

*RK responding to Bruce McPherson, The Library, Woodstock, 22 November 2014*

I like how you say, “charged writing,” and then talk about breath — where else can writing get its charge except from breath. I grew up in a time when the writers that were looked at in prose in America were, say Thomas Wolfe, not Tom; Thomas Wolfe, the one, the old one, the six foot seven one, and Faulkner, two writers who wrote with their breath, and I grew up with Joyce. All you have to do is listen to Joyce reading that fantastic end of The Washerwomen by the Ford section of Finnegans Wake to hear what breath and fiction have to do with each other.

I think the only fiction that excites or interests me comes when the language arises from the breath. I’ve been writing stories again recently for some strange reason, this summer it landed, I hadn’t for some years been writing stories ... and the one thing that strikes me as the case, at least in my own writing, is that writing stories and writing poems is exactly the same— there’s no difference except the speed of the breath is different.

Though I did find one difference thinking about it this morning, knowing something like this would come up. When I start writing a story I get a line or phrase in my head and I go from that phrase, exactly the same way in which a poem begins. I said years ago in an interview,

not interview but dialogue, triologue situation with Chuck Stein and George Quasha, I think that is where I said, or it certainly sticks in my mind: that the poem is the *ta'wil* of its first line. The poem is, any poem is the interpretation, the continuity of form from that first line. The first line is the kind of *missing aleph* of the bible. They always say— in Hebrew as you know the bible begins with the letter B, the second letter of the alphabet. [*Bereshith bora Elohim et hashamayim wa et ha aretz*] So it begins with a B not with an A, and Rabbis always ask Why does it begin with the second letter rather than the first? And there are all kinds of wonderful explanations for that. In that same sense that breath of beginning is what the first line is of any poem, or any story: I don't know any other way of writing, the word comes into my head I write it down, I follow it. Sometimes the following is a story, or sometimes, much more likely, it's a poem. Or something. Or something.

I have here a giant book of essays, [*drops book*] that just popped out... from another press, a press called Contra Mundum, 760 pages of essays, many of which look like poems on the page, and many of them don't, many of them look like just the old boring essays we've been reading and writing all our lives. Today it occurred to me that the simplest way I could distinguish a story from a poem, in my own practice is— I mean not a story from a

poem, but a story and a poem on the one hand from an essay on the other— is that story and poem both arise *from*— something. Whereas an essay is *about* something. I constantly run into young poets who want to write about something, and I beg them not to, I beg them to forget everything they know and want, and allow whatever they want whatever they know to work behind them, pushing. So that the poem, or the story, is coming *from*, and the essay is *about*.

From. About. You know the only important words in the language are prepositions. If we were Angels, or a little more like Angels than we are... some of us are close to angels...even in this room... all we would need to talk would be prepositions: [*whispering*] from... of... towards... in... into... on... under... over... what more do we need than those words, the other stuff is just bric-a-brac, bric-a-brac, just dust between the prepositions, so I think that from and about are very important distinctions. And I'm not conscious of any essential difference in the 'how' of writing.

—*Transcribed by Tamas Panitz*