

Short stories by M. Banier

**In a single click, the writer François-Marie Banier fixes his prey.
The story of a life in an instant.**

[Photo from the collection published by Denoël]

Almost all writers have a hobby. Some gather prizes; others suffer failures. Some make waves; others wallow in their solitude or discourage their best friends. In any case, they all find something to occupy them. M. François-Marie Banier, novelist and playwright, ever the young man about town, has been taking photographs for a long time – a period no less considerable than his height, his charm and his effrontery. In reality, the photos on show at the Musée National d'Art Moderne – an extension of his collection published by Denoël – are like short stories, in the sense that the short story is a short cut, a sharply intensified picture of a life captured at the moment of its conclusion: the fourth act without the previous ones where the tragedy, or sometimes the farce, has taken shape. When M. Banier, tired of walking round his subject, pulls the trigger like some familiar spirit imbued with a mortal unconscious mind, the irreversible is accomplished in the existence of his prey. It is the moment, for example, when Beckett's fame, or Silvana Manganò's beauty, or the great age of some anonymous woman seen walking, are at their apogee. M. Banier has a distinctly Baudelairian taste for *passantes* – women passing by – from simple housewives caught just after they get out of bed to millionairesses whom all the diamonds in the world can't stop looking like fortune tellers. They also possess a loneliness which, in the early 1970s, the great American photographer Diane Arbus was able to capture in ferocious-looking glamourpusses foreshadowing Mrs. Nancy Reagan. Perhaps only purely Parisian stars, distorted by the routine of fame, resist naturalness.

There's a feeling that, for all these men and women, it's time to look back and take stock. What happened a few minutes ago, or yesterday, or in the most distant days of childhood we have never recovered from? Is Nathalie Sarraute thinking of the samovars of old Russia as she looks at her teapot? It's up to us to piece the events together, or at least to put forward a hypothesis. M. Banier, from whom one may have feared systematic cruelty, obliges the viewer to feel tenderness, to be imaginative, and to have a sense of humour. To enter the dreams of others, unlocking the doors to their mysteries. How has he managed to make us believe we can hear the sound of footsteps in a snow-covered garden or on the desert pavement outside a café? If there was true justice, M. Banier would be indicted for abusing a minor art form. He'd be sent to prison where, true to form, without equal but not without his camera, he would be capable of recreating Piranesi's drawings.

Angelo Rinaldi.

(Translation by Martyn Back)