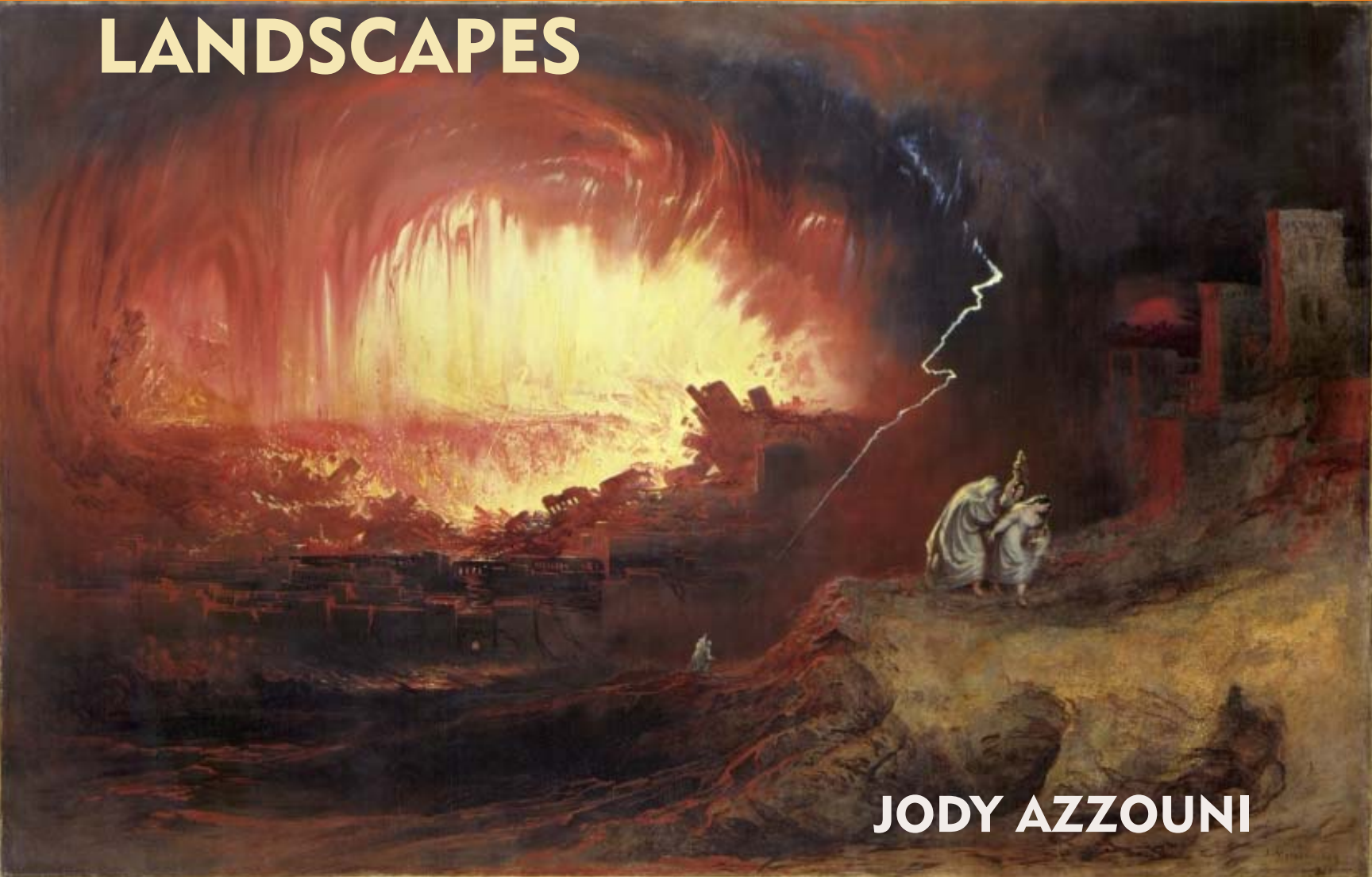


HEREAFTER LANDSCAPES



JODY AZZOUNI



Hereafter Landscapes

Jody Azzouni

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PROLOGUE



Oracles for modern times

1. Notice there is too much gold
in the air these days.
It is a message from the ozone
that light will soon be acid.
Sunshine is everywhere
and if we are reborn as urns
we will make good still lifes
for what is next to come.
2. Notice the coins in our pockets.
They are godheads without magic.
Their flat mouths are quiet.
We waste only time
if we stare at the divine faces
trapped there.
3. The clocknest is nearly empty.
When the amygdala panics,
it prays to whatever gods are at hand.

