

ACANTHUS

Also by Claire Potter

In Front of a Comma

N'ombre

Swallow

CLAIRE POTTER

ACANTHUS

NEW POEMS



First published 2022
from the Writing and Society Research Centre
at Western Sydney University
by the Giramondo Publishing Company
PO Box 752
Artarmon NSW 1570 Australia
www.giramondopublishing.com

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Cover and design by Jenny Grigg
Typeset by Andrew Davies
in 9/15 pt Tiempos Regular

Printed and bound by Ligare Book Printers
Distributed in Australia by NewSouth Books

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia.

ISBN: 978-1-925818-95-6

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The Giramondo Publishing Company acknowledges the support
of Western Sydney University in the implementation of its book
publishing program.

This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government
through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



For Rufus

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After the burial of a young girl in Corinth, a bereaved nurse gathered a few precious items and took them to the girl's grave. She left the offering in a basket and covered it with a roof tile. Unknowingly, the basket covered the roots of an Acanthus plant that had died back in winter and gone underground

The following spring, the Acanthus, pressed down by the weight of the basket, spread creepers under the basket and grew tendrils of flowers and leaves up the sides. At the level of the roof tile, the plant's stalks, as Vitruvius explained, *turned outwards; when they met the obstacle of the corners, first they began to curl over at the ends and finally they were induced to create coils at the edges*. Passing this votive basket entwined in foliage, Callimachus decided to carve it in stone

In *La Vérité en peinture*, Derrida writes that *everything will flower at the edge of a desolate tomb*. It is on the overlapping edges of these two accounts that this writing might be said to begin

CP

Of Birds' Feet

I ~

As if the pattern
winding across the frost appearing
disappearing three-pronged weightlessness small
mathematical signs pointing
like bird-arrows to almost nothing discernable at all
We circle re-circle
fields that in summer gleamed
with buttercups utopias of translucent grass
But for now the opposite
stubble and heather a vast hibernation layered
underfoot
The dog's in a mood (myself
as well and so we tread
undergrowth to sole
empty loose the breath of forest between us

Acorns and twigs serif the sky with the poise of cutlery
leaves shimmer the colours of hail
Winter sun languidly assiduously makes its way half
way across the hill
All else is birdcall and mudfall nothing
to recall a souvenir or a beginning of place——what is it
to begin an evolution a vision in the trees?
The wind and the rocks

have the ears Milton gave them
the multitudes and reservoirs of things silent and odd
different hemispheres atmospheres
yesteryears as well each evaporating
and resetting thereabouts
therefore to rest

II ~

Last year's blackberry vines tangle willfully open-
handedly paths—whispering trees—gesturing
—————what goes underfoot stays...
recursive unconscious
the dog's in a stream she barks
a way over and invisible I
follow for more yellow wood-
pecker more dusky kestrel more shadow
upon shadow upon shadow of crow
something alive as in a starling here
there beak to ground claw to earth black leaves
reminds me
of Easter our tiny hands scratching
the middle bread at Grandma's for the Wagyl and the black swans
living at Lake Monger
Grandpa driving us every weekend
his sun-spotted
knuckles stretched over the wheel He was

a man sometimes in clay a man always smoking
 head in hands sinewy elongated
 _____still life on the table tugged
 by my grandmother's field of observation
 her whetstone thumb drawing bodies from terracotta
 I could reach him only
 by pulling myself up to the Edwardian table
 scratching walnut and beeswax peering
 into a garden completely different
 to the glade I'm treading now
 to the selves I'm walking now
 _____unmade unburied
 soft English greens
 I read the birds' algebra the equations rusked in snow
 the pattern of feet no less bird than
 a line of black swans
 migrating south in arrows...