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A Riddle-Song For Duke Ellington

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A Riddle-Song for Duke Ellington

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pigshit", *Artaud Anthology*, ed. Hirschman [San Francisco, 1965], pp. 38-40). While speaking he moves in a slow continual circle round the walls of the auditorium behind the audience so that by his final words he will have returned to his original position.

Silence. Very softly in unison the group on the stage chant the three verses of "I want to be happy" from *No, No Nannette*; during the third verse they wander listlessly off the stage and take up positions behind the audience on either side of the auditorium. Silence. Flute music begins, pastoral and slow. The two bodies on the ground rise and move very slowly towards each other. When they meet they touch hands and in slow motion lower themselves onto the ground on top of each other. Gradually they start rocking back and forth. The drum begins a gentle tapping. The rock becomes a roll over and over towards the front and then the back of the auditorium. The roll increases in speed, covers more and more area and the drum beats louder. Finally, at maximum speed they roll the full length of the auditorium from front to back and, at the final crash of the drum, stay still. The drummer, as ten-foot puppet, then comes forward slowly towards the couple. He stops, looks down, and kicks the couple so that they roll towards the front of the auditorium. Each step he takes kicks them further up the center. As this happens, the group from the back of the audience starts snickering softly. The laughter grows in volume and threat as they move out. Four members come round the front towards the wheelbarrow and tip it so that it is ready to receive the rolling couple. The final kick projects them into the wheelbarrow as the laughter grows in intensity. The wheelbarrow is righted and the group behind closes in throwing sacks on top of the couple. In a single moment all freeze in mid-gesture. Two members break from the freeze, move towards the wheel, hoist the person at the wheel onto their shoulders, carry her back, and place her standing astride the wheelbarrow. As her feet touch, the group fling themselves backward onto the ground and remain still. Sudden music (Tallis forty part Motet or strong unaccompanied choral music) for thirty seconds, followed by a strong rock number without break. As the music changes, each member of the group, at five second intervals, leaps up and breaks into a spastic dance like a puppet jerked by strings. Dancing this way they turn their backs on the audience, move onto the stage, and finally exit on either side. The figure on the wheelbarrow stays still throughout. Blackout.

A RIDDLE-SONG FOR DUKE ELLINGTON

Ten tall ballerinas of bone
 Danced on a table of ivory stone—
 Clothed like blackbirds warbling home—
 And their shoes were like windows,
 And their shoes were like bone.

CRAIG WILLIAMSON