After the fire goes out

The ashes flutter like black moths
when I stir them,
then drift back into place

like a scattered dead thing
returning to sleep.



EMBERS AND SNAPSHOTS

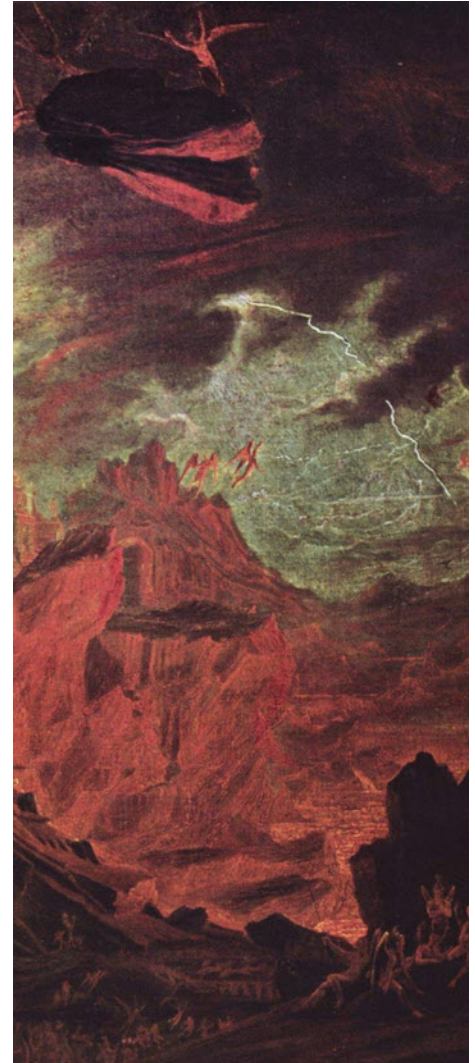


Who can we eat next?

When all the suns set bloody together
(and the horizon is red for one last time),

spread out the surreal (like paint).
You get to do it once.

(Advice for writing poetry
during the end of days)



We drop the bombs

Lift the ore,
bask in the warm glow
of its half-life

(the ghost glows).

And the warning bells
(their bodies half-hearted throats).

When the sky sprays light
(and we are looking for caves to hide in).

Four or five troll eggs
(ready to hatch)
sleek as warts.

Will we still have blogs?

We were an empire once
(but the binge of landscape is over).

Only skulls still move like armadillos
(and we can finally retire the wheel).

When that last new thing is made.



Have a little sympathy for Cassandra, won't you?

(Eyeballs hide indoors.)

Look at all the heads in the sand.

Later (when we are trolls

having children for breakfast)

we will wander the earth like plastic bags.

(It will still look good on wireless Television.

We'll watch *Happy Days* over and over as we munch.)

When all us slaves have inherited the Earth

We mourn the passing of cereal
(but there's still plenty of packaging around).

Campbell's soup (improbably: an icon of food).

The bluecollar myth of the toolbox
(Should all the stars wink out one by one).

Like brave men around a campfire,
moths die.

When all the blankets have gone to hell

We are frozen
(despite our furs).

(Dante would have loved it.)

Once,
 we had many empires
 (the Internet, the factory farm, countries true and brave).

Let us whistle
(in unison)
our tunes of extinction

(the chewing of the last dirge).

Jellyfish, too, are a cult
(watch them evaporate).

Why you never know

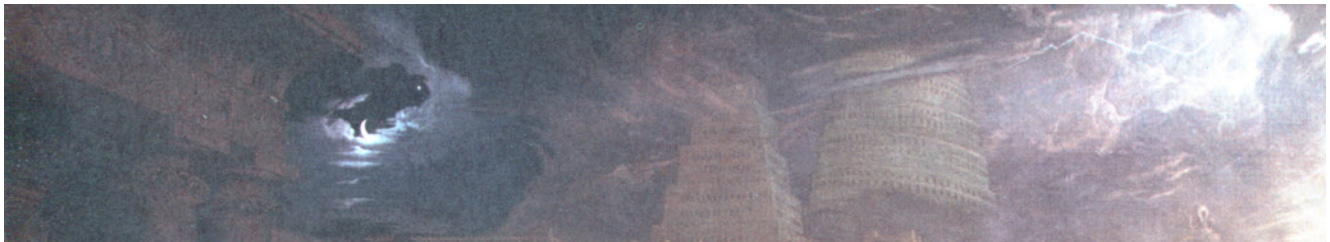
The liquid of fear
(ice nevermore).

