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Ships vs. Shops

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BILL CARTY

Ships vs. Shops

When the net comes aboard it is mostly trash, mostly
small sharks fin-flapped, tails struggling
vis-à-vis our stratagem. The net is passed over-
head, litter-like. Stiff rope
and radio crackle. The light's askew.
Light is a small disturbance on the sea and the white flash
is a gull. I find fifteen wings
at the high-water mark. I find no fish
and one owl. Water rushes from the deck,
cod slide across the metal.
Then the machete,
then fish heads buoyed in wake.

Now let's reckon with retail.
The museum used to be the main cube. Now the store's the cube.
The museum used to be on display but now we parade
our purchases. We show off that we're browsing.
Often browsing is enough. To enter the cube
is to reveal your taste (it's exceptional).
Taste changes people and to practice
taste is to wish to be changed. We lower
a net in the dark and discover

the net hauls a new ship.
It is just the right size. The crew fits perfectly.
The new ship's old crew, the dead crew, there's no sign
of them. There are some rays in the hull with their fins
sliced off, and where there's blood, gulls.
Gulls, you are welcome!
That's how I take the bell's ring
as the screen door swings: here is a tune,
please empty your pockets. The shopkeeper
heads home to shower. He is calling it a day.
There is a shower on the ship too.
There is much visible ink, many Celtic crosses.

Let's be honest about the bounty.
Remember how you encountered a squid?
It wasn't aswim; it was for sale.
At the deli counter, or in the dark, the captain
can hardly see beyond his reflection.
Night is the one-eyed mask taunting
Odysseus, "Swindler!" That he was
a mariner can't be denied. And I haven't
even mentioned the sail/sale thing.

I'm on a ship reading about the ship.
I'm at the store looking for a new monitor.
The sample screen shows a man on a ship watching
a show about a ship. I'm in the shop watching the ship-watching
captain. Gulls float upside down
at the bottom of the screen. I swim
through a garden of jellyfish blooms.
I drown not knowing which way is up.
Then comes the lowering
of the big chain curtain. This is how
we haul the catch. This is how we prevent the theft.