

The Confessions of Roe Rosen

2007

English translation by the author

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Three foreign workers deliver the text in Hebrew without understanding the language by reading a transliteration from a teleprompter. Roe Rosen¹ recites the prologue and the first monologue, Roe Rosen² the second monologue, and Roe Rosen³ the third. This delivery cannot be considered acting (as the workers have no notion of a role they act). The performers have the same clothes and a similar hairdo.

Signs on the teleprompter indicate pronunciation stresses and pauses between sentences. An asterisk indicates body and face gestures. These gestures were performed by the real Roe Rosen (seated behind the camera), and mirrored by his surrogates.

The Confessions of Roe Rosen Ensemble performs musical interludes. It is made entirely of women musicians. As the movie progresses, the ensemble gradually grows and seems more ecstatic

The set: a small apartment. The monologues are delivered in the bedroom, with the performer seated at a desk, and the music in the living room. Like the text, the set is a hybrid between things that seem to belong to the real Roe Rosen, and others that can conceivably belong or refer to the foreign workers.

Prologue

Roe Rosen¹ [close up. After a pause]: Hello. I am Roe Rosen. My days are numbered. I will soon be dead. I suffer. The pain is excruciating. Nothing will stop death this time. In fact, it is likely that now, as you watch me, my corpse already rots in its grave [Pause. Grips her head].

Those of you who heard of me, know that I have built my entire career on lies, scandals, obscene pictures, fake identities. I have pretended not to be myself. No more. It is urgent to do the right, difficult thing. You are about to hear [shouts:] *The Confessions* [quietly:] of *Roe Rosen* [Camera zooms-out to a mid-body shot, which is the default frame of the work].

I will make my own contribution to the wonderful tradition of Augustine, Rousseau, and the pretty magazines. I shall claim for myself the glory conferred upon those who show their real wound. I shall confess lies, crimes, poisoning of wells, decadence and perversions. I will tell only the truth. You will be appalled. You will scorn me. Perhaps you will shed a tear. It's not going to be pleasant, but it will be worth your while.

"I have entered upon a performance which is without precedent, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man [stretches her arms] in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself."¹
[Looks to the right, supposedly towards the ensemble]

Opening titles sequence

The ensemble performs Chopin's prelude #4, orchestrated for three recorders and a cello. The camera shows close ups of the musicians' hands, and roams about objects in the room of the confessions.

¹ Rousseau, *The Confessions*, Book 1.

1st Monologue – General Knowledge, A Feeling Heart

Roe Rosen1: Thank you for returning to *the Confessions of Roe Rosen*. I am Roe Rosen. I was born in a small, dismal village in Israel, four years before 1967. My wonderful parents have bequeathed me a feeling heart; for them, it was the source of their felicity, for me, it was the foundation of all my misfortunes. Everything was painful, and the pains of others were even more unbearable than my own. Once my mother told me I made a babysitter cry. The thought that I caused grief was shattering. The ceiling collapsed [raises both hands]. A torrent of vapors and fallout flooded the house. [Shouts:] The toilets vomited feces and blood [opens and closes her mouth]. Rockets fell from the sky and pulverized bodies [nods twice].

Yes, I was too sensitive. The eyes ejecting jets of tears like a pair of broken faucets in a restroom. By the age of six, the nightmares became a nightly affair. I am waiting in hiding for the soldiers who will come and kill me. I am being buried alive, but the earth is transparent. I see through it, from down up [looks up], people's feet, dogs' shit, the skies. But despite the asthma and the diarrhea, I always considered myself very happy.

I grew, but not much. My feeling heart drew me to the arts. At the same time, my sensitivity to people shifted to their loins. My tongue longed to serve rectums as if the ass was itself a religion. So strong was my faith in beauty and buttocks, that I remained completely blind to other realms of truth and knowledge.

And here's a paradox: the very obsessions that caused my willful ignorance, made me appear learned, a scholar of beauty and buttocks.

I was a foreigner. A pervert. Human scum. But instead of expelling me, they gave me tenure [a gesture of amazement].

True: I was monstrously intelligent. Furthermore, I gained recognition as a quick-tongued orator, with a magical mastery of the Hebrew language. Without an effort I left my listeners with dry mouths, moist genitals, slight nausea – in short: infatuated.

But underneath the seductive veneer lurked total idiocy. Let's say that knowledge is a face. And let's say that on the face of knowledge, mathematics are the eyes [points to the top of her head]. Let's say that on the face of knowledge, science is the ears [points to her eyes]. Let's say that on the face of knowledge, philosophy is the forehead [points to her chin]. Economics are the chin [points to her ears]. And let's say that beauty and desire are the nose. In this sense, I was a face with only a nose, a gigantic monster of a nose, blushed and quivering, in a constant state of lust and horror [a hand gesture extending from the nose forward]. To demonstrate my ignorance, I will now say everything I know about the body [stands and allows the camera to roam over her body briefly. Sits].

