

UPLAND CASTRUM

Seen in shade from far away, it's a hand-print inked
on the hillside, fingers splayed to crenellate the sky;
up close, its walls are the crumbling paradigms
of a fossilised tongue, stones consoled by lichen,
a skelter of nettles, wild orchids spilling pearls.

Now, crows mimic the cries of merchants once
grown fat on trade with China, ladies' soft gossip
is the wing-swoop of kites, the flittering of bats
in the spidery damp where urchins used to play.

Someone, a traveller offered lodging, or a transient
squatter perhaps, has nailed to the castle gate a clock
that's lost its hands, and below it, Swiss-knifed
in the oak is an arrowed heart encircling

*Franco ama Maria
per sempre*

By Susi Clare