

# Paul Hetherington

## SHOP OF MASKS

The shop of masks was small; a counter  
jutting past the dressing room  
closely hung with painted faces,

long ribbons, thin elastic, scarves.  
You'd said the coming carnival  
warranted some preparation.

As I tried on plastic masks,  
each grimacing and frivolous,  
all my close anxieties

dissolved into a heady freedom.  
Meanwhile you uneasily  
fingered ears, synthetic hair,

until the owner dragged a box  
from underneath the counter. "These  
masks are more traditional."

The faces of the carnival,  
ancient and ambiguous,  
expressed our own uncertainties,

but, affecting carelessness,  
I chose a face of recklessness  
and pirouetted once, then twice.