

Mermaids

The Italian brothers paid \$40,000 for her. She was stitched
from monkey arms and fish skin, assembled

by a bird stuffer in London's West End.

P. T. Barnum's came from Japanese fishermen

who claimed her charmed corpse might rescue
the human race. These are facts—

Miss Mackay spotted her off the coast
of Caithness, her face round and fair,

William Munro of Scotland saw her combing
her hair. He says, "It appeared proud."

Tennyson, too, saw the sea-fairie, her bosom "prest /
To little harps of gold."

Henry Hudson's was "speckled like a mackerel"
and Peter the Great begged to hear again

about the one who lived four days and seven hours
in a barrel. Time to time she uttered

little cries. As a child I too beheld her. She rode atop bath
bubbles, preened inside clamshells I carried home

from the beach. The knife seemed a kindness—a way to crack
us open, see what was happening on the inside.

But she was sly, left only a quiver of gray
staring back at me.

My sister says I was dreaming. She remembers no mermaid.
Yet it is told by Berosus the Chaldean—how Oannes

and Atargatis carried sun and moon upon their backs.
Strange silhouettes rising and falling morning and night,

dipping between worlds.