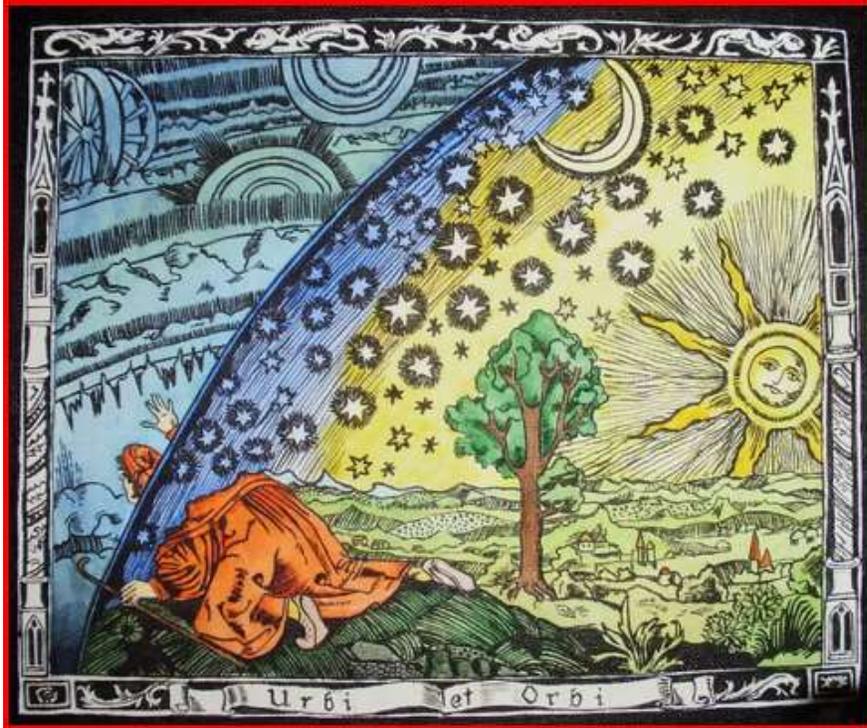


In Flammarion's Woodcut

By Reed Venrick



WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... ‘...Flammarion’s Woodcut’ considered a pastiche, whatever that is. But I reckon Venrick has an idea.... A sailor, at the edge of the earth, where it meets the sky, minding a gap, sticks his head, shoulders and an arm out to look beyond the heavens: Deferring to an oracle dolphin: ““Is it all simpler than we think? Do we / not stick our heads outside this port- / hole bubble around the sea to witness / not just water and space, but time? Why / is it in our face, but we cannot see?”” It’s and ekphrastic poem...so you just have to look at the picture provided. Just read Mr. V. “...drifting / through the unconscious cave of sleep?” “Why was it so hard / to peek behind the curtain of space” “time, a conceptual device ... like weighing stones and measuring Sticks” He’s “anchored to a rainbow”*

In Flammarian's Woodcut

Flammarian asked the dolphins
swimming along side his sailing ship:
"Is it all simpler than we think? Do we
not stick our heads outside this port-
hole bubble around the sea to witness
not just water and space, but time? Why
is it in our face, but we cannot see?"

For what he saw across the void of oceans
and endless starry nights was what
he witnessed around the curving bubble
of space; like time, space had no beginning,
but had always been there, though not
noticed. Because he had been drifting
through the unconscious cave of sleep?

Some dared ask—why had he not discovered
the porthole before, considering all his
salty sailing years? Why was it so hard
to peek behind the curtain of space that
enclosed his eyes, and the curtain of time
that contained his mind? Much less other
satellites that revolved around his global

reckoning, nor other moons that spun
him round like a bottle, bone, or boulder?
But he could only answer—you will not see
unless you seek the light above the fog
that canopies the horizon's ridge, so gaze
into the enlightened clarity of space
that measures the cusp of infinite lines.
He felt trembling, he felt fear to be
In a space as deep as the ocean's bottom.

Are we not looking to find our way out
of the invisible bubble we are imprisoned?
But like a mute god who makes herself
known by stirring a little breeze but manifests
Her anger in a level 4 hurricane, Flammarian
realized now that space had always been
there, and always will be, even long after

humans have finished their carnage and rape

of earth and are digging garbage pits and graves on Mars, moons in other solar systems. But with his vision finally outside the porthole bubble, Flammarian now saw that time was an human construction, designed to organize parameters, A mere tool shaped and sharpened for a purpose.

But the tick and toll of time had always sounded to the ears of divines long before other gods imagined earth as more than a speck of dust on a cosmic mirror—time, a conceptual device for humans like weighing stones and measuring sticks and calling this evaluation—organization.

Hours, days, years. The Flammarian man, who dared poke his head outside the porthole, the man who risked a cosmic storm and lived to remember some, realizing that he was born again—not as a baby nor as a Christian, but as a mortal human who finds a pot of gold floating in the sea, where it always was and will always be, yet anchored to a rainbow that only a few will live to see unless they poke their heads outside the porthole to visualize reality.

THE POET SPEAKS: *A few years ago I worked on a round-the-world ship, where, while reading art history, accidentally discovered a woodcut of the Flammarian Man from the 19th century. The concept seemed appropriate for a sailor discovering, not just the sea and earth, but the universe of space and time. So here's my ekphrastic poem!*

AUTHOR BIO: lives in Florida; usually writes poems with nature or history or psychological themes.