

'Heartfelt, deeply thoughtful, blazing with truth-filled rage'

PEGGY FREW

'Deep, honest, beautiful'

JULIA ZEMIRO

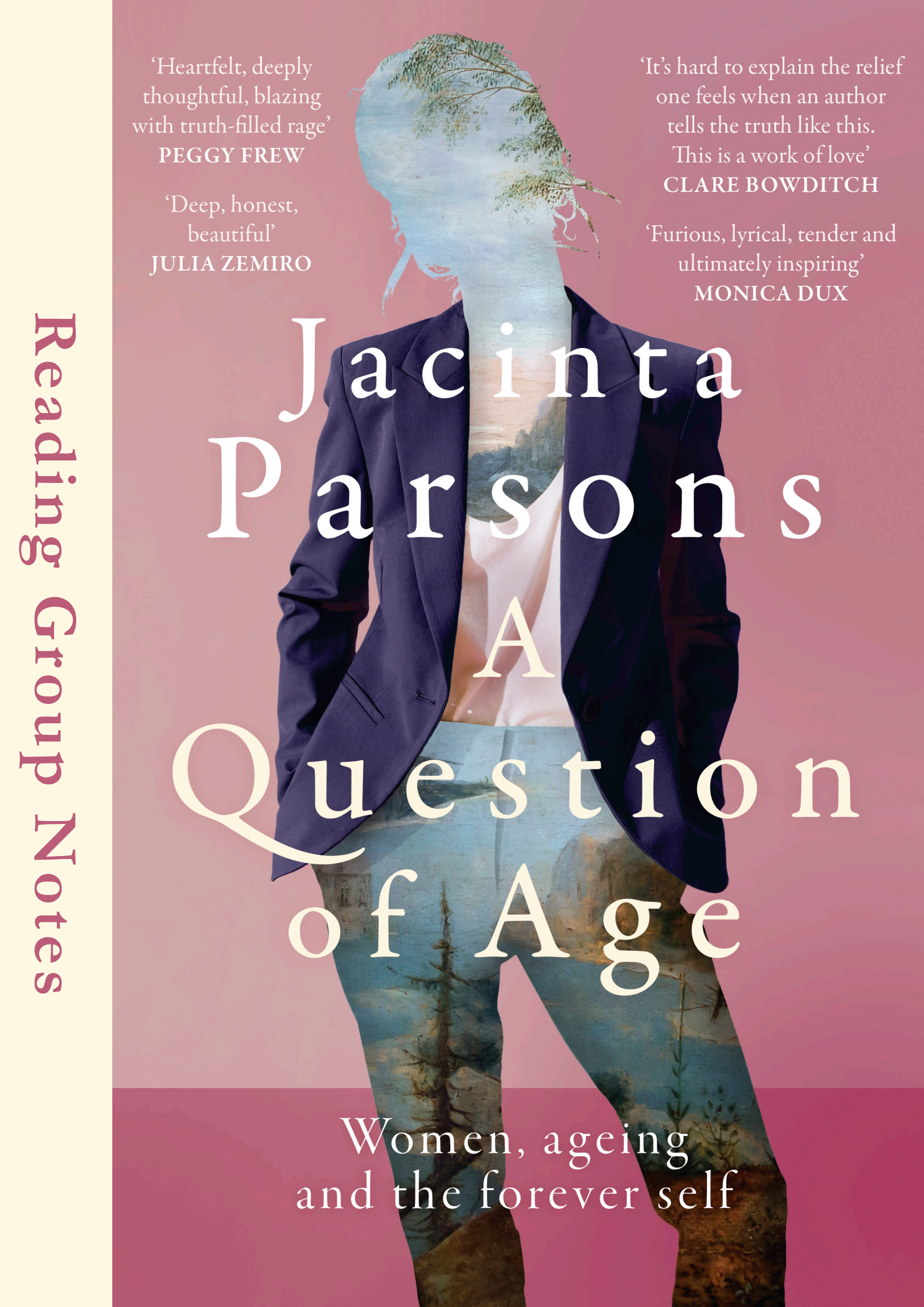
'It's hard to explain the relief one feels when an author tells the truth like this.'

