

THE MASTER OF THE UMSCHWEIGEN APOCALYPSE
A Revisited Scene

David Cole

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David Cole
137 Cottage Street
New Haven, CT 06511
phone: 203-624-3982

Characters

The SUBCURATOR

The MUSEUM GUARD

An APOCALYPTIC ANGEL

"But he that of repetition is most master"

(Scene: A rarely visited gallery of a minor museum in a provincial city.

The gallery has no walls, but two large, flat, rectangular objects, hanging in the same plane over upstage, together suggest an upstage wall. These are:

1. An off-white, black-rimmed plaque, upon which is stencilled:

GALLERY 14C. WORKSHOP OF
THE MASTER OF THE
UMSCHWEIGEN APOCALYPSE

(The words "WORKSHOP OF" are painted in a slightly different color from the rest, as if added at a later time.)

2. A seven-paned clerestory window, its frame and pane-dividers of dark bakelite, its seven panes (each slightly broader than high) of clear glass, thus:



Through the panes of the clerestory window pours the "city sunset": a stream of late-afternoon light broken at intervals by the silhouettes of rooftops, foliage, etc.

The gallery offers an exhibition of illuminated manuscripts--books of hours, graduals, tropers, etc.--set out in vitrines.

The vitrines are of different shapes and sizes and face in different directions. Most are mounted on rectangular wooden bases painted a neutral tone, but several hang suspended from wires above the stage floor. Some of the vitrines contain a single large codex open to its prize illustration; others feature two or more smaller codices laid out side by side.

All the vitrines are lit from within and emit a faint greenish glow.

A number of the floor-based vitrines face away from the audience, so that all that can be glimpsed of their contents is this emitted glow.

Of these faced-away vitrines, one will henceforth be referred to as "The Central Vitrine," not because it is literally center-stage but because the overall arrangement of vitrines is such as to lead the eye to it.

Downstage right, a MUSEUM GUARD sits in a chair, reading. Just upstage of him stands a small postcard rack displaying reproductions of some of the gallery's more distinguished illuminations.

Both the GUARD's chair and the postcard rack echo the design of the vitrines, i. e., both contain elements of neutral-toned wood and glass (or plexiglass) with bevelled edges; and both emit, or pick up, glints of greenish light. Indeed, at moments the entire setting, with its profusion of reflective surfaces--glass, plexiglass, bakelite, illuminated book pages--seems to be all aglint--glints glinting off other glints

At rise, the GUARD sits hunched over a huge dark book resting on his knees. He is so engrossed in his reading that he does not even look up when now an APOCALYPTIC ANGEL first appears overhead, enclosed in an aura of the same greenish light that emanates from the vitrines.

"Appears" . . . that is to say, the ANGEL does not obviously descend or walk or fly in, but something more like coalesces out of the hints of color already present in the gallery air

The ANGEL seems on the verge of utterance, his lips are already parted to speak--but then instead he makes a slight adjustment to his annunciatory pose and remains silent. This sequence is several times repeated.

For a while the GUARD reads on, not so much as registering the presence of the ANGEL, so absorbed is he in his book.

But at length, out of the corner of his eye, he becomes aware that there is someone else in the gallery with him and, still without looking up, calls out:)

GUARD

We're coming up on closing time. If you plan to see the show, you've got, at the outside, no more than---

(He is just on the point of turning over the last page of his book when something makes him look up and he first sees the ANGEL.)

Holy hell!

(He slams shut the book and stows it under his chair.

The ANGEL, having at last settled on an annunciatory pose, now proclaims:)

ANGEL

"Woe, woe to the inhabitants of earth! The time is at hand. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

(But at once the ANGEL has second thoughts about his pose and sets about revising it.

The GUARD bangs down on an alarm/intercom button concealed somewhere in the vicinity of the postcard rack.)

GUARD

Security! We have a situation in Side-Gallery 14C. Possibly terrorism-related.

ANGEL

"I come as a thief in the night. I will remove your candlesticks out of their place."

GUARD

(into the intercom)

Art heist in progress!

(to the ANGEL)

I don't know where you're thinking to unload museum-grade candlesticks. Not that you'll find any brassware in this gallery. We're all illuminated volumes here. Actually,

(points up at the hanging plaque with its inscription:

GALLERY 14C. WORKSHOP OF
THE MASTER OF THE
UMSCHWEIGEN APOCALYPSE)

all a single Master's illuminations

ANGEL

"There shall not remain one stone upon another, that hath not been cast down."

GUARD

Yes, well, first off, anyone even contemplating an act of vandalism should be aware that the vitrines are shatterproof, heat-resistant and pressure-sensitive. Bars go up, barriers come down. So that, unless you've somehow managed to get hold of the deactivation sequence--

ANGEL

"Behold, I make all things new."

GUARD

A copyist? Why didn't you say so?

(speaks into the concealed intercom)

Security? Never mind. Countermand.

(to ANGEL)

The Museum flings wide its doors to copyists. Let me just run through some main points of gallery policy in this area. (1) Copies must be on another scale than original. (2) Copies must employ either fainter or brasher colors than original. (3) Copies must reflect--

ANGEL

"I have set before thee an open door. And there shall be no temple therein, for thou thyself art the temple of it."

GUARD

Of course. I should have known. You're here for the

(a sneer coming into his voice)

Performance Fair. Gallery 8, six rooms down, "Representation After Representation." You do realize the Performance Fair only kicks off once the Museum closes, which won't be for . . .

(calculating under his breath)

"times, time and a half, half a time . . . "

(to ANGEL)

Oh, I'd say at least another hour and a quarter. Meanwhile--

(Offstage thunder)

ANGEL

"The sun shall be darkened; the moon shall give no light;
the stars shall fall from the sky. Come and see."

(The GUARD crosses upstage and stands
tiptoe to peer out the clerestory window.)

GUARD

Hmm . . . It does seem to be clouding over a bit out
there

(Louder offstage thunder)

ANGEL

Woe, woe to the inhabitants of Side-Gallery 14C!

GUARD

All right, at this point I think The Powers That Be
need to be brought in on this. Could I possibly ask you
to hold up for two seconds, just . . . hold up! I'll be
right back with my Subcurator.

(The GUARD exits.)

Left alone, the ANGEL experiments with
a series of "zapping" gestures, each more
overstated than the last, and each aimed at
a different one of the gallery's vitrines.

But as his gaze, following out after his
extended arm and hand, travels from vitrine
to vitrine, his "zapping" gestures gradually
transform into something more like gestures
of framing-off or appraisal, and his posture
comes to seem more that of a connoisseur than
a destroyer; the ANGEL, in short, begins to see.

