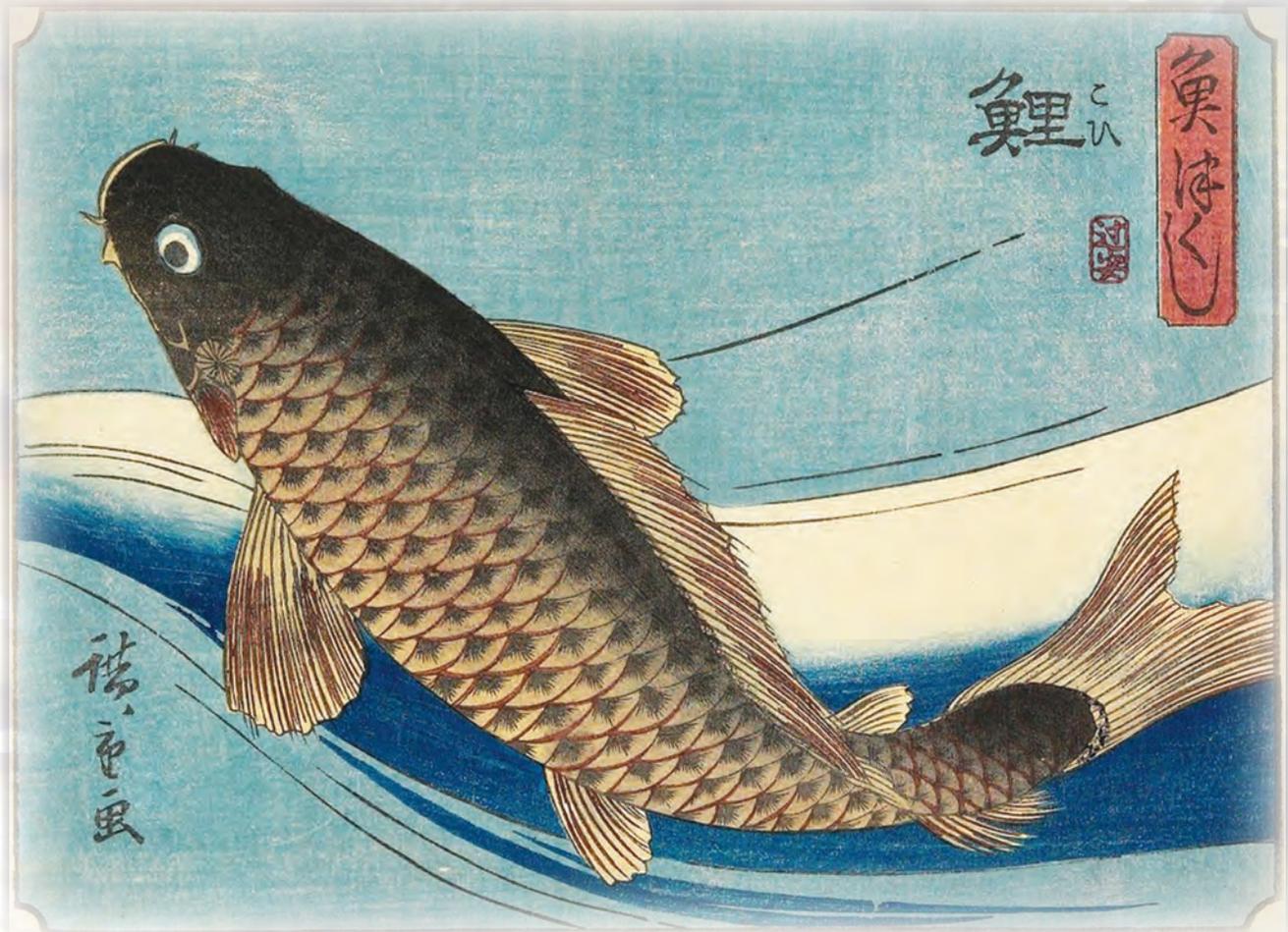


POETRY OF CARP



Utagawa Hiroshige

Last January we invited readers to write poems about carp for our first ever poetry contest, and the response was good, especially as the deadline neared. These are the first poems that have ever appeared in *Big River*. The entries celebrated fishing for carp, the beauty of carp, smoking carp, carp lips, carp character and eating carp. We hope you enjoy them.

