



Orion Is Upside Down

Amy Kernahan

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This sea story from the bottom of the earth takes the reader on a philosophical voyage through many realms, religious and secular, mathematical and poetic, natural and mechanical. Something akin to a Scottish Bill Bryson, Amy Kernahan, who was born and grew up on the Isle of Lewis, the largest of the chain of islands off the northwest coast of Scotland, sets out with her travelling companion, her father, to journey in the Antarctic and follow her dreams of seeing, and even standing in, the places where Sir Ernest Shackleton had been. Casting Shackleton in the role of Virgil to her Dante, she follows his trail through the ice fields around the Antarctic Peninsula, a vision here on earth as hellish as the frozen Lake Cocytus at the centre of Dante's Inferno. Along the way, the might of the sea, and the glories of the Antarctic set Amy pondering themes of Judeo-Christianity, seeing Antarctica as a remnant of Eden, unpopulated by both mankind and sin. The mathematics of nature reveals itself to her, and she is awed by the prophetic soul of Coleridge and his Ancient Mariner. Amy has set out on her journey believing it to be a pilgrimage to Shackleton's grave, but as she sojourns beneath striking southern skies where even the familiar is alien, she realises that she is on another more spiritual pilgrimage, called by the ancient Christians of her homeland peregrinatio, the search for what they called 'the place of one's resurrection' or true home. The outcome, although perhaps not surprising, is not quite as clear cut as it might have been.

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