The body is covered by a sack of skin. It has a few holes, perhaps eight or nine cavities, depending on who is counting. This leather bag is crammed with white and red meat, marinated in blood and phlegm. The central lump, from which the limbs extend, is filled with inner organs, like the heart, the liver, the kidneys, the spleen, the appendix.

Some of these organs have to do with food. Others with air. But I haven't a clue which does what. As far as I'm concerned, the body runs by its own, or by

mysterious humors [a thoughtful pose]. Furthermore, the body delineates a difference between inside and outside. Some things come from within: the heart, winds. The rest is outside. In this, the body resembles a Nation State, or a museum. On the other hand, the body is akin to a cow or a bus. These too are stuffed entities, like the leather bag. I once used to sell “leather” bags in an open market. It was cold, minus twenty. But I digress. In sum: cow, heart, bus, body. A punctured thing moves about and rots. I am about to raise my right arm [stands and raises her right arm].

I have honestly confessed my ignorance in natural sciences, medicine and anatomy. The world remained inexplicable. I did not try to change that. I was indifferent my whole life, like a tourist who opts to remain on the bus during the tour through Rome or Nablus. In economics I learned only this: including latrines – six shekels an hour. I did not become familiar with the cities through which I passed. Like that guy wrote: there is an address, but there is no street. What we call a city is nothing but wavering. Knowledge? Does geology help washing the floors? The elderly I served – would astrophysics help change their diapers?

[Smiling emphatically:] And now, a short break and some entertainment: I am delighted to present *the Confessions Ensemble* in a classic dying song [looks to the right].

[The ensemble performs in Hebrew the aria of Dido’s death from Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. In this version, there are two Dido, and the aria is doubled].

2nd Monologue – Love and Revenge

Roe Rosen2: Thank you for returning to *the Confessions of Roe Rosen*. I am Roe Rosen. All my life people tended to fall in love with me. Perhaps it was because of my body: an electrifying mixture of the very best in feminine and masculine beauty. Perhaps they fell in love because they perceived my excessive lust as romantic fervor. Maybe they longed for me because I was a foreigner. The foreigner ignites a tantalizing combination of guilt and aggression, as well as a curiosity regarding the shape and taste of her genitals. When the ass meets the foreigner's face it is not unlike.... I am about to raise my right arm [stands and raises her right arm].

At any rate, as soon as I deceitfully infiltrated New York, I conquered the hearts of several American women. The fairest of them became my first wife [turns a framed picture on her desk towards the camera. The photo shows a young couple, the man's complexion very dark. The photo is out of focus].

The year was 1986. I escaped on time. I watched the *Intifadah* on TV. Rabin broke the Palestinians' bones, and I shoved my tongue in between the china buttocks of my wife, whose name was Hayley or Mills. Pay attention: even though I don't know it yet, I am about to make a tree [stands and raises her arms].

I studied art in a prestigious college. There, I was the prettiest, most gifted boy. Furthermore: aided by my nymphomaniac wife, I received real documents, on federal paper. I suddenly existed. But at the same time, I remained a foreign worker. I weaved shawls for four dollars an hour. I emptied classified rubbish in the office building of an arms dealing conglomerate: Four dollars forty an hour. I sold "leather" bags in the market: four dollars an hour. Toilets: three dollars an

hour. Teaching Hebrew: four dollars eighty. I worked as an assistant to Cindy Sherman. Cindy Sherman [a broad smile]! She is really nice! Twelve dollars an hour plus chamomile tea, but the project was soon over. In the meanwhile, teachers and artists ignored me like one ignores the stench of a fart. When they spoke to me as if I was a retard, my complexion, dark to begin with, was tinted deep purple. The feeling heart thumped: *Pakoom! Pakoom! Pakoom! Pakoom!* And there was always the fear of the immigration police.

I was small, but the body always craved to shrink further. Saint Augustine said: “My body is like a shattered house, too small for God to enter.”² But for people like me, smallness is an intangible ideal. It is always better to be smaller still.

[During the following sentences, Roe Rosen² will show the camera 10 images, none of which directly relates to what she says] Those were the days of Reagan and Mary Boone. Pink marble and Yhoji Yamamoto. Recession came. Everything, supposedly, changed. In the galleries, artists served macrobiotic food, and spoke about Kurt Cobain and dung. I lived in Harlem. I separated from my wife. A suicidal conceptual artist fell in love with me. I married a beguiling alcoholic from Teheran. On the side, I continued to provide sexual services for money, and to work on my doctoral dissertation. And then. [Stops showing images; shouts:] Then! I was possessed with the madness that brought me to the brink of a breakdown. I pretended I wasn't a maid or a whore, but a Jewish Neo-Nazi. For Three years I painted swastikas and iron eagles. I am about to raise my right arm [raises right arm, but in a more resolute fashion this time].

² Augustine (in the first book of his *Confessions*) says that his soul was too small for God to enter, not his body.

