

Eliot in drag downtown!

DOES PLOT MATTER?

BY DEBORAH JOWITT


Photograph by Richard Termine

■ Ariane Anthony approaches text and narrative in unusual ways. Her latest and most ambitious piece, *Do I Dare?*, set to an effective score by John Stone, riffs off T.S. Eliot's bitter and poignant poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," using a cast of seven and spare scenery by Roger Predmore that contrasts the stuffy coziness of a London flat (armchair, lamp, mirror) with the stairs the protagonist wearily ascends and descends, with windowpanes that float down and buildings that fly up to reveal sky.

The choreographer herself plays the Prufrock of Eliot's fears: wire-rimmed spectacles, drab suit, too-tight collar, bowler, furled umbrella. She's wonderful at conveying his timidity, slight prissiness, and attempted jauntiness. I've always envisioned the "you" of "Let us go then, you and I" as a lady of the streets. Anthony is accompanied by a slightly bolder self (Andrea Thome) who appears

Ariane Anthony and Company: Eliotic

from behind the mirror, and who does "dare to eat a peach." At one point, the other cast members, in Prufrock attire and masks, invade the protagonist's lair—sit in his chair, open his book, try his pipe.

In Anthony's hands, the literal becomes strange, fey, revelatory. Eliot's images—the stairs, distant voices, tea and cakes, the coffee spoons that may measure out a man's life, the scuttling ragged claws of sea creatures—crop up manipulated or transformed. Performers in black pants and T-shirts dance holding ruffled red gowns (by Agata Oleksiak) against themselves. As tempo and mood become more hectic, an orgy develops. You'd swear partners were tangling on the floor before Prufrock's shocked and concupiscent eyes.