

Art, Gods and the Eve of Destruction

Review by Harry Bonham

Sky by George Gessert; self-published, 1230 W. Broadway, Eugene, OR 97401; 40 pp, \$7.95.

Earth is the ancient female principle. Sky is the ancient male principle. Long before Saturn, the sky god was Uranus. Uranus was dismembered by his son, Saturn. His body disappeared. When Martin Klaproth discovered the metal which is the prime component of nuclear weapons, he named it

after the sky god.

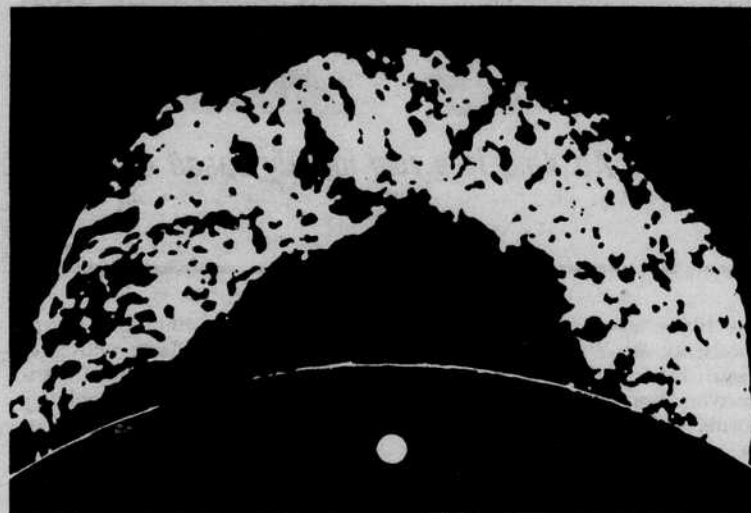
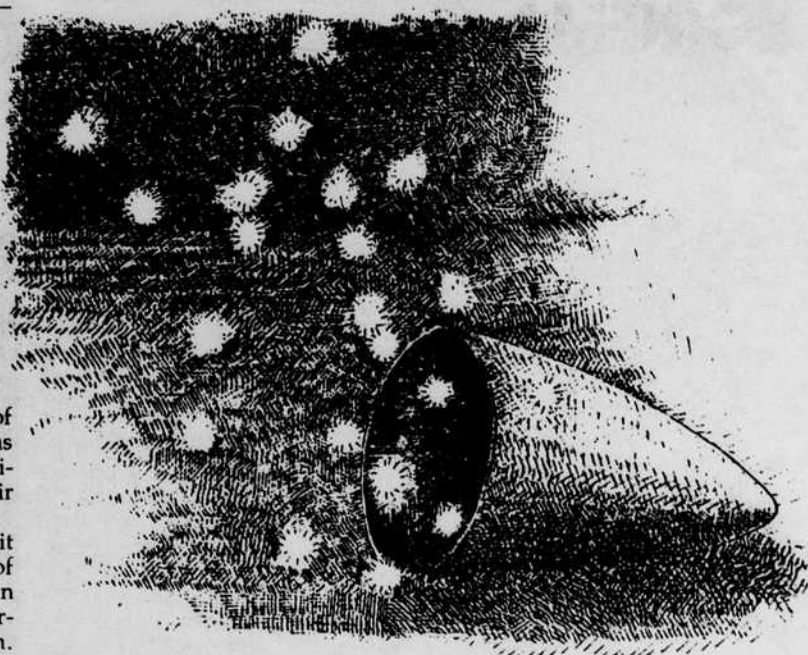
What are nuclear weapons? The people involved with the anti-nuclear movement have a clear idea. Even our children have a clear understanding of what these weapons can do, if they are ever used. We have all the statistics. The millions of megatons, the number of missiles and bombs grows larger daily. The members of the anti-nuclear movement have been waging a seemingly fu-

tile battle with the governments of the world that use these weapons to create an economy and intimidate other governments and their own populations.

