

Three Poems by Stephen Massimilla

MONKFISH IS

the fish that fishes
with the phosphorous lure
wriggling on the barb

of its ugly big frog-
fish face....

II.

So grave inside
the church-cellar jaw,
daemonion abides

locked like love with-
drawn; and in

that lowest deep,
a lower deep
always threatening

to snap open, next
to which the dark
I suffer seems a light.

III.

In an explosion, it gulps
the delicate smelt,

leaves churned-out
clouds of silt
to winnowed silt.

That's something I forgot
beneath a heaven

of red coals. I devoured you,
quiver of syllable,

sank back
into colorless dust.

What wasn't there still left
a fin-flame...

IV.
To hell with all doubt,
I snapped
at the archiepiscopal

mackerel, the miter-
headed Dagon.

I know why
my Pharisaical
hunger woke:

To chunk the tail, to chomp
on garlicky flesh,

to taste Castilian fire
in oil—its sizzle,
its bite—

is to feed on
this much
love and fear

of life within life
and in life.

HOT BROCCOLINI RHAPSODY

Shadows of a cloud-chaparral
almost rebirthed in the thought
of contact
with thermal floodwater...

But how recalcitrant it was,
that sanatorium for green monkeys:

Erect homunculus musculature
breached by bunched blossoms,

lean thighs in bean-dark pom-pom skirts,

taut stalks dwarfing gratification:

I wouldn't have had them,
not even blanched, buttered,
tendering mineral-rich crowns, not until—
crunch yielding deep fresh wounds—

there was more give
in the sinews and spines,
there was more cream in the boughs.

Cut down, transformed, my love
is still tassel-tangled, steam-wild: the vast dark Brassica forest.

In soup is a soothing
bitter paradox. In the trepidation
and wonder that takes me, I am

in the soup—
my tongue cradling
all its bubbling flavor

for you. And still, my moment of green hunger is never sung,
being now too close

to my sun-heap,
my gush of green lanterns, lit aroma of greenness
rippling from the bowl.

EPHEMERIDAE

I.

There was always the alternate version, coexisting in mind,
the familiar immutable moving past the unpredictable present.

Keep the latches open for that self by the window
to the Borgesian library, open archway full of windy folds . . .

recalling which is almost an art, like rereading a long poem . . .

II.

In a dark garment shot with red threads, you paused breathing
in a carmine circle,
your eyes as if following a wide-turning swan, loitering

like the feather-touch of blood in hurt valves, the curve of your thigh
a late wave in the flushed crease of sundown.

III.

You know
that reaching the precise end of summer—like a lure on a fishing line,
the blur of not-yet-autumn in its wake—
is no more difficult than catching smoke

IV.

with your hands. *Immune to change* is just a turn
of phrase in that ripple of reflected lights: the stone volumes,

the archway of dark arts, the windows, the wet streets
like mirrors running
sky-lights to the port. Still, for that moment, through the frame
in the fall

of the children calling, of running hydrants, the ferries,
of the fleeting, the spectral, the flowing,
in the darkening, like a ruby,
you wanted this thing that endures.