However, he holds one of these appraising/framing gestures, directed at "The Central Vitrine," a fraction of a second too long: there is a blinding flash and a puff of smoke.

Startled, he pulls back his hand but--too late: he has apparently, without intending it, vaporized the contents of "The Central Vitrine."

The ANGEL descends to ground level and heads over to the display window of "The Central Vitrine" (from which the smoke and glare of the explosion triggered by his too-long-held gesture continue to emanate), to inspect the damage. Since, as will be recalled, "The Central Vitrine" faces away from the audience, the ANGEL is concealed from view when now the GUARD re=enters, leading the SUBCURATOR.)

GUARD

Well, there you are, Subcurator, you must make up your own--

(looks around the gallery)

Gone! Gone? Subcurator, my apologies: I appear to have called you away from your . . . subcurating to no end.

But, really, in my own defense-- I mean, honestly, the language! Quenched suns and falling stars and walls torn stone from stone My first thought was--well, I mean, these days, whose first thought is not?--a terrorist. But, no, then, after a time, it's sounding more like art theft. Or possibly, a terrorist financing his operations by means of an art theft

And of course, all the while I'm telling myself:

"you're overreacting, in all likelihood this is just some art student getting carried away with his studio project."

Or likelier still, an early arrival to this . . .
 Performance Fair-thing that's on the docket for tonight
 after the Museum closes. Meanwhile, though, I can't
 help noticing how things out there are breaking along
 lines distinctly reminiscent of-- May I ask, Subcurator,
 is it possible nothing of all this has filtered up
 to the curatorial level?

(Before the SUBCURATOR can reply, the
 ANGEL rises into the air from behind "The
 Central Vitrine" and, after his usual run
 of false starts, hits on a suitable pose
 from which to proclaim:)

ANGEL

Woe, woe to the inhabitants of Side-Gallery 14C, "Master
 of the Umschweigen Apocalypse"!

SUBCURATOR

(to the ANGEL)

You!

(to the GUARD)

That's all right, Barr. I see what the trouble is.
 I'll take it from here.

GUARD

Yes, well, I would just point out you've got, at most,
 forty-five minutes to deal with this before we go into
 the Performance Fair.

SUBCURATOR

(his attention all on the ANGEL)

Mmm

GUARD

Three-quarters of an hour till closing time!

(Exit the GUARD.)

The SUBCURATOR looks long and hard
at the ANGEL.)

SUBCURATOR

Art thief? Terrorist? Vandal? I can, with an effort,
just barely see how you might be taken for one of these.
But not by me, to whom your image has, over decades
in the field, grown achingly familiar. You are--oh,
unmistakably!--the Angel of the Apocalypse and we can
be packed in half an hour.

(The ANGEL ~~makes~~ to interrupt.)

Which is not to minimize the difficulties. We are,
I recognize, talking about perhaps the steepest
museological challenge to confront this or any generation,
next to which the whisking-away of the entire Warburg
collection to the butteries of innumerable country houses
for the duration seems child's play. But--crates are
standing by--have, indeed, been standing by for some
while now. I mean, what with all this End-Time buzz,
not to mention bomb threats and crazy weather . . . well,

one had best be at the ready. I must say, I haven't given much thought to whether I am "at the ready." I guess I felt, so long as my charges were certain to be "saved" There, I guess, you touch up against the limits of the curatorial mindset Well! Be that as it may, we can be crated and on the rise in half an hour--oh, except for a pair of Spanish antiphonals currently at the bindery for restitching that I guess are going to have to find their own way home.

(Once again the ANGEL makes to interrupt.)

I realize, so far nothing has been said of installation options. And, listen, it's a tricky question, all that jasper and chalcedony leaving, as it were, no place to bang in a nail. But--not to worry! Surely the ideal venue for these objects

(gestures around gallery)

would be a replica either of their original site of production (i. e., a monastic scriptorium) or of their actual place of use (i. e., a cathedral library), either of which could readily be brought within the proposed design scheme. But these are issues that can really only be explored onsite. The first thing is to get it all upstairs.

ANGEL

(after the usual flurry of last-minute
pose adjustments)

Nothing of all this shall be taken up!

SUBCURATOR

Really? Well, of course, I can see where you all mightn't be in any hurry to pepper the town with instances of mortal book production. I mean, how eager can He be to invite comparisons between the no doubt shaky penwork in His own Book of Life and that of, say, the Monte Cassino Lectionary? Still, I wonder if anyone's quite worked through the logistics of maintaining a whole other set of exhibition facilities here below. To say nothing of the symbolism! I mean, think about it: to keep all the art down here does rather smack of keeping art down.

ANGEL

(shifts to a mirror-image of the pose
of his previous speech)

Nothing of all this shall remain below!

SUBCURATOR

Well, you know, you can't just leave it all lying around and expect it to come through unscathed.

(Offstage thunder, followed by several
isolated cries)

There's going to be high winds, flood tides, fire damage
We're talking about irreparable harm to innumerable
artifacts!

(The ANGEL shrugs: "But--exactly!")

Wait a minute, surely you're not saying--?

ANGEL

I am an Angel of the Apocalypse--

SUBCURATOR

Did I not but now, all unprompted, hail you as such?

How should I,

(gestures around gallery)

Watcher Over the genre that I am, fail to recognize
a Herald of the End?

ANGEL

Recognize, then, that I herald the end of, along with
so much else--

(He concludes with (several stabs at)
a "magnificently inclusive" gesture.)

SUBCURATOR

You can't possibly mean-- Vaporize the production?

(The ANGEL, who has been floating
above the stage since p. 8, now comes down
to earth.)

ANGEL

What's the difference? After today, there's not going
to be anyone around to enjoy it.

SUBCURATOR

I get a little crazy when I hear that argument, I don't know where to-- All right, yes, true, art craves a public but, surely, no less craves . . .

ANGEL

Yes?

SUBCURATOR

To be out from under such cravings. To have gone apart. To be there. Case in point: Suppose that early Ottonian psalter,

(gestures toward a manuscript
in a remote vitrine)

everything about which--mise-en-page, gilding, rubrication--argues a lesser hand, were suddenly to pass from the scene, not, now, via Apocalypse or anything, but--oh, I don't know, owing to poor moisture control or maybe just misshelved and so as good as gone. Isn't it clear, looking out over a world from which this not-so-wonderful object has vanished, that we are looking at less of a world?

ANGEL

(not at once)

No.

SUBCURATOR

Well, yes, all right, true, it's minor work. Lose the Ottonian psalter. Take a different illuminated volume, one you're not charged with destroying-- Or better: is there, perhaps, some other class of artworks altogether, that, over the course of your long aeons "on the bench," waiting this hour, have brought you special joy?

