

copy of sheet given
to Berya Rosten

Sept 15 78

THE MOMENTS OF THE WANDERING JEW David Cole
~~Some~~ Suggested Scene-Combinations:

Note: No scene except the last requires more
than 7 actors; most require 2-5.

Scenes ~~with~~ ^{for} 2 male actors

- Part I, Scene 1: WITH THE NEIGHBOR
- Part I, Scene 3: WITH PONTIUS PILATE
- Part III, Scene 2: THE WANDERING JEW THE WORLD HAS BEEN
WAITING FOR
- [Part IV: scenes between the Inspector and the WJ,
the Hochhimelfahrt "Christus" and the WJ -
also the various "versions" performed by
the Hochhimelfahrt "Christus" and the Hochhimelfahrt "WJ"]
- [Part V, Scene 2: the final ~~exchange~~ ^{episode, with} ~~the~~
the WJ and the Trumpet Angel]

Long excerpts ^{performable} ~~as~~ as "one-act plays"

Part IV: THE HOCHHIMMELFAHRT PASSION PLAT

Part II: (sequence of 3 scenes)

Part II: ~~IN~~ THE CHAMBER OF CURIOSITY

ALSO POSSIBLE: an abridged version ~~of the~~ made
up of a series of short scenes, ~~some~~ ^{to be selected from:}

- ~~all those~~ ^{scenes} listed under "Scenes for 2-male actors," above
- Pt I, Scene ~~12~~ (the 3 Magi, the Goddess Fortune)
- Pt II, Scene 1: THE WOMAN WHO LOVED THE WANDERING JEW

THE MOMENTS OF THE WANDERING JEW DAVID COLE
Arrangement of Scenes for Fall 1979 production

AFTERNOON (or: **FIRST of 2 EVENINGS**)

- With the Neighbor
 - The Three Kings
 - The Goddess Futura
 - Pontius Pilate (original version, with possible cuts)
- (original versions)
- 50 minutes

Intermission

- The Three Examiners (original version, with possible cuts)
 - The Wandering Jew the World Has Been Waiting For (March version, with cut on pp. 8-9)
- 1 hour and 15 min.

DINNER BREAK (or: END of FIRST EVENING)

EVENING (or: **SECOND of 2 EVENINGS**)

- Hochhimmelfahrt (original version, with some cuts)
- 1 hour and 20 min.

Intermission

- The Woman Who Loved the Wandering Jew (original version, in "one piece")
 - The Curtain Rises on the End of the World (abridged, March version)
- 45 min.

DIR. And to such considerations the 800-year-old festival drama of Hochhimmelfahrt must accommodate itself!

BURG. Ah, well, now as for that--what has our play ever done but accommodate itself? In fact, the whole course of its development might be described as one long bow to considerations.

DIR. Of course I realize certain changes have had to be introduced from time to time....

BURG. Certain changes! There's scarcely a scene or a line that hasn't been rewritten twenty times in deference to somebody or other. We have upgraded the bearing of the mob in response to Social Democratic pressures, de-emphasized Old Testament parallels at the behest of Liberal Theologians. Only last festival the Temptation in the Wilderness began to be understood as a parable of isolated consciousness. And if the new work in Viennese brain-science comes to anything, the Casting Out of Demons episodes will not be as they were.

DIR. All the more reason to leave the Wandering Jew-scene alone. It's one of the few segments that haven't been tampered with.

BURG. I presume you mean: not recently. In the original script one reads only: Enter Laquedem: "Get away from my shop." Exit Laquedem. But then, it would be difficult to find a scene or a line that hasn't been rewritten twenty times.

DIR. And yet we have the temerity to boast of having performed our play "continuously" for over 700 years.

BURG. As well we may!

DIR. Yes, but-- what has continued?

BURG. (after a moment's thought) You know the folklore of this town is full of stories of Archdukes sleeping on floors when there were no other accommodations at festival time; of cast-members being invited back to châteaux, and lionized; of wonderful parcels arriving in coaches with heraldic crests on the doors--

(calling over to the HOCH. CHRISTUS)

Zelber, was it the Queen Mother of Belgium who sent you that piece of faience for a wedding-present?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Of Pomerania.

INSP. What did you expect?

WJ. You spoke of a "mirror of Western thought"....

INSP. A mirror... is where an image is sought. A mirror is where the little modifications show up first. A mirror reflects change--and Hochhimmelfahrt is nothing if not reflective.

~~In periods haunted by hellfire, they wheeled out the smoke-machines. When the age was more inclined to laugh at such things, the only devil on hand was the one who reels out Judas' entrails in the form of a string of sausages. From the scripts of the Counterreformation period, any remark that could be construed as remotely anti-hierarchy has been excised. Whereas, when anti-clerical feeling ran high, Caiphas began to resemble the archbishop of a certain nearby cathedral city. And the final Cry from the Cross has been in or out depending on the changing status accorded subjective feeling in one era or another.~~

~~WJ. And before this wretched mirror, the celebrated Western Mind contentedly sits?~~

~~INSP. Ah, well, as for that, the Western Mind has never been too nice in its choice of mirrors.~~

WJ. But why should it matter to anyone how some remote Alpine village stages its local religious pageant?

INSP. There's a sort of agreement that it matter. Like gold-- as a kind of indicator. If you can once get a view promulgated from up here, it will spread--

WJ. Like the plague.

INSP. I was going to say: everywhere.

WJ. And what makes you so sure there's a place in all this for me?

INSP. There's a place in all this for the silent will of our community, which you seem to me to embody much in the manner of an Unknown Soldier.

WJ. Hm.... Am I, then, so typical?

INSP. Well, of a certain elderly median stratum of respectable European Jewry--yes, I should say so, if I might without offense.

WJ. None in the world. Only--

INSP. I felt, from the moment of our first meeting, that I could hardly do better.

WJ. Short of the Figure himself.

INSP. Ha, ha, I'm afraid we can't very well afford to let it all ride on him.

WJ. I wonder what you expect will be the consequence of letting it all ride on me.

INSP. Why, Mr. Ash, I'm surprised at your having to ask. I expect you will lean toward the portrayal that does Israel the maximum possible good.

WJ. You mean the one that shows the Wanderer in the noblest, most sensitive--

INSP. I mean the one that shows as little of him as possible!

WJ. You... you want to eliminate him?

INSP. Eventually, yes.

WJ. Wait a minute. Do you mean, from the play, or the actual Figure?

