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Barbara Kingsolver - b. 1955

Bénédicte Meillon



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Interviewed by Bénédicte Meillon, October 20, 2002, First published in *JSSE* n°41, 2003.

- 1 Barbara Kingsolver was born in 1955 and grew up in rural Kentucky. Her college education in Indiana and Arizona developed her interests as a scientist. She mostly studied ecology and biology, in which she received her Masters of Science degree, while simultaneously taking creative writing classes. She gradually became a full-time fiction writer after having covered a broad range of professions, including copy editor, housecleaner, X-ray technician, archaeologist, biological researcher and translator of medical documents, and scientific journalist. She has lived in the Congo and the Caribbean in her childhood, and later in France and Greece. These experiences abroad together with her Cherokee origins have paved the way for her deep involvement in politics. Barbara Kingsolver claims to be a “political artist”, which shows through her highly multicultural writing and the historical background that permeates her fiction. She now lives in Tucson, Arizona, with her husband and two daughters, and they spend a lot of time as a family on a farm in Southern Appalachia. Her writing includes one collection of poems, a non-fictional account of women’s role in the Arizona mine strike of 1983, three books of essays, one collection of short stories and five novels. Both her scientific vision of the world and a syncretic form of mysticism underlie all her writings, expressing concern for how we create stories about who we are as individuals, as members of a community, and as part of the cosmos.

Bénédicte MEILLON: Why write only one collection of short stories and so many more novels?

Barbara KINGSOLVER: I guess the answer to that question is that I am long-winded, maybe. Because several times I have begun short stories that turned into novels. It’s very hard for me to be succinct. I can write a short essay, but with fiction I love a

broader canvas, I love to take on very large subjects. I think it may have to do with the fact that my work is driven by theme. My point of origin is theme, rather than character or plot, and short stories are plot-driven. I very rarely *begin* with a plot in mind. I begin with a theme in mind and then I begin constructing the plot to service the theme, to carry the theme, and that method doesn't lend itself very well to short stories, unless I begin with a very miniscule theme. It happens sometimes that I'll just think of a perfect little plot that makes a fine short story, and I have written a lot of short stories since *Homeland*. That collection was the accumulation of probably close to ten years of writing short stories. And early in my career, I wrote short stories a lot. Before my official career, early on, when I was beginning to think about myself as a writer, I tended to write a lot of short stories because it was less intimidating. It's a good place to begin, as a writer, and it's also a good place to learn. You can try a lot of different points of view, a lot of different voices, a lot of different settings without investing so much. I *have* continued to write short stories and I have an accumulation. I have maybe half a collection now. I thought that *Prodigal Summer* was going to be a collection of short stories, but three stories took over, and then they started interacting, and then the next thing I knew they were a novel!

B.M.: So what would the composition differences be? Are there elements that belong to the short story and not to the novel?

B.K.: Well, to generalize, I think a short story is driven by plot and a novel is driven by character. A short story doesn't really give you room for a full characterization, whereas a novel requires a great deal of characterization, to sustain your interest and to compel you through the entire story. So I would say that they have reverse importance. In a short story, plot is more important than character, and in a novel the reverse, although everything has to *be* there but it's a question of what is primary.

B.M.: And although also the modern – or contemporary – short story tends to be without a plot?

B.K.: True. That's true. They appear plotless. I would say that in the case of the... oh, what is it called that school of... Now I can't think of it in English! ... The Bobby Ann Mason and Raymond Carver school of... of... I'll think of it later. Anyway, there's a style of short story that came to prominence in the 80's, I think. It was sort of like post-modern realism and kind of the K-Mart short story. Those *appear* to be plotless, but I would say they are incident-driven. They are about things that happen even though it might not necessarily add up to what we would classically call a plot, with the climax, and dénouement and all that. They're still driven by incident much more than by character.

B.M.: And do you think that short stories such as "Stone Dreams" or "Jump Up Day" are very accessible to the average reader?

B.K.: "Jump Up Day"... that's interesting you should choose that one. I guess I'm tempted to ask *you* why that's less accessible.

B.M.: Because of magic realism. And because I'm not sure the average reader would know what to make of such a story.

