

Trouble for the Theatre: 3

THE RECALL OF RABBI ITHAMAR BEN ZAKHIEL  
FROM ECSTASY

by  
David Cole

1998

## What is Owing

For my title and several details of action I am indebted to Lawrence H. Schiffman's article, "The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah ben Ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the Hekhalot Rabbati" (AJS Review, Volume 1, 1976).

What I know of the early Jewish Merkavah or "Throne" narratives--accounts of mystical ascents in which a visionary like my Ithamar rises, in trance, through a succession of heavens to a final encounter with a Throned Figure--I have learned from the writings of David Blumenthal, David Halperin, Martha Himmelfarb, Michael Lieb, Peter Schäfer and Gershom Scholem.

## Characters

RABBI ITHAMAR BEN ZAKHIEL

His FORMER SCRIBE

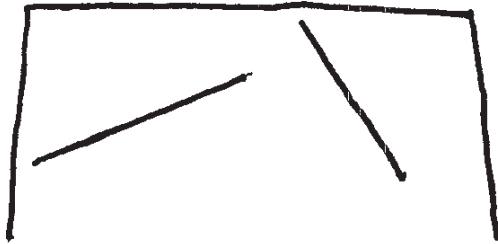
His CURRENT SCRIBE

The HANDMAIDEN, whom they call "The Overseer"

## Scene

The Inmost Forecourt of the Synagogue

(Scene: The inmost forecourt of the synagogue--an asymmetrical, wedge-shaped area defined by two walls that converge toward, but do not meet, up-left:



Through the gap between these walls one glimpses a succession of courtyards, each opening back out from the last--or so at first it appears. But as one's gaze rests upon this vista of successive outward-opening courtyards, the view suddenly transforms into one of successive downward-opening levels or tiers. And ever after, the scene glimpsed between the walls will seem to alternate between the view out from a center and the view down from a height--the eye cannot make up its mind.

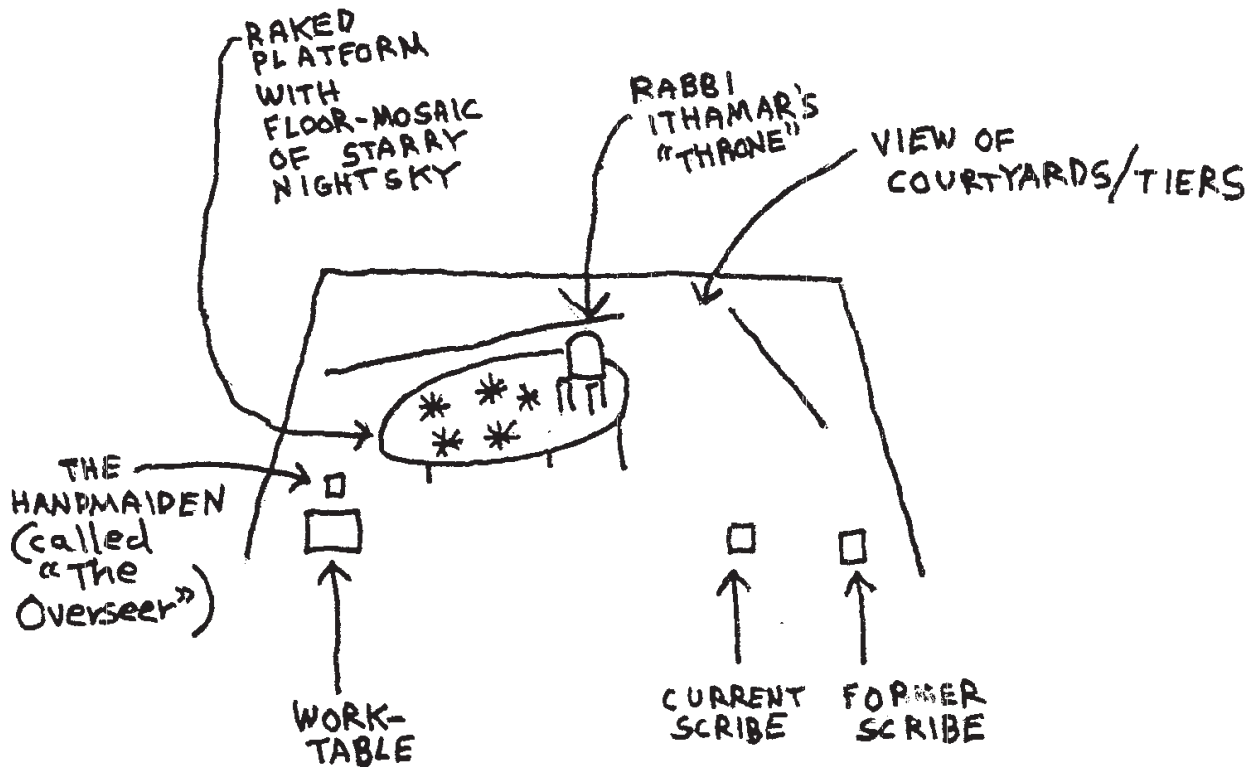
Up-right, a broad, low platform, sharply enough raked so that the audience can easily make out the design on its surface: an elliptical floor-mosaic of the night sky evenly tiled with stars.

At the more upstage focus of the ellipse stands a rabbinic "throne"--actually, a massive, over-decorated armchair.

Upon the "throne" sits RABBI ITHAMAR BEN ZAKHIEL, in trance.

Down-left, seated on stools, RABBI ITHAMAR's FORMER SCRIBE and his CURRENT SCRIBE.

Down-right, seated at her work-table, the HANDMAIDEN, whom the SCRIBES mockingly refer to and address as "The Overseer."



The general course of the interaction among these characters is as follows:

RABBI ITHAMAR, from trance, calls back the sights and events he is encountering along his visionary way.

As he does so, the CURRENT SCRIBE transcribes his words.

The FORMER SCRIBE, meanwhile, following along in a transcript which he has made of the words ITHAMAR called back from trance during a previous ecstatic journey over this same route, cross-checks ITHAMAR's current against his earlier trance-utterances. (Both the FORMER SCRIBE's completed and the CURRENT SCRIBE's evolving transcripts consist of a sheaf of unbound parchment pages.)

Meanwhile, at her cluttered work-table--dominated by a vast pile of used, creased, stained sheets of parchment, but also containing various pen-knives, inkpots and a quiver of replacement quills--the HANDMAIDEN/"Overseer" is engaged in smoothing down and scraping clean for eventual re-use one after another of the parchment sheets out before her.

Each time the CURRENT SCRIBE comes to the end of the page he is writing on, he calls out "'Overseer'! A page!" and the HANDMAIDEN promptly brings him a "fresh" sheet, i. e., one of the smoothed-down, scraped-clean parchments she has been preparing.

At the outset, the HANDMAIDEN, with a small backlog of these refurbished pages on hand, works at a leisurely pace. But, as she is a perfectionist about getting out every last crease and blot, it takes her far longer to ready a sheet for re-use than it takes the CURRENT SCRIBE to fill up a page.

Initially, owing to ITHAMAR's near-silence, the demand for parchment is light, and the HANDMAIDEN manages to stay abreast: thus, she is able to devote the entire interval between p. 4 and p. 12 to preparing the single sheet called for on p. 12.

But as ITHAMAR grows more voluble and the CURRENT SCRIBE has more and more to record--a new page is called for on p. 14 and then almost at once another on p. 15 --the HANDMAIDEN falls further and further behind, must work ever more hastily and carelessly to keep up, and, despite her best efforts, finds herself out of fresh pages as early as p. 17.