INSP. I mean: from human memory! Time that mirthless stereotype took a load off his feet once and for all! Were you not yourself only just now speaking of a "phantom"--

WJ. --that has displaced the Figure, yes. But--

INSP. But the Figure himself you still want to see as a "noble image" of "tragic Israel"?

WJ. How is it possible my view of him should be altogether a negative one?

INSP. Believe me, But we cut our own throats when we assent to this mascot! To us he may appear the very type of heroic endurance; but in accepting a victim, however noble a one, for our national symbol, we must seem to be acquiescing in our own victimization!

WJ. Well, how do you want to see him?

INSP. I told you: I want to see him disappear!

WJ. But I mean, what do you take the real essence of the Figure to be?

INSP. That is a subject on which I have no opinion whatever.

WJ. But... you must!--or what made you so sure I could serve as the model for him?

INSP. Model for him?

WJ. The way you swooped down on me...! --don't tell me you hadn't some idea in mind! Although, in light of all you've said since, I hardly know whether to feel--

INSP. But, my dear Mr. Ash, there's been some misunderstanding. I didn't ask you here to serve as a model for the Wandering Jew. The staff of the Passion Theatre has got up several new versions of the scene he figures in: your role is to help me choose ~~the one that best serves our aims~~ ^{the one that best} My dear sir, I need you as a representative of contemporary Jewish feeling, not a... tailor's dummy.

WJ. Then you hadn't recognized...? You didn't...?

INSP. A thousand pardons. I thought I'd made everything clear on the train. And here you've been anguishing over the suitability of your profile.

~~WJ. Room, room for the phantom!~~

~~INSP. Well, of course, it's true--in no version from their hand is he likely to emerge as much more than a phantom. But that needn't bother us.~~

~~WJ. How should it not--?~~

~~INSP. Because, as I say, all we have to do is pick the phantom that best serves our aims.~~

WJ. But if our "aim" ^{As you say} is to get rid of him--

INSP. Yes?

WJ. Then what difference does it make which version I choose? You don't want this version or that--you want him out!

INSP. Well, of course, if I thought I could get an excision straight off, I'd go for it. But they'd never agree. No, our strategy must be to try and sneak some watered-down version past them: say, a Wandering Jew-scene that didn't actually show the moment of encounter with the Nazarene....

WJ. No, that's indispensable. If things are ever going to make any sort of sense, that moment is going to have to be included.

INSP. Well, you're probably right: they'd never accept it. But the point is to get them to go along with something they won't be happy about, so that eventually they'll want to give it the axe themselves. You know: it's all a question of applying pressure, jockeying for position....

WJ. And suppose all this should fail to...awaken his interest?

INSP. What?

WJ. Suppose that he is less than ever content that others should pick and choose for him--or even to make his own selection from among alternatives which others lay out? Suppose he should turn out to have... some suggestions of his own?

INSP. Him? Who? Who are you talking about?

WJ. The Wandering Jew.

INSP. What difference does it make what he wants?

~~WJ. You are more dependent on him than you know!~~

~~INSP. Are you suggesting we sit down at the feet of our myths and let them dictate their terms to us?~~

~~WJ. I cannot imagine what other posture to assume in the presence of a myth.~~

~~INSP. Well, let me tell you, that's not how we do things here. This is Hochhimmelfahrt--but beyond that, this is the Modern World! Here we tell the myths what to mean; the symbols come to us for their instructions....~~

WJ. I'm sorry, I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to help you after all.

INSP. What!

INSP. Herr Burgermeister, Gentlemen: I bring greetings from the Jewish citizens of our Duchy. But beyond that, I stand before you here an emissary of the European Jewish community. Allow me to introduce Mr. Solomon Ash, a representative of all that is eldest and finest in our traditions, who has kindly consented to assist me in my deliberations.

BURG. Mr. Ash--a pleasure. Rindl, another chair for Mr. Ash.

(The HOCH. WJ begins to shuffle out. But as he crosses in front of the WJ, the WJ touches him on the arm.)

WJ. I can stand.

(The WJ scrutinizes the HOCH. WJ's face intently, but without seeming to find what he is looking for. The HOCH. WJ submits to this scrutiny for a moment, but then brusquely turns away. During the following speech, he goes around setting up chairs behind the INSP., the DIR. and the BURG. Having once set up a chair, he waits beside it insistently until the intended occupant has taken a seat. The WJ remains standing throughout.)

BURG. Gentlemen: let us not misconstrue the nature of the present occasion. What confront each other here today are not the bastions of tradition and the forces of change, but rather, a just demand and a ready acknowledgment. Indeed, if there is any "tradition" one may speak of in connection with this festival, it is precisely one of responsiveness. Hochhimmelfahrt has always moved with the times! For this, some have rebuked us, pointing out that the subject-matter which has been entrusted to our care is not for a season or a day. True--yet what these well-intentioned critics forget is that the drama we enact is not that of Our Savior's suffering and Death per se, but rather: the endless struggle of the European mind to come to grips with that material--and this, while a perennial theme, is a perennially changing one. Therefore be assured--Herr Inspector, Mr. Ash: we not only shall not oppose your well-founded demand for change, we wish to associate ourselves in it. At this point, I should like to turn the proceedings over to the Director of the Passion Theatre.

DIR. My staff has prepared several new versions of the famous Wandering Jew sequence of the Hochhimmelfahrt Passion Play. We are prepared to insert whichever one seems to you to strike the most satisfying balance between dramatic artistry and, uh... other considerations. First the actors will present the scene as currently performed.

HOCH. WJ. Emptiness is also an opportunity. This empty death of yours, for example--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Ah!

HOCH. WJ. --in itself, futile; yet destined to be a source of consequences that will reach to the end of time--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Yea, truly; for--

HOCH. WJ. --for by this final action, you set in motion a power for social change among generations yet unborn! Sentenced to history! All I could ever ask for!

(As before, the HOCH. CHRISTUS and the HOCH. WJ drop their characters before reaching the wings, and remain on opposite sides of the stage. The HOCH. WJ unstraps his sword.)

WJ. But--

INSP. Ash! Don't say a word! It's a trap.
(to INSP. and BURG.)
A moving tribute to the dramatic talents of the Secret Police.

BURG. and DIR. (together) Secret Police!

INSP. Oh, come gentlemen: it's not difficult to see how this was meant to go. An official Jewish representative is cajoled into endorsing a view of the Jew-as-revolutionary; there follow mass arrests, confiscations, cancellation of all debts outstanding to Jewish creditors--including, of course, any that may happen to be owed by His Grace the Duke--

~~DIR. What's he talking about?

