

Trouble for the Theatre: 2

IN THE BLACK AND WHITE OF FIRE

unrepresentable

by

David Cole

1995

Claim the rabbis: "God looked into the Torah and created the world" (Ber. Rabb. 1: 1). If the world . . . did not yet exist, however, what form had this Torah? "It was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire" (Yer. Shek. 6: 2; Rashi on Deuto. 33: 2).

Susan Handelman

[For the kabbalists] the white fire constituted the true text of the Torah, whereas the text that appeared in black fire was the oral law. . . . "Everything that we perceive in the fixed forms of the Torah, written in ink on parchment, consists, in the last analysis, of interpretations. . . . Essentially, only Moses, master of all the Prophets, penetrated in unbroken contemplation to that mystical written Torah, which in reality is still hidden in the invisible form of white light. Even the other prophets gained only a fleeting glimpse of it. . . ."

Michael Lieb, quoting Gershom Scholem

There were peals of thunder and flashes of lightning . . . upon the mountain . . . for the Lord had come down upon it in fire. . . . The Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first and I will write upon the tablets the words which were on the first tablets, which you broke." . . . The Lord said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." . . . And he wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant. . . . When Moses descended from Mount Sinai--the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hands as he descended--Moses himself was not aware that the skin of his face shone because he had been conversing with God.

Exodus 19: 16-18; 34: 1, 27-29

What can it mean to trust in the covenant, not between Yahweh and the Jewish people but between writing and a writer?

Harold Bloom

First I thought I was a writer. Then I realized I was a Jew. Then I no longer distinguished the writer in me from the Jew because one and the other are only torments of an ancient word.

Edmond Jabès

DRAMATURGICAL PAGE (cont.)

Poetic power is transmitted not by imitation but by . . . reimagining the scene of the transmission of power.

Leslie Brisman

An important quality of romantic writing is the confidence with which it points to human truths it cannot yet represent.

David Bromwich

Characters

SOFER BEN SOFERIM, a Torah-copyist

MOISHE/MOSES, a grate-sweeper

THE READER

p. 1
(In the darkness before the lights come up, a thunderous offstage sound, as of hundreds of staves being repeatedly brought down upon the earth in anger or impatience.

Upstage-left, a disembodied light-source appears in the air and begins a lurching advance across the rear of the stage from up-left to up-right.

About a third of the way across, this self-advancing light comes to a halt in air, makes a sharp turn downstage, and begins to float forward toward the audience.

Fp. 2
As the light reaches a point just left of center, the Thunder of Staves abruptly ceases and the stage lights come up, very dim, revealing in faint outline the following scene:

Down-left, a high-backed chair, unoccupied.

Down-right, a narrow hinge-topped desk with a low-backed chair, unoccupied.

Center, an identical hinge-topped desk, but with a high-backed chair like the one down-left.

Fp. 3
At this center desk sits the Torah-copyist, SOFER BEN SOFERIM, writing in a scroll with a quill pen. From a peg on the side of the copyist's desk hangs the Pattern Book, actually a sheaf of different-sized and -shaped swatches of parchment joined together through their upper lefthand corners by a brass ring. Each "page" of this Pattern Book displays, as will be seen, a sample of some different but, in every case, imaginary "Hebrew script."*

The dim light that now comes up reveals two further figures--THE READER and MOISHE/MOSES--just this moment going past SOFER BEN SOFERIM at his desk. Indeed, the effect should be as if it were THE READER and MOISHE/MOSES passing SOFER BEN SOFERIM that cues on the stage lights.

*See below, p. 4 note.

All three figures--SOFER BEN SOFERIM, MOISHE/MOSES and THE READER--wear the identical costume: say, a coarse buff robe.

Fp. 4

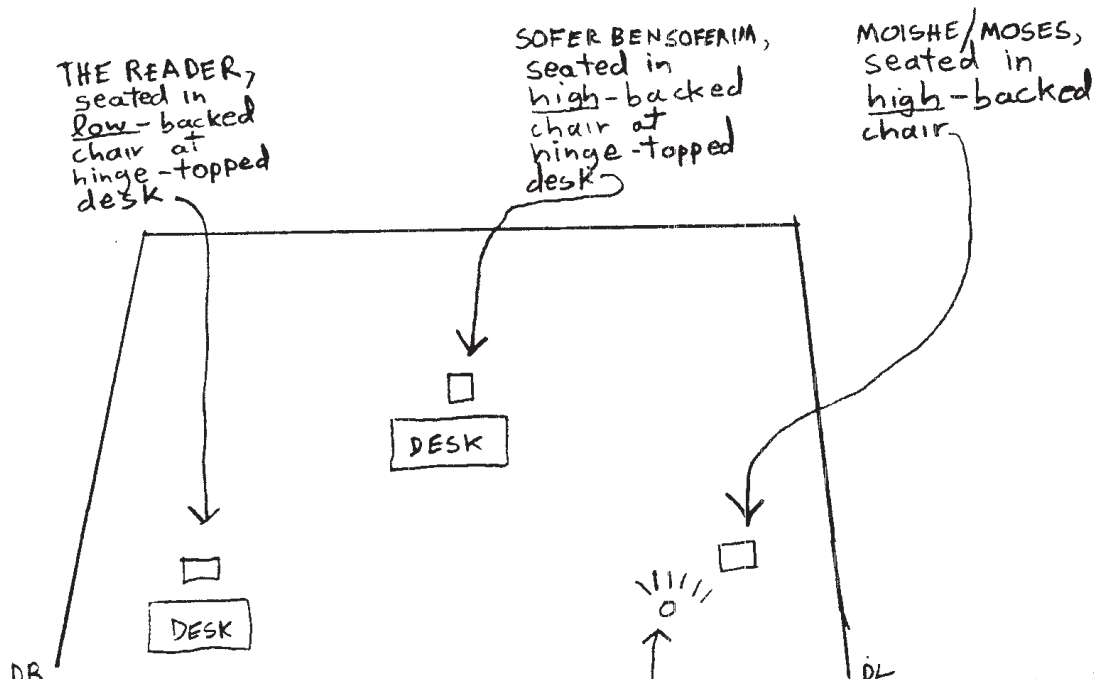
MOISHE/MOSES escorts THE READER past SOFER BEN SOFERIM toiling at his desk, center, and on to the other, unoccupied desk, down-right. In one hand MOISHE/MOSES carries a scroll identical to the one SOFER BEN SOFERIM labors over. In the other hand he holds aloft a torch by which he guides THE READER over the dim stage. This torch borne forward by MOISHE/MOSES is, we now see, the "self-advancing light" that appeared to be lurching wildly on its own from up-left to up-right before the stage lights came on.