At rise, a beat; then, from trance, RABBI ITHAMAR, his eyes fixed somewhere far out over the audience, speaks with unnatural clarity the words:)

ITHAMAR

And am, once more, before the Throne.

(ITHAMAR's head drops abruptly forward onto his chest.

As the FORMER SCRIBE checks these last-delivered words against his transcript of ITHAMAR's previous utterance from from trance, the CURRENT SCRIBE inscribes them on the last line of the page before him.

But with a word or two to go, he discovers he is out of space. He slips the filled sheet into his transcript and calls across to the HANDMAIDEN:)

#### CURRENT SCRIBE

"Overseer"! A page!

(The HANDMAIDEN gathers up the page she has been preparing and starts over toward the CURRENT SCRIBE, who awaits her arrival impatiently, his pen quivering in the air. . . .

The FORMER SCRIBE seems surprised and a little dismayed by his colleague's miscalculation.

The HANDMAIDEN places the fresh sheet before the CURRENT SCRIBE, returns to her table, and sets to work on another new page, the smoothing and cleaning of which will occupy her through p. 12.

For an instant, with the fresh sheet now before him, the CURRENT SCRIBE seems to draw a blank on the final word or two of ITHAMAR's that he intended to set down there.

The FORMER SCRIBE is visibly troubled by this further lapse on the CURRENT SCRIBE's part.

But the next moment, the CURRENT SCRIBE recalls the final words, writes them down at the top of the new page, and turns expectantly back toward ITHAMAR, waiting for him to resume speaking.

When, after a time, it becomes clear that ITHAMAR is not about to do so, the CURRENT SCRIBE draws a line under the words he has just written, slips the page containing (only) them into his transcript, and sets down his quill.

The FORMER SCRIBE, who has grown increasingly nervous at each of the CURRENT SCRIBE's recent stumbles--first he miscalculated the amount of writing space at his disposal, then he momentarily forgot the words he meant to record, and now he has (prematurely?) laid aside his pen--can no longer contain himself:)



## FORMER SCRIBE

I hope you're getting it all?

(The CURRENT SCRIBE looks up, puzzled by the question.)

The FORMER SCRIBE makes a scribbling gesture.)

Down. I look to you to bear me out! If at no point your writing departs from mine--

## CURRENT SCRIBE

Lay them out side by side and see!

(The FORMER SCRIBE, taken aback, starts to object that ITHAMAR is still in trance, may at any moment resume--)

The voyager . . . suspends. How if we availed ourselves of this (no doubt brief) interval to read back my penscript of these latest soarings against yours, of his earlier words called back from trance.

(For a moment, the FORMER SCRIBE seems inclined to press his objection--but then, as if accepting a dare or wager, defiantly flips back to the beginning of his transcript in a manner that seems to challenge the CURRENT SCRIBE to do likewise.)

The CURRENT SCRIBE, in response, turns back to the beginning of his transcript and now sets about paging forward in it, reading or summarizing aloud as he goes, while the FORMER SCRIBE checks each read or summarized passage against the corresponding entry in his own transcript of ITHAMAR's earlier trance-remarks.)



So. We pick him up here, at the outmost margin of the inmost forecourt of our synagogue, upon the Chair of Witness throned.

FORMER SCRIBE

As before.

CURRENT SCRIBE

We mark his rise, in trance, from off the mosaic floor up through tier on tier of worlds:

FORMER SCRIBE

As before.

CURRENT SCRIBE

The Heaven of First Misgivings. The Heaven of Removed Props.  
The Heaven of Stripped Halls--

FORMER SCRIBE

And on up into The Heaven of Caught Reflections--

CURRENT SCRIBE

Only, at every terrace, to find his way barred by a self-crowned overseer, each than last more fierce, that must by chant or charm be got round.

And now at last he comes out onto the skymost shelf:

The Heaven of Concentrated Courtyards, each on a further, more inward, opening--

## FORMER SCRIBE

As before.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

--which, threaded, proves no more but the tier-on-tier over again, this time on the level of--

(turns the page of his transcript)

this time on the level.

## FORMER SCRIBE

As before.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

And even at the thought, the voyager finds himself poised on the utmost margin of the inmost heaven, from where, far out over the starry floor that tiles these courts, he beholds--

## FORMER SCRIBE

--The Throne, even as at first.

(slams shut his transcript)

It is, steep for steep, at one with Ithamar's prior rising to these heights, as set down by me. At every turn your writing seconds mine. I'm not hearing anything I haven't heard before.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(pressing on in his own transcript)

About the Throne, Watchers--

## FORMER SCRIBE

Stay! What was that last?

(re-opens his just-slammed-shut transcript  
and leafs through to find his place)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(reading)

About the Throne, Watchers, who nor by night nor noon  
turn aside their gaze--

## FORMER SCRIBE

I don't immediately put my finger on these "Watchers."

## CURRENT SCRIBE

Do not you? Well--there's your Lost Passage. Shall we  
bring him down?

## FORMER SCRIBE

Can you think it was for such a trifle I was thrust out  
and you, thrust in?

## CURRENT SCRIBE

I know that upon me, as a successor, your judgment  
can only be--

## FORMER SCRIBE

Is my place lost to me? Farewell, my place! But . . . for  
want of a misplaced "Watcher" or two? No such small lack  
sets us once more trailing Ithamar from synagogue to sky.

It was nothing less than the furthest moment of his highest flight that our Master dropped me for having dropped.

CURRENT SCRIBE

What "furthest moment"?

FORMER SCRIBE

There Ithamar himself could shed no light. But that something central had fallen out--

(waving his transcript)

"The Vision Brought Home, call you this?" he would taunt, flourishing my own page back at me. "I tell you, nowhere along these lines may the heart of vision be read!"

CURRENT SCRIBE

How should that be?

FORMER SCRIBE

(shrugs)

Our Master's first run at heaven was an intoxicating occasion for all present in the synagogue that midnight. I do not doubt I took him down in an ecstasy profound as his own. For all that, I don't think I missed anything: that night, as this, he called back his world clear as clear, and we hung on his every word--as the closeness of your present to my earlier transcript (but for the small matter of these "Watchers") plainly attests. Of course, there is another possibility . . . .

(ITHAMAR shifts his weight in his chair, moans, and seems about to resume speaking.

The SCRIBES suspend their exchange and scramble for their transcripts, pens, etc. But ITHAMAR lapses into silence once more.)

CURRENT SCRIBE

"Another. . . ?"

FORMER SCRIBE

How if I caught it all, but a leaf or so of my transcribing was subsequently--

CURRENT SCRIBE

Destroyed?

FORMER SCRIBE

That--given the reverence in which the voyager was held--seems unlikely. No, but shall we say . . . huddled off . . . spirited away . . . .

CURRENT SCRIBE

But who--? Why would anyone--?

FORMER SCRIBE

Who, indeed? In what breast might lurk the passion for building a backlog; by whose hand every last scrap or shred be laid by?

## CURRENT SCRIBE

You don't mean--?

(gestures toward the HANDMAIDEN)

## FORMER SCRIBE

Who dispenseth, disposeth--and of how much else besides;  
truly, of what not? Above it all! "Overseer," in very truth!

(Both SCRIBES look toward the HANDMAIDEN,  
who just at this moment is engaged in  
performing a final, loving "pass" or two  
over the page she has been at work on  
since p. 4.)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

Was search made?

## FORMER SCRIBE

The synagogue through! From inmost forecourt to most  
outlying peristyle, down every socket of the polycandelon,  
into each recess of the work-table--

## CURRENT SCRIBE

And?