INSP. "A power for social change among men yet unborn"--translation: any time there's trouble, you know who to thank for it. "This new master whom you serve"--translation: it's a foolish prince who puts his confidence in them. I anticipated a certain amount of foot-dragging, but this out-and-out attempt to subvert my mission--~~

BURG. Herr Inspector, I assure you, that suspicion is--

WJ. (speaking out of a line of thought of his own) Exactly wrong!

DIR. (to INSP.) Ha! There you have it, from the lips of your own associate.

WJ. Unrecognizable, that way....

INSP. Ash! Keep out of this. You don't understand--

BURG. Please, Mr. Ash, if there's anything you can say to persuade your colleague of his error--

INSP. Ash!

(takes him aside)

Don't be a fool. You don't suppose I actually believe these mountain-goats are capable of such a trick? I'm just building a bargaining position.

WJ. (to BURG. and DIR.) The Jew as champion of the historical? --the Jew, who has never been able to rise above a view of history as the kind of thing that happens to other people; who ducks into a doorway when the March of Events turns down his street?

~~BURG. I don't follow that.~~

~~WJ. And "social change"--what should he know of such a thing? In what light can he ever be expected to view society but as an enormous refuge taken against the thought of him?~~

INSP. In other words, Mr. Ash feels, as I do, that ^{the Jew} is far more likely to be history's victim than its perpetrator, ^{and that} ~~any~~ ^{any} to represent him as disposing of the very forces by which he suffers is nothing more ^{or} less than--

WJ. (again out of his own line of thought) An ^{out and out} ~~complete~~ reversal!

INSP. Precisely.

WJ. Your Jew... is far closer to Him!

BURG. Wait a minute. Are you saying Our Lord was a revolutionary?

INSP. Careful, Ash!

(to BURG.)

I warn you, these crude attempts at entrapment--

WJ. (to BURG.) But on the side of history, surely; of a mind with history. I mean, who came wafting down into when He didn't have to? But you seem to want to portray all that in the person of the Jew —

INSP. — who, however, easily recognizes the motives that dictate such a portrayal, and demands its withdrawal.

BURG. Consider it withdrawn. But Herr Inspector, these suspicions of yours--

INSP. --will not survive the insulting caricature that provoked them.

BURG. Say no more, it's out.

DIR. But--

(The BURG. waves him into silence.)

INSP. (aside, to WJ) You see? It's all a matter of catching them with their guard down....

WJ. All the elements there, but... other way round, so to speak --as if in a mirror. It's strange--stranger in some ways than not having come anywhere near....

INSP. Next version, please!

DIR. Well, this isn't likely to set anyone's thoughts running on the Secret Police, anyway.

(The DIR. signals the Players to begin. The HOCH. WJ faces upstage to get into it. The HOCH. CHRISTUS begins staggering along under the Cross, takes a few steps, and collapses. The HOCH. WJ "enters" (i.e., faces around), sees the HOCH. CHRISTUS, starts angrily toward him--and then has a better idea.)

HOCH. WJ. (calling) Wife! Leah! Come out here! There's something I want you to see.

BURG. How's that?

INSP. I think Mr. Ash may be alluding to the high value which Jewish thought traditionally sets on the role of witness--

DIR. (rounding on the INSP.) Are you saying this tableau is satisfactory to you?

INSP. Well--

BURG. Of course it's not satisfactory! It's nothing! To stumble into the midst of the greatest event in human history, and do no more than see it in a certain light--

WJ. --exactly describes this whole enterprise of yours!

BURG. } (together) { Eh?
INSP. } { Ash--

WJ. What could be more in the spirit of this place? What is this festival of yours all about if not seeing in a certain light--and then in another; getting all one's action into seeing; having an impact as having a look. Well--that's the very quality I'm pointing to in him. To me, the Wandering Jew appears a kind of one-man Hochhimmelfahrt. I see him as-- doing what you do.

BURG. But he "did" nothing!

WJ. Why is it suddenly nothing when he does it? You don't set such a low estimate on your own efforts along these lines--
~~oh, no: you're "charting a course for Western Culture," and so forth.~~ Respect for a predecessor!

BURG. Our predecessor?

INSP. Him?

WJ. Surely this cannot be disdain I'm hearing? he is not disdainful of you--oh, no: he advances upon the Modern World with arms flung wide; he knows when he is among his own.

WJ. Pardon?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Right in the middle of the Crucifixion scene, the strap supporting my left arm suddenly gave. I had to hold my arm out there by sheer will power. The Crucifixion scene is over ninety minutes long! Of course, that couldn't happen nowadays. In the present Christ-as-vegetation-deity version, there is no Crucifixion scene, just some winter-planting pantomime with a Cross-shaped tree in the background.... Well! So what was the verdict on that performance of yours?

WJ. They understood nothing.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Well, as far as that goes, I must admit--

WJ. You alone understood.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Me?

WJ. To be understood of Christus alone... that's rich--though whether in promise or ironies....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. But--

~~WJ. Meanwhile, they're off scuttling the scene.... Well, let them! Cut away! As if it were any less the image that cuts them, that renders this whole immense vaudeville of theirs ~~superfluous~~ superfluous by already containing every possible departure for thought. ~~Let them try and turn their backs on it: the very space through which they turn, it has made available to them....~~ Listen, I don't suppose you'd be willing to-- Oh, what's the use? If you couldn't reach them through your performance, if not even that superb ending you came up with had any impact--~~

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Listen, I want to explain about that. I hope it didn't look like I was walking out or anything. What happened--

WJ. But what are you apologizing for? You found a way to make the very look of the action speak my meaning: the withdrawal of immediacy in a moment of comprehension expressed by--a withdrawal: that endlessly suggestive exit you improvised....

WJ. The Jew?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The Savior. "Tarry till I come..."--I don't think He meant anything by it. He was suffering, exalted; His mind was on other things. It slipped out. And the poor fellow goes and takes Him at His word.

WJ. Yes, but would taking Him at His word be enough to... make it happen?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. (shrugs) You know how these things are. We had a lad here playing Judas once, got so caught up in the role that at one performance he actually hanged himself and had to be cut down. And it's not at all unusual for the girl who plays Maria to enter a convent afterwards.

WJ. And you think the Wandering Jew may have been one of these ... suggestible types?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I'm only speculating...