ANGEL

Actually, I'm quite partial to Camden Town verre parlant.

SUBCURATOR

Sorry?

ANGEL

Verre parlant. It's a kind of art glass with the inscription scratched on.

SUBCURATOR

How full of surprises the angelic mind! Well, all right, then. For you, Camden Town verre parlant. With me, I guess, it would be silent pictures. I brood continually on the cries of actors in pre-sound movies, now never to be heard because--quite apart from whether after today anyone will be around to hear them--they were never picked up in the first place.

ANGEL

Most likely, the players in those films did not trouble to cry out "in the first place," knowing their cries certain to be forever lost.

SUBCURATOR

Ah, surely, the whole promise of Apocalypse is that no cry--nothing--is forever lost, but shall sound (once more? at last?) "on that day." May not the silent film star dream to hear her words ring forth in the New Jerusalem? Shall not the glassblower look to catch the glint of uncreated light off his verre parlant? And may not such-and-such a minor Ottonian book artist, whatever else he may or may not come upon in the Heavenly City, trust to come upon

(gesturing again toward the remote vitrine)

his handiwork there? What but this can the New Jerusalem offer the old artificer? How but in gazing upon their saved productions shall the "saved" producers pass their long afternoons?

ANGEL

(shrugs)

They can contemplate the beauties of the Heavenly City.
They can have the Beatific Vision.

SUBCURATOR

Ah, craftsmen don't "have" visions, they craft them!

ANGEL

Then let them pass their afternoons in crafting some new ones, possibly (why not?) depictive of that very world we shall see no more, save in their visions of it.

SUBCURATOR

But in that case, why not simply tack up the visions already crafted--especially since it is, after all, these that have got the visionaries where they are today? Shall you really be altogether easy floating out before the sunset to proclaim: "Masters! Your creations are hereby consigned to the very flames which you, for devising them, are hereby spared"?

ANGEL

Haven't you even now been urging me to a view of the artist as only ever really focussed on his next contribution?

SUBCURATOR

And is not that hand of thine raised against all contributions alike?

ANGEL

All contributions? This hand? My goodness, what an overdeveloped sense you appear to have of my importance.

And, if I may say so, what an underdeveloped sense of the reach, the splendor, the (for want of a better term) sheer compartmentalization of the Celestial Choir.

SUBCURATOR

Of course, like any decent medievalist, I've read Maimonides and Isidore of Seville on the Angelic Hierarchies--as if it wasn't already clear from Revelations alone how ready you Apocalyptic figures are to parcel out the chores: this one pouring down plagues, that one unbolting abysses, that other pacing off courtyards with his little golden measuring rod

ANGEL

Oh, but it goes well beyond-- Trust me, the written sources give only the haziest idea of the branching and sub-branching We don't just, in a general sort of way, roll up the weather, the seasons, mathematics--oh, no! You've got Ananiel, Angel of Low-Lying Mists, Gamaliel, Angel of Winter Sunsets, Zachariel, Angel of Mersenne Primes--

SUBCURATOR

And so on, down what looks to be an ever-receding line: to each, his little subcanton in the Empire of Eliminations.

ANGEL

True, one is but one. But . . . this one, charged with just these-- Don't you . . . ?

SUBCURATOR

Oh, I understand. After all, is not even such a "parcelling out" to be met with among curators?

ANGEL

Do you know, that's a parallel to which, well before today--I mean, over the course of my "long aeons 'on the bench'," as you put it--I have given much thought. Certainly we are not, you and I, so much at odds as might first appear. Shines there not forth, in the dealings of an angel with his charges, something frankly curatorial? Comes not the curator before us as "guardian angel" of his hoard? And to be the angel over just this corner of things--what is this but to be, in effect, a kind of subcurator?

SUBCURATOR

With, however, the slight difference that subcurators take care of the art entrusted to them.

ANGEL

(grimly)

Oh, I shall be taking care of the art entrusted to me.

SUBCURATOR

Barr was right. You are a terrorist.

ANGEL

Was ever one of aim so modest, end more circumscribed?
From the dawn of time I have brought all my fervor of
extirpation to bear solely upon--

(stops)

SUBCURATOR

Upon what, exactly? Not (you have been most emphatic)
upon all of world art. Well--how much of it? Just which
"corner" of the visual treasure of the race shall you be
taking out this afternoon?

(The ANGEL hesitates.)

Perhaps . . . all of medieval art?

ANGEL

Nothing like!

SUBCURATOR

All medieval book art?

ANGEL

Nowhere near!

SUBCURATOR

All medieval book art south of the Rhone and prior to 1400?

ANGEL

Narrower!

SUBCURATOR

Middle Period Sienese altar sculpture?

ANGEL

Please

SUBCURATOR

(exasperated; not a real guess)

I don't know, perhaps it is only our little local pinakothek you have been sent against--assuming one angel is equal to the demands of an entire museum?

ANGEL

That's a nice assumption coming from a subcurator. Should you be "equal to the demands of an entire museum"--everything from the T'ang Earthenware to the Mannerist Crystal?

SUBCURATOR

Wait a minute. Surely you don't mean--?

(Offstage thunder, followed by several isolated cries joining, for a moment, into a dissonant chord.

A flicker of lightning is seen through the clerestory window.)

ANGEL

Woe, woe to the inhabitants of Side-Gallery 14C, "Master of the Umschweigen Apocalypse"!

SUBCURATOR

Just us? Then--

(gestures around the gallery)

how come we're still here?

ANGEL

I'm waiting on my Cuing Angel.

SUBCURATOR

"Cuing Angel"?

ANGEL

For each of us obliterative spirits there is another who comes just before in the order, and whose coming-into-play puts me in play: one's "Cuing Angel".

SUBCURATOR

How very . . . worked.

ANGEL

Where but in gradation seek the apocalyptic?

SUBCURATOR

And in your own case, this emboldening forerunner whose letting-fly gives you wings--that would be . . . ?

ANGEL

Athamas, Angel of Prismatic Color.

SUBCURATOR

So, before you can snuff out our holdings, this Athamas must first unthread the rainbow?

ANGEL

You misunderstand. To be the Angel of Prismatic Color doesn't mean you wipe out prismatic colors. It means you bring all shades and hues down to the rainbow's seven.

SUBCURATOR

A glimpse into the decorative program of the Promised Quarters. Well, and when may we be looking for your chromatic colleague to put in an appearance? How long's the collection got?

ANGEL

Let's see

(The ANGEL consults his "girdle book," a small illuminated volume in a fitted pouch that hangs down on a leather thong from his waist.)

