

Returning To Dalhousie Medical School From Southern New Brunswick by Shane Neilson

A stretch of road is return:
men on machines that cut down dead, golden things. I head home to sick-wards
but the machined men don't know disease, only to reap what's sown: long rows
of folded gold left to dry in the sun. The evening come, just a faint glow left to burn
the hay from its water. Farmers gather gold to feed a field of winter steeds.
The return is also hay, a return of cut stalks and a return of burnt oil,
the return of hurry: men in cabined tractors look back at families in farmhouses,
the fantasia of inside.

I return to an ill city of wards to auscult the hearts of men, women, and children.
If I stop the car to explain to the fields that I've never known a good yield,
having fled their sharp gold for Halifax's skyline of loss and piers of women,
Halifax a skyscraped warehouse of loneliness, I would stop for nothing. I stop anyway.
I shuffle into fresh-cut hay and grab a handful of the brittle stuff, but walk away
with foolishness no woman or sick man would understand.

A piece of me or a piece of what country? Exchange done, I drive further down the road,
past further fields with old tractors longitudinal on lines of hillsides, the first hay bales
like odd, unassuming stones dropped from a receding glacier. The men outlast the glacier
or are taken up by it to be tossed aside in a different field, a different wife, the same life.
The tractor-diesel is thick enough to make men sick if they inhale the fumes,
their lungs made stiff, black, breathing a sound intended to be heard by me. Gold shimmers
behind the smoke-haze. The whole earth decides to alchemize its gold today.
Return, coins are mowed to the earth, then twined, return. The coins seed the fields, return.
The coins seed the lungs, return. If it rains tonight, the hay will rot, the stiff gold softening into gray,
the return of the body, the whence of the dust, the rows of gold in the pristine field.

The McKay Bridge is a straight shot into city. Return to the washed-silver floors
and elevators and four-to-a-room, the men tucked in their beds for medicated nights.
Return to girls as if on a carousel, their dresses descending on the flanks of painted horses.
The bouquet of straw knows only the field, foolishness women and sick men can't understand;
the ice casts out a boy with shoots of wet hay, a whole life to know how to prepare for work,
machines, and women, a strange process taking up a life and setting it down, distant, and elsewhere;
a habit of ice taking up men and reseeding them in a different nation,
where they don't know they belong.