WJ. But if you were doing the role, that would be your interpretation?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Ah, but, now, you see, one can't just independently fix on an interpretation of nim. I mean, one can't start there. In practice, how he's played has always been entirely a function of how I--sorry: of how ^{our} ~~the~~ ~~word~~ ~~is~~ being done. When the emphasis was on Christ-as-Judge, the wanderer stood in the dock. Whereas, in Christ-as-Mercy-Seat periods, we were treated to the spectacle of Simon Laquedem, Beaten Chest. And now that Christus has passed over into an emblem of integrated selfhood--guess who gets to sound the note of neurotic demand. An ever-changing Christus means an ever-changing Jew. So long as I haven't finished meaning, neither will he.

(Re-enter the BURG., the DIR. and the INSP. It is clear at a glance that they have settled their differences.)

BURG. It's so obvious, I can't think how we didn't hit on it sooner.

DIR. (with a glance at the WJ) Perhaps there wanted a change of scene.

INSP. Well, Ash! It appears that, contra all odds, we've come up with a solution. A Wandering Something they feel they must have. But there's nothing says it has to be a Wandering Jew. So what we're going to do is, let that be the part that varies.

WJ. (with a look toward the HOCH. CHRISTUS) Vary till I come!

INSP. "Vary till I come"--ha, ha, that's good.

BURG. But in a strictly topical sort of way, you see. A Wandering Turk years when the Duke is receiving unfavorable trade terms from the Emirate....

DIR. A Wandering Pole, at times of tension on the Eastern frontier....

INSP. A Wandering Jesuit!

BURG. A Wandering Free Silverite!

DIR. A Wandering Anarcho-synicalist!

WJ. A Wandering Shadow!

BURG. Pardon?

WJ. No--not even so much. A shadow, at least, is cast by the thing that comes between the light and itself. With the impulse to belabor him, we are still in the realm of impulses toward him--but this! A Wandering Suitcase, packed and ready, let who will pick it up and run with it....

BURG. Well, I must say! After the exhibition you've just given of "picking up and running with it"....

DIR. ~~Wandering~~ We're artists; it's our business to pick up on things....

WJ. But--I had it for you there! I gave you--

BURG. You gave us some highly personal impressions--

DIR. Talk about ^{"picking up and running with it"...} "belabored"! At least we're aiming for a topical tie-in. That Wandering Crypto-Aesthete of yours doesn't come out of anything or go anywhere.

WJ. (aside) Why is it when people are forced into a corner and have to say something ridiculous, that's the moment they seem to become capable of giving me the truth of my existence? I should think about that. I really should.

(notices that the BURG., the DIR. and the INSP. are on their way out)

Hey! Where to now?

INSP. We just have to initial the agreement. Then you can be on your way.

(under his breath)

You see? It was just as I told you: putty in my hands. Bravo, Ash! You have won yourself a place in the imagination of your people this day!

~~DIR. Oh, Inspector! How would you feel about starting off with a Wandering Nihilist? They say Nihilism's the coming thing.~~

~~INSP. I understand the Dowager Duchess is up to her dewlaps in the occult. Suppose we get the ball rolling with a Wandering Swedenborgian?~~

~~(Exit the INSP., the DIR. and the BURG.)~~

HOCH. CHRISTUS. What doesn't seem to have occurred to them is that they're opening up twenty quarrels as the price of settling this one. We'll now be playing the scene for Turkish Inspectors, Polish Inspectors, Customs Inspectors--

WJ. I had it! I had it for a moment there! But then I... went past it. It turned out to be just one more of the things I go past.... But that's not to say I never had it! That's not to say there was nothing to be had! Christus! What is to be done about the Wandering Jew?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The best thing would be to cut him....

WJ. Have even those eyes caught a glimpse of the end of the line?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Oh--not for any reason like that. Just that, if he were cut, we could move directly from Pilate's chamber out onto the Hill. It'd be a far more dramatic scene-change.

WJ. And to a mere formal consideration--
(hears himself, stops)

HOCH. CHRISTUS. It's just one more episode in a part of the play that's littered with them already. The Savior's story is complete without it.

WJ. What about the Jew's story? To him, that meeting is not just "one episode the more," but the one hint he gets; the sole reference-point by which he might ever hope to orient himself; something approaching an origin. His every hope centers upon that moment; his only thought is of enacting that moment--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Yes, well it still doesn't do the scenic rhythm any good.

WJ. (giving him a long look) It is you, isn't it?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Pardon?

WJ. That rendezvous in the image was signalling your arrival, since--here you are--and upon my own ground--and after how long a denial that I so much as stood upon ground.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I'm afraid I--

WJ. "Doesn't do the scenic rhythm any good"...! A Christus after my own heart? But I wonder what you mean by it, though. Mockery, most likely: "See how it feels!" But I'm going to give it a chance to be more than that. I'd like to think the formalism of a Savior might be His way of announcing: "Of that impulse, too, I am the salvation."

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS suddenly snaps his fingers.)
Yes? I've got it?

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS strikes his forehead.)
No? I'm deluding myself?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I've just remembered, I've got to see about the Last Supper.

WJ. WHAT!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The "Last Supper"--that's what we call the banquet that's held at the close of every season. They're supposed to be joyous occasions. Maybe for some they are. But for me, the prospect of having to lay aside the Divine Nature and go back to my carpenter's tools again.... Hard enough when it's a matter of saying goodbye till next festival. Imagine when it comes time to part with it all for keeps!

WJ. I've never doubted that the role of Christus, too, has its calvaries....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Hard to get, harder to hold--but hardest of all to take leave of! I don't mind telling you, I cried like a baby. Of course I knew I was getting too old. But in spite of everything, I had allowed myself to hope.... Well. It's a painful moment.

WJ. And what about taking leave of the Wandering Jew? Is not that, also, a "painful moment"?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. But as I've just explained to you, the "Wandering Jew" is merely preparatory. One only passes through it on the way to better things.

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS produces a watch.)

WJ. Let me hear again what it was supposed to be the preparation for! To me it seems so conspicuously to be going nowhere!

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS consults ~~the~~^{his} watch and turns on his heel.)

~~But don't now you be the one to "put a distance between" us! I thought the eye for the eye was your particular aversion. Doesn't that rather rule out the recourse to irony?~~

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I'm afraid I can't possibly get out of--

WJ. Well, all right, then!--a distance, a great gulf fixed, no use denying it. But the distance between you and me is as a ~~some~~ net which we have dragged through the waters of history together: will you not now sit down beside me and examine the catch? This is no casual invitation, nor one likely soon to be repeated. Has it not long since been apparent to you that we are the sole relief provided, each for other; that only one of us can penetrate the solitude of the other? For you, too, this is the unrepeatable opportunity: think carefully before you pass on your way.