B. K.: Oh? Maybe, although it didn't strike *me* that way. I built it the same way I always build... I tend to build short stories the way I build novels. I work a lot on the architecture of the plot and the characterization, so for *me* the symbols were all in place, the plot is all in place. But it's true it does require perhaps a larger suspension of disbelief than something more sort of... quotidian.

B.M.: And maybe a lot more analysis too?

B.K.: Maybe, yes. Yes, I think people read short stories in very different ways. I think a lot of people just read it page by page and then when they're finished, they're finished. And then they say oh, O. K. that was nice.

B.M.: And how do you feel about people reading your short stories like this?

B.K.: I can't do that. I always want to understand what I've just read, and that's why I'm very picky about short stories. I really dislike most short stories that I read, most short stories that are published I find very unsatisfying. I think there is a kind of prototype of what I call *TheNew-Yorker* story, that isn't really going anywhere. And I just look and look for the last page that's not there and that will sort of wrap it up and mean something. I like fiction to mean something. Well, anyone would guess that, because of what I write. But every reader's different, obviously. Obviously a lot of people like that sort of story.

B.M.: So how far would the ideal reader interpret the stories for you?

B.K.: Oh I could never say that. I don't think there is an ideal reader – except the one who writes me to say, "I've read *The Poisonwood Bible* four times!" That's of course the ideal reader, someone who really pays such close attention they get *everything*, they get every symbol, they get every nuance, they don't miss anything. But, I don't write *only* for the people who are going to read my books four times. Good heavens! I couldn't, because there aren't so many readers with that much energy. I don't want to place so much expectation on the reader. I'm just happy for any reader to derive what they will. If someone wants to read just for entertainment, I hope that I can entertain them. I have a commitment to accessibility, I think partly because of where I came from as a person. I came from a class of people who were not readers of literature, who read newspapers maybe, or... the *Sears Catalogue*, but who never read great novels. And I think about those people when I'm writing, I want *them* to be able to read my novels and to take *whatever they want* from the story. I really insist that there is no *wrong* way to read my books. I mean, I've said that a lot before – except holding a book upside down, that's really a wrong way!

B.M.: When you wrote "Fault Lines" and "Secret Animals" –

B.K.: Ah, O.K. You've found those...

B.M.: Why write two sequels? Why write two sequels and not two new short stories with new characters in them?

B.K.: *Why not?* I had reread *Homeland*, and I was thinking about those characters, and it just crossed my mind as a sort of artistic challenge, to imagine all those different characters in that whole strange collection of... situations, to move them ten years forward and to see where they were. I like to do that, even though I always insist I won't write a sequel to a *novel*, mainly because so many people ask for it, and, that's not a reason to say "No," but I have to say it because people ask. It doesn't interest me to invest so much time – the *years* it takes to write a novel – in doing something that I've already done. But a short story's different. If you take a set of characters and move them ten years forward in time, you have a whole new short story. And it's only going to take a few days, or at most a few weeks to write the story. It's not like giving my life back to Turtle or something. So I guess I did it just for fun, and to see where it would lead. And I even had this idea that I might do an entire collection of *Homeland* stories ten years later. I still might, I've considered it. It's not out of the question.

B.M.: I personally felt that these two stories were almost trying to make more explicit what was already implicit in the first two.

B.K.: *That's interesting... that's very interesting.* I didn't necessarily think that. I thought that they were about different questions. But you know, if that's your interpretation, you're welcome to it!

B.M.: What would the vocation of the short story be, in post-modern society?

B.K.: Vocation? Oh, that's a hard question! What's the vocation of literature in general? I think in general it's to take the people out of their own lives and to create empathy and to expand the imagination, to inform, to amuse, to disturb in certain ways that people need to be disturbed. There are certain things on that list the novel does better. A novel does a much better job, I think, in taking people out of their lives because you have time to go deeper into it. You really become engaged with these characters and you start thinking about them. When you have to put the book down and go to work, you still think about them; and I'm convinced that that's the reason why novels are much more popular than short stories. I think people want to leave their lives when they read. It's a little vacation somehow from the cares of your day. So maybe a short story doesn't do that so well. But it can certainly do a lot of the other things on that list. It can inform, it can amuse, it can stretch your imagination, and in some ways, I think a short story can be more experimental. I think that there's a reason why some of the most imaginative creations in literature – such as Kafka's *Metamorphosis* – are short. No one could follow that cockroach for a whole year! Right? But because of the brevity you can take people farther, in some ways.

