The Deconstructionist’s Misery

this is a poem

it is a poem about poetry’s place among the arts

there are only seven fundamental arts

are you ready for this?

pictures

sculptures

music

cooking

dance

acting

and

words

we may remake this list as follows:

two dimensional visual art

three-dimensional visual/tactile art

sonic art

delicious art

movement art

portrayal art

and

linguistic art

all the other arts

from opera to film to tying wombats to flagpoles

are only variations on these

perhaps the most important of the hybrids

is theatre and its many avatars

we do not dishonour it with the name hybrid

all of these fundamental forms

come in many flavours

pictures are as varied as the artists who make them

we all have our own dances

we hum our own songs

we make our own flavours

words are no different

story

dialogue

essay

these are the favoured children of the art form

and here i am, a poet

wearing the shabby shoes

poetry has fallen on hard times

it is the unloved poor relation

in the family of the arts

musicians brag about music

cooks brag about cooking

visual artists brag about visual art

dancers brag about dancing

who brags about poetry?

the art of words is as ancient as language

at one time, poetry and storytelling

were best friends

those who could read and write

keep the histories and account the days of life

were elevated above their peers

stood at the right hand of power

were the stars of the communal house

i would say

we’ve lost it.

why should this be so?

poetry, after all, is the fundamental form

of this fundamental form

stories must be poetic to be interesting

plays must use poetry to be compelling

an essay must use an elevated rhetorical style

poetry is in all of these

yet poetry is shunned

we must ask

why should this be so?

the answer

lies less with the poet

than with the audience

in the days of Christendom, long that they were

the poetry of the pulpit was prime

the church knew how

to put on a big show

candles and gold

the body and the blood

the sermon and the scripture

it is no accident

that the bible is written in verse

in Shakespeare’s day

the poem was still beloved of the masses and kings

but began to wane nonetheless

simple recitation

had come to pale in comparison

to the hybrids: song and theatre

those minstrels, they knew how

to put on a big show

and the big show

was full of meaning

in our day, words envelope us

tv, film, newspaper

there are more words than ever

but there is less poetry than ever

poets do not know how

to put on a big show

and the big shows have moved on

we care more about the bigness

than the meaning

the vacuous has triumphed at last

and that, my friends

is the reason for the plight of the poet

for the art of the wordsmith

is the art of meaning

and without meaning

poetry has come to mean nothing

and nobody can care about nothing

poets, in their desperation

speak only to poets

and the poets, in their desperation to be heard

are not listening to each other

you, the audience

are as full of the art of words

as humans are, in our world

you love the word, elevate the word

but you do not spread the word —

the gospel of the word

the word of the gospel

i therefore command

that the poet remember

that the art of words is meaning

and that we learn

to put on a big show

thus will we rehabilitate our art

raise the art of words

from the pit of disdain

i hereby announce

the dawn of a new hybrid

the poetry of the big show

i will blow something up

and write my words

on the ball of flames

i will dive from a roof

and write my words

on my pathway through the air

i will remind you of all you have forgotten

for even now

there are no masters of the word

and the poet

is the highest of its slaves