According to my "Book of Hours," we're just now taking the impact of Sphandor, Angel of Culverts and Cloverleaves. Soon, moving inside the Museum, Sithariel will put paid to Mycenaean jewelry, then Batarriel polishes off South Asian Faience. Whereupon . . .

(runs his finger slowly down
a column of the "girdle book")

There we are! My Cuing Angel of Prismatic Color
will himself be cued on by the opening of The Book
With 7 Seals.

SUBCURATOR

Yes, we've got that here.

(The ANGEL looks up, startled.)

The SUBCURATOR gestures vaguely in the
direction of "The Central Vitrine.")

Case 4, Item 9. Rumored to be the very volume mentioned
in Revelations 5. Of course, it's only a folktale.
Still . . . perhaps you'd like to page through it
before you blast it to kingdom come.

ANGEL

Not really.

SUBCURATOR

Seen it all before, have we?

ANGEL

Before . . . ?

SUBCURATOR

I mean, on one of your earlier visits to the gallery.

ANGEL

Earlier visits . . . ?

SUBCURATOR

Oh, come on! Don't tell me you haven't been round once or twice on quiet afternoons, when you'd have the place to yourself, to take in all you must one day take down.

ANGEL

(looks nervously toward "The Central Vitrine," whose contents he appeared to vaporize back on p. 7)

Not . . . till quite recently.

SUBCURATOR

Really? Well, I can see where that might appear the nobler course: to bide up there "on the Bench," season after season, picturing the scene

ANGEL

That remark betrays a staggering incomprehension.

SUBCURATOR

Of the nobler course?

ANGEL

Of life on the bench. The only "scene" I have all this while sought to "picture" is my own founding act of destruction.

(Offstage thunder, followed by a sustained dissonant chord of cries.)

A lightning-like flash of red light is glimpsed through the clerestory window.

The ANGEL's voice goes strange,
enlarges)

Before it was ever painted, I already meditated
the single, unanswerable gesture

(strikes a "destroying angel" pose . . .)

that should bring your volume to--

(. . . and, as usual, drops it for
another)

that should send your volume to--

(and another)

that should turn your volume to--

(drops this last pose as well;
seems balked)

SUBCOURATOR

What is it?

ANGEL

I'm far from confident of hitting on a posture sufficient
to the hour. I want to do this well and, unlike most
of my colleagues, I need to do so straight off. I mean,
after all, if Abariel, Angel of Anhydrous Compounds
or Kastariel, Angel of Sand Dollars and Beach Fleas,
comes up a little shy the first time round--well, after all,
there's plenty more dry patches and shore life out there
for another go. But I get only this one chance.
I have to get it right the first time, and--

(tossing off a bewildering variety of
"destroying angel" poses in rapid succession)

what is right?

(The SUBCURATOR crosses decisively to the postcard rack (see p. 2), reaches down a postcard from the display, and, while himself looking pointedly off in another direction, hands it to the ANGEL.)

SUBCURATOR

This any help?

ANGEL

But--that's it! There I am! How--?

SUBCURATOR

"Destroying Angel," Plate 16 of The Umschweigen Apocalypse, the founding treasure of our collection. How do you suppose I pegged you when you first blew in here?

I've been staring at you in miniature

(gestures toward the postcard in the ANGEL's hand)

ever since when.

(The ANGEL turns the postcard in the light, examining it from every angle)

Perhaps you'd care to have a look at the original?

(starts toward "The Central Vitrine")

ANGEL

Not necessary. I can work from a reproduction.

(pointing, with his free hand, at the postcard in his other)

Look at that. It's exactly . . . but exactly--

SUBCURATOR

Exactly. But now, reflect: You claim to have dwelt, all that time "on the bench," upon your own image as destroyer, with never a thought to the image you must one day destroy. And yet, the image you must one day destroy being, precisely, of

(gestures toward the postcard in
the ANGEL's hand)

yourself-as-destroyer, what have you, all this while, been contemplating but it? Mightn't you like to consider sparing a collection that contains the image which solves your whole problem for you--and is, to boot, your own image?

(A cracked horn-blast, followed by
very loud thunder)

ANGEL

My "problem" only ever was how to destroy that collection. If I spare it now--

SUBCURATOR

If you strike it now, your whole history to this hour having been but lead-up to the blow, what shall you do next morning and all the next mornings of eternity to come?

ANGEL

I plan to spend eternity contemplating my own act of apocalyptic deletion.

SUBCURATOR

Of which act you shall, in its earliest moments, have deleted

(points to postcard in ANGEL's hand)

the sole available aid to contemplation.

ANGEL

Even thus making good my claim to be part of it all.
What is the Apocalypse if not the end of images,
a farewell to representation . . .

SUBCURATOR

Then I saw a new aesthetic and a new earth.

ANGEL

. . . and how better show oneself an agent of Apocalypse than by forgoing one's own crack at self-representation?

(Deafening thunder, followed by a dissonant chord of cries, followed by a cracked horn-blast.)

The clerestory window goes black and remains so till noted.

Enter the GUARD, his costume in tatters, with burnmarks streaking his face and clothes.)

GUARD

It's chaos out there. "Continental Road-Screens" lie in cinders. "Late Gothic Metalwork" has vanished without a trace. Oh, and Baffin Bay and three of the five regular solids look to be gone.

(starts to leave, turns back)

None of which, by the way, is keeping the Performance Fair crowd from massing in the courtyard, ready to pounce the minute the Museum closes. They seem to be thriving on the hoc-ha. "It's all grist for our mill," as one workshop leader put it to me.

(Thunder, a dissonant chord of cries, and a cracked horn-blast ending in what sounds like a cascade of breaking glass.)

There goes the Camden Town verre parlant!

(calls offstage)

Coming, coming!

(exits)

SUBCURATOR

(to the ANGEL, resuming their interrupted exchange)

A farewell to images? The Apocalypse? Say rather: the image to end them all. Really, it resembles, this Apocalypse of yours, nothing so much as a vast illuminated manuscript, the scroll like which (if we may trust Revelations 6) "the heavens shall be rolled up," as rendered by, say,

(gestures toward a remote vitrine)

The Master of the Bedford Hours on folio 19 verso.

Certainly this would explain why such a large number of surviving illuminated manuscripts are, in fact, apocalypses:

(gestures around the gallery to
various remote vitrines)

The Metz Apocalypse, the Cambrai Apocalypse, the
Cloisters Apocalypse, and so on. Can you not,
as, after all, yourself a minor apocalyptic figure,
manage a little more reverence for these artifacts
that, so plainly, image your task?

ANGEL

I am on my knees to all but the handful of codices
I am charged with annihilating.

SUBCURATOR

Those being--which, exactly?

