

## What's in a Word?

Art requires no interlocutor. If it can be explained in words, it is not art. These are familiar dictums. Yet words do supply the key, as in titles. And words do prepare the way, as in program notes.

Below are printed excerpts from the program notes for Martha Graham's new dance composition, "Deaths and Entrances," as it was informally presented in practice clothes, in two private previews at Bennington College, where it was in rehearsal during July.

The title is a line from a poem by Dylan Thomas. The music is by Hunter Johnson. The set, lighting and properties are by Arch Lauterer, and the choreography by Miss Graham.

"This is a legend of the heart's life. The action takes place in a room and the halls of an ancient house. It concerns three sisters 'doom-eager' as the three Brontë sisters were 'doom-eager' to fulfill their destiny.

"It concerns the restless pacings of the heart on some winter evening. There are remembrances of childhood, certain dramatizations of well-known objects, dreams of romance. . . . It is 'imagination kindled at antique fires.'

"There are 'Deaths and Entrances' of hopes, fears, remembrances, dreams, and there is ultimate vision.

"This is essentially a legend of poetic experience rather than story of incident. In the secret life of the heart there are invisible actors and 'Deaths and Entrances' with no barriers of period or time. Rather there is a suspension of time and the subsequent intensification of experience at the sight of some simple remembered object: a shell, a glass goblet, a vase.

"All of the objects are used in this sense rather than as stage properties to accompany some specific action. The whole is presented as action due to intensification of experience rather than as everyday seen behavior of body."

This work (which the writer has not seen) is evidently not about the Brontës, but about Us, all of Us. It uses the Brontës and their milieu as a flying-field, a starting-off place into the land of common experience in the heart of man. For who has not been flooded with remembrance, a sharp renewal of experience, at the sight of an object—such as an ornament, a piece of china—or felt an intensification of the moment, present or past, or both together, at a sudden sound or thought?

Here words do prepare the heart to receive the new message from the heart. But when the work is publicly shown, as it is expected to be this fall, words will not be sufficient to describe all that is seen and felt. Judging from former Graham works, the overtones and undertones, the subtle and allusive suggestions, will be intimate and personal, yet

universal in their application. This is the secret of Martha Graham's greatness—she is in touch with humanity. Her very movement quality is derived from human movement.

However, when the work does come to production, all may be changed. Program and program notes may be entirely different. Miss Graham is a perfectionist, a careful worker. But the substance will remain. Whatever alterations she may see fit to make, it will still be "a legend of the heart's life"—of that, We for whom it is made may be sure. M. L.

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