## FORMER SCRIBE

Nothing. What was there for it? Ithamar must return  
on high--this time, with a fresh scribe in tow (no change of  
"Overseer" was apparently contemplated)--and receive the  
Lost Passage all over again. So he re-enters trance,  
mounts anew, tier by tier, to The Heaven of Concentrated  
Courtyards, threads these--

ITHAMAR

(raises his head; from trance)

--And am, once more, before the Throne--

(As on p. 10, the SCRIBES abruptly drop their conversation and reach for their writing materials: the FORMER SCRIBE, for his transcript of ITHAMAR's earlier trance-journey, in which he now resumes following along; the CURRENT SCRIBE, for his quill pen and the evolving transcript of ITHAMAR's current remarks.

The CURRENT SCRIBE raises his pen over his transcript to enter the words ITHAMAR has just spoken, sees that he is out of parchment sheets (having filed away his last one back on p. 4 ), and calls across to the HANDMAIDEN:)

CURRENT SCRIBE

"Overseer"! A page!

(The HANDMAIDEN sweeps up the sheet of parchment she has been engaged in smoothing/cleaning ever since p. 4 , brings it round to the CURRENT SCRIBE, then returns to her work-table and immediately sets about preparing the next sheet.)

ITHAMAR

(picking up from his previous speech)

--or at least, here, on the utmost margin of the inmost heaven, glimpse it far off: the Supernal Throne!, set over against me across the starry floor that tiles this court. About the Throne, Watchers. Upon the Throne, a Figure of Light, but for his face in shadow or of shadow (how, from this distance, well say?) The Figure appears



to be holding forth . . . to be holding forth . . . .

(ITHAMAR squints into the distance)

FORMER SCRIBE

(to the CURRENT SCRIBE; pointing at  
his own transcript)

I don't show the Throned Figure doing any "holding forth"  
last time round.

CURRENT SCRIBE

Sounds like we're stealing up on the Lost Passage.

(The FORMER SCRIBE waves off the suggestion.)

ITHAMAR

What is this that the Enthroned of Light extends me?  
I strain out over the abysm for sight, but . . . see!  
The Watchers about the Throne put up their pens  
and the scene darkens.

CURRENT SCRIBE

(to the FORMER SCRIBE)

"Put up their pens"?

FORMER SCRIBE

Pens: "pinions," "wings." An archaism of vision; enter as is.

ITHAMAR

Figure of Light! What you have for me, I will have of you!

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(Having come to the end of the sheet on which he has been transcribing ITHAMAR's words since p. 12, he calls across to the HANDMAIDEN:)

"Overseer"! A page!

(This time--unlike the previous occasion (p. 12) on which a fresh page was demanded of her--the HANDMAIDEN has had only a brief while in which to accomplish her smoothing and cleaning.

She hurriedly applies a few finishing touches to the new sheet, rises, and brings it over to the CURRENT SCRIBE.

She then returns to her work-table and immediately sets about preparing the next page.)

## ITHAMAR

I step up to the brink of night, lay course for the Throne, put my foot down among stars-- But even from the first of dark, the distance between him and me seems to open as entered upon; open, and darken, till-- Here is no above or behind, ahead or beneath, but I move within the gap left by the dropping-away of the spatial from this experience--distances that nothing but one's determination that there be distance keeps in space. Through such a breach, if I am in motion, with what motion?

(ITHAMAR rises from his rabbinic "throne.")

Does one push past . . . dance over . . . trample upon . . . ?

(ITHAMAR begins to move forward in the Unadvancing Glide, a fluid, expansive walking-(almost)-in-place that, for all its air of confident progress, after many steps has brought him only a little ways from the rabbinic "throne.")

Here is no coming up, unless it be coming up on an awareness; nor, if it be not a descending to particulars, any descent. And if, as seems least unlike, I penetrate to the core--oh, core of what? How hence? How on?

#### CURRENT SCRIBE

(Already out of writing space, he calls across to the HANDMAIDEN:)

"Overseer"! A page!

(This time the HANDMAIDEN, having had almost no opportunity since the CURRENT SCRIBE's last demand for parchment (p. 14) to prepare a fresh page, gathers up her entire remaining store of reworked sheets (some 4 or 5), and unloads them all at once on the CURRENT SCRIBE, who, thus provided, will not need to call out again for parchment any time soon but henceforth simply resupplies himself from this trove at intervals, as needed, between here and p. 30 .

The HANDMAIDEN then returns to her work-table and--in light of what has begun to seem an ever-accelerating demand for fresh parchment--sifts through her pile of used pages in search of some that can be got ready for re-use in less than the usual time. This search will occupy her through p. 17 ).

#### ITHAMAR

(picking up from his previous speech)

Did I think to advance upon the Figure? But, upon such grounds, upon such a Figure, what were advance?

Only, it brightens! No step I tread over the starry floor puts me in any nearer the Throne, and yet, with every step, sharper my Figure shows: no nearer for brighter, grant;

yet what did one promise oneself of a nearer access,  
 if not even such an access of illumination? True,  
 black about the brow of my . . . Transfigure, shadow yet  
 falls, a blot upon noon--

FORMER SCRIBE

(to CURRENT SCRIBE)

This "shadow" to which he has now more than once referred--

CURRENT SCRIBE

Cast, may we not assume, by the any-moment-now-to-be-regained  
 Lost Passage.

ITHAMAR

But, those overshadowed features apart, what feature of the  
 scene--Throne, Figures-About, Figure-Upon--but seems not now,  
 with each my unadvancing step, to brighten in detail--here!  
 another . . . and--now! a further, luminous-- to the point  
 where-- can this conceivably--? yes! past all doubt I view  
there,

(On the word there, ITHAMAR, whom the  
 Unadvancing Glide has by now carried some distance  
 off from his rabbinic "throne," whirls round in  
 its direction and, moving always in the Unadvancing  
 Glide, between here and p. 18, gradually returns  
 most of the way back toward it.)

in the Figure's hand--even that which fetched me first onto  
 the starry floor and which I have fared all this way of  
 no faring to glimpse more nigh: the Enthroned puts forward  
a page.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

That's it! Your Lost Passage!

## FORMER SCRIBE

(confused)

How did it get up there?

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(calls across to ITHAMAR)

Bring it over! Put it into our hands!

(The HANDMAIDEN mistakenly hears this imperative addressed to ITHAMAR as the usual request to her for more parchment.)

Because she has been engaged, since p. 15, in sifting through her pile of used sheets in search of one she can rework in a hurry, she does not have a fresh page ready just yet. So, now, by way of demonstrating to the CURRENT SCRIBE why she cannot comply with what she takes to be his request for clean parchment on short notice, she scoops up the entire used-page pile off her desk, crosses to the CURRENT SCRIBE with it, and, holding it out toward him, begins to leaf through it, displaying one after another heavily marked page.

Confused, the CURRENT SCRIBE motions her back.)

No, no! It was not to you that I--

(The HANDMAIDEN, confused in her turn by this "inconsistent" behavior on the part of the CURRENT SCRIBE--first he calls for more parchment, then he doesn't want it--gives him a questioning look, which the CURRENT SCRIBE misinterprets as a mute request for pardon:)

But--don't give it another thought! One easily enough sees where you might have--

(More confused than ever, the HANDMAIDEN turns and starts back toward the work-table.

But with her first step she trips, and the entire pile of used pages she carries goes flying.

The HANDMAIDEN drops to her knees and, from here through p. 21, crawls around the downstage area gathering up the scattered leaves, hastily wiping and smoothing off each as she retrieves it.)

### ITHAMAR

(picking up from p. 16 )

Come, let me look along the lines the Figure holds forth:

(squints into the distance)

"0 { site / sight } \* --but scarce have I brought out two words when, even as before, the Watchers About the Throne put up their pens and the page darkens. What rests but that I must now take things into my own--

(ITHAMAR's Unadvancing Glide, which by this has brought him almost within arm's reach of his rabbinic "throne," here slows to a kind of groping-ahead in the direction of the chair.)

