed the script enclosed with the letter that opens this study—written on that cool May morning “with fear and trembling.” Drawing together the structural restraint of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* and the mythic intensity of “Daughter of Colchis,” she delivered on her commitment to Copland through a work that reframes the small-town realism of the former and the tragic interiority of the latter into a distinct “legend of living in the AMERICAN PLACE.”[312] Graham’s revised scenario traces the arc of a young couple’s formation, from courtship through marriage and into the first rhythms of shared domestic life. Their small world—defined by a porch, a doorway, a swing, and a simple rocking chair—briefly assumes the cast of a communal idyll, until two intercessions rupture the staged peace and contentment. In the script that shapes this world, Graham provides not merely the spoken text but the entire theatrical architecture: dramaturgical notes, episode breakdowns, character descriptions, scenic indications, and guidance on music and staging. Built on this foundation, the imagined dance unfolds in discrete yet thematically linked scenes that move from Edenic courtship through Civil War separation to a postwar return. Graham’s conceptualized world is populated by a cast of archetypal figures drawn from a notional American family—the Mother, the Daughter, and her suitor, the Citizen—augmented by characters who

[311] Bellah, “Civil Religion,” 46.
[312] Graham, “Letter to Aaron Copland, May 16, 1943”; Martha Graham, “House of Victory [Script for *Appalachian Spring*, 16 May 1943],” *Library of Congress*, Aaron Copland collection, 1841-1991, 1.

punctuate each episode's cadence, including a Younger Sister, Neighbors, Children, and a Fugitive, "the slave figure of the Civil War."[313] Across these layers, biblical quotations and colloquial speech recur at key junctures, providing a structural throughline that stabilizes the episodic form and anchors the scenic shifts in theological cadences and historical allusions. Against this structural backdrop, Graham extended the literary and mythic vocabulary explored in "Daughter of Colchis" and the socio-political and civil religious aspects of *American Document*, while foregrounding a liturgical timbre reminiscent of Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*.

To understand how Graham situates the domestic order of her "House" within such a multifaceted symbolic grammar, the script's architectural debts—to Wilder's minimalism and the tragic subtext of "Daughter of Colchis"—need clarification. Like *Our Town*, "House of Victory" seeks to express "certain permanent qualities in the American body frame."[314] The role of the Mother, seated on the porch, positioned literally between the private intimacy of the house and the civic world outside, reciting lines drawn from scripture, functions as a moral and narrative lodestar; much like Wilder's Stage Manager: an intermediary presence who speaks both within and about the action. Yet the structure of Graham's drama owes more to "Daughter of Colchis," with its Greek tragic architecture, rondo form, and racial undertones. A further point of reference is *American Document's* engagement with the darker, complicating passages of American history, which serves as a bulwark against reductive mythologizing and provides the template for the ethical critique in Graham's schema. If, as Burt Cardullo succinctly states, "the whole point of *Our Town* … is to document not only the

[313] Graham, "House of Victory," 4.
[314] Graham, "House of Victory," 1.

pleasurable anti-drama of everyday life, but also the pleasure the townspeople take in enacting it," then "House of Victory" works to undermine that anti-drama with the tragic awareness of "Daughter of Colchis": life's normative continuity disrupted by the physical and psychological rupture of slavery and war.[315] Where, as Mary Brewer states, "the spatial model of identity narrated by the Stage Manager clearly affords no room on Main Street for the location of the 'other,'" Graham, in confronting her audience with the Fugitive, the "hunted creature," unsettles the very premise that the American home can remain closed to the "other."[316] The result is neither a direct fusion nor a simple borrowing, but a transmutation, with *Our Town* providing the frame of American communal order and "Daughter of Colchis" furnishing the mythic intensity that animates it. Together, they yield a staged testimonial confronting an inherited cycle of violence and a restoration still under sin within the American cultural landscape. In this sense, "House of Victory" does not merely resemble "Colchis" at the thematic level; it deploys the same underlying tragic grammar.

[315] Bert Cardullo, "Whose Town Is It, Anyway?: An Historico-Aesthetic Inquiry into 'Our Town,'" *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 8, no. 1 (1996): 40; Contemporary assessments of Wilder's work range from critiques by Bert Cardullo and Nancy Bunge regarding the play's perpetuation of white, male, heterosexual ethos to the views of Lanford Wilson, who sees the work not as a pastoral ideal but as a bleak social critique. Rather than a golden community, these readings suggest a population paralyzed by fear of change, where individuals repress themselves and deny hope to those around them. The residents of Grover's Corners thus appear as heirs to a lineage of constrained subjects who surrender their freedom and desire to a suffocating routine in exchange for the illusion of bourgeois security. Cardullo reinforces this by highlighting the play's internal isolationism and its preservation of a reactionary social order that marginalizes ethnic minorities and limits the agency of women. Such a vision of the individual's struggle against a repressive communal order clearly recalls the strains of Hester Prynne. See Nancy Bunge, "The Social Realism of *Our Town*: A Study in Misunderstanding," in *Thornton Wilder: New Essays*, ed. Martin Blank, Dalma Hunyadi Brunauer, and David Garrett Izzo (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1999), 349–64; and Lanford Wilson, "'Our Town' and Our Towns: Wilder's *Our Town*: Still Standing After 50 Years," *New York Times*, December 20, 1987, H1, H36.

[316] Mary F. Brewer, *Staging Whiteness* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 37; Graham, "House of Victory," 37.

Within this dramatic frame, the characters themselves occupy a parallel spectrum that ranges from Wilder's vernacular realism to Graham's archetypal compression. The Neighbors, for example, though "exist[ing] outside of [a] definite period . . . [are] definite in quality . . . a little like the Mark Twain figures, [Yankees]," echo the naturalism of Wilder's Grover's Corners, while the Citizen, and the Fugitive function symbolically, their gestures and conflicts written as embodiments of collective meaning rather than as individuated personalities.[317] It is at this symbolic extreme that an additional echo with "Daughter of Colchis" emerges: through these figures, "House of Victory" reproduces the same pattern of inward, involuntary force that characterized the earlier tragedy. The Mother, however, reflecting her staged positioning, mediates between the extremes of character particularity and symbolic meaning. This convergence of Wilder's domestic minimalism and the tragic inheritance of "Colchis" provides the hinge for what follows. In the remainder of this section, Graham's biblical language serves as an organizing analytical framework through which literary echoes informing the Mother, Fugitive, and Civilian are interwoven. Taken as a whole, these elements show how the characters function as carriers of national meaning and how Graham's scriptural recitation—though framed as cultural inheritance—operates as a sustained theological argument.

Incorporating not just "Colchis's" tragic inheritance, "House of Victory" has the Hawthornean shadings of internalized moral conflict accomplished through a subtle sermonic idiom that Dawn Coleman identifies as a constituent component of *The Scarlet Letter*—a literary inheritance most evident within the dramaturgical development of the

[317] Graham, "House of Victory," 4.

Mother.[318] Coleman effectively argues that in the novel's final chapter, the narrator adopts the voice of the pulpit—that is, he performs the role of preacher rather than storyteller—and that this sermonizing moment exposes Hawthorne's simultaneous fascination with and skepticism toward homiletic authority. She notes that the narrator's appeal to canonical documents purporting to record the origins of the scarlet letter mimics the rhetorical stance of a minister citing scripture, since his instantiating claim that "the authority which we have chiefly followed" mirrors biblical authentication formulas used to legitimate the Gospels.[319] In "House of Victory," both the proposed staging and Graham's characterization anchor the Mother's authoritative position as the work's legitimate deliverer of moral address, drawing directly on the sermonic voice Coleman identifies in Hawthorne. This sermonic mode subtends not only Graham's literary sources but also the ballet's theatrical architecture, beginning with the opening tableau that centers the Mother as the figure who speaks and frames the action.

The opening episode, "Eden Valley," makes this explicit: "the curtain lifts in darkness . . . the outlines of the house are visible," and the first light falls not on the land but on the Mother—her face illuminated in a Byzantine glow as she sits in the rocker on the porch, already possessing the land she "helped to stake a claim and win."[320] Setting the Mother within an ordinary domestic frame—the pared-down world familiar from *Our Town*—Graham presents her as "an American Primitive," "like an early American Portrait in costume and looks," and "a type … specific and definite in the way such

[318] See Dawn Coleman, "Secularizing the Sermon in *The Scarlet Letter*," in *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013).
[319] Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 293; Coleman, "Secularizing the Sermon," 126.
[320] Graham, "House of Victory," 5.

paintings are that hang in so many American homes."[321] This description draws on visual cues rooted in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century folk portraiture.[322] By designating the Mother in this idiom, she places her within a tradition of folk likeness recognizable to her audience, such that her significance as the carrier of American memory into the present is presumptive, embodying a sense of determined destiny. As the threshold figure between the private interior and the public world outside, Graham ensures her legibility at a glance even before she speaks. From this liminal position, the Mother never moves even as the staging, following the biblical progression of creation from dark void to illuminated form, extends into the broader visual field: the light tracing "across the stage [and] reaching thru the doorway into the house."[323]

The Daughter runs to the doorway with youthful eagerness, "she is the laughter of the American woman," prompting the Mother, speaking not to her daughter but into the void as narrator-interlocutor, to deliver her first biblical line: "AND THE LORD GOD PLANTED A GARDEN EASTWARD IN EDEN."[324] The verse is delivered in truncated form; the second clause, "and there he put the man whom he had formed," is withheld.

[321] Graham, "House of Victory," 3.
[322] In American art history, *folk* or *primitive* portraiture typically refers to the work of self-taught or itinerant painters whose likenesses were frontal, stylized, and largely without expressive variation; their purpose was to record family lineage and identity rather than to capture individualized traits or moods. These portraits circulated beyond elite collections, often preserved as household heirlooms and displayed in middle-class interiors, and they remained visible long after such artists had been eclipsed by the daguerreotype and later photography. As the Chicago Historical Society's catalog of early American primitive paintings describes, these were works by artists who "received instruction only from the itinerant painters who roamed the country," whose portraits were executed with "pure color instead of blended tone," whose figures possessed "little perspective," and whose close attention to dress and domestic setting allowed the images to function as records of "the features of our ancestors" and the household environments in which they lived; Chicago Historical Society, *American Primitive Painting, Nineteenth Century: The Chicago Historical Society's Collection*.
[323] See KJV, Genesis, 1:1–3; Graham, "House of Victory," 5.
[324] Graham, "House of Victory," 5; KJV, Genesis, 2:8. For the biblical quotations, the citations will include both the location within the script as well as the chapter and verse within the King James Bible. The capitalization of the spoken lines is retained from Graham's script.

The effect is to situate the scene within an already-ordered world, displacing the moment of divine creation and positioning the human and pointedly female inhabitants posterior to the implied Edenic condition they occupy.[325] This condition is immediately reinforced by the Mother's subsequent colloquial line to the Daughter—"PRETTY ISN'T IT, DAUGHTER? ALWAYS WAS PRETTY"—stated as if this Eden's quality were less a moment of divine bestowal than an enduring condition of the land itself.[326] The Daughter then moves to the steps and performs a solo that Graham specifies may have the quality of a psalm, not religious "in a dark sense," but, by implication, religious in the "lyric, poet[ic]" sense, "rich in feeling, and possessed of energy in texture."[327] Only after this hallowed atmosphere is fully established does the script, in a reversal of biblical order, permit the entrance of "a man," the Citizen, into the established world of the women, and the Mother speaks her second biblical line: "AND THE LORD GOD TOOK A MAN AND PUT HIM INTO THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO DRESS AND KEEP IT."[328] Graham here subtly substitutes the original definite article of the biblical quote, "And the Lord God took *the* man," for the indefinite article "a," such that the primal Adamic uniqueness is reconfigured, and the male inhabitant, one of a multitude, is selected rather than formed, a figure who enters Eden rather than emanates from it.[329] It is also interesting to note that this reversal reinforces the established feminist hierarchy, placing "man" as subordinate to and serving under the women who claimed and developed the land.

[325] KJV, Genesis, 2:8.
[326] Graham, "House of Victory," 5–6.
[327] Graham, "House of Victory," 6.
[328] Graham, "House of Victory," 6; KJV, Genesis, 2:15.
[329] KJV, Genesis, 2:15.

Graham makes clear the Citizen is a figure who is never simply "a man," suggesting dissatisfaction with the name; however, the provisional designation nonetheless signals a generalized civic typology, the distillation of an engaged national character.[330] The term "Citizen" carries its own cultural weight: it evokes hereditary assumptions about belonging, responsibility, and participation within the polity. In deploying it as a character name, Graham summons a figure already saturated with ideological expectation, one that embodies more than individual agency and instead stands as a condensed symbol of national identity. He is "shy, fanatical," not a rustic or pastoral figure but, as Graham stresses twice, "no bumpkin" and "a creature of American bone."[331] Such a performative veneer masks an inward intensity that recalls the grammar of latent force already present in "Daughter of Colchis," where outward containment concealed a suppressed will moving toward violent disclosure. The Citizen's "awkward grace of action," coupled with "overtones" of Puritan ancestry, marks him as a body governed by a conviction shaped by a prior moral inheritance.[332] Graham calls him "the kind of man that became the abolitionist, the John Brown," a shorthanded modifier for a personality defined by unyielding inner necessity—the man who "would fight to the death for civil rights for mankind," and is therefore "tragic in his dedication as well as heroic."[333] Graham folds the Citizen into the choreography, under the watchful eyes of the Mother, through a "duet of courtship," framed musically, in an intertextual note directed at Copland, by a sense of the familiar, as if "having been woven on this country's

[330] Graham, "House of Victory," 3.
[331] Graham, "House of Victory," 6.
[332] Graham, "House of Victory," 6.
[333] Graham, "House of Victory," 3.

loom."[334] In such tonal familiarity, reaching for something larger, Graham would have the audience sense a certain timelessness throughout the episode, mirroring the formative Edenic staging. Herbert Marks provides an excellent theological orientation that bears on this approach, stating that it "seems misleading to speak of" the likes of Adam "as 'characters' at all," but rather, in the terms of the poet William Blake, "giant forms," as "they seem always to be involved in something bigger than themselves, to carry . . . destiny with them and to persuade us their destiny is also our own."[335] Blake's formulation of "giant forms" gestures toward embodiments that gather up "Nations & Peoples & Tongues," figures in whom the communal inheritance is already inscribed.[336] In this lineage, the Citizen is not merely *civis*, the local townsman, but an outward sign of the encompassing *civitas*, the collective for whom he stands. Graham, in turn, works through this persuasive logic, presenting her "characters" as American forms already shaped by an inherited condition, one shared by her intended audience, made legible through her visual grammar.

As the script progresses through courtship and on to the wedding day scene, described as "a Country Fair, a little of a revival meeting, a party, a picnic," the Citizen performs a solo that foregrounds "qualities such as Davy Crockett had in legend," qualities drawn from a genealogy of charismatic self-assertion, literally sweeping the daughter off her feet, over the threshold and into the house.[337] The scene joins the

[334] Graham, "House of Victory," 6.
[335] Marks, *Old Testament*, 6; Marks is referencing William Blake's illuminated work, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, a reimagining of Adam and Eve through a mythical primordial human whose fall into division and selfhood mirrors Adam's fall from unity with God. Jerusalem, as Albion's Emanation, functions as a redemptive counterpart to Eve, representing the restoration of spiritual unity and the reintegration of the divided human form.
[336] William Blake, *Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion* (London: J. Pearson, 1877), 53.
[337] Graham, "House of Victory," 7.

domestic union with the civic tableau predicated on both the Citizen's vernacular heritage and the Mother's sermonic authority to embed the pair within an Arcadian idyl. For "an instant," Graham suspends narrative time in "stillness and silence," a moment that opens onto the next line: "AND ADAM SAID, 'THIS IS BONE OF MY BONES AND FLESH OF MY FLESH, AND SHE SHALL BE CALLED WOMAN."[338] Immediately, the scene divides: inside the house, the love scene is reticent and spare, while outside the gathering escalates into "an old-fashioned chivari (charivari)" of the kind Graham identifies with "the out districts of this country," notably contrasting it with the "more [sophisticated] areas."[339] Graham's marking of cultural differentiation produces a double dialogic tension: within the episode itself, the low vernacular form presses against the high biblical idiom voiced by the Mother; and, at the same time, the script's reliance on such "low" cultural materials unsettles the elevated register expected of an audience trained in dominant cultural norms, consistent with Mikhail Bakhtin's account of how vernacular forms penetrate and disturb official discourse.[340] Graham's framing of the celebration as a localized folk ritual reinforces the Mother's liminal positioning, for Graham roots the

[338] Graham, "House of Victory," 7; KJV, Genesis, 2:23.
[339] Graham, "House of Victory," 7. Annegret Fauser situates Graham's proximity to *Oklahoma!*—which premiered in New York in March 1943—and notes Graham's direct familiarity with Agnes de Mille's choreography, the production's visual idiom, and the revival of the charivari ritual in its wedding scene; Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 30–31.
[340] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), especially the Introduction (pp. 1–58) and Chapter One (pp. 59–144). While Bakhtin identifies laughter and the "carnival spirit" as the specific mechanisms for subverting high ideology, this analysis extends his concept to the "out district" vernacular in general, treating it as a "low" or subordinate voice that penetrates "high" cultural forms. Graham's usage of the "old-fashioned chivari" functions as a "double dialogic tension." First, as a "low" vernacular form, it presses against and "unsettles the authority" of the Mother's "high" biblical idiom. Second, by specifically attributing this ritual to the "out districts of this country" and contrasting it with "more [sophisticated] areas," Graham creates a secondary tension between rural folk materials and the elevated register of elite urban society. This "double take" reflects Bakhtin's broader model of "heteroglossia," where multiple socially inflected voices—official, vernacular, sacred, and aesthetic—coexist within a single performance. By framing these "out district" rituals as a localized folk ritual, Graham establishes a "third space" of cultural enunciation. In this space, the dominant and subordinate meanings are not resolved but are held in "productive tension," effectively rendering the "out district" voice audible within the framework of a national aesthetic.

elevated scriptural idiom she gives the Mother in the concrete, situated consciousness of people "who think in Bible terms and incidents."[341] This modulation between low and high forms clarifies how the biblical line settles upon the Daughter and Citizen as a mythic dyad inseparable from the complex, differentiated customs of the American community. As Marks writes, the narrative episodes of Genesis "reside in a mythic dimension beyond any temporal continuum," not biographical but structural.[342] This structural isolation mirrors Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the epic as an "absolute past" of national beginnings, which is walled off from contemporary reality by an impenetrable "distance" that excludes any contact with the unfolding present.[343] By embedding this scriptural idiom within a localized folk ritual, Graham effectively "novelizes" the biblical text, pulling the congealed epic word into a zone of contact with the unfinished present and its potential for historical re-evaluation.[344] In Graham's staging, this line from Genesis is likewise a structural hinge anchoring the pair, isolating them, as Adam and Eve in the garden, while at the same time joining them to the civic realm through the shared musical accompaniment. Accordingly, the biblical utterance does not inaugurate a

[341] Graham, "House of Victory," 1.
[342] Marks, *Old Testament*, 7.
[343] M. M. (Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich) Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, by M. M. (Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich) Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1981), 13.
[344] Bakhtin characterizes the epic as a "congealed and half-moribund" genre that relies on sacrosanct tradition and memory rather than personal experience, placing its heroes in a "monochronic" world where everything is already finished. The novel, however, effects a "radical change . . . in the temporal coordinates of the literary image" by placing it in an "open ended present." While Marks argues that the episodes of Genesis are "discontinuous" and reside beyond time, Graham's staging draws them into what Bakhtin calls the "full light of the historical day," where the mythic past is forced to interact with the "spontaneity of the inconclusive present." This shift from vertical, hierarchical time to a horizontal line of historical becoming reflects the broader Renaissance project of reconstructing the cosmos to center on the body of the people moving toward a real future. In this context, the chivari acts as a carnivalesque mechanism that "uncrown[s]" the static authority of the biblical past, transforming it into the living and plastic substance of a new national identity; Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," 14, 15, 11, 7; Marks, *Old Testament*, 7; Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," 3, 27, 23.

pristine dyad as does the bible; rather, delivered by the Mother, who is fixed between the private interior and the public world, it registers the pair's formation as one event absorbed into an enduring American civic order.

"Finally, all activity fades and the stage is dim and empty again," save for the ever-present Mother. Graham's instantiation of the script in Genesis culminates in the "Interlude," the third episode, with the action resuming and children playing "as they do in the early morning," the light again streaming "across the stage thru the house as it did in the beginning," restoring the original visual geometry.[345] The Daughter and Citizen walk to the door "as the Daughter did in the beginning of the piece,"[346] and it is at this point that the Mother speaks a verse that interrupts the script's linear biblical movement, returning the audience to the threshold of creation: "AND THE EVENING AND THE MORNING WERE THE FIRST DAY."[347] Graham inverts the cosmological sequence, moving from the established firmament toward the undifferentiated void, enacting through her dramaturgy "quasi mythical accounts of the genesis of human life as we know it" residing "beyond any temporal continuum."[348] The originating moment becomes unsettled, no longer sealed off behind the characters; the timelessness of Eden is intimated as recoverable. Once again, Graham reinforces her intentions through colloquial interjection, the Mother observing, "SPRING COMES EARLY THIS YEAR, DAUGHTER. ABOUT TIME FOR SPRING PLANTING, SON."[349] What appears as a return to origins is re-articulated as the continuation of a cyclical life, the seasonal return

[345] Graham, "House of Victory," 8.
[346] Graham, "House of Victory," 8.
[347] Graham, "House of Victory," 8; KJV, Genesis, 1:5.
[348] Marks, *Old Testament*, 9, 7.
[349] Graham, "House of Victory," 8.

to new life echoed in the children playing and the instantiation of labor, the pioneer condition of planting and tending the land, not a symbolic abstraction, but a direct articulation of the work that accompanies life in the American garden.

Graham described the "Interlude" as "the essence of living together without war and in a common bond," with "a feeling of time suspending, of a world listening."[350] The episode ends with the entire company seated around the stage, the day once again fading to night and a return to a single light isolating the Mother who invokes the prophet Isaiah, marking the introduction of the first rupture: "IN THAT DAY SHALL THIS SONG BE SUNG, WE HAVE A STRONG CITY; SALVATION WILL GOD APPOINT FOR WALLS AND BULWARKS. OPEN YE THE GATES, IN THAT THE RIGHTEOUS NATION WHICH KEEPETH THE TRUTH MAY ENTER IN."[351] Prophetic discourse may be described as baroque, heightened, and often violent in register, its authority rooted in the prophet's effacement as one who "speaks for" another and intensified through oral delivery, parallelism, and other insistent repetitions.[352] Graham anchors the move towards rupture in the Mother's delegated authority, her prophetic speech introducing a new civic frame into the suspended garden. The Biblical chapter from which Graham draws belongs to the so-called "Isaiah Apocalypse," an anthology whose eschatological imagery sets two cities—the "city of confusion," what Augustine called the "city of man," and the "strong city," or the "city of God"—in unresolved tension, where civil destruction and divine salvation coexist rather than follow in linear

[350] Graham, "House of Victory," 8.
[351] Graham, "House of Victory," 8; KJV, Isaiah 26:1–2.
[352] Marks, *Old Testament*, 1188.

sequence.[353] Graham, in gathering the entire company on the stage, paints them as the strong city with its protected community and suspended time; however, opening the gates to even the "righteous nation" introduces a broader civic order, one grounded in truth—the embodiment of reality—that unsettles the script's Edenic enclosure. Read within this context, Graham's invocation of Isaiah functions as a threshold event: once the city of men enters, the garden can no longer sustain the work's earlier timelessness. The prophetic utterance breaks that suspended register and clears the way for the script's turn to historical conflict and rupture in the scene that follows.

The aptly named "Episode" marks the script's first direct intrusion of historical reality, introduced not as an abstract past but as a recognizable American cultural touchstone—Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—whose textual resonance, theatrical afterlife, and authorial weight Graham mobilizes in a manner parallel to Roosevelt's invocation of Sandburg. Graham presents the Episode in miniature—"a play within a play," staged as if conjured by children—yet this reduction sharpens its force.[354]

[353] See KJV, Isaiah, 24:10, 26:1; Marks, *Old Testament*, 1193–1196, 1234; Augustine underscores that the disasters of earthly history do not resolve the opposition between the two communities, for in this life they remain "entangled and mingled with one another… until the last judgment shall separate them". Their divergence is rooted in the fact that "two cities… have been created by two loves: the earthly by love of self… and the heavenly by love of God". The earthly city's pursuit of temporal goods leaves it "divided against itself by lawsuits, wars and strife," and even its victories "bring only death" or are "short-lived". By contrast, the heavenly city "lives like a captive and a pilgrim," making provisional use of earthly concord while orienting all things toward "the peace which is a perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God"; Augustine, *City of God* I.35, XIV.28, XV.4, XIX.17. In Augustine's account, destruction and salvation therefore inhabit the same temporal field, but their ends—and the loves that shape them—remain decisively and permanently at odds.

[354] Graham, "House of Victory," 9. Graham's invocation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* foreshadows a similar use of the material by Rodgers and Hammerstein in *The King and I* (1951), where it appears as a stylized play within a play titled "The Small House of Uncle Thomas." While *The King and I* draws from Margaret Landon's semi-fictionalized biographical novel *Anna and the King of Siam* (1944), itself adapted from the memoirs of Anna Leonowens, no evidence suggests that Leonowens used *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a teaching text in Siam; the interpolation of Stowe's novel is a theatrical invention by Rodgers and Hammerstein. The recurrence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* attests to the novel's enduring symbolic potency as a moral and racial narrative scaffold within mid-century American performance. This echo is particularly resonant in light of Graham's own proximity to the musical theatre milieu, including her familiarity with *Oklahoma!* and its wedding chivari scene.

She identifies these as "the crucial scenes," the passages from Stowe that "turned the attention of the world to slavery and precipitated the crisis."[355] Their inclusion draws on both the novel's cultural import and Stowe's continued presence in American public life, made evident on the New York stage, where, during the same period, Helen Hayes was performing as Harriet Beecher Stowe in the Broadway production *Harriet*, underscoring how clearly Stowe remained a publicly legible moral exemplar.[356] Within the broader press, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continued to function as an immediately recognizable cultural shorthand. In February 1943, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* ran the front-page editorial cartoon "The Return of Simon Legree," invoking Stowe's villain to condemn New Deal labor initiatives and equating federal regulation with a revived form of slavery.[357] Consistently critical of Roosevelt-era social programs, the *Tribune* used Stowe's imagery as a ready emblem of government overreach. Later that year, *Newsday*'s editorial "Topsy Will Be a Patsy" drew on the same cultural familiarity, invoking Topsy—an unruly child repeatedly contrasted with the saintly Eva in the novel—to satirize postwar industrial planning.[358] The piece cast mismanaged labor conditions in terms that echoed the racial and moral hierarchies embedded in Stowe's characterization, demonstrating how the novel's symbolic language continued to animate mid-century political discourse. Within this cultural atmosphere, Graham's reference did not require character assignment or theatrical reenactment to register with her audience, as the figures of Stowe's narrative, as well as Stowe herself, were still circulating visibly and recognizably across both stage

[355] Graham, "House of Victory," 9.
[356] See "Helen Hayes Scores Success for Play About Harriet Beecher Stowe," *Daily Boston Globe*, March 7, 1943, C40.
[357] "Editorial Cartoon 1—No Title," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1943, 1.
[358] "Topsy Will Be a Patsy," *Newsday*, November 19, 1943, 19.

and print media. Decidedly unsubtle, with no recourse to metaphor or mythologizing, the "Episode" turns directly to what even in the early to mid-twentieth century was termed America's "original sin," staging slavery through explicitly enacted scenes.[359] In doing so, Graham brings into the work the "truth" of the nation's past, closing the span of the strong city's suspended order and preparing the way for the confused city of man that follows.

As a direct response to the enactment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the passage between scenes, from "Episode" into "Fear in the Night," is marked by the Mother's continued recitation of Isaiah: "THE NEW WINE MOURNETH THE VINE LANGUISHETH ALL THE MERRY HEARTED DO SIGH — ALL JOY IS DARKENED THE MIRTH OF THE LAND IS GONE."[360] Consonant with the introduction of the nation's original sin, the verse identifies that the American garden is already tainted. Into this darkening frame enters the Fugitive, followed by the Citizen, and what the script had staged at the scale of childhood play emerges, in maturity, as a paired lineage of possession traceable

[359] The term "original sin" as applied to American chattel slavery can be traced back to at least 1831, first adopted by antebellum defenders of slavery, including Thomas R. Dew of William & Mary, who argued that slavery was indeed a sin but an inherited one and therefore beyond remedy by the present generation. Proslavery writers deployed the metaphor to attribute responsibility to Great Britain, maintaining that the colonies' hands were "unpolluted" because they had resisted the trade prior to independence. Charles Sumner directly attacked this logic in his 1845 speech opposing the admission of Texas, identifying it as a "specious" attempt to shift culpability onto the nation's "progenitors" and the "mother country." Recasting the metaphor, Sumner warned that the deliberate expansion of slavery into new territory would constitute a "new case of actual transgression," transforming an inherited evil into the present generation's own "original sin." John Patrick Leary observes that this metaphor exploits the theological definition of sin as "contracted" rather than "committed," thereby turning a human-made social institution into an abstract, "foggy, opaque mystery" for which no living individual bears specific responsibility. Leary argues that contemporary usage often mirrors this original intent, serving as a "pious deflection" that uses a "generalizable guilt" to avoid addressing the concrete obligations of slavery's afterlife in the present. See Thomas R. Dew, *The Pro-Slavery Argument, as Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States* (Charleston: Walker, Richards & Co., 1852), esp. 341–54; Charles Sumner, *Orations and Speeches* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1850), esp. "Speech against the Admission of Texas as a Slave State, Made at a Public Meeting in Faneuil Hall, Boston, Nov. 4, 1845," 107–16; and John Patrick Leary, "'Original Sin,' Slavery, and American Innocence," *Social Text Online*, April 3, 2017.
[360] Graham, "House of Victory," 9; KJV, Isaiah 24:7–11.

to "Colchis." Graham's treatment of the Fugitive draws on the "unhuman" mythical voice of the Fury, the Medea, and her eruptive physical manifestation of internal psychological possession, here the vocal emanations are remapped into the physical vocabulary of a metaphorically racialized body; his choreography written as the outward expression of a slave's psychological torment: "There is a dance of a hunted creature, followed or imagining he is being followed. He falls, rushes, hides, tumbles, lies still."[361] He is seen only "in the half-light and shadows," and his body is described as bearing the "tragic awkwardness of the hopeless," which situates him not as a character with dramaturgical agency but rather, through Graham's metaphorical dehumanization, presented as evidence—lived proof of suffering that cannot be assimilated into the domestic order.[362] This treatment reflects the structural mechanism Susan Manning defined as metaphorical minstrelsy, further evident in Graham's later direction that "he will not be made up as a negro or dress as one, but there will be moments when there will be a feeling of negro body in his movements."[363] The dramatic function of the Fugitive also extends a Hawthornean inheritance. In "Rappaccini's Daughter," just as Beatrice does not choose contamination but becomes poisonous through the world that formed her, the Fugitive likewise embodies a cultivated suffering imposed upon him. At the end of his dance, he moves to hide "by the skirts of the Mother."[364] This attempt to conceal himself marks his unhoused condition: there is no rightful place for him within the world the drama constructs, only a brief concealment within the third space between the domestic and civic realms, before his erasure, as the script records no formal exit for

[361] Graham, "House of Victory," 9.
[362] Graham, "House of Victory," 9.
[363] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 5.
[364] Graham, "House of Victory," 9.

him—an omission unique among the characters. His role thus ends when his presence makes visible the structural tensions underlying the household's, the strong city's order, tensions that the script resolves by removing him silently from the stage. In continuity with "Colchis," the persecuted figure does not survive the tragic circumstances; they consume him.

The Fugitive's removal clears the space for the next eruption, as the Citizen steps from the house for his solo—"angry, violent, possessed."[365] Although the Citizen is characterized by outward restraint, that restraint signals an unsettled containment rather than calm, a pressure building beneath the surface towards violent retribution. In "Colchis," the Fury embodied this structure as "the inner aspect of the woman," a volatile double whose force gathers within her before breaking outward; for Graham, Poe's "Ligeia" offers a similar pattern of apparent stillness masking a concentrated will.[366] The Citizen functions as the masculine counterpart to this configuration. His outward reserve holds a latent fanaticism—a Puritan inheritance lodged in the American moral imagination—violent in origin before it becomes violent in action. When the eruption comes, enacted in solo, it is but the emergence of what has been present all along. Graham reinforces this by assigning the Mother lines from the prophet Jeremiah, woven intermittently throughout the dance as an antiphonal counterpoint to the Citizen's fury: "FOR THUS SAID THE LORD GOD OF [ISRAEL] UNTO ME: 'TAKE THE WINE CUP OF THIS FURY AT MY HAND, AND CAUSE ALL NATIONS TO WHOM I SEND IT TO DRINK IT. AND THEY SHALL DRINK, AND BE MOVED AND BE

[365] Graham, "House of Victory," 9.
[366] Graham, "Colchis," 6.

