

A preview of

PQRS, by Patrick Durgin

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Act Two: Scene One

Productions in Chicago:

Audience and players without stepping out of character gather in Millennium Park, surround Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate*, each with a flash bulb in hand angled from a unique stance like gawking tourists enjoying fresh, lake air and a funhouse mirror. All bulbs are set off simultaneously. An aerial photograph is taken of the event and shows a poltergeist effect. S takes the photo home, acquires a self-portrait.

Productions in Madrid:

Audience members climb a ladder cautiously placed before *Guernica* and trace the hen. The first with egg on their face becomes S. Because museums in Europe frequently do not charge admission, the queue to trace *Guernica* will seem miniscule in comparison to the crowds gathered to see art rather than poets theater. But this only improves the odds of entering the script as S, who then exits into the painting to make way for herself.

Productions in Los Angeles:

S solicits treatments. The audience concurs. The winning treatment comprises the experience of winning. It's a bargain, the audience concurs.

Productions in Paris:

S is dressed in a stereotypical mime's costume complete with whiteface. She acts as a docent at the Square de la Petite Roquette, gesticulating a silent narrative of the early prison stay of

Jean Genet at the panopticon prison for children that stood here for decades—she and the audience stand amidst the playgrounds of the current park, small children all around, climbing over the swings and gyms. Standing before the plaque at the gate to the park, where the tour begins, S performs the box—poorly, too gracefully—to illustrate and pay tribute to the plight of the female resistance fighters who were imprisoned there during the German occupation. She leads the audience through the fountain just beyond the gates as the tour winds down, soaking everyone and disappearing into the water like a witch.

Productions in Prague:

Audience members are given solar filter lenses transmitting less than 0.003% (density~4.5) of visible light (380 to 780 nm) and no more than 0.5% (density~2.3) near-infrared radiation (780 to 1400 nm) before being led to stand before František Bilek's *Moses Dreaming of Adam*. Unbeknownst, the glasses had been dipped in a lethe-like serum which immediately returns each member of the audience to a dream state exactly replicating their very last dream, at which point their nomenclature awaits experience, though an exact fit is imminent and partially recognizable as they dimly emerge from this state to contemplate the even dimmer outline of the figure of Moses perceptible through the glasses. This premonition—a bad word for it, but a better one is sure to come—registers as a trivial menace or a kind of cramp. S is everything everyone is about to say.

Productions in London:

The theater and its scenario—that is, the house and its inhabitants—enter the transverse realm of cinema, Derek Jarman's *Jubilee*: specifically the super-8 scene of a bonfire featuring Amyl Nitrate, the historian, dancing a ballet beside “the boys.” This

scene elaborates on and foreshadows the scope of the tenacious grip of lucre on the imagination of temporality—not only history, but time itself, signaled by the classical masque dangling above the flaccid penis of one of the brother-lovers, as well as the sheen of decay over both the visuals and the soundtrack (deeply romanticized ennui—lugubrious nostalgia). We hear Amyl utter the line “Carnation from Floris: not all the good things have disappeared” in the voice of S and recognize we are the kidnapped young women, “punk” hooligans, attending a lesson in the hovel Amyl shares with Bod (Elizabeth I’s doppelganger), Mad, Chaos, Crabs, and the boys. We hear this line again in voice-over as the car is pulling up to Borgia Ginz’s estate in the gated community of Dorset, after the girls have sold out to the media machine. Amyl’s obsession with the destruction of civilization through commercialism, on one hand, or through ennui on the other sits uneasily beside her adoration of all things flash. She is distraught when her Winston Churchill mug breaks. She loves expensive French perfume and enjoys the help of a French au pair. Yet she is not at all bothered by this fundamental contradiction. Mad’s take on history is quite different, it seems. Mad duplicates the contradiction. “This is how to compress [history],” she says, “you forget it.” But she doesn’t advocate the abolition of memory so much as the destruction of half-remembered artifacts. She sets light to Amyl’s *Teach Yourself History* book. Viv, the “artist” is a romantic. She’s not nostalgic, but she believes and invests in love. She and the boys have a tender affair. She says to them, “I know [Mad] is right, that’s what upsets me.” Theater’s allusive texture is transformed into didacticism in cinema. S is Amyl, but also Viv, Mad, and the boys themselves (not a resolution of their conflicting traits, but a combination). And we know this as we come out of the screen back into the theater. S does not acknowledge this collective epiphany, but why should she? She resolves the known, not the spasm of the onset of knowledge. She is beyond irony.