B.M.: Yes, and you probably don't really leave these characters either, especially when they're open-ended.

B.K.: Yes!

B.M.: Most of your short stories are pretty open-ended.

B.K.: I think most short stories are open... I mean very few short stories kill everybody at the end, and say, "The End." So that's true too, maybe it's something you carry with you. I always feel when I'm writing – I've never really analyzed this or even said it aloud – but when I'm writing, I feel like a perfect short story is like a perfect song. You know, the song you hear on the radio that just makes you want to sing along. It just says something perfectly, and the melody is just exactly right, and it ends, and you say, "Bravo!" That's what I aspire to in a short story: just that piece of music that will be very satisfying somehow.

B.M.: And how would you compare the short story with myth?

B.K.: Well... you might think that a short is related to a fable, or a myth. But in our tradition, in our Western tradition, they're really not. If you read Native American myths, or Aesop's fables – I guess Aesop's fables come a little closer – they have a plot and they have a climax and someone changes, someone learns his lesson. So I suppose there is some similarity, except that it lacks art. A fable lacks the craft and the beauty of artifice that shields the most obvious aspects of the moral of the story. It doesn't bang you over the head with the moral of the story. It suggests to you that you find your own moral. But the myths that I read from aboriginal cultures – and I've read a lot of them because of the kind of writing I do, I'm really interested in mythology – and they don't generally resemble Aesop's fables or the modern short story at all. Usually no one learns any lesson. Someone gets away with murder and they don't really *teach*. African

stories are that way and Native American stories are that way. Nobody learns a lesson. And it leaves you sort of befuddled if you've grown up cutting your teeth on Aesop's fables. You want this tidy morality, and they don't offer it. They tend to be much more open-ended. They tend to explain what *is*, more than they tell you what should be, I guess, in terms of how people behave. That's my impression. They tend to create some imaginary scenario explaining why the sun rises and sets the way it does. Or how the world began, and how everything got here on the back of a turtle. And they're also often tales of extraordinary bravery or tales of extraordinary treachery or cowardice, or something that, I guess, sort of makes us look at ourselves, helps us look at ourselves, helps us laugh at ourselves. And so, a short story can do those things also. But I'm not convinced that the modern short story has its roots in either place. I don't really know. You would know more than that, you're the scholar!

B.M.: And do you think eventually the short story could replace what the myth used to do for people, its function?

B.K.: I think novels are more likely to do that. I really do. I think people look more to novels for the *weight* of... Mythology has *weight*. Mythology tells the *big* stories. Whether it does it well or poorly, it tells you how we got here and why the sun rises. I think we're asking different questions now, because science has really replaced mythology for the empirical questions. Now we tend to be asking more questions about the world created by humans, and relationships between people, relationships between people and our place, or our work, or our bosses, or our children. And I think novels provide these answers for us.

B.M.: How far do you intentionally include a mythic dimension to your short stories?

B.K.: Oh! I include *everything*. That's why it's so hard for me to write short stories. I just keep wanting to throw more stuff in, it's hard for me to rein myself in!

B.M.: Are you familiar with Chaos theories?

B.K.: Chaos theory, yes.

B.M.: Is that part of "Stone Dreams" at all?

B.K.: Well, it's interesting, because I was thinking a lot about... let me think. See, I haven't read "Stone Dreams" for... ten years.

B.M.: It's beautiful.

B.K.: Oh! Thank you, you like it?

B.M.: I love it.

B.K.: Let me think about it... let me remember it. "Stone Dreams" is the story in which... a woman sort of runs away with her daughter and... with her lover, and...

B.M.: With her lover, and it's implied in the end that she's decided to leave both, her lover and her husband.

B.K.: Yes, and her husband. And what was the last line? Something like, "You and me, that's enough." Her daughter...

B.M.: "When it was over [the crashing of the petrified forest], there would be only Julie and me left standing in the desert, not looking back." And there was this whole parallel with – I think – Lot's wife... You know it's this story where she goes to the Petrified Forest and "they

looked like... it reminded me of this Biblical disaster era" "a bunch of toppled-over women, etc."

B.K.: Right. And she's really coming to terms with the reality of what... She's trying to use another man for escape and she understands that she's just going to be Lot's wife if she does. That the only way to do it is just on her own with her daughter. Yes, and her daughter had tucked the note in her pocket and she finds it in a really inopportune moment.