And yet . . . over this void, but now first securely known for the gap between one way of looking at the thing and another, how stretch forth a hand? What one has put away all hope of laying hold on, may one still dream of finding within one's reach--or might to make a grab for it be to put it out of reach once for all? But--make a grab for it and--

(His hand, held out toward his vacated chair, suddenly closes upon itself.)

---

\*For an explanation of this notation, here and further on in the script, see p. 19n.



--there! firmly within my grasp, the unimaginable distance . . .

(As if his extended hand had just closed about a vertical pole or other handhold, rather than upon itself, ITHAMAR swings himself round on his own clenched fist and lowers himself back down into his own chair.)

. . . gone in the motion that neglects it. Figure! How is this?

I lift eyes of inquiry to that face all shadow or in shadow, set over against my own, and--

(White light comes up very bright about ITHAMAR's features.)

see! from before the front of him fronting me, all trace of shadow has lifted now; these eyes meet these eyes, and--

(The CURRENT SCRIBE here whips out, and inscribes the following words of ITHAMAR upon, the next-to-last of the clean sheets supplied him by the HANDMAIDEN back on p. 15.)

0 { site / sight } \* , never less at one, and nevertheless at one,  
with itself!

FORMER SCRIBE

(to the CURRENT SCRIBE)

That last of his . . . ?

(points to his transcript and shrugs)

Nowhere upon leaf! As I live, I have not heard those words till now.

---

\*So as not to prejudice the outcome of the debate which now ensues as to which of these homophones ITHAMAR has spoken, here and at several similarly ambiguous moments later in the script, I print both alternatives in this format.



## CURRENT SCRIBE

(shrugs)

Being, as they are, what first he makes of a  
but-now-extended page.

## FORMER SCRIBE

Surely, rather, what first he reads upon a  
but-now-extended page.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

How, "reads"? Not into the matter of the page, but into  
the eyes of the page-bearer was Ithamar looking when last--  
So much is plain from the first words out of his mouth:

(holds his transcript out toward the  
FORMER SCRIBE, with the tip of his quill  
resting on a particular word)

O sight--

## FORMER SCRIBE

(looking at the place in the transcript  
indicated by the CURRENT SCRIBE)

Stay, there! I've had my doubts, but only now do I  
first actually catch you in a--

(points into the CURRENT SCRIBE's transcript)

You wrote down the wrong word! It should read: O site,

(makes an inclusive, boxing-off-of-the-scene  
gesture, to suggest "site")

Not: O sight.

(makes a hand-shading-eyes-as-one-peers-into-  
the-distance gesture, to suggest "sight")

## CURRENT SCRIBE

No, no-- O sight.

(repeats the FORMER SCRIBE's eye-shading  
("sight") gesture)

## FORMER SCRIBE

Look, I know what I heard.

(He snatches the page with the disputed word on it out of the CURRENT SCRIBE's transcript, crumples it, and tosses it over his shoulder onto the floor.)

It lands smack in the path of the HANDMAIDEN, who, still on her knees, has just now recaptured the last of the pages which she let fall back on p.18 and has been crawling around the downstage area ever since to retrieve.

The HANDMAIDEN picks up the tossed-away, crumpled page and, tucking the mass of previously recaptured sheets under her arm, sets about smoothing it down.)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(to FORMER SCRIBE)

Hey--!

## FORMER SCRIBE

This time, write it right: O site--

## CURRENT SCRIBE

I tell you I have him fair: "O sight,

(repeats the FORMER SCRIBE's earlier,  
eye-shading gesture for "sight")

never less at one, and nevertheless at one, with itself."

## FORMER SCRIBE

But--you're astray from the first: "O site,

(repeats his own earlier, boxing-off gesture for "site")

never less at one, and nevertheless at one, with itself."

(The FORMER SCRIBE and the CURRENT SCRIBE are eyeball-to-eyeball.)

The HANDMAIDEN, having by now got the page crumpled and discarded by the FORMER SCRIBE fairly well smoothed out, comes up off her knees between the two SCRIBES and attempts to hand it back to the FORMER SCRIBE.)

What's this? The long-withheld--?

(to the CURRENT SCRIBE)

I told you it was she who-- And has all this while been--

And only picks now to-- Ah, "Overseer," but think

what you might have spared your Master, spared us--!

(looks a little more closely at the page the HANDMAIDEN holds out to him)

Oh. A fresh leaf. Fresh leaves to the "fresh leaf."

(He jerks his head in the direction of the CURRENT SCRIBE.)

The HANDMAIDEN, accordingly, turns and offers the CURRENT SCRIBE the retrieved page.)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

What . . . ? No, no . . . .

(He holds out his transcript to indicate to the HANDMAIDEN that he is not in need of fresh parchment just now, then turns to the FORMER SCRIBE:)

You know, she's only filling her post. Why you feel you must come down on her in this extraordinary--

(He gently motions the HANDMAIDEN back.

The perplexed HANDMAIDEN, rebuffed on every side in her attempt to return the discarded page, places it on top of her pile of retrieved sheets, slowly returns to the work-table, plunks down the entire pile, lifts the discarded page off the top, and sets about a thorough smoothing and cleaning of it, in anticipation of the next request she may receive for fresh parchment.

The CURRENT SCRIBE now plunges back into his dispute with the FORMER SCRIBE, which the HANDMAIDEN interrupted on p. 22:)

I see no other way. We're going to have to bring him down.

FORMER SCRIBE

(instinctively stepping between the CURRENT SCRIBE and ITHAMAR's "throne")

Bring him down!

CURRENT SCRIBE

Only briefly. We'll shoot him right back up there the moment he gives for site or sight. Well, oh, and maybe clears up one or two other tiny . . . for example, that about "never less at one . . . nevertheless at one"--  
(gives a mystified shrug)

FORMER SCRIBE

Fetch our poor master home from heaven mid-ecstasy?  
What are you thinking of!

CURRENT SCRIBE

We need a reading. He alone can supply it.

## FORMER SCRIBE

Yes, but--

## CURRENT SCRIBE

I know: why not wait till he's back?

(The FORMER SCRIBE nods: "Exactly!")

It would be anybody's question. And yet, I am bound to say, it is a question I little looked to find on your lips; for it is a question that bespeaks profound disattunement from everything we, of this court-- Put aside that the visionary may be able to say what he means only in the throes of meaning it, "Wait till he's home" is a posture that does scant justice to--well, let me be plainer: that leaves wholly out of account the urgency of interpretation in this tradition. "What! Intermit a vision for an elucidation? Better, sure, hold off till vision has run its course!" Ah, but the course vision runs is toward elucidation! Its elucidation is what it has envisioned from the first. Plunged down from ecstasy to mere interpretation? How, when the interpretation is the ecstasy toward which the whole process mounts, when interpretation is ecstasy!

(The FORMER SCRIBE is unconvinced but does not know what to reply.

Tense pause.)

Besides, the minute he breaks the impasse--back upstairs he goes!

(On the words "back upstairs," the CURRENT SCRIBE, who all throughout the preceding speech has been gesturing excitedly with his pen, gives the quill a particularly energetic flick that sends it flying across the stage, "spattering ink" onto ITHAMAR's face as it passes.

The ink striking the rabbi is represented by a small splotch of purple light appearing upon ITHAMAR's face, replacing the white radiance that has overlain it since p.19 with an inky shadow.

Neither the SCRIBES nor ITHAMAR himself appear to notice the accident that has befallen him.