The drowning seals
(and what will the spiders do?)

We fortify our staircases in vain.

When fire comes,
pinecones are reborn.

Think of the rubble of Germany
(circa 1946).



And yet we still wonder where all the fish went

We eat bushmeat now
(with our gloves of blood).

When clans run in herds
(and collect murderabilia).

When each bomb tells such a long story
and those who are good at emptying pockets.

When television flickers like fire
(and we carry brakes this way and that).

We are trolls

so we live in cans
(like snails)
(like hermit crabs)

like the homeless.

We order the ground underneath us to hold still
(sand takes to the sky in revenge).

Nothing *really* flies anymore (except carbon).
(Are you listening to these stories of our collective death?)

Hide in school as long as you can.



But we can love

The global wake:
For a moment
there is air (and so wind).
And through the sideways trees:
The irony of something whispering.

(Time for us to reproduce again.)

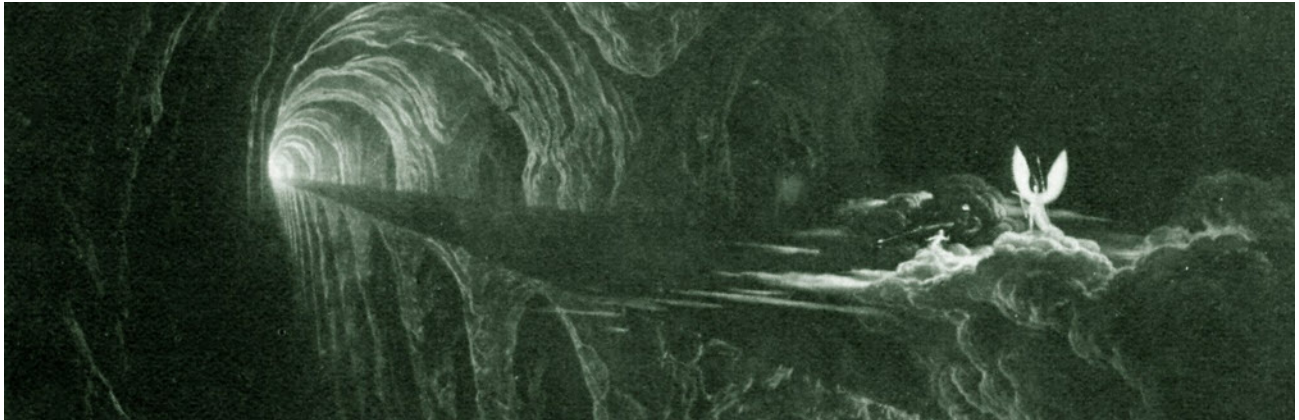


Extinction Chronicles

Seasons once were the panic of fashion
But now it is quiet
(because everything is dead).

We orbit the Sun
(like all the other rocks).

(Sculpture, at least, begins stillborn.)



We smell the future

Think of us as a mood that's passing
(like dinosaurs).

We are still human
even though our hands are webbed.

(When even nail polish won't cover it up anymore.)

Ice cream is too rare to eat.

Hang onto those hobbies as long as you can

The last of the wind evaporates
(and we are stunned by the gasping that's been left behind.)

Like clams in the dark,
we open our mouths plaintively,
make the pretty sounds that silence makes.

Pompeii all over again

Lava creeps up on us
(on cute little cat's paws)
like pseudopods.

Meanwhile,
we apply makeup,
(eyeshadow).

We plan our beautiful futures.

When oceans boil away.

(I'm talking about heaven, of course.)



God is doing above

The wisdom of scar tissue.

(It still looks good on Television:
everyone has teeth there.)

Nothing heals anymore
(they say entropy is to blame).

Like wounds we drip

(when I have news like this to tell you:
I whimper it to myself).

When all the floors give way at once

(The trapdoor as horizon.)

We breathe ash now
(just like they do in hell).

We urn our keepsakes,
live on mud

(just like the poor people did).

There are plenty of bad endings to go around.



**When even the frogs have two heads
(and eight limbs)**

(Everyone a picture: postcarding memory:

useful for those rare moments
when features come back together again.)

How to recognize the four horsemen

Eaten by owls
(they're having children for breakfast again).

Winter runs transparent (snow is history).

(It's reassuring to think time might be an illusion.)

No one has arms and legs anymore
(centralize failure).



Live happily ever after

Think small
(think of insects).

Mourn the evergreen
(but keep it light).