THE READER, with MOISHE/MOSES guiding him, continues on past SOFER BEN SOFERIM to the vacant desk, down-right, and seats himself at it. MOISHE/MOSES sets the scroll he carries on the desk before THE READER.

Fp. 5

As THE READER opens and seeks his place in the scroll, MOISHE/MOSES moves off across the downstage area toward the high-backed chair, down-left. He seats himself in the chair and places the torch in a floor-socket at his feet. So placed, the torch illuminates MOISHE/MOSES' face more brightly and evenly than might have been expected of a light-from-below.

The stage-picture at this point is thus:



Fp. 6

SOFER BEN SOFERIM, who ever since the lights first came on has been writing away steadily in his scroll at the desk, center, now suddenly, like a conductor giving an upbeat, raises his quill above the page--but does not bring it down: his hand remains suspended in the air over the scroll.

As if cued by this gesture of SOFER BEN SOFERIM's, the stage lights come up full.

In this better light, THE READER at once finds his place in the scroll and begins to read:)

THE READER

I read of--

(As at opening, the Thunder of Staves.

THE READER rises, crosses to the extreme right margin of the stage and calls off:)

Not yet!

Fp. 7

(Abruptly, the Thunder of Staves drops off, except for a single, determined staff that keeps on pounding out an irregular, insistent rhythm, until at last, with a high-pitched cracking sound, it is struck and "silencèd" by another staff.

THE READER, meanwhile, has returned to his desk, down-right, and once more found his place in the scroll.

NOTE: Except as indicated, SOFER BEN SOFERIM and MOISHE/MOSES perform the actions which THE READER describes them as performing, though not always in any very exact or literal way: the manner of enactment will vary from meticulous to sketchy, as seems appropriate.

Occasionally, as SOFER BEN SOFERIM and MOISHE/MOSES converse, THE READER can be glimpsed tracing out their dialogue with a finger in his scroll.

THE READER now resumes reading:)

Fp 8 I read of the scroll-copyist, Sofer ben Soferim. Seventy and more times is the completed Torah gone forth from his hand. Yet see! Now his hand wavers nerveless above the page and will not be brought down--how is this, **Sofer?**

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

No pen swifter flew than mine until the hour when, reading back over a verset but now inked in, and finding it, as ever, true to His word, I chanced to think: "Yet how if not, as in all probability not, true to His hand?"

Fp 9 Faithful executant of a divine original, can it suffice that I but put my Author's words faithful down? No, sure, but I am bound to, in the very coils of His writ, coil after Him; flourish in the selfsame flourishes of Him preferred when quill He hefts--in short, at every turn to make my script as **one** with the script He writes. Which till I may--"

(sets down his quill)

THE READER

Oh, rash resolve! For behold!

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM takes the Pattern Book off the peg on the side of his desk, lifts it into the light and begins to leaf through it, exposing sheet after sheet, each completely covered with a different but, in every case, imaginary "Hebrew script," i. e., with a string of marks that suggest Hebrew writing as it might appear to one ignorant of Hebrew.*

*For an example of one such imaginary Hebrew script, see the depiction of the Tablets of the Law in Conrad Witz's fifteenth-century panel painting, "The Synagogue," reproduced in Frank Manuel's The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes, Plate 1.

As he turns over each leaf, SOFER BEN SOFERIM
~~murmurs~~ the name of the script he finds there.)

Great is the multiplicity of Hebrew scripts; and, turning
 through the volume of pattern hands bequeathed him
 by masters now dust--

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Your Palaeo-Semitic. . . . Your Proto-Sinaiatic. . . .

THE READER

--the copyist meets with none that unmistakably proclaims
 itself first script of all.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

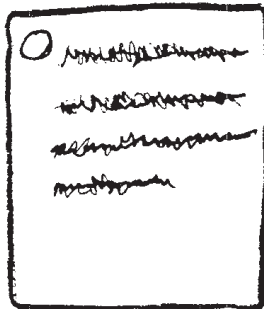
Your Pre-Exilic. . . . Your Late-Italkan cursive. . . .

THE READER

In which, if any, of these made our Author first His
 mark?--this, did one hope to make a mark of one's own,
 one had needs discover; yet how discover? Where might one
 hope to light upon an instance of the divine hand?

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM now turns up a page in the
 Pattern Book that displays line after line of
 writing so many times gone over and struck through
 as to appear, itself, an instance of some
 incredibly elaborate script.

He lifts the page into the light and slowly
 rotates it, seeking an angle from which this "script"
 will become legible. As he does so, we can see
 that the lines of scrawl cover only the upper portion
 of the page, breaking off suddenly about halfway
 down the sheet in the middle of a line. The lower
 half-page is blank, thus:



Unable to make anything of the scrawl, SOFER BEN SOFERIM abruptly gives over the attempt and resumes leafing through the Pattern Book.)

Fp. 13

To this puzzle, nor answer nor prospect of an answer seemed forthcoming, until one day, turning over the leaves of his pattern book for the thousandth time, the copyist chanced to mark the sense of a passage always till now viewed solely as a not especially fine example of the so-called "Rashi"-script, of exegetes preferred.

(Once more SOFER BEN SOFERIM turns up the upper-half-scrawled, lower-half-blank page of the Pattern Book, once more lifts it into the light--and this time succeeds (or at any rate persuades himself that he succeeds) in deciphering the scrawl:)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(reading (?) from the Pattern Book page)

We find written: "God looked into the Torah and created the world." But if, as yet, world were none, what was the composition of this Torah? Back came the reply: "It was written in letters of Black Fire upon a ground of White Fire."

Fp. 14

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM lets the Pattern Book page sink slowly to the desktop and remains lost in thought.)

THE READER

What is it, Sofer, in this mystic saying holds thee thus rapt?
 The extreme beauty of the figure, is it, that snares thee?
 Or, more likely, the extremity of the thought itself:
 this scene of ours no more but a page of writing, read back?
 Nor on this nor this other do your thoughts at present run,
 but run:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Was it, then, in a Palaeo-Semitic majasculc or a Proto-Sinaiatic
 block-hand that He laid Black Fire to White Fire? in tongues
 of Pre-Exilic slanting script or flickers of Late-Italkan
 cursive that He made out His world?

THE READER

That is: it hath upon thee broke that these fiery characters
 from which a world might be read can of no hand have issued
 save His, that reads them; for, as yet, apart from Him,
 was neither hand nor pen nor world else. So that for one
 who dreams--as dreamest thou, Sofer--to strike out, in
 every stroke, after Him, to conform and in nothing depart
 from His hand--

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

My way is clear.

(raises the hinged top of his desk, drops in
 the Pattern Book, and slams the desktop down)

Let others pray sight of the Throne-Chariot, the

crystalline corridors, the Marshaller of Wings. Vision
 be mine of this primal lettering-from-whence-a-world.