The HANDMAIDEN, however, whose eyes have followed the course of the flying pen, seems much distressed by the rabbi's disfigurement. Her gaze wanders all over the stage in search of something to clean ITHAMAR off with, but lights on nothing. She is just turning her search to her own work-table, rummaging about beneath, behind, to either side of the used-page pile, when--)

CURRENT SCRIBE

(calling over to the HANDMAIDEN)

"Overseer"!

(Reflexively, the HANDMAIDEN snatches up the nearest-to-ready sheet--the page discarded on p.21 by the FORMER SCRIBE, which she retrieved and has been working on ever since p.23 --so as to be ready to comply with what she assumes is going to be the usual request for more parchment.)

A pen!

(With her free hand, the HANDMAIDEN grabs one of the replacement quills out of the quiver on her work-table and heads over to the CURRENT SCRIBE with it. She still holds the discarded page, whose existence she appears to have forgotten, clutched in her other hand.



The pen delivered, she now launches into a fervent mime intended to impress upon the SCRIBES ITHAMAR's polluted condition and to enlist their aid in getting him cleaned off.

But the FORMER SCRIBE, intent on getting back to his quarrel with the CURRENT SCRIBE (which the incident of the "lost" pen has interrupted), abruptly waves her off.

Having failed to find any means either of assisting ITHAMAR herself or of persuading others to do so, the rebuffed HANDMAIDEN slowly starts off back toward the work-table.

Meantime, the FORMER SCRIBE, who has all this while been meditating a response to his colleague's p.24 outburst, now very deliberately turns to the CURRENT SCRIBE:)

#### FORMER SCRIBE

Even did I lay my unjust dismissal at our Master's door (which I do not: plainly Ithamar was misled)--yet even were all blame his, this cruel and ignorant course you commend--that, in effect, we go about to shake him out of it--

#### CURRENT SCRIBE

But no one is proposing-- Bump an ecstatic down from heaven mid-ecstasy? It would kill him! No, but we must "loosen the knots of exaltation."

(The FORMER SCRIBE looks blank.)

Let him down easy.

#### FORMER SCRIBE

But how?



(Arrived back at her work-table, the disheartened HANDMAIDEN notices that she is still clutching the discarded page. She is about to set it down on top of the page-pile--but then, struck by a thought, arrests the gesture: Is not this scrap of parchment in her hand the very thing she has been looking for--a "rag" with which to wipe clean ITHAMAR's brow?

Rag in hand, she sets off toward ITHAMAR.

But by the second or third step, her simple walking across the stage toward the "enthroned" rabbi has become something else. Like ITHAMAR himself when he first (on p. 14) rose from his seat and attempted to move over the starred floor-mosaic, the HANDMAIDEN now finds herself caught up in the Unadvancing Glide, that fluid walking-in-place which has the look of progress but makes little.

In general, the HANDMAIDEN's "journey" to ITHAMAR seated upon his rabbinic "throne" reprises ITHAMAR's own earlier portrayal/account of his advance toward the Heavenly Throne on pp. 14-19. That is, like ITHAMAR before her, the HANDMAIDEN discovers distances altering as ventured upon, finds that she cannot easily distinguish up from down, forward from back, and experiences perplexity as to what (if any) sort of motion will bring her further along such a way, etc.

The upshot is that, like ITHAMAR's own earlier passage, the HANDMAIDEN's crossing of this brief stretch of stage becomes the traversal of some sort of problematic visionary space. But with this difference: specific moments and details mimed or recounted by ITHAMAR are only hinted at in the HANDMAIDEN's recreation. She allusively recapitulates, rather than literally repeats, his "journey" in her own.

Concurrently with this advance of the HANDMAIDEN toward ITHAMAR, the SCRIBES embark on a heated discussion of how best to recall the rabbi from trance:)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(addressing himself to the FORMER SCRIBE's  
p.26 question: "But how?" )

"How . . . ?" Well . . . to bring him down to earth,  
we might read him something down-to-earth.

## FORMER SCRIBE

Assail the wandering mind with secular texts? I don't  
possess any secular texts. Do you possess any secular texts?

## CURRENT SCRIBE

We could throw up a sash and let some life in by the window.

## FORMER SCRIBE

Recall him to the things of this world with street noises?  
It is late--past midnight. Without these walls, the  
precincts of the synagogue are soundless--still as the court  
of heaven itself.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

Say he were to be touched by some impurity of the world  
he would regain: the shawl of a menstruant, a forkful of  
undedicated meats--

## FORMER SCRIBE

But either such defilement were insufficient to break the  
trance or, if sufficient, must destroy him.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

Let him, then, be touched by an object wrongly supposed  
impure.

## FORMER SCRIBE

Better: let fall upon him the shadow of an unclean thing.

(By now, the HANDMAIDEN has advanced to within arm's length of ITHAMAR. She halts, moistens her "rag" (the discarded parchment page) with the tip of her tongue, tentatively brings it forward to wipe the ink off ITHAMAR's face--and is suddenly flung back, blinded, most of the way she has come toward ITHAMAR's "throne.")

Their attention caught at last by this commotion, the SCRIBES only now first realize that all during their dispute, the HANDMAIDEN has been moving toward ITHAMAR--has, indeed, come within an ace of actually making that contact with him the wisdom of which they have been debating.)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

See! "The Overseer" makes for the throne!

## FORMER SCRIBE

(calls across to the HANDMAIDEN)

Destroyer! Turn back!

(Having been slowed for an instant, if that, by the FORMER SCRIBE's barely caught cry, the HANDMAIDEN resumes her course.)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(to the FORMER SCRIBE)

She's only doing what she can!

## FORMER SCRIBE

Ah, hasn't she done enough--lost our Master his vision and me, my place--but she must now-- But she must not!

(calls over to ITHAMAR)

Look up, Master! Help is on the way! I follow after!

(The FORMER SCRIBE sets off after the HANDMAIDEN.

The CURRENT SCRIBE makes to join in the pursuit, but the FORMER SCRIBE waves him back.)

No, no: this one's mine. Lay back and indite.

(calls across to the HANDMAIDEN)

"Overseer"! I am for you!

(Hearing "far off" this tumult at her heels, the HANDMAIDEN sneaks a glance over her shoulder, becomes aware that she is being followed, and quickens her stride.

But after a step or two in pursuit of the HANDMAIDEN, the FORMER SCRIBE, like ITHAMAR and the HANDMAIDEN herself before him, becomes caught up in the Unadvancing Glide through a space that alters as ventured upon.

For a time, Pursuer and Pursued move in tandem through this problematic space.

The CURRENT SCRIBE remains behind, pen raised anxiously over the waiting blank page--the last of the blank pages supplied him by the HANDMAIDEN back on p. 15.

At length, the HANDMAIDEN finds herself once more within striking distance of the seated ITHAMAR.

As before (p. 29), she halts, moistens her "rag" (the discarded page) with the tip of her tongue, and begins to reach out with it to wipe off ITHAMAR's face.

But then, recalling what happened last time at this juncture--how she was blinded and flung back most of the way she had come--this time she averts her eyes and, as a further precaution, puts her free arm up before her face.

Thus shielded, she cautiously advances her "rag" toward ITHAMAR's brow . . . .

Throughout the long speech of ITHAMAR's that will follow upon her touching "rag" to brow:

- (1) the FORMER SCRIBE continues to walk in place in the Unadvancing Glide, as if moving against wind; and
- (2) the CURRENT SCRIBE remains with quill poised and hovering. He seems every moment to be on the verge of bringing the pen down onto the page, but never quite manages it.

