

Ukai

by Elizabeth Kate Switaj

If it weren't for the different lengths of dock, I would think the river just goes past me. Maybe it does, and the banks move too. Orderly where the clouds are random. I have cormorants, passengers, and salmon. They catch each other. They make my crew money. When did my crew catch me? Captain, my captain, my speech and your oars

flow. Only I am traditionally painted. Sunset tries to match my gold when that painting's fresh, so every couple years I matter to the sky. Then I am chipped and faded. My red is crab and not metallic. If I were the age I'm supposed to imitate, I'd have known the days when crews could make their living with their fishing birds. They wouldn't need this extra human weight.

If I were part of that weight, I would say the past isn't better just because it's the past. I would say that to me, and yet the kind of being I would be made me like the past. At least I love what I represent. The more my paint fades and peels, the less choice I have.