ANGEL

What do you mean, "which"? The lifework of the Master
of the Umschweigen Apocalypse. The contents, more or less,
of the present gallery.

SUBCURATOR

Well, as you say . . . more or less: There is the small
matter of that gilt breviary in Darmstadt. But few
accept Eckstander's attribution of it to our Master,
so why should you? However, that still leaves unsettled--some
might feel, unaddressed--the question of just how much
one sees here proceeds directly from the brush of--

(He points to the large overhead plaque bearing the inscription:

GALLERY 14C. WORKSHOP OF
THE MASTER OF THE
UMSCHWEIGEN APOCALYPSE

on which, it will be recalled (see p. 1), the words "WORKSHOP OF" are painted in a slightly different color from the rest.)

Note the emendation: workshop of. Recent scholarship has reassigned all but a handful of our treasures to other hands. But then, I don't guess it would matter hugely if you took down a coupla "workshops-of"--I mean, seeing as how they're all marked for excision anyway

ANGEL

On the contrary, as I've sought and sought to convey, the Apocalypse likes every pigeon in its hole. Any borderline cases fall to the hand of Dubatiël, Angel of Doubtful Attributions; I shouldn't care to encroach. You've got to help me. How can I be certain I'm confining my thunder to undoubted productions of our Master?

SUBCURATOR

These attributional questions are many-sided

ANGEL

I've got maybe

(reaches down to consult his "girdle book" (see p. 22))

a quarter of an hour before the Angel of Prismatic
Color shimmers on. Give me an education.

SUBCURATOR

All right, let's come down to cases.

(During what follows, each time the
SUBCURATOR mentions a specific illuminated
book or type of book (as indicated by a
single asterisk: *) or names a particular
master-illuminator (as indicated by double
asterisks: **), he points out the book
of that name* or by that master** in one or
another of the display cases.

This "tour of the vitrines" the SUBCURATOR
thus gives the ANGEL seems to be following
no particular trajectory, but is all the while
spiralling them in toward "The Central Vitrine.")

First off, I would direct your attention to a group
of six manuscripts believed to have been illustrated
by our Master on the grounds that each contains
a signed self-portrait of him.

ANGEL

Well, so, clearly, at least in those instances--

SUBCURATOR

Not so fast. In three of these six volumes--The
Beaufort Hours*, The Bodmer Hours*, and The Playfair
Breviary*--the artist has portrayed himself as St. Luke,
patron of Christian painters. In two others,
however--The Sherborne Missal* and The Hornsbach
Sacramentary*--he gives himself the trappings of

the classical Greek artist, Apelles. And here in The Luttrell Psalter* he represents himself as the contemporary monastic craftsman he no doubt was. Now, as no single artist would likely view himself in three such different lights, it seems doubtful that all six of these volumes portraying our Master as their maker are, in fact, by him. And, absent all independent evidence for which (if any) of these self-images he might have embraced, we must reluctantly dismiss them all.

ANGEL

Plus, I guess, no one really knows what he looked like.

SUBCURATOR

Considerations numberless send us in quest of better data--which, happily, are not far to seek. Most of the manuscripts known or on the firmest grounds believed to be by our Master display four characteristics:

1. They are written in a semi-cursive Gothic book hand with outsize ascenders.
2. Their historiations spill out past the framing scrollwork onto the white of the page.
3. They represent drapery by a zigzag--rather than the expected "dampfold" or clinging--convention.
And
4. They portray figures-in-motion with a rhythmic torque not elsewhere seen in the art of the book.

Now, of these four traits that, together, mark a manuscript as likely by our Master, a number of the volumes in our collection display a number. The Ramsey Psalter* features zigzag drapery, torqued figures, and spillover historiations--but is not written in Gothic script. The Codex Palatinus* torques its figures, shows drapery by zigzags, and is written in a Gothic hand--but its historiations keep within bounds. The Book of Hours of Joanna the Mad*--

ANGEL

Yes, yes, I see where this is headed: no volume in the collection is going to turn out to possess all four of the markers associated with your Master.

SUBCURATOR

Not so fast. All four traits do, in fact, occur in The Tickhill Psalter* and The Harley Golden Gospels*.

(The ANGEL makes to interrupt:
"Well, then--?")

BUT: The Tickhill Psalter* contains pen-flourishes of a sort found nowhere else in our Master's corpus. While the Harley Golden Gospels* lays figures along the diagonal in a manner characteristic only of his early or conjectural works but everywhere on view in the pages of The Master of the White Inscriptions** and The Master of Morgan 339**.

ANGEL

It seems like what you need is some simple, single, uncontested---

SUBCURATOR

Copper blue!

ANGEL

Sorry?

SUBCURATOR

Our Master, almost alone among his contemporaries, makes use of a certain copper blue pigment.

ANGEL

My uncle, Cashriel, is charged with destroying all Earth's remaining copper deposits--or make that:

(consults his "girdle book")

all Earth's remaining copper deposits in the Western Hemisphere north of latitude $30^{\circ} 14'$.

SUBCURATOR

If I might continue. Our Master, as I say, employs a distinctive copper blue paint rather than the azurite favored by most illuminators.

ANGEL

So any book in the gallery painted copper blue must be by him?

SUBCURATOR

Not so fast. I said "distinctive," not "unique".
 Yes, traces of this rare colorant are indeed to be met with in three of our graduals* and five of our collectars*, all of which might, on this basis alone, be confidently assigned to the Umschweigen Master. However, of these eight manuscripts, two* also contain pale yellow washes, a device largely shunned by our Master, but to which The Master of the Munich Boccaccio** is much given; while in the remaining six volumes* the copper blue is laced with ochre, rarely if ever utilized as a mixing color by our artist but frequently so employed by The Master of the Leaping Figures**, The Edgerton Master**, and The Master of the Upturned Gaze**.

On the other hand--

ANGEL

If you please, the hour is late. Are there, or are there not, illuminated volumes that (A) contain likely self-portraits of your Master, (B) display all four of his stylistic markers and (C) employ copper blue as only he employs it--thus providing an infallible measure of whether other books in your gallery are, or are not, by him, and so must, or need not, be spared by me?

SUBCURATOR

Yes! There is one such volume, and it is--

(His "tour of the vitrines" has brought him out alongside "The Central Vitrine," which, it will be recalled, faces away from the audience.)

He rounds the final corner and points into "The Central Vitrine" with a gesture of triumph that, halfway through, transforms into a gesture of dismay:)

Gone!

(looks back into "The Central Vitrine")

It can't be

(calls offstage to the GUARD)

Barr!

(no reply)

Where's he got to . . . ?

(calls again)

BARR!