MAD, BECAUSE OF THE SWORD THAT I WILL SEND AMONG THEM.'"[367] Marks describes Jeremiah as the prophet who "expresses the deepest anger and pain," the one associated with Israel's destruction rather than its formation.[368] Sacvan Bercovitch, in *The American Jeremiad*, argues that this prophetic structure was fundamentally transformed in the American context from a traditional lament over a world "sick unto death" into a vehicle for cultural cohesion and progress.[369] In Graham's staging, the Mother's recitation of Jeremiah functions in this register: the words are spoken into a scene already marked by violence, not as a prediction of what is to come but as part of what is taking place. In the American context, the prophet's "doomsday thunder" is never merely a prediction of ruin; instead, Bercovitch posits that it functions as a "corrective affliction," where the threat of divine vengeance is inverted into a "promise of ultimate success."[370] This specific rhetorical strategy allows for what Bercovitch calls a "ritual of a culture on an errand," in which neither the wine cup of fury nor the "anxiety" of the present moment discourages the community but rather releases the "progressivist energies" required for the fulfillment of a sacred national destiny.[371] The American figure through whom this inward severity becomes explicit, invoked directly in Graham's evocative description of the Citizen's movements as "reminiscent of HARPER'S

[367] Graham, "House of Victory," 10; KJV, Jeremiah 25:15–16.
[368] Marks, *Old Testament*, 1309.
[369] The term "jeremiad" originated from the biblical prophet Jeremiah and served for centuries as a literary label for prophetic laments or moral denunciations over cultural decline. In his 1978 study, *The American Jeremiad*, Bercovitch decisively defined and systematized it as a uniquely American rhetorical form distinct from its biblical and European antecedents. He argued that in the American context, the genre was fundamentally transformed from a traditional discourse of decline into a mechanism for affirmation and national mission. Prior to this work, scholars typically analyzed Puritan rhetoric through the separate lenses of covenant theology or "declension narratives." Bercovitch provided a unified rubric for understanding these disparate narratives through a progress-oriented, nation-building logic that persists as a central American ideology.
[370] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, anniversary ed. with new preface (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), xii, 58, 7.
[371] Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 23.

FERRY, AND JOHN BROWN."[372] John Brown's conviction, like Medea's, extends beyond the self, with broader familial impact; two of his sons were killed in the Harpers Ferry assault, losses bound up with his refusal to retreat both morally and physically.[373] The historian Dan McKanan documents this pattern in Brown's life, describing him as "an ardent Calvinist" for whom "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," noting his attachment to Old Testament models of sacrifice, and explaining why some contemporaries regarded him as "a new Christ."[374] Just as Euripides framed Medea's killing of her children as a "fearful and necessary wrong," Graham draws on this pattern in constructing the Citizen's "tragic…dedication."[375] When Brown erupts through the Citizen, Graham is drawing on a historical figure whose authority was simultaneously prophetic and self-fashioned. Richard Brodhead describes Brown as one who "out-Ahabs Ahab," weaponizing holy fury until conviction becomes indistinguishable from self-assertion, and as a man who "put himself forward as a divine instrument," while carefully manufacturing that image within the press.[376] Graham's staging reflects this conjunction by placing the Citizen's most extreme movements under the Mother's recitation of Jeremiah. Marks notes that Jeremiah's cup is "an allegorical version of the trial by ordeal," a ritual in which judgment is enacted rather than awaited.[377] By linking the Citizen to the prophetic burden of John Brown, Graham invokes an Americanized version of the prophet—one who weaponizes consecrated fury not to signal a final end, but to

[372] Graham, "House of Victory," 9.
[373] See Richard H. Brodhead, "Prophets, Publics, and Publication: The Case of John Brown," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 111 (2001): 544–45.
[374] Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 79, 79–80, 81.
[375] Euripides, *Medea*, line 1253; Graham, "House of Victory," 1.
[376] Brodhead, "Prophets, Publics, and Publication," 542.
[377] Marks, *Old Testament*, 1359.

facilitate a trial of testing through which the nation proves its elect status. In "House of Victory," the Citizen thus stands within that ordeal, as Jeremiah's words are spoken over choreography that enacts the strain of conflict. In Graham's staging, the Citizen does not merely resemble a prophet: he inherits the prophetic burden of enacting judgment; his "Fury" as opposed to Medea's does not represent psychological disjunction but rather sacred wrath.

Graham introduces the next scene, *"*Day of War,*"* with an expository statement of its scope, placing it "in the CIVIL WAR period," yet specifying that it is "the state of war at any time, with its timeless tragedies of separations, bewilderment, loneliness, loss, and the quiet, simple agony of uneventful lives torn asunder."[378] The stage, as with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is "laid against [a] childish background." The Younger Sister runs across in "a frenzy of adolescent excitement," and the children enter "playing at a charade of war."[379] Graham's staging demonstrates that the trauma of conflict has already been absorbed and normalized within the domestic culture. The children's charade, no longer the innocent play in the morning hours, the bagatelle one might enact in Grover's Corners, it becomes, as she writes, the register through which war takes form within the domestic frame itself. What distinguishes this moment from the ballet's earlier pastoral imagery is not simply the intrusion of violence, but the manner in which that violence is rendered legible through the idiom of play. The children, as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, stage in miniature the unconscious rehearsal or manifestation of the surrounding reality. In this respect, the episode resonates with Robin Bernstein's account of childhood "innocence" as a performed condition rather than a natural state—a mode of what she calls "holy

[378] Graham, "House of Victory," 11.
[379] Graham, "House of Victory," 11.

obliviousness," through which racial and political meanings are not erased but rendered permissible by being ostensibly unnoticed.[380] The children's play functions as an alibi: by staging war as a miniature, theatrical diversion, Graham's script allows historical violence to enter the pastoral American "Eden" under the protective aura of innocence, masking the persistence of conflict beneath the appearance of childish abstraction.[381] In essence, the interpretive implication of the children playing at war is that it serves as a seismograph, registering the shift in the American place from an idyllic, if fractured, garden to a nation under siege, where war has become a normalized part of the cyclical life of the household, forcing the adults to move into a state of grief and violence.

The Citizen reenters, and he and the Daughter move into the house, establishing "a double scene": a goodbye inside while the children continue their mimicry outside. Graham notes that "they both [use] the same tragical music," binding the private farewell and the children's imitation within a single musical realm, harking back to the wedding day.[382] When the Citizen exits "after the children," the Daughter collapses at the Mother's feet, and the cursory stillness: "GET TO YOUR FEET. YOU ARE MY DAUGHTER."[383] What follows is a dance for the Daughter described as "like a psalm

[380] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 20–22.
[381] Bernstein's analysis helps clarify how children's play can function as a mechanism through which political meanings are absorbed and normalized rather than explicitly articulated. As she argues, play enables divergent political positions to appear "natural, inevitable, and therefore justified," even when the activity itself is framed as innocuous or "sweet." This distinction is sharpened by Bernstein's contrast between "cuddle games," which appear purely domestic, and "floor games," which openly rehearse structures of power, including war and imperialism. Graham's movement from early-morning innocent play to a charade of war follows a comparable shift, with war taking form as a domestic rehearsal rather than an external rupture. Finally, Bernstein's treatment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a "repertoire" of embodied practices—walking, talking, crying, and gestural identification—illuminates Graham's use of Stowe's narrative as a hinge for the children's episode, situating the play within a longer cultural logic through which childhood mediates historical violence via stylized, racialized figures. Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 4–5, 69–72, 92–94.
[382] Graham, "House of Victory," 11.
[383] Graham, "House of Victory," 11.

only in the sense that it is strong and ecstatic," not religious but shaped by the "militancy and poetry" Graham associates with the period.[384] Once this frame is established, the Mother speaks from the Book of Micah: "NOW GATHER THYSELF IN TROOPS, O DAUGHTER OF TROOPS: HE HATH LAID SIEGE AGAINST US."[385] Marks notes that Micah prophesied when Judah "was in imminent danger of being overrun," and is the first prophet to speak simultaneously in his own person and in God's name, whose emphasis was "primarily ethical rather than political."[386] Graham assigns these lines at a point when the scene's elements—the children's play, the parting inside, and the shared music—already situate the action within the pressures of war rather than at its threshold. A dance for the women follows. Graham writes that it "should be beautiful and terrible," containing "bitterness as well as grief and gentleness," and that it is "strong with a new strength."[387] She describes it as "almost like an incantation for return of right living," yet clarifies that its aim is not to restore an untouched past. Instead, the dance is sustained long enough to enact that return and signal the cessation of war, even allowing for "a time of darkness on the stage" while it persists.[388] Graham's turn to Micah does not resolve the narrative crisis; it allows her to choreograph its afterlife. The women regather not as inheritors of Eden but as figures moving within a world marked by loss, compelled to carry forward a world that can no longer be sheltered from history, yet also not fully surrendered to it.

[384] Graham, "House of Victory," 11.
[385] Graham, "House of Victory," 11; KJV, Micah 5:1.
[386] Marks, *Old Testament*, 1613.
[387] Graham, "House of Victory," 11.
[388] Graham, "House of Victory," 11.

The concluding scene, “Return,” solidifies the work’s thematic commitment to recurrence rather than restoration. The scene intentionally does not lift the script back into Eden, but reopens the space in which Eden once seemed possible; the difference between those two states is what gives this ending its unsettled power. Though the structure repeats the ballet's opening gestures—“the Mother sits alone [and] light extends into the house”—and the world “seems to return to the beginning,” the return is no longer unmarked, no longer naïve; it carries the sediment of what has intervened.[389] This ambiguity confirms Graham’s intent for the final image to register, “that it is in the period now (today),” not nostalgic but touched by modernity’s knowledge of rupture.[390] The possibility of Eden remains performable but is no longer anterior to history; it arrives only after the confrontation with original sin. Seen from this vantage, the figures who reappear in the closing image, again bifurcated between the domestic and civil realms, stand not as restored types but as forms suspended between Wilder’s realism and Graham’s archetypal abstraction, altered by the ordeal the script has carried them through. This ambivalence can be seen to extend the Hawthornean lineage that runs through Graham's dramaturgy. In his tale “Young Goodman Brown,” the protagonist ventures into the wilderness expecting to encounter temptation, only to discover that the evil he encounters originates not in the forest but in his own congregation. Goodman Brown learns that “the deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me,” hears his minister and deacon “talking so strangely in the empty air,” and finally recognizes that the voices in the dark are “towns-people of his own, men and women,

[389] Graham, “House of Victory,” 12.
[390] Graham, “House of Victory,” 11.

both pious and ungodly."[391] The forest thus renders visible what the covenant community conceals. In Graham's structure, the Fugitive performs a similar function: he does not create disorder but reveals it. His mere existence forces the household to confront what it has displaced—the violence embedded in its vision of domestic order—a confrontation witnessed by the Mother and rendered visceral by the Citizen's eruption.

"Name?"

As the summer of 1943 progressed, Graham did not abandon the dramaturgical line initiated in "House of Victory" but continued to revise it through two subsequent scripts, provisionally titled "Name?" and submitted to Copland on July 10 and then again on September 5. In mid-July, in the accompanying letter to the first of these, she candidly admitted the strain of the work—"I am not lost completely, though I have almost been lost in the writing of this piece"—and stated her aim directly: "a gentleness without sentimentality and a sense of the universal without being symbolic."[392] Yet as the revisions themselves demonstrate, the work's movement toward universality depended precisely on the symbolic operations Graham claimed to resist. In her letter, she introduces several clarifications and adjustments; one of the most significant is the addition of a newly conceived character, the Indian Girl. Though Graham initially frames the figure as having "no reason in one sense… to be there,' she immediately insists that "she is always there… in the names of our cities, states, rivers, and in the play of all of us

[391] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," in *Rappaccini's Daughter* (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), 52, 57, 58.
[392] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this paragraph are drawn from Martha Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, July 10, 1943," Aaron Copland Collection, 1841-1991, Box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.

as children," an inclusion neither incidental nor capricious. Jacqueline Shea Murphy proposes that Graham approached the figure of the Indian Girl with an unusual degree of self-awareness for a non-Indigenous artist. Within the script, Graham acknowledges the difficulty of staging Indianness "with theatricality and complete design, rather than from the anthropological point of view," insisting that the character "is not a native Indian… not an Indian's Indian but a white man's Indian."[393] Murphy observes that this admission reveals Graham's awareness that "her own position as a white artist representing an idea of an Indian, and of the limits of this idea," signals a recognition of "the limits of visual representation of 'Indians' more generally."[394] Her line of argument aligns with the more apologetic defenses of Graham's use of minstrelsy, essentially a form of metaphorical indigeneity to bend Manning's critique. However, Murphy's position is ultimately more nuanced than the initial generosity of her reading might suggest. She later turns a critical eye toward the aesthetic mechanism itself, arguing that in this context Native American culture functions less as a cultural system than as artistic material available to the non-Indigenous artist. The force of this critique resonates with the ballet's eventual form, in which all traces of both the Indian Girl and the Fugitive disappear—evidence that, despite Graham's intermittent gestures toward social critique, the subaltern vocabulary remained instrumental rather than integral, something that could be incorporated for its expressive utility and, when the work demanded, just as readily set aside.

Possibly understanding the material tentativeness of her construction, anticipating objections from Copland, Graham defended the addition of the Indian Girl by threading it through an expanded literary genealogy drawing upon "the use that Hart Crane made of

[393] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, 5/29/1943–7/10/1943," 4.
[394] Murphy, *The People*, 164.

her and also the 'American Grain' of William Carlos Williams."[395] As well, she indicates that her orientation to biblical utterance, her view of the mechanics of the spoken word is beginning to shift. So, while she "still kept the Bible lines," she contemplates moving away from direct citation toward a looser lyrical approximation more integrated into the choreography: "I thought I would get someone to write some lines that would express the idea without using the actual quotation." This reconsideration of sources frames a third adjustment, confirming a decisive excision: the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* episode, which Copland had objected to. "I have, as you will see, taken out the... episode altogether. I think you were right that it was dragged in by the hair of the head and I did not seem to be able to fix it so I started on a different aspect." Graham's admission is not entirely straightforward, as the episode was hardly an extraneous insertion. It had supplied the hinge between the Edenic opening and the darker arc of "Fear in the Night" and the "Day of War," marking the intrusion of historical reality into the pastoral frame. It also foreshadowed the children's later charade of war and, further, carried a widely recognized moral signification for her intended audience. Her decision to remove it may be seen as serving two aims. On one level, her correspondence shows a reasoned deference to Copland, and, in response to his objection, she may simply have wished to mollify his concerns. More consequential for the development of the scripts, the excision also marks her move toward greater mythological abstraction—away from the explicit portrayal of slavery and toward a mode that reframes historical violence through fully stylized subaltern figures. Read in this light, the removal functions as both a strategic

[395] All quotations in this paragraph are drawn from Graham to Copland, July 10, 1943.

conciliation and a recalibration of the work's symbolic grammar, underscoring the very instability in the use of subaltern material.

The tone of this July letter is anxious, self-aware, and pleading for temporal accommodation—she apologizes repeatedly for lateness, admitting she has "hampered" Copland by the delay.[396] Six weeks later, Harold Spivacke's decision to postpone the entire project intervenes, upending the schedule she had already built for her season. Graham records this bluntly: "I have just had a letter from Mr. Spivacke telling me that he has decided on postponement. There is no date set. I am greatly upset but I suppose it will be for the best."[397] The second "Name?" script, sent on September 5, comes in the immediate wake of this reversal: she confirms that postponement is now accepted—"I suppose it is the only thing to do"—but, still trying to hold Copland emotionally close, tells him that his letter had "cheer[ed] me up very much," and reports that she has used her "spare time" to alter the ending, which she felt had "more finish this way."[398] What Graham understated as "more finish" involved a decisive textual turn away from the secular, contemporary homecoming of the "Time of Return" in *House of Victory* toward a sacralized communal ritual titled "The Lord's Day." While the July script had left the conclusion in a naturalistic state—a town "settling down for the night"—the September revision transforms the household into a "country church," anchoring the finale in the liturgical cadences of the Sabbath. In this final iteration, Graham positions the Indian Girl as a mythic witness to this religious "sense of place." She sits at the Mother's feet to hear

[396] Graham to Copland, July 10, 1943.
[397] Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, August 19, 1943, Aaron Copland Collection, 1841–1991, box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[398] Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, September 5, 1943, Aaron Copland Collection, 1841–1991, box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.

the Genesis account of the Seventh Day, her presence holding the "white man's Indian" within the Puritanical order of the congregants. The religious implications are not dogmatic but atmospheric; Graham seeks to evoke the "fervor of a communion" and the "wildness" beneath the quiet Sunday surface, eventually resolving the tension through the Indian Girl's final, "free run" into the shadows as the Mother invokes the primal creation: "IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH." This shift reorients the conclusion not just toward a historical return but toward a mythic restoration of the American garden. Read sequentially, these two revised scripts do not mark a break after "House of Victory," but, instead document the continued forward movement within Graham's evolving American idiom: removing an element of theatrical excess she admits she could not justify, introducing the Indian Girl as a specifically American figure drawn from Crane and Williams, and beginning to redistribute the biblical material's symbolic weight toward the choreographic body, that is, a staged, poetically inflected vernacular, even as the scriptural citation persists—changes that were occurring at the very moment when the external institutional scaffolding of the project, its premiere and timetable, collapsed around her.

Beginning with Graham's literary referents, both William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain* (1925) and Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (1930) are implicated as key influences on her decision to revise the "House of Victory" script to include the character of the Indian. Williams's work, an experimental prose inquiry into the psychic, moral, and cultural roots of American history, developed through a series of "impressionistic essays," bears a structural affinity to Graham's episodic vignettes, suggesting an influence that extends not only across these revised scripts but back into the earlier

conception of “House of Victory.”[399] A pediatrician and leading figure of American modernism, Williams was known for his advocacy of a distinctly American vernacular in both poetry and prose.[400] Rejecting inherited European forms and Puritanical constraints, Williams, as Will Montgomery observes, sought “a specifically American prosody,” one “forg[ing] a linguistic art form from contemporary materials” and freed from “prehistoric prosodic rules.”[401] His poetry and prose, as Montgomery continues, prioritize an "objectivity of perspective" by locating the poetic "thing or object" externally, ensuring that the experience of the perceiving consciousness is communicated chiefly through the deliberate "handling of poetic form," the poem’s "technique" and the precise "minute character and relationships of the words."[402] Comparably, Graham’s evolving scripts locate meaning in outwardly structured visual vocabularies, for example, the Fugitive’s gestural vocabulary, locating meaning in the external choreographic emanations of interior consciousness and trauma. In this way, Williams’s vignettes of historical figures, including Cortez, the Indian sachem Jacataqua, and Daniel Boone, function less as biographical sketches than as mythic counter-figures in a broader struggle to liberate American identity from the weight of European cultural authority. Particularly striking is his recurring portrayal of Indigenous Americans and Black Americans not as mere victims of European conquest and moral hypocrisy, but as bearers of a sensual, reciprocal

[399] Ian Copestake, “Williams in the American Grain,” in *The Cambridge Companion to William Carlos Williams*, ed. Christopher MacGowan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 130.
[400] Biographical information over the next few paragraphs relies primarily on Ian Copestake’s and Lawrence Kramer’s work on, respectively, William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane; see Ian Copestake, “William Carlos Williams”; Ian Copestake, “Williams in the American Grain,” in *The Cambridge Companion to William Carlos Williams*, ed. Christopher MacGowan, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Hart Crane, *Hart Crane’s The Bridge: An Annotated Edition*, ed. Lawrence Kramer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).
[401] Will Montgomery, “William Carlos Williams,” in *Short Form American Poetry: The Modernist Tradition*, ed. Will Montgomery (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 45.
[402] Montgomery, “William Carlos Williams,” 42, 56.

relationship to land and life, a relationship Williams believed was foreclosed to the European colonist by Puritanical fear, framed in the words of Ian Copestake as "the imagination, intoxicated by prohibitions," an imagination that for Williams, must be reasserted for any cultural birth to occur.[403] In this regard, the work anticipates the efforts of both Martha Graham and Aaron Copland to locate American identity through native form rather than European precedent. However, this, too, reflects a broader pattern in which non-Indigenous white artists pursued 'native' American forms from a position fundamentally removed from the cultures they invoked. Even when conceived in good faith, such gestures relied upon appropriations of subaltern figures to articulate a national distinctiveness not their own to claim. Further, the linkage of sensuality as inherently subaltern bears a certain Orientalist fetishization, even though, as in Graham's attempted ironic exhortation of America's sins of the past in *American Document*, the intention is critical of the white European hegemon.

Graham's acknowledgement of literary influence finds an additional echo in *The Bridge*, which Lawrence Kramer describes as "an epochal statement about American life and character… [uniting] mythology and modernity as a means of coming to terms with the promises, both kept and broken, of American experience."[404] Written by Hart Crane—an Ohio-born poet associated with American romantic modernism—*The Bridge* is widely regarded as a landmark attempt to craft a national epic. Although initially derided, the poem has come to be seen as a major achievement of twentieth-century American poetry: a compact epic that, in Crane's words, is shaped by his desire "to give [poetry] *as a whole* an orbit or predetermined direction of its own… toward a state of

[403] Copestake, "American Grain," 131.
[404] Kramer, "Introduction," xiii.

consciousness," through which "certain spiritual illuminations shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous precepts or preconceptions," of the American imagination might emerge.[405] Positioned as a counterpoint to the pessimism of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, *The Bridge* affirms a residual Whitmanian optimism, a conviction that the nation's fractured modernity might still be gathered into a coherent imaginative order.[406] As Robert Hass observes, its "complex circular structure and Bergsonian conflation of time—in which the past, present, and future merge to establish a Platonic vision of American possibility"—renders Crane's epic less a lament than an attempt to stage a capacious temporal consciousness.[407] That structural ambition aligns suggestively with Graham's dramaturgical practice, whose episodic forms likewise work to draw disparate historical moments into a single, emblematic frame, while also resonating with the utopian inflection Mark Franko identifies in *American Document*. In this light, Crane's temporal expansiveness offers a genealogical precedent for Graham's choreographic architecture—a project carried from *American Document* through "House of Victory" and the subsequent "Name?" scripts—in its ambition to fashion an Arcadian vision capable of gathering national experience into an idealized imaginative whole while embedding socio-political critique through the very contradiction of drawing on appropriated cultural forms to imagine the redemptive national arc of a transcendent American civil religion.

[405] Hart Crane, *Hart Crane: Complete Poems & Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 163.
[406] Kramer, "Introduction," xiii.
[407] Robert Hass, "Hart Crane's Visionary Company," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, ed. Mark Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 261.

Two scenes from Graham's scripts are particularly helpful in drawing out the tensions between idealized national possibility and the charged social dynamics embedded in her stagings: "The Wedding Day" and "Fear in the Night." In both, Graham has kept much of the structure from "House of Victory"; however, in each, she has provided supplemental coloring for the characters and integrated the Indian Girl in particularly pointed ways. A reconsideration of "The Wedding Day" shows how the scriptural modifications add further layers of meaning to the scene's bifurcation between the "simple and restrained movement" of the interior love scene and the external charivari. The implication of the Citizen's Puritan embodiment is newly externalized in the grammar of the love scene, as Graham notes, "it is essentially [one] that takes place in a Puritan country where Protestantism is strong."[408] This doubling of the Puritan construct pushes the nature of ethical containment into a more psycho-historical claim that may be anchored by Williams's formulation that in the Puritan legacy "the impossibility to attain is the source of all good," a training in "delay" that yields a social life without "direct touch; all is cold, little and discreet," teaching women to feel "vicious, evil" for seeking pleasure, an inherently sinful act.[409] Given that the scene had opened with a solo outside the house by the Citizen, embracing the exuberance of legend, the move from the exterior state of revelry, of more mythic and sensual abandon, the transition, no longer merely an "instant of silence," now becomes "a breathless moment, a suspense, a curiosity," with "a sense of the secretive whisper."[410] The romantic core is staged not as release as that has already happened through the solo, but as the immediate

[408] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 8.
[409] William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* (New York: New Directions Books, 1956), 176, 183.
[410] Graham, "House of Victory," 7; Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 8.

constraint of that release. Williams contextualizes this stance within a larger intellectual climate shaped by what he calls a "nearly universal lack of scale," a constricted moral and affective horizon that he sets against the generous and expansive attitudes of figures untouched by New England rigor.[411] Within this frame, restraint is not a benign habit but a form of injury, what Williams describes as a maiming of sensibility, a condition where the spirit is "clipped in mind, stripped to the physical necessities," through which the community generates, and then refuses to acknowledge, the "supreme agony" of a psychological oppression that suffering bodies inevitably externalize and bear.[412] As such, the suffering body is the evidence of a psychological state that cannot otherwise be articulated in a restrictive society. Applying this concept to the script, one might view this as a displacement of the inner, psychological, textual voice of the script and the intended physicality of the choreographic body, creating a persistent third space of negotiation between the two states.

This temperamental divide—the liminal space between the psychological and the physical that Graham casts upon the Citizen and the world around him—is sharpened by her introduction of a historical register, "the feeling that time slips back into the period of Merrymount (*sic*)," a reference that engages Williams's *American Grain* while extending a Hawthornean literary lineage.[413] As John McWilliams observes, it was Hawthorne who

[411] Williams, *American Grain*, 75; Cf. Williams, *American Grain*, 120, and Martha Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 9; see esp. their parallel characterizations of generosity.
[412] Williams, *American Grain*, 111; Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 5.
[413] Graham consistently uses "Merrymount" throughout her script as opposed to "Merry Mount" used by both Williams and Hawthorne; this spelling is retained only when referencing her work directly. The Merry Mount Colony, founded in 1624 CE and later led by Thomas Morton, represented a progressive and nonconformist alternative to its neighboring settlements, particularly the strict Puritan Plymouth Colony. Unlike Plymouth, which was primarily an agricultural community, Merry Mount functioned as a successful trade center characterized by its liberal religious views, equal relations with Native Americans,

first privileged Merry Mount's psychological and moral significance, a struggle over the "future complexion of New England," over its historical particulars.[414] Williams follows Hawthorne in this symbolic prioritization, insisting that Merry Mount was destroyed for its moral rather than economic offenses, though he radically intensifies Hawthorne's more ambivalent stance into a polemical indictment of Puritan repression.[415] Operating as a dramaturgical undercurrent, this psychological register not only enables the Citizen's repressed desire to become legible within the civic community external to the household but also enlightens the treatment of the Indian Girl. Graham, Williams, and Crane converge on a single representational logic in which Native women index the continent's foundational, unmediated reality. Graham casts the Indian Girl as the "symbolic figure of the land, the Eve of our Genesis," "like a tree or a rock in her relationship to place," and the "supreme spectator," sometimes seen and sometimes unseen because Americans "can

and a festive atmosphere, famously exemplified by the erection of an 80-foot Maypole. This "riotous prodigality" and Morton's practice of selling firearms to the natives led to a bitter conflict with Plymouth, whose governor, William Bradford, viewed the settlement as a "school of Atheism." The dispute culminated in Morton's arrest and deportation twice by Plymouth's militia, ultimately leading to the colony's destruction in 1630 CE; however, the ongoing legacy of Merry Mount as a symbol of jollity versus Puritan gloom has evolved in scholarship, eventually leading to a more positive re-evaluation of Morton and his unique settlement. See John P. McWilliams, Jr., "Fictions of Merry Mount," *American Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 18; Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Maypole of Merry Mount," in *Twice-Told Tales* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865) and Richard Clark Sterne, "Puritans at Merry Mount: Variations on a Theme," *American Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1970).

[414] McWilliams, "Fictions of Merry Mount," 61.

[415] McWilliams, "Fictions of Merry Mount," 24; see also Sterne, "Puritans at Merry Mount," 853–54; Hawthorne's short story *"The May-Pole of Merry Mount"* was first published in 1837. While William Carlos Williams makes no explicit reference to Hawthorne in his chapter "The May-Pole at Merry Mount," his treatment may be read as an implicit critique. Williams makes plain his disdain for Hawthorne as an unoriginal copyist, wedded too closely to a "New England melancholy." Richard Sterne argues that Hawthorne remains fundamentally "ambivalent," wistfully associating the hedonists of Merry Mount with a "lost paradise" even as he casts them as "Gothic monsters," an ambivalence that ultimately resolves in Hawthorne's acquiescence to the colony's destruction, insofar as he judges its revelers "existentially superficial" when set against the Puritans' deeper, if grimmer, preoccupation with "sin and sorrow." Such ambivalence—coupled with acquiescence—would have been anathema to Williams, who instead sought to "drag this THING [Puritanism] out by itself to annihilate it"; Williams, *American Grain*, 228; Sterne, "Puritans at Merry Mount," 846, 849; Williams, *American Grain*, 114.

never escape the sense of her having been here and of her continual existence."[416] Williams gives the historical analogue in Jacataqua, a figure "primitive and direct," the "form which bitterness of pioneer character had denied" to womanhood, set against a Puritan training that evacuates contact and punishes pleasure.[417] He generalizes the ground of this symbol in a religious-anthropological register—"the earthward thrust of their logic; blood and earth; the realization of their primal and continuous identity with the ground itself."[418] Crane renders the same identity as a poetic literalization of the landscape, not just feminine, but a fully eroticized feminine body. For example, in describing the Mississippi River, he writes of those who "lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast / Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue . . ." and of winter that "Papooses crying on the wind's long mane / Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain, / —Dead echoes! But I knew her body there . . ." and of the wind, "Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned / O stream by slope and vineyard—into bloom!"[419] In this triangulation, the Indian figure functions as the constant measure against which Puritan restraint appears aberrant: the land's immediacy, its continuity, and its claims are borne by the indigenous feminine body that the settler order both desires and refuses.

In this context, Williams's evocation of Merry Mount is especially pointed: he renders the Puritan elders' denunciations of its "inclination to boisterous revelry"—the "dancing and frisking" with Indian women taken as "consorts," the "sexual spontaneity" they were "fearing to touch," and the "perverse nature" and "fantastic violence" they

[416] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 3, 4, 3.
[417] Williams, *American Grain*, 187, 186.
[418] Williams, *American Grain*, 33.
[419] Crane, *The Bridge*, 38, 39, 52.

believed such freedom unleashed.[420] Graham extends this poetic take on history into the choreography of the outdoor celebration, letting the scene move from the immediacy of the wedding festivities into "something wilder and infinitely older," charged with an "animal vitality."[421] As Richard Sterne notes, Williams reads the Puritan assault as a legacy of repression and sexual envy persisting into modern America "like a bad breath in the room," a formulation that resonates with Graham's staging of Merry Mount as an ever-returning psychic pressure rather than a closed historical past.[422] As the love scene unfolds, the charivari intensifies, but Graham punctuates the sequence with brief arrests in which the men and women separate and the women fall still. In these intervals, the Indian Girl emerges: she "dances with the men, but is never seen by the women," figured as their "dream of the eternal woman, gentle, generous, utterly loving and innocent." The women, by contrast, stand in "arrest," "unable to enter" that area of action.[423] Williams again brings an almost perfectly mapped resonant subtext to Graham's work, in his description of the youthful sachem Jacataqua, who was "silent in the midst of noise and laughter," a figure who gave "to womanhood in her time, the form which bitterness of pioneer character had denied it."[424] Read together, Williams's poetic history, Graham's

[420] Williams, *American Grain*, 78–80.
[421] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/194343," 8.
[422] Williams, *American Grain*, 78–80. See also Sterne, "Puritans at Merry Mount," 853–55.
[423] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 9.
[424] Williams, *American Grain*, 186; Jacataqua is remembered through legends as a beautiful Abenaki sachem who supported the 1775 Quebec expedition and supposedly bore Aaron Burr's child. These stories detail her exceptional skills as a huntress and her eventual placement in a convent, though her factual existence remains historically unverified. Bryce Conrad interprets her as a modern invention designed to serve as a creative catalyst for the male poet rather than a documented historical figure. As a supplying female within a pseudo-matriarchy, she is conjured to fertilize the male imagination where the historical record is otherwise silent. This framing reflects Joseph Evans Slate's view that the historical record must be dismantled to reveal human truth through imaginative freedom. Ultimately, she remains an ambiguous figure who facilitates a purposeful departure from fixed chronological records into a mythic reality; see "Jacataqua, the Indian Sachem Who Bore Aaron Burr's Love Child," *The New England Historical Society*; Bryce Conrad, "Engendering History: The Sexual Structure of William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*," *William Carlos Williams Review* 35, no. 1 (2018); and Joseph Evans Slate, "William Carlos

blocking and stage directions, and Crane's lyric scene all turn on the same hinge: the temporary suspension of Puritan discipline exposes the latent structure of desire as communal, physical, and older than the settler polity, and it does so by giving the Indian feminine presence control of the scene through the promise of sensual touch.