(Thunder of Staves)

And, vision, come soon!

THE READER

. . . he adds. For--dost mark?--the Community Without,
 that from its copyist's hand long since attends the
 completed scroll, now restive grown to have received, as yet,
 no work of his hand, bring their staves down and again down
 upon the earth; in which clamor the scribe makes out,
 or fancies he makes out, the words of self-reproach he hath
 often enough found rising to his own lips:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

"Stilled Hand,"

(Thunder of Staves suddenly softer)

THE READER

Such is the secret name the scribe is accustomed to give
 himself in his thoughts, as one between scripts wavering
 and idle the while.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

"Stilled Hand, **why** bringest thou no word forth the while?"

(Thunder of Staves back up to loud)

THE READER

To settle the clamor, the "Stilled Hand" cries out unto the staves:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(calling offstage)

O you without! Be yet a while content without, and from my servant Moishe's hand

(gestures toward MOISHE/MOSES, seated down-left)

you shall ere long receive the word you want!

THE READER

Which undertaking given, the copyist turns his hand once more to the suspended task

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM picks up his quill. The Thunder of Staves abruptly ceases. SOFER BEN SOFERIM takes a few half-hearted swipes at the scroll before him, pausing after each to examine the result.)

--but, oh! how unwillingly! For, till that first, fiery script be in vision glimpsed. . .

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

. . . what assurance can be mine that every mark by me set down does not but set me down a little farther off the mark; does not but mark, if anything, a further departure from heaven's writ?

Fp. 20

THE READER

So it is with ever-deepening reluctance that the stilled hand immerses itself in the ritual bath prescribed ere commencing day's labors; with ever-deepening reluctance introduces the gum Arabic into the fresh-stirred ink; makes ever more reluctant trial of the nib's keenness by writing, then quick blotting, the name of "Almarek" (whose name Heaven blot!); and ever more reluctantly seeks out the verse of joy upon which the copyist is bidden his day's labors cease. Slower and more slow the quill draws on, until at last, one winter dawn, somewhere far out among the columns of Exodus, having but now blacked in the words:

Fp. 21

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(speaking aloud as he writes)

"He came down upon the mountain in fire and thunder"

THE READER

. . . the wavering hand falls still, and lets fall the pen.

(Thunder of Staves)

All unattended now, the clamor of Them Without for a completed word thunders on, unanswered, unmet.

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM leans forward slightly, as if straining to catch a just barely audible sound.

As he does so, the Thunder of Staves subsides; but SOFER BEN SOFERIM remains in the position of one straining forward to hear.

Fp. 22

MOISHE/MOSES rises from his high-backed chair, down-left, and begins to move toward SOFER BEN SOFERIM at the desk, center. The radiance that has all this while rested upon MOISHE/MOSES' face somehow remains there, even though MOISHE/MOSES is getting farther and farther away from the torch in the floor-socket, down-left, that, so long as he remained seated nearby, seemed to be its source.

Fp. 23

His face thus inexplicably aglow, MOISHE/MOSES comes up behind SOFER BEN SOFERIM and peers over his shoulder, casting a sudden light on the scroll-in-progress.)

But, now, what is here? Suddenly athwart the scribe's page falls like an accusation a harsh draft of light that seems to bring within its indictment hand, pen and all.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

In whose judgment do I stand thus?

THE READER

. . . marvels the scribe; and, veering round to see, sees looking down on him one whose face shone like the day. Just for a moment, Sofer actually takes the Radiant One for our unlettered grate-sweeper. . .

Fp. 24

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(passing his hand over his eyes)

Moishe. . .?

THE READER

. . . he, who many the winter dawn has lit the scribe to his rest. But now the majesty of the figure is come home to him; and, shielding his eyes against the splendor, he asks:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

What art thou, Master, that, with thy shining face, casts
light upon my page?

THE READER

And the Radiance, his hand going to his cheek:

MOISHE/MOSES

Doth shine my face?

THE READER

Fp. 25

Whereat the scribe grasps: this can be none but Father Moses,
as he appeared when, coming down off the mountain 'neath
tablets bowed, his face "shone, but he knew it not"--nor
knows to this hour. The copyist is on his knees.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Master! Those features veil! For what am I that he who lit
Israel a path through the waste light my late toils?

MOISHE/MOSES

Fp. 26

And is it thus thou welcomest the vision so long sought?
Behold! I am Moses, first in line of thee and all that
heaven's writ take down. **When**, 'mid the rumblings and flashes
of Sinai, I was handed stylus and stone and bidden mark
what was spoke, was not my first question, as lately
thine (thy questions being ever but late re-posings of
my own): Lord, after what hand? Did I not then,

as lately thou, waver between the Palaeo-Semitic, the
 Proto-Sinaiatic, and a hundred scripts else? Craved I not
 then--as, since, thou cravest--to be granted glimpse of the
 Black on White Fire, that therewith I might make one my hand?
 Nor vain my prayer. For lo! There on the heights,
 responsive to my cry, the Primal Torah of Flame unscrolled
 before me, a pattern for all setting-down to come.

Fp.27

THE READER

The copyist cannot believe his ears.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

First of prophets! Givest thou me to understand that those
 columns ever by Israel deemed highest truth, were, in fact,
 held out to thee as (bless us!) no more but a mere. . .
 calligraphy lesson?

Fr.28

MOISHE/MOSES

What was then held out to me, I now hold out to thee.
 See what I bear!

THE READER

. . . And puts forth an empty hand.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

But, Master, thy hand is empty!

THE READER

. . . protests the visionary. And the Vision:

MOISHE/MOSES

Look more nearly into the emptiness of my hand.

THE READER

At which, the Tablet-Bowed lays his hands to either side his shining countenance--what next you hear, dream not to view, but dream and view*--and lifts away whole the mask of fire that o'erspreads it.

Held, for a moment, delicately, in shape-respecting hands--

(peers closely at the words he has just read, then emends them to:)

Held, for a moment, in delicately shaping hands,

*Trouble for the Theatre. Here the script--here writing--proclaims the insufficiency of its own representational means to the task at hand. And indeed, the sequence of actions prescribed on pp. 14-15 --character lifts mask of light from face and proceeds to refashion it into scroll of flame--is beyond representation. Something must be put onstage. And no doubt actor and lighting designer can, **between them**, work up something "beautiful" here. But for all that, neither a "realistic" nor any conceivable "stylized" portrayal of such a course of events (if events they be) is likely to carry much conviction. "To stage the script," at this juncture, can only mean: to stage writing's despair at the limits of its own power. (Of course, theatre can boast some proficiency, and much experience, in the staging of this particular despair.)

