

I, CLODIA,
AND OTHER PORTRAITS
ANNA JACKSON



As always, Jackson's riveting triumvirate of story, character and language beats as one crucial poetic heart. With her pitch-perfect mix of classical high-drama and a glorious, loping, feminist street-cred, *I, Clodia* delivers literary history like never before. – Anne Kennedy

In this fine-grained new collection by Anna Jackson, Clodia Metelli speaks and a photographer lifts her camera . . .

In giving Clodia – the ‘Lesbia’ of Catullus’s famous love poetry – her own first-person narration, Anna Jackson upends and reinvigorates the beloved classical sequence with biting wit and tender attention. Who was Clodia and what did she think about the affair, the gossip, the scandal, the poems? Jackson honours and subverts her source material in lines that are a marvel of ventriloquism.

In the second section of the book, a photographer reads, writes, gives presents and considers the art of portraiture. Jackson takes us within and without a range of characters and subjects in characteristically witty style – sometimes mock breathless, sometimes dryly pointed, and always clever, stylish and emotionally engaging. If a photograph is a ‘secret about a secret’, as Diane Arbus put it, these poems are also secrets – about lives; about portraiture; about those who have the power to record and betray.

Anna Jackson’s ‘I, Clodia’ poems are fine and dramatic and fresh and original and clever and moving – especially moving as the sequence goes on. Such a great idea, so thoroughly carried through. – C. K. Stead

I am strongly moved by this sequence. I love the subtle touches – for those who know the personaggi Catulliani there are charming in-jokes . . . – Marilyn Skinner,
The University of Arizona



ANNA JACKSON has published five poetry collections with Auckland University Press, most recently *Thicket* (2011), shortlisted for the New Zealand Post Book Awards. She has a DPhil from Oxford, where she has also lectured, and now teaches English Literature at Victoria University of Wellington. Jackson is the author of *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries 1915–1962* (2010) and, with Charles Ferrall, *British Juvenile Fiction 1850–1950: The Age of Adolescence* (2009).

PART I, CLODIA

PART II THE PRETTY PHOTOGRAPHER

- The pretty photographer
- The photographer reads *The Mysteries of Udolpho*
- The photographer's hallway
- The photographer in the library
- The photographer's Olympics
- Amanda in the mirror
- Saoirse at the fridge
- Diane, unexploded
- The politician's wife
- The girl in the emerald dress
- Sabina and the chain of friendship
- Emily, too early
- Timothy, after the conference
- Roland on the outskirts
- Evelyn, after tennis-playing
- Cambio's wife
- Jane Eyre
- Emma in the emergency room
- Ishmael in the bedroom
- The father, late at night
- The proof-reader after hours
- Sylvia in the supermarket
- Disghosting
- Afraid of falls?
- The pretty photographer's Christmas Eve

- Historical note
- Acknowledgements

A thousand kisses, then a hundred

Out of all the affairs I've had
ours has got to have been
the most efficient!
Over almost before it has begun,
from the cautious brushing of your hand on mine
to the violent taking and retaking of each other,
the evading, the reclaiming,
the nostalgia for the good times we used to have
earlier in the same day . . .
Already there are no more kisses
requiring kissing,
no endearments left
you haven't already said.
Let Cicero regret the days of epic sincerity,
let me be loved by one of the new poets:
a quick couplet, a startling rhythm,
and no decline into grandeur . . .

This business of kissing

This is a serious business, this new method
you are trialling to protect my reputation –
don't let me, with my flighty ways,
make you break off from your kissations!
I'm not sure you've quite reached a total yet
uncountable enough to put us
out of reach of gossip,
though enough that it would be embarrassing
if the number did get out.
Don't even think about that business
in Bithynia, there's work
to be done right here in our kissiary . . .
only, how many will it be till you're done?

Pipiabat

[used to chirp . . .]

Look at me, my tear-stained face,
my red eyes – is this what you came for?
It's not what you think.
So there are verses about me
circulating about the city – how could you
possibly imagine I, Clodia, would care?
I might cry over your verses –
tears of laughter –
but these are real tears,
I'm grieving.
Look at what was my little bird,
yesterday – this was
somebody, closer to me than . . .
you had better be leaving.

