

Poems by Jal Nicholl

Fruiting Body

A mushroom with spokes

Instead of gills as

A way of warning

By skeletal analogy

But called via hypallage

‘The rubberneck’

Switches on the lamp

Under its cap, glowing

In the sleet from the roadside

A Brace of Sad Pierrots

I.

From Picasso's grey period
When he experimented with gelatin silver
They come dressed as gorillas
About to be baited
By the pitbull who shares their parasol

Nothing happens as the stolen year
That year was still far in future

Hanging over the shower rail

The picture of two girls' butterflies

II.

They went into the jungle on their mercy mission, many losing their lives to gorilla wounds and malaria as they sought the sudden cul-de-sac of the great river's source where giant mosquitos eased themselves down like pensioners into a heated pool for their aqua-aerobics class. They dragged the fish on deck and cut each one open to save the human being inside for whom they conjectured the animal might have functioned as a diving apparatus—but found that it was he who was dead every time, the unkillable monster still thrashing around on deck, relieved to be relieved of its burden of humanity

Reminiscent of that cruel device
Of the fanatical commandant
Of an antipodean penal camp
'The fisher of men'
A cat-o-nine-tails with a sinker and hook
At each thong's end

III.

Eyes and the girl you cannot see

The animal that is the girl, its wings

Are *kinda* open

Looked more like a dragonfly their legs'

Expression normal but surprised

He holds a long object, cooler and the fact

That they are in the water

Whose hairline is his costume in its entirety

Pain Threshold

Pain has a maximum threshold that once reached
Converts it into the ultimate enjoyment
Of gnosis, the body neither you nor yours
And she came back from being burned alive
To tell you this because you were next in line
Still a struggling small business had to go
Into hibernation inside the family home
Where it was menaced by a gang who knew
Of the family's distrust of banks. This took place
While your burning procedure was in motion
So that there was nothing you could do to intervene
And anyway you soon forgot what that
Experience had taught you, rejoining
That petit bourgeois family
Who with their arsenal saw off the threat
Or would have done—except that, gun in hand
The eldest son, the heir apparent had
To leap onto one end of the backyard see-saw
So hard that it became a scale of justice
At least from his point of view, flinging
The intruder, who was doing his hardboiled pose
Clear up into the blue of sainthood
So that the household had to double down
The police to besiege them for months on end
Until the time came to flush them out with fire

Haven

Darkness accomplished yet

The view is white inside

Bars of the bed head trellises

Contract and dilate with at once less

And more of dream than there are grains

Of warm unmelting snow attached

To a further more winning head

Galatea

A figure of painted concrete stands
On a pedestal, tipping an urn
Under a weeping birch whose catkins
Divide their colour with the algal blooms

And yonder rises, colossal in marble
Amidst a bird bath more capacious
A bay like a tilted glass
Of yellow, late-harvest wine

The tides are caused by the urn she empties
And refills so the drosophila
Are frequently overwhelmed, some finding
The lip of the world, that drinks them

Bush Block/Guillotine

Girondins en route to their comeuppance

Togaed martyrs with daggers in their pockets

35-year-old grandfathers in extremis

Suckled by their own daughters in law

Figures, constitutions, rental agreements

Sculpted in everything on down

From alabaster to Paris plaster

Demolished then

the lots

Where they stood soon redeveloped

In high-density Styrofoam

And littering the grass like stones

A farmer piles merely into heaps, not cairns

Their severed heads, etc.

Belated Fire Warning

The furnace under the furniture

The tiers of potted plants

A change table for the unbaptised infants

Washed up on the far shore of a house

Where the bathroom fitted with a gantry

For hefting survivors stiff as pylons

Succumbs to a fire known as moisture

We Will Forget

The emptied and closed accounts
Reopen beneath new names
Inflammations masked with an extra
Layer more or less the same colour
That only makes her look ten years older
Dead claws scratching a quotable passage
Through low-density polyethylene
That leaks a mixture of water and diesel
To exemplify species memory