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS starts to leave.)

Shall it have been only... "one afternoon in Hochhimmelfahrt"? Shall we not... meet again?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Look, I'd like to continue this. But I really do have to run now. Could I possibly ask you to wait here till I ~~return~~?

(The WJ nods absently, preoccupied. The HOCH. CHRISTUS exits. Only then does the WJ hear the HOCH. CHRISTUS' parting words. He does a huge take, and looks after the HOCH. CHRISTUS.)

2 copies

revised script for
Aug. 15, 1983 reading
at Newstage,
Murray-Dodge Theatre,
Princeton, New Jersey, of The Reason of Timmy's Playing

THE REASON OF TIMMY'S PLAYING

Unaccompanied Suite

David Cole

SCRIPT w/
REVISIONS
for Aug 15 83
Princeton
reads

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CHARACTERS

TIMMY, a violinist

SETTING: A concert stage

TIME: Timmy's farewell performance

THE REASON OF TIMMY'S PLAYING

(About seven minutes before rise, the last movement of the Sibelius Violin Concerto begins to be played over the sound-system. At rehearsal number 12, the curtain rises.

Left-center, about where a violin-soloist usually stands, TIMMY is sitting in a wheelchair--actually, a normal orchestra player's chair, but fitted with wheels and a mail pouch hanging off one arm-rest. He is playing the solo part in the concerto.

Projected onto a large screen which hangs up-right-center (but not too far up: the stage should be shallow) is SLIDE 1. SLIDE 1 is a photograph of a Conductor making a grand gesture and his musicians intent on their playing.

Note: All the slides are coarse-grained photographs in which all faces--the Conductor's, the musicians'--are shown averted or blurred out. The slides should, however, show enough detail for the audience to be able to recognize that TIMMY's chair is exactly the same as those of the orchestra musicians in the photos, except for its having wheels, arm-rests, and the pouch.

Do not read

~~SLIDES 1a, 1b, etc.: At the director's and designer's discretion, as the concerto nears its close some slides may be flashed on showing the Conductor and his musicians in different tableaux: e.g. the Conductor might be shown giving a cue to TIMMY; or several slides could be rhythmically alternated to give a sense of the musicians' movements. These slide-changes should come on a rhythmic emphasis, a sudden change in volume, or a dramatic shift in the instrumentation.~~

The concerto comes to a close. TIMMY plays the final measures and sinks back triumphantly. Recorded applause and cries of "Bravo!" TIMMY bows, exhausted, from his wheelchair, which he never leaves in the course of the play.

TIMMY gestures up to the Conductor on the screen.

SLIDE 2: Conductor bowing.

SLIDE 3: Conductor gesturing toward orchestra musicians, who have risen.

SLIDE 4: Musicians seated; Conductor gesturing toward TIMMY, who bows.

SLIDES 5 and 6: Two successively bigger enlargements of the Conductor's arm (isolated from SLIDE 4) gesturing toward TIMMY, who bows.

Applause reaches peak, and subsides.

SLIDES 7, 8 and 9: Each of these slides shows fewer and fewer musicians left onstage; some players are shown in the act of leaving.

SLIDE 10: Conductor and all musicians have left the stage. A few instruments lean up against, or rest upright on, the seats of the players' chairs, some of which are askew or overturned.

SLIDE 10 holds throughout the play.

TIMMY sticks his fiddle and bow in the mail pouch to the side of the wheelchair, and puts out his hand to the audience as if to keep them from leaving.)

TIMMY

Ladies and Gentlemen: We fiddlers are well-known for milking the romance of our farewell performances, but I'm thinking of transacting some serious business on the occasion of mine. You've all heard about this contest I'm running to unload my earnings from the violin--which, by the way, comes to more in two years than I made my whole working-life^{before} as a line-man, before I got sick. Well, I think I've decided to let you have the winner of that little game of chance tonight, on the occasion of the last music you'll ever be hearing from my bow--which is what that D-Major arpeg-hee-o

(As he says the words, "D-Major

arpeg-hee-o," he replays the final two measures of the Sibelius concerto.)

just was; for as most of you know, by next season I'll be dead and laid out as flat as Schaffner's reading of the Frankel cadenzas. So this'll have to be it for the ~~concert~~^{contest}-returns. contest

I should say right off, I haven't turned up a winner yet; if that amazes you, it's equally surprising to me. When I first made it known I'd will my entire earnings from the violin to whoever could guess my reason for taking it up, I expected to be swamped with winners--to have to split the loot fifty ways, it seemed to me that obvious. It still seems so to me; but--the fact remains: no one's guessed right yet, and I'm down to my last five entries

(taking a packet of envelopes out of the mail pouch)

from the mountain I started with; and then I've brought with me to open here in your presence tonight, because I can't help feeling the presence of my loyal public'll bring me a winner if anything can.

(starts to undo the packet, then looks up with an embarrassed smile)

You notice the way I assume four thousand people'll have an interest in this. My new-found sense of being a Figure-whose-every-move. Although,

(slowly nodding his head, with arch shrewdness)

I expect a good percentage of you have entries in--yes?--so

there'll be an incentive for you beyond what appears. Well!
Let's read our mail.

(undoes the packet, fans the five envelopes out in his left hand like a poker "hand," studies his "cards," "draws" one, and "discards" the rest back into the mail pouch. He opens the letter he has chosen, and reads:)

Sir:

The years, the application--when I think what my Second Violinist's desk in the Hayfield Civic Symphony has cost me--and you claim never to have touched an instrument till age 60? to have gone from line-worker to soloist in 30 months? Let the non-violin-playing public swallow that! I submit you have been a violinist all your life.

(as if anticipating an outraged response from the audience)

No, look, this is a misgiving anyone is going to have. Be certain, many more have had it than write it in.

(finding his place)

... a violinist all your life--only, never much of one, never favored with the public's gaze, languishing in the rear-desks of obscure ensembles--

(looking up)

Don't he write like an entire brass section, though!

(resumes reading)

On, ~~wh~~ what rear-desk player hasn't dreamt of

making it your way: going underground, surfacing in
 a new context, and ~~giving out~~ ^{letting it be known} this was just now your
 first steps on the instrument; fantastic progress;
 talent-hours--and bam! celebrity is his, who the top
 line in a five-part divisi would've honored ~~these days~~ ^{back then}.
 Oh, who has not cherished such visions!--but I cannot
 at present enlarge upon that.

letting
it be
known

back
then
back
then

There, anyway, is the "reason" of your playing--
 and what do you propose to do about it? Shower me
 with recognition? The likelihood is small. No one
 who penetrates the fraud is likely to receive public
 acknowledgment of having done so--which makes your
 contest still a greater fraud than your playing, even.
 I don't know why I bothered to write in, or what I
 supposed would ever be coming to me anyway.