The pretty photographer

The pretty photographer smells of vervain.
She washes her pink knit top in vervain soap
and dries it laid out on a small white towel
on the white painted wooden floorboards
in front of the double doors
that lead to a tiny balcony
where no one ever goes.
Once, her brother stood out there
and when he leaned over the iron railings
she saw them begin to bend
and she said nothing,
and when he came back inside
still smoking his cigarette she said
nothing about the rust stain striped across
his oatmeal-coloured V-neck jersey.

This is where the photographer is now:
outside the zoo, taking photographs
of people's bags, and what
they are carrying in their hands.

The photographer says nothing
in interviews or artist statements
about the people's bags, their hands,
the things they carry.
She talks instead about the importance
of shadows to the composition,
and the problem of the colour
of the shadow often clashing
with the colour of the object in the sun –
a third colour must be found
to act, she says, as a go-between.
And then she laughs, a curl of hair
slipping down across her face.

The photographer's hallway

The photographer likes to keep
her apartment uncluttered
so hangs every picture she ever buys
in the hallway and hosting a party
finds she can only relax
when her last guest has left
the apartment empty again. Standing
in the hall with her last guest
she finds she actually *wants*
to talk – ‘we might call
the hallway a hail-way’ – detaining
her guest by using the pictures
as ‘conversation pieces’.
She keeps her there
for half an hour and still
it seems her guest leaves in
a hurry deterred perhaps by her
come-hither eyes, though once home
the guest dreams not of her come-hither
eyes but the ‘with’ withheld
a hallway out of reach,
the recurring melting
of a chronic glacier.
Meanwhile the photographer remains
awake, unable to sleep not only
while there are dishes to wash
and put away, cushions to return
to their places, but while
there are still pictures
in the hallway – suddenly
she finds the hall too much
of a *receptacle*, determines
to stack everything
that was on display away
in rows on the floor
of her cavernous wardrobe.

The girl in the emerald dress

She wishes she hadn't said it was her birthday
when it wasn't. Now these friends
of friends are trying to build the evening up
into some kind of party, and she can't
even drink because she said
she was pregnant, which she's not.
Another drink of orange juice is really
not what she needs. A girl
in an emerald-green dress is pregnant too
and thinks they will be friends
but in less than three months
they would have to be *very* good friends indeed
if she were going to tell her everything
or else travel, better travel,
the 'birthday' brooch wrapped
in a scarf until she picks her suitcase up
off the carousel and opening it
to make sure it really is her own
she'll pull out the brooch and pin it
to an emerald-green dress
she will have searched for
and not been able to wear until
she'd left that 'friendship' far behind.

The pretty photographer's Christmas Eve

The pretty photographer has never given a photograph
as a present. One Christmas when she had bought
no presents to give she spent Christmas Eve
wrapping her entire collection
of vintage tea towels, selecting the Eiffel tower
for her mother, songbirds for a friend
she hadn't seen in years and would not have thought
to buy a present for.

Usually she chooses books online.

This year, the year of the portrait disaster, she has
ordered nothing and so at ten at night
on Christmas Eve she writes
a list of names, selects the same number
of photographs, then
matches one of each to the other.

The night is almost over, the sky lightening,
when at last there is one name left on her list,
and one photograph on the table.

The name left on her list is her brother's.

The photograph is a portrait:

Her brother on her balcony, half his face
lit up by the sun.

She sets up a flash, a timer, steps out onto the balcony
and makes a portrait of herself leaning backwards
against the dawn sky, develops
the film, prints the photograph, takes
an etching out of a frame and frames
the self-portrait, wraps it and gives it to her brother
who gives her a book by Paul Auster.

The portrait of her brother
she hangs above the bookcase,
where she used to watch the shadows
drift across the empty space.

AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS



\$24.99

.....
210 x 135 mm, 76pp, paperback

.....
ISBN: 9781869408206

.....
Published: November 2014