Embrace dogma like a terrorist.
(Hang onto that afterlife that you've been promised.)

(When even the toothfairy has fangs.)

I dream of futures

We make oxygen any way we can
(we eat our relatives too).

God is allergic to us (but there are still those people
who sing patriotic songs
to cheer us up).

The fossil has grandeur now
(a landscape only of memories).



When cardboard will be a step up

(I keep telling you the news no one wants to share.)

The extinction wars
(the acid of ocean; the absence of frog).

When the icicle goes extinct.

We lived on Earth once
(but the mountains had become as plastic).

The hunger myths:
I dream of fish, lightly shingled.

Why stomach acid should be kept on a tight leash:
(who needs an ocean that dissolves everything in it?)

Why we still watch the horizon for food

(And only see the Sun rise.)

Remember the polar bear
hibernating for good.

(Still, we have postcards, photographs, Disney movies.)

When lining up the last ducks
(squint away the future).

When you still hear voices
(and there is no air).

When all the eggs have hatched

The whimpering of naked yokes.
The exchange of platitudes
(the hot air of money).

We shout our commands with great elegance.

Meanwhile, carbon is transparent now
(ash disguised as air).

The illusion of stopwatch.

We're talking about the we in all of us

Seedlings in Autumn
(but the routine is over).

The water wars:

(One way or another, they tell us what to do.)

We exchange hoods
(under the overweight of cops).

The know is spreading:
(that nothing can protect us).

When thick eyebrows are a sign of health
(and all the feet are long-gone).

How to escape the future

(You're joking, right?)

Recollect the good things:
dead ghost pooled around us.
(*That* was nice, we say.)

The noise of death:
even without air
light cries its way forward.

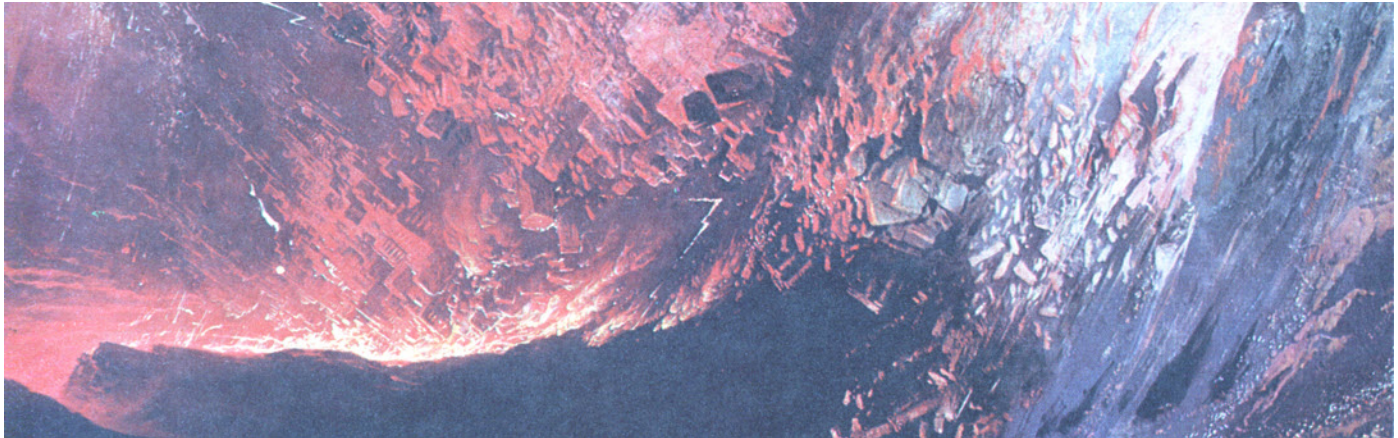
(When God empties the trash,
we'll find other planets to move to.)

Oddly enough, some of us want to keep our day jobs

Though each day starts with a grunt
(something blackened rising into the sky),

I used to dream of fish,
I used to dream of leaves falling off of trees.

Now water from the sky is acid
(let's sit at home in our coffins).



The politics of oil slicks

Like so many other fools,
we keep hope locked tight in a box
(feed it memories; coo promises to it at night).

Elsewhere,
purses hiss in gardens
(fertilized with pets and dollparts).

Take crutch as an attitude
(car our way into the expanding ocean).

The wounds on Earth that we are (when scabs go extinct)

Our flesh spreads over the landscape
(like batteries dying).

Horror as future
(Dante as landscape artist).

The death of us
(radiation pretending clock).