(He reaches into "The Central Vitrine" and pulls out one after another illuminated manuscript, briefly examining each for flame damage before tossing it onto the floor.)

I don't understand. How could this possibly--?

ANGEL

Ah, well, now, here's the thing

SUBCURATOR

(rounds sharply on the ANGEL)

You know something about this?

ANGEL

Actually

SUBCURATOR

You did this?

ANGEL

I was, how to say, making trial of my powers;
you know: letting fly. And I guess one kinda sorta
 got away from me. But apart from that lone instance,
 I left things pretty much as I found them.

SUBCURATOR

Yes, but that "lone instance," as you so blithely
 put it, was The Umschweigen Apocalypse!

(The ANGEL looks blank.)

As in--

(He gestures up toward the words
 " . . . UMSCHWEIGEN APOCALYPSE" on the
 overhead plaque.)

The ANGEL still looks blank.)

You asked, is there not to hand some volume displaying
all the traits that mark a work as infallibly by our
 Master, thus furnishing a yardstick by which every
other book in the place may confidently be ascribed
 to him or not, and so confidently be turned over to you
 or not. Well, there is one--was one: The Umschweigen
 Apocalypse, late gone up in smoke, leaving behind only
 the question of whether its destruction has or has not

purchased too dear the safety of all the rest. For, of course, you must now spare them all.

ANGEL

Say rather: smite them all, since any one of them might now be by him.

SUBCURATOR

(suddenly, out of nowhere, tempted)

Empty the room?

ANGEL

Ho-ha! I see that in thine (as in what curatorial bosom not?) pounds a deaccessioning fervor.

(He raises his arm in some version or other of the "zapping" gesture he attempted earlier, when alone.)

SUBCURATOR

(gesturing toward the ANGEL's gesture)

Yet how, upon such venture, first raise hand, when--?
The Umschweigen Apocalypse offered an image of a destroying apocalyptic angel--the very stance you could not bring yourself to assume until I set it before you. How shall you now rise into action, having but now made away with this sole pattern of the action you would take?

ANGEL

Say rather: made it my own by making away with it.

Who brings to nought, brings to fulfillment--do we not even here come upon the "sole pattern" of every apocalyptic act? To what end one's misgivings?

I have done it, therefore apparently always could.

Anyway, I've always got the postcard.

(And he drops his "zapping" gesture long enough to consult it.

He is, on the basis of what the postcard shows, just launching into a new, enlarged "zapping" gesture--and the SUBCURATOR is just stepping forward to intercept it--when a thunderous explosion, culminating in a sustained horn-blast, sends the two of them hurtling to opposite sides of the stage and transforms the scene as follows:

The seven-paned clerestory window, which went black on p. 28, is now irradiated by colored light, one color of the rainbow per pane, reading, from audience-left to audience-right, as follows:

RED	ORANGE	YELLOW	GREEN	BLUE	INDIGO	VIOLET
-----	--------	--------	-------	------	--------	--------

As these seven streams of colored light strike off the bevelled edges of the vitrines, the GUARD's chair, and the postcard rack, shards and pools of color, pure and mixed, appear at random points about the stage.)

The time is at hand! Behold Athamas, Angel of Prismatic Color--

SUBCURATOR

--And see!

(pointing to each in turn of the seven clerestory window panes, from (audience) left to right:)

Madder Red, Burnt Sienna, Mars Yellow, Hunter Green, Prussian Blue, Raw Indigo, Spectrum Violet--what is this but the illuminator's basic palette? Bless me if this Apocalypse of yours does not prove to be at last one big volume of illuminations; this forerunner of yours, the Genius of Book Decoration.

ANGEL

By whatever name hailed, he hales me after.

(calls up toward the clerestory window)

I come, I come quickly!

(Now at last the ANGEL hits on the long-sought definitive form of his "zapping" gesture.

As on p. 40, the SUBCURATOR steps in to block the ANGEL's gesture--and winds up mirroring it.)

SUBCURATOR

Stay!

(Re-enter the GUARD.)

GUARD

All right, that's it, time's up, everyone now please clear the hall.

ANGEL

What?

GUARD

It's closing time--well, or nearly: 5: 55. The Museum swings shut every afternoon at 6.

SUBCURATOR

(to the ANGEL)

Our little local daily Apocalypse.

GUARD

(to the ANGEL)

Sir, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to exit the gallery.

ANGEL

Exit the-- ? How can I possibly-- ?

(points up at the clerestory window)

The Angel of Frismatic Color is only just arrived on the scene!

GUARD

(shrugs)

We're open late alternate Tuesdays for school groups and seniors. Perhaps you and your prismatic friend could come back on Tuesday.

ANGEL

I can't "come back on Tuesday." There's this unique, unrepeatable event in progress--

GUARD

Actually, the Performance Fair doesn't really start up till after hours, although

(with a nervous glance offstage)

the hordes are certainly mustering

ANGEL

I'm not talking about your Performance Fair. I mean the Last Judgment, the End of the World. You can't seriously expect the Apocalypse to defer to somebody's out-of-the-blue, arbitrary closing time.

SUBCURATOR

I thought the Apocalypse was somebody's out-of-the-blue, arbitrary closing time.

ANGEL

The Apocalypse is on a schedule!

SUBCURATOR

So's the Museum!

ANGEL

Herewith abrogated.

SUBCURATOR

What?

ANGEL

Well, or say: put on hold. I hereby declare the hours of your gallery extended by such time as may be consumed in laying waste its contents.

SUBCURATOR

You can't do that!

ANGEL

Says who?

SUBCURATOR

Why--yourself!

(The ANGEL looks blank.)

3 Have you not over and over stressed how, in this beautifully, this endlessly ramifying event which is the Apocalypse, your sole and whole charge, the Alpha and Omega of your efforts, is to shred the output of one small-town book illustrator?

ANGEL

(not seeing where this is headed)

Yes. . . .

SUBCURATOR

Well, then, plainly, it is not also your charge to be shredding museum schedules. Surely your Mersenne Primes colleague isn't about to add Hausdorf Spaces to his mandate--that's another angel's lookout. Nor will your Low-Lying Mists crony be taking an axe to Stationary Fronts--that's somebody else's job. Well! By the same token, it would seem that any tampering with the museum's schedule must--in the infinite divisiveness of Apocalypse, to which you have raised such hymns--fall to another hand. In short, I'm afraid if this gallery is to keep extra hours, it's going to have to be on someone else's say-so than thine.

(The ANGEL is momentarily at a loss . . .)

Silence in Heaven.

(. . . but then he pulls out his "girdle book" and begins to page through it.)