With this kind of opposition, it is no wonder that the members of the anti-nuclear movement can find themselves caught up in a circle of fear, anger, and frustration. Which brings us to the point of Mr. Gessert's book. He is suggesting with his words and pictures that these weapons may have a psychological and spiritual dimension not yet considered. He presents us with page after page of images of warheads and nose cones in the context of objects of art and worship.

Mr. Gessert states in his introduction, "Nuclear weapons are the most significant monuments of the 20th century civilization. Like Stonehenge, the Egyptian pyramids, Emperor Shi Huang Ti's army of the dead, and Gothic cathedrals, nuclear weapons represent the wealth, the technical skill, the cultural beliefs, and dreams (or nightmares) of a period of history."

He presents us with a variety of images to support this statement. Nose cones are evenly spaced across the surface of the moon as



A prominence emerging from the sun. The white disk indicates the relative size of the earth.

if it were some future Stonehenge. In another, a drawing, Faust orbits the sun 180 degrees out of phase with the other planets. Another drawing shows fireflies swirling out of a warhead while its accompanying text compares the life of fireflies to the fate of two Japanese cities, Kokura and Nagasaki.

Western culture presently defines art as any object which is useless except for contemplation. Mr. Gessert explores the idea that these weapons are that, and more. Taking the concept from western and African culture and stating that they are religious in nature, he points out they are in fact focal points for fears, anxiety, and hope.

Although some of the images and the text which accompanies them are self-explanatory, enough

of them are not. Some make little sense at all to a person outside of the anti-nuclear movement. This will limit the appeal of the book somewhat to those in the movement. And it is this audience that the author is seeking out. Mr. Gessert has been involved with many organizations in the anti-nuclear movement and it is from this long association that he has created this book.

The book does not offer the movement any new strategies for dealing with the nuclear establishment. However, it can help to understand the place these weapons are taking in our society, perhaps allowing those in the anti-nuclear movement a new perspective on the nuclear dilemma. The book is for sale at the UO Bookstore, the Book Mine in Cottage Grove, and from Gessert at his above address.

"Engrossing tale of terror, mystery" Dutch novelist chronicles childhood lost to WWII

Review by Lois Wadsworth

The Assault by Harry Mulisch; first American edition published by Pantheon Books in 1985; translated from the Dutch by Claire Nicolas White.

Dutch novelist Harry Mulisch takes us back to 1945 in *The Assault*, to the rag-tag end of the German occupation of Holland during the war. One night a few months before the Allied Liberation, a young boy's austere family life ends violently when a local collaborator (a despised chief of police) is assassinated on the road outside their home. The boy watches in stunned disbelief as the avenging Nazi soldiers burn down his house. He loses his parents and older brother and is himself thrown into a jail cell for the night. Surprisingly, Anton's cellmate is a young woman. The boy

does not even learn her name, but she consoles him in his darkest hour and remains important to him throughout his life.

The young boy, Anton, goes to live with his aunt and uncle in Amsterdam and tries to put the horrors of the night of the assault behind him. But the unexplained mysteries of the night's events continue to surface in a second episode in 1952, and again in 1956 and 1966. Finally, in 1981 at a huge anti-nuclear demonstration in Amsterdam, the last piece falls into place. *The Assault* brilliantly demonstrates how a survivor slowly reconstructs the main event of his childhood from bits and pieces of information gathered here and there, as if by accident. Because Anton's childhood shattered so abruptly, his emo-

tional stability as an adult is dependent on the recovery of these vital links to the night of his family's destruction.

Harry Mulisch is known as a major European literary figure; his interest in WWII comes to him naturally:

"Born in 1927 to a Jewish mother whose family died in the concentration camps, and a father who was jailed for collaborating with the Nazis, Mulisch has said, 'It isn't so much that I went through the Second World War; I am the Second World War.'"

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