

The Arab Apocalypse⁽³⁾

by Etel Adnan

Reviewed by Evelyn Accad

Lebanese poet, writer, painter, tapestry designer, Etel Adnan writes both in English and French. At a conference in 1987, she mentioned how painting was the language she liked best because it is «international.»

In this epic poem about the war, she has combined both poetry and small illustrations, signs, symbols and unusual punctuations. These cut across the sentences, words and pages in a style reminiscent of concrete poetry and of the movement of «L'écriture Feministe» in France. It is very effective in expressing the chaos and absurdity of war and the anger of the author. **The Arab Apocalypse** was first published in French in 1980 by the Editions Papyrus in France. The present English version is the author's own translation.

The Arab Apocalypse which was written during the first two years of the civil war in Lebanon, transcends that specific moment of history to speak of all wars and of human destiny.

The central character of this epic poem appears to be the sun. The sun takes on different colors and mostly negative characteristics: the sun as «a pool of blood» (p.21); the sun «contaminated by the city» (p.20); the sun as «**LUCIFER**» (p.26); the yellow sun as «a bagfull of pus collected with a spoon in the Arabs' wounds»

(p.31); the sun «crying» (p.32); «in the halls of the sun we manufactured virulent religions» (p.32). The poem also brings out a strange image of the sun for a feminist: «Pot-bellied mercenary **aging female** (my emphasis) that's the sun» (p.39); and a whole page about the guilt of the sun (p.40).

The tragedy ends in death, the death of history, and the sun reduced to «Nothingness, the air burning forever.» (p.73) There is not a glimpse of hope in this nightmare powerfully expressed by Etel Adnan who shakes both form and content with her innovative creation. It may not be what the unfortunate Lebanese innocent civilians need to hear right now, unless it moves them to want changes to start taking place in their society. Given the strength, the weapons and militias, it is unlikely reforms could begin at the present time. The work is a warning to all those engaged in violent destruction. «Apocalypse» could well be not only upon the Lebanese people, the Arabs, but the world in general.