B.M.: Yes, You remember?

B.K.: O.K. Now I do remember. Yes. You see when I was in graduate school in evolutionary biology, that's when I really read a lot about Chaos theory. And so, there may have been some of that on my mind. I was certainly familiar with it. It's hard to answer a question like that so long after the fact because I don't remember exactly what was in my mind when I was writing it. There's always an imprint. I think everything I've ever known, everything I've ever read – including the Bible, including Chaos theories – leaves its imprint on my work. Some of it is probably subconscious but once it's pointed out I say "Oh yes, that's there." It's funny that – I mean, this is a little digression but – a lot of people said, after *The Poisonwood Bible* was published, "Oh! Was this a sort of revisiting of *Little Women*?" because there were four daughters. And I had to think about it because, of course, I didn't intend that. I wasn't thinking "Oh I'll set out to do – what do you call it – a revisitive *Little Women*. I didn't start out that way. If I was going to rewrite anything..."

B.M.: Why in the Congo then?

B.K.: ...it would have been *Heart of Darkness*, right, exactly. Why snakes, you know, why... that? And besides every dynamic is different. You know, they loved their daddy they loved their mommy. He was away at the war being good, being virtuous. None of it matched but I thought "Well *Little Women* was my favourite, favourite novel when I was in fourth grade and I adored it and I still think about Jo March sometimes." So it was in there. So it may have had some influence on the creation of a blonde prissy daughter and the tomboy daughter! But, you know, *everything*... everything you read informs everything you write in some way, if you have a good memory.

B.M.: Right. Although in a case such as "Stone Dreams" you actually quote and integrate into your short story Robert Southey –

B.K.: Oh yes, that's right.

B.M.: Nietzsche, Jung, Freud...

B.K.: Right, that's right.

B.M.: All these are quoted, so there seems to –

B.K.: Yes, so it was more conscious. Yes.

B.M.: And there seems to be some dialogic play between the literature of other authors and your own short story in the making sense of what's going on for the characters.

B.K.: Yes, exactly. Yes. I'm sure I was reading all those things at the time. That's probably why, although sometimes my writing does direct my reading. When I'm creating a certain character then I'll go and find books that he would be reading, and I'll sort of use that to inform the conversation.

B.M.: With Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible*, for example, did you read a lot of psychoanalytical –

B.K.: I read psychology, I read a lot of medical literature about that particular kind of brain damage and case histories of people who have that sort of brain damage, so that I can understand how that kind of mind would work.

B.M.: Right, and in reality such a mind could have been just suffering from such psychosomatic disease?

B.K.: Well, in *my* imaginary world, it *did*. Such things can happen, I read enough to convince myself it could happen, it could be possible. It can be possible that development can be arrested in a certain way. And this whole sort of crawling rehabilitation is something my... I have a relative who's involved in that and he talked to me a lot about it, and he told me how he would work and how he would do it. And that's something sort of new. So I'm not sure it existed at the time Adah would have encountered it. Maybe it did, I must have looked that up. I try really hard to avoid anachronisms. That was the hardest thing about *The Poisonwood Bible*!

B.M.: Are you not afraid that sometimes the very accessible aspects of your novels will make you an "auteur grand public"? You know... somehow implying –

B.K.: Yes, commercial rather than literary.

B.M.: Yes, yes, exactly.

B.K.: I don't worry about that. It seems silly to me to worry about that. I just make sure that I work very hard on the *craft*, and make certain that it *is* literature, that every book I write *is* a novel that you *could* read four times, and still glean more from each time. Commercial fiction you would never read twice. Nobody would read a mystery twice because you read it to find out what happens, so once you know what happens you're done. I know that... well, I try to construct *compelling* plots. They aren't that simple. You don't read to find out what happens, you read – I *hope* – because you want to be there, because it's a place you enjoy going and visiting, and characters that you like to listen to and you want to understand. So as long as I make certain that the literary quality is in place, it doesn't bother me *at all* that lots of people want to read my book. On the *contrary*, it's just the opposite. I'm amazed and very pleased that my work is popular. I know that there *are* some writers – artists of all types – who say, "Well if you're that popular you can't really be *good*", but I think that's sour grapes! To refer to a myth, to a fable. I think that's ridiculous. I would never aspire to obscurity. That goes against everything I believe in. Plus it's a waste of paper, a waste of good trees!