Graham's reconfiguration of the "Fear in the Night" episode brings the moral costs of any Edenic vision of American founding into singular focus through a composite image built around the Fugitive—"the man who is hunted, persecuted," who "exists in all times," "particularized by the slave."[425] Once his solo is completed, he no longer runs to hide beneath the skirts of the Mother, but is intercepted by the Indian Girl, who "holds the Fugitive across her knees in a way reminiscent of the Pieta."[426] The posture fuses two primary victims of the settler order—the enslaved African and the dispossessed Native—into a single tableau of compassion and grief. Williams provides the historical surround for this image by naming both the perpetrators and the witnesses: "We are the slaughterers. It is the tortured soul of our world."[427] He inventories sacrificial figures shaped by, and resisting, this regime: Père Sebastian Rasles, who in a "close embrace of native things" is killed "at the foot of his cross," drawing fire to shield his followers; and Abraham Lincoln, carrying the "age-old torture" in a register Williams marks as feminine—"a woman, born somehow, aching over it, holding all fearfully together"—a figure in an "old shawl" whose acts could bear "unearthly reality."[428] Crane provides a closely patterned analogue: "There was a veil upon you, Pocahontas, Bride—O Princess

Williams, Hart Crane and 'The Virtue of History,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 6, no. 4 (1965).
[425] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 5.
[426] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 10.
[427] Williams, *American Grain*, 41.
[428] Williams, *American Grain*, 121, 127, 234–235.

whose brown lap was virgin May."[429] In Graham's scene, the "supreme agony" attached to the Fugitive's body is not narratively solved; it is held.[430] In Crane's poem, the cost of mastery is figured as technological and spiritual rupture—"SCIENCE—COMMERCE and the HOLYGHOST" swelling in the American roar, and "iron… [that] dealt cleavage"—a modernity that tears the timber even as the poem still insists on "her body there."[431] Within this shared structure, Graham's Pieta gives a visible, stationary form to what Williams and Crane render historically and lyrically: suffering is inassimilable to Puritan reserve, yet it is the central fact of the polity's becoming—borne, literally and figuratively, by the very figures the settler order dispossesses.

Taken together, *The Bridge*, *In the American Grain*, and Graham's developed script engage the spiritual dimensions of American identity not only through the formal theology of the biblical quotation, but also through poetic and mythic civil religious constructions. Crane's vision is vertical, gesturing toward transcendence through lyric abstraction and national synthesis; Williams's is horizontal, rooted in the tactile, historical, and often violent particulars of the American land and its contested inheritances. That this cross-disciplinary body of work repeatedly turns to Indigenous and Black figures—mythologized, mourned, or reanimated—to define that American idiom, even as the cultural agency within these creative circles remains exclusively white, underscores the extent to which such projects rely on Morrison's Africanist presence in their effort to locate a redemptive structure—mythic, moral, and aesthetic—adequate to the scale of American becoming.

[429] Crane, *The Bridge*, 46.
[430] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 5.
[431] Crane, *The Bridge*, 34, 39.

Chapter IV.

Revisions and Remains:

Aesthetic Negotiation and the Civil Religious Frame

With the delivery of her final script to Aaron Copland in September 1943, Martha Graham brought the ballet's textual development to its conclusion. For more than a year, she had revised the scenarios to better articulate her artistic vision while sustaining Copland's creative investment in the project; with this last draft, he now possessed all the dramaturgical material he would receive. Having begun compositional sketches in late May, shortly after the "House of Victory" script reached him, by early summer, he was roughing out what he labeled a theme for an overture and experimenting with the musical contours of the opening episodes. Though primarily oriented toward the expressive range of the Daughter, these early, brief sketches reveal a composer attempting to map Graham's evolving structure.[432] While nothing in the surviving record indicates whether any portion of the music made its way back to Graham, what is clear is that Copland, even while distracted by other projects, was composing, albeit tentatively, in dialogue with the textual architecture she had provided.[433] As he completed his prior obligations, written communication between the two artists entered a more intermittent phase,

[432] Aaron Copland, "*Appalachian Spring* [first rough sketches]," *Aaron Copland Collection*, Vault ML29 ("Martha's Ballet" folder), Music Division, Library of Congress. While the document itself is undated, notations in Copland's hand—referring to the material as "First Rough Sketches" and identifying it under the working title *House of Victory*—indicate that it belongs to this phase of the ballet's development.
[433] During this period, Copland had briefly set aside the commission while completing the score for *The North Star*, a wartime film released on November 4, 1943. Originally conceived as a wartime narrative dramatizing the guerrilla resistance of Ukrainian villagers against the German invasion of the Ukrainian SSR, a project that would have aligned well with Copland's anti-fascism and especially his more progressive leanings, as the film was widely understood at the time as a pro-Soviet work. Its political framing became a liability in the 1950s, prompting a substantial re-edit that removed the idealized depiction of collective farms and added references to the Hungarian Uprising of 1956.

marking a shift in the rhythm of their exchange. By mid-October, he was able to notify Harold Spivacke that his schedule had cleared and could devote sustained attention to the score—a declaration that would have come as a relief to Graham—and, further, would meet personally with Graham at the end of the month.[434]

At that meeting, Copland played for Graham the small portion of the score he had completed, music she later described as "very beautiful" and marked by a strong sense of musical direction.[435] This small teaser from Copland would have placed Graham in a position, much like Copland's while he had waited for the script revisions, of heightened anticipation, anxious to dive into the realization of the choreography. That anticipation was intensified by the fact that *Appalachian Spring* now formed only part of what had become a three-work commission Graham was simultaneously preparing for the Sprague Foundation. Alongside Copland's score, she was also engaged with *Imagined Wing*, set to music by Darius Milhaud, and *Mirror Before Me*—better known as *Hérodiade*—with music by Paul Hindemith.[436] Graham's sustained sense of expectation would stretch across another three months before she would receive additional material, having, by mid-January, finally received roughly half of the score. Acting on her anticipatory feelings, by her own admission, she had been and would continue "hounding" Copland

[434] Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 41. The chronology that follows for the period between late October 1943 and early June 1944 is based on Annegret Fauser's reconstruction of Copland and Graham's correspondence as cited in *Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring*. Because these letters are physically held at the Library of Congress with no digital reproduction and are not presently accessible, the details quoted or paraphrased here reflect Fauser's secondary summaries rather than direct consultation of the archival documents.
[435] Graham quoted in Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 41.
[436] Of the two, *Imagined Wing* would prove short-lived, performed only a handful of times before being dropped from the program and, as one contemporary reviewer observed, "summarily dismissed," while *Hérodiade* achieved far greater critical and institutional success, remaining in the repertory long after the original commissioning context had passed; Margaret Lloyd, "Poetic Imagery in Movement," *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 10, 1945, 8.

for the remaining sections.[437] In the midst of this waiting period, in an unusually blunt moment, Graham revealed her growing frustration in a terse telegram: "Am desperately in need of rest of music—when do you think I can have it?"[438] When Graham next wrote, a full five months later, in response to receiving the completed score, she expressed unqualified enthusiasm—"so happy to have it"—even while acknowledging that she had not yet had the opportunity to hear it.[439] That exhilaration, however, is one Graham herself qualifies in the same letter; while framing the moment as the realization of a long-held artistic dream, she turns to the practical burdens of staging: the financial strain posed by the technical restraints of mounting a tour.[440] Nevertheless, as in earlier correspondence, Graham affirms Copland's compositional achievement, returning to her characteristic mixture of praise and reassurance, that she was confident that "the last of it is as beautiful as the first."[441]

The evidence, therefore, implies that Graham was acquainted with parts of the score, some of which she heard Copland play, yet offers no sign that she had begun shaping choreography in response. This is further substantiated by Graham, rather gleefully proclaiming that she was "writing at once" to Harold Spivacke, informing him that she was ready to proceed "full steam ahead."[442] If the documentary record is

[437] Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 41.
[438] Martha Graham, "Telegram from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, n.d. [1943]," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[439] Martha Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, June 19, 1944," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[440] While Graham expresses her satisfaction with the thirteen-player arrangement Copland planned for their upcoming Washington performance, she voices significant financial and logistical concerns regarding future tours. To manage budgetary constraints and rehearsal difficulties, she suggests the possibility of reducing the string section when performing away from major venues, due to a single evening's program typically requiring uniform instrumentation. Graham also discusses the potential for a full orchestral version of the work, though she notes that her teaching schedule and the costs of copying parts prevent an immediate expansion.
[441] Graham, "Letter to Aaron Copland, June 19, 1944."
[442] Graham, "Letter to Aaron Copland, June 19, 1944."

somewhat fragmentary and opaque, its implications are not; the music was conceived as a direct reflection of the script's episodic arc, its internal rhythms keyed to the structural and emotional coordinates Graham had defined. Copland's extant drafts align with the episodes of Graham's final "Name?" script, down to the marginal timing notes written in her hand: from the "Prologue" to "Eden Valley," and closing on "The Lord's Day."[443] And yet, as Graham had long acknowledged, the script was never intended as a set of binding instructions, but as a generative instrument, a provisional frame from which she felt free to depart once the "inner life" of the dance revealed itself.[444] Her early appeal to Copland, that its "literary terms" had to "come alive in a more plastic medium" and that he should "let the music take its own life," only deepened after she had lived with the score for several weeks.[445] What struck her most was the coherence: "It is so knit and of a completeness," confessing in a follow-up letter to becoming "obsessed" with it, even "cursing" as she began to sense that the music would compel her to rethink elements of the scenario, anticipating a stark departure from the textual world she had so carefully constructed."[446] As she put it, the score "takes you in very strong hands and leads you into its own world," marking, for the first time in the collaboration, a shift in the creative center of gravity: rather than Copland building on Graham's textual architecture, Graham

[443] The alignment of the score—particularly in Copland's handling of tempo—with Graham's scripts is evident in Copland's handwritten notations throughout the score delivered in June. This alignment was subsequently formalized in the black-line piano rehearsal score, reproduced via the diazo chemical printing process and used in the days immediately preceding the premiere; see Martha Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, June 19, 1944," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress; and Aaron Copland, "*Appalachian Spring* (Piano rehearsal copy no. 2)," *Martha Graham Collection,* Box 10, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[444] Graham, "Letter to Aaron Copland, July 22, 1943."
[445] Graham, "Letter to Aaron Copland, July 22, 1943."
[446] Martha Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, August 5, 1944," *Aaron Copland Collection,* Box 255/22, Music Division, Library of Congress. All subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from this letter.

recognized that she would need to meet the music where it stood—a recognition she registers with disarming simplicity when she concludes, "And there I am."[447]

The path from Graham's shift into the musical world of the score to the form the ballet ultimately assumed is the subject of the remainder of this chapter, proceeding in three phases. The first considers elements that shaped the work's final contours: the coherence of Copland's music, which pressed against Graham's episodic design; the 1944 critical reevaluation of *American Document* over its representational strategies; and the contribution of Isamu Noguchi, whose stage design anchored the ballet's emerging theatrical idiom. The chapter then moves from conditions of production to conditions of legibility, turning first to the rhetorical field immediately surrounding the ballet's completion and premiere, before moving into a close reading of select elements of the performance through the lens of the symbolic civil religious structures activated on stage. While previous chapters drew chiefly upon textual materials, this section brings the visual field into view—sets, staging, and other contextual imagery—to clarify how the ballet's final form was articulated in practice. By attending to how the ballet organizes and animates space through plastic (sculptural) design and the patterned articulation of movement, this section traces the processes by which the work consolidated its expressive identity. In doing so, the chapter reads *Appalachian Spring* as the culmination of a creative trajectory defined by what the final staging preserved, transformed, or abandoned.

[447] Graham, "Letter to Aaron Copland, August 5, 1944."

Setting the Stage

The emergence of the ballet's final form is inseparable from the musical architecture Aaron Copland established, a score whose internal logic redirected Graham's choreographic imagination. Up to this point, her structuring devices, developed across "House of Victory," the multiple "Name?" drafts, and their antecedents in *American Document*, depended on an episodic grammar: scenes arranged as discrete tableaux, sequences that could be theatrically punctuated by silence, and the periodic eruption of biblical or civic utterance. This textual motif assumed accommodation within the acoustic field: pauses into which speech could enter, ruptures that could pause or reset temporal logic, and a dramaturgical rhythm that moved between action and declamation. Copland's score, by contrast, unfolded as a fluid, continuous musical line, one that left little room for interruption or rhetorical incursion.[448] Through seamless transitions and tightly knit motivic development, the music dissolved the sectional breaks that had structured Graham's earlier narrative imagination, narrowing the spaces in which silence, spoken utterance, or discrete dramatic units might intervene. Her only recourse, as Annegret Fauser correctly assesses, was to collapse "the characters and story lines... into a tight plot."[449] To choreograph the ballet to this music was to abandon the suggestions of recursive temporal modality and episodic sequencing of her scripts and to submit instead to a musical line whose sustained flow compressed the narrative fragments into a single unfolding arc. This shift would ultimately necessitate a conceptual realignment of the

[448] While Annegret Fauser argues that Graham's episodic dramaturgy "found its echo in the musical structure of the score," such an alignment holds most convincingly at the level of tonal organization rather than formal segmentation; the score's through-composed continuity, sustained by seamless transitions and tightly integrated motivic development, effectively forecloses the episodic interruptions that had previously structured Graham's dramatic imagination; Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 42.
[449] Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 42.

ballet's representational framework, initiating a transition from the literal staging of historical friction toward a unified if mediated structure capable of holding, in mythic suspension, America's unresolved past and present, its subaltern erasures, and, as will be shown, the exigencies of wartime ethnic displacement.

Copland's more direct approach to the score emerged, in part, as a deliberate, almost visceral, response to Graham's aesthetic, which he understood as requiring music that was at once disciplined, uncluttered, and structurally whole, a formulation consonant with Shaker aesthetics. As he later explained, "When I wrote *Appalachian Spring* I was thinking primarily about Martha and her unique choreographic style, which I knew well . . . there's something prim and restrained, simple yet strong, about her which one tends to think of as American."[450] That perception was not idiosyncratic. Writing in *The Nation* in 1938, Lincoln Kirstein characterized Graham's movement vocabulary as carrying "moral and almost didactic overtones," describing her as a "New-England Puritan" whose physical presence recalled "New Bedford sailing-ship figure-heads" and whose "surface finish" resembled "useful Shaker wood-turning."[451] A year earlier, in his 1937 pamphlet *Blast at Ballet: A Corrective for the American Audience*, Kirstein associated her formal restraint with the "economy and suavity of Shaker architecture or wood-carving."[452] In a separate 1937 essay on Graham, he extended the analogy further, writing that she had created "a kind of candid, sweeping and wind-worn liberty for her individual expression at once beautiful and useful, like a piece of exquisitely realized Shaker furniture or

[450] Aaron Copland, liner notes, recording of *Appalachian Spring*, performed by Eduardo Mata and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra (RCA Red Seal ARL1-2862, 1978). As the work lacked a settled title, Copland began referring to the score as "Ballet for Martha," a working designation that underscored both the choreographer's centrality and the absence of a fixed public identity for the piece at this stage.
[451] Kirstein, "Dance: Martha Graham at Bennington," 230.
[452] Lincoln Kirstein, *Three Pamphlets Collected: Blast at Ballet (1937); Ballet Alphabet (1939); What Ballet Is All About (1959)* (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1967), 249.

homespun clothing."[453] Across these formulations, Kirstein repeatedly marks Graham with a distinctly New England–Protestant aesthetic, aligning her choreographic language with the moral economy, restraint, and material plainness culturally associated with Shaker tradition. Copland's sympathy with that idiom—having long contemplated a Shaker-influenced work—found expression in his turn toward a deliberately pared-down musical style during the previous decade, an evolution that aligned naturally with both his modernist agenda and Graham's own preference for distilled, essentialized forms.[454] In both "House of Victory" and the subsequent "Name?" scripts, Graham was careful to state that "there need be no use of folk material except as you see fit," explicitly reminding Copland of his own capacity to evoke national character through abstraction rather than quotation.[455] Pointing to what she called "the utterly unforgettable quiet part of the LINCOLN work,"—as opposed to the derivations of "Camptown Races" or "Springfield Mountain"—she praised its having been "woven on this country's loom without seeming to use any folk material really," a formulation that clarifies her resistance not to national idioms but to overt folk literalism even as Shaker imagery persisted as a visual and kinetic presence within Graham's scripts.[456] From the earliest descriptions of the set, the centrality of a "Shaker rocking chair with a bone-like simplicity of line" was emphasized, and in the final script she extended that sensibility into movement itself, noting that the closing section, "The Lord's Day," "could have the

[453] Kirstein, *Three Pamphlets*, 52.
[454] Edwin Denby—poet, dance critic, and librettist for Copland's *Second Hurricane* (1937)—noted Copland's interest in a Shaker project as early as 1941, writing, "I go around telling all the poets I meet you are looking for a Shaker one acter, it's like planting cherry pits in the yard"; quoted in Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 639.
[455] Graham, "House of Victory," 6; Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, between 10 July 1943," 2; Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, between 29 May and 10 July 1943," 6.
[456] Graham, "House of Victory," 6; Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, between 10 July 1943," 2; Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, between 29 May and 10 July 1943," 6.

feeling of . . . a Shaker meeting where the movement is strange and ordered and possessed."[457] As David Vanderhamm notes, the Shaker's broad appeal lay less in historical precision than in the symbolic utility they offered—an available lexicon of American virtue and aesthetic clarity that could be mobilized without ethnographic constraint.[458] When, in mid-March, Copland presented Graham with what would become the most recognizable portion of the score—the overt citation of the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts," recalling his earlier vernacular invocation of "Camptown Races" in *Lincoln Portrait*—she hesitated over its suitability. That hesitation persisted even after the arrival of the completed score, easing only after nearly two months of living with the music—Graham finally conceding that the tune would "stay with people and give them great joy," thereby signaling her acceptance of its expressive and cultural resonance.[459]

The musical vocabulary resonated not only with Graham's aesthetic but with the broader cultural discourse surrounding the Shakers, whose material culture and music had come to signify an idealized American simplicity.[460] The Shaker movement originated in Manchester, England, in 1747 and entered the Anglo-American press through reports that framed its beginnings around a "prophet and prophetess," figures said to have received their religious tenets through visions—a characterization codified in a 1769 *Virginia Gazette* reprint of a foreign correspondent's notice and marked by a tone of observational

[457] Graham, "House of Victory," unpaginated (first page); Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, between 10 July 1943," unpaginated (first and third pages); Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, between 29 May and 10 July 1943," unpaginated (first page), 3, 5, 11.
[458] David Vanderhamm, "Simple Shaker Folk: Appropriation, American Identity, and *Appalachian Spring*," *American Music* 36, no. 4 (2018): 507–26, esp. 520.
[459] Graham, "Letter from Martha Graham to Aaron Copland, August 5, 1944."
[460] For an overview of Shaker history that informs the following discussion, see Jane Crosthwaite and Christian Goodwillie, *Millennial Praises: A Shaker Hymnal*; for a fuller treatment of the movement's development in America, see Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*.

distance rather than theological engagement.[461] Under the leadership of Ann Lee, known more familiarly as Mother Ann, a small group of Believers, as they were known amongst themselves, migrated to America in 1774 to escape persecution and establish a new society based on celibacy, pacifism, and communal property. More specifically, Shaker culture has long been organized around what are commonly known as "the 3 C's," which comprise, as one of the three remaining Shakers as of 2025—explains, "the confession of sin," understood as "the opening of the mind and the gateway to the church"; the "community of goods," in which "nobody owns . . . anything, but we all own everything"; and "celibacy," modeled on the celibate life of Christ.[462] The last of these core tenets is among the severest structural limits on the possibility of a self-sustaining religious community. Although the society reached a mid-nineteenth-century peak of roughly 6,000 members, the demands of celibacy and the pressures of modernization produced a steady decline, leaving only a single community active as of 2026. Shaker spiritual life is further defined by a radical separation from the world and a belief in the religious value of daily labor, often condensed in the maxim "Hands to work and hearts to God."[463] These principles guided an unwavering belief in pacifism, a defining feature of Shaker society: during the American Revolution, Believers refused to take up arms and discouraged others from joining the military effort, a stance that brought persecution and imprisonment, and reinforced their status as a distrusted religious minority subject to hostility and mob violence. Even during later global conflicts such as World War II,

[461] *The Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg, VA), no. 964 (November 9, 1769), printed by Purdie and Dixon, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Special Collections.
[462] Madi Smith, "The Number of Shakers in the U.S. Rises to 3," *NPR*, August 19, 2025.
[463] Janet A. Kaplan, "The Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, Contemporary Art, and the Shakers: A Conversation with Janet A. Kaplan," *Art Journal* 57, no. 2 (1998): 10.

Shakers sought to maintain a serene distance from the world's strife, performing non-combative service through industry and letters of comfort rather than military participation.

Within this religious economy, worship assumed a form that appeared startling to outsiders. Among the most "outwardly defining characteristic[s] of the sect variously called Shakers, Shaking Quakers, Believers, and the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing has always been their singular use of music and dance in worship," a practice that became inseparable from the communal principles that structure Shaker life as it gradually became organized into a uniform ritual practice.[464] Early Shaker music was predominantly wordless, expressed through "unknown tongues" or vocables such as "lo-de-lo," which provided rhythmic scaffolding for dance rather than semantic meaning.[465] Only by the early nineteenth century did Shaker missionaries begin composing hymn texts as a means of communicating their unconventional theology to potential converts. The publication of *Millennial Praises* (1812–13), the first Shaker hymnal, marked a decisive shift, offering 140 hymns that articulated a radical feminist and millennial doctrine. Jane F. Crosthwaite describes the collection as a crucial "bridge between theological argument" and communal practice, translating complex belief into a "pithy and concise hymn format" capable of circulating among a popular audience, while advancing a "binary male and female universe" that replaced the traditional Trinity with an "Everlasting Two"—a dual Godhead of Father and Mother.[466] However, Stephen Stein cautions that such formal theological records generate an idealized picture of Shakerism,

[464] Jane F. Crosthwaite and Christian Goodwillie, eds., *Millennial Praises: A Shaker Hymnal*, with Daniel W. Patterson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 1.
[465] Crosthwaite and Goodwillie, *Millennial Praises*, 5.
[466] Crosthwaite and Goodwillie, *Millennial Praises*, 5.

noting that the sentimental spiritual values of published hymnody often conflict with the highly factional and disciplinary realities recorded in private Shaker journals.[467] He identifies persistent internal "fault lines" between progressives and traditionalists, recurrent regional tensions between communities, and a leadership structure that relied upon "pastoral" rebukes to secure communal obedience.[468] Private correspondence likewise reveals sustained efforts to suppress "independent spirit" and "insubordination," with members chastised as selfish for resisting communal directives, while other firsthand accounts suggest a degree of surveillance and control at odds with the familiar image of Shaker simplicity and serenity.[469]

In this sense, as Stein observes, both popular and academic "accounts of Shaker history [were, and] remain antiseptic."[470] As Shakerism moved further into twentieth-century cultural circulation, its public persona became sufficiently detached from its religious discipline so as to invite commodification. While Shakers had long sold goods such as seeds and chairs to support their communities, the modern period saw the "Shaker image" itself become a commodity for elite and urban consumers, driven by collectors who transformed the pursuit of Shaker artifacts into a lucrative calling.[471] By 1939, department stores such as Wanamaker's were marketing "Shaker Simplicity" as a fashion idiom, presenting the sect's austerity as a reservoir of aesthetic possibility.[472]

[467] Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 426–29.
[468] Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, 429.
[469] Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, 347.
[470] Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, 430.
[471] See esp. Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, 422–24 and Vanderhamm, "Simple Shaker Folk," 514–18.
[472] For a reading of the advertisement focused on the marketing of Shaker cultural artifacts, see Vanderhamm, "Simple Shaker Folk," 517–18.

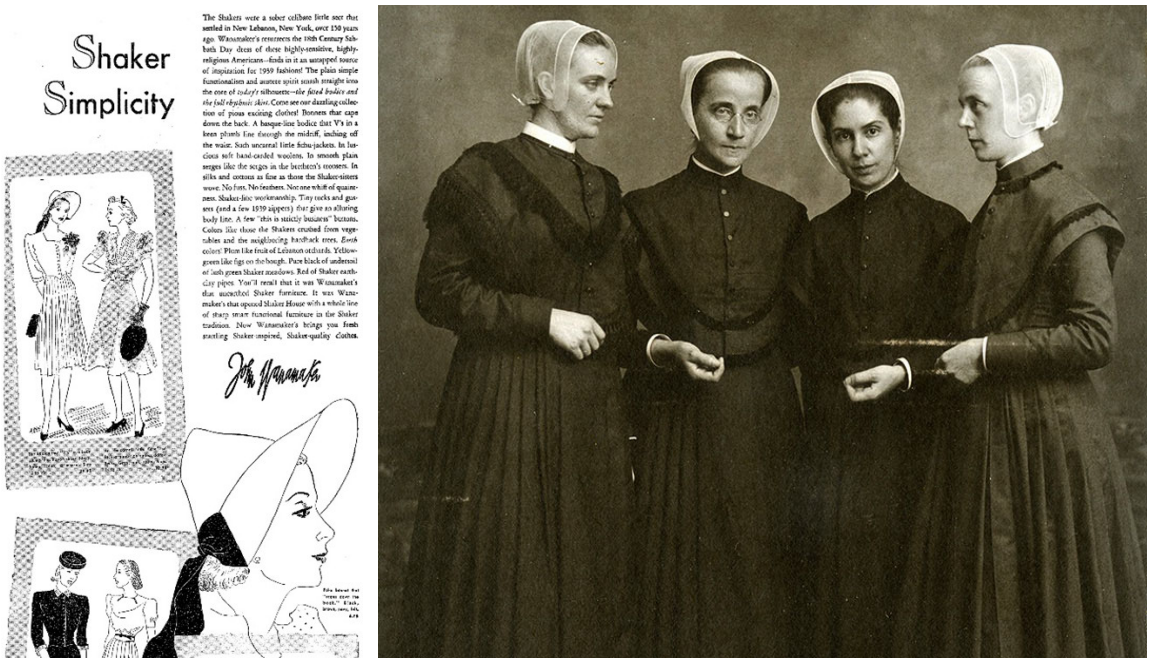


Figure 1. Shaker Simplicity

Left to right: (a) "Shaker Simplicity." Advertisement. New York Times, January 19, 1939, 20. (b) Women of the Canterbury Shaker Village. Photograph reproduced in Laura Mars, "The Year of the Shaker Woman," Berkshire Magazine, March 13, 2024.

A half-page advertisement (Fig. 1a) in the *New York Times* proclaimed:

> "Wanamaker's resurrects the 18th Century Sabbath Day dress of these highly-sensitive, highly-religious Americans—finds in it an untapped source of inspiration for 1939 fashions! The plain simple functionalism and austere spirit smash straight into the core of today's silhouette—the fitted bodice and full rhythmic skirt. Come see our dazzling collection of pious exciting clothes!"[473]

When the language of "Madison Avenue" marketing is contrasted with the stern posturing of actual Shaker women (Fig. 1b), an ironic tension arises from the gap between an embodied ascetic practice and its fashionable abstraction. One dress was

[473] "Shaker Simplicity," advertisement, *New York Times*, January 19, 1939, 20.

described as featuring "an 'uncarnal little fichu' of lacy organdy on sinless dotted Swiss," a verbal overlay that mobilizes theological vocabulary to imply not only innocence but the repression—or desired absence—of carnal desire.[474] Such language resonates with Graham's Puritan-inflected imagery while also recalling Williams Carlos Williams's critical treatment of Puritan severity, which he renders not as a living moral system but as a residual structure emptied of theological authority. In *In the American Grain*, Williams repeatedly frames American culture as haunted by such inherited forms—what he describes as the afterlife of a "relic of some died out tribe," a "malfeasant ghost" that persists through habit and structure rather than spiritual conviction.[475] This tethering of simplicity to moral rectitude was not accidental. John Wanamaker, a pioneer of the American department store, conceived commerce as a vehicle for Protestant reform, transforming a former revival tabernacle into a retail "temple" dedicated to ethical practice. As Nicole Kirk argues, he practiced a form of "aesthetic evangelism," using architecture, fine art, and pipe-organ music to cultivate moral and cultural refinement.[476] Catering to an upscale urban clientele, the store's carefully managed "racial demographics," in Rachael Buckley's interpretation of Kirk's analysis, "protected societal hierarchies and forcibly made a 'safe space' . . . for white, middle-class" consumers drawn to its projection of elite taste.[477] David Vanderhamm situates this process within Van Wyck Brooks's notion of a "usable past," a selectively constructed inheritance through which modern cultural arbiters detach moral and aesthetic energies

[474] "Shaker Simplicity," *New York Times*.
[475] Williams, *American Grain*, 115, 65.
[476] Nicole C. Kirk, *Wanamaker's Temple: The Business of Religion in an Iconic Department Store* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 12.
[477] Rachel Beckley, "Playing with Noah in Wanamaker's Temple: (Re)Thinking U.S. Christianity in American Studies," *American Studies* 58, no. 2 (2019): 10.

from their historical conditions and redeploy them as legitimating resources in the present.[478] In Brooks's formulation, this imperative arises from an American culture whose inheritance has been rendered "meager" and inaccessible by institutional custodians who have "cheated" writers of their own traditions, necessitating a past that can be imaginatively reclaimed and made available as a repertoire of "apt attitudes and adaptable ideals."[479] Stein describes the resulting embrace of Shakerism as a form of "collective nostalgia," in which consumers attempt to buy into an idealized national heritage in order to manage the anxieties of modern life.[480] In this process, Shaker religion itself becomes the casualty: objects such as chairs and baskets are transformed into "religious furniture" that does not "talk back," inviting modern viewers to project fantasies of tranquility and moral clarity onto mute forms.[481] The same curatorial logic governs Shaker music and dance, which circulate as aestheticized fragments available for insertion and removal at will, a condition that parallels the instrumentalization of subaltern figures traced in the previous chapter, where cultural materials remain expressively useful precisely because they can be detached from the histories that once gave them force.

Copland's compositional premise, writing for Graham as an American archetype in sympathy with a distinctly American religious idiom abstracted for material culture, helps clarify the score's impact, narrowing, though not precluding, the conditions under which spoken biblical utterance and episodic division could meaningfully function. In

[478] Vanderhamm, "Simple Shaker Folk," 511.
[479] Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," in *The Dial; A Semi-Monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information (1880-1929)*, LXIV, no. 764 (1918).
[480] Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, 425.
[481] Stein, *The Shaker Experience*, 424.

works such as *American Document* and “House of Victory,” such mechanisms, enmeshed in the music, had supplied structural and tonal scaffolding, permitting the voice to intervene—interrupting action, reframing historical scenes, or imposing moral commentary. But as the integrated logic of Copland’s score made these interventions increasingly untenable, it served as the defining catalyst for Graham’s move away from textualized dramaturgy and toward a choreographic language capable of sustaining continuity without rhetorical interruption. It also reframed the representational problem itself: if the narrative structure could no longer depend on breaks or declaimed lines, then the figures and symbolic devices embedded within it would require reconsideration. In this way, Copland’s score did not merely influence the choreographic vocabulary; it precipitated a conceptual realignment, tightening the ballet’s expressive frame and prompting Graham to seek choreographic forms that could meet the music on its own terms.