We enjoyed all the entries, and want to thank everybody who submitted them. We also thank our distinguished judges, Ken McCullough and Emilio DeGrazia, the current and previous (in that order) poets laureate of Winona, Minn. Ken and Emilio are also *Big River* subscribers.

Perhaps we will have another poetry contest next winter, maybe on the subject of carp or maybe something else — say duckweed, wingdams or muskrats. What do you think? Let us know via postcard, email or Facebook, and we'll talk it over.

HAIKU

FIRST PLACE

Six HAIKU

this Carpstock Lode yields
rich veins, silver scales top a
full minnow bucket.

this old carp edges
water with a golden string —
an April sunrise

April Fools' — and still
the golden carp bubbles me,
water writer — Day

craggy ice chunks melt —
a cold, fighting carp nibbles
on a frozen worm

bamboo pole arches
like single golden bridge beam —
a hungry carp strikes

invisible line,
half white-red bobber plunge on
bite of a spring carp

Dick Stahl
Davenport, Iowa

SECOND PLACE

The carp's tail flashes first
Hatched scales of copper skin
Gleam in summer's sun

Gerhardt Brecht
LeClaire, Iowa

THIRD PLACE

Carp in strip-mined pond
swim round with flashes of gold.
Land renewed, alive.

Gayle Rein
Geneseo, Ill.

LIMERICKS

FIRST PLACE

A quick Google search reveals harp
And five other words rhyme with Carp,
But what prize-seeking plinker
Would go hook, line, and sinker
For a limerick played in C-sharp?

Sister Rafael Tilton
Rochester, Minn.

SECOND PLACE

There once was a man from La Crosse
Who thought he'd teach carp who was boss
As he hauled up his netting
He found himself fretting
That he had no dill for the sauce

Gerhardt Brecht
LeClaire, Iowa

THIRD PLACE

A SAD LIMERICK

There once was a girl from Moline
Whose passion for fishing was keen.
She held her line tight
Waited long for a bite
But a carp left her hook very clean.

Gayle Rein
Geneseo, Ill.





OTHER

FIRST PLACE

I remember the smoking refrigerator
A relic salvaged by my grandpa
And used to smoke carp
The air hung with its savory fragrance
Later at grandma's table
Peeling back scales thick as fingernails
Releasing the pungent odor of fresh baked fish
We'd peel away the slabs from the sticky skin
Laying flaky flesh across saltines
Holding them gently
Then shoving into our salivating mouths
We'd pull bones like dense toothpicks
Laying them gently aside our next bite
Some may malign this great river fish
But every time I taste smoked carp
I taste a smoldering memory
Of home

*Nick Nichols
La Crosse, Wis.*

SECOND PLACE

FANFARE FOR THE COMMON CARP

It's a big, robust fish for big rivers,
for big, fresh water spaces
like the Mississippi River whose spine bends
and holds like the carp's arch toward its dorsal fin.
This world traveler traces its ancestry to the Danube River 2000 years ago —
from Central Asia, China, Europe to America.

This Marco Polo swims the globe
to fame. Gold. silver and bronze
in amazing combinations dazzle its winning features.
Four barbels like whiskers comb for food,
its scale like a mesh of doubloons discovered
rising from the bottom into the sun
like golden treasure.

*Dick Stahl
Davenport, Iowa*

THIRD PLACE

CARPE CARPIO

Six carp lay in the grass, mouths gasping, out of sync.
They stared blankly skyward, without expression or emotion.
Their fight was long gone and their thrashing ended,
Except for the random twitch of a tail.

Two young boys stood over these fish,
Smiles so wide they could have looped over their ears.

Who cares that dad says carp are crap fish, too bony to eat,
Muddying the water and scaring off proper game species,
Getting into places they ought not to be, non-native, invasive.
No way we're just gonna kill 'em and throw 'em into the bushes!

We're gonna eat 'em!

But these carp were here today, doing what carp were wired to do,
Swimming around, making more carp, without expression or emotion,
Waiting for boys to do what they were wired to do.

Neither species meant anything by it.

*Mark Seaholm
Moline, Ill.*