Gottfrank Dessous
 Second Violin
 Hayfield Civic Symphony

(waving letter)

Not exactly tortured by uncertainties, this one. Well, brace
 your bones, because positive Mr. Dessous, here, is not entirely
 off-course: I have had a fiddle in my hands before two years
 ago, one belonging to a school-chum, who asked me to hold it
 while he went and took care of some gump who'd made a doubt of
 the Irish character. I held that instrument to me like it was
 a bit of crystal too fragile for big fingers, or like holding a
 sick kid, till Pat came in from his fighting and took it off me
 again. The next time I held a fiddle, it was the cancer ward of

St. Andrew's and forty years later.

And what was the rest of it...?

(consults letter)

"That you have been a violinist your whole life long"--you know what I've been my whole life long, up to the cancer? I know, you've read "line-operator"; but you know exactly my job? I sat before this transmission-gauge in the Canadian wilderness-- pipe-line running off to either horizon--and took good care that a certain needle never fluttered above a certain digit--90, I think it was. If you was to ask me, "90 what?"

(shrugs)

or what would have happened if it had--I couldn't enlighten you; because, you see, I took good care it never did.

(smiles ruefully)

Early years of a servant of the arts.

Well, I'm afraid Mr.

(consults letter)

Dessous comes not near the reason of Timmy's playing; although-- with all due apologies to the

(reading)

"Hayfield Civic Symphony"--maybe we could come a little nearer the reason of Mr. Dessous' writing. But then: maybe we could just go on.

(returns Letter 1 to pouch; takes out and opens another letter; reads:)

Dear Timmy, Dear Champion of the Human Spirit!

(looks up dubiously; then resumes reading)
Oh, it could only have been to hurl defiance

that you took up your instrument with so little time before you. Being myself in poor health,

(owing to headaches and shooting pains in the back, or more like a throb, or even a mood, actually), I derive new strength from the heroic example you set of the human spirit triumphing over death-- refusing to obey the nod of the Grim Reaper. Surely we must all take up our little fiddles, or whatever, as the storm-cloud approaches.

You may send my cheque to: etc.

Yes, I keep all these heroic ones in a sack marked: "While Rome Burned." And you know who I always point to in reply? Commodore Peary and Joan ^{of} ~~the~~ Ark, two figures who seem to me to clinch it better than any fiddler, if it's the "human spirit" we're discussing. I mean, it's all very well to talk about-- what is it she says?--

(consults letter)

"hurling defiance as the storm approaches," but Jesus, can you imagine a fateful gesture issuing from a little man

(pantomimes playing a fast, intricate passage)

tipped over to the side and rapping his fingers ^{like} a bag of nerves? No, hero's a career in itself; if you're a fiddler, let's hear those spiccato runs. Anyway, it's wrong at the heart, this about "casting defiance"--quite out of place in a performing artist! Let me say to this correspondent, that if I was playing for a storm-cloud, I'd want the storm-cloud to enjoy the performance; and it's my sincere hope any grim reapers in the audience'll go back to their reaping with a new-found love of the violin repertory.

(waving the letter)

Too much about death; too little about music!

(thrusts 2nd letter into pouch, pulls out and opens 3rd letter, which should be distinctly different in shape and color from the 2nd. He runs his eye over the 3rd letter; then, triumphantly, as if the 3rd letter exactly confirmed what he's been saying:)

Yeah, and this one

(waves 3rd letter)

--just the other face of the coin. This one

(reaching 2nd letter up out of pouch and waving it)

says: "to show your contempt of death"; this one:

(waving 3rd letter in his other hand)

"to keep your mind off dying."

(crossing his hands with the letters in them)

"Just the opposite!" you'll say; but what's a little difference of opinion

(vibrating his crossed hands)

beside the way they both

(uncrossing his hands and gesturing emphatically forward with both of them)

bring it down to death, as much as to say, if death's in it at all, death must be all there is of it.

(replaces 2nd letter in pouch)

Sure, it's true I took up the violin

(consults 3rd letter)

"in the full knowledge of having only two winters left on earth,"

but that may just have happened to be the moment I got interested. A queer moment, I grant you--sort of like starting a novel in the prison library the night before you get sprung--but really, when all's said, SO queer a moment that I should hear nothing but death in explanation of my playing on all sides? Almost, you know, as if it was the mark to distinguish me by when the talk turned to fiddlers: so-and-so's fantastic triple-stops; A.'s crystalline harmonics; Timmy's cancer.

(slower; growing more inward and fearful)

Even in my own mind, you know, for some time now it has been growing difficult for me to get past the view of my dying as anything other than...

(mortified)

well, a feature of my technique. So that for this contestant to speak of

(tracing the words off Letter 3 with his finger)

"holding death from your thoughts"--

(shrugs wearily)

I have all I can do to force death into my mind for a moment now and then: ^{to remember} that I'm really dying, besides its being a factor in the career. You find that beyond belief? You think death must be more demanding than the violin? I point you to the number of virtuosi at each!

(triumphantly stuffs 3rd letter into pouch; pulls out and starts to open 4th letter, but interrupts himself, looking up:)

But I tell you again, you ones who only have to hear the word "death" and that settles it, you might as well save yourselves a stamp.

(takes out 4th letter and reads:)

Attention Red Fabian Pig!

Well, that breaks the death-emphasis, anyway.

Attention Red Fabian Pig!

As if there could ever be any question regarding the motives of a Russki violin-player! Stringed music debilitates! Jefferson. Nero. Guarneri and the October revolution. Does not Mao Tse Tung play the violin? And did not Lenin before him? Let children and Mensheviks profess to see the hand of chance there! The only question in my mind touching your association with these Fabians is: Are you a tool or a dupe?

(signed)

Hoffnung Hoffe

on behalf of Certain Parties

(TIMMY drops his hand with the letter in it to his lap and lets his eye run over the audience, fixing now this member of it, now that, in a speculative gaze. Then he slowly shakes his head.)