ANGEL

Perhaps Sbarnek, Angel of One-Time Extensions or Graphiel, Angel of Scheduling Meltdowns

GUARD

I'm going to have to ask you gentlemen to take it outside. The gallery is now officially closed for the day. Please exit by the main stairs.

SUBCURATOR

(to the ANGEL)

Which, by the way, will take you right past the gathering Performance Fair, in case you'd like to give them a look.

ANGEL

I don't really have time to take in a show.

SUBCURATOR

I meant: give them a look at you. That unceasing quest of yours for the perfect apocalyptic gesture should go over huge with that crowd. It's just their type of thing.

ANGEL

Hmm . . . well, maybe I could peek in for five minutes.

(consults his "girdle book")

Performance Art isn't slated to be rolled up for another hour and a half, right after Flemish portraiture Well, so, then--

(The ANGEL raises his arm.

The SUBCURATOR and the GUARD instinctively duck, but the ANGEL is only waving goodbye.)

Until such time as.

SUBCURATOR

We'll be counting the minutes.

(Exit the ANGEL.

No sooner is he offstage than the pattern of seven rainbow colors shining through the seven-paned clerestory window (see p. 40) is instantaneously replaced by the "city sunset," that stream of late-afternoon light naturalistically broken at intervals by shadows of rooftops, foliage, etc., which was visible through the clerestory window at rise (see p. 1). At the same moment, the pools and shards of color that were flung about the stage on p. 40 by this now-vanished influx of colored rays likewise disappear.

The SUBCURATOR gestures up toward the "city sunset":)

SUBCURATOR

Once more late afternoon. The collection always looks exceptionally well at this hour.

GUARD

It's a good viewing light.

SUBCURATOR

Is it not? Ah, I little thought to look on this light, or my charges by it, any time soon. Thanks, however, to your inspired "closing time" ploy--

GUARD

I don't know what you mean by a "ploy". It was closing time.

SUBCURATOR

It was, indeed, closing time. The end of another day.

Not, however, it appears, the End of Days. Your lively abruption of the Apocalypse gives us back our world. We live to gaze, art lives to be gazed on, . . . well, precisely, "another day."

GUARD

Now when you say, "Art lives" True enough--for us, here. And, listen, don't misunderstand: I'm thrilled. For do I not, like yourself, cherish a sneaking fondness for

(gestures expansively around
the gallery)

these "chaps" of ours? But, face it, we're not the whole story--as a short stroll down the corridor soon makes clear. Where's "Triglyphs and Metopēs"? Gone to glory! What about "Georgian Marquetry"? Lying in the dust! Yes, you've sent our fellow

(jerks his thumb in the direction
of the departed ANGEL)

packing, with only some minimal damage. But what about all the rest of the art-world, the world's art, the world?

SUBCURATOR

(rounding on the GUARD in sudden fury)

Do you throw it up at me that somewhere--in the next gallery or galaxy--the Apocalypse yet rages? Mark me, and mark me well, for we are only going to have this

conversation once. I am the subcurator of a side-gallery of a minor museum. To my hands have been entrusted certain codices of a small town's sole master, and, so far as in me lies, I have discharged that trust. As for the art-world, the world's art, the world--"all the rest," as you so blithely put it--as in earlier cultural crises, every Master, manner and school is going to have to find its own champion; or, failing to find, go under. Let us hope they find one. But they shall not find him here. I have made my contribution.

(The GUARD stares, open-mouthed,
at this outburst.)

Forgive me, Barr. It is, after all, myself, not you, that I am angry with. The disappearance of our central treasure gives me no peace.

GUARD

(uneasily)

Disappearance . . . ?

SUBCURATOR

Of course, some will say that we were lucky to get off with the loss of a single volume, even if that "single volume" was the linchpin of the collection, the Umschweigen Apocalypse--

GUARD

(more uneasily still)

It's lost . . . ?

SUBCURATOR

--that the making away with, after all, but one book
was a small price to pay--

GUARD

(really alarmed)

Not, surely, made away with!

SUBCURATOR

--that, indeed, our heroic codex went down defending
its fellows, died that others might live--

GUARD

Listen, there's something we need to

SUBCURATOR

--but I am a mere subcurator and these Olympian
perspectives are foreign to me.

GUARD

I took every precaution!

SUBCURATOR

Heavens, Barr, no one's blaming you! I don't think
you were even on the scene when our seraph,

giving vent to his powers, lobbed one into the very
vitrine

(points to the still-smoking
"Central Vitrine")

wherein reposes . . . or reposed

GUARD

Into the . . . ? But in that case--

(The GUARD barrels over to his
down-right chair, reaches under it, feels
around, and triumphantly draws forth the
large, dark book (see p. 2) that he left off
reading and stowed there at the ANGEL's
first appearance (p. 3).)

There we are. Safe as houses.

SUBCURATOR

The Umschweigen Apocalypse!

GUARD

Not, as you can see, "lost" or "made away with"
but simply . . . laid by.

SUBCURATOR

The Umschweigen Apocalypse! But how--?

GUARD

Listen, I know this looks bad. But you've got to understand,
I had it out just for the afternoon. I was planning
to "reshelve" it the minute I finished reading it--

SUBCURATOR

(wonderingly)

You were reading it?

GUARD

Look, I realize I'm here to keep tabs on the beauties, not savor them. But here's the thing--

SUBCURATOR

(in ecstasy)

You were reading it?

GUARD

Well, yes. Because, you see--

SUBCURATOR

O wonder greater than the averted Apocalypse--greater, indeed, than the Apocalypse! The Watcher Over Umschweigen's treasure--the reader, we may say, above all others sought--has taken the Apocalypse into his own hands, impelled, no doubt, by
But by what?

(From here until he finally succeeds in getting a word in on p. 53, the GUARD tries repeatedly to interrupt the SUBCURATOR's torrent of speculation, but always the SUBCURATOR is too quick for him.)

Maybe you just wanted to read the Book of Revelations and here was the closest copy. --Or no, wait:

You heard visitors to the gallery praise the volume and had to see for yourself. --Or no, wait: The "sneaking fondness" you've acknowledged feeling for "our chaps" got the better of you for a moment. --Or no, wait, here it is: Your self-image as a guard seemed to dictate a more hands-on approach. --Or maybe you sought relief from the cares of a guard by imagining yourself into the ampler scenes pictured in our codex: Barr the Trumpet, Barr the Dragon, Barr the---why not?---Apocalyptic Angel. --Or maybe you were just . . . passing the time. After all, the days of a museum guard are long. An old script to decipher, an old tongue to construe--surely these might, quite apart from any intrinsic interest, fill up the hours like nothing else. At first, no doubt, it would have been more or less like doing a crossword puzzle under glass. But then, insensibly, the beauty of these objects you had turned to for mere distraction would begin to work: the delicate coils of a line of Humanistic Cursive sending your eye to an echoing curve in the border scrollwork, the gilding around an historiated initial picking up the highlights of an adjacent grisaille. And so on, splendor upon splendor, until, nothing for it but you must jimmy the case and lift the centerpiece of the collection into the light to be your leisure reading.

