

Jar and Light

Paul Hetherington

The room's a jar
where we breathe
lidded months,
fractious, gasping.

In squeezing memory
streets and buildings
we used to inhabit
are hallucinations—
flowers vining
our prickling play,
and chants at festivals
washing on skin
as clammy humidity.

We can't live within
insistent probings
of 'name' and 'identity'
as our bodies discard
their closest places,
and though language would stand
apart from paperwork
the airless words
won't translate,
curling and shrinking.
Behind reinforced glass
our futures are written
in Times New Roman.

We're haunted by shreds
of implosive memory,
soldiers running
through sleeping villages—
shouts, arrests,
strafing bullets.
Trekking for days
on a valley floor

below a grey snowline,
we carried hope
like a clot in the gut.

We've counted days
by scoring brickwork—
and still we're counting.
Time hangs like a shirt
on razor wire.

At last, a meander
of roads and dry wind
where our children's names
catch at branches.
Our language crowds
doubtful mouths
as some of us scuff
the turning dust
with hesitant steps.
Intimate speech
broaches new accents.