

Paul Hetherington

Their gestures

Imagine the roof gone and see the labyrinthine arena that our rooms have become. We've visited them so often they stick to the heart like old gum to a dresser's underside; we've opened their doors in every mood and find them obdurate with feeling; we've loaded their shelves with books and hear them whispering all day and night. They inhabit us with the confidence of children in a cubby house; their gestures of light and dark become ours; the piquant memories they contain are our ragged edges of thought. We close curtains and they move in on us. We clean them out and they reproach us with our own loss. If only we knew where we lived. The view in the garden is not the same as it was. The windows of the house are as open-eyed as wary soldiers. They see what we do not.

Again

Once again, too-much-rehearsed words balloon in the hearing, carrying unexpected cargo. Winter winds bang our shutters and we don't belong in the day. The room is a width of conversation from long ago, resonating like a squally violin—time has stretched the strings. You stand up to see the church's familiar lights, and people filing in. It's time for Mass. Why does the past behave like this, like a preacher of the apocrypha? Why does organ music sound like early snow?

Typewriter

We're not the sum of what we possessed, yet sometimes the shed's ancient typewriter looks eloquent. The clattered-out voice of its love letters has long since flown into mawkish distance, but we remember their cadences, as if early gaucheness adheres like an impress. Time has whited out most of it, but I see that girl standing in a hallway offering me the rest of her life. I guess she meant marriage, my letter like a severed wing. We cried, and agreed we'd have to change things. It's there in the way the carriage returns, as new utterances obscure what's already been said, every one of our phrases reinscribing our palimpsests.

Paul Hetherington is Professor of Writing in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra, and Head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) there. He has always been interested in connections between play and poetry and has published eleven full-length poetry collections, including *Burnt Umber* (UWAP 2016) and five poetry chapbooks, most recently *Earth*. His collection *Six Different Windows* won the 2014 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards (poetry), and he was a finalist in the 2014 international *Aesthetica* Creative Writing Competition. He was shortlisted for the 2013 Montreal International Poetry Prize, commended in the 2016 Newcastle Poetry Prize and shortlisted for the international 2016 Periplum Book Competition (UK). He recently completed an Australia Council for the Arts Residency in the BR Whiting Studio in Rome. He is one of the founding editors of the international online journal *Axon: Creative Explorations*.