Now the HANDMAIDEN, eyes averted and shielded, brings her "rag" the rest of the way toward ITHAMAR's brow. At the moment of contact, the white radiance that first came up about ITHAMAR's face at p. 19 (and was replaced by a "splash" of purple light at p. 25, to suggest the spattering of ink from the CURRENT SCRIBE's quill) comes back on again.

Encouraged, the HANDMAIDEN lowers her other, shielding hand from before her face and sets about the job of removing the rest of the "ink" from ITHAMAR's face.

But with her first attempt at a wiping motion, she finds that she cannot lift away the "rag"--or her hand--from their point of first contact with ITHAMAR's brow.

Her mouth flies open, as if in a soundless cry, and remains open all through ITHAMAR's subsequent speech, so that it is difficult not to see her as the "mouthpiece" or conduit for the rabbi's words.



ITHAMAR, his face illuminated, now proceeds to deliver the explanation of the crux in his recent trance-utterance which the SCRIBES debated recalling him from ecstasy to resolve.

Has the touch of the "rag"/page waked him from trance? Difficult to say: his interpretive "lucidity" could as plausibly be taken for the intensification of ecstatic consciousness as for a release from it.)

ITHAMAR

o { site } , never less at one, and nevertheless at one,  
with itself--but this is as who should say: You, Throne  
of Vision, no more but-- You, Watchers-About, Figure-Upon  
the Throne, who, if not--? In these, in every feature  
of the contemplated scene, rightly seen, no more find but--

"The utmost margin of the inmost heaven," whence I  
put forth--what, seen aright, is here but this most inward  
of synagogue forecourts, where even we, even now--

The "starry floor" that tiles this heaven I would be  
across--seen aright, what is that but this starry  
floor-mosaic underneath my shoes.

Those "Watchers About the Throne" that bar the scene  
from view--who, seen aright, are they but my Scribe-Disciples  
shuttering site from sight: Whom for great Soferiel one  
took, know for-- Him deemed Metatron, acknowledge as--

And did these, in vision, "put up their pens" against  
a nearer view? See if, even now, one hath not

(imitates the "hovering quill" gesture  
of the CURRENT SCRIBE)

put up his pen!

Yea, and that "visionary seat," glimpsed as in heaven--it, seen aright, know for none other than--

(strikes the arm-rests of his "throne" with his palms)

this Chair of Witness, wherefrom heaven is glimpsed: in the Supernal, mark the Rabbinic, "Throne."

What remains for you, Figure Upon the Throne, seen aright, to have been but-- But here I do not see aright--do not see at all--that face ever in shadow or of shadow.

So that when, now, at the full of vision, my Enthroned holds forth . . . holds forth . . .

(ITHAMAR gropes out before him in all directions, reaching for something . . . .)

Finally, happening to bring his hand back around toward his own brow, he makes contact with the "rag"/page that the HANDMAIDEN has been holding against it since p. 31.

ITHAMAR's hand closes around the "rag"/page.)

. . . the page, far glimpsed, since sought, now grasped,

(The HANDMAIDEN's mouth falls shut.

ITHAMAR violently wrenches the "rag"/page out of the HANDMAIDEN's hand, flinging her some ways off in the process.

He gazes at the page in his hand and speaks. It is not clear whether he is reading from or addressing the page:)

what do I look upon, silent facing Other, set over against me there, but the present otherness of a self lost to itself, from its own greatness turned--



(in one motion averting his eyes from the page and thrusting the page itself as far off as possible in the opposite direction)

Take back those words!

(Supposing this final imperative to be addressed to her, and assuming that it is to her ITHAMAR thrusts forth the "rag"/page, the HANDMAIDEN once more draws near him.

As she stoops to receive the page from his hand, ITHAMAR lifts an inquiring gaze toward her. Their eyes meet.

ITHAMAR looks deep into--seems, indeed, unable to tear his eyes away from--the eyes of the HANDMAIDEN.)

For, seen aright, what must be this gaze answering gaze, this sight that meets this sight, but--? Am I not

as seeing with one's own eyes: all one had traversed of such realms--the centered courtyards, the tier-on-tier of worlds--but so many . . . forecourts of recognition, a mounting certainty; all that stayed the advancing vision--those self-crowned overseers, each than last more fierce--no more but that in the self which checks advance. That face, toward which I lift gaze, no more but . . . . This shadow, from before that face passed off, no more but . . . . These eyes, into which I . . . from which I--  
 O { site / sight }, never less at one, and nevertheless at one, with itself--seen aright, what are these words the Figure { (that is, I) / that is I } holds forth but my own "holding forth," in figure: Look not to me for their untwining! Here is no disposing between, for here is no distinguishing between--

(In what follows, ITHAMAR distinguishes site from sight by matching each word to the gesture first employed by the FORMER SCRIBE for this purpose back on p. 20, i. e., a boxing-off-of-space gesture for site, a shading-eyes-with-hand gesture for sight.)

The site is the sight! The sight is the site, lifted and held unimaginably far off. Brought home, the vision is of the visionary's own { self, envisioning / self-envisioning }.

(The "rag"/page still clutched out before him, ITHAMAR suddenly slumps over in his chair; as earlier (p. 3), his head drops abruptly down onto his chest.

The HANDMAIDEN snatches the "rag"/page out of ITHAMAR's hand and, between here and p. 38, turns it over and over, searching avidly for something about or upon it that might explain ITHAMAR's having derived such inspiration from its mere touch.

At the moment the HANDMAIDEN snatches away the "rag"/page, and as if this gesture of snatching-away had broken the spell:

(1) The FORMER SCRIBE slows to a halt in his "walking against the wind" (see p. 31) and begins to "come out of it"; and

(2) the CURRENT SCRIBE triumphantly brings down onto his page the quill that he has held hovering above it since p. 31.)

FORMER SCRIBE

What passed? I'm afraid it all . . . went by me.

CURRENT SCRIBE

No matter.

(holds out his transcript)

I got it all.

(The FORMER SCRIBE looks dazed. The CURRENT SCRIBE taps on his transcript with his quill-tip.)

Down! Every word he spoke.

FORMER SCRIBE

Did one speak words? I caught none, only . . . something like a rush of wind with something like the occasional word something like borne upon it . . . .

CURRENT SCRIBE

Whatever we were let have,

(again taps his transcript)

here find. Behold! As between a site

(the boxing-off-space gesture)

never less at one and a sight

(the hand-shading-eyes gesture)

never less at one, Rabbi Ithamar ben Zakhriel comes down for--

(He holds forth his transcript to the FORMER SCRIBE--and only in so doing notices that the page on which his quill-point rests is blank.)

Nothing!

(turns toward ITHAMAR)

Master, how---?

FORMER SCRIBE

It seems, after all, we must wait till we have him home.

CURRENT SCRIBE

Have him home? Look closer! Had one ever more the air of being gone past recall . . . ?

FORMER SCRIBE

(looks toward the HANDMAIDEN, who is avidly as ever perusing the "rag"/page)

Or other, more the air of having put him there.

CURRENT SCRIBE

(looking in turn toward the HANDMAIDEN)

You think . . . she made it across?

## FORMER SCRIBE

Apparently, since there she plies, busy about . . .  
 about . . . . What is that in her hand? My god, you  
 don't suppose all the while we were worrying the merits  
 of this or that delicate means of recall, she simply  
 blew on over and--

(to the HANDMAIDEN)

Heaven and Earth! Did it not suffice to plunge your Master  
 yet again amid toils, but you must then, with your own  
 hand-- What is that piece of darkness you have, to all  
 appearances, brought down upon--?

## CURRENT SCRIBE

(calling across to the HANDMAIDEN)

Bring it over! Put it into our hands!