This shift in formal pressure coincided with a second development, one that further clarified the dramaturgical elements Graham could no longer theatrically sustain: the critical reevaluation of *American Document* during its spring 1944 revival. While the archival record of Graham’s thinking at this moment is sparse—marked by long silences and scattered references—the published reviews suggest an animated and conspicuously public debate surrounding her treatment of race, democracy, and the portrayal of “American” identity. In doing so, they cast retrospective scrutiny on structural and representational devices she had carried forward through “House of Victory” and into the “Name?” scripts. John Martin’s assessment was pointed, observing that "perhaps nowhere else in her entire repertory has she been guilty of cliches such as her [now]

outmoded views," Martin fixed particular attention on the "movement of her Negro slavery section."[482] The language of culpability here is striking, as he explicitly renders Graham responsible for the work's shortcomings by framing it as a personal lag in judgment, treating the choreography as evidence that she had fallen out of step with the times, leaving portions of the work stranded in what he deemed an already superseded aesthetic and moral framework. Edwin Denby was equally severe, if more explicit: in its current form, he wrote, *American Document* amounted to "complete failure," its moral gravity collapsed into "mawkish sentimentalism," with earlier protest elements now thinly staged and overpowered by a tonal disparity with the times.[483] What emerged from these critiques was not merely a waning tolerance for Graham's episodic looseness, nor fatigue with her preferences toward tonal incongruities, but a growing recognition that strategies once perceived as bold—particularly the deployment of minstrel-show framing and the metaphorical substitution of white bodies for Indigenous and Black figures—had become ethically and aesthetically untenable within the progressive cultural milieu she inhabited.

The timing of these reviews, printed less than a week before the arrival of Copland's score and immediately preceding the commencement of choreography, would have amplified their significance for Graham's subsequent process. Though Graham had persisted with these motifs in the scripts—continuing to articulate subaltern figures such as the Fugitive through explicitly racialized movement—the public challenge to such formulations would almost certainly have given her pause. In earlier contexts, such

[482] John Martin, "Ballet Theatre Does 'Barn Dance': Catherine Littlefield's Work Proves …," *New York Times*, May 10, 1944, 17.
[483] Edwin Denby, "The Dance: Sweet and Sour Americana," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 12, 1944, 13A.

representational substitution was considered an acceptable symbolic idiom; in the climate of 1944, however, these devices, which Rebekah Kowal defines as the "staging of integration," appeared increasingly fraught.[484] Under the combined pressure of shifting racial mores and a nation at war, explicit portrayals of slavery and dispossession would have risked unsettling the image of a “righteous nation” being asserted in opposition to fascism. The suggestion here is that the revival, with its reviews, would have sharpened the distinction between symbolic condensation and racialized substitution at the very moment Graham was being pressed toward greater abstraction. The revival and its reviews thus converged with both Copland’s formal demands and the exigencies of a continuing war, sharpening the choreographic problem Graham now faced: how to articulate “American” identity without recourse to the racialized figures or episodic narrative structures that had organized her earlier work. It signaled that the conceptual ground required transformation.

Under the combined pressure of Copland’s continuous musical architecture and the increasingly untenable critical reception of *American Document*, Graham’s eventual solution was achieved through a process of radical condensation in which the subaltern characters of the scripts were withdrawn as explicit roles and reconstituted within a

[484] Rebekah J. Kowal, *Dancing the World Smaller: Staging Globalism in Mid-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 32; see esp. chap. 1. According to Kowal, the climate of 1944 was defined by a paradoxical "structure of feeling" where the drive toward global integration clashed with persistent Anglo-supremacist and isolationist legacies. This era saw the fracturing of universalism, as critics and artists began to realize that using the white body as a "human common denominator" often masked a process of containment that situated other cultures within a strictly Western grid. Kowal observes that such intercultural stagings became "fraught with ambivalence" during the war years, as emerging standards for ethnic self-definition challenged the authority of white artists to serve as "translational" mediators for subaltern identities. These insights build on Susan Manning’s analysis of this period's transition toward mythic abstraction; these social pressures effectively signaled the eclipse of metaphorical minstrelsy, rendering Graham’s racialized tropes "dated" and "guilty of clichés" in the eyes of 1944 critics; Kowal, *Dancing the World Smaller*, 71, 91, 18, 31.

narrowed cast of archetypal bodies. In the course of this reconfiguration, figures such as the Fugitive and the Indian Girl disappeared, while a Revivalist entered the work accompanied by his four Followers who would absorb the collective presence of the secondary roles—including the Younger Sister, the Children, and the Neighbors, even as earlier civic and familial types were streamlined—the Citizen becoming the Husbandman and the Daughter emerging as the Bride. Subsequent scholarship has retrospectively interpreted this process as one of compression rather than erasure. Mark Franko characterizes the result as the production of "monstrous bodies," in which multiple historically burdened figures are condensed into singular characters carrying the "ghostly" weight of several accretions at once.[485] Jacqueline Shea Murphy, in similarly spectral terms, argues that these figures persist as "ghostly being[s] present in [their] absence," haunting the performances through suggestive choreographic means rather than literal depiction.[486] Read in this way, the disappearance of the Fugitive and the Indian Girl becomes a form of encryption, a transformation of representational specificity into embodied residue.

Yet this account depends upon a position that would be unavailable to the work's initial audience. For viewers about to encounter *Appalachian Spring* in 1944, without access to its discarded scripts or compositional genealogy, these "ghosts" would not have been legible as such. Contemporaneous critical reception emphasized the ballet's clarity, restraint, and affirmative tone, often describing it as a work of untroubled unity with "no hidden meaning at all."[487] By relinquishing metaphorical minstrelsy and the explicit

[485] Franko, *Love and War*, 62, 58.
[486] Murphy, *The People,* 157.
[487] "Music: Purely Symbolic," *TIME*, May 28, 1945.

staging of racialized figures, Graham moved toward a mode of mythic abstraction that converted historical friction into a safe sign of national continuity. In this sense, the ballet operates as a formal enactment of national forgetting, achieving a civil-religious efficacy precisely by erasing the controversial figures that had once animated its scripts. The dissymmetry between what was perceptible to the audience and what remained both visible and audible to the creators is therefore central.

Although a fuller analysis of the performance follows, a brief analysis of a single scene is warranted at this juncture to illustrate its decisive transposition of racially and historically legible figures into an archetypal body capable of absorbing dichotomous political and moral charges. In performance, the historically explicit violence of "Fear in the Night"—previously articulated through the Fugitive and the Citizen as distinct figures—was displaced into a single Revivalist solo, staged against a fixed devotional tableau. In the script, Graham distributed the condition of possession between two historically legible eruptions: the Fugitive's solo, choreographed as the embodied torment of the hunted slave, and the Citizen's subsequent prophetic outburst channeling the moral fervor of John Brown. In the performed version, these two currents are no longer staged in sequence but absorbed into the Revivalist, whose dance unfolds against the "bleaker [musical] sonority" of "Graham's original prompt," while the Bride and Husbandman kneel in prayer, the Mother sits apart, and the four Followers cluster tightly, lifting the Revivalist's hat into a sustained posture of ritual elevation.[488] The Revivalist—or to use Mark Franko's term, the resulting "monstrosity" —did not operate as a decipherable historical sign for contemporary audiences, yet neither was it completely veiled. Early

[488] Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 71.

reception suggests that this condensation was apprehended affectively rather than narratively, allowing the work's historical residue to be apprehended without explicit recognition. Where critic Robert Sabin perceived only a "fanatical and handsome preacher," Howard Moss identified "revivalist evil," articulated through a "persecuting finger and [a] contorted body."[489] Other observers reached for still less stable descriptors, noting a "voodoo-like" intensity mounting in "jungle-born rhythms," subconsciously registering the subaltern tenor.[490] These responses do not suggest recognition of the Fugitive or the Abolitionist as such, but rather the successful displacement of their political charge into archetypal fanaticism. By painting over the idiosyncrasies of a John Brown with generalized religious fervor, Graham met the wartime demand for national cohesion, converting historical friction into a safe, abstracted myth while allowing its affective pressure to persist below the threshold of narrative recognition.

This particular scene, as performed, expands the earlier scriptural-physical third space—the gap between Graham's textual voice and the Citizen's choreographic body—by redistributing that temperamental divide across the ballet's broader formal architecture. In this shift, the representational individuation of the Fugitive and the Abolitionist is withdrawn, only to be reconstituted within the archetypal vessel of the Revivalist. His solo functions as a composite register, where the outward sign of religious fanaticism negotiates with the psychological pressure of an erased national history. By employing what Franko terms an "antinarrative strategy," Graham allows the work to

[489] Robert Sabin, "Dance at the Coolidge Festival," *Dance Observer* 11, no. 10 (December 1944): 120–21; Howard Moss, "Moss Interprets Martha Graham's 3 Dance Dramas," *The Vassar Chronicle* (Poughkeepsie, NY), vol. II, no. 19, January 27, 1945, 1, 4.
[490] Louis Biancolli, "The Dance: Copland-Graham Ballet Blends Best of Two Arts," *New York World-Telegram*, May 15, 1945, 18.

function as a multivalent rendering of national identity: a performance capable of satisfying the wartime demand for patriotic affirmation while remaining choreographically polyphonic.[491] In practice the ballet could be consumed as a "pleasant, good-humored ballet" by the casual observer, even as it retained for others the capacity to register the ghostly "jungle-born" traces of the Fugitive's frenzy, displaced into the Revivalist's fervor without being restored as a character.[492] The noncoincidence of medium and message thus preserves a site of generative possibility, where the "ghostly" residues of subaltern trauma continue to exert affective pressure beneath the ballet's unified, mythic surface.

Formally, the disjunctive nature of this construct preserves a site of generative tension, in which the "present absence" of history is borne by the dancers' bodies, a configuration that extends into the work's physical architecture. Anchored by Isamu Noguchi's contribution, the stage design provided a sculptural scaffolding within which Graham's turn toward a more abstracted American mythos could be sustained, maintaining narrative continuity even as her more literal representational strategies were relinquished. Although often treated as a late-stage addition, Noguchi's involvement should instead be understood as the convergence of an evolving sculptural practice with political and aesthetic pressures already in circulation, pressures that would have subdermal implications analogous to those shaping Graham's choreographic abstraction. These affinities are legible in *Appalachian Spring's* set—its stark planes, open spatial intervals, and distilled symbolic forms—emerging from Noguchi's sustained engagement

[491] Franko, *Love and War*, 56.
[492] "Music: Purely Symbolic."

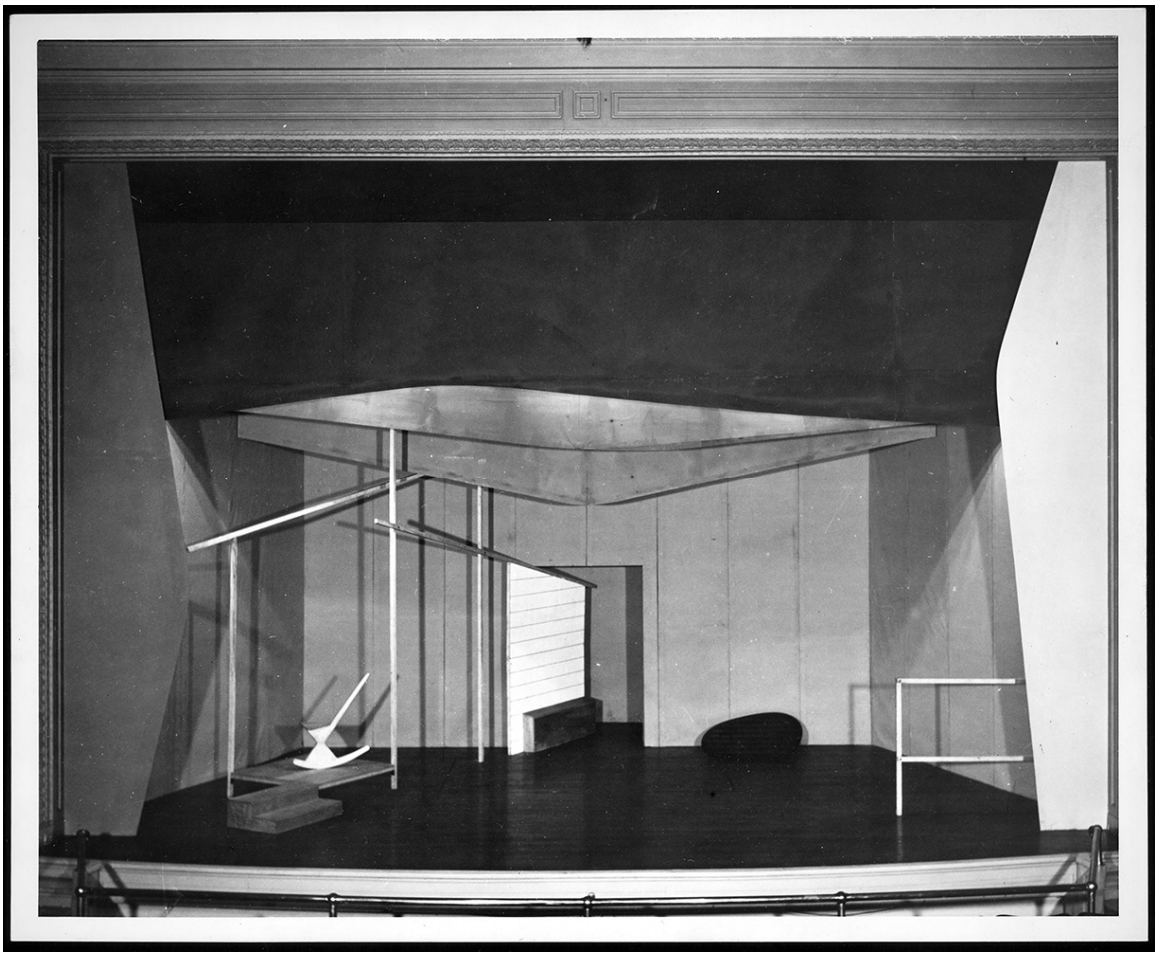


Figure 2: Isamu Noguchi, Stage Set for *Appalachian Spring*, 1944

Premiere Set, Black-and-white photograph. Aaron Copland Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

with progressive political commitments oriented toward marginalized communities, particularly in response to racial violence and exclusion, and intensified by his voluntary confinement at Arizona's Poston War Relocation Center in 1942. Though the bare set from the premiere (Fig. 2) might make it tempting to reduce Noguchi's contribution to a mere translation of Graham's outline, spare as that might appear:

> These are the aspects of building. There will be no heavy construction. There will be the framework of a doorway, the platform of a porch, a

> Shaker rocking chair with its exquisite bone-like simplicity, and a small fence that should signify what a fence means in a new country.[493]

to read the design as an exercise in faithful minimalism, a dutiful materialization of Graham's enumerated objects, risks mistaking economy for literalism. Noguchi's approach to set construction should be viewed instead as inseparable from both his identity as a sculptor, an identity marked by the memory of racialized constraint, and his understanding of art as the animation and ordering of space to express the "continuum" of human existence.[494] That continuum in Noguchi's thinking did not recognize sharp separations between lived environments and performative ones; in other words, stage space was meant to function as a distilled extension of lived social spaces and political ideals, what Bruce Altshuler nicely frames as a "social notion of sculpture."[495]

Long before the war, Noguchi had been a visible participant in New York's activist artistic milieu, sharing left-wing commitments with Martha Graham and Aaron Copland and confronting racial violence directly through his sculptural work.[496] Prefiguring Graham's own encounter with the unsteady ground of artistic reception over *American Document*, Noguchi's moral engagement, however, was tested early by the contentious reviews surrounding his 1934 sculpture *Death* (Fig. 3). Depicting a human figure cast in reflective monel metal and hung by a real rope from a simple steel armature, the sculpture stages both individual agony and collective African American suffering in a single form that implicates the viewer, whose reflected presence is folded

[493] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring* between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 1.
[494] Isamu Noguchi, *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and Bruce Altshuler (New York: H. N. Abrams in association with the Isamu Noguchi Foundation, 1994), 24.
[495] "Clytemnestra and the Dance Dramas of Martha Graham: Revising the Classics," forum panel with Julie Malnig et al., *Dance Chronicle* 33, no. 1 (2010), 23; see the full commentary by Bruce Altshuler for an extended analysis of Noguchi's approach to space and the relationship between the stage and life, 20–29.
[496] See Lyford, *Noguchi's Modernism*, esp. the "Introduction"; and Noguchi, "Oral History Interview."



Figure 3. Isamu Noguchi, *Death (Lynched Figure)*, 1934.

Sculpture in monel metal, rope, steel, and wood. Photograph by Berenice Abbott. The Isamu Noguchi Archive, Photography Collection (Identifier 06796).

into the scene of violence. In reviews of Noguchi's 1935 solo exhibition at the Marie Harriman Gallery, critical responses to the work exposed the constraints placed on such unmediated and intimate ethical gestures by prevailing critical and aesthetic norms within American modernism. In *The Art News*, *Death* was framed as a symptom of corrosive dissatisfaction rather than moral urgency: the sculpture, "a lynching executed in chromium after a [published] photograph," is described as originating in disillusionment and dismissed as "a pendant mass of silvered realism" that is "only a macabre commentary, closely approaching the bizarre."[497] Writing in the *New York Sun*, and deploying a similar logic, the highly respected art critic, Henry McBride, dismissed the sculpture as "the grewsome study of a lynching, with a contorted figure dangling from an actual rope," conceding that it "may be like the photograph from which it was made," yet concluding that "as a work of art it is just a little Japanese mistake"—a phrase that doesn't just racialize the artist but binds aesthetic failure to race.[498] Within this discourse, realism itself becomes the problem—not simply because it confronts viewers with the disfiguring realities of racial terror, but because that confrontation is articulated by a subaltern voice, rendering the critique doubly intolerable. What minimal abstraction exists is overridden through the mirrored reflection as the viewer becomes a participant in the act of lynching. As the writer Erskine Caldwell wrote, "a member of a lynching party is an active participant whether he is merely an observer or whether his own hand do the killing."[499] Here, Noguchi has refused the distancing mechanisms through which violence

[497] Laurie Eglinton, "Noguchi: Marie Harriman Gallery," *Art News* 33 (February 2, 1935): 8.
[498] Henry McBride, "Attractions in the Galleries," review of *New Sculpture by Isamu Noguchi*, Marie Harriman Gallery, New York, *New York Sun*, February 2, 1935.
[499] Noguchi Museum and Archive, *An Art Commentary on Lynching*, Arthur U. Newton Galleries exhibition catalog, ca. 1935, Manuscript Collection, Exhibitions, Identifier MS_EXH_013_001.

might otherwise be displaced by metaphor. His insistence on bodily proximity and moral confrontation rendered the work untenable within dominant modernist conventions, exposing the limits imposed on the legibility of racialized critique.

By contrast, the Baltimore *Afro-American,* an influential advocacy publication, reporting on a subsequent NAACP anti-lynching exhibition that included *Death*, departed sharply from the language of the mainstream press, which had responded primarily to the exhibition as a collective moral intervention rather than to Noguchi's sculpture in isolation. The establishment coverage of the exhibition, more measured than of Noguchi's individual exhibition, acknowledged its seriousness while still framing it as unpleasant, sensational, and of dubious artistic value, describing the show in pejorative terms—such as the *New York Times*'s headline description of a "macabre exhibition" or the *Baltimore Sun*'s characterization of it as a "propaganda exhibition"—even as the underlying anti-lynching message was treated with approval.[500] The *Afro-American*, however, situated the same body of work through a Popular Front perspective, first describing the exhibition as an unprecedented intervention in New York, then framing all forty-four works as a collective "plea for America to become civilized" and finally

[500] *An Art Commentary on Lynching*, which opened February 15, 1935, and ran through March 2, 1935, at the Arthur U. Newton Galleries (11 East 57th Street, New York City). As art historian Helen Langa notes, the exhibition was organized for the NAACP by its executive secretary Walter White as a deliberate publicity-and-pressure initiative aligned with the organization's renewed campaign for federal anti-lynching legislation. The exhibition coincided with escalating Senate debate over the Costigan–Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill, which, as contemporaneous reporting made clear, faced determined opposition and the threat of extended filibuster on constitutional and states' rights grounds. In this context, the exhibition functioned as a cultural analogue to legislative advocacy, staging lynching as a national moral crisis at precisely the moment when federal intervention remained politically uncertain. For contemporary political context, see Arthur Krock's coverage of the Senate impasse, "In Washington: Anti-Lynching Bill Threatens to Tie Up Senate"; for extended scholarly analysis of the exhibition's organization, reception, and political aims, see Langa's study of anti-lynching art exhibitions, "Two Anti-Lynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints." For quotations see "Protests Bar Show of Art on Lynching: Macabre Exhibition Canceled on 'Outburst' of Objections from Secret Sources," *New York Times*, February 12, 1935, 23; "Anti-Lynch Exhibition," *The Sun* (Baltimore), March 31, 1935, sec. 2, 16.

positioning Noguchi as an exceptional presence within the exhibition's moral community, thereby affirming works such as *Death* as a civic indictment rather than an aesthetic misjudgment.[501] The paper's rhetoric repeatedly casts the exhibition in quasi-sacral terms: the assembled crowd was likened not to casual gallery-goers but to pilgrims "going to some sacred shrine, to some high and holy place of atonement," with the walls imagined as bearing witness and those assembled watched over by a "jury of lynched spirits."[502] This ritualized atmosphere was reinforced by the opening program, which included spirituals sung by Edward Matthews, a prominent African American baritone, lending the event the cadence and affective structure of a church service rather than a conventional gallery opening. Against this backdrop, the *Afro-American*'s treatment decisively cast the exhibition as something closer to a moral rite than an ordinary art display or even a conventional act of protest. The presence of the author and humanitarian Pearl Buck, as the keynote speaker, thus provided a dual contextualization of the moment: on one level, identified pointedly as "white," she was rendered less as an individual author than as a surrogate moral voice for her race, speaking from within, and toward, the community implicated in the violence represented by the artwork; on another, her remarks, described as a "sermon" delivered to the dead rather than to the living, re-

[501] G. Fleming, "N.Y. Art Display Condemns U.S. Lynch Practice: 44 Pieces Offer Plea …," *Afro-American*, February 23, 1935, 12; Originally founded in 1889 as *The Baptist Messenger*, this Baltimore-based publication evolved into a prominent voice for the African American community under the long-term stewardship of the Murphy family. The newspaper functioned as a stout advocate for education, frequently criticizing the lack of resources and Black faculty in schools while encouraging readers to pursue mainstream societal integration. Beyond standard news coverage, it employed an editorial style to offer instructional columns on religion, child-rearing, and social etiquette, aiming to empower and refine its audience. Its success eventually made it one of the largest African American newspapers in national circulation, serving as an essential historical record of life in Baltimore; see Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American, 1892-1950* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

[502] Fleming, "N.Y. Art Display Condemns U.S. Lynch Practice," 12; all subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from the same source.

sited moral judgment, displacing interpretive authority away from the spectators and toward the victims of racial terror. Buck's own words sustained the first of these positions, stating that after coming to know people outside her race, she realized there was "no rest for me in my own country" and pledging to raise her voice against "race feelings" and "mob rule," while the sermonic nature of her address sustained the second, binding her oratory to an acknowledgment before the dead rather than the persuasion of the living. In this framing, her "sermon" functioned as a public performance of white accountability, positioning the exhibition not just as a political protest or a documentary mode of exposure, but as a collective act of national reckoning, one that drew on familiar religious forms of confession, judgment, and moral appeal without recourse to ecclesiastical authority to confront a secular national crisis. By singling *Death* out, proclaiming it "alone, worth a visit to the galleries," the *Afro-American* cast Noguchi's work as the paramount source of moral authority, allowing the sculpture's reflective, accusatory address to function as part of the broader civic ritual.

Yet the contingent politics of reception that had shaped the fate of works like *Death* would, after December 1941, give way to a far more coercive confrontation between racial identity and hegemonic power: internment. Hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor over his car radio while traveling to San Diego in search of sculptural materials, Noguchi later recalled that in that moment he understood himself as "not just American but Nisei. A Japanese-American."[503] That recognition hardened into action with President

[503] Noguchi quoted in Noguchi Museum and Archive, *Self-Interned*, 3; Amy Lyford, *Isamu Noguchi's Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and Nation, 1930–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 107. Much of the historical information regarding Poston and the other internment camps is taken from Amy Lyford's excellent monograph, especially Chapter 4, "Negotiating Japanese Confinement," 107–129.

Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066, which initiated the federal internment program and prompted Noguchi to co-found the Nisei Writers and Artists Mobilization for Democracy, a collective meant to combat what he described as the racial "hysteria that was developing."[504] The group, clinging to the ideals of Roosevelt's progressive allegiance to democratic ideals and social justice, authored a "Plan for [a] Government Sponsored Farm and Craft Settlement," framing consent to evacuation as a "duty" and a "measure of patriotism."[505] The proposal drew explicitly on the structural logic of New Deal relief programs he admired, particularly the Works Progress Administration, which framed social welfare through collective labor, and the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which relied on land-use intervention to remove or rehabilitate agricultural space.[506] Its optimism—imagining the revitalization of abandoned land into "a planned and beautiful city"—stood in tension with the stark fact that many of the camps were constructed on established Indian reservations. Seeking a means to "serve the cause of democracy," Noguchi, putting his ideals to practice, chose to volunteer for confinement at Arizona's Poston internment camp.[507] Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier had encouraged and ultimately convinced Noguchi to assist in forming an "ideal community," which Noguchi envisioned as grounded in a "rebirth of handicraft and the arts," a capacity he claimed the Nisei had "so largely lost in the process of Americanization," implicitly

[504] Noguchi, "Oral History Interview."
[505] Isamu Noguchi, "A Plan for Government Sponsored Farm and Craft Settlement for People of Japanese Parentage," Appendix A in *Isamu Noguchi's Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and Nation, 1930–1950*, by Amy Lyford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 207.
[506] Lyford, *Noguchi's Modernism*, 109–110.
[507] Isamu Noguchi, *I Become a Nisei* (Holyoke, Massachusetts; New York: The Brother in Elysium: The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, 2020), 1; Noguchi Museum and Archive, *Self-Interned, 1942*, 6.

casting himself less as a member of that community than as its cultural intermediary.[508] However, his attempt to intervene at Poston proved untenable.

As art historian Amy Lyford demonstrates, the establishment of Poston revealed a deeper colonial structure: federal authority over Indigenous land converged with the management of a captive labor force.[509] Collier explicitly characterized internees as being "colonized," arranging for Noguchi's enrollment to appear as though he were compelled to go to one of "our colonies."[510] Nowhere was this more visible than in the mandated agricultural programs. Internees at Poston were tasked with transforming "sagebrush and silt" into "a green irrigated valley," while the description of a companion camp promised "8,000 acres of raw land" that could "be developed for agricultural production," gains designated not for the displaced population but for postwar use by the tribes whose lands had been requisitioned.[511] In this configuration, agricultural "improvement" functioned as a recursive colonial gesture: land first seized during westward expansion was requisitioned once more, taken from the Indigenous communities under the language of stewardship and development to be temporarily worked by another displaced population and returned—purportedly enhanced—to its original inhabitants, revealing how federal narratives of benevolence and uplift could accommodate successive displacements while preserving the underlying logic of territorial control.

[508] Noguchi Museum and Archive, *Self-Interned, 1942*, 6; Isamu Noguchi to K. R. Fryer, July 28, 1942, Biographical Files, Manuscript Collection, The Isamu Noguchi Archive (MS_BIO_020_005).
[509] Lyford, *Noguchi's Modernism*, 113–114.
[510] Lyford, *Noguchi's Modernism*, 114, quoting letters from John Collier to Wade Head.
[511] United States War Relocation Authority, "Relocation Communities for Wartime Evacuees," (Washington, DC, September 1942), University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections (PNW02129), 7; United States War Relocation Authority, "The War Relocation Work Corps: A Circular of Information for Enlistees and Their Families*"* (Washington, DC, ca. 1942), University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections (PNW01616), 13.

The War Relocation Authority (WRA), the agency created to care for the internees, had presented the centers in terms that masked their coercive and structurally colonistic apparatus, which quickly eclipsed the reformist premises that had animated Noguchi's decision. Built within the unforgiving expanses of the Arizona desert, Poston was far less a "pioneer community," as the government claimed in its official literature, than a structured environment closely resembling prison conditions.[512] Surrounded by barbed wire and regimented into blocks containing rows of standardized barracks, the settlement relied on communal resources, shared mess halls, latrines, and limited personal quarters, which imposed a rigid geometry on daily life. These specifications were not just functionally efficient; they fundamentally altered the rhythms of social interaction.

Life inside Poston juxtaposed the official propaganda of self-sustaining rural industry with an austere reality in which developmental initiatives struggled against climatic extremes. To understand Noguchi's decision to engage in such a harsh environment, one might view his volunteerism in sympathy with his identity as a sculptor as an attempt to treat the social chaos of the war as a spatial problem, in which the camp's environment could be chiseled and shaped into a meaningful community through deliberate design. Yet when Noguchi arrived in May 1942, infrastructure remained incomplete, hampering any additional work, and environmental conditions—described by Noguchi as a landscape of "eye-burning dust," where "the temperature seemed to stand at 120° for three solid months," and most of the internees "became sick"—rendered both his reformist and artistic aspirations largely impractical.[513] For an artist attuned to the dialogue between built form and surrounding landscape, these contradictions were

[512] United States War Relocation Authority, "The War Relocation Work Corps," 2.
[513] Noguchi, *I Become a Nisei*, 3.

psychologically formative. Behind the curtain of benevolent settlement lay a coercive regime in which productive labor was tethered to conditional loyalty.[514] Noguchi himself registered this experience in explicitly carceral terms, noting that the administration staff "seemed to have changed from the sensitive people I knew them to be into our keepers whose word was our law," and that "along with my freedom I seemed to have lost any possibility of equal friendship."[515] Against this coercive backdrop, his attention turned increasingly to the conditions of everyday survival: the reliance on shared facilities, the practical necessity of architectural openness to counter heat, and the quiet ways individuals nonetheless personalized constrained surroundings despite material shortages. As Noguchi conceded, moments of collective elation were repeatedly "defeated by the poverty of our actual condition," by the "lack of water and equipment for farming, of tools and materials," and by the barracks themselves "surrounding us," rendering large-scale transformation merely aspirational.[516] So, after seven months of confinement and repeated failures to attain any foothold either with the camp's fellow internees or the administrative bureaucracy, Noguchi departed Poston on November 12, 1942, not freely but by needing to secure a temporary thirty-day pass to travel to New York.

Although Noguchi initially suggested to camp newspapers that he might return, he remained in New York, effectively abandoning his overt political activism, "resolved henceforth to be an artist only."[517] This withdrawal, however, did not signal a renunciation of the spatial and ethical questions that Poston would force into view, nor an

[514] Enlistment in the Work Corps, the only path for productive contribution, required an oath "in thought, word, and deed," any "disloyal utterance" was subject to "trial and suitable punishment," and all improvements had to be built on federally owned land to ensure that evacuees' labor produced "public, not private, assets." United States War Relocation Authority, "The War Relocation Work Corps," 8, 9, 6.
[515] Noguchi, *I Become a Nisei*, 3.
[516] Noguchi, *I Become a Nisei*, 6.
[517] Noguchi quoted in Noguchi Museum and Archive, *Self-Interned, 1942*, 13.

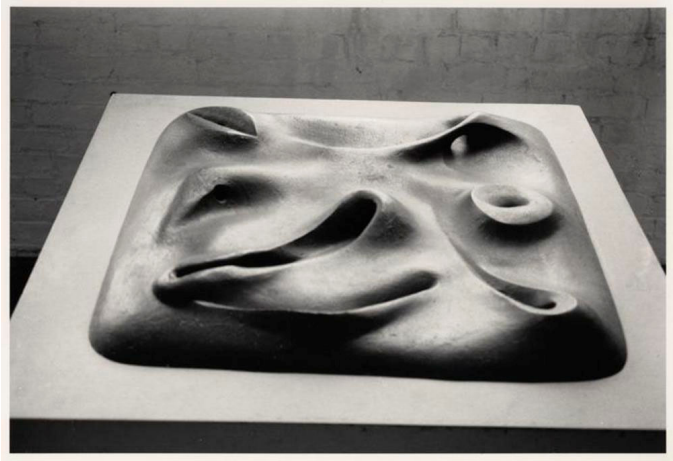


Figure 4. Isamu Noguchi, *This Tortured Earth*, 1942.

Bronze sculpture. The Isamu Noguchi Archive, Photography Collection (Identifier 12723).

abandonment of addressing social and political issues, but it did mark a decisive shift in how Noguchi would address them—no longer through direct political organization, but through a formal vocabulary increasingly reliant on abstraction, displacement, and mediated legibility. If the subaltern critique embedded in *Death*, its confrontational insistence on racial terror as an American fact, was untenable within mainstream modernist criticism, then a direct artistic reckoning with internment in a time of war would have been equally foreclosed. Noguchi's increasing turn to abstraction, in this sense, was not a withdrawal from political meaning but a viable and safe form through which he could sustain critique while remaining legible within dominant aesthetic prescriptions. In the years just after his release from Poston—precisely the years during which Graham was revising "House of Victory" and the "Name?" scripts—Noguchi began turning his representational mode toward biomorphic abstractions. Works such as *This Tortured Earth* (Fig. 4) transposed the affective content of suffering, the human



Figure 5. Isamu Noguchi, *Remembrance*, 1944.

