

RAYMOND ROUSSEL'S SELF HELP NOTES (A COMMENTARY ON BOB PERELMAN'S "CHRONIC MEANINGS")

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If I could at least find some meaning for my chronic symptoms, even if I can't cure them. Reducing them all to **the single fact is matter**¹ for fantasy, but I would settle for a thread of some kind. Already people are coming to me, unsolicited, and asking advice on interface. But, it's like I'm sending telegrams to myself, and **five words can say only** so much. Ordinary things like **black sky at night, reasonably** integrated into the logic of cause and affect, have the power to fill me with an utter sense of dread. No matter what I say **I am, the irrational residue** of what I'm not haunts me more than anything.

When I was a kid, my friends and I stumbled on a **blown up chain link fence**. We knew at the time it wasn't really blown up, but we began to believe our own lie and the thought that it might really have been blown up returned **next morning stronger than ever**. And by **midnight the pain is almost** palpable, we think that we're the chain link fence in the act of being blown up. **The train seems practically expressive** as it goes by, mocking us.

It's a story familiar as a story can be. Society has broken into bands the nineteenth century was sure would end up burning **characters in the withering capital**.

The heroic figure straddled the globe—my father. **The clouds enveloped the tallest** mountains, rendering his reaction to the death of his own father invisible. **Tens of thousands of drops** of rain could have fallen and I would have been unable to know if he was crying. **The monster struggled with Milton** Bradley, and it all depended on a roll of the dice.

I thought that **on our wedding night I** would broach the subject of my fear concerning fathering a retarded child. I could tell it as a Gothic Romance, "**The sorrow burned deeper than** the fjords of Norway. **Grimly I pursed what violence** destiny had chosen for me, **a trap, a catch, a zine.**" **Fans stand up, yelling their** approval of the stage version. **Lights go off in houses** as couples are inspired to at least have the chance of avoiding the birth canal. It would be neither an essay nor a novel, **a fictional look, not quite** a fiction. The royalties are not important. **To be able to talk** about it is reward enough.

¹ Bob Perelman, "Chronic Meanings," in *Postmodern American Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1994), 501-504. The words in bold represent the lines of Perelman's poem, in order, which in the original all begin with capital letters and end in periods.

The coffee sounds intriguing but looks even more so under the expert hand of Jean Luc Godard. **She put her cards on** the table and admitted that boredom had driven her to this point. **What had been comfortable subjectivity** suddenly degenerated into a very awkward conversation. **The lesson we can each** take from this is to always load the burning deck.

An hour a day is **not enough time to thoroughly** exhaust my resources. **Structure announces structure and takes** structure as its structure. **He caught his breath in** spades. **The vista disclosed no immediate** problems.

Another Saturday night, **alone with a pun in** the oven. **The clock face and the** mountain face were my only company. Although I could have leaned on the **rock of ages, a modern** prosthetic seemed more in order. **I think I had better** have a plan A.

I know all about globalism and multinational, cosmetic-driven satellite empire, but just **now this particular mall seemed** different. **The bag of groceries had** a way of forcing you to decide just what your life would become, **whether a biographical junkheap or** something that would make people tremble. **In no sense do I** condone turning to a vegetable, but **these fields make me feel** like opening up, admit that I once proposed to **Mount Rushmore in a sonnet**. Some in the party tried sestinas, **so it's not as if** my scheme was completely harebrained.

That always happened until one day **she spread her arms and** asked the sky if anything grew which left **a lot of** one's evenings and weekends free.

No one could help it fulfill the dreams its father had for the future. **I ran farther than I** had ever run before, and when I got there I died. **That wasn't a good one. Now put down your pencils.**

They won't pull that over two or three yards. **Standing up to the Empire** requires the aid of a professional like Hans Haacke. Even so, your wife may silence everyone—**stop it, screaming in a** voice reserved for medieval torture and well-done porno. The calm before the storm comes with **the smell of pine needles.**

I've thought about psychotherapy, but **economics is not my strong** point. **Until one of us reads** the instructions, this argument is pointless. **I took a breath, then** ran into the burning building. **The singular heroic vision, unilaterally** inspired, came at the wrong moment.

Gregorian **voices imitate the very words** used at Greg's funeral: "His **bed was one place where** he always mixed business and pleasure. He knew what summed up **a personal life, a toaster. Memorized experience can't be completely** faithful to an individual as mysterious as he."

Sometimes, while reading about the paradigm shift enacted by quantification of the speed of light, I'm paralyzed by **the impossibility of the simplest** procedures, like not being punched in the face by an angry motorist, losing my balance, and falling headfirst into traffic. Now someone might say, "You obviously can't handle books of such a specialized nature, **so shut the fucking thing** and realize that the world is divided into

two types of people, those who read primary texts and those who read secondary texts.” But that same person, upon starting to see me tear, would then say, “**Now I’ve gone and put** my foot in your mouth, **but that makes the world go round.**”

The point I am trying to make, in case one day I should become someone’s Dr. Schreber, is that I feel like my life has been wasted **like a cartoon worm on** benzedrine, which has speech without a physical mouth, when all I ever really wanted was to be a real man on quaaludes, having **a physical mouth without speech. If taken to an extreme,** this conceit could lead to Manicheism.

“**The phone is for someone** who really knows how to use it,” I proclaimed in a moment of rare charisma, “like Dr. Freud.” At the moment I uttered the statement, it walked away from me like a distant woman in a train station, and yet **the next second it seemed** trite. **But did that really mean** I thought the statement was stale or hackneyed? I tried to ignore the ramifications, **yet Los Angeles is full** of agoraphobic dandies just like me.

Naturally enough I turn to writing as an escape from life, thus rendering questionable its efficacy as a form of therapy. When it comes to the mind, **some things are reversible, some** are not. We should be happy for even that malleability. With physical laws, **you don’t have that choice. I’m going to Jo’s for** comfort food.

Now I’ve heard everything, he said in a tone that made one believe the statement was not only not stale, but not even quoted. **One time when I used** quotes in the transcript of one of his speeches, he threatened to sue me for **the amount of dissatisfaction involved.** Believe me, when you’ve seriously considered life at the whim of the elements, you’ll discover **the weather isn’t all it’s** purported to be.

You’d think people would have a “category e,” **or that they would invent** one in order to justify whatever they want to do. **At least if the emotional** elements of the problem were properly addressed, no one in their right mind would begrudge **the presence of an illusion.**

The perfect place to write a great work of literature would be a **sympiosis of home and prison. Then, having become superfluous, time** could really come into its own. **One has to give to** maintain appearances, prioritize. For instance, there are only two things I want to **taste: the first and last.**

I remember the look in my mother’s eyes when I told her I wanted to make impressions of Africa for future use. **It was the first time** she had ever grimaced and I had **some gorgeous swelling feeling that the success which owes its fortune** to hard work would soon be a thing of the past.

Come what may it can’t be any worse than that. **There are a number of** ways to make a rebus **but there is only one** way to tame one. **That’s why I want to** declare a moratorium on comparison and contrast.

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