

Variation on a Variation of a Mode

by Sam Rasnake

I'll begin with Julio Cortázar, "What remains to be said is always a cloud, two clouds, or long hours of a sky perfectly clear," then turn the camera to my own face. He turns the camera, and the strap falls across his left wrist, and snaps the shout. Suddenly, and it was over before I noticed what had happened, the young boy runs out of the park — Paris or London or Memphis — out of the story, and into my poem, my prose poem, a flash even — Borges must be so proud somewhere. If I listen closely, the pen's scraping on the page speaks the words. He has to listen closely, bending his ear to his notebook. The furnace has cut on. It's February though he's not certain of the year, but he's sure it's the year of record snows.

There's a woman in the story — there's always a woman in the story — and it's the same woman, sometimes blond, sometimes brunette, though she's new to me, but her face is familiar, her cheeks sloping marble-like to both exquisite temples, with the softest of ears, and eyes that stop you cold, and lips whispering golden words against your neck, her hand always stretched toward the lens of a Nikon S.

I know the man with his black tongue and dark suit is not far off. He's out of his car now. He's been parked there for some time, maybe reading, maybe watching. I hear his footsteps and decide to add that sound to the piece, and it's a good sound: the *clomp, clomp, clomp* that only thin soles over asphalt can give.

The time is unclear, but it's real, and it's late. He's on a sidewalk— his car, a convertible, must be parked nearby. A sea of faces — He writes "sea" but decides against it — *-sea — I'm on the*

sidewalk now, a _____ of faces moving in synch — He'll come back to this part later — on a night, a warm one at that. But it's not the park, not the story or poem, or even the club he finds himself wandering into — or is it chasing or being chased, I never can remember — and it doesn't really matter since they're all the same. Instead, it's a film. The Yardbirds' "Stroll On," at first a low rumble, then, as he gets closer — distinct and loud. There's a crowd. Most are standing, one couple dances in the back of the room, and no one is talking.

He rolls with the reel, the hot light of the projector making everything clear and alive over the seats and heads and onto the screen. He's very pleased that he began with clouds and ended with a film in a not-so-crowded theater. I am pleased. That's true, and I don't know why. What's that? —

Alternate ending, 1:

One ends with pigeons or sparrows, one with a mimed game of tennis, and another with a crossed out word. The intent is to go back to the page and write a word that fits, and he will do it. Just not now.

Alternate ending, 2:

He's eating waffles with coffee. A paperback and journal on either side of the plate. One pen, one pencil.

Alternate ending, 3:

It'll never be known how this has to be told is his favorite passage. "I can't do better than that," he says. These are the only words actually spoken.

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