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2017

2017 'Why Humanities?' Finalist

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Why Humanities? Contest

Finalist 2017

Why Humanities

Marisa Bordonaro

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 oppressed 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?

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.