This is a work of love'

CLARE BOWDITCH

'Furious, lyrical, tender and ultimately inspiring'

MONICA DUX



Jacinta
Parsons
A
Question
of Age

Women, ageing
and the forever self

Reading Group Notes

A Question of Age

By Jacinta Parsons

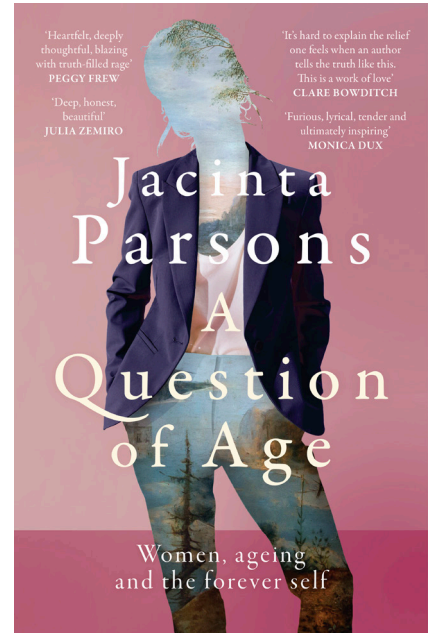
Warning: this is not a self-help book. Or, a helpful book, necessarily. No one really needs 'help' with ageing. It will happen no matter what we do. Neither is it a book to guide you through these stages of ageing. This book will not ask you to love your lines. Or to post on social media that you feel privileged to age. This book is, instead, a howl of rage.

Grappling with ageing is one of the most confronting elements of being a woman. When we become invisible, when we lose our sexual currency, when we lose that elasticity in our skin, when our bodies soften and change, when our perceived 'value' to society dramatically falls, when our notion of self-worth takes a radical shift.

What do we do when our outside self doesn't match our inside self? That old woman staring back at her reflection in the mirror doesn't understand why she feels so young. So how do we adjust our perceptions of getting older? What does it mean to age as a woman? How do we adjust our thinking about being in the world? What is our currency now?

Midlife is a crucial reckoning with despair and hope, a time when you are naked in the centre of the world and no-one notices or perhaps cares to look. Midlife is a time when you take stock – to look back and understand how you were made as a woman, and to look forward into the future, to see how you might unmake yourself to live the life that perhaps you should be living.

A Question of Age is incendiary, raging and raw, but also compassionate, insightful and powerfully energising. It is a book for every woman looking in the mirror thinking she no longer recognises herself. It is a book for our times.



About the Author

Jacinta Parsons is a broadcaster, writer, speaker and author of memoir *Unseen: The secret life of chronic illness*. She currently hosts Afternoons on ABC Melbourne, delivering a popular mix of art, culture and ideas.



On Writing

A Question of Age

The writing of *A Question of Age* began simply enough. The proposition, I thought, was straightforward: how could I age well? I found myself talking a lot about ageing to women who were my age and older. There was one thing we felt that we all agreed on - that we had little idea of what might lie ahead.

I had already noticed that world around me had started to treat me differently, and that my body was changing – that I was changing. I wanted to know what I could learn from people who had done it before me. But when I sat down to write the book that you're now holding in your hands, I found out that to find the best way to age wasn't straightforward at all.

I found out that the ageing woman that I was transforming into could not be easily separated from all the other selves that I had been. Crucially, the little girl I once had been was still part of me. And I began to understand that all the ways I had lived in this world, first as a girl and then as a woman, would impact on the way that I would understand myself as older.

I found out that I would need to reconcile the way that I had been *made* by this society – as if inside a machine that treats women like objects – in order to *unmake* myself so that I could ensure that my older self was someone closer to my truth.

When I started writing this book, and I was beginning to understand just how much I shared with the women in my past and women in my future, I found a rage burning inside me. I had always known it was there, but the more I looked at my ageing self, I wondered why there was so much anger inside me? And why was this anger something I seemed to share with so many of the women I spoke to, who were becoming older like me?

I sat in a small studio during the cold months of 2021, while we were stuck in the middle of a pandemic, and I travelled all the way back to some kind of beginning point to try and understand who I had been made to be.

There were questions that kept cropping up:

- Why are we so resistant to becoming old and looking like old women?
- Why do we keep secrets about the way we have been hurt?
- How had I believed them when they sold me a story of old, useless women? And what would it take for it to feel different for me?
- How can we sit still when there is more inequity for some women than others?
- What can this elemental world, and the women who travelled this earth hundreds of years ago, teach me?