How could I have forgotten the awful certainty you bring to these questions? "We bring? Putting us in with that crank?" But you're all more or less cranks, really: to ^{let it be known} ~~give it out~~ you know *let A* what sends an artist to his bench is to be a crank--and even the *Si* *K...* hesitant little guesses don't argue any great state of competency.

(glancing at the 4th letter again;

with a snort)

"Red Fabian Pig"!--I'm a "Red Fabian Pig" to all of you, whatever it is in your mind ^{that} holds the niche ^{that} "Red Fabian Pig" holds in his. And I had to go and set up a contest for you to tell me so! (Or rather, I may have thought I was setting up a contest: no doubt as far as each of you were concerned, no other entry was ever in the running.) Merely because I couldn't think where to dump some recital fees, I'm having to watch my life be run wild over by that one-string ingenuity of yours in its endless pursuit of the one motive it can buy in every case...

that / sent

(hearing himself and catching himself)

Ladies and Gentlemen: I'd never think to ask for your pity because I'm dying, but I do now ask your forbearance.

That last,--

(shrugs in amazement at himself)

panic of a mind near darkness. Words meant for the darkness should not be taken up and applied.

(looking about in the 4th letter for something to lighten the tone)

"Fabian"... Wasn't that the thing Mr. Bernard Shaw was?--and he was in music, at least critically. Suppose we agree to let it all stand

(raises the letter like a train-signal above the pouch)

or fall

(opens his hand, allowing letter to drop into pouch)

by that sinister coincidence. So.

(takes 5th letter out of pouch)

Last of the lot. No great significance in that: any one of the ones I've opened tonight could have come up last--not to mention the thousands I've opened before tonight. Still, as this is my last hope of being understood on this earth, you'll pardon me if I grow a bit awestruck.

(holds Letter 5 out at arm's length and turns it over in his hand; then suddenly, decisively, tears it opens and reads:)

Brother:

How well I understand the yearning of one near death to fulfill a childhood ambition.

(TIMMY smiles vaguely; the letter has triggered a recollection.)

I was thinking of an old man on some street of my childhood who sat on a porch and gave the impression of having lived through everything. Sammy had it in his head to be a ball-player, and Nick a cop; but that old man was all I ever dreamed of ~~coming out~~ ^{becoming} ^{brooding}.

The only

(jiggles 5th letter)

"childhood ambition" I ever cherished was... longevity.

(Pause. TIMMY turns the letter over several times.)

It's unsigned. Isn't that queer? You want the money enough to try the contest--and then forget to say who. Well, it won't result in a nationwide search; it's wrong--

(drops Letter 5 back in pouch)

and no great novelty as a guess , either: I've had maybe a hundred "childhood ambition" ones... Still, it's nice to finish on one of the less discouraging ones. For that completes the business of the day as between you and Timmy, it remaining only for me to take my farewell and vanish. Now that really is an awesome moment, I suppose, but hard for me to feel as such, "farewell" seems so accustomed a word to be forming on a fiddler's lips, all violin music having always that character, whatever it may read at the head of the page about gigue

(which he pronounces with both "g's" hard)
 or GAY-vot , or whatever. Very early in my playing--oh, I don't think I could have given you a decent portamento yet--I remember one of the nurses showing me a print from an old Illustrated called

(blocking the caption in air with his thumb and forefinger)

"The Fiddler Bringing the Party out of Town"; and that has come to seem to me what a fiddler is ever and always at, though he plays to thousands in a raftered hall: always speeding the company on their way, giving good journey...

(as if responding to a heckler, though none is heard)

(as if responding to a heckler,
though none is heard)

What's the situation back there? The what? The reason of my playing? Is it possible you still don't--? when I've all this while been--? Look, why don't we give that subject a rest and let me tell you some things about this violin, shall we?

(takes violin from pouch and holds
it up)

Comes to me from a string-player who died in the ward just before I went in. When I say, "comes to me"... he didn't entrust it or anything--just died and left it there, a thing that--at first, anyway--interested me more than the violin did: what kind of man would do a thing like that, make no provision, just ~~off~~ ^{disappear?} Imagine if I had thrown up my line-gauge that way ^{disapp} instead of staying on, illness or no, till they trained the new man. It was the last type of behavior I could understand! I asked Nurse Cloyne about him. But the more I asked, the less seemed to come back to her. Whether it was they're not supposed to talk about the dead, or just that he hadn't made much of an impression on her, I don't know; but the only thing she ever succeeded in conveying about him was his hands-- and then, only with the violin in them (I once set ^{out} to try ~~to~~ imagine those hands cutting an apple, but could get no image). So I began to wonder less about the violinist, and about the violin more.

(lifts the violin by the neck and turns it around)

A real Cremona, apparently. Not a Stradivari; probably ¹⁰⁰ from the workshop of the Amati grandsons. But ten generations old, anyway--and so nearing the peak years of its effectiveness right now. You look at it and you think of it changing hands: the twilight concerts in a nun's garden; the half-century on a nobleman's sideboard; the millionaire's daughter whose passion for it lasted a week--and of course its last owner, those mysterious hands holding it, which I was more and more coming to see as holding it forth. At any rate I began to care for it as if it had been entrusted to me: moving it back out of the sun or damp, rewhittling a peg that warped, dusting the scroll. But for all the care I took, the instrument seemed to be falling apart: strings snapped, pegs popped, the purfling began to turn a funny color, and finally one day after a flash storm the glue on the blocks gave and sent a big crack across the upper bouts.

Then Nurse Cloyne made a joke: "She wants you to touch her, don't you see; she's asking for attention." This was nothing to me, but apparently something took root. Because I did actually begin to feel that fiddle was reproaching me for never playing it, though I took all care short of that and had never so much as had a fiddle in my hand before--except, as I told you, that once, to hold. The next morning, while draining out some juice an orderly had spilled down the sound-holes, I drew bow across strings for the first time, and that evening began to work out of a manual Nurse Cloyne brought me, following up her joke.

(again as if responding to a heckler)

What? What do you mean, never mind all that, just tell you--what do you think I've been telling you?

(thrusting the violin out at the audience)

There! There! There's your winning entry--in plain view from the start, undreamt of by all. Which to me is more amazing than all my progress on the instrument, even--that I... pose an enigma. Why couldn't you just know? Why did there ever have to be a contest? ~~There's~~ ^{There are} no winnings--anything I ever had is gone long since on doctor bills, violin repair shops... Any winner would have had to take his prize in the form of one Cremonese fiddle. Is that a swindle? But now, think a minute: who could ever have won this contest and not regarded the perfect prize as--not even the violin itself, really, so much as to care for it.