B.M.: So, to go back to what you were saying, would you say that your short stories are more literary than your novels are?

B.K.: Probably. I think other people would say that, perhaps because they're less accessible.

B.M.: Right, right...

B.K.: If less accessible means more literary, then, yes. I don't think they are in terms of what I put into them. I don't tend to think of them that way, but they're certainly... well, they're perhaps more obscure. It takes more effort to understand them, let's put it that way. But that's how short stories *are*. When you tell your publisher you've got a book of short stories, they say, "Oh, really? That's nice." But they don't jump up and down and say, "Hurray!" because they know it's not going to be a bestseller. Short stories don't – at least in the U.S., I don't know how it is here... A lot of people *write*

them, but not a lot of people *read* them. You know it's sort of... the literary community writes them for each other. *I* think a very large reason for it in the United States is the prevalence of Master of Fine Arts programs. There are a lot of these programs where people who want to be writers go, and they spend two or three years getting their degree. What they do during that time is write short stories, and ideally they publish those short stories. So there are all of these literary magazines. In a certain way it's a supply-and-demand thing. There's this *industry* for producing short stories so there has to be a market for publishing them. And then other M.F.A students read them. It's artificial in a certain way because once those students graduate, they don't go on writing short stories. If they're going to make a living as a writer they write novels. And otherwise they get a job as a professor or a chef or something... something else! But nobody except Raymond Carver ever made a living of writing short stories, I would guess. It's about like poetry. It's not lucrative. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it *should* be this way, but it *is*. Nobody in America makes a living as a poet, by writing poetry. You might supplement your income as a professor of poetry by going out and giving poetry readings, but that's a different thing. That's performance; it's not just writing. Nobody sits in a studio and sells enough poems to pay the rent. Because Americans don't buy poems because they don't want to read them. Not *enough* Americans, anyway. And I don't know why because we're famous for having a short attention span!

B.M.: But maybe that's it too, maybe it's not that much a question of short attention span when you're reading poetry and a short story –

B.K.: It takes a lot of work. It's hard to understand.

B.M.: It takes a lot of work. So if you're looking for entertainment – and easy entertainment –

B.K.: It's much farther from TV, that's right. You have to do a lot of the work; that's absolutely true. I just want to ask you now, did you see that I edited *The Best American Short-Stories*?

B.M: No.

B.K.: Oh, O.K. This was last year. It came out this year but it was 2001. So that involved reading hundreds of short stories and then collect... You know about *The Best American Short Stories*?

B.M.: I read your essay in *Small Wonder*, "What Good is a Story" and was that –

B.K.: That was adapted from the introduction that I wrote to *The Best American Short Stories*.

B.M.: Oh, all right.

B.K.: And that was interesting because it had been a long time since I just really devoted myself to reading short stories, so for a period of my life I just read short stories and it was interesting. It really helped *me* define for myself what makes a good short story. I think that's something I changed in the essay. I made it less specifically about short stories. But the introduction to the book was just specifically what I think about the short story... what makes a good short story, and why it works when it does. And, boy! I read so many stories I just didn't care for, that didn't move me! The great majority of them, which had been of course pre-selected by the series editor – *she* had to read, theoretically, every short story published in North America in the whole year, and then she winnowed that down to a few hundred. And then I read all of those and for most of

them, when I finished I was just exactly the same person as when I started. Even though I did try to extract what the author wanted to give me. But my conclusion was in a lot of cases that the author himself didn't know what he wanted to give me. And... well, that's just lazy!

B.M.: You wrote in that essay that what really made a good short story – which I totally agree with – is the way it will bring you to a new truth, or make you see a truth that you probably already saw, but not exactly –

B.K.: In a new way.

B.M.: Yes, in a new way.

B.K.: Yes, it gives you something...it leaves you a something in your hand.

B.M: And don't you think the novel is much more didactic about this in that it can lead the reader on to understanding much more *what* new truth or *what* new angle?

