

The Hamilton/Brantford Rail Trail

Niko Haloulos

at times the smoothly
paved pathway and delicate
line of trees feels momentarily
beautiful until a sharp turn
reveals a department store and
main st. w and honking horns
and screeching car tires
and factory smells and factory fog
and uncomfortable amounts of people
marching there and back
shuffling in and around
the space that was supposed to be
calm.

past the smell of candy
lies a stop sign
and a crosswalk
each one more dangerous than the last
placed awkwardly in a blind spot
look both ways before crossing
and go to the next
and the next
and the next
holding your breath
while vehicles with impatient drivers
whisk the sludge and dirt from the ground
onto your jacket.

the trail opens
and lines of trees
thinning in the cold
reveal backyards
and backyards
and backyards
the space of nature
folding out to show
the likes of the city.

further down the snow
piles past my shins
its yellow stain at parts
looks too controlled to
have been done by an animal.

the sun creeps through the fog
masking the dead trees
a slight look to the sides
and between the branches lies
a gym and a hair salon
a message from outer space
to cover up the cityscape
and walk along alone.

further up the hill lies the bridge
the bridge overlooking west hamilton
and the apartments that stand thin
a distance that now feels real
a busyness anesthetized
a calm on happy juices
meeting you at the peak.

a sign welcomes you to the bridge
and the bridge stands tall
and I can finally see the sun
its shadow beaming pink and yellow
a feeling inside waiting to be released
onto the rail trail
and trees deceased.

I follow in the footsteps of
others walking down the trail
their footprints in the snow
the same size as mine
and yet I feel the need
to step to the right
and trudge my own way
off into the distance
and out of sight.

atop the hill
the trees curl inward
protecting me from the lights
and the horns
and the smells
and the sights
of an urban centre fleeting
towards its greatest life.

and yet
something inside me says
turn around

go back home:
go back to the trails that you know.