

A classical marble sculpture of a muscular man with a curly beard and hair, holding a sword, surrounded by other figures. The sculpture is the central focus of the image, set against a dark background. The man's expression is one of intense emotion, and his body is highly detailed, showing the texture of his skin and the musculature of his torso. The sword he holds is positioned diagonally across his body. Other figures are visible in the foreground and background, though less distinct, suggesting a larger scene or a group of characters.

BITER

Claudia Jardine

Ancient Greek epigrams drive a bitinglly contemporary first poetry collection.

I fell in love
I kissed
gains made
it all happened
I am desired

but I?
and you?
and how?
one god alone knows

— ‘One God’ from Palatine Anthology V.51 — Anonymous

Filled with hickeys, puttanescas and tart wit, *BITER* is an apt title for Claudia Jardine’s debut collection of verse. Fresh translations of erotic Greek epigrams are threaded through boozy sonnets, ecstatic odes and startlingly vulnerable love poems. Jardine weaves ancient and modern together into a rich, glitzy, idiosyncratic tapestry – and in doing so crafts a poetic voice that is at once classical and frisky.

Claudia Jardine has an MA in classics with distinction from Victoria University of Wellington, where she won the 2020 Alex Scobie Research Prize and a Marsden Grant for Masters scholarship. Her first chapbook, ‘The Temple of Your Girl’, was published in *AUP New Poets 7*. Her ancestors are from the British Isles and the Maltese Archipelago, and she lives in Ōtautahi. There are lots of wonderful things about living in Ōtautahi – for example, have you ever seen the royal spoonbill, or kōtuku ngutupapa, feeding in the estuary at dusk? Marvellous.



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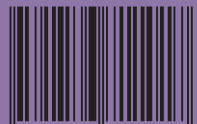
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Cover image: *Laocoön and His Sons*, marble, copy after a Hellenistic original from c. 200 BC. Found in the Baths of Trajan, 1506.
Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen, 2009.

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for Nathaniel

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ille mi par esse deo videtur

Preface

Several of the following poems are translations of epigrams recorded in the *Palatine Anthology*. An epigram is a short, concise poem with a witty turn of thought towards the end. I have translated these poems from Greek to English, and have taken some creative liberties. Readers don't need an education in the classical studies of Ancient Greece or Rome to understand these poems. The *Palatine Anthology*, it is commonly believed, was compiled in the tenth century by the Byzantine schoolmaster Constantinus Cephalas. Cephalas's compilation was likely based on even older anthologies. The epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology* are attributed to authors who lived and wrote between the seventh century BCE and the seventh century CE. The Greek language is one of the few things these authors had in common with one another.

Ode to Mons Pubis

fatty tissue, edifice of overtures
joints, ligaments, bones, cartilage
dark turns to stars when I think about
the buttress of pubic symphysis
yes! paths of faery lights, yes! brambly wads
yes! tracks of calligraphic gastropods
yes! tender grasses, yes! boxed beds
clippings from a crooner's greenhouse
topiary of the descent
one sight of the treeline and brain tells blood to bouse
erogenous zone! bumper bar!
tendons, abdominals, I know what you are!
hair-covered fat pad, fine hill for roly-polies
the best views, as we know, should be taken in slowly
but not too slowly! Byron did say that
'high mountains are a feeling,'
and this mountain, though not high, feels like
a chalet, a chassis and a beacon
oh shady stoa! sloping lawn!
diving board of channel crossings!
the panache and talent of your form
absorbs all of my worries
your body, my body, round and around
the belt of Adonis ♥ the Venusian mound
and all my moth-heart dashboard ablaze –
interrupt my Byron – ready the belays!

I fell in love
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it all happened
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— 'One God' from *Palatine Anthology* V.51 — Anonymous

An erotic and arresting first collection of poetry by
Claudia Jardine.

'*BITER* powerfully strips back the experience of being human across millennia, revealing sharp teeth, still-beating hearts and iron cervices alike. Here the veins of the Tiber flow right through to the Ōtākaro, and Byzantine scholars burn with the same passions as the modern woman – even when she finds herself in the back of a charging Nissan Leaf. Jardine weaves all the tones and textures of life together into a collection that shines with erudition while firmly asserting that to err is human, especially in the kitchen.'

— Rebecca K Reilly

'She's sharp, critical, iconoclastic, sexy, frank and funny – often all of these in one poem. And while love and sexuality are the dominant themes, there is nothing it seems that Claudia can't write poetry about.'

— Anna Jackson



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