Now, perhaps I was an idiot, but I wasn't stupid. I knew I was ruining my career as an artist. I became one of those vile people of culture who dub the past as if they owned it, that is to say, I became the rat I vowed never to become. If before I was seen in New York to belong to an inferior caste, now I became a veritable untouchable. Art in Manhattan is a matter of high style, and the holocaust has no *chic*. A famous abstract painter explained to me that we have already dealt with the holocaust, and wittily suggested I'll find a fresher catastrophe. The pictures I made were incredibly beautiful. This only made matters worse. People with sensitivity to beauty vomited, fainted, were rushed to emergency wards.

No doubt, I betrayed. But it had nothing to do with monetary or shock value. I aimed to take my revenge on father. Father. Destroying myself was a low price for me to take revenge on him. My father was a child during the holocaust. During my own childhood, he maintained a monstrous silence. That silence made me the adult, while preserving him as a child-victim, inching his way all alone in the frozen forest, through trees and corpses. A glorious daddy, an attractive daddy, disturbingly vivacious. [Brings her hand to her ear] I hear the gravel grating above me. Soil fills my mouth. The earth tightens. But my father is still up there. Were the soil in which I'm buried transparent, I would have seen his feet again. How I wish! My father's feet are breathtaking, alluring. The toes are fine yet firm, practically begging to be sucked. And the smell! [Brings her fingertips to her lips] The smell emanating from these feet, like that of a martyr's body, is the delicious aroma of a cake just out of the oven. [Mechanically produces four cough-like sounds, accompanied with the fitting hand moves]: *Ocho, ocho, ocho, ocho*.

Because the grave's soil is transparent, I now see my wife's panties, slightly soiled. I even seem to hear a whimper or two. But because of my vantage point, it's hard to

tell which wife it is. Grief and grating gravel. [Pause] Father? [Pause] Did I keep saying 'Father?' I meant, of course, to say 'mother.'

[Smiling] and now, *the Confessions Ensemble* in a classic dying song.

[The ensemble performs in Hebrew *I'll Fly Away*]

3rd Monologue – Politics and Toilets

Roe Rosen³: Thank you for returning to *the confessions of Roe Rosen*. I am Roe Rosen. This morning, the Israeli army killed seven people in Gaza, six of them of the same family.³ The killing is ordinary and thus has no name. The army grants names to operations with a high body count and concentrated, successful wreckage. The Israeli army prefers lyrical names. "A rainbow in a cloud" [turns a framed picture on her desk. It shows a drawing of a rainbow in a cloud]. The Gaza routine was recently disturbed by a little war in Lebanon. In the London zoo, new agronomic mattresses were installed on the sleeping benches of the squirrel monkeys. In the village of *Bilin*, weekly demonstrations are held against the wall that gnaws Palestinian land. There are Jews amongst the demonstrators. It is unbecoming to kill them. Thus, the army tries all sorts of exotic, gentle weapons. In historical moments such as this, there's a moral imperative for an urgent action. I drift in reveries. I was always both naïve and lustful and now, one thing leading to another, I became a veritable super-hero of perversion. I swiftly switch my mundane clothes with a stupendous costume. Only for me, the costume is my body, naked save for the service apron I put on when I clean my mistress' toilets.

³ The original version of this monologue was written on October 26th, 2006, and refers to that day's news.

For me, if Clark Kent is a maidservant in the restroom, Superman is the lavatory seat itself. When I'll finish licking the floor, I shall wait there, docile, until the mistress of the house come and empties herself into my mouth. My backbone is arched on the hard seat. My pelvis is about to break. Even though the lady is not here yet, I dare not move. Will she allow me, before peeing down my throat, to kiss the plumage of her armpit? I await the punishment that is also my reward. My gag reflex is reserved for the fulfillment of love. Tears of humiliation flow from my eyes. Tears of desire trickle from my sex glands. Tears of horror. My whole body sprinkles fluids. I am lost. I no longer know who am I, who the mistress of the house is, when shall I be deported.

But then, then something sublime happens. Is it a vision? Is it a revelation? The soil upon which the houses are built, suddenly becomes transparent. Deep down, in the belly of the earth, I can suddenly see the mighty modernist grid of the sewage canals, a stupendous web of reason, pipes upon pipes of efficiency and merit. The moles in their burrows, the decomposing corpses, the roots of the citrus trees, all this subterranean wealth retreats to reveal the mighty sewer system of the *Sharon* region, where the affluent ladies reside with their maidservants. This web is a matrix of feces and finance, and I realize that because I am nothing but a human latrine, this marvelous grid can reveal itself to me. And now – it slowly ascends. Just for me. The shit tunnels rise and rise. Soon this web will reach the building's ground level, the floor will crack, and the metal web will lift me, and continue its ascent [passionately lifts her gaze and her arms].

[Her voice louder and louder] I am ascending; I am ascending to the heaven, carried by a divine chariot of cosmic shit, a bed that emanates childhood sweetness and a homely smell. As I lay upon the sublime sewer bed, suddenly existence regains the

meaning it once had, when I was a girl. This is the vision. And I know that the punishment that awaits me will be more glorious than ever, and I also know that the end is a happy end – yes, yes, yes, yes.