Mahogany Sculpture. Photograph by Kevin Noble. The Isamu Noguchi Archive, Photography Collection.

figuration of anguish found in *Death*, into a textured, undulating terrain. Other pieces, including *Remembrance* (Fig. 5), utilized a modular structural logic that allowed for rapid dismantling and reassembly, marking an aesthetic idiom of "relocatability" that Amy Lyford suggests "mimics" the experience of evacuees forced to pack the pieces of their lives into suitcases during relocation.[518] Yet, this modularity also served as a vehicle for

[518] Noguchi Museum and Archive, *Self-Interned, 1942: Noguchi in Poston War Relocation Center—Curriculum Guide* (Long Island City, NY: The Noguchi Museum, 2017), 13; Lyford, *Noguchi's Modernism*, 156.

adaptive resilience, as the physical requirement of continued reconstruction transformed a symbol of "humanity uprooted" into an act of creative participation that, for Noguchi, made life more meaningful.[519] By demanding this active re-engagement with form, Noguchi aligned his abstract practice with an undiminished faith in democracy, mirroring his belief that despite the trauma of the camps, "the spirit of freedom may be nurtured and grow even in confinement" through collective effort and the "actions of democracy."[520] In essence, reassembling these sculptures was akin to repairing a broken social contract; each time the pieces were fitted back together, it was a renewed democratic gesture, proving that even a fragmented life could be reconstructed into a "planned and beautiful" whole.[521] This interactive understanding of sculptural reception proved readily translatable to the stage, where the manipulation of space could mold not only perception but the contours of the choreography.

Accordingly, recent scholarship has increasingly proposed reading this shift through the lens of Noguchi's incarceration. What emerges across the scholarship is a tension over the extent to which causality and historical legibility may be applied. If, as John Hutnyk argues, histories often enter works obliquely through reception rather than intention, then the problem becomes not whether incarceration was translated into form, but how certain spatial dispositions became available for retrospective legibility.[522] Photographic records of the Poston camp—showing hastily constructed barracks articulated through skeletal framing, planar partitions, and provisional thresholds—

[519] Noguchi quoted in Noguchi Museum and Archive, *Self-Interned*, 2; Yoshinobu Hakutani, "Father and Son: A Conversation with Isamu Noguchi," *Journal of Modern Literature* 17, no. 1 (Summer 1990): 22.
[520] Noguchi, *Nisei*, 7; M. T. O., "An Artist Fights Fascism: Isamu Noguchi, Noted Sculptor, Casts His Lot with the Nisei," *Pacific Citizen*, July 2, 1942, 5.
[521] M. T. O., "An Artist Fights Fascism," 5.
[522] See John Hutnyk, "Hybridity Saves? Authenticity and/or the Critique of Appropriation," *Amerasia Journal* 25, no. 3 (1999): esp. 39–41, 46–47.

underscore the extent to which confinement operated through an extended spatial logic distributed across interstitial zones: roadways, gaps between structures, circulation corridors, and unfinished thresholds, where movement, visibility, and proximity were persistently regulated. In a lecture delivered to the Library of Congress, musicologist Marta Robertson advances an explicitly rectificatory project; "an intervention in the whiteness and privilege of the standard music history narrative" that reframes *Appalachian Spring's* frontier myth through a Japanese-American gaze.[523] While Robertson acknowledges that "given no primary source documentation from Noguchi, it's not possible to say whether" elements of his stage design are physical manifestations of personal historical referents, for example whether internment camp "barracks are echoed in the frame of the house" in the ballet, her analysis nonetheless proceeds by aligning the set closely with the material and symbolic conditions of incarceration, effectively privileging causal implication over evidentiary restraint.[524] Such readings are encouraged by the formal affinities visible across the visual record itself. The photographic evidence in Figures 6a and 6b reveals an environment structured by the rhythmic repetition of exposed rafters and vertical studs, a configuration that finds a striking parallel in the minimalist diagonal geometry of the house's roofline and wall construction, as seen in Figure 6c.[525] Likewise, the rudimentary timber platform captured

[523] Robertson, "'A Gift to Be Simple': Japanese American Influence in *Appalachian Spring*," Concerts from the Library of Congress, May 19, 2021, video, 00:03:42–00:04:15.
[524] Robertson, "'A Gift to Be Simple'," 00:44:27–00:44:55.
[525] Two films document early performances of *Appalachian Spring* by the Martha Graham Dance Company and serve as primary visual sources for this study. An undated archival film, widely circulated online, preserves the original cast in a post-premiere performance at an unidentified venue and is sometimes mischaracterized as having been filmed at the Library of Congress, though no evidence supports that claim. A second version was produced for public television in 1958 by WQED, directed by Peter Glushanok, premiered at Chatham College in January 1959, and was subsequently broadcast nationally on National Educational Television (NET). While both recordings present the same score and Noguchi set without alteration, the choreography exhibits very minor variances in specific moments. Though they do share the

in the Poston construction photograph (Fig. 7b) is reconstituted in distilled form as the elevated base for the rocking chair (Fig. 6c), translating a provisional architectural necessity into a reduced theatrical element. This correspondence becomes tactile in Figure 7a, where the Husbandman's hand rests against a thin, slatted partition that affords only a fragile semblance of enclosure, visually recalling the camp structures' permeable weatherboarding, which left internees exposed to the relentless "eye-burning dust" of the Arizona landscape. Read together, these parallels suggest that the set's formal economy does not merely echo the idea of domestic construction but reconfigures the stripped, standardized vocabulary of the camp within the idiom of the American home, allowing conditions associated with Poston's material austerity to persist through associative interpretation rather than explicit reference.

Art historian Marci Kwan extends this line, offering a more analytically rigorous account, expressly refusing direct correspondence and instead situating Noguchi's design within a spatial logic informed by memory.[526] In Kwan's formulation, the significance of the set resides not in strict representational references but in the residual organization of space through liminal thresholds and skeletal frames that structure the relational movement shaped by lived constraint, configured through subconscious recollection. The distinction is consequential. While no archival evidence supports a conscious or programmatic translation of internment into the scenic architecture of *Appalachian Spring*, the set remains legible as operating under the mental shadow of incarceration: a

same choreographic language, they do differ markedly in stage scale, cast, and cinematographic treatment, reflecting the transition from fixed theatrical documentation to television-specific mediation. The thesis draws on both recordings to support close analysis of staging, gesture, and symbolic embodiment, to clarify claims that cannot be established through the scripts or musical score alone.

[526] See Marci Kwon, "The Fence and the Chair: Isamu Noguchi, Appalachian Spring, and Internment as Modernist Setting," *Modernism/modernity Print Plus* 3, no. 1 (2018).

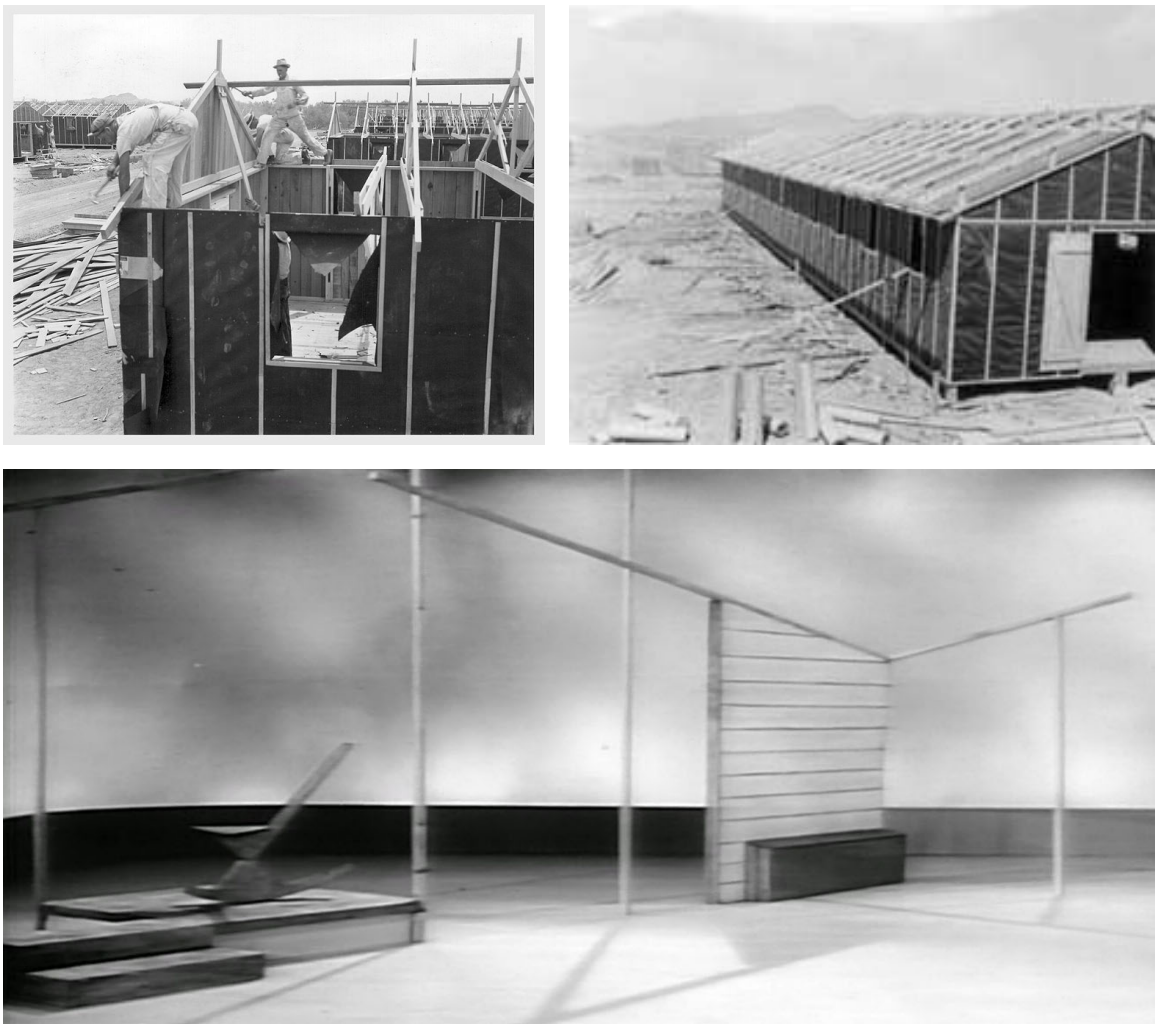


Figure 6. Poston and Appalachian Spring: Structural Comparisons.

Clockwise from upper left: (a) Fred Clark, Barracks under construction at Poston, Arizona, May 19, 1942. Photograph. Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority. National Archives at College Park (NAID 536298); (b) Fred Clark, Parker, Arizona. Partially completed building showing double construction for hot-weather protection, May 9, 1942. Photograph. Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority. National Archives at College Park; (c) Appalachian Spring, filmed 1958. Dir. Nathan Kroll. From Martha Graham: In Performance (Kultur, 2002). Frame at 02:06:19.



Figure 7. Poston and Appalachian Spring: Structural Comparisons.

Left to right: (a) Appalachian Spring, filmed 1958. Dir. Nathan Kroll. From Martha Graham: In Performance (Kultur, 2002). Frame at 01:12:09. (b)Child and barracks at the Poston (Camp II) Relocation Center, Arizona. Photograph from the personal album of Fusako Imoto, documenting daily life at Poston.

sedimented spatial disposition mediated by memory and carried forward in abstracted form.

Considered in isolation, the scenography of *Appalachian Spring* invites precisely the historiographic tension that has structured recent debate. Yet if the three Coolidge Festival commissions are viewed together—as a contiguous body of stage work rather than as discrete designs—a clearer formal trajectory emerges, one that supports reading incarceration as a condition sedimented across Noguchi's theatrical vocabulary rather than localized in any single work. That trajectory is materially registered in a sketchbook sequence by Noguchi (Fig. 8), where a series of vignette-like studies progresses from a flattened scenic ground consistent with the planar logic of *Imagined Wing*, through increasingly articulated spatial volumes explicitly labeled *Hérodiade* and *Appalachian*

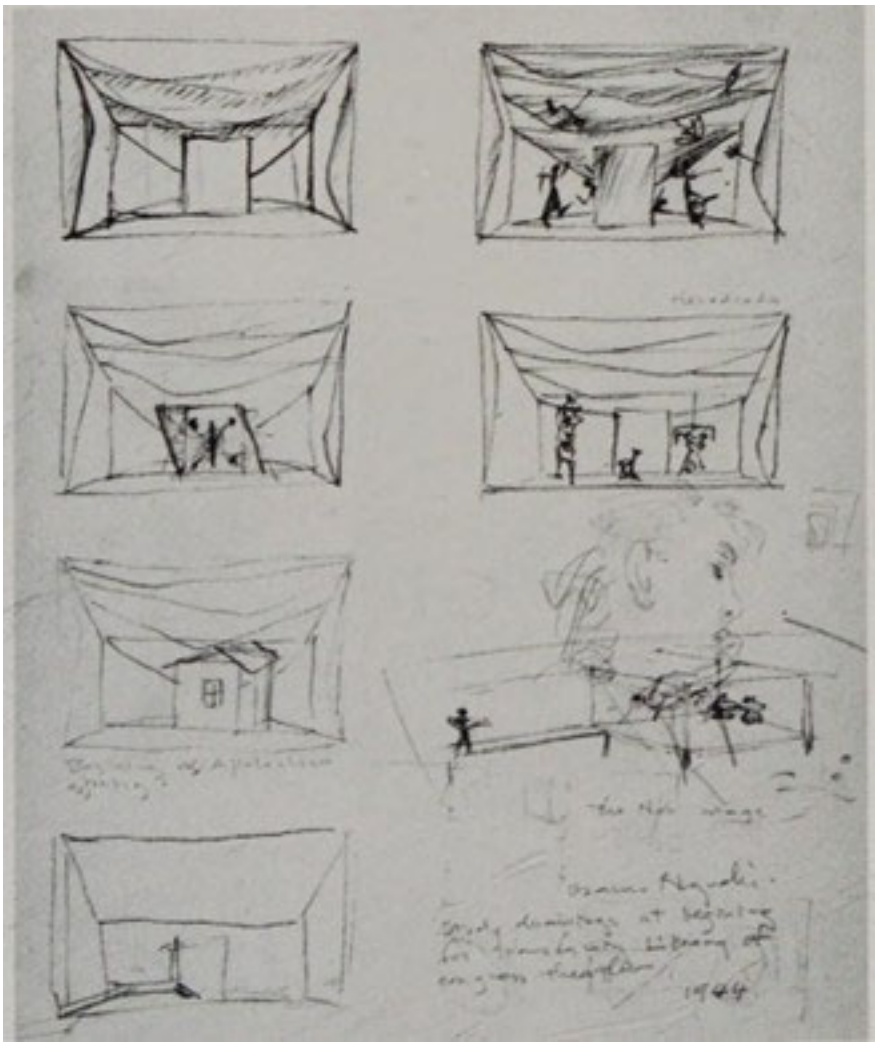


Figure 8. Isamu Noguchi, Design Sketches.

Sketches for the stage set for transformation of the Library of Congress Theatre, pencil on paper, The Isamu Noguchi Archive.

Spring. Though the earliest vignette remains unnamed, contemporaneous reviews of *Imagined Wing* describe a setting comprised of "a solid canvas square changing color accents as the dancers saw fit," a configuration that suggests a radically reduced scenic field: planar, non-architectural, and activated only as the backdrop to the performance,



Figure 9. Isamu Noguchi, *Hérodiade* Set.

Left to right: (a) Hérodiade, 1944. Photograph of the set. Photograph by Arnold Eagle. (b) Hérodiade, 1944. Composed photograph of the set with Martha Graham and Mary O'Donnell. Photograph by Arnold Eagle. The Isamu Noguchi Archive.

descriptions with the sketches.[527] This elemental square—functioning less as an object than as a mutable spatial ground—marks the first stage in a process of abstraction through which space itself becomes the primary medium of meaning. In *Hérodiade*, the planar logic established in *Imagined Wing* persists, as can be seen in Figures 9a and 9b, not through the replication of its singular scenic unit but through the retention of a rectilinear backdrop that sustains the earlier work's visual economy, now inflected by the introduction of freestanding sculptural objects that interrupt the plane volumetrically. These sculptural elements, drawn from the same idiom as works such as *Remembrance*,

[527] Patricia Simmons, "Graham Group Dances Trio of New Works," *The Washington Star* (Washington, D.C.), October 31, 1944. There appears to have been no photographs of the set design taken, probably a reflection of the poor reception that it received.



Figure 10.Isamu Noguchi, Chairs.

Left to right: (a) Hérodiade: Chair, 1944. Photograph by Kevin Noble. The Isamu Noguchi Archive, Photography Collection. (b) Appalachian Spring: Rocking Chair, 1944–1985. Photograph by Kevin Noble. The Isamu Noguchi Archive, Photography Collection.

carry forward Lyford's view of the residual modality of relocation in Noguchi's modular sculptures. *Appalachian Spring* completes this arc by translating those planar and modular principles into an explicitly architectural environment. The partial wall and exposed house frame (Fig. 6c) extend the rectilinear scenic ground of *Hérodiade* into the inhabitable structure, while the chair—already present as an autonomous sculptural element in *Hérodiade* (Figs. 9a, 10a)—reappears embedded within that domestic milieu (Figs. 6c, 10b), shifting from an isolated object to a functional component of architectural space. Across the three works, Noguchi's scenography moves from abstract plane to

modular intervention to architectural realization, tracing a consistent formal logic in which confinement becomes legible both as a sedimented spatial disposition and as a set of visual affinities that invite associative interpretation, registering memory obliquely through abstraction rather than as direct depiction. Framing Noguchi's scenography as a process of translation—from autobiographical memory, intercultural reference, and geopolitical constraint into abstract scenic structure—must be approached with caution, since translation, as invoked here, may operate as an inherently imperfect passage rather than as a claim of equivalence. As Jacques Derrida insists, "in a sense nothing is untranslatable; but *in another sense*, everything is untranslatable," a paradox John Hutnyk extends beyond linguistic transfer to translation understood as a methodological metaphor governing interpretation across cultural forms.[528] In these terms, the set's legibility may suggest the oblique persistence of memory without implying direct or recoverable correspondence between experience and form. Read in this sequence, the claim that *Appalachian Spring* operates under the mental shadow of incarceration is not an isolated interpretive gesture but the culmination of a sustained exploration of how constraint, provisionality, and collective negotiation can be staged through abstraction.

From this vantage, Noguchi's set for *Appalachian Spring* registers less as a symbolic container than as a spatial mechanism whose formal idiom corresponds to the withdrawal of explicit historical figuration from Graham's revised dramaturgy. The

[528] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 56–57; Hutnyk's engagement with Derrida situates translation not as a problem limited to linguistic fidelity but as a methodological figure operative across cultural analysis, extending from ethnography to theories of hybridity. Drawing on Geertz's conception of the anthropologist as interpreter producing "thick description," Hutnyk argues that translation functions as an imperfect, idiomatic passage shaped by positionality, institutional authority, and historical constraint rather than by equivalence or transparency. The present analysis extends this framework to visual and spatial form, treating Noguchi's scenography as a site where memory and historical condition become legible through mediated, non-equivalent translation rather than through direct representation.

question is not whether Poston can be "found" inside the set, but how constraint becomes a durable disposition of form—one in which absence, interval, and threshold assume structural agency. The open frames, suspended planes, and skeletal boundaries do not represent confinement, nor do they allegorize historical experience; instead, they organize movement through regulated passages, orient bodies without enclosing them, and render space itself an active participant in the ballet's meaning. In this configuration, the set aligns with the same formal logic that governs Graham's revised dramaturgy. The set performs for space what the Revivalist performs for the body: each emerges from the same turn toward mythic abstraction as a response to representational strategies that had become aesthetically, ethically, or politically compromised. Just as Graham achieved a radical condensation by withdrawing the Fugitive and the Indian Girl while reconstituting their affective pressure within the Revivalist's composite, archetypal body, Noguchi withdraws the literal imagery of the barracks and reconstitutes the spatial calculus of confinement within the skeletal frame of the house. In both cases, figural specificity gives way to a composite register in which the frontier myth negotiates with the mental shadow of incarceration, and religious fervor serves as the surface register beneath which the suppressed national history of slavery and abolitionism continues to exert pressure. Read together, the choreographic body and the sculptural environment form a unified mode of containment: a rendering of national identity in which ghosted histories remain structurally present even as direct representation is relinquished. The ballet's formal architecture—its continuous musical line, the Revivalist's condensed and "monstrous" body, and the set's open frames and suspended planes—thus operates as an archetypal vessel capable of holding historical tension without recourse to literal substitution. The

result is the use of abstraction as a mediating formal system in which civic myth, historical violence, and national belonging are held in suspension—legible without being declared.

Rhetorical Prelude

The days immediately preceding the premiere of Appalachian Spring offer two instructive instances of a process already shaping the ballet's formal syntax: the detachment of language from the argumentative and historical stakes that originally gave it force. The first is political, the second artistic, but both illuminate how abstraction converts contested symbolic material into portable emblems of national continuity. In the final week of the 1944 presidential campaign, as Allied forces advanced across Europe and the Pacific, but with the contours of a postwar order remaining unresolved, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the midst of his fourth run for the presidency, returned to a familiar rhetorical maneuver: aligning his leadership with Abraham Lincoln's. On October 27, just three days before the premiere, Roosevelt quoted Lincoln during a rear-platform campaign address in Wilmington, Delaware, a shipbuilding center whose wartime production he had praised repeatedly. The quotation itself was brief and familiar, but its use was structurally consequential. When read against its original context, the episode illustrates how Lincoln’s historical language could be mobilized as a rhetorical fragment, continuing to function authoritatively even as it was severed from the argumentative stakes that once gave it force. The speech was informal in tone and modest in length, but its opening gesture was deliberate. Roosevelt framed the moment as historically exceptional, reminding his audience that the nation was holding an election “while the

Nation is at war," something that had not occurred since 1864.[529] That invocation served as the hinge for what followed: a quotation drawn from the sixth Lincoln–Douglas debate at Quincy in 1858, offered as both historical echo and political weapon. Roosevelt recalled a remark Lincoln had made while campaigning against Stephen A. Douglas: "In every way possible he tried to prove that a horse chestnut is a chestnut horse."[530] For Roosevelt, the line functioned as a neatly packaged rebuke to Republican "political oratory … agitating the air waves," a way of characterizing his opponents' arguments as willful distortions rather than substantive disagreements.[531] The effect was immediate and legible. As *The New York Times* reported the following day, Roosevelt "reached back eighty years to another wartime election" and quoted Lincoln while "assailing tactics of opponents," treating the remark as a pointed but genial jab.[532] The *Christian Science Monitor* likewise presented the quotation as a familiar Lincoln "chestnut," a clever historical flourish that underscored Roosevelt's confidence and command.[533] What is striking is not that Roosevelt quoted Lincoln, but which Lincoln he quoted and how completely the quotation was severed from its original argumentative work. In the sixth debate at Quincy, the "horse chestnut" analogy does not function as a general complaint about misrepresentation, but rather as an integral part of a tightly circumscribed exchange about slavery, race, and political bad faith. Lincoln introduces the metaphor while responding to Douglas's claim that he secretly endorsed full racial equality and

[529] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Remarks at Wilmington, Delaware," October 27, 1944, *American Presidency Project.*
[530] Roosevelt, "Remarks at Wilmington, Delaware."
[531] Roosevelt, "Remarks at Wilmington, Delaware."
[532] "Roosevelt Derides Republican Talks: In Wilmington Speech He Quotes …," *New York Times*, October 28, 1944, 8.
[533] "Roosevelt Recalls 'Chestnut' Used by Lincoln in 1864," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 27, 1944, 10.

abolitionist extremism. The phrase is embedded in a long passage in which Lincoln insists that arguments that collapse distinctions between natural rights and social or political equality are not merely mistaken but deliberately deceptive. As Lincoln put it, any attempt to read his position as advocating racial equality amounted to "a specious and fantastical arrangement of words by which a man can prove a horse-chestnut to be a chestnut horse."[534]

The force of the analogy at Quincy depends on the moral pressure of the subject under dispute. Lincoln is not speaking abstractly about rhetoric; he is defending a position that insists slavery is a wrong that cannot be linguistically neutralized. The "horse chestnut" image functions as a warning against euphemism and false equivalence, against the rhetorical smoothing over of a moral contradiction that, in Lincoln's view, demanded clarity rather than compromise. The surrounding argument makes this explicit. Lincoln acknowledges his opposition to racial equality in social and political terms, yet simultaneously insists that Black Americans are entitled to the rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence—"the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Slavery, he argues, cannot be rendered acceptable by rearranging words; to attempt to do so is precisely the distortion the metaphor condemns.[535] By affirming white superiority while simultaneously defending formal legal rights, Lincoln allowed for a "neutral territory" of consensus that sidestepped the political strife entailed by any defense of absolute equality; what, to borrow from Terence Whalen might be seen as "average racism," a methodology used to shift focus to a "common ground"—which, in the 1800s,

[534] National Park Service, "Sixth Debate: Quincy, Illinois," October 13, 1858, Lincoln Home National Historic Site.
[535] National Park Service, "Sixth Debate: Quincy, Illinois."

was often rooted in shared racial prejudices.[536] Whalen's lens is, like Toni Morrison's Africanism, literary, though, while Morrison focuses on the psychic and ontological mirror blackness provides for the white self, Whalen emphasizes the market-driven and social utility, the politics, of that same shadow for white-to-white consensus. Yet, this is not to suggest intentionality on the part of Lincoln—being a man of his times, he was certainly complicit in these shared prejudices—only a resultant condition that served to dampen sectionalism. Perhaps more pointedly, John Burt proposes that Lincoln embodied a certain "tragic pragmatism" by acknowledging that deep moral conflicts often "can be neither evaded nor compromised away."[537] Thus, Lincoln's denial of racial equality, rather than being strategic, was but a part of a messy coexistent "tangle of intuitions" wherein he "both did and did not will racial equality."[538] In Burt's formulation, this isn't just a political marketing ploy, as Whalen might see it, but a recognition of complicity; Lincoln acted knowingly with stained hands, in order to maintain a "prophetic sense of mission" without descending into "crusader politics."[539] Roosevelt's reuse of the line elides this moral field entirely. In Wilmington, the quotation is detached from slavery, race, and constitutional contradiction and redeployed as a generalized expression of frustration with political misrepresentation. As such, the deployment of the metaphor no longer guards against the neutralization of injustice; instead, it becomes not simply a

[536] Terence Whalen, "Average Racism: Poe, Slavery, and the Wages of Literary Nationalism," in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 129; Whalen's average racism was a "strategic construction" used by writers like Edgar Allan Poe and publishers like Thomas Willis White to "expel politics from the literary commodity." By appealing to shared prejudices rather than specific doctrines, they created a "neutral territory of mass culture" that allowed literature to circulate nationally without triggering sectional strife; Whalen, "Average Racism," 112, 145, 140.
[537] John Burt, *Lincoln's Tragic Pragmatism: Lincoln, Douglas, and Moral Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 12.
[538] Burt, *Lincoln's Tragic Pragmatism*, 3.
[539] Burt, *Lincoln's Tragic Pragmatism*, 25.

rhetorical convenience but a commodified portable symbol of embattled leadership able to subdue the unresolved moral conflicts that originally animated it. Roosevelt does not engage Lincoln's words but rather flattens them, abstracting the argument into a ready-made emblem, emptying the quotation of the very stakes that made it meaningful.

Contemporaneous responses make this displacement visible. National newspapers treated the quotation as effective precisely because it required no contextual unpacking. The *New York Times* emphasized the crowd's response and Roosevelt's ease, noting that cheers followed the line and that the speech quickly moved on to production, workers, and the war effort.[540] The *Christian Science Monitor* framed the remark as a timely reminder of Lincoln's wit rather than his moral urgency.[541] In both cases, the quotation circulated as a familiar fragment of Lincolniana, its authority residing in recognition rather than substance. African American newspapers, by contrast, reveal what is lost in this process of abstraction. Editorials and letters published in the *Michigan Chronicle* and *Chicago Defender* repeatedly resisted treating Lincoln as a symbolic stand-in detached from material outcomes. One *Michigan Chronicle* editorial argued bluntly that Lincoln could not be resurrected through rhetoric alone, insisting instead on evaluating Roosevelt through concrete policies affecting Black Americans.[542] Letters to the editor and opinion pieces framed Lincoln as a moral benchmark whose significance lay in action rather than analogy, sometimes invoking him in explicitly religious terms, but always tethered to

[540] "Roosevelt Derides Republican Talks."
[541] "Roosevelt Recalls 'Chestnut.'"
[542] "Republicans Cannot Resurrect Lincoln," *Michigan Chronicle*, October 28, 1944, 2. While the headline critiques the Republican Party's attempts to "resurrect" Lincoln through "insincere propaganda," the editorial uses this point to argue that Black voters should instead judge Roosevelt's Democratic administration by its "concrete policies" and material achievements. By decrying Republican rhetoric, the author emphasizes that Roosevelt more fully embodies Lincoln's legacy through action rather than mere symbolic gestures.

questions of segregation, labor, and political rights, forcing a return to "fraught political particulars," refusing to let, in John Burt's words, the "irony of liberal democracy itself" be smoothed away.[543] W. E. B. Du Bois's contemporaneous endorsements sharpen this contrast further. In both the *Chicago Defender* and the *St. Paul Recorder*, Du Bois measured Roosevelt against Lincoln not symbolically but historically, arguing that Roosevelt had done more for the "uplift and progress of the American Negro than any President since Abraham Lincoln," and then enumerating specific policies—WPA employment, FEPC enforcement, housing, labor rights—that justified the comparison.[544] For Du Bois, Lincoln is not a rhetorical flourish but a standard of accountability. Seen against this broader discursive field, Roosevelt's Wilmington quotation marks a late-war moment in which Lincoln's language circulates most freely when it is least burdened by its original meaning. The analogy survives because it no longer threatens to reopen unresolved moral conflicts; it reassures rather than unsettles an ostensibly white audience. In this respect, Graham's project may be read as operating within a logic similar to Whalen's average racism, with abstraction assuaging the possibility of overt racial confrontation, constructing a symbolic "third space," a neutral ground in which critique remains perceptible to those attuned to its pressures, while allowing those unsettled by such implications to pass through the work without encountering direct challenge. The result is not the erasure of racial tension but its displacement into symbolic form, where,

[543] B. H. Hayes, letter to the editor, *Michigan Chronicle*, October 28, 1944, 6; Burt, *Lincoln's Tragic Pragmatism*, 3, 5.
[544] "Dr. DuBois Says Negroes Should Elect Roosevelt," *Chicago Defender* (National edition), October 28, 1944, 1; W. E. B. Du Bois*, "Dr. Du Bois Tells Why He Supports Franklin D. Roosevelt,"* St. Paul Recorder, October 27, 1944, 3.

as in Burt's tragic pragmatism, moral contradiction persists, held in suspension without resolution.

Read alongside the formal developments already shaping *Appalachian Spring*, Roosevelt's Wilmington address enters the same field of abstraction as a parallel rhetorical construction. Copland's score had pressed Graham away from episodic construction by sustaining an uninterrupted musical continuity; Noguchi's scenography, rather than reproducing specific historical environments, organized space in ways that invite associative interpretation, allowing earlier pressures to remain legible without being restaged. Roosevelt's quotation of Lincoln operates comparably at the level of rhetoric: the line circulates as a familiar fragment, detached from the argumentative context that once structured its force, yet still recognizable and authoritative. Abstraction, in this sense, renders the transgressions of history safe, converting a metaphor forged in the heat of antebellum racial conflict into a benign sign of continuity and endurance. This process, by which symbolic coherence is achieved through the removal of friction, forms part of the same cultural schema that shaped the final form of *Appalachian Spring*, where abstraction offered unity at the cost of historicity and the voices that once animated it.

