

Summer storm and leaf litter

Rachael Mead

sometimes air feels most
like itself just before rain.
 clouds surrender to gravity
 and when rain writes itself
 in grey italics, even the stones
 read. leaf mould promises sweet rot
 and mushrooms, deep in these
 green shadows where I hide
 from the plasma flash and rumble.
nothing changes quicker than light.
all movement is now water
and down, the insects and birds
quiet. I don't know these trees
 or who their ancestors were
 but we are all standing together
 in the rain and I'm tracing us
 back through the aeons to a place
 before we drifted apart, to the life
 from whom we are all descended
the bacterium, the monocotyledon,
the cosmic dust the world spins out
into all its making and unmaking –
 back, back to when all possible life
 was dissolved into one.

End-stage pastoral

Rachael Mead

Water and time change everything. Like all complicated stories,
this has both running through it. Above and underground.
Deposition and erosion. Traditions and modernity.
Migration. The picturesque and the pragmatic.
The Bergamini still lead their herds to the high pastures.
On foot or by truck. Or they don't. The fields are still auctioned
for the summer, the land parcelled by the cows it can feed.
Cheese is made. Or it's not. It's eaten in the valley. And shipped
beyond the equator. The line and the circle. One can be bent
into the other. The cows keep the forests at bay
but isn't everything marching up the mountain?
Dry-stone walls crumble. The doors to the *baite* rot.
Motorbikes zip summer milk down to the creamery.
Shutters stay closed. *Vendesì* signs bloom like geraniums.
The church-bells sound the hours. Rain falls. There is grass.
Milk. Butter and cheese. UNESCO and DOP. Heartbreak
and indifference. Beautiful weeds. Arduous customs.
Species loss. Fragmentation. Hay and pasture.
Curds and whey. Glaciers retreat. Forests follow.
Money moves to the city. People follow. Stones tumble
into pebbles. Days tumble into years. The line
can't quite touch its toes. Water and time change everything.
Like every complicated story, this has both running through it.
The Salzana flows into the Enna. The Salzana flows into the Enna.

Rachael Mead is a South Australian writer and graduate of the University of Adelaide's English and Creative Writing department. Her most recent poetry collection is *The Flaw in the Pattern* (UWA Publishing 2018) and her debut novel *The Application of Pressure* was published by Affirm Press in 2020.