



The Complete Fiction: The Bean Trees, Homeland, Animal Dreams, Pigs in Heaven

By Barbara Kingsolver

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Editorial Review

Review

"A novel full of miracles." -- *Newsweek*

Pigs In Heaven

"Kingsolver is a writer of rare ambition and unequivocal talent....*Animal Dreams* is a complex, passionate, bravely challenging book." -- *Chicago Tribune*

Animal Dreams

"Kingsolver is an extraordinary storyteller." -- *Chicago Tribune*

Homeland and Other Stories

"The Bean Tree is the work of a visionary...It leaves you open-mouthed and smiling." -- *Carolyn See, Los Angeles Times*

The Bean Tree

About the Author

Barbara Kingsolver was born on April 8, 1955. She grew up "in the middle of an alfalfa field," in the part of eastern Kentucky that lies between the opulent horse farms and the impoverished coal fields. While her family has deep roots in the region, she never imagined staying there herself. "The options were limited--grow up to be a farmer or a farmer's wife."

Kingsolver has always been a storyteller: "I used to beg my mother to let me tell her a bedtime story." As a child, she wrote stories and essays and, beginning at the age of eight, kept a journal religiously. Still, it never occurred to Kingsolver that she could become a professional writer. Growing up in a rural place, where work centered mainly on survival, writing didn't seem to be a practical career choice. Besides, the writers she read, she once explained, "were mostly old, dead men. It was inconceivable that I might grow up to be one of those myself . . . "

Kingsolver left Kentucky to attend DePauw University in Indiana, where she majored in biology. She also took one creative writing course, and became active in the last anti-Vietnam War protests. After graduating in 1977, Kingsolver lived and worked in widely scattered places. In the early eighties, she pursued graduate studies in biology and ecology at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where she received a Masters of Science degree. She also enrolled in a writing class taught by author Francine Prose, whose work Kingsolver admires.

Kingsolver's fiction is rich with the language and imagery of her native Kentucky. But when she first left home, she says, "I lost my accent . . . [P]eople made terrible fun of me for the way I used to talk, so I gave it up slowly and became something else." During her years in school and two years spent living in Greece and France she supported herself in a variety of jobs: as an archaeologist, copy editor, X-ray technician, housecleaner, biological researcher and translator of medical documents. After graduate school, a position as a science writer for the University of Arizona soon led her into feature writing for journals and newspapers. Her numerous articles have appeared in a variety of publications, including *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, and *Smithsonian*, and many of them are included in the collection, *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from*

Now or Never. In 1986 she won an Arizona Press Club award for outstanding feature writing, and in 1995, after the publication of *High Tide in Tucson*, Kingsolver was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from her alma mater, De Pauw University.

Kingsolver credits her careers in scientific writing and journalism with instilling in her a writer's discipline and broadening her "fictional possibilities." Describing herself as a shy person who would generally prefer to stay at home with her computer, she explains that "journalism forces me to meet and talk with people I would never run across otherwise."

From 1985 through 1987, Kingsolver was a freelance journalist by day, but she was writing fiction by night. Married to a chemist in 1985, she suffered from insomnia after becoming pregnant the following year.

Instead of following her doctor's recommendation to scrub the bathroom tiles with a toothbrush, Kingsolver sat in a closet and began to write *The Bean Trees*, a novel about a young woman who leaves rural Kentucky (accent intact) and finds herself living in urban Tucson.

The Bean Trees, published by HarperCollins in 1988, and reissued in a special ten-year anniversary hardcover edition in 1998, was enthusiastically received by critics. But, perhaps more important to Kingsolver, the novel was read with delight and, even, passion by ordinary readers. "A novel can educate to some extent," she told *Publishers Weekly*. "But first, a novel has to entertain--that's the contract with the reader: you give me ten hours and I'll give you a reason to turn every page. I have a commitment to accessibility. I believe in plot. I want an English professor to understand the symbolism while at the same time I want the people I grew up with--who may not often read anything but the Sears catalogue--to read my books."

For Kingsolver, writing is a form of political activism. When she was in her twenties she discovered Doris Lessing. "I read the *Children of Violence* novels and began to understand how a person could write about the problems of the world in a compelling and beautiful way. And it seemed to me that was the most important thing I could ever do, if I could ever do that."

The Bean Trees was followed by the collection, *Homeland and Other Stories