2017 ‘Why Humanities?’ Finalist

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Why Humanities

2017

is caught by
mechanical bars
The future is guarded by computers
But still, each day, each year, I climb,
reaching for my degree,
hoisting myself over endless essays, evidence
of a past preserved within pale pages
But the “true mystery” isn’t mine to discover
apparently. Eyes creep over me like they’re reading lines of jumbled jargon,
meaningless to everyone but me: the subject.
I am their thesis.
Through foggy spectacles, they squint at me,
a creature enamoured with the words of Shelley
but unworthy of being a Victor Frankenstein,
and ask—no—ponder,
“Why the humanities?
The humanities are dead.”

Everyone drinks in the question—corrosive enough to stir even Socrates
If the humanities are dead, then who killed them? And how?
The world’s setting has altered; aid arrives electronically faster than a pen or a sword
But does this make the pen meaningless?
Transcribe the half-broken smile on a grieving mother

 granted a translation of an ancient verse

Psalm 73:26: My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Can healing only mend the body?
Speak over the ninth-grade girl working to reconstruct her mind and body
through psychiatrists and spoken word, remolding the perceptions of an audience forced to listen, to see.
How can a body be healed by the dead?

When the last chapter closes, should we burn the book?
Have we finally oppresed its purpose?
You don’t need to ask the historian who shouts at us all, spitting stars, points to moth-ridden textbooks
Don’t let the dust cloud your eyes—remember!
Reminding us of a past that we vow never to repeat but always do.

So, if the humanities are dead, then how do its subjects breathe life and soul into those who inhale its dust?

Marisa Bordonaro, Finalist, 2017
Writers, linguists, theologians, philosophers, musicians, historians…
the witnesses of human nature
before their books are burned not through fire, but derisive words—
the only fitting method for writers

Investigating claims
of literature and human beings
takes a new set of lenses
to look at a valley of ashes with a new perspective
The humanities only enliven the investigation, so surely
they can find their own killer

But there is no body found dead
Just a mass of new investigators
working with sciences, maths, technologies
to break outside their cages
and grab each other’s hands
through countries, centuries, and disconnection
You ask, why the humanities?
They save our future.