When each politician keeps his own timebomb at home.



The last pond

They used to come back, someone says (about fish).

Oil slick is the new surface:

We dream of enamel:
the tooth, proud and angry,
ready to defend us.

Aspire to the immortality of glass.
Paint the depths of ocean on its surface.

(Advice for the end of days.)



Turn on that TV and watch all that snow

Like acne,
the moon moons over us.
Blue is gone now,

horror no longer pastel
(no longer flat on the movie screen).

When frogs are gone
(obeying the implacable laws of evaporation),

like headlights we shall stare down the future
(gun our motors; cook with gas).

Don't eat the Bambi all at one go

Once we had dental floss,
toothbrushes.

When all the freshwater is gone
(and all the luxury items too).

Snails, in their tiny shells.

When that last penguin is steak
(when hope is the only occasion to celebrate).

Why we might need to travel in space

The over of time
(and the frogs are gone too).
But craters at half price
(Mars is a bargain whatever we pay for it).
When we're on the move,
we can fight over the islands that are left.

(Change our tapeworms in time for our last meal.)

The future is in landscaping

We eat
our demented pets
(lost without us).

Landscape is fragmented now
(the sideways trees, the
fossilized squirrel; the nut,
eternally waiting for spring.)

Cars, however, have legs.

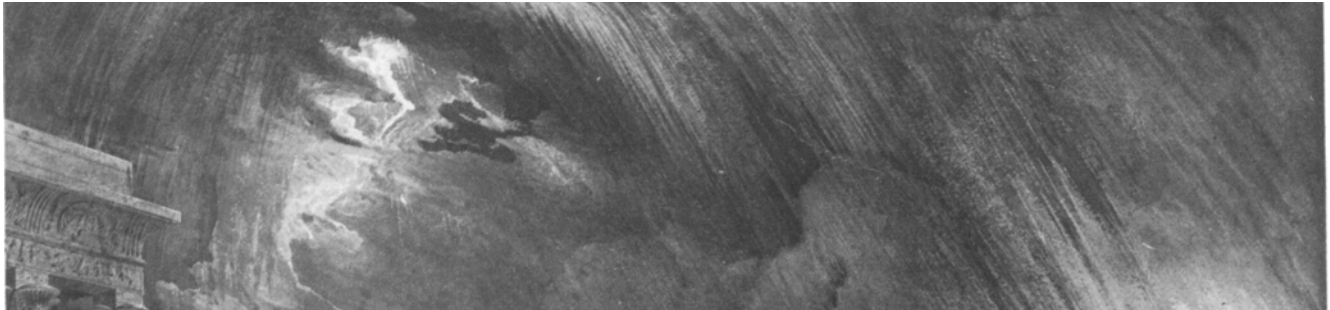
(The road out is gone.)

The last refrigerator

To be steamed away
(when Mars is our future).

When fossils keep time.

(When even hotels are no longer safe.)



The evaporation myths

Asphalt is for good,
but my happiness is only tea.

The mineral, leached from its home
(we burn coal implacably).

Stay here and now,
(for there is a threat, and later only a dream of before).

Let's church ourselves into oblivion
(and yet, still manage to deliver the mail).

(It's the small things that matter.)

Cars lumber in herds

inexorably (like entropy).

We beg for wind turbines
(riot each fall).

Snow is a commodity now
(futures in snow).

Neck in neck
(we eat each other).

Everywhere a toilet.

When even hurricanes get really big

Shivering our timbers into crunch.
(Can we hear the warnings yet?)

Quick: everyone wear headphones.

The weeping of science
(the chatter of television).
The coming of rain.



After the extinction wars have started

As we puddle our ways like amphibians,
watch mermaids evaporate along with their ponds.