*There are
the
winning*

But that's a class of entrant we're not seeing too much of. So fiddle, lie there,

(gets stiffly out of wheelchair, and places violin on it in the manner of many of the instruments shown in the scene on SLIDE 10)

until such time as the next Timmy learns to look upon his ten thick fingers as appropriate hands.

(starts slowly toward the wings; stops and faces out)

And can all this really not have occurred to you?

(resumes his painful exit. The lights go to black before he reaches the wings. When the houselights come up, SLIDE 10 is still on, and the violin still rests on the chair.)

END

Introd. to reading of The Responses, ch. 14-24
Rabbi - David Cole
Scribe - Robin Hirsch
Cornelia St. Cafe - Sun., Apr. 16, 1989

2-person, abridged version of
The Responses, read by David Cole (RABBI)
and Robin Hirsch (SCRIBE) at the
Cornelia Street Cafe, Sun., 4/16/89

Robin and I are going to read
an ~~extended~~ excerpt from a one-act
play of mine called The Responses.

The Responses takes its title
from, and takes off from, a
Jewish religious practice called
responsa-writing.

So before I set the scene of
the ~~play itself~~ ^{play itself}, I'm going to offer a
little program-note on the practice
of responsa-writing.

The Talmud is notorious for
discussing religious and legal problems
in excruciating detail. But not even
the Talmud could anticipate every
situation that might conceivably arise.
As with any legal system, there
could always be borderline cases,
new developments.

For example, when electric light was invented, the question arose whether switching on a light violated the prohibition against kindling a flame on the Sabbath.

Or more recently, when organ transplants began to be performed, there was some uncertainty as to whether tissue from a non-Jewish animal could be used in operations on Jewish patients.

So practically from the day the Talmud was ~~was~~ completed (in the 5th or 6th centuries) right up through our own time, famous rabbis have found themselves besieged by requests for rulings on doubtful cases of this sort.

These letters of inquiry, together with the rabbis' answers or responsa (responsa is the Latin word for "answer") constitute an enormous literature of spiritual case-law — a literature ^{of international} ~~international~~ scope, encyclopedic in range, and continuous from the early Middle Ages to the present day.

SCRIPT: NOTE

↓

My play, The Responses,
 (shows) one of these responsa-writing
 rabbis at work with his Scribe.
 In the early part of the play
 The Scribe reads off one after
 another letter of inquiry, each
 with its own urgent ^{baffling} ~~puzzling~~
 question.

At first, the Rabbi's answers
 are ^{SC 157 # 3500} pertinent, even ingenious.

To give you an idea of what
 these initial exchanges are like,
 Robin and I will ^{now} read 3 of these
 early questions and their answers 😊

h.3 START
↓
MID

SCRIBE

(opens another scroll and reads:)

From Rabbi Ezekiel Landau of Prague:

Master, in great perplexity we turn. Rashi teaches that amulets intended to bar the entry of evil spirits from a house must be horizontally affixed to the door-frame. His pupil, Salman of St. Goar, on the other hand, holds that these talismans are most effective when vertically attached. What is your position in this matter?

RABBI

I am for compounding the wisdom of two great men: Let the amulets go up at a slant.

SCRIBE

(opens another scroll and reads:)

From Rabbi Simeon Duran, known as RASHBA, Algiers, North Africa: O thou dweller in the Tents of the Law! Is a man required to do penance for a Sabbath-violation committed in a dream?

RABBI

It will suffice if he... dream a penance.

SCRIBE

(opens another scroll and reads:)

b.460f

From Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra, known as RABBATZ, Safed, in the Holy Land:

Master, in great perplexity we turn. It is written: "Approaching a village where the majority of the inhabitants are Jewish, one pronounces a blessing. If, however, the majority are gentiles, one does not pronounce a blessing." The question now arises: what does one do in a case where the population is evenly divided?

RABBI

One then... pronounces the blessing with a divided heart.

But gradually, in contrast with exchanges like that one, ~~But gradually~~ the Rabbi's answers begin to drift off the point. ^{In fact, after a while, no matter what} ~~the subject-matter~~ of the question the Scribe reads, the Rabbi's answers ^{zing back} obsessively to ^{some memory of} ~~something about~~ a beach at night, a roar of voices, a search for a fallen meteorite.

For a while, the Scribe just goes on reading the incoming questions. But finally his curiosity gets the better of him and he ^{comes} out and asks the Rabbi: "What's all this about a roar of voices, a search for a fallen meteorite on a beach at night?"

In reply, the Rabbi recounts a sort of visionary experience he had when he was a younger man; just starting out as a response-writer.

It's this account of the Rabbi's — together with the Scribe's irritated, puzzled and wondering questions that interrupt it — for the Scribe, too, now moves beyond asking other people's questions and finds that he has some questions of ~~his~~ his own — it's ~~this~~ this exchange between the visionary ^{Rabbi} and ~~this~~ his ~~the~~ commonsense ~~and~~ Scribe that Robin and al are going to read — or read the final section of.

The Rabbi begins by telling the Scribe how, in his early days as a responsa-writer, he received an especially tricky question which read as follows:

Jade [the green mineral, 'jade']
Jade from the sky, fallen to earth is
in a meteor — might this be gathered up and
put to all the same uses as earthly jade?

For example, could it be used to make a jade Torah-pointer, the little implement that readers in the synagogue use to keep their place in the scroll as they read?

The Rabbi is particularly anxious to find the right answer to this question because he realizes it's a test-question sent ~~to him~~ ^{to him} by his superiors on the Katover Rabbinical Board; and on the basis of how well he answers it, he will or will not be admitted to the ranks of full-fledged responsa-writers.

So in view of the importance of the question, ~~he~~ ^{he} broods, he does research, and finally ^{it dawns on him} ~~he~~ ^{that} the answer ~~to the question~~ must hinge on whether the fallen meteorite ^{containing the jade} is still hot or has cooled down. ☺

If it's still hot, it doesn't yet belong to our earth, and ^{the jade in it} can't be put to earthly uses.

But if ^{the meteorite has} cooled down, it's part of our world, and ^{the jade in it} can be fashioned into a Torah-pointer or anything else.

So to answer this question that will make or break him as a respondent, the Rabbi ~~set forth~~ tells the Scribe how he set forth to acquire an actual, recently-fallen meteorite.

p. 14 It was the latter weeks of Nisan ...

→ p. 14 It was the latter week of Nisan



p. 24 ... [↓] was used to stand

p. 24 ... I find I have never ceased to stand.