GUARD

What it is, actually, is they don't let you bring in a paper.

SUBCURATOR

What?

GUARD

You know the museum rules: No reading on the job that is unrelated to the job--which pretty much rules out the morning paper. Oh, of course, Anders in "Italian Primitives" gets to page through the Corriere della Sera. And no one's going to say a word if Attway in "Ming Pottery" dips into The South China Morning Post. And, listen, I myself, all that time I stood in for Schaffer in "European Painting," was grudgingly conceded my half hour over The International Herald Tribune. But here, with us--? I challenge you to come up with a single journal even marginally bearing on-- I mean, no offense, but really, for a person even a little eager to stay on top of his world, this boneyard of long-spent illuminations is far from the ideal/assignment. In short, I was really hurting for something to read, until the day it dawned on me that, my goodness,

(with a sweeping gesture)

these were, after all, books all about one, I was absolutely up to my eyeballs in reading-matter. That morning I reached down this lovely

(flourishes The Umschweigen Apocalypse)

and from that hour I have never looked back.

(He sets out over the stage to retrieve the scattered volumes which the SUBCURATOR, in search of the "missing" Umschweigen Apocalypse back on p. 37, had pulled out of "The Central Vitrine" and flung on the floor.)

And you know the funny part? The Last Call, The Trumpet, Former Things--all those dailies I used to think I couldn't start ~~the morning~~ without? Since I've got caught up in this,

(again flourishes The Umschweigen Apocalypse)

I never give them a thought. In fact, I can't remember the last time I so much as--

SUBCURATOR

What is the Apocalypse but even such a forgetting of the daily? How strange, then, that it is to your craving for your "daily" that we owe the survival of our Apocalypse; that when Heaven couldn't be bothered to kick in a wall and a nail and all one's curatorial eloquence went for nought, only a museum guard's passion for his morning paper has saved a timeless treasure from the flames.

GUARD

(crosses, with his arms full of the books he has gathered, to "The Central Vitrine")

Actually, I think maybe by now things have cooled down to the point where--

(The GUARD replaces the smaller books in "The Central Vitrine" and is about to do likewise with The Umschweigen Apocalypse when the SUBCURATOR snatches it out of his hands, carries it off downstage, and sets about examining it for damage, opening it here and there at random for a spot-check.)

SUBCURATOR

No worse for wear at "closing time." Preserved, one might note, even by the very act of "vandalism" that--

(arrests his random flipping through the book at a page about halfway in and stares hard at it)

There he is, our Herald of the Dawn, safely back between boards and looking, I must say, every inch the figure in a performance piece he has, by this, no doubt become.

(thrusts the open book out toward the GUARD, so that the GUARD--but not the audience--can see the illustration the SUBCURATOR has just described)

I wonder you didn't recognize him from your reading the minute he crashed through the skylight; it's him to the life.

GUARD

(squinting at the page the SUBCURATOR holds forth)

I don't know, they all look a little alike in this style, don't they? Or maybe his picture is on the last page?

SUBCURATOR

No, about halfway in. Wait a minute. Why would you think it's on the last page?

GUARD

I was just about to turn the last page when himself appeared.

SUBCURATOR

(with a nervous, too-loud laugh)

Ha-ha! Lucky he showed up when he did, then--it kept the world from ending.

GUARD

What?

SUBCURATOR

There's a legend about

(flourishes The Umschweigen Apocalypse)

this one. It's said to be the original "Book With 7 Seals"--you know, the very one referenced in Revelations 5--that somewhere along the line found its way to Umschweigen. I know--it is an apocalypse, so how can it also be a book mentioned in the Apocalypse?

What can I say, we're in the realm of fable here.

Anyway, the story goes, if someone was ever to, as you just now very nearly did, turn over its last page--

(spelling it out)

i. e., "break the Seventh Seal"--well, you know the rest.

"Silence in Heaven." The End of the World. That would do it somehow, apparently.

GUARD

And in fact has anyone ever-- ?

SUBCURATOR

That's the funny thing. One might suppose that, surely, just in the normal course of museum maintenance, every page in the book--not excluding the last--must at some point have been turned to, opened, pressed down But apparently not. Apparently there's some stiffness or dryness in the spine such that, if anyone ever did crack open the final quire, the whole thing would . . .

(groping for a term)

blow up in one's face? crumble to dust? fly apart in one's hands?

(hefts the book appraisingly)

I don't know, the end-bands and turn-ins look pretty solid to me. How about it, Barr? What would you say to-- ?

(mimes "turning the last page")

GUARD

Ah, haven't we had enough excitement for one afternoon?

SUBCURATOR

(his attention all on the book)

Hum

GUARD

Well, it there's nothing further . . . ?

(pause)

Shall I, on my way out, stop by the Performance Fair
and see how our friend is fitting in?

SUBCURATOR

(increasingly absorbed in the book)

Umm

GUARD

Now, as regards return of the volume to its rightful

I assume I may leave the fate of the Apocalypse
in your capable

SUBCURATOR

(lost in contemplation of his book)

Mmm

GUARD

Well, so, then, Subcurator, I guess I'll be taking off.
See you in the morning.

(Exit the GUARD.)

The SUBCURATOR, always intent upon the
book in his hand, drifts over toward the chair
in which the GUARD sat reading at rise,
sits down, and opens The Umschweigen
Apocalypse to a page near the end.

Slowly, experimentally, the SUBCURATOR
begins to leaf through the last few pages
of the book.

As he turns the pages, and as if evoked by his doing so, the shards and pools of colored light that fell about the stage on p. 40 (and were subsequently dispelled by the returning "city sunset" on p. 47) are once more seen, this time in motion, slowly rotating like the pattern of glitter cast by the revolving mirror-ball at a dance. (The "city sunset," meanwhile, as if drained of its colors to supply this new effect, goes to a washed-out, black-and-white version of itself.)

As the SUBCURATOR speeds up his page-turning, the rotating pattern of colored lights also accelerates.

Now the SUBCURATOR has come to the very last page.

He hesitates.

The light-pattern freezes in place.

He lifts the last page to turn it

As he turns over the last page, and in exact synchronization with his doingso--blackout.

A beat of darkness.

Houselights suddenly, blindingly, up.)

AN END