(The HANDMAIDEN crosses to the SCRIBES  
 and holds the "rag"/page out to them.)

The FORMER SCRIBE snatches the "rag"/page  
 out of the HANDMAIDEN's hand and turns it over  
 appraisingly to get a feel for its dimensions  
 and texture.

As he does so, it can be seen that the  
 "rag"/page contains only a few lines of writing  
 near the top; below, it is all one large  
 purple inkplot.)

## FORMER SCRIBE

(musingly)

The Vision Brought Home . . . .

CURRENT SCRIBE

This is it? The abrupted leaf?

FORMER SCRIBE

(continuing to weigh the "rag"/page  
in his hand)

Well . . . of the heft of . . . of a piece with . . .

CURRENT SCRIBE

(snatching the "rag"/page out of the  
FORMER SCRIBE's hand)

What's it say?

(reads)

0 { site } , never less at one, and nevertheless at one,  
with itself--

FORMER SCRIBE

(in quiet triumph)

Ha!

CURRENT SCRIBE

I don't understand . . . .

FORMER SCRIBE

Didn't I tell you I got him whole?

CURRENT SCRIBE

Yes, but--

(taps the "rag"/page)

this is not . . .

(runs his finger along the lines of writing  
at the top of the "rag"/page)

these cannot be--

#### FORMER SCRIBE

It is the "lost" page with the "lost" words plain upon it!

#### CURRENT SCRIBE

Words, you assured me, that nowhere figure among your  
earlier trance-scribings. Words, which you swore  
up and down you had not heard till Ithamar spoke them  
but now.

#### FORMER SCRIBE

(passing the back of his hand across  
his brow)

Said I not, I wrote him out of an ecstasy profound as his  
own? The trance, it appears, ran deeper than I knew.

Watch, though, if it doesn't all come back to me

as I hear the rest. Read on! o { site / sight } , never less at one,  
and nevertheless at one, with itself. And then?

#### CURRENT SCRIBE

(turning the sheet over, around, etc.,  
in a vain effort to see what might lie beneath  
the purple inkblot that fills its lower half)

And then, nothing. The page darkens.



## FORMER SCRIBE

(snatches the "rag"/page out of the CURRENT SCRIBE's hand and rounds on the HANDMAIDEN with it:)

What have you done with my Master's words?

(Grateful for the chance to clear things up at last, the HANDMAIDEN grabs away the "rag"/page from the FORMER SCRIBE and sets about to explain, in a hopelessly elaborate mime, the whole "history" of her dealings with it: how she retrieved a sheet tossed aside by the FORMER SCRIBE (p. 21), tried to return it first to the FORMER SCRIBE (p. 22), then to the CURRENT SCRIBE (p. 22), only to be rebuffed by each; whereupon she took it back to her table and was engaged in preparing it for eventual re-use (p.23), when--finding herself in need of something to remove the ink from ITHAMAR's brow and unable to lay hold of anything else suitable for the purpose (p. 25)--it suddenly occurred to her that this discarded page already in her hand might well serve her turn (p. 27).

Of all this, the SCRIBES can, predictably, make very little.)

Then--you admit you tore it out of the transcript?

(The HANDMAIDEN mimes a clarification: "out of the transcript," yes--but not out of the FORMER SCRIBE's transcript of ITHAMAR's earlier trance-journey; rather, out of the CURRENT SCRIBE's transcript of ITHAMAR's present one.

This (mimed) distinction is lost on the FORMER SCRIBE, who turns triumphantly to his colleague:)

In other words: she took a leaf out of my book on the occasion of Ithamar's first trance-mounting and has been sitting on it ever since, happy to let us turn the synagogue inside out, forecourt to peristyle, in fruitless search.

It's thanks to her Ithamar must brave heaven a second time; with what results--

(gestures sadly toward the slumped figure on the "throne")

Oh, I suspected something like this: some such occlusion, some such handing-off . . . .

CURRENT SCRIBE

But why?

(to HANDMAIDEN)

Why?

FORMER SCRIBE

So as to be, in truth, the "overseer" our jesting makes of her--regnant over a process she does but serve or disserve.

CURRENT SCRIBE

(to HANDMAIDEN)

Can this be--?

(The HANDMAIDEN violently shakes her head "No!" and launches into yet another mimed clarification.)

But before she has got past the first couple of gestures--)

FORMER SCRIBE

Oh, la, to hear her tell it, my "lost" leaf somehow just found its way in among the rest--and then, quite as mysteriously, found its way out again.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

You know, it is her office to keep an eye out for such stray leaves as may, from time to time--

## FORMER SCRIBE

(snatches the "rag"/page out of the HANDMAIDEN's hand)

And this . . . innocent merely fell in with the wrong crowd?

## CURRENT SCRIBE

Well, and is that so--? I mean, after all, why otherwise would she, knowingly, have--?

## FORMER SCRIBE

Surely it will not have escaped your notice that our fetcher-in of stray leaves has been fetching up a little short lately; in fact--

(gestures toward the work-table)

the cupboard is bare. What--for one who dreamt of o'erstriding the entire process--a humiliation! Merely to keep the pages coming, it seems, she must lay under charge every last scrap or shred to present, up through and including

(waves the "rag"/page)

our Master's single, vision-fraught--

## CURRENT SCRIBE

--Which, in the end, she turned back.

## FORMER SCRIBE

(thrusting the "rag"/page out toward  
the CURRENT SCRIBE)

Ah, but--in what a state! Where she preserved, she annulled,  
blotting out all trace of The Vision Brought Home  
but for these few, these last--

(reads)

o { site  
sight } , never less at one, and nevertheless at one,  
with itself--and the page darkens.

(For a moment, the CURRENT SCRIBE seems  
inclined to pursue the matter. But then,  
suddenly, he turns instead to the  
HANDMAIDEN:)

## CURRENT SCRIBE

To this moment I have defended you, possibly from no higher  
motive than-- Well, were the "lost" page all this while  
with you, my predecessor ought never have been cast out  
nor I brought in. And now--behold! The "lost" page was  
all this while with you. My scribeship is injustice!  
Never ought the pen have fallen to my hand:

(turns to the FORMER SCRIBE and presses  
the quill upon him)

My hand relinquishes it. When next we hear from Ithamar,  
it must be you, Predecessor, who takes him down.

(Both SCRIBES look toward the rabbi.)

## FORMER SCRIBE

Is he sunk in madness? Does he abide before the Throne?  
Or perhaps what we call "madness" is even such an abiding  
before the Throne, silent from that hour. Father!

(The FORMER SCRIBE casts the quill  
he has just been handed to the floor.)

I do not think we'll be "hearing from" Ithamar  
any time soon.

## CURRENT SCRIBE

And must we, then, never look to have the Lost Passage  
once more under our eyes?

## FORMER SCRIBE

But--it is under our eyes at this moment; there wants but--

(holds the "rag"/page out to the  
HANDMAIDEN)

You, Maker-Free of Blots, of blot do you now make free  
this o'ershadowed. Knead, scrape, scour, smooth,  
till forth from under a cloud the obscured lines of  
the vision once more show plain.

(The HANDMAIDEN looks mystified. The  
FORMER SCRIBE speaks more plainly:)

Get up every particle of ink off this page, that we may  
once more have sight of the words of Ithamar that lie  
beneath it all.

(The FORMER SCRIBE thrusts the "rag"/page  
out at the HANDMAIDEN. Her fingers instinctively  
close around it.)

She stares blankly at the "rag"/page, as if momentarily unable to recall the sequence of events by which it has come to her hand.

The two SCRIBES gather up their papers and other writing materials and make for the exit.

