

Jack Ketch in Hell

by James Knight

Lost in the booth of Mr Punch's dreams,
Jack Ketch flinches at the images
flickering across torn curtains.

The chirpy projectionist
sits in his nest,
flinging pictures:

A snake, rising from a discarded pair of clown's trousers.

A monkey, balancing on a watermelon.

A burning sofa.

A boat made of newspaper, translucent with vinegar, sailing on a sea
of soggy chips.

Blackpool Tower, shattering into confetti.

A spiral staircase that is a shell, revolving in the salty breeze,
turning into an ear.

An eyeball, floating in a toilet bowl.

A glove puppet and a love puppet, waltzing in space.

Flowers in a trance.

Two black chess pieces: a knight and a king with feathers, in place
of a crown.

A tiny man, drowning in a bottle of tomato ketchup.

An upside-down bowler hat, full of custard.

A beach ball, bouncing in slow motion through a hall of mirrors.

A puppeteer, hiding in a bin.

A small child, cheeks pink with joy, holding an ice cream made of
seagulls.

A dirty puddle, in which someone has dropped a slim paperback
called *Mrs Punch Screams*.

A man with a knife for a nose.

A chainsaw-winged angel, slashing his way out of a cocoon.

A round mirror, mimicking the moon. A face like a cloud crosses its
surface.

The forest in which stories are born. Bloody and raw, they bawl

beneath the eyes of shadow birds.
The Umbrella Men, sacking the City of Rain.
Judy's moody brood, sulking in the shadow of a bouncy castle. But
there's one ninny enjoying himself, bouncing, ferociously alone:
Punch.
A palace made of crumpled lager cans, on the wet waste of a beach.
A blancmange, thrown at a face.
Roll up, roll up! Come and see the Tyburn Gardener get his just
desserts. Roll up, roll up!
The mirror frame above the chest of drawers
is a yellow loop
around Ketch's head.
The Tyburn tree,
the stinking crowd,
a rotten egg sun.