If Roosevelt's Wilmington quotation shows how Lincoln's language could circulate most freely once detached from the argumentative field of slavery and constitutional contradiction, the late adoption of the title *Appalachian Spring* performs a comparable operation, though across artistic rather than political registers—a phrase translated from one expressive context to another while shedding the specific pressures that originally gave it meaning. In Hart Crane's *The Bridge*, "Appalachian Spring" names a source of water encountered in motion—canoeing, climbing, portage—an eruptive

moment of physical emergence rather than a cyclical image of time. Crane's line, "One white veil gusted from the very top. / O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge," imagines a climactic bodily encounter with the landscape, what Jacqueline Shea Murphy describes as an "orgasmic moment" grounded in the pressure and release of flowing water.[545] Graham's use of the phrase, by contrast, places it in a different register altogether: "Spring is purely symbolic of the springtime of the nation," a formulation that converts a symbolic physical event into an allegory of American beginning.[546] What follows is a temporal and teleological inversion, shifting from apotheosis, the summit of embodied ascent, to genesis and the birth of national myth, as an image once anchored in an erotic bodily encounter with the land now circulates as a name for national renewal, retaining its evocative charge while no longer requiring the terrain, movement, or physical struggle that originally gave it form.

Graham's reassignment of Crane's poetic turn of phrase embodies an ongoing, iterative process through which Appalachia itself had been made legible to elite audiences. From the late eighteenth century through the interwar years, urban writers, journalists, missionaries, and cultural producers repeatedly rendered the region through a paired logic in which the land appeared as a fertile, Edenic wilderness while its inhabitants were cast as primitive, degraded, or stalled in time.[547] Timothy Flint's description of Kentucky as "the garden of God," a "wilderness [that] blossoms as the rose" where man and beast might reach their "full size," exemplifies how the mountains

[545] Crane, *The Bridge*, 47; Murphy, *The People*, 158.
[546] "Music: Purely Symbolic."
[547] For sustained analyses of this paired representational logic—wherein Appalachian land is alternately idealized as Edenic or resource-rich while its inhabitants are rendered primitive, degraded, or temporally stalled—see Katherine Ledford, "A Landscape and a People Set Apart: Narratives of Exploration and Travel in Early Appalachia," and Tyrel G. Moore, "Place Identity, Regional Imagery, and Regional Policy: Connections from Nineteenth-Century Southern Appalachia."

were imagined as a space of unspoiled generativity rather than as a lived social world.[548] Hart Crane's personification of the Appalachian landscape as the "bride" Pocahontas, her "brown lap" figured as "virgin May," extends this sexualized, gendered gaze upon the land into modernist poetry, recoding territory as an inviting body rather than a site of contested history.[549] Yet this Edenic landscape was rarely imagined as belonging to those who lived within it. Explorers and speculators such as William Byrd II described the mountains as harboring "treasure in the bowels of the earth" that would redeem the "poverty of its surface," establishing a way of seeing in which land mattered primarily as a future commodity rather than as a present home.[550] Byrd's outlook was explicitly prospective and extractive while also shaded by a feminized symbolic geography: his "hopes were in the riches that might lie under ground," and he went so far as to name local landmarks "Potosi" in response to their "metallic appearances," projecting onto the Appalachian terrain the cloak of mineral wealth and deferred value that informed early modern imperial extraction while also perceiving the topography through an anatomical lens that found the 'Shape of a Maiden's Breast' in the mountain ridges.[551] Capitalistic

[548] Timothy Flint, *The First White Man of the West; or, The Life and Exploits of Col. Dan'l Boone, the First Settler of Kentucky* (Cincinnati and Philadelphia: H. M. Rulison and D. Rulison, 1856), 52.
[549] Crane, *The Bridge*, 46; Murphy, *The People*, 158. For a foundational study of the gendered metaphors that structure the American relationship to the land, see Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975). Kolodny argues that the American landscape has historically been experienced as a "total female principle of gratification," a psychological orientation she terms the "pastoral impulse." She specifically notes that the figure of Pocahontas functions as an "objective correlative" for the European possession of the "virgin continent," a framework that clarifies how Crane's personification facilitates a sense of "receptivity, repose, and painless... satisfaction" while obscuring the historical realities of mastery and despoliation. Kolodny*, Lay of the Land*, 4, 6–7, 24, 5, 4.
[550] William Byrd, *The Westover Manuscripts: Containing the History of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina: A Journey to the Land of Eden, A.D. 1733, and A Progress to the Mines* (Petersburg, VA: Printed by Edmund and Julian C. Ruffin, 1841), 112.
[551] Byrd, *Westover Manuscripts*, 112. William Byrd, *Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, introd. and notes by William K. Boyd, new introd. by Percy G. Adams (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 249.

framing thus went hand in hand with a colonial vocabulary of sexual possession smoothed over by imagery of maternal nurturing. In this gesture, the land was apprehended less as inhabited territory than as latent sustenance awaiting technical and economic activation.

The invocation of Potosí was not incidental. The sixteenth-century Andean silver mountain—discovered in 1545 and rapidly transformed into the principal bullion source of the Spanish Empire—had come to signify a global regime in which landscapes were reimagined as reservoirs of convertible matter.[552] As Orlando Bentancor observes, colonial discourse framed such environments as imperfect material requiring external mastery, a metaphysical rationale that legitimated both extractive industry and coerced labor by casting technical domination of land and population as the fulfillment of the natural order.[553] Byrd's transposition of "Potosi" onto an Appalachian river thus marks an early articulation of this commodity-oriented visuality within an Anglo-American context: the land is valued for what may be removed from it, its present surface subordinated to a speculative subterranean future. As Katherine Ledford notes of Byrd's descriptions, he "reacts to [the mountains] primarily as a capitalist, inventorying what can be extracted for economic gain."[554] Annette Kolodny deepens this line of reasoning by

[552] Discovered in 1545, the Cerro Rico of Potosí became the principal silver supplier for the Spanish Empire and the foundation for its global economy. This silver output funded a transnational credit system and the political projects of the monarchy across Europe and its colonies. During the 1570s, the administration regularized production through the *mita,* a system of mandatory labor drafts, and relocated indigenous communities into centralized settlements. These efforts were supplemented by the introduction of a mercury-amalgamation refining method, known as the patio process, which allowed for the processing of low-grade silver ore on an industrial scale. The resulting silver flow integrated the Americas into a global trade network that spanned from Europe to East Asia. For an extended analysis on the history and the philosophical principles defending Spanish Imperialism see Orlando Bentancor, *The Matter of Empire: Metaphysics and Mining in Colonial Peru* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).
[553] Bentancor, *Matter of Empire*, esp. the Introduction, 1–39.
[554] Ledford, "Landscape and a People Set Apart," 60.

arguing that this activation was often experienced as a "bold exercise of masculine power over the feminine," suggesting that gendering the land was a way to civilize the unknown, casting human relations onto the wilderness to make its eventual " human violation" or extraction from the landscape more legible.[555] Read in a longer arc, the feminine Edenic idealization and masculine extractive commodification operate as mutually reinforcing modes of apprehension; interlocking, they constitute a perspective from which the land appears simultaneously as sacred origin and an exploitable resource, its aura of plenitude inseparable from its material availability, yet almost universally defined by the male gaze. This doubled apprehension anticipates later aesthetic transformations in which territory becomes an object, a symbol, and, eventually, an assembled cultural material—from the feminized and eroticized landscapes of Crane's poetry to Graham's mining of regional and religious forms into choreographic substance. Within that same optic, the region's settler population—treated as if they were the original and only human inhabitants—was increasingly cast as impediments to that destiny. By the early twentieth century, this grammar had entered formal historical discourse. The British historian Arnold Toynbee, for example, described the Appalachian "Mountain People" as "White barbarians" and "'fossils' of extinct civilizations" who had relapsed into illiteracy and witchcraft, attributing to the rugged environment a "reversion" to a lower state of humanity, aligning Appalachian communities with the "Hairy Ainu" or other racialized figures of evolutionary failure.[556] Noted Journalist H. L.Mencken's notorious accounts of "Holy Roller" worship in the Tennessee hills operate within the

[555] Kolodny, *Lay of the Land*, 22.
[556] Arnold J. Toynbee, "Scotland, Ulster, and Appalachia," in *Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, ed. Robert J. Higgs and Ambrose N. Manning (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1975), 386, 388.

same frame, portraying Appalachian Christianity as a series of heathenish orgies and "delirious caterwauling," an "obscene heap" of bodies spouting "apocalyptic texts" and "speaking in tongues," language that removes these believers from the category of civilized religion and recasts them as a kind of cultural contagion.[557]

The tension between these two portrayals—the beautiful "Garden of God" and the degraded "barbarian" population—produced what Matthew Richards identifies as a moralization of class, a mode of seeing that by the 1930s and 1940s had intensified into what he calls a "violence of representation," as artists and journalists visited Appalachia to record scenes of poverty in ways that made hunger, poor housing, and bodily exhaustion appear as innate conditions of mountain life rather than as the consequences of extractive industry and political neglect.[558] Appalachians could thus be framed as "our contemporary ancestors," "Rip Van Winkles" who had slept through centuries of progress, or as "civil savages" analogous to the "vanishing Indian," figures imagined as part of a primeval landscape that was destined to be cleared away by modernity.[559] Once the mountains were understood as a commodity rather than a barrier, the people who occupied them became "adversarial, unnatural, and out of control" within the elite gaze, a condition that made the seizure of mineral rights and the reorganization of land under

[557] H. L. Mencken, "The Hills of Zion," in *Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, ed. Robert J. Higgs and Ambrose N. Manning (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1975), 436–438.
[558] Matthew S. Richards, "'Normal for His Culture': Appalachia and the Rhetorical Moralization of Class," *The Southern Communication Journal* 84, no. 3 (2019): 161. See also Denise Giardina, "Appalachian Images: A Personal History," in *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, ed. Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).
[559] William Goodell Frost, "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," *Appalachian Heritage* 4, no. 4 (1976): 73, 70; see also Ronald L. Lewis, "Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity: Diversity and the History of Appalachia," in *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, ed. Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); and Meredith McCarroll, *Unwhite Appalachia, Race, and Film* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 30.

corporate ownership appear not only profitable but necessary.[560] It is within this long-established representational economy—where Appalachia could be admired as a biblical garden even as its inhabitants were rendered as religious wildlings—that the title *Appalachian Spring* acquires its resonance, thereby allowing the region to be invoked as a site of national origin without summoning the histories of dispossession, labor conflict, and racialized hierarchy that had structured its availability for symbolic use in the first place. In this setting, Graham's pastoral household—newlyweds building a home under the watch of a Mother and a Revivalist preacher encircled by four Followers—rests on historically ungrounded cultural idioms. The Shakers, whose music anchors Copland's score, were celibate, pacifist, and, as opposed to the outward posture of revivalist missionary evangelism, oriented inward toward disciplined communal perfection. The Appalachian world invoked by the title had long been imagined by elite observers through a paired logic of Edenic land and degraded religious practice. The ballet's legibility, therefore, does not arise from historicity but from the ability of these idioms to coexist once lived social presence has been displaced in ways that allow cultural idioms to circulate as objects of elite recognition and self-fashioning.

The compatibility of these idioms became evident in how audiences identified the ballet as "Appalachian" through an assemblage of cultural cues rather than through lived experience or historical reference. As Copland later observed, audiences believed they were encountering "Appalachia" in musical and choreographic form, even though most had never been there and even though Appalachia itself had entered Graham's project only through the late choice of a name.[561] What they recognized was not a region nor a

[560] Ledford, "Landscape and a People Set Apart," 49.
[561] John Randolph, "Aaron Copland Plays *Appalachian Spring* and Interview," YouTube video, 1:43–2:07.

religion, but a repertoire of images already organized by decades of literary, journalistic, and artistic framing—an interior America imagined as morally clarifying precisely because its social contradictions had been displaced. Roosevelt's use of Lincoln belongs to the same pattern: a phrase forged in the pressure of slavery and constitutional crisis circulates most freely when those pressures have been set aside. In *Appalachian Spring*, Shaker piety, revivalist fervor, frontier domesticity, and a mythic Appalachia converge not because they share a history, but because abstraction allows them to meet without forcing their differences into view, producing a vision of national origin that is reassuring in form even as its inheritance remains unsettled and unseen.

Raising the Curtain

Appalachian Spring premiered on the evening of October 30, 1944, in the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress, presented as the final work of a three-day festival honoring Elizabeth Coolidge's eightieth birthday. The preceding two days had been devoted entirely to chamber music: a Saturday evening program for violin and harpsichord featuring Bach, Mozart, and Couperin; a Sunday afternoon concert for strings and two pianos with works by Mozart, Schubert, Stravinsky, and Rieti; and a Sunday evening program for strings and organ that included Bach, Beethoven, Piston, Reubke, and Dupré. By the time the audience returned on Monday night, they had already encountered a dense array of musical forms, styles, and historical registers, ranging from Baroque counterpoint and Classical formalism to Romantic lyricism, twentieth-century neoclassicism, and sacred organ repertory. Monday's concluding event was announced not as a continuation of this musical series but as "A Program Devoted to

the Dance."[562] On that evening, the program listed Martha Graham's trio of works in sequence: *Imagined Wing*, described as "a fantasy of theatre with several characters in various imagined places"; *Mirror Before Me*, a setting of Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* structured around waiting, self-scrutiny, and preparation for an unknown destiny; and finally *Appalachian Spring*.[563] Set changes between the works created intervals during which the audience could orient itself through the program notes provided for each work prior to its performance, establishing a frame of expectation in advance of the dance. Graham's description for *Appalachian Spring* offered a concise but potent orientation:

> Part and parcel of our lives is that moment of Pennsylvania spring when there was 'a garden eastward in Eden' "Spring was celebrated by a man and a woman building a house with joy and love and prayer; by a revivalist and his followers in their shouts of exaltation; by a pioneering woman with her dreams of the Promised Land.[564]

Situating the ballet within a web of biblical allusion, historical reference, and aspirational myth, this deceptively spare statement provided an initial lens through which the audience could anticipate the imaginative terrain ahead. Paradisiacal language, emotive religious fervor, and the rhetoric of settlement are presented as symbolic registers through which national origins, moral purpose, and collective destiny are invoked in compressed form. The remainder of this chapter proceeds from that framing. Rather than tracing the ballet in its entirety—a task already addressed by several sustained scholarly analyses—it concentrates on three distinct motifs that emerge from Graham's programmatic orientation: the mobilization of Eden as a theological concept inflected toward American settlement; the establishment of a liturgical tenor through choreographic structure and

[562] *The Tenth Festival of Chamber Music* (1944), Music Division, Library of Congress, Martha Graham Collection, ML31 .G727.
[563] *The Tenth Festival of Chamber Music*.
[564] *The Tenth Festival of Chamber Music*.

staging; and the repetition and transformation of emblematic religious gestures across the work.[565] Taken together, these motifs clarify how *Appalachian Spring* operates within the symbolic grammar of American civil religion.

Scripting an American Eden

The symbolic work of this programmatic statement becomes clearer when its language is read as more than scenic description. The textual juxtaposition of the specific historical and geographical setting, Pennsylvania, a traditional gateway to the American West, with the biblical location of paradise, "eastward in Eden," establishes a profound and paradoxical tension through the reversal of sacred geography inherent in the long-standing conception of American settlement as a providential mission within a sacred history.[566] Through this evocative program note, Graham engages the powerful dichotomy of East, as the direction of exile and the Fall, and West, as the direction of promise and redemption—an opposition that undergirds the imaginative stirrings of American Manifest Destiny. By opening its description with Genesis, the program situates the ballet within a symbolic geography that places American settlement in relation to an established narrative of sacred origin. Zachary Hutchins has shown that early American thinkers treated Eden not only as a historical location but as a model to be reimagined within new social and political forms, allowing paradisiacal language to migrate from scripture into civic life.[567] Eden here functions as a point of reference that

[565] For movement-by-movement analyses of the music, choreography, and staging across the full performance, see Fauser, "*Appalachian Spring* Onstage," in *Appalachian Spring*, 61–75 and Marta Robertson, "Musical and Choreographic Integration in Copland's and Graham's *Appalachian Spring*," *The Musical Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (1999): 6–26.
[566] KJV, *Genesis*, 2:8.
[567] See Zachary McLeod Hutchins, *Inventing Eden: Primitivism, Millennialism, and the Making of New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. "Introduction: Eden and Intellectual History," 3–11

quietly governs the acts of building, revival, and aspiration that the dancers will soon enact. It is from this imagined garden, rather than from Pennsylvania alone, that *Appalachian Spring* is invited to begin. In traditional Judeo-Christian cosmology, the movement subsequent to the Fall of Adam and Eve was expulsion eastward, away from the presence of God and paradise. This establishes East as the spiritual direction of exile, the source of original sin, and the location of the fallen world. Yet the immediate context of *Appalachian Spring*—centering a "Pioneering Woman" and "her dreams of the Promised Land" made manifest as the Pennsylvania frontier—is intrinsically linked to the cultural mission of American westward expansion.[568] Through this framing, Graham locates her audience's imagination within a moment of prelapsarian purity, while simultaneously referencing the origin point of the Fall, creating a deliberate spiritual ambiguity. The sequence moves forward in time and outward in space, away from the garden's original location and toward acts of building, worship, and expectation.

That forward movement aligns closely with a long-standing American habit of reorienting Edenic language away from its biblical geography and into a westward-facing historical imagination. Early American ministers and thinkers, rooted in Puritan traditions, established America's identity by contrasting the New World with the Old World, Europe and England in particular, consistently casting the latter as the source of corruption, complexity, and oppression—the East, metaphorically, representing the site of Pharaoh's tyranny.[569] Thus, the physical act of moving westward, first from Europe

and "Promoting Paradise, Ordering Wilderness: Topographical Optimism Meets Agricultural Reality," 35–67.

[568] *The Tenth Festival of Chamber Music*. See also Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, esp. "The Typology of America's Mission," 93–131;

[569] Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 121–124.

and then across the continent, became synonymous with reversing the spiritual trajectory of the Fall. Seventeenth-century New England sermons teased the beginnings of this shift. Although John Winthrop's *A Modell of Christian Charity* does not explicitly mention Eden, it frames migration as undertaken within a divinely ordered plan, one in which place acquires meaning through covenantal purpose rather than scriptural precedent.[570] Samuel Danforth's election sermon, *A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness*, is more explicit. Drawing on prophetic and gospel texts, Danforth repeatedly casts the wilderness not as a site of abandonment but as a destination marked by divine intention, asking his listeners to consider "what went ye out into the wilderness to see?"[571] The language of "errand" emphasizes movement, departure, and obligation, shifting attention away from an originary garden toward a future-oriented task.

The concept of American destiny successfully reversed the traditional spiritual compass. Instead of fleeing east toward exile, Americans interpreted their geographical movement westward as a providential act of spiritual progress and reclamation. As Bercovitch notes, the Puritan errand led not from earth to heaven but from "lesser to greater glories on the American strand."[572] The "West" became the central stage for America's millennial fulfillment. By the eighteenth century, this reorientation is articulated with remarkable clarity in George Berkeley's *Verses on the Prospect of*

[570] John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry, rev. and updated ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 37–41.
[571] Samuel Danforth, *A Brief Recognition of New-Englands Errand into the Wilderness: Made in the Audience of the General Assembly of the Massachusetts Colony at Boston in N.E. on the 11th of the Third Moneth, 1670, Being the Day of Election There* (London: Printed by S.G. and M.J., 1671), A3, Early English Books Online.
[572] Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 95.

Planting Arts and Learning in America. The well-known stanza beginning "Westward the course of empire takes its way" situates historical progress itself along a westward axis, casting America as the latest stage in a providential sequence that moves steadily away from Europe and toward renewal.[573] Berkeley does not mention Eden, yet his poem provides a directional grammar that will prove durable: decline lies behind, fulfillment ahead, as the "West" becomes the site where what was lost or exhausted elsewhere may be recovered in altered form. Nineteenth-century sermons and political oratory extend this grammar by explicitly linking westward expansion to religious destiny. In *A Plea for the West*, Lyman Beecher insists that "the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West," framing the region as both vulnerable and determinative.[574] This movement was imbued with divine purpose, transforming the West into a new locus of sacred history, as Jonathan Edwards proclaimed, the American sun would rise "from the West, contrary to the course of the world."[575] The land itself, often portrayed as a "hideous and desolate wilderness," needed to be subdued and cultivated to achieve its inherent potential as a "second Eden," drawing America and Americans closer to God.[576] Albert J. Beveridge, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, echoes Berkeley's formulation almost verbatim—"Westward the Star of Empire takes its way" recasting it in openly imperial terms, grounded in law, commerce, and national power, culminating in an uncompromising eschatology of empire—"it is the high and holy destiny of the

[573] George Berkeley, "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America," in *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed. David Nichol Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 220.
[574] Lyman Beecher, "A Plea for the West," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry, rev. and updated ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 123.
[575] Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things,* ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 116.
[576] William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647: The Complete Text*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison, American Past (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 62; Hutchins, *Inventing Eden*, 36.

American People..”[577] Across these texts, the West is repeatedly imagined as a space where promise remains active, where institutions must be planted, and where history continues its forward course.

Not all voices accepted this transposition of sacred geography. Oratory attributed to Chief Seattle, a leader of the Duwamish and Suquamish peoples, offers a starkly different account, one in which land is bound to memory and ancestry rather than future fulfillment. “Your God is not our God,” the speech declares, rejecting the theological premises that underwrite settler claims to destiny.[578] Here, movement westward is experienced as loss, a displacement that exposes the cost of treating geography as symbolic capital. The speech’s force lies in its refusal to accept Eden as transferable or renewable through migration. Graham’s program text, however, does not adjudicate among these competing traditions; it draws selectively from the dominant one. Eden appears as a remembered orientation that informs acts of settlement and belief, while Graham’s cast of characters reflects the necessary social components for achieving this reclaimed Eden. The Husbandman and Bride are building a house "with joy and love and prayer", representing the re-establishment of the Adamic mandate to cultivate and keep the garden.[579] Unlike the original Eden, which required only maintenance prior to the Fall, the American Eden demanded what William Alexander, 1st Earl of Sterling in 1625 called "guiltlesse labour" and strenuous exertion, a process deemed restorative and

[577] Albert J. Beveridge, “The Star of Empire,” in *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry, rev. and updated ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 146, 159.
[578] Chief Seattle, “Oration,” in *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry, rev. and updated ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 35.
[579] *The Tenth Festival of Chamber Music*; see KJV, Genesis, 2:15: “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.”

purifying.[580] Alexander's framing aligns with Leo Marx's characterization of the transition from a primitive, effortless Eden to a "cultivated garden," in which abundance is the intentional result of human "improvement" rather than a spontaneous gift of nature or God.[581] According to Marx, as proposed in his seminal work, *The Machine in the Garden*, this active engagement transforms the American landscape into a "fusion of work and spontaneous process," offering a site for secular "regeneration" and the reconciliation of civilized discipline with natural bounty.[582] In contrast, the "revivalist and his followers in their shouts of exaltation" serve as the instrument for ensuring the moral health of the nascent community, echoing the historical importance placed on the evangelical ministry to provide a "moral culture," without which, as Lyman Beecher warned, the rushing prosperity of the West would lead the nation to "perish by our own prosperity."[583] The dialectic between the couple and their taming of the frontier and Revivalist's moral stricture fits within Marx's understanding that the best human condition exists in a "middle landscape," a state located between J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur's "brutality of unconnected savage nature" and the authoritative power of a coercive social order.[584] Marx defines this middle ground as a "landscape of reconciliation" resonating with Homi Bhabha's description of the third space as a "position of liminality," that is, hybridity itself, which rejects the logic of cultural and political binaries to allow "other positions to emerge."[585] Furthermore, both spaces are

[580] William Alexander, *An Encouragement to Colonies* (London: William Stansby, 1625), 6.
[581] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, 25th anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 87.
[582] Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 112, 111.
[583] *The Tenth Festival of Chamber Music*; Beecher, "A Plea for the West," 128.
[584] Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 103; de Crèvecœur quoted in Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 113.
[585] Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 87, 122; Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 209, 211.

characterized by their regenerative potential; while Marx's middle landscape offers a site for "secular . . . 'resurrection'" and the construction of a new American identity, Bhabha's third space is a terrain for "elaborating strategies of selfhood" that initiate "new signs of identity."[586] Ultimately, both notions represent the habitation of an "intervening space" in which original identities are displaced, or renegotiated to produce something new.[587] Lastly, the "Pioneering Woman with her dreams of the Promised Land" reinforces the conflation of the West with the promise of Canaan, a New Jerusalem, the ultimate reward for the Israelites after their wilderness journey, which became the "typology" for America's westward expansion, shifting the fulfillment of God's plan from Israel to America.[588] Graham's Pennsylvanian spring thus becomes, in her own reflective words, symbolic of the "springtime of the nation," locating the nation's genesis not in the founding East Coast colonies but perpetually in the Westward journey.[589] Thus Graham's symbolic return to Eden is recursive, not retrogressive; by displacing the climactic apotheosis of Crane's individual ascent, she transforms the recovery of national origins into the vital impetus for a perpetual, future-facing mission. In this seasonal liturgy, the "springtime" of Genesis is reconfigured as the inaugural moment of the American errand, where the reclamation of sacred space gives rise to the collective moral labor of sustaining and renewing the national house.

The coherence of this vision rests upon a landscape that, even for Graham, whose earlier scripts had attempted to stage that prior presence, is rendered available. It is notable then that while the ballet retains spectral traces of subaltern figures from its

[586] Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 111; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 1–2.
[587] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 7.
[588] Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 122.
[589] "Music: Purely Symbolic."

earlier scripts, Graham's programmatic framing enacts a comparable abstraction of Indigenous presence. The theological and symbolic geography she mobilizes presumes an available landscape, one already cleared for cultivation, revival, and aspiration. The Indian Girl—earlier described as "the symbolic figure of the land, the Eve of our Genesis"—no longer occupies this terrain as a visible agent. Instead, Indigenous habitation recedes into an unspoken background, its absence enabling Eden to function as a transferable origin rather than a contested ground.[590] In this respect, the ballet's symbolic economy mirrors the expansionist logic it inherits: a vision of renewal that depends upon selective remembrance—the West endlessly reconstituted as promissory space only by suppressing the prior inhabitation that would otherwise contest it. Graham's program note offers a sequence of images whose coherence depends on a common cultural participation in a long American habit of redirecting sacred origins into forward-looking narratives of settlement and aspiration. The program does not explain its references; it assumes their legibility. In doing so, it trusts an audience shaped by sermons, poetry, civic ritual, and political rhetoric that had long treated westward movement as both historical fact and moral metaphor. The result is a framing mechanism that operates quietly but effectively. Before the choreography begins, the audience is invited to inhabit a world in which building a house, gathering for revival, and dreaming of a promised land are intelligible responses to an Eden instantiated in American mythic narration. The garden lies behind, eastward, while meaning unfolds ahead, westward through collective action and belief. In this sense, Graham's use of Eden translates a

[590] Graham, "Script for *Appalachian Spring*, between 5/29/1943 and 7/10/1943," 3.

dense and contested symbolic inheritance into a spare textual gesture that prepares the ground for what follows on stage.

Choreographing Liturgical Structure

With the audience imaginatively oriented by the program note, the curtain rose on a fully illuminated but empty stage—"calibrated," as Annegret Fauser notes, "to evoke a sunny spring day"—revealing Noguchi's spare architectural framework as the first inscription upon a landscape rhetorically cleared of prior possession. The staged landscape, devoid of specific historical residue, its luminosity serving as the visual equivalent of an Edenic threshold, prepared the ground for the ritual instantiation of a national myth.[591] Rather than emerging through episodic entrances tied to narrative cues, the performers entered one by one in a slow, deliberate procession from a single side of the stage. Each crossed in full view along the back boundary, turned, and passed through the framed portal into the interior of the set, moving to a predetermined position within the space. The Revivalist entered first, proceeding to the center and mounting a plinth; the Mother followed, taking her place in the rocking chair on the porch, each remaining immobile as the remainder of the cast arrived. The Husbandman and Bride entered next, briefly converging before being spatially divided by the entrance of the four Followers, who crossed as a group and assumed their worshipful stances; the Daughter moved to kneel before the Mother, and the Husbandman took up his position by the fence (Fig. 11). Graham's carefully regulated entry does more than organize the stage; it choreographs the "errand into the wilderness," transforming the empty architectural frame into a

[591] Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 61.



Figure 11. *Appalachian Spring*, circa 1940s original cast.

Martha Graham Dance Company, YouTube video (posted April 18, 2020). Frame at 02:06:19.

consecrated frontier. By adopting a ceremonial tempo, she ensures that the "Pennsylvania spring" of the program note is not merely a setting, but a sacred time and space being actively reclaimed from the void. The sequence unfolded over the roughly two-minute "Prologue," after which the music corresponding to "Eden Valley" began almost immediately, the suspension of total movement so brief as to nearly escape notice. Unlike the scripts, which rely on entrances and exits to articulate episodic structure, the performance retained all dancers onstage thereafter, with figures periodically returning to their initial positions until the concluding departure of the Mother and Followers—again in single file, through the same portal—leaving the Husbandman and Bride behind.

This carefully regulated sequence of entry is not merely a staging choice but establishes the performance's governing temporal and spatial order, one that activates the program's Edenic framing through ritual associations. As in Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, the resonance here does not depend upon explicit liturgical citation but upon the activation of a structure that would have been broadly legible through habitual religious practice. What emerges is an implicit analogue to the normative Christian entry, or gathering, procession, a ritual action by which the assembled community transitions from ordinary social space into the ordered time and space of worship, marking the formal beginning of the church's liturgical action. The processional does not merely initiate the service but enacts the formation of the church itself, as disparate individuals are gathered and visibly constituted as a single worshiping body.[592] In this sense, the Christian procession signifies entry not only into a building but into the Church understood as the Body of Christ, made present through the collective, embodied act of assembly oriented toward God. Out of this collective constitution, sacred space emerges through the ordered gathering of the community itself—a spiritual materialization the ballet transposes into theatrical form—enfolding the audience within the act of assembly and positioning them as participants in the gathered body, no longer solely ecclesial, but within the American civic community. As with the liturgical undertones of Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* and the interpretive reservoir embedded in Noguchi's set designs, these associations should be understood as operating subconsciously within the audience rather than any explicit associative recognition.

[592] See Britannica, s.v. "Procession"; see also James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, esp. "The Service of the Word," 141–160 and Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), esp. "Assembly," 19–49.

Copland's opening establishes a spare but harmonically charged ambient effect that, as encapsulated by Fauser, is at once modernist and archaic: a highly economical texture grounded in tonal tradition and pastoral topoi, yet rendered strange through harmonic compression and timbral restraint.[593] As in *Lincoln Portrait*, this economy of means permits memory association to accrue, shaping the conditions under which the opening is heard without prescribing a single interpretive outcome These formative measures not only furnish the harmonic foundation of *Appalachian Spring* as a whole but also define a musical space that parallels Noguchi's set, each operating through a restrained but calibrated minimalism to orient the audience before the dramatic action begins. The analogy, however, diverges in a crucial way; whereas in *Lincoln Portrait* the resonance shifts from Copland's subliminal invocation of Jewish liturgical memory toward a broadly normative Christian civic idiom, the opening of *Appalachian Spring* draws that Christian inflection through a different lineage. The ordering of entry, spatial passage, and sustained stillness aligns not only with Christian ritual habit but with the conventions of Noh drama.

In Noh, the principal performer (*shite*) enters the stage via the *hashigakari*, a narrow bridge that connects the backstage preparation space to the performance area.[594] This passage is not treated as a neutral corridor but as a liminal zone in which the performer's appearance is understood as the manifestation associated with the descent or emergence of a spirit into the visible world.[595] The deliberately slow traversal of the *hashigakari* does not advance the narrative action; instead, it establishes a ceremonial

[593] Fauser, *Appalachian Spring*, 63–64.
[594] "Introducing the World of Noh: Stage," *The Noh*.
[595] Richard B. Pilgrim, "The Japanese Noh Drama in Ritual Perspective," *The Eastern Buddhist* 22, no. 1 (1989): 54–55.

