



Lacuna

Fiona Snyckers

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In Fiona Snyckers's dark and riveting novel *Lacuna*, a young South African woman struggles in the aftermath of a gang rape.

Lucy Lurie's brutal assault is a personal tragedy and the perceived pivotal event of John Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. *Lacuna* challenges *Disgrace*, allowing Lucy to reject her role as Coetzee's tacit muse, the attack upon whom was detached from the novel's plot.

"Fiction-Lucy," as Lucy calls her alter ego, becomes pregnant because of the rapes; she decides to have the baby, believing that her mixed-race child will represent a new South Africa. In *Lacuna*, Lucy gulps down morning-after pills, recalling her pain and her attackers' ejaculatory "grunts of frustration and triumph." The rape is a horrific violation—not a male author's noble literary device. Indeed, *Lacuna* skewers John Coetzee, who's depicted as a peevisish, sexist professor, approaching "academic obscurity" before he's inspired to write his acclaimed *Disgrace*. *Lacuna*'s hypocritical Coetzee later moves to a "white" and "beguiling" city in Australia, far from South Africa's high crime rates.

Though *Lacuna* is weighted with anguish, it also includes twists of mordant humor. Lucy creates a new fashion statement, dressing in excessive, protective layers—"Raped Chic," as she describes it. She imagines herself jetting off to Australia and confronting Coetzee; in reality, she admits that she is near-agoraphobic, can't afford to travel, and would be just as likely to "fly to the moon."

Lucy is an erratic narrator, caught up in her fantasies of recompense. Told that she is lucky to be alive after her attack, and that many poor Black women live under the constant threat of sexual violence, she struggles with survivor's guilt and privilege. Yet with hope, bitterness, and confusion, *Lacuna*'s Lucy speaks into the female void of *Disgrace*, desperate to tell her own story.

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