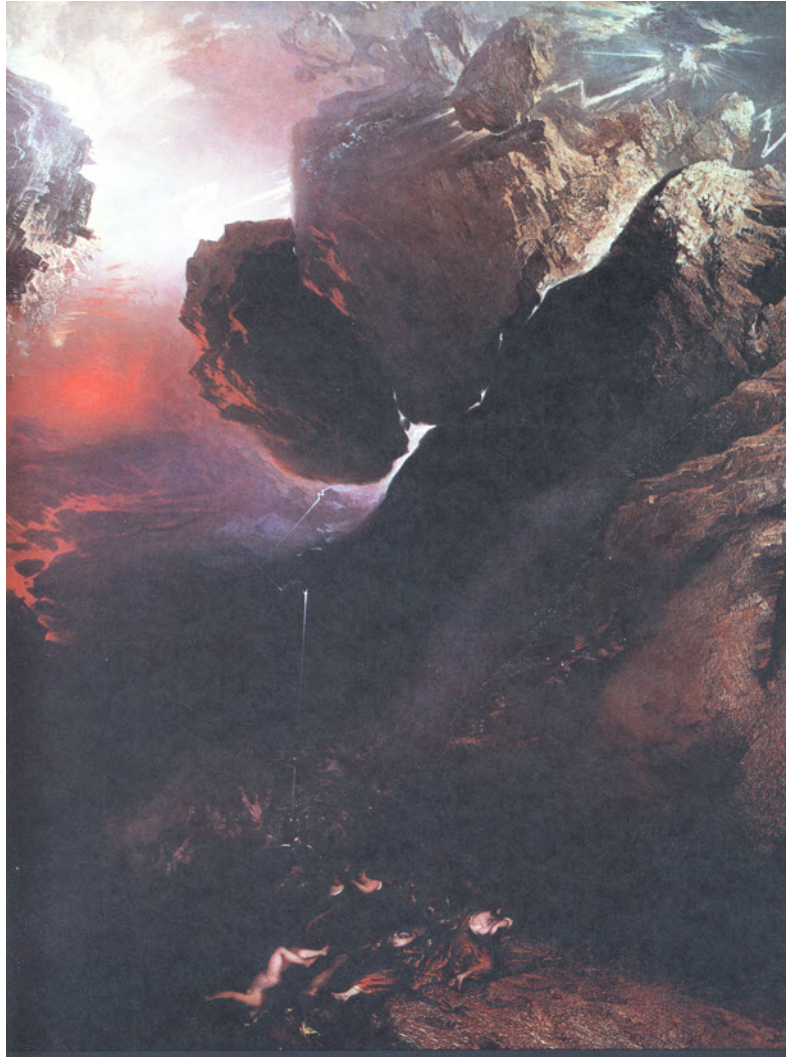
If we can only think of salt as a foodstuff.

(Even if the faces return,
the people won't.)

(Film left in cans for those who come after us.)



EPILOGUE



Epilogue

Rocks

here

and here

a piece of human stomach

About the Poet

Jody Azzouni was born in NYC, and — somewhat like a cat — is a product of geography (and not of his purported roots, understood in any of the other typically presumed biographical senses that the others of his species are generally so proud of). His poems — therefore — are *sculptures* of voice, thought, and imagery. He writes rarely from his own perspective — thematically, that is — but instead from the perspective of other people and things (from the perspective of other minds and emotional states, regardless of what sort of flesh they are instantiated in). His work also tries to extend the resources meaningful voices already have, without sacrificing the primary thing that makes language so gorgeous: *that it can be used to say things*. “Grammar,” narrowly understood, can be bypassed; it is, after all, only the passing fancy of a time; but this is not true of meaning. Words are meant to be left for others, and to delight those others by conveying what we were, what we’ve seen, what we were capable of saying (and how). We must try to speak to the invisible future, and in a way that it can hear, regardless of the geometry of the limbs it uses to pick up our ancient products, and regardless of the uncanny organs of sight it uses to study them. Humans, we want to say to them (among the many many other things we want to say to them), humans were not just flash and patter, not merely something that crawled around on the surface of things for a millennia or so, and then died.

The neuropsychologist Antonio Damasio writes, in *Descartes' Error*, "Individuals born with a bizarre condition known as congenital absence of pain do not acquire normal behavior strategies. Many seem to be eternally giggly and pleased, in spite of the fact that their condition leads to damage in their joints (deprived of pain, they move their joints well beyond the affordable mechanical limits, thus tearing ligaments and capsules), severe burns, cuts (they will not withdraw from a hot plate or a blade destroying their skin)."

Jody Azzouni has a previous book of poetry, *The Lust for Blueprints*, published with *The Poet's Press*, in 1999, and 2001. He has also published short stories in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and in several other little magazines. He publishes philosophy with *Oxford University Press*, *Cambridge University Press*, *Routledge*, and in professional journals.

"After the fire goes out," appeared in an earlier form in the APA's *Newsletter on Philosophy and Medicine*, Volume 91:1, Spring 1992.

"Oracles for modern times," appeared in *Cider Press Review* 6, in 2007. The rest of the poems were composed in January of 2007.

"When cardboard will be a step up" was published in *Edgz* 17 (2009), and "And we still wonder where all the fish went" will be in a future issue of *Art Times*.