B.M.: It can do a lot. It can explore a lot more new truths. I think it does ultimately the same thing. It should wash you up on a different shore when you've finished. But a short story just has time to give you one little thing, just one, really. When I teach M.F.A students, – they're writing short stories – what I'm always telling them is, "First of all, please, figure out what it is you want to tell me in the short story. And second of all, if it's five things, pick one, and throw out the rest," because it won't succeed if it tries to do five different truths, some of which might be contrary to each other! So yes, I think of this little gem. A story can give you a gem whereas a novel can lead you through a wilderness and show you many different aspects of the wilderness and make it known to you, help you understand it so it doesn't frighten you. It has time to do all that.

B.M.: And also sometimes the characters voice their own explanations, of how to reread the Bible, for example –

B.K.: *Exactly*. Whereas a short story could never do that, it would just be too obvious. Yes. You don't have time to... in a novel you can lay down all this material in which you can leave direct themes, and it doesn't seem so conspicuous.

B.M.: In French I speak of "la nouvelle-oxymore" to speak of your short stories, because I compare your short stories to oxymora. Does that make any sense to you?

B.K.: Well, it *does*...I suppose I deserve it because my titles are so often oxymora – *deliberate* oxymora – or if not oxymora, at least they create cognitive dissonance. I think that's how I prefer to think of it. If I'm not outright contradicting myself I'm at least attempting to create some cognitive dissonance in a title. I do it specifically because I think it will catch your attention.

B.M.: Sure.

B.K.: And it just grates a little bit so it's not so forgettable. Although people invariably get my titles mixed up *because* they have that cognitive dissonance. Just like my name, people try to make it into something that makes sense, so they always say "Kingslover" because it makes more sense to love a king than to solve one. And I mean, not because of that, but it's the same kind of thing. My titles are combinations of words that don't quite make sense together and so they're troubling a little bit. And they also lead you into the same troubling dissonance within the short story. Yes and I guess my short story titles are the same: "Stone Dreams", doesn't make sense. A dream is filmy and the stone is hard. The title "Homeland" I really don't like. It's the only title of all my books that I didn't choose. The title *story* I chose. That story that's called "Homeland" in this collection is the one I wanted to be the title story, but when I wrote it, I called it "The Waterbug's Children" which is disturbing. It's a Kingsolver title.

B.M.: Yes.

B.K.: Yes. But I was a new author at the time, I didn't have any power and when I submitted the manuscript they said "Pfff! This won't work! People hate bugs and they don't like children! So you just have to make a new title," and they suggested to call this "Homeland." But I don't like it. It says nothing. Well, I don't *hate* it, but to me it's disagreeably mild. It does say *something*, and I conceded to use it because it does sort of tie the collection together. I think it does *work* as a title because what seems to connect all the stories is that all these people are trying to find their place... They're trying to find a place for themselves within a context of upheaval. So it's an O.K. title, but it's not *my* title, and I've never really liked it. I wish in the translation it could have a different title! But I don't know how that goes...

B.M.: I'm trying to think...because this one translation was already done by Guillemette Belleteste.

B.K.: Oh, really?

B.M.: She has as a matter of fact translated "Homeland" and "Jump Up Day."

B.K.: Oh! She has? Those two stories?

B.M.: Yes, which are my favourite, I think, with "Stone Dreams" and –

B.K.: Oh! Well, oh thank you, they're my favourites too.

B.M.: ...and "Blueprints," maybe.

B.K.: "Blueprints," yes.

B.M.: Did you have Baudelaire in mind when you wrote "Stone Dreams"? For the title?

B.K.: No.

B.M.: Because it is the beginning of the first line of "Ode à la Beauté": "Rêves de pierres"...

B.K.: Oh! No. I can honestly say that was not in my mind.

B.M.: Right. I never thought about it. I was hinted by someone else, "This is Baudelaire," and I thought, "This is right," but then I was finding it hard to make sense of this.

B.K.: It doesn't make sense, right, it doesn't connect.

B.M.: Only, that I was thinking, "Well, it would be funny because I am also exploring from a discursive-mode point of view how far short stories are short stories. How far they are narratives and not poetry. And it's very ambiguous where to draw the line between short stories and poetry.

B.K.: It is. Oh, it's so true.

B.M.: And Baudelaire *was* this man saying, "I have this dream of 'petits poèmes en prose,'" which *are* very close to short stories, again.

B.K.: It's true. But if you work hard enough you can connect anything!

B.M.: Yes, yes, that's for sure...