I hope that you also find something of yourself in this. That somewhere in the dirt and the muck and the mess we can know each other somehow. And that together there might be a way in which we can settle on the terms of how this might be different, both for us and for the little girls who roam the world now.

I hope that one day ageing is felt to be the transformation that takes us home in the most joyful way.

Discussion Questions

Why are we so resistant to becoming old and looking like old women?

Virgin, whore, mother, crone – why are these the only archetypes available to women?

What does the ‘male gaze’ mean to you? How has it affected or shaped you? Does it still?

Forget your chronological age, how old do you feel?

What does it mean to be an elder, and not just older?

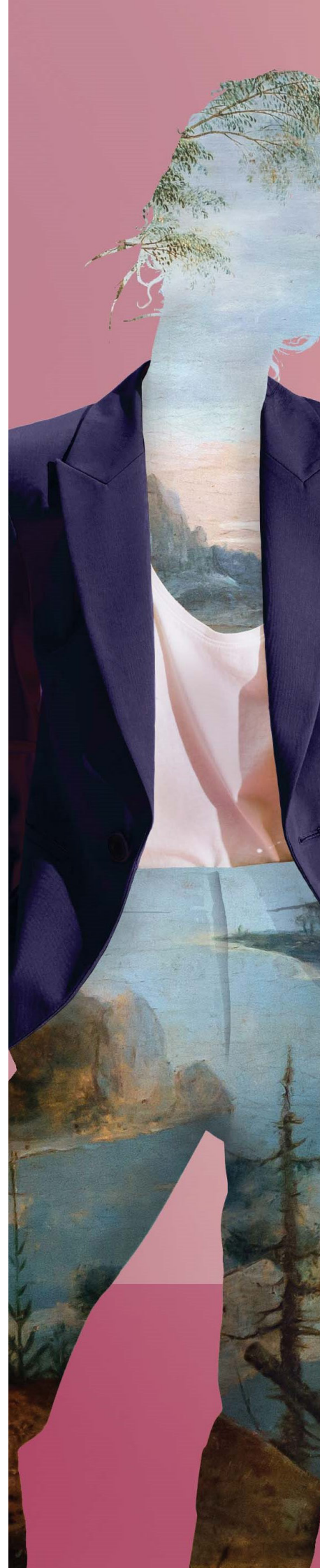
When was the moment you realised other people thought you were ‘not young’ anymore? How did it feel?

What’s been your favourite decade/age? Why?

Who is your elder icon?

Over 40, and full of rage? Discuss.

What have you loved giving up, now you’re older?





Praise for

A Question of Age

‘A rich, first-person exploration of an issue common to us all. Parsons mines her own experiences in what becomes an immersive, often brutal, always honest ‘the only way out is through’ approach to ageing. Readers who enjoyed Annabel Crabb’s *The Wife Drought* should enjoy *A Question of Age* for its depth, research and straight shooting. It is an insightful and thought-provoking read.’

Books+Publishing

‘Heartfelt, deeply thoughtful, blazing with truth-filled rage.’

Peggy Frew, author of *Wildflowers*

‘Deep, honest, beautiful’

Julia Zemiro

‘It’s hard to explain the relief one feels when an author tells the truth like this. This is a work of love.’

Clare Bowditch, author of *Your Own Kind of Girl*

‘At once lyrical and searing, *A Question of Age* is a book of both power and vulnerability. A uniquely honest take on what it is to age in a woman’s body; how age deconstructs us, and how we can also see it as a rebuilding, and a reinvention, it is the perfect antidote to the relentless stream of sexism and ageism that women ultimately contend with. Furious, lyrical, tender and ultimately inspiring, this is a book that should be read by all women, whatever their age.’

Monica Dux, author of *Lapsed*

‘A life affirming and necessary read, Jacinta Parson’s illumination of womankind devours our female silence and complicity. I was equal parts proud and appalled, validated and illuminated - this book gets personal and goes deep into our collective female experience, I could not look away. Confronting, nurturing, heartbreaking and uplifting, all at once.’

Mimi Kwa, author of *House of Kwa*