Note

29

x-frag to
Fpp 29-31

Fp. 30 the uptorn light retains, briefly, its hang of the human visage whence prised, but, then, of a sudden, sinks in upon itself to a ball of flame turning out between the Master's hands, which, now when he lifts, now when he parts, draw the light out along itself into a surface of flare that broadens and thins in the passage between hand and hand.

Fp. 31 Now in either these bounding hands appear vertical flames, to which leap out and moor the sheet of fire floating between. So that--behold! The Law-Bringer finds himself bearing up under a scroll of flame hefted high upon rollers themselves of flame, or aflame.

(Fascinated, SOFER BEN SOFERIM rises from his desk and begins to move toward MOISHE/MOSES.)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Sure, this is not--? Yet, sure, what can this be else but the Primal Torah of Flame, with which I have long sought to match my hand. And now, it seems, I have but to lift mine eyes and--

Fp. 32 (suddenly covers his eyes with his forearm and reels back away from MOISHE/MOSES)

THE READER

But see! the long-dreamt vision upon him, the copyist can but back draw, in fear no less for vision than very life!

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Prophet! May one upon such gaze and ever upon aught else?

MOISHE/MOSES

Look'st thou on blindness here? Yet before these eyes flickered these flames, all that time I, vision on Sinai's peak vouchsafed, read off words in fire and writ in stone.

THE READER

At which the copyist only first grasps what had been the glow since marked upon the features of Moses: what, in truth, but afterglow of that first, fiery script--a reflection the Tablet-Burthened must ever strive--is, indeed, at this hour striving--to lay hold of and transmit.

If doubt were yet, doubt is past. Here is he hath looked on the wonder else viewed of none.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Master! Say: in what script stood written those primal columns of flame?

THE READER

But for all answer, the Scroll-Bearer thrusts out at him the betwixt-flame-spooling sheet of flame, as who should say: "Thy prospects read!" The scribe disposes himself to receive the proffered page, but, as the thing flares over into our space, finds himself, for all the Prophet's assurances, blinded--well, dazzled--and makes his vision fast 'gainst the oncoming word.

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM, his eyes screwed shut, gropes the air, possibly in search of, possibly to ward off, the approaching scroll.)

Whatever "Torah of Flames"--effect the lighting designer has thus far managed to keep in play out between MOISHE/MOSES' hands abruptly goes off.

Fp.36

MOISHE/MOSES, all in a single motion, pivots round toward SOFER BEN SOFERIM's desk, *lays hold of the handles* of the uncompleted Torah lying open there, lifts it off the desk, wheels back around toward SOFER BEN SOFERIM, and thrusts the latter's own scroll-in-progress out at him.)

Yet even in this flurry of lost bearings, the scribe, bethinking himself that, according to our law, not one page of sacred writ must touch upon earth, blindly puts forth his hands to receive the spindles of flame, and--

Fp.37

(MOISHE/MOSES places in SOFER BEN SOFERIM's hands the handles of the Torah-scroll he has just taken off SOFER BEN SOFERIM's own desk.)

But, now, what is here? Instead of the expected searing of laid-hold-on flame, the copyist marks only

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

. . . This coolness, as of turned wood

THE READER

And, opening his eyes, sees that he has in hand

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

. . . A plain parchment Torah-scroll

THE READER

Covered with characters the briefest glance reveals to be

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

. . . Early Peninsular Sephardic cursive

THE READER

Fp. 38 --That commonest of all Hebrew scripts--and displaying all the traits of a handwriting he has scarce the leisure to wonder:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

How so familiar?

THE READER

. . . before it comes over him that

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

I am looking at my own hand.

(Thunder of Staves, offstage)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM and THE READER

(calling off, together)

Not yet!

(Thunder abates.)

Distracted by this interruption, ~~THE~~ READER loses his place, and winds forward and back through the scroll in search of it.

While THE READER is thus occupied, SOFER BEN SOFERIM rounds on MOISHE/MOSES.)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Father Moses! To what a height of mockery am I brought!
 For the primal Torah all this time sought, I am offered
 parchment and pine. For the fiery flourishes
 all this while dreamt, I look on my own hand.

MOISHE/MOSES

Look on thine own hand. Read what is in thy hand.

THE READER

(only now finds his place in the scroll
 and resumes reading:)

So, from off the pine-coiled parchment there before him
 in his own hand the copyist sets about to read; and reads:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Stilled hand,*

THE READER

. . . but immediately breaks off.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Master! Seventy and more times is the Sefer Torah gone forth
 from my hand; nor is there a verset my fingers do not
 take the heft and set of well before my mind places
 the words. But about these words--

(nods toward the scroll in his hands)

"Stilled hand"--my fingers will not form. For none of Scripture's

*From here through p.24 the centering of a passage
 indicates that it is read aloud by SOFER BEN SOFERIM
 from the scroll he carries.

are they: rather is "Stilled Hand" the secret name
 I am accustomed to give myself in my thoughts, as one
 between scripts wavering and idle the while. Master!
 Will you hold that it is in the Primal Torah of Flame
 that I read, reading my own words?

Fp. 41

MOISHE/MOSES

And didst thou think to find, in all this all-prescribing
 charter, no word of thee set down? Read on!

THE READER

So, addressed in a hand he knows not--and called by a name
 he knows not--how to plead distinct from his own,
 the copyist (as I read) reads:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(reading, somewhat haltingly, from the scroll
 in his hand)

Stilled hand, here if nowhere else bring forth
 what it is hath stilled thee the while.

Long my prayer hath run: Author of all,
show Thy hand, that with my own I may write
after Thee. But, Lord, You who know hands
 and hearts as well, know otherwise--know,
 that if of the imprescriptible script I have
 craved vision, it was not, as oft urged,
 that thereto I might conform my hand,
 but that therefrom I might. . .

Fp. 42

(squints at scroll; to MOISHE/MOSES:)

"Veer off," is that? Or "sheer off"? I don't make out my own writing here. . . .

Fp. 43

(He squints harder at the page.

THE READER, either hearing SOFER BEN SOFERIM's inquiry as addressed to him or, more likely, himself becoming intrigued by the textual crux, pauses to check the wording in his own scroll--and thereby once more, as on p. 18, loses his place. During what follows, he winds the scroll forward and back to find it, but only succeeds in doing so a split-second before his next speech (on p. 22).)

X-ref to
Fp. 38

X-ref to
Fp. 46

It could be "strike off." Yes, I'm distinctly inclining to "strike off."

Fp. 44

(resumes reading)

If of the imprescriptible script I have craved vision, it was not that thereto I might conform my hand but that therefrom I might strike off, seeing, as I did, in the multiplicity of Hebrew scripts (your Palaeo-Semitic, your Proto-Sinaiatic, and the like) not so many candidates for the divine hand but so many strikings off from it--and myself desiring no better than to strike off after them, that all issue of my pen should be not according to Thy hand but always otherwise.

Fr. 45

Presumption unthinkable on the part
of mere copyist, seems this? And yet,
breathed there ever scribe who did not,
at moments, fancy the sacred vocables
that from his pen freely pour, free
outpourings? Here is no more but the
resonance certain to attend, the flourishes
likely to adorn, the scribal act,
be the "scribe" in question our Author
of authors; the chipper-away at stone
from on high; or one's own, poor, scribbling--

THE READER

Fr. 46

But further along such lines the scroll-copyist will not
venture; but, now, all indignation upon the Tablet-Bowed
turning:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

That such, or any such, in earliest fire stands graven,
you shall not bring me down to believe!

MOISHE/MOSES

And yet, it is in the Primal Torah of Flame that you read.
Along these very lines the All-Fashioner ran eye and
wrought world; wherefore, ever about these lines flicker
the world of possibilities He looked at and wrought not.

This is a Torah distinguished from that you know by already containing every possible off-sheering from itself. Each departure it tells; therefore, tells yours; therefore, read on!

Fp. 47

THE READER

So, Sofer ben Soferim, called "The Stilled Hand," all unwillingly turns his gaze once more to the proffered page, and, ever in his own script (as I read), reads:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(reading from scroll in his hand)

Stilled hand, having your stilled thoughts this one time brought forth, come, and do you now first venture true prayer: Author of all, by Your hand the world is written, and they who write after Your hand do but rewrite the world. I, however, would myself propose a world--

(squints into scroll; to MOISHE/MOSES:)

Got to be "compose," no?

(Once again, as on p. 21, THE READER pauses to check the reading in his scroll, and, as before, loses his place, with the result that he is a beat late coming in on his next speech (p. 24).)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM resumes reading from the scroll in his hand.)

X-ref
to Fp. 43

X-ref
to Fp. 49

Fp. 48

I, however, would myself compose a world,
and do therefore now, in contempt of
all mere rehandlings, hold forth my hand
to Thee--or would do so, did not the
stilled hand--even at thought of all it is
holding forth, back drawing--fall slack away.
Stilled hand, you are in motion once more
from the moment you urge: "Lord, put me
in the way of Thy hand, that I may
the sooner depart

(Having read "depart," apparently the last word on its line, as if it were also the end of the sentence, SOFER BEN SOFERIM now, on a hunch, looks ahead to the beginning of the next line and, finding the sentence to contain one more word, adds:)

therefrom."

Fp. 49

THE READER

Once more the scribe breaks off.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Father Moses! Who forges me thus? You have given me to believe that scroll unafame in earliest flame stands scriven; that writing in my own hand is from the supernal hand gone forth; that words none of Scripture's speak Scripture here. But that the divine page fills my mouth with prayers to be shut of the divine Author--! Oh, since conjectured, now known: Upon the Black and White of Fire I have still to gaze!

Fp. 50

MOISHE/MOSES

Dost doubt that o'er the primal columns of flame thou
fares? Oh, then--turn back!

Fp. 51

THE READER

Whereupon the scribe sets about to turn this
Torah-so-called back upon itself.

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM lifts the scroll into
the light and begins to wind back through it.)

While he is thus engaged, MOISHE/MOSES
returns to his high-backed chair, down-left,
and seats himself there. Though he is once
more within range of the torch in the
floor-socket, no radiance any longer plays
about his face.)

Back, back twirls the scribe--

(Rewinding the scroll, SOFER BEN SOFERIM
exposes the columns of script he has just been
reading from. These, however, now display the
altered appearance described by THE READER
in the following sentences:)

Fp. 52

--but, now, what is here? Where'er his eye hath lit
upon the o'erwritten page, all trace of writing is gone,
burnt clean away, line after line; so that, where once
columns of script towered, now his gaze snags upon
a shutter of charred slats, through which, held out
into the winter dawn, filters first light.

Fp. 53

At which the scribe first grasps: "Here indeed hath
passed before me the Primal Torah of Flame, in form of
those columns upon columns of burnaway, as which. . ."

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(How else?)

THE READER

". . . the Black Fire comes into view for man; and through which flicker those earlier-than-early glimmers, as which. . . "

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(How then?)

THE READER

". . . breaks upon mortal ken, the White."

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

And yet. . . ,

THE READER

Once more his inquiry upon the Scroll-Flourisher turning,

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

. . . how, being first fire, came this writing, **when first** read, to appear to me unaflame and mine own? . . . Moses?

THE READER

But see! Moses is gone. And, as if in the very disparition of Moses answer finding, suddenly the scribe conceives that, of the scroll's being first fire, precisely its "**appearing** unaflame and mine own" offered best proof.

Fp.55

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(holding the scroll up and out at different angles, so as to "read" the lines of light coming through the printlike rows of char-edged horizontal slits)

I saw no fire when reading because its appearing to be my own writing was the truth with which it was on fire, the radiance it gave off, the illumination conferred.

Fp.56

THE READER

And does not just herein lie, Sofer, the granting of your copyist's prayer "to be shown in what script runs the primal writ of fire, that thereto I might conform my hand":

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

It lies in my own hand. For where but in my own hand should those earliest sparks of creation start up afresh, their looking for all the world like "my own writing" their one stab at the problem of what writing a world might look like for me.

Fp.57

THE READER

Now that he grasps what he has in hand, all his thought is to come once more to the place where but now he gave over reading, and pick up where left off.

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM begins to wind the (by now largely rewound) scroll forward again.)

Small mind he pays to any "hidden wonders" set out therein:

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(impatiently muttering the titles of sections as he winds past them:)

. . . "The Throne-Chariot" . . . "The Crystalline Corridors"
 . . . "The Marshaller of Wings" . . .

THE READER

Ah, of higher mystery than these is he gone in quest!

For did he not from Moses' own lips have it that--

(THE READER has his lips parted to complete the sentence when the words are taken out of his mouth by MOISHE/MOSES, speaking from his down-left chair:)

MOISHE/MOSES

This is a Torah distinguished from that you know by already containing every possible off-sheering from itself. Each departure it tells; therefore, tells yours; therefore, read on!

THE READER

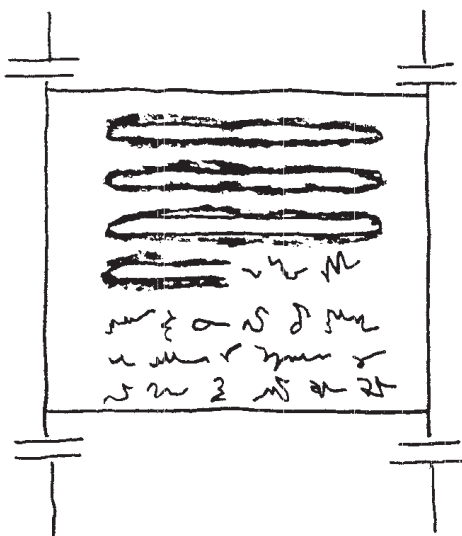
Now, **as yet**, ~~now~~ way apart from the divine page hath from off the divine page flared up at him. Therefore, somewhere on past the point of broken-off reading must lie; therefore, lies hence;

(to SOFER BEN SOFERIM)

therefore, read on!

(Continuing to wind the scroll on past column after column of charred slits, SOFER BEN SOFERIM at last arrives at a column that is char only to about its mid-point. The lower half-column,

it can be seen as he now slowly lifts the scroll into the light, is covered with one of those imaginary "Hebrew scripts" displayed in the pages of the Pattern Book (see p. 4 note). The changeover from charred slits to imaginary "Hebrew" writing occurs about halfway down the page, in the middle of a line, thus:



Already his eye is running down the page, in search of the transit from char to script--the juncture where but now his all-consuming gaze turned off unfilled--when suddenly--

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM thrusts the scroll in his hands out to one side and averts his eyes from it.)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

What was I about to do? Was it not my reading of these lines re-lit the flames that devoured them? And if I now read on, shall not whate'er remains be, in my reading, likewise consumed; Israel be reft of the lone instance she shall ever possess of the divine hand; and I, of the sole proof I might ever hope to bring that in my own the eternal script reappears?

Fp.62

THE READER

Ah, copyist! So valiant for Israel's treasure, so zealous of thine own fair name! Yet neither the one nor the other is it that wards thine eye from the page, but a reflection I little look to hear thee acknowledge

(THE READER pauses to give SOFER BEN SOFERIM an opening. SOFER BEN SOFERIM thrusts the scroll in his hands even farther off to one side.)

nor even in inmost thought avow. . . .

(THE READER again pauses. SOFER BEN SOFERIM shuts his already averted eyes to the thrust-away scroll.)

Is't even so? I must speak you, then: "Have I not all this while of the sacred page sought vision that from that first of scripts I might read my departure? But how shall what is read therein, therefrom make a departure? Indeed, was it not from all mere reading off of pages (and, of all pages, this!) that one dreamt to depart? What wonder, then, if I, who would hold my course away from that page, hold, as well, my eyes from it? For, let my gaze but once thereon have lit, and--"

Fp.63

Fp.64

(Suddenly SOFER BEN SOFERIM is caught up in "hand-to-hand combat" with the scroll in his hands: he struggling to keep it from coming before his eyes, it struggling to bring itself under his gaze.)

See how even at the thought, the hunger of the eyes for the page grows unassuageable, and it is only by crushing the all-promising, as yet but half-scanned sheet to his breast that he finds he may deny them their will.

The script thus taken to heart, he feels, briefly,
 a safety; then, a burning, as the balked letters--of no less
 searing import, it seems, when blindly embraced than
 looked at full on--seek to impress upon flesh what they
 cannot otherhow impart. Turned from as vision, the writing
 returns as pain; but the pain, no less than the vision,
demands to be read.

So, now, quickly, before he can yield, peruse and ignite--and
 so lose man his one prospect ever of the divine hand,
 in form of his own--the copyist winds up the fire-marked
 scroll and,

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM gestures to MOISHE/MOSES,
 who rises and crosses to him.)

summoning in our unlettered grate-sweeper, Moishe--him for whom
 he had earlier Father Moses mistook--confides the Torah
 to his hands.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(to MOISHE/MOSES)

This burnt-out Torah scroll came to grief in transcription.
 According to our law, such must be laid in earth. Take it,
 therefore, from my hand and give it to dust. Note that
 I do not ask where.

(MOISHE/MOSES accepts the proffered scroll.)

THE READER, silently following the dialogue
 with one finger in his scroll, traces out these
 final words of SOFER BEN SOFERIM along the
 bottom line of a column, attempts to wind the scroll
 forward to the next column--and finds that there
is no next column: he has come to the end
 of the scroll.

He raises the hinged top of his desk, pops in the used-up scroll, and rifles through the interior of the desk, in search of the still-to-be-read portion of his role.

Fp.67

MOISHE/MOSES, meanwhile, bearing aloft by its two handles the charred Torah he has just been given by SOFER BEN SOFERIM, sets off toward THE READER with it, arriving just as the latter emerges from his (apparently fruitless) search of the desk. MOISHE/MOSES thrusts the handles of the charred Torah into THE READER's hands and returns to his high-backed chair, down-left.

NOTE: It must be clear to the audience that, because THE READER had his head in the desk all the while MOISHE/MOSES was advancing toward him, he does not realize that the scroll MOISHE/MOSES here puts into his hands is, in fact, the very Torah-scroll MOISHE/MOSES himself has just now received from SOFER BEN SOFERIM. Rather, THE READER assumes he is simply being supplied by MOISHE/MOSES with the text of the remaining portion of his role, as he was with its initial segment, **back on p.2.**

x-ref
to Fp.4

Fp.68

THE READER cautiously opens the scroll he has just been given by MOISHE/MOSES, exposing that very column--char above, imaginary "Hebrew script" below--at the mid-point of which SOFER BEN SOFERIM earlier (p.29) left off reading.

x-ref
to Fp.61

Puzzled by the "damaged" condition of his new "script," THE READER lifts the scroll into the light, rotates it, holds it out at different angles, etc., in a determined effort to construe the fire-scored upper half-column.

Fp.69

All at once, as if suddenly inspired by this tableau of THE READER struggling to decipher the charred page, SOFER BEN SOFERIM hastens back to his desk, center, for the first time since p.15, takes up his quill to write, and has brought it halfway down before he notices that--the Torah-scroll upon which he labored at the outset having since, unbeknownst to him, been whisked off his desk by MOISHE/MOSES (p.17) and, more recently, handed along to THE READER (p.32)--he has nothing to write on.

x-ref
to Fp.31x-ref
to Fp.36x-ref
to Fp.67

X-ref
Fr. 6

Astonished by the "disappearance" of the Torah, he once more, as at opening (p. 3), suspends his pen for a moment in mid-air.

Then, frantic lest he "lose the thought," he dives back into his hinge-topped desk, in search of either the "vanished" scroll or some other scrap of writing material.

Thunder of Staves, offstage.)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(calling off, as he continues his search)

Not yet! Oh, if ever from my hand you looked to receive a perfected scroll-- Indeed, if ever to other rumblings than your own you thought to give ear--

Fr. 70

X-ref
to Fr. 16

X-ref to
Fr. 12

(After much rummaging, SOFER BEN SOFERIM emerges from the desk clutching the Pattern Book he deposited there back on p. 7 . It is still open to the upper-half-scrawled, lower-half-blank page (see p. 6 , illus.).

He lifts this page into the light, scrutinizes its upper half closely, hesitates for a moment, then slaps the sheet down on his desk and sets about writing rapidly on its unused lower half.

The Thunder of Staves dies out.

THE READER, meanwhile, has given up trying to extract any sense from the upper half-column of charred "writing" in the Torah-scroll brought him by MOISHE/MOSES. He sets the scroll down on the desk, hastily runs a finger along the burnt lines to ascertain exactly where char yields to script, and--just at the instant when SOFER BEN SOFERIM starts in writing on the Pattern Book page--commences to read aloud from that point in the scroll:)

THE READER

Fp. 71

'Lord*, put me in the way of Thy hand,
that I may the sooner depart

(Having read "depart," apparently the last word on its line, as if it were also the end of the sentence, THE READER now, on a hunch, looks ahead to the beginning of the next line and, finding the sentence to contain one more word, adds:)

Fp. 72

therefrom'--knowing, now, that I should never look upon the words that followed, I found I could think of nothing but what might follow from those words--and found myself to be, in speculation upon this theme, inexhaustible. Slowly, patiently I excluded (that is to say: invented) one after another possible departure for thought, till at length I beheld the scroll to which I was confiding these sequelae quite blackened o'er. Might it be that somewhere, in all this putting down, I had put down the very words that, upon the turned-from sheet of flame, represented my departure? Clearly, I should never know. Yet as I beheld this, my Book of Exclusions (to give the treatise the title by which it since made my name) swell 'neath my hand,

Fp. 73

[Fp. 71]
 x-ref to
 Esp. 39-48]

*Here, as on pp. 19 - 24, the centering of a passage indicates that it is read aloud from (what was formerly) SOFER BEN SOFERIM's scroll.

Fp. 74

I saw I should never need to. For,
let but that page remain unglimped,

Fp. 75

and the very alternatives--text departed
and text conformed, writing after and
writing free, taking down and taking off--
remain unthinkable, no more surely to be
told apart than my from that other script
along the columns traced, wherein that which
I transcribe, that by which I transcribe,
and that by which I am transcribed, speak,

Fp. 76

all, a common hand. Stilled hand,
long you fancied you should not "write"
before you had put aside all uncertainty
upon this score--and so held off.
But to write, you now see, is, precisely,
to write this uncertainty. Thus,

Fp. 77

the imperusability of the divine page
that erst stayed thee, now drives thee.
For, so long as one cannot tell what
along that page lies, one will never be
at **an** end of

(squints at page)

the glossing over

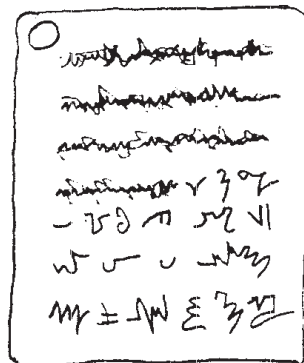
(squints again; tries another reading:)

the mourning over

(squints again; settles on:)

the telling over. . . . So long as one cannot tell what along that page lies, one will never be at an end of the telling over that blank which is writing. And in these unceasing efforts to supply what the divine text wants, the unstoppable fecundity of the divine text itself re-appears. To which, . . .

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM imparts a final flourish to the writing he has been doing on the Pattern Book page and slowly waves it in the air to dry. To the upper half-page of indecipherable scrawl described on pp.5-6 he has, it can now be seen, added a lower half-page of imaginary "Hebrew script." The switchover from scrawl to script occurs about halfway down the page in the middle of a line, thus:



SOFER BEN SOFERIM sets the Pattern Book down on his desk and applies himself to reading back over his half-page of additions, cutting and emending freely as he goes.)

. . . bear witness, thou blackening page.

Fp 78

X-neF
to Fp. 12

Fp. 79

(Thunder of Staves.

Startled, THE READER drops the scroll onto his desk. It rolls shut.

MOISHE/MOSES half-rises, turns toward SOFER BEN SOFERIM, and puts out his hand to receive the Pattern Book page which SOFER BEN SOFERIM has been re-reading/emending.)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(to MOISHE/MOSES)

Not yet! Least of all now!

(Thunder of Staves subsides.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM returns to his revisions.

MOISHE/MOSES looks toward THE READER with a shrug, as if to say: "I tried!" and sits back down in his chair.

THE READER, having lost his place in the scroll when it fell shut on his desk, now picks it up again, mumbling over, as he does so, the last words he read:)

THE READER

". . . Bear witness. . . thou blackening page. . . "

(Holding the scroll upright on the desk before him, THE READER opens and begins to turn through it, in search of his lost place.

But it soon becomes clear that the Torah now before him has undergone a change.

The first column he opens to is made up entirely of lines of char-edged horizontal slits.

He winds forward to another column.--. . all char again.

He winds back several columns, then forward again, then back. . . ever and always char.

Fp. 81

Finally, stretching his arms as wide as they will go, he draws open the entire scroll like an accordion. All the columns he thus simultaneously exposes are made up of lines of char-edged slits.

Slowly, he lowers the open scroll, still held upright, from before his face, until the tips of its handles rest on the desktop.

We see in his eyes what he has seen.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM, meanwhile, his review and revision of the Pattern Book page now complete, rises with the Pattern Book in his hand and, gazing fixedly at his own writing, begins to speak.

NOTE: He is, in fact, reading from the Pattern Book page, but this does not become evident until the moment indicated on p. 39.

X-ref
to Fp. 84

Fp. 82

As SOFER BEN SOFERIM speaks (reads), THE READER drops his eyes to the charred scroll he holds upright on the desk before him and seems to follow along silently in its burnt lines of "script.")

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

(his eyes always upon the Pattern Book page)

I mark you there, upon the unscrolling flame-on-flame gaze bending, and only now, Creator, is it first borne in on me wherefore You did not simply call forth or summon up Your creation but--in the words of the figure that started me down this path--"looked into the Torah and read back the world." This Torah, in which You read, Author of all, is given in Your own hand (of this, its being given in my own hand makes mortal representation). And it was

Fp. 83

precisely in the writing's being Your own that You read the prospect of a world of Your own writing. "Looked into. . . read back"--it is not as if You made out upon that "page" all the marks of (say) "eel-grass"--and snatched some eel-grass from the flames. No; what You "read" in that place was the contestation of Black and White Fires there, in Your own writing, raging; of which contestation, You saw,--

SOFER BEN SOFERIM and THE READER

(together; THE READER softly reading along from the charred scroll)

--as I, as each, see after You--

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

--a world might be made; or rather, what we call "the world" is only this contestation, read out. Upon this bitter warring

(stops; squints at Pattern Book page in his hand; grabs quill off his desk; emends a word; replaces quill; and resumes what is only by this gesture seen to have been reading all along)

Upon this bitter marking of flame by flame, this resoluteness of either flicker to be the death of the other, You gazed and glimpsed--

SOFER BEN SOFERIM and THE READER

(together; THE READER reading softly from the charred scroll)

--as I, as each, glimpse after You--

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

--the tumults that us beset,

SOFER BEN SOFERIM and THE READER

(similarly)

the scene that was to be ours.

(THE READER continues to stare at the all-char scroll--and SOFER BEN SOFERIM, at the Pattern Book page--from which each has just read out these final words.

Pause.

Thunder of Staves.)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

Not--

("... yet!" he is about to say, but checks the impulse)

Even now.

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM beckons to MOISHE/MOSES, who rises and goes to him.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM tears out of the Pattern Book the page he has just read aloud and holds it out toward MOISHE/MOSES:)

Go without,

(inclines his head in the general direction of the offstage Thundering Staves)

show yourself among them who all this while of my pen await the accomplished word. Not a one of them but it will inwardly rejoice to see you down from the heights, bearing as you do the page they have so long wanted from my hand.

(Thunder of Staves ceases.)

Fp. 87

He starts to hand the page to MOISHE/MOSES,
but arrests the gesture.)

And should their faces dim to behold, not the familiar
columns by thee since given to dust, but, merely,
certain late reflections from my hand, say to them:

(flourishing the Pattern Book page)

"What word but this can you have supposed was wanting?"

Fp. 88

Has it not, with every 'I' spoken grown plainer that
it is I who speak, I who have spoken from the first--that
one did but imagine some further voice reeling off the tale
(the 'tale' being precisely that of such an imagining)?
Of a voice, so understood, what madness to attend
'revelations,' 'outpourings'! Is not, rather, such an
understanding of **voice** the 'revelation' like no other,
the 'outpouring' second to none? Oh, you would do
well--oh, you can scarce do otherwise--than to. . . "

Fp. 89

(MOISHE/MOSES snatches the Pattern Book page
out of SOFER BEN SOFERIM's hands and begins to
move off with it, leaving SOFER BEN SOFERIM
staring at his empty hands.)

Slowly, experimentally, SOFER BEN SOFERIM
raises the tips of his fingers to his cheeks.
At their touch, his whole face relaxes; his eyes
close; and he seems to enjoy a moment of perfect
peace.

Suddenly his fingers spring away from his
cheeks, his eyes flick open, and he looks around
anxiously for MOISHE/MOSES.

MOISHE/MOSES, however, has meanwhile embarked
upon a slow, circuitous exit that, at the moments
indicated will eventually take him

- (A) past his own chair, down-left, where he gathers up the torch from its floor-socket;
- (B) past THE READER's desk, down-right, where he deposits the Pattern Book page he has just snatched out of the hands of SOFER BEN SOFERIM; and finally
- (C) straight on out of the world of the play, via a sharp turn in some direction that nothing about the staging thus far would suggest is that of the offstage, stave-banging "Community Without"--e. g., straight down the center aisle and into our midst.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM watches MOISHE/MOSES move away over this trajectory.

THE READER sets down the charred scroll in which he has been following along since p.38 and watches SOFER BEN SOFERIM watch the exit of MOISHE/MOSES.

As THE READER speaks the following, an apparently sourceless glow, such as earlier played about the face of MOISHE/MOSES begins to come up about his face.

The stage lights, meanwhile, gradually dim, as if the intensifying glow on THE READER's face were slowly drawing up all the available light into itself.)

THE READER

With this, faithful transcriber of a Great Original, thou standest at the Aleph of Jewish letters, whence branch all the scripts. The high point of the story, the summit long dreamt, the lone imaginable conclusion.

Fp. 90

X-ref
to Fr. 82

And if now, sole upon the heights--

((A) Here the exiting MOISHE/MOSES wrenches the torch from its floor-socket over by his high-backed chair, down-left.)

--the splendor since gone over, the thundering well past--what awaits thee bears all the marks of a comedown--well, how but after the fashion of a comedown shall that which has come down to us come down? From these (as from what heights not?) one descends, at length,

((B) Here the exiting MOISHE/MOSES passes by the desk of THE READER, down-right, on which he places the Pattern Book page he snatched away from SOFER BEN SOFERIM.)

empty-handed.

(THE READER takes up and scrutinizes--but does not read from--the page he has just received.)

"How! Did I not set vision down?" Aye--vision of just such a work of setting down as this present. "Did I not read writing back?" Aye--the writing of just such a scene of reading back as here unscrolls.

(Thunder of Staves, which this time does not abate.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM turns toward, and calls out to, the offstage Staves:)

SOFER BEN SOFERIM

As full my word as I could wish to see it or think to make it. Who would more, let him look to his own hand!

(He faces back around in the direction where, prior to the interruption by the Staves, he had been following MOISHE/MOSES' exit; "scans the horizon"; but can't now seem to bring him in view.)

THE READER

Which is but to say: look upon emptiness.

(SOFER BEN SOFERIM, continuing to scan out over the audience in search of MOISHE/MOSES, seems more and more bothered by a bright light in his eyes.)

Nothing, alas, hast thou in hand! Yet how if it were just this emptiness of hand one had a vision of oneself as conveying; sought, indeed, above all else to convey? Empty hand, would you close on fulness once more, you have but to grasp--

(Just here (C) the torch-bearing MOISHE/MOSES steps beyond the world of the play and into our midst.

At the instant when MOISHE/MOSES crosses the outer boundary of the playing-area, the glow upon THE READER's face comes up full and the stage lights go completely down.

SOFER BEN SOFERIM, apparently blinded by the (to us, invisible) bright light "out there," wheels back around into the action--and finds himself staring straight into THE READER's illuminated face.

THE READER looks up from the Pattern Book page.

At the instant the eyes of THE READER and SOFER BEN SOFERIM meet, the glow on THE READER's face--the sole remaining source of illumination onstage--goes out.

Fp. 92ADD

Fp. 93

Fp. 94

Now all one sees is the lurching torch that MOISHE/MOSES is carrying out of the theatre. In the otherwise total darkness, this appears, as at opening, a self-advancing light.

Just as the torch passes from view, the Thunder of Staves abruptly diminishes to a single, determined staff that keeps on pounding out an irregular, insistent rhythm in the darkness, until at last, with a high-pitched cracking sound, it is struck and "silenced" by another staff.

A moment of darkness.

Then, lights suddenly, blindingly up on an empty stage.)

END