Startled out of her reverie, the HANDMAIDEN flings herself in the path of the exiting FORMER SCRIBE and sets about one last time to convey to him, in mime, the reality of the situation, namely, that this is the SCRIBES' own discarded page, that no words will be found underneath the blot it displays, since that blot comes of the HANDMAIDEN having wiped ITHAMAR's ink-spattered brow with the sheet's blank lower half before any further words could be added to the few it already contained when discarded.

But the FORMER SCRIBE sweeps past her and exits.

The CURRENT SCRIBE is about to follow suit when his eye is caught by the pen (lately his own) which the FORMER SCRIBE flung to the floor back on p. 45.

He stoops, takes up the pen, and holds it out appraisingly before him.

The HANDMAIDEN now approaches the CURRENT SCRIBE and redirects her mimed explanation at him.

For a time, the CURRENT SCRIBE observes this frenzied performance with incomprehension and some distaste.

At length, the distaste prevailing, he flings the pen at the feet of the HANDMAIDEN and exits.

Beyond outrage, without recourse, the HANDMAIDEN lifts her eyes and hands to heaven in an immense gesture of frustration.



But then she returns to her table and takes up her assigned task--though what she is doing looks more like working out resentment on, than getting ink up off, the "rag"/page.

Still, she works--and after a time becomes absorbed in her work.)

### ITHAMAR

(his head still slumped forward onto his chest (as it has been since p. 35) and his eyes still shut, but in a perfectly normal, non-trance voice:)

One is, then, at last alone?

(The HANDMAIDEN's head snaps upward: he was awake, he heard, he knew--and he said nothing . . . ?

Snatching up the "rag"/page, she rises indignantly and starts over toward ITHAMAR to demand an explanation.

But after only a step, recalling how her last attempt to go to ITHAMAR turned into an Unadvancing Glide through an ever-changing space (p. 27), she arrests her stride and proceeds more cautiously: ventures a small step; halts; ventures another . . . .

But apparently, whatever force previously drew her into the Unadvancing Glide is no longer operant. She drops the cautious approach and walks straight over to ITHAMAR.

As she draws near, ITHAMAR lifts his head from his chest, opens his eyes, and follows her progress toward him.

When, however, she actually stands before him, he averts his eyes and shrinks back into his chair.



Interpreting ITHAMAR's shrinking from her as an avowal of bad conscience, the HANDMAIDEN is encouraged to pursue her complaint.

As best she can, she mimes to ITHAMAR:

"They blame me for losing them the central passage of your vision, which, they claim, was on this page.

"But this page is their discard--it never contained the passage in question. Indeed, you only first spoke the 'missing' words when I touched you just now--with this very page!

"I gave you the vision they blame me for having lost you--and it went right over their heads!

"If, as now appears, you never really were in trance (or at any rate have long since awakened from it), and so might confirm all this, why in heaven's name did you not leap to my defense?"

ITHAMAR

You mean: how could I--?

(The HANDMAIDEN mimes: "Exactly!")

--let my poor scribe stumble on under the impression he'd "failed" me, when the truth was--?

(The HANDMAIDEN, who has meant nothing of the kind, starts to protest--but her protest is, in its turn, misconstrued.)

Believe me, I regret the necessity; but if ever one was to have one's vision whole-- That first time out,

I--well, you cannot say "came to nought": one had, after all, breached heaven, run up the tier-on-tier. But the final turning in the way of vision--whatever it was sought my eyes in the eyes of the Enthroned--eluded me.

Well, so, you ask, why not float back on up for another look? Believe me, I'd have liked nothing better!

Ah, but my scribe, now . . . would not hear of it--what! venture his master a second time in the wastes of vision!--and trust me: in this tradition, the visionary is going nowhere without his scribe in tow.

(shrugs)

There was nothing for it. I must give him out as having missed me my crowning moment--which, of course, he had not: the only missing-out here was on my part--with the consequence that I must now resume the sky. How can he contest a journey his own lapses compel? He assents--first making over his office to a fresh quill (shall the hand that brings once more to grief be, as well, grief's chronicler?)--and I ascend. Once more I mount heaven, thread the concentered courtyards--and am, once more, before the Throne. Again these eyes meet these eyes and again I am about to come up empty, when suddenly--

(He passes the back of his hand across his forehead.)

--a hand is upon me,

(The HANDMAIDEN excitedly points with one of her hands to the other: "That was me! It was my hand! I gave you your vision!")

and by this hand I know I am looking out my own eyes, into my own eyes; from every imaginable point of view, I dwell upon my own.

(He lets his hand drop from before his brow.)

Whose hand . . . ?

(Once again the HANDMAIDEN points frantically at one of her hands with the other.

ITHAMAR stares at the hand he has just allowed to drop from before his brow.)

Whose, if not--? Rightly seen, the hand that confers the vision as, ultimately, of one's own { self-envisioning }  
 { self, envisioning }  
 can none other be but--

(He brings his free hand up behind his already extended one, cups it from behind, and gratefully brings his hands, thus clasped, to his breast.

Staggered by the realization that only she grasps the role she has played in conferring ITHAMAR's "self-conferred" vision, the HANDMAIDEN . . . well, staggers, totters, seems on the verge of a faint or fall.

The "rag"/page slips from her hand and flutters to the floor.

Seeing her about to keel over, ITHAMAR quickly rises and offers her his chair.

Are we to see in this gesture some acknowledgment on ITHAMAR's part that to the HANDMAIDEN, as the one with the more inclusive perspective on the visionary scene, the "Seat of Vision" now rightly passes? Well . . . he offers her his chair.

She mimes polite reluctance--"Oh, no, I couldn't possibly"--but is caught, mid-demurral, by a wave of vertigo, flails out in all directions for support and, with the assistance of ITHAMAR, sinks down gratefully onto the chair/"throne".

Safely ensconced, the HANDMAIDEN looks up at ITHAMAR to acknowledge his assistance--and their eyes meet.

For a moment, ITHAMAR recognizes the HANDMAIDEN: he knows where he has seen those eyes before.

In the same instant, the HANDMAIDEN sees in the eyes of ITHAMAR what ITHAMAR sees.

But then, the next moment, ITHAMAR abruptly turns from what he has seen and begins to exit.

The HANDMAIDEN, however, looks still, will now henceforth look ever, on what she has seen.

She is ready.)

#### THE HANDMAIDEN

Seer!

(Brought up short by the sound of the HANDMAIDEN's voice, ITHAMAR stops and turns warily toward her.)

A page!

(ITHAMAR seems uncertain whether or how to respond.

But then the "rag"/page, lying on the floor where the HANDMAIDEN let it fall on p. 50, catches his eye.

He picks up the "rag"/page, crosses back to the HANDMAIDEN, hands it to her, and resumes his exit.

The HANDMAIDEN takes the "rag"/page, smooths it down, and sets it out on her lap.

Once more ITHAMAR is practically offstage, when--)

#### THE HANDMAIDEN

A pen!

(Again ITHAMAR is stopped in his tracks by the HANDMAIDEN's voice, and again he turns back--this time in some annoyance.)

But then the quill on the floor, which the CURRENT SCRIBE flung there on p. 46, catches his eye.

He picks up the quill, crosses back to the HANDMAIDEN, and hands it to her with the distinct air of having called a bluff.

The HANDMAIDEN raises the quill over the "rag"/page.

ITHAMAR watches expectantly.

But the HANDMAIDEN keeps the quill hovering above the page for a time . . . for a further time . . . .

Out of patience, ITHAMAR gives an exasperated shrug and exits.

The moment he is offstage, the HANDMAIDEN begins to lower the quill toward the parchment.

While she is still in the act of lowering it--before the pen can make contact with the page--the scene darkens.)

END