



by **Dagmar Leupold**
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Fiction

Lavinia

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review

Dagmar Leupold's novel takes us into the mind and soul of a woman on the brink. *Lavinia* is a testament to the power of literature and language in the face of personal and national trauma.

Lavinia is in the slipstream. She is standing on the balcony of her apartment on the twenty-fifth floor of a skyscraper in New York City when her life suddenly begins to rush over her. Here, near the banks of the Hudson River, she is pulled down into her past. The memories rapidly unfurl – of beginnings and endings, of other rivers she has lived near in Germany and Italy, of the men who have loved and abused her, of the words and the stories that have given her life meaning and kept her afloat. As she falls forwards in time and then arrives once again on the balcony above the city, Lavinia takes ownership of her experiences and takes up her pen to reclaim her narrative.

The novel is written as a stream of consciousness and Lavinia's memories are interwoven with diverse references to current events, medieval love poetry, contemporary advertising slogans, Roman mythology, modern history and rock song lyrics. Leupold's masterful use of this style gives the narration a compelling intimacy and momentum. Meanwhile, the entire text is held together by an overarching concern with literature and language, giving Lavinia a way in which to articulate and process her experiences and thoughts. Lavinia ultimately rediscovers herself and reclaims her voice, recognising her resilience in the face of her experiences of love and

loss, joy and violence.

Leupold creates an intriguing narrative flow in which the reader is simultaneously drawn both down into the narrator's psyche and forwards in time. The novel offers an unvarnished insight into one woman's life from loss of childhood innocence to first love, from #metoo moments to powerful reconciliation with her personal and national history. Scenes evolve quickly and witty wordplay ebbs and flows as Leupold moves deftly between different languages, capturing Lavinia's quicksilver mind in action. Dagmar Leupold's high-quality literary fiction is reminiscent of writing by Canadian author Anne Carson. *Lavinia* would appeal to readers of Helen Dewitt's *The Last Samurai* and Lucy Ellmann's *Ducks, Newburyport*.

about the author

Dagmar Leupold was born in 1955 in Niederlahnstein, Rheinland-Pfalz. She studied German, classic philology and philosophy in Marburg, Tübingen and in New York. She lives in Munich, where she works as an author and translator. She has directed the Studio Literatur und Theater at the University of Tübingen since 2004. Her work includes novels, poems and essays.

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Jung und Jung Verlag

Contact: Dr Jochen Jung

office@jungundjung.at

Tel: +43 (0)66 2885048

www.jungundjung.at