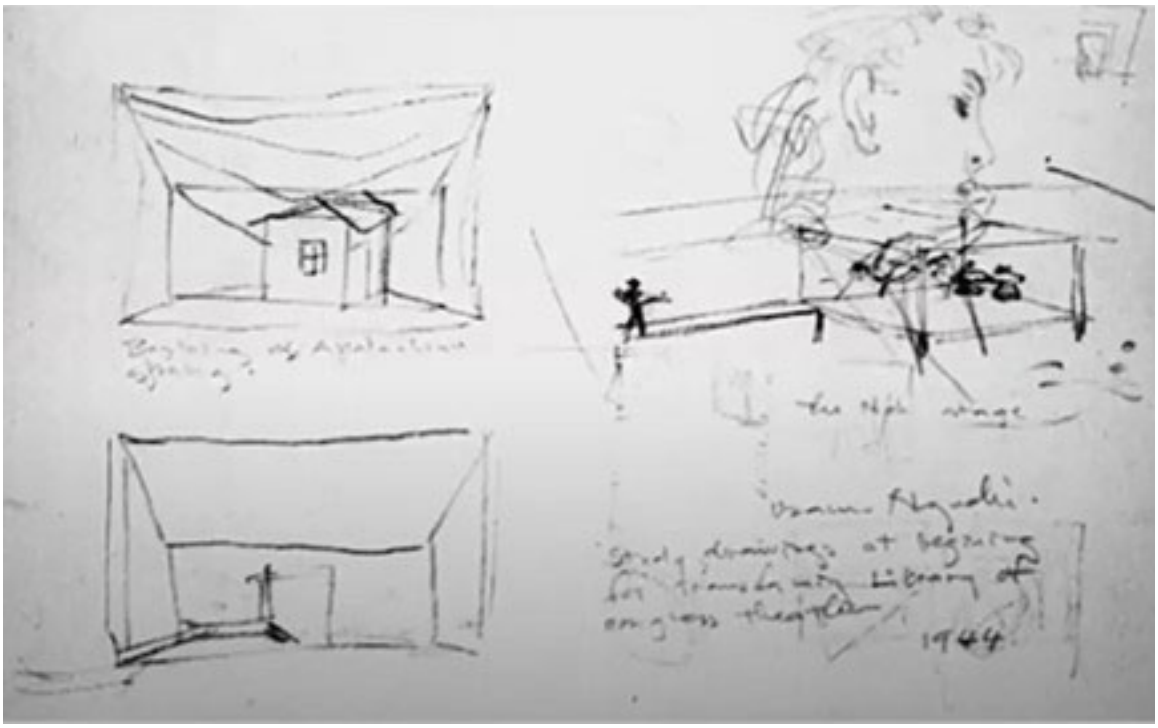


Figure 12. Isamu Noguchi, Set Design Sketch Details.

Detail from Figure 8: Sketches for the stage set for transformation of the Library of Congress Theatre, pencil on paper, The Isamu Noguchi Archive.

tempo that distinguishes performance time from ordinary time, preparing the audience for an encounter structured by ritual attention, a formula that resonates with the liturgical procession.[596] Noguchi's 1944 sketch for *Appalachian Spring* (Fig. 12) explicitly labels one of the design's iterations as a "Noh Stage," situating the ballet's opening within this architectural and cultural logic. The portal through which Graham's dancers enter does not reproduce the *hashigakari* literally, but it performs a comparable function by foregrounding passage itself as an essential act. By requiring each dancer to cross visibly,

[596] Ashton, *Noguchi, East and West*, 53–56.

turn, and pass through the threshold before taking up a fixed position, the choreography emphasizes the entrance as a constitutive moment, moving the dancers from their corporeal reality into the American mythic construct suggested by the program. Just as the *shite*'s traversal of the bridge signifies the descent of a spirit into the visible world, the dancers' passage through Noguchi's portal signifies the emergence of national archetypes into the 'sunny spring day' of the American garden. The Noh-inspired entry provides the ritual scaffolding for Manifest Destiny, presenting the arrival of the settlers as a providential manifestation rather than a mere historical event. In this sense, the opening procession does not introduce characters in the dramatic sense but consecrates the stage as a space in which figures appear according to an order that precedes collective action, aligning the ballet's opening with a theatrical tradition in which spatial orientation and ceremonial timing carry religiously grounded historical force.

What governs the entrance is not specific character psychology but rather compliance within an external order that precedes the dancer's presence and determines its meaning. Richard Pilgrim identifies this logic as central to Noh's ritual efficacy: the performer's authority derives not from expressive freedom but from submission to form, since "it is the noh as ritual art that establishes its religious power," and its ritual forms function as "a 'body' of forms acting as containers into which the body/mind can pour itself," such that "orthopraxis is prior to orthodoxy."[597] Placement, duration, and restraint are therefore not secondary to the development of meaning but its primary vehicles. Peter Campbell approaches the same phenomenon from a different angle, emphasizing the

[597] Pilgrim, "The Japanese Noh," 54, 56.

pedagogical and spatial discipline of Noh performance rather than its ritual ontology.[598] For Campbell, performer training cultivates an awareness of movement as inseparable from spatial relation, so that "movement and its relationship to space and other people" becomes "intrinsic to living in a traditional Japanese home," a principle he translates directly into performance pedagogy by structuring the totality of performance space from dressing rooms through to the stage proper.[599] Where Pilgrim stresses the religious force generated by this discipline, Campbell underscores the way spatial training conditions perception—both for the performer and the audience—by stabilizing attention and expectation.

Graham's opening procession aligns closely with this shared structural premise. Each dancer's passage through the portal resolves not into expressive gesture but into spatial commitment: a location is reached, occupied, and held. Meaning accrues through the relation established among figures once the stage has been fully populated, not through individual action upon arrival. This does not require positing Graham's choreography as ritual in the strict sense, as Pilgrim describes, nor does it reduce the sequence to a pedagogical exercise in spatial awareness as Campbell might frame it. Instead, the opening inhabits the productive tension between these accounts. The dancers' adherence to fixed positions and regulated timing constrains expressive agency in a manner consistent with Noh practice, while the audience's perception is reorganized through the visible completion of the stage's spatial order. Authority, in this moment, resides neither in narrative causality nor in individual intention but in the successful

[598] See Peter A. Campbell, "Teaching Japanese Noh Drama through Visualizing Space," *Theatre Topics* 21, no. 1 (March 2011).
[599] Campbell, "Teaching Japanese Noh Drama," 6, 8.

realization of a form whose coherence depends on collective compliance. As dancer and choreographer June Watanabe—herself trained in both Graham technique and Noh—succinctly observes, "Noh is about what is unseen," a formulation that clarifies how meaning in such performance traditions resides less in overt action than in the disciplined management of presence, attention, and expectancy.[600] It is this convergence—ritual restraint without doctrinal assertion, spatial discipline without didactic display—that allows the opening of *Appalachian Spring* to register as religiously inflected within the framework of American civil religion, without mimicking an external cosmology or a symbolic system.

Having established a regulated order of appearance, the ballet momentarily suspends motion at the point at which the assembly is complete. This pause is neither prolonged nor emphasized choreographically, but it marks a critical liminal moment. What matters here is not stillness as a dominant aesthetic but the way this brief arrest confirms that the stage has reached a state of completion—spatially populated, hierarchically organized, and ready to sustain meaning without further structural adjustment. In Noh theory, such moments of non-action—*senu tokoro*—are points of heightened concentration, where physical restraint and mental focus converge.[601] Graham's choreography operates in a comparable register. The dancers' stillness is not neutral; it is charged by the effort required to maintain it. The audience is invited to

[600] Judith Coburn, "A Modernist Says 'Yes' to Noh," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1996, F53. June (Tsukida) Watanabe (b. 1939) is a Japanese American dancer and choreographer whose training bridges Graham technique and sustained study of Noh. Introduced to Graham technique by Yuriko while working on *The King and I* (1955), Watanabe later understudied with the Martha Graham Dance Company and went on to develop a body of work in Northern California that frequently engaged Japanese American internment history and Noh-based performance structures. Her formulation of Noh as oriented toward "what is unseen" reflects both technical training and choreographic practice rather than abstract theorization. See also "June Watanabe," *Dance History Project of Southern California*, accessed January 6, 2026.
[601] Pilgrim, "Japanese Noh Drama," 67.

register this effort by perceiving the body not as an expressive instrument but as a site of disciplined attention. This emphasis on restraint resonates with Buddhist conceptions of *mushin*, or "no-mind," in which action arises without deliberation from a state of unobstructed awareness.[602] While Graham's dancers are not practicing Zen, the choreography cultivates an economy of movement in which intention is already embedded in the structure the gesture inhabits—the gesture does not assert meaning but fulfills it.

This discipline is both spatial and corporeal. Noguchi's use of such minimal, non-enclosing demarcations as the fence and framing merges mimetic internment with implications of boundaries derived from Noh; as Dore Ashton notes, Noguchi repeatedly drew on memories of Noh to define what he called a "hypothetical space" for performance, relying on pared-down structural markers and extreme reduction rather than representational realism.[603] From the perspective of ritual theory, this mode of spatial definition aligns with accounts of the Noh stage as a shrine-derived performance space, modeled on the *himorogi*, in which meaning emerges through the marking and activation of a delimited field rather than through architectural enclosure.[604] Graham's dancers occupy fixed zones within this field, their positions stabilizing relations of authority, witness, and vulnerability across the stage. The Mother's position on the porch, the Bride's placement in the yard, and the Revivalist's elevation at center are not arbitrary blocking choices but components of a symbolic architecture that distributes attention and ethical weight. As in Noh, where the supporting actors often remain stationary as an

[602] Ronald S. Green, "Zeami's Buddhism and Noh in Kurosawa's *Ikiru*," *Journal of Religion & Film* 28, no. 2 (2024).
[603] Ashton, *Noguchi, East and West*, 55, 58.
[604] Pilgrim, "Japanese Noh Drama," 61.

observing presence, figures in *Appalachian Spring* function more as anchors than as agents, each returning to their originating positions, stoic and often unresponsive, even disengaged from the movements of other characters, in each instance, holding the performance's moral and spatial order in place. These formal strategies—ritualized entry, architectural sparseness, disciplined restraint—intensify the ballet's consolidation within American civil religion by providing a performative infrastructure capable of sustaining its abstractions, constructing an expanded present in which the American frontier is not reenacted as a historical event but held as an enduring moral condition, one repeatedly entered, inhabited, and tested through ceremonial practice.

Choreographing Civil Religious Gesture

Building on the ritualized entry, the choreographic vocabulary of *Appalachian Spring* deploys a pattern of repeated and interwoven gestural forms drawn from Christian ritual practice—supplication or prayer (Figs. 13a-d, 14), prostration (Figs. 15a-c), and imposition through the laying on of hands (Figs. 16a-c). These gestures occur across the ballet not as isolated expressive accents but as a sustained corporeal grammar woven through the choreography. Rather than operating in isolation, they are articulated alongside a parallel vocabulary of fixed stances and expansive movement through which the body is consistently turned outward and stabilized in space, as if oriented toward something beyond itself (Figs. 17a-c). These movements establish a bodily relation to the surrounding space that emphasizes presence, reach, and endurance. The dancer's extensions and held positions create the impression of a body situated within a larger terrain—one that must be, as with Eden, inhabited and maintained through physical effort over time. The interaction between these registers—ritual submission and expansionist



Figure 13. *Appalachian Spring*, Images of Supplication.

Clockwise from top left: (a-d) Appalachian Spring, filmed 1958. Dir. Nathan Kroll. From Martha Graham: In Performance (Kultur, 2002). Frames at 06:11:06, 09:09:10, 10:47.08, 28:16:07.



Figure 14. May O'Donnell as the Mother.

First production of Appalachian Spring, 1944.

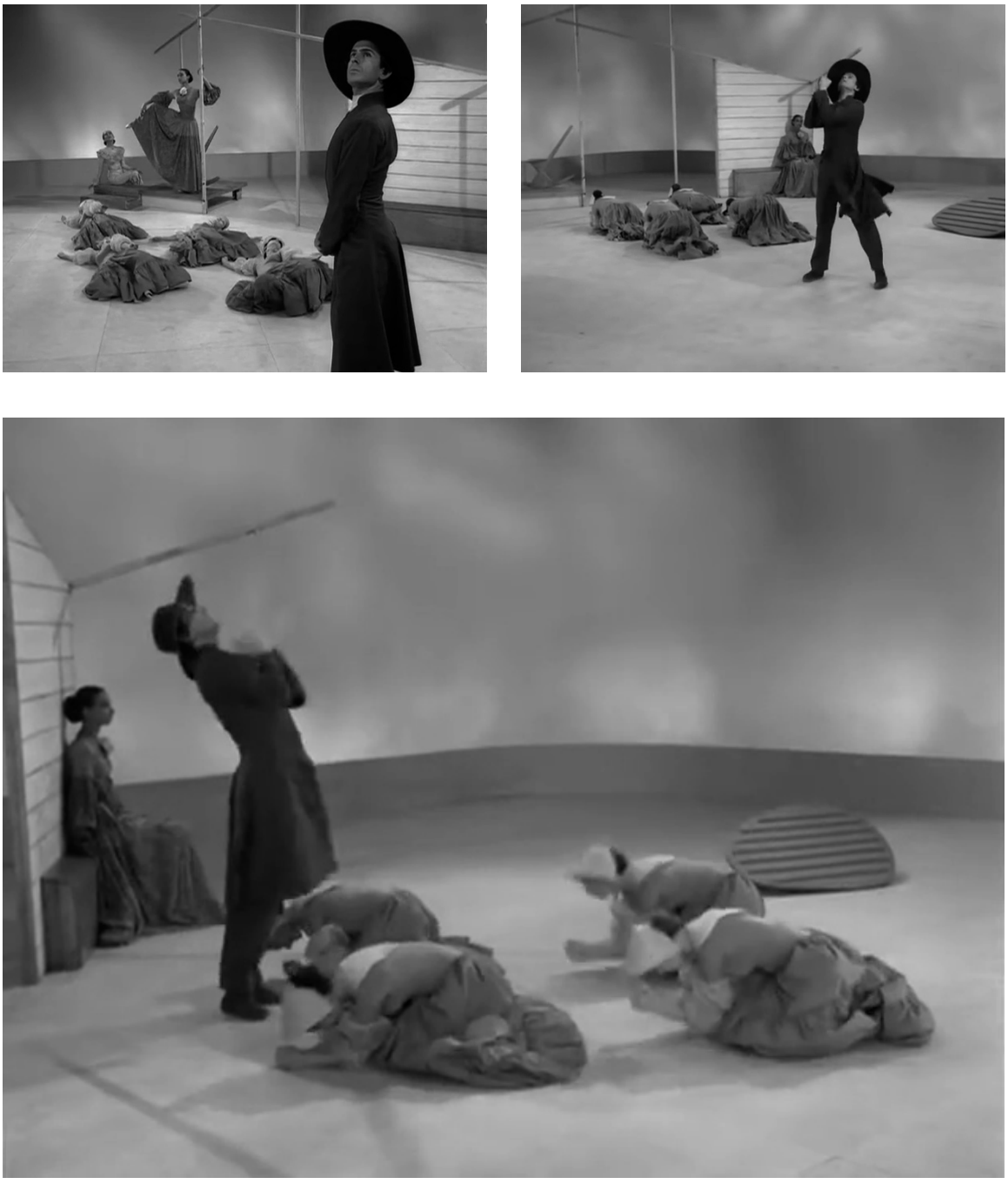


Figure 15. Imagery of Supplications

(Clockwise: a-c) Appalachian Spring, filmed 1958. Dir. Nathan Kroll. From Martha Graham: In Performance (Kultur, 2002). Frames at 02:14:04, 03:31:01, 09:11.00.

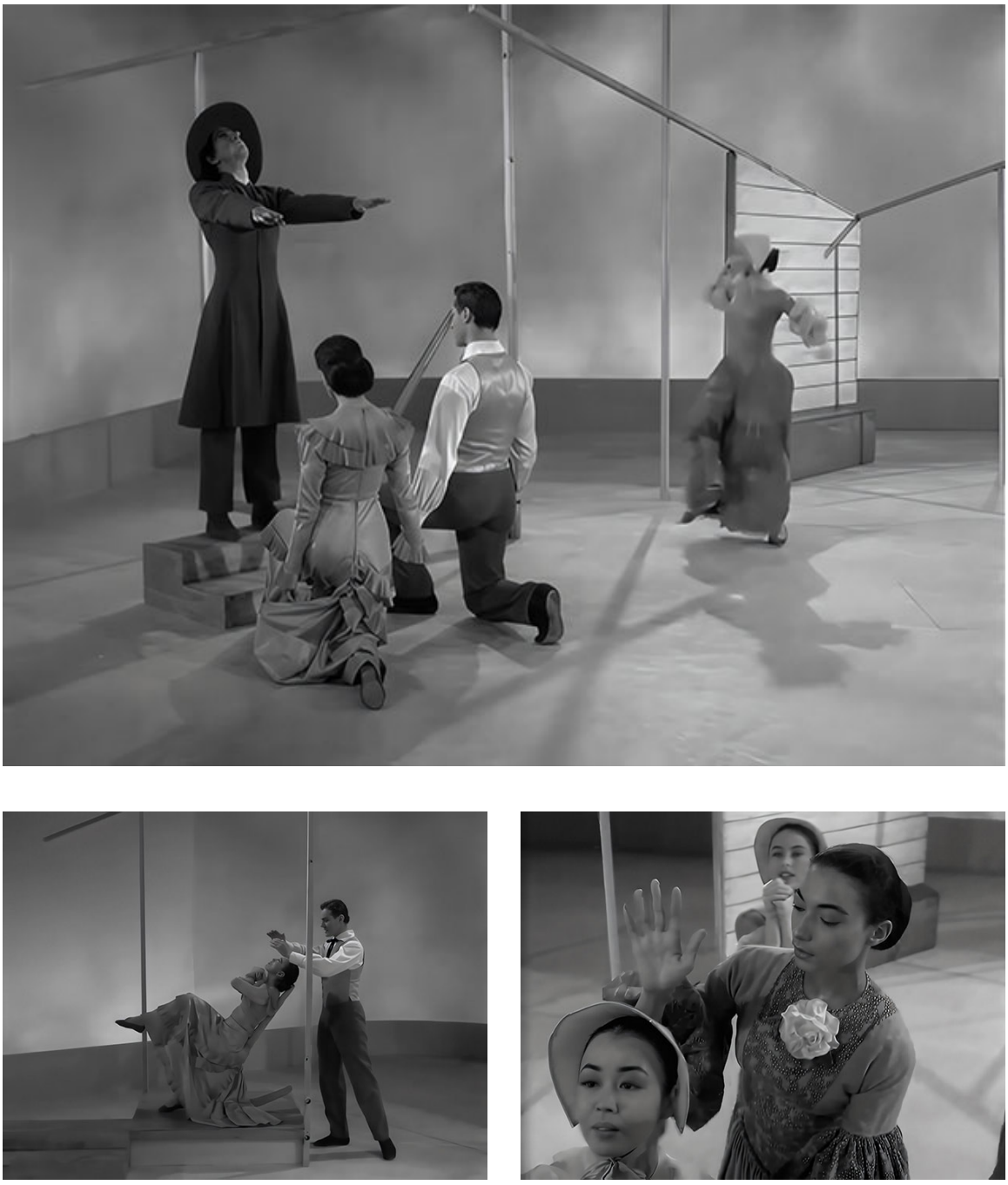


Figure 16. Laying on of Hands.

Clockwise from upper left: (a-c) Appalachian Spring, filmed 1958. Dir. Nathan Kroll. From Martha Graham: In Performance (Kultur, 2002). Frames at 16:52:18, 04:12:11, 26:34.03.



Figure 17. Images of Expansionism.

Clockwise from upper left: (a-b) Appalachian Spring, filmed 1958. Dir. Nathan Kroll. From Martha Graham: In Performance (Kultur, 2002). Frame at 01.01.01, 12:06:08. (c) Erick Hawkins in the first production of Appalachian Spring.

projection—constitutes a choreographic system in which religious action and civic posture are structurally interdependent. Through this conjunction, these habituated gestures operate as a process of abstraction in the Cassirerean sense, moving historically specific forms of religious and frontier action away from their immediate doctrinal contexts and into a more generalized, embodied symbolic register. Once abstracted in this way, these forms do not remain inert but become available, in Barthes's terms, for remythologization: their origins in particular historical and religious circumstances recede, while the gestures themselves persist as seemingly self-evident modes of collective orientation, capable of sustaining the civil-religious imaginations of national unity.

If the preceding paragraph establishes how gestures in *Appalachian Spring* are abstracted and remythologized through repetition, the question that follows concerns how such gestures acquire durability and force once embedded within the choreography itself. That problem is not primarily symbolic but structural: how repeated bodily actions come to function as carriers of meaning without relying on narrative exposition or doctrinal reference. Susan Foster frames this process by describing choreography as a "theorization of identity," in which movement does not merely express subjectivity but actively produces it through patterned action.[605] Foster argues that gestures, when organized choreographically, cease to be narrative accidents and instead function as "physicalized discourse," durable records of action capable of constructing arguments about subjecthood.[606] Through repetition across contexts, gestures become choreographic

[605] Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 4.
[606] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 13.

signifiers within a "constellation of [evolving] representational conventions."[607] Contrary to John Martin's suggestion that spectators internally mimic movement as an unmitigated psychophysical event, Foster argues that Graham's choreography summons the viewer's musculature into a state of tension and release only because the connection is densely mediated and filtered through "representational conventions" and culturally sedimented norms.[608] Applying this account to *Appalachian Spring*, Graham's repeated use of religious gestures may be read as mobilizing this mechanism directly, soliciting a mediated spiritual response in the spectator through the representational conventions of liturgical gestures.

Among the gestures mobilized within this choreographic system, the laying on of hands occupies a particularly charged position, carrying a dense liturgical genealogy. In the Christian scriptural tradition, the act signifies the transmission of spiritual power and divine presence, as in Acts 19:6: "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."[609] James F. White situates this gesture within a broader ritual continuum, noting its function in blessing (Genesis 27; Genesis 48), certification of authority (I Samuel 16:13), and reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for those initiated into the "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:10).[610] White further traces how, through the Reformation and Puritan substitution of the profession of faith, the sacramental force of imposition was increasingly displaced by intellectual assent and public declaration—transforming the gesture from a divinely

[607] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 5.
[608] John Martin, *Introduction to the Dance* (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1965), 49–53; Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 5.
[609] KJV, Acts 19:6.
[610] White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 194.

efficacious act into a pedagogical or communal one, its meaning now contingent on the human community performing and witnessing it rather than on divine agency alone.[611] This historical attenuation does not strip the gesture of meaning; rather, it alters the conditions under which it can function. As the laying on of hands is displaced from its status as a sacramental act grounded in divine agency and recast as a pedagogical or communal practice, it becomes available for redeployment beyond the church without losing the sedimented memory of its theological force. In *Appalachian Spring*, the act no longer mediates the descent of the Holy Spirit nor confirms ecclesiastical authority, yet its physical form retains the embodied signification of imposition. When performed by the Revivalist as a blessing of the couple (Fig. 16a), the gesture establishes a recognizable ritual relationship in which authority is exercised downward, marking the transition of the Bride and Husbandman into a sanctioned communal order. The imposition here functions less as a sacrament than as a public confirmation, aligning the couple's union with the community's moral armature. The same gesture acquires a different inflection when it is taken up by the Mother, whose placement in spatial and visual counterpoint to the Revivalist's in their opening positions (Fig. 17b) reconfigures imposition as a domestic and generational act rather than an ecclesiastical one. As she performs the act upon each of the Followers in succession (Fig. 16b), the gesture functions as a genealogical transmission of continuity. When the Husbandman subsequently performs the gesture upon his new wife (Fig.16c), imposition is further secularized and internalized, functioning as an enactment of mutual obligation within the household rather than as an appeal to divine agency. Across these iterations, the laying on of hands circulates through

[611] White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 204.

distinct relational contexts—clerical, maternal, and conjugal—each time preserving the physical structure of imposition while shifting its operative meaning. During this displacement, the gesture may be seen to enter a state of liminality—a "betwixt and between" condition as theorized by Victor Turner, where it is no longer strictly theological but not yet fully secularized.[612] This creates a space for negotiated interpretation in which the viewer must decide whether to read the gesture as a divine blessing or a human obligation, thereby preventing the meaning from being pinned down. The gesture thus operates in a civil register while continuing to carry the residual weight of its liturgical history even as it is redistributed across the social architecture of the ballet. What is invited of the viewer is not assent to doctrine but an embodied recognition of transmission itself: authority, obligation, and continuity felt through contact rather than comprehended through declaration. What is enacted on stage is not sacramental, but neither is it emptied of sacred cadences; instead, the gesture functions as a bodily conduit through which theological memory is translated into a form compatible with the ballet's civil-religious horizon.

Running parallel to this abstraction of ritual gesture is a visual rhetoric drawn from an older repertoire of frontier spectatorship, in which authority and legibility are established through elevation, outward orientation, and command of the horizon. The Revivalist's placement upon the ambo (Fig. 17a) situates his body in a manner strikingly analogous to nineteenth-century visual representations of the explorer or pioneer positioned upon a rocky outcrop—figures momentarily arrested in ascent, surveying a landscape rendered as expansive, unclaimed, and awaiting inscription. Frontispiece

[612] Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), 95.



Figure 18. Surveying the Land.

From Left to Right: (a) F. C. Yohn, Lewis's First Glimpse of the Rockies. Frontispiece in Noah Brooks, First across the Continent: The Story of the Exploring Expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1803–4–5 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901). (b) The Argonaut's Soliloquy. Frontispiece in Charles Warren Haskins, The Argonauts of California: Being the Reminiscences of Scenes and Incidents That Occurred in California in Early Mining Days (New York: Fords, Howard & Hulbert, 1890).

illustrations such as those accompanying Noah Brooks's 1901 *First Across the Continent* (Fig 18a) and Charles Haskins's 1890 *The Argonauts of California* (Fig. 18b) repeatedly stage this posture: one foot advanced, torso upright, gaze cast outward over an unruly terrain that is brought into coherence through the very act of being overseen. In these images, elevation does not function simply as a point of observation but as a formal

mechanism through which authority is produced, situating the body as a stabilizing axis between the ground and the horizon. When transposed into *Appalachian Spring*, this posture is no longer tied to geographic conquest but retains the memory of its structural logic. The Revivalist's stance, like that of the explorer, establishes a relation of oversight and orientation rather than movement through space, aligning religious authority with a frontier-derived mode of bodily command. The ambo thus functions less as a pulpit than as a symbolic outcropping, binding liturgical presence to a visual tradition in which civic legitimacy is conferred through the ability to stand, endure, and look outward. Within that tradition, the landscape is not approached as already inhabited or worked but imagined as pristine and unclaimed—rhetorically emptied so that it may be constituted as the proper object of moral labor.

The translation of these choreographic gestures, however, should not be understood as determinate content capable of direct transmission, a form of semantic code in the way John Martin proposed, that implies a rigid, one-to-one dictionary of movement, given accounts that emphasize an inherent ambiguity in Graham's creative process. Merce Cunningham, who originated the role of the Revivalist and who even at that early stage of his career was becoming a noted choreographer in his own right, later recalled Graham's uncertainty during rehearsals as to whether a particular movement expressed fear or ecstasy. Rather than insisting on a definitive affective interpretation, Graham acknowledged the ambiguity and permitted Cunningham to explore the movement physically, treating indeterminacy as an intrinsic condition of the choreography rather than a problem to be solved. Graham's own "basic respect for the ambiguity in all dance movement," as Cunningham recalled, reveals a practice less

concerned with fixing emotional meaning than with sustaining conditions of bodily openness in which response remains fluid rather than prescribed.[613] In other words, if even the choreographer cannot distinguish fear from ecstasy in her dance vocabulary, the associated movement might not be said to encode the stable directive necessary for bodily speech. Mark Franko describes this as the "emotionally ambiguous body," relocating the site of meaning from the biological—where response would be automatic and fixed—to the historical and social, where meaning is constructed and subject to interpretation.[614]

If, as Franko proposes, the body functions as a "languagebody,"—that is, as a form of bodily discursivity structured like language—it shares the properties of language itself: it is mediated, convention-bound, and yet fundamentally excessive and drifting, such that it can never be fully or finally unambiguous.[615] However, because the connection between the dancer, as the conveyer of choreographic intent, and the viewer is mediated by the "subjectivity in" any given historical [or social] moment," the viewer must actively participate in the "reading" of the dance.[616] While the gestures of supplication, prostration, and imposition are mediated and discursive in the sense that they function as physicalized discourse, their cumulative effect is not one of destabilization that is usually afforded by excess. Instead, the choreography produces an enforced homogeneity. Rather than allowing the "ambiguous body" to remain in a perpetual liminal state, Graham selects from the "constellation of representational

[613] Merce Cunningham quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde*, expanded ed. (Harmondsworth, England; New York: Penguin, 1976), 247.
[614] Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism / Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023), 89.
[615] Juan Ignacio Vallejos, "Genealogy and Event in the Work of Mark Franko," foreword to Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism / Performing Politics*, xi.
[616] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 2.

conventions" that the audience already possesses. By doing so, the ballet takes the body's potential to say more than its formal or literal constraints, what Juan Ignacio Vallejos calls "discursive excess," and anchors it to a stable, shared mythology, turning the potentially unstable interpretation of a physical act into a singular, civil-religious understanding.[617] Victor Turner's theory of ritual process provides a model for understanding this outcome. Turner defines communitas as a modality of human interrelatedness that presents society as a "homogeneous, unstructured unity."[618] While existential communitas arises spontaneously, it must be converted into normative communitas to endure, developing structure and order as it is institutionalized. Within *Appalachian Spring*, the repeated civil-religious gestures may be seen as a form of existential communitas, which, through inner spiritual mimicry, produces a felt immediacy of shared religious and national symbolism. Turner's account clarifies how such moments are rapidly subsumed into a "perduring social system," in which spontaneous affect is rigidified into norm-governed perception.[619]

As such, the prior understanding of the audience of Christian ritual gestures and American mythology supplies the semantic system that allows the choreography to function. As choreography does not invent meaning ex nihilo but selects from existing representational conventions to summon other bodies into a specific way of feeling, the Revivalist's fixed stance and the Husbandman's expansive gestures draw on this shared symbolic repertoire, preventing the ambiguous body from dissolving into anomie. The choreography, therefore, domesticates the disorderly potential of movement and channels

[617] See Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism*, esp. the Introduction, "The Politics of Expression"; Vallejos, "Genealogy and Event," xi.
[618] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 92.
[619] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 132.

it toward "master symbols representative of structural order."[620] What Foster and Franko identify as discursive ambiguity is here converted into a civil-religious unity that absorbs and neutralizes critical social theorization. The repeated gestures operate as a trigger: by inducing spiritual mimicry, they situate the audience within a liminal interval in which individual interpretive positions are softened, allowing a collective symbolic identity to take hold. The sculptural stances of manifest destiny and prayerful imposition are not merely observed but inscribed upon the audience, reinforcing a perception of American religious unity that transcends individual experience and consolidates the ballet's civil religious orientation.

[620] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 93.

Chapter V.

Conclusion

Appalachian Spring's afterlife, its deployment as a national emblem and institutional canonization, cannot be understood solely through its formal features or symbolic vocabulary. Rather, its significance lies in how aesthetic abstraction operated as a sorting mechanism, producing differential legibility across diverse interpretive communities. That differentiation was immediately evident in the work's reception, where abstraction functioned as a gatekeeping device separating those equipped to translate modernity from those for whom the dance remained opaque or even offensive. The critical reception established a fault line that would later prove central to its political utility: a pronounced divide between elite admiration and broader public resistance. Initial reviews and editorials reveal a consistent pattern: the ballet was embraced by critics already aligned with modernist aesthetics; however, audiences shaped by traditional ballet and narrative conventions often responded with confusion, skepticism, or outright hostility—responses echoed and legitimized by critics who continued to champion those older forms. This divide was not incidental to the work's later circulation but formative, revealing from the outset that the ballet functioned less as a homegrown populist expression than as an elite cultural object whose legibility depended upon prior initiation into the aesthetic language of modernism. Within metropolitan critical circles, the ballet was frequently framed in expansive humanist terms. Consistent with his unwavering support of Graham and modernism, John Martin praised the work as "natural," describing it as transcending mere "Americana" to become "a kind of

testimony to the simple fineness of the human spirit."[621] Robert Sabin, writing for the Dance Observer, echoed this elevation of the ballet into a universal register, characterizing it as a Whitmanesque vision of democracy in action—"simple people with the dignity of kings"—and insisting that it was "as unmistakably American as the tang of cider or the taste of flapjacks on a winter morning."[622] Sabin's insistence that *Appalachian Spring* "works outward into the basic experiences of people living together, love, religious belief, marriage, children," and the moral rectitude of work, is particularly revealing, insofar as he expressly links an ostensibly universal "human society" to these normative constructs of Americanness, recalling not just Whitman but, for example, the visual grammar of Norman Rockwell's iconic *Four Freedoms* published a year before.[623] That alignment is not without tension: while Rockwell's broader oeuvre would later confront racial injustice with striking directness, the *Four Freedoms* paintings operate here as a stabilizing visual norm of a normative hegemonic American mythos—one whose exclusions, like those of *Appalachian Spring* itself, become legible only in retrospect. By elevating the ballet into an abstract register of humanist universality, these critics secured its cultural authority while simultaneously ensuring that responses not grounded in modernist initiation would appear deficient rather than differently situated.

Beyond the elite circles, however, the ballet's reception was markedly different. Critics ideologically further from the modernist center frequently described Graham's movement vocabulary as awkward, grotesque, or willfully obscure. Elliot Norton, the highly respected, but Eurocentric, music and dance critic for the *Boston Post*, observed

[621] John Martin, "The Dance: Washington Festival," *New York Times*, November 5, 1944, X4.
[622] Sabin, "Dance at the Coolidge Festival," 121.
[623] Sabin, "Dance at the Coolidge Festival," 121.

that while committed "partisans" were "stirred and charmed," much of the audience was "plunged… in[to] doubt," describing the choreography as a deliberate demonstration of "what awkward and grotesque attitudes the human body can assume under duress."[624] His parting assessment, sermonizing to the reader, reduced Graham to a kind of huckster, a "peanut vendor" at the circus, whose modernist severity appeared less as artistic rigor than as performative provocation.[625] Similar reactions appeared in Rochester, where Norman Nairn compared the performance to a "cult," writing that while audiences were accustomed to ballet that "carries a story," this "seemingly pointless and endless stuff, however artistically done, doesn't register."[626] His concluding remark, that "we're really not educated up to it, poor, provincial people that we are and too much devoted to the obvious," operates, much in the vein of Norton, not as confession but as sardonic dismissal—a mock self-indictment that converts cultural resistance to the new into a badge of common sense rather than a failure of critical engagement.[627] A.J. Warner of the *Rochester Times-Union* echoed this posture more curtly, conceding that while "its partisans found it brilliant," the work was nonetheless "not [his] dish of tea."[628] In such formulations, the repeated invocation of the "partisan" does more than mark a difference in taste; it casts modern dance as a militant aesthetic enclave while asserting European classicism as a historically inherited aesthetic order whose authority demanded preservation. Framed this way, resistance to *Appalachian Spring* could be presented not just as a defense of an inherited tradition but as a commonsense rejection of an intrusive

[624] Elliott Norton, "Martha Graham," *Boston Post*, January 27, 1945.
[625] Norton, "Martha Graham."
[626] Norman Nairn, "Graham Dancers Prove Puzzle at Eastman," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, January 30, 1945.
[627] Nairn, "Graham Dancers Prove Puzzle at Eastman."
[628] A. J. Warner, "Graham Dancers Applauded," Rochester Times-Union, January 30, 1945.

avant-garde—an act of cultural border control that reinforced, rather than questioned, the authority of the established aesthetic hierarchies Graham, Copland, and Noguchi were explicitly attempting to displace.

This division extended beyond professional criticism into public discourse through letters to the editor, where audiences articulated the experiential demands the work imposed. One attendee quite passionately described the physical and mental exhaustion of attempting to decipher Graham's intentions, noting that she could not "relax and let it sink in in its own way" because "every fiber of [her] being was concentrated on trying to find the proper attitude," an effort that ultimately produced an "aversion" to experiencing Graham's work again.[629] In sharp contrast, Elizabeth Stiles, a local student at the Eastman School of Music, castigated traditionalist critics for allowing views "clouded by age and mental laxness" to shape public opinion, insisting that modern dance was a "new art" requiring audiences to seek out "libraries, periodicals, and a few 'unprovincial' people" to provide explanation.[630] Taken together, these exchanges make clear that *Appalachian Spring* did not initially function as a broadly accessible cultural artifact, its modernist language frequently eluding those not already conversant with the aesthetic assumptions of the East Coast avant-garde.

However, in the years following World War II, it was precisely this elite status that rendered *Appalachian Spring* valuable as American policymakers increasingly turned to cultural diplomacy to counter Soviet portrayals of the United States as a cultural wasteland. What had initially functioned as a marker of aesthetic distinction within

[629] Betty Anne Percy, "Letters: Enough for a While," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, February 2, 1945.
[630] Elizabeth Stiles, "Letters: For Modern Dance," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, February 1, 1945.

domestic critical hierarchies became, in the postwar period, a strategic cultural asset. The tactical value of modern dance emerged gradually through earlier experiments in cultural exchange developed during the Second World War.[631] These wartime precedents established both the administrative infrastructure and the ideological rationale for the later export of American culture as evidence of political and moral legitimacy. In the context of the growing Cold War, these strategies were redirected toward a new set of adversarial representations. As Naima Prevots emphasizes, U.S. cultural initiatives increasingly sought to counter Soviet caricatures of Americans as "gum-chewing, insensitive, materialistic barbarians," reframing American artistic production as a site of refinement, discipline, and intellectual seriousness.[632] By the mid-1950s, the federal government, under President Eisenhower, had moved toward systematic support for the international export of the performing arts, deploying living artists whose physical presence and off-stage interactions could be mobilized as embodied evidence of American individual freedom and democratic practice.[633] In this vein, African American performers such as Louis Armstrong and Alvin Ailey were foregrounded as counters to Soviet critiques of American racism, even as the artists themselves navigated logistical hardship, political surveillance, complex cross-cultural encounters, and, of course, the confrontation with Jim Crow upon their return home. Unlike static cultural artifacts, these artists were understood as mobile representatives whose bodies, comportment, and modes

[631] As Jennifer Campbell notes, models of cultural diplomacy were shaped during the 1940s in response to Nazi propaganda and anti-American sentiment, establishing cultural exchange as a means of countering hostile representations of the United States abroad; Jennifer L. Campbell, "Creating Something Out of Nothing: The Office of Inter-American Affairs Music Committee (1940–1941) and the Inception of a Policy for Musical Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (2012): 30–31; per Campbell these efforts were concentrated mostly within the American sphere of influence, almost exclusively in Latin America.
[632] Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press; Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 3.
[633] Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6.

of interaction could be read as extensions of American national ideology, operating through a managed and sanitized representation of American social reality.[634] Graham emerged in this context as a national cultural asset, increasingly positioned as a symbol of American artistic sophistication, whose work could be framed as both innovative and representative, precisely because she performed "American freedom" in the "correct" contexts.[635] Her choreography offered an abstract aesthetic that could be mobilized without appearing ideologically unruly, in other words, safe.

As modern dance came to be increasingly described by U.S. officials as "the one art uniquely American," *Appalachian Spring* gradually assumed a more privileged position within Eisenhower's broader diplomatic project, emerging as one of its most portable exemplars.[636] Framed as a visually legible narrative of national formation, the ballet offered an image of the American experience that could be read as a response to the political and social instabilities of the twentieth century. Through the Revivalist's stylized projection of religious freedom and the Husbandman—Graham's earlier Citizen persisting as a residual presence—the choreography enacts a disciplined, self-reliant mode of civic formation, an emergent individual "exploring" his rights within a new polity; thereby staging a schematic vision through which emerging nation-states might imagine their own trajectories of development.[637] What emerges is a representational schema in which figures that elsewhere registered as unstable or excessive, even monstrous, are here fully domesticated into legible, exemplary bodies of nation-building.

[634] Prevots, *Dance for Export*, 5; Campbell, "Creating Something Out of Nothing," 36–38.
[635] Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats*, 33.
[636] Donald Moore quoted in Geduld, "Dancing Diplomacy," 47.
[637] Geduld, "Dancing Diplomacy," 62; Victoria Phillips, "How Martha Graham Became a Cultural Ambassador: Modernist on the Frontier," in *Martha Graham's Cold War: The Dance of American Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 58.

The resulting vision naturalizes moral purpose as the foundation of social order, displacing the "ghosts" of American contradiction and masking the underlying coercive intentions of the diplomatic endeavor.

The ballet's abstracted presentation of the moral value of labor, of freedom of religion, and of the promise of a domesticated life allowed the American experience to be projected not as contingent or exceptional, but as exemplary and, more importantly, duplicatable. *Appalachian Spring* was thus deployed as a cultural roadmap, translating American national mythology into a form made legible within the broader geopolitical discourse of decolonization. Graham herself promoted the choreography as a "language that needs no words," capable of crossing cultural boundaries while staging the aspirational "dream of America."[638] In the process, that mythology was packaged into a portable aesthetic commodity—one that could circulate internationally as evidence of democratic maturity even as its underlying frontier logic remained structurally expansionist and inherently colonial. The ballet's capacity to hold these tensions without destabilizing fit perfectly within Eisenhower's broader effort to frame the United States as an anti-colonial power in the postwar world, even as that framing depended on a strategic abstraction, or bracketing, of America's own settler-colonial origins and its emerging forms of post-imperial leverage. For newly decolonized nations such as India, Burma, and Indonesia, the ballet was framed as the story of a former colony that had achieved prosperity and stability after breaking from British rule.[639] Given Eisenhower's repeated insistence that the United States was the "natural leader of the newly

[638] "Graham's Dances 'Pruned Down' Classics," *Stars and Stripes*, October 19, 1955, 9; Martha Graham to Visit Japan: "American Modern Dance Fanatic Popularity in the United States," *Sankei Evening*, September 5, 1955, quoted in Phillips, "How Martha Graham Became a Cultural Ambassador," 37.
[639] Prevots, *Dance for Export*, 45; Geduld, "Dancing Diplomacy," 45, 62.

independent countries," a position he grounded in the claim that "the whole of [American] history… [was] anti-colonial" within diplomatic discourse, the ballet's narrative could be read not simply as an aesthetic object but as a narrative analog for political development.[640] The maturing legacy of *Appalachian Spring*, then, was one of paradoxical entanglement. Conceived as a modernist experiment and received initially as an elite aesthetic provocation, it was later elevated into a nationalist emblem and deployed as evidence of American freedom and anti-colonial virtue. At the same time, elements such as the abstraction of frontier mythology through the erasure of Indigenous history rendered it, as Victoria Geduld pithily states, a "strange commodity": a work that testified to the human spirit while simultaneously underwriting the symbolic grammar of American global hegemony.[641] In this sense, the ballet and the diplomatic framework that elevated it operated through the same mode of abstraction, each translating historically contingent power relations into a universalized narrative of moral legitimacy and political maturation.

What enabled *Appalachian Spring* to function so effectively within the circuits of Cold War cultural diplomacy was not simply its aesthetic coherence, but a broader cultural apparatus that treated historical materials as mobile and adaptable forms. Traditions rooted in specific regional, religious, or racial contexts were abstracted into symbolic resources—valued for their affective resonance, incorporated when they served national representation, and quietly discarded when they did not. In this respect, the ballet

[640] Wm. Roger Louis, "American Anti-Colonialism and the Dissolution of the British Empire," *International Affairs* 61, no. 3 (July 1985): 416; United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Western Europe*, vol. VII, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), doc. 128.
[641] Geduld, "Dancing Diplomacy," 44.

participates in the symbolic operations characteristic of American civil religion, where historical specificity is repeatedly subordinated to national utility. This process of abstraction and circulation is not confined solely to the ballet's mid-century context; rather, it constitutes a persistent mechanism by which American identity continues to be assembled, stabilized, and marketed across cultural and political domains, shaping how regions, figures, and histories are made legible within contemporary public discourse. One site in which this abstractionist logic becomes particularly visible is in persistent representations of Appalachia, where the region is, to this day, frequently framed through a stark duality. As has been shown, on the one hand, Appalachia is rendered as Edenic—timeless, unspoiled, and available for discovery—embodying the pastoral abstraction staged in *Appalachian Spring*; on the other, it is invoked as a site of enduring white poverty, cultural stagnation, and social failure. These two frames appear opposed, yet they operate through the same process of symbolic compression, each reducing a complex and historically stratified region to a cultural shorthand deployed by elite powers to a receptive citizenry. Examining how these competing images circulate together reveals how abstraction continues to structure the cultural afterlife of *Appalachian Spring*'s mythic terrain.

Contemporary tourism-focused promotions from the region repeatedly frame Appalachia through descriptors that emphasize the redemptive purity of its landscape and the promise of discovery. West Virginia's official materials, drawing on the lyrics of John Denver, brand the state as "Almost Heaven" and pair that language with repeated invitations to encounter "unspoiled" landscapes and "hidden" destinations, presenting the region primarily through scenic encounters rather than any engagement with social or

industrial history.[642] Comparable place branding in neighboring Appalachian states adopts the same lexicon. Pennsylvania's official tourism platform consistently describes the northern tier and Appalachian Plateau, particularly the Pennsylvania Wilds, as a region of "unspoiled forests and mountains," while travel itineraries and destination copy regularly employ "hidden gem" language to position landscapes and recreational sites as available frontiers ripe for exploration.[643] Across these materials, Appalachia is thus rendered legible through a performative re-mythologization that strips the landscape of its industrial and social friction, converting a specific geography into an Edenic national idyll—a portable symbol detached from the historical contingencies of labor and struggle.

This same abstractionist grammar also structures aspects of contemporary political rhetoric, where gestures of identification rely less on historical argument than on culturally saturated signposts of moral gravitas, strategies that closely align with those deployed by Roosevelt in the mid-twentieth century. A recent and instructive example appears in the campaign rhetoric of then Vice Presidential candidate J. D. Vance, who, when responding to accusations of racial insensitivity, invoked his consumption of Mountain Dew as a gesture of identification with white Appalachian voters. At a campaign appearance on July 22, 2024, Vance remarked, "I had a Diet Mountain Dew yesterday and one today. I'm sure they're going to call that racist too, but—it's good. I love you guys."[644] As Ian Bogost observes in *The Atlantic*, the comment was not a throwaway joke but a deliberate appeal to what he characterizes as "a whole history of

[642] West Virginia Department of Tourism, "Almost Heaven"; the official state tourism campaign of West Virginia.
[643] Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, *VisitPA*, "Pennsylvania Wilds," official state tourism destination page.
[644] Ian Bogost, "J. D. Vance Has a Point About Mountain Dew," *The Atlantic*, July 23, 2024.

symbolism for white, rural America."[645] Bogost notes that Mountain Dew has come to function as a condensed "symbol of Appalachia," a region he describes as the perceived host of "America's white poverty, despair, and addiction," and argues that Vance's gesture works by transforming the cultural shame associated with the drink into a defiant marker of class and race resentment.[646] In this formulation, the soda operates as a symbolic proxy through which political affiliation and grievance can be signaled without overt ideological exposition, relying instead on the drink's accumulated cultural associations. This symbolic potency derives from historical layers that predate its commercialization. The term "Mountain Dew" long functioned as Appalachian slang for moonshine, a linguistic marker tied to the region's Scots-Irish settlers, many of whom migrated to the Appalachian Mountains to evade state oversight and taxation.[647] As Ray Rensi and Leo Downing explain, moonshining emerged from a constellation of "values, beliefs, and lifestyles" shaped by a deep "distrust and hatred of what [settlers] perceive as unwarranted government intrusion into their private affairs."[648] For these communities, distilling whiskey was not merely an economic necessity but a cultural expression; its material history providing the foundation for the soda's later mythification.

As the product entered national markets in the mid-twentieth century, this regional symbolism was further stylized through what Douglas B. Holt identifies as "cultural branding."[649] In Holt's account, iconic brands draw upon "populist worlds as

[645] Bogost, "J. D. Vance Has a Point About Mountain Dew."
[646] Bogost, "J. D. Vance Has a Point About Mountain Dew."
[647] Ray Rensi and Leo Downing, "A Touch of Mountain Dew: Art and History of Whiskey-Making in North Georgia," in *The Many Faces of Appalachia: Exploring a Region's Diversity: Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Appalachian Studies Conference*, ed. Sam Gray and Jacqueline Stewart (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985), 195–204.
[648] Rensi and Downing, "A Touch of Mountain Dew," 195.
[649] See Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004).

source materials" in order to perform myths that resolve cultural contradictions.[650] Central to this strategy was the "Hillbilly Myth," through which the brand constructed a model of fictional manhood opposed to the emotional restraint and routinized existence of the "organization man."[651] By the 1970s, however, the "hillbilly" archetype had acquired new political associations, increasingly aligned with reactionary identity and cultural marginalization. These accumulated historical and commercial layers converge in Vance's contemporary rhetorical deployment of the brand. As Bogost notes, Mountain Dew today occupies a contradictory position: it is the fifth-most-popular soda in the United States, having long since exceeded any fringe market, yet it retains a deep cultural association with Appalachia, where terms such as "Mountain Dew Mouth"—a reference to poor dental health—continue to function as mechanisms that "make deprivation seem like personal choice."[652] In this context, Mountain Dew resolves its cultural contradictions by allowing consumers—and, in this case, political figures—to transform stigmatized markers into emblems of authenticity. Vance's invocation of the drink thus exemplifies the persistence of a political method in which historically specific materials are abstracted into portable symbolic capital, capable of signaling allegiance, grievance, and belonging through recognizably American forms rather than explicit historical argument.

A parallel process is evident in contemporary invocations of Abraham Lincoln, particularly in the rhetoric of Donald Trump and Joe Biden during the 2020 presidential election, where Lincoln was repeatedly summoned as a source of moral authority while

[650] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 9.
[651] Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 40.
[652] Bogost, "J. D. Vance Has a Point About Mountain Dew."

being detached from the historical contingencies of the sectional conflict and emancipation. During a Fox News virtual town hall on May 4, 2020, Trump gestured toward the Lincoln Memorial and, in a similar, if stunted, deployment to Roosevelt's "horse-chestnut," remarked, "They always said, 'Lincoln, nobody got treated worse than Lincoln.' I believe I am treated worse."[653] In this formulation, Lincoln functions, as with Roosevelt's analogy, as a benchmark of unjust persecution, mobilized as a legitimating comparison without reference to the political, military, or racial conditions that defined his presidency. By contrast, in an address delivered at Gettysburg on October 6, 2020, Joe Biden framed Lincoln's words as a living moral resource, quoting the Gettysburg Address and insisting that Lincoln's lesson—"a house divided could not stand"—remains "a great and timeless truth," before recasting that line as an immediate diagnosis: "Today, once again, we are a house divided," and an imperative for civic recommitment, "We must be dedicated now to our own sacred effort," a formulation he explicitly folded into his campaign's recurring claim that the election constituted a "battle for the soul of the nation."[654] In both cases, Lincoln operates less as a historically situated actor than as a civil-religious emblem, capable of organizing a transcendent and theologically grounded authority through collective national self-recognition. Considered alongside Vance's Appalachian gesture, these examples illustrate the persistence of a rhetorical method in which named historical figures and regional signifiers are abstracted from their original specificity and redeployed as portable moral capital. This method—central to Roosevelt-era political language and cultural production—continues to structure contemporary

[653] "Trump Says U.S. Press Treats Him Worse than Lincoln," *Voice of America*, May 4, 2020.
[654] Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania," October 6, 2020, *American Presidency Project*; Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Address Accepting the Democratic Presidential Nomination in Wilmington, Delaware," August 20, 2020, *American Presidency Project.*

political discourse, enabling appeals to national identity and legitimacy through recognizably American forms that function at the level of symbolic recognition rather than historical exposition.

The persistence of this abstractionist logic helps explain not only the ballet's historical deployment but also its continued interpretive flexibility in the present. As *Appalachian Spring* has remained in continuous repertory, it has been ritually invoked in moments of contemporary crisis as a symbolic resource—one capable of absorbing new meanings while retaining its civil-religious authority. The work's capacity to be read as both historically grounded and perpetually contemporary underscores how abstraction enables cultural forms to function as sites of moral reassurance, offering continuity amid disruption. While the ballet is often celebrated for its "mystic glow" and its ability to serve as a "parable of a struggle that leads… to a new beginning," its American tenor emerges, in contemporary readings, as a complex construct shaped by diverse and sometimes conflicting influences rather than a singular or homogenous identity.[655] This interpretive elasticity is especially evident in recent critical engagements that situate the ballet within unfolding crises. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mark Swed, writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, explicitly linked the work's wartime origins to what he described as a "new world war against a novel coronavirus," framing *Appalachian Spring* as a necessary "parable of a struggle" capable of guiding a fractured society toward "humility and grace" and, ultimately, a "new spring."[656] Against the backdrop of the divisive presidential campaign of 2020, Swed positioned the ballet as

[655] Mark Swed, "A Ballet for Us All: How *Appalachian Spring* Carries Promise for a New Beginning," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 2020, E3.
[656] Swed, "A Ballet for Us All."

offering "a vision of an America not of cancellations but additions," emphasizing that the score's American sound is itself a "melting pot of races and cultures"—one whose layered genealogy challenges assumptions of a stable or monolithic national identity and gestures instead toward a form of utopian transcendence at a moment of social incompatibility.[657] As the public sphere reopened following pandemic shutdowns, Bonnie Costello similarly turned to *Appalachian Spring* as a resource for navigating contemporary cultural fracture. Writing amid intensifying culture wars in which terms such as "heritage" and "patriotism" had become, in her account, "tainted and degraded," Costello argued that the work offers a "usable past" capable of acknowledging historical "terror" without remaining bound to it.[658] She further underscored how contemporary performances featuring diverse dancers reconfigure the ballet's meaning by integrating "particular experience and presence," transforming what might otherwise appear as abstract or objective conflict into "our conflict."[659] In this reading, the ballet's central visual image of what Costello identified as the "unfinished house" operates as a durable metaphor for the American experiment itself: a structure perpetually under construction, requiring continued ethical and civic engagement from each generation.

This capacity to stave off narrative closure animates Swed's later commentary, extending conceptions of renewal but under conditions of loss. Written in the wake of the fire-devastated landscape of Los Angeles and against the ongoing destruction of neighborhoods in Ukraine, *Appalachian Spring* emerges as both a "balm for trying times" and a blueprint for "spiritual renewal," its quietude offering a counterpoint to spectacle

[657] Swed, "A Ballet for Us All."
[658] Bonnie Costello, "Still Unfinished: Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring* and Ours," *American Scholar* 92, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 17.
[659] Costello, "Still Unfinished," 17.

and excess.[660] Drawing a direct parallel between contemporary catastrophe and the ballet's emergence out of global war, the work, for Swed, represented not simply restoration, but "a rebuilding in an entirely new spirit," one oriented toward restraint, acceptance, and a "calm, inspiring" reorientation toward nature.[661] It is precisely this capacity for the iterative regeneration of collective moral purpose, its ability to offer symbolic continuity without denying rupture, that renders the ballet resonant again and again, marking it as a resource for imagining civic transcendence, one that figures a passage beyond crisis. Taken together, these contemporary reactivations confirm that *Appalachian Spring* endures not because its meanings are resolved, but because its abstraction continues to render the work available as a civil-religious instrument—capable of absorbing crisis, redistributing moral affect, and reaffirming national coherence without requiring historical closure.

Concluding Reflections

This thesis has approached *Appalachian Spring* not as a stable emblem of American identity but as a cultural formation whose meaning emerged through a series of negotiations—ideological, historical, and creative—across the early 1940s. By tracing the ballet's genealogy through its scripts, collaborative processes, musical architecture, scenographic logic, and reception, the study has argued that *Appalachian Spring* does not merely resonate with, but actively engages with a uniquely American dimension of civil religion, doing so through a system of abstraction. That abstraction did not simply

[660] Mark Swed, "Commentary: What a Smoldering L.A. Needs Now Is Martha Graham Dance's *Appalachian Spring*," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 2025.
[661] Swed, "What a Smoldering L.A. Needs Now."

remove historical particularity; it reorganized it, translating situated cultural materials into symbolic forms capable of functioning as national myth. The ballet's enduring cultural authority rests in this capacity to render historical contradiction aesthetically coherent while preserving a residual tension that continues to invite interpretive engagement. At stake throughout this project has been a methodological question as much as a historical one: how to account for a work that appears to affirm national unity while emerging from, and quietly bearing the imprint of, plural identities, ideological commitments, and cultural dissonances. Rather than resolving this tension, the thesis has treated it as constitutive. *Appalachian Spring* operates within the symbolic economy of American civil religion precisely because it sustains a tentative balance between legibility and productive indeterminacies—between the promise of moral consensus and the persistence of unresolved histories.

The central claim advanced here is that abstraction functions as a civil religious mechanism that translates historical experience into a symbolic register. In the case of *Appalachian Spring*, abstraction refers to the process by which particular histories—regional, religious, racial, and ideological—are compressed into visual forms that appear timeless, even self-evident, producing forms that are secure within that racial hegemony yet adaptable to progressive cultural claims. This process is visible across the ballet's development, from the imprint of *American Document* or *Lincoln Portrait*, through the Civil War-inflected dramaturgy of "House of Victory," to the pared-down ritual landscape of the final work. What is achieved through this abstraction is a symbolic elasticity: the ballet becomes available as a national parable that transcends its own historical contingency to sustain readings of moral origin, renewal, and continuity. This

process embodies the mechanism of re-mythologization theorized by Cassirer and Barthes, wherein the regional and the particular are abstracted into a universal symbolic form, one that stands for the consciousness of the multitude. Refracted through Bellah's conception of civil religion, this framework demonstrates how *Appalachian Spring* functions as a durable symbol of American identity: the ballet does not narrate the nation's past, but rather stages a symbolic grammar through which that past can be felt, rehearsed, and affirmed within a unified understanding of the American experience. Gesture, musical cadence, and spatial arrangement substitute for narrative specificity, allowing the work to circulate as an emblem of collective memory without demanding historical reckoning. This mechanism is neither neutral nor accidental. The abstraction that renders the ballet culturally powerful also circumscribes the range of meanings it can bear. By translating conflict into ritualized movement and historical trauma into symbolic posture, the ballet aligns with the integrative aspirations of civil religion while remaining insulated from direct political critique. This insulation is not total; it is precisely the traces, the dialectic of unresolved tensions, that prevent *Appalachian Spring* from collapsing into empty formalism.

As such, *Appalachian Spring* may be understood as a work that cultivates a collective orientation toward national moral unity rather than as one that argues for it. In other words, rather than articulating any prescriptive claim, it enacts a dialectic through various combinations of action and pose, the choreography organizing bodies into patterns of supplication and imposition, intertwined with expansion and collectivity, that echo civil and liturgical structures without invoking institutional particularities. Copland's score, particularly in its pacing, its tonal restraint, and incorporation of Shaker

material, reinforces this logic by offering a musical analogue to civic ritual: affectively resonant, formally disciplined, and oriented toward shared recognition. This alignment with civil religious structures helps explain the ballet's capacity to function across divergent historical contexts. From its wartime premiere to its Cold War deployments and subsequent canonization, *Appalachian Spring* has remained relevant as a statement of national ethos precisely because it avoids explicit claims. Civil religion, as Bellah theorized it, depends upon such symbolic indirection. Its authority derives from the appearance of transcendence over partisan or sectarian divisions, even as it draws selectively from particular traditions. The ballet's invocation of religious gesture without theological specificity exemplifies this dynamic. Acts of blessing, prayer, and communality are detached from doctrinal content and reconstituted as bodily signs of moral order. In this way, *Appalachian Spring* does not secularize religion so much as civilize it, relocating sacred meaning within the domain of national culture. The result is a choreography of collective orientation that invites participation without requiring ideological commitment, a hallmark of civil religious expression.

At the same time, the ballet's civil-religious coherence depends on a mode of abstraction that operates as a mediating field, within which culturally specific materials are neither fully assimilated nor openly contested, but held in a state of negotiated suspension. The materials from which *Appalachian Spring* draws—Appalachian regionalism, Shaker religious practice, frontier mythology—enter the work as selectively thinned signifiers rather than intact traditions, rendered available for national circulation precisely by the suspension of their historical tensions. Postcolonial theory, particularly through the concepts of Orientalism and hybridity, has provided a critical lens for

examining this process. The ballet's treatment of cultural otherness does not conform neatly to colonial paradigms, yet it participates in analogous dynamics of representation. Appalachian culture becomes an interior frontier, rhetorically emptied of social contradiction and made available for the deployment of moral labor. Shakerism is abstracted into an aesthetic of simplicity divorced from its theological and communal radicalism. Indigenous and African American presences, while invoked in earlier scripts, recede in the final ballet into symbolic absence. This structural erasure functions in the manner identified by Toni Morrison as a reflexive Africanist presence—a fabricated shadow, or a Derridean trace, against which the normative, namely the white American self, is reimagined as innocent and progressive. In this way, the ballet constitutes an "epistemology of whiteness," which, for its effect, depends on the subliminal detection—as with the reviews of the Revivalist's solo—of a subaltern "other," an asymmetrical ground upon which white American identity is remythologized as moral and subsequently experienced as the natural reflection of a unified, cross-cultural national whole. The production of said unified image within *Appalachian Spring* depends upon a certain level of ambivalence that arises from within a third space in which cultural materials are neither wholly subsumed nor fully articulated. In other words, a field of abstraction from which the enunciation of a recognizably American national identity occurs precisely because it remains haunted by what it cannot safely and openly incorporate. The work's civil religious power thus embodies an ethical ambiguity: the capacity to unify through symbols that allow for but do not demand historical accountability.

One of the distinctive contributions of this study has been its attention to performative gesture and spatial design as repositories of cultural meaning. In *Appalachian Spring*, both the body and the set function as an archive of historical memories—the settings, roles, actions, and gestures of an American dramaturgical toolkit—transmitted without textual articulation and apprehended through affective rather than analytical recognition. One way to approach what *Appalachian Spring* is doing—and what this study has tried to remain answerable to—is to treat the ballet as a mechanism through which national meaning is physically produced, stabilized, and made recognizable. As such, what distinguishes *Appalachian Spring* is that the dancer's body does not merely signify a national imaginary but carries within it the genealogy of the processes through which that imaginary was formed, carrying, quite literally, the sediment of aesthetic history: the accumulation of technique, discipline, and inheritance that makes certain movements legible as "American" while concealing the labor required to produce that legibility. Nothing in *Appalachian Spring* arrives fully formed or unconditioned. Graham's movement vocabulary, Noguchi's sculptural frames, and Copland's musical architecture all emerge from personal genealogies shaped by modernist experimentation and cultural trauma, Orientalist borrowing and racial hybridity, and religious and political subtexts colored by literary invocations. In this sense, the ballet may be seen as a concentration of embodied cultural energy, converting through performance aesthetic, political, and cultural histories into forms that can be felt, rehearsed, and collectively recognized.

At the same time, the study has resisted the temptation to read the ballet as either a straightforward affirmation or a covert critique of civil religion. Such binary framing

would flatten the work's complexity. Instead, *Appalachian Spring* has been treated as a site where civil religious logic is both realized and tested. The ballet affirms the possibility of shared meaning while exposing the limits of that affirmation through its omissions and tensions. The implications of this analysis extend beyond *Appalachian Spring* itself. By foregrounding abstraction as a cultural mechanism, the thesis offers a methodology for examining other works of American modernism that participate in the construction of national myth. Music, dance, architecture, and visual art all contributed to the symbolic repertoire of mid-twentieth-century America, often through similar processes of translation and simplification. Future scholarship might build upon this approach by attending more closely to the embodied dimensions of civil religion across different media and historical contexts. Performance, in particular, offers a lens for examining how national identity is not only represented but rehearsed—how citizens are invited to inhabit symbolic roles through shared aesthetic experience. Such inquiry may prove especially fruitful in analyzing moments of crisis, when civil religious forms are most actively mobilized. The study also invites further engagement with the ethical dimensions of abstraction. While abstraction enables inclusivity by avoiding explicit exclusion, it also perpetuates structural invisibility. Attending to what is lost in the translation from history to symbol remains an essential task for scholars of culture and religion alike. *Appalachian Spring* endures not because it resolves these contradictions of American identity but because it renders them aesthetically and conceptually manageable. Functioning as a Bakhtinian zone of contact—where the hegemonic civil-religious narrative must constantly negotiate with the haunting presence of the vernacular and subaltern voices it seeks to simplify—the ballet stands as a paradigmatic example of

American civil religion at work: not as doctrine, but as practice, not as consensus, but as performance. Its cultural authority lies in its capacity to invite recognition without demanding agreement, to evoke belonging without prescribing belief. The work's power and its ambiguity reside in this invitation. By tracing the cultural genealogy of *Appalachian Spring*, this thesis has sought to illuminate how modernist performance participates in an ongoing dialogue constitutive of national meaning. The ballet does not simply reflect American civil religion; it helps constitute it, offering a model of how abstraction can both unify and obscure. To attend to this dynamic is not to diminish the work's achievement, but to recognize the complexity of the cultural labor it performs—a labor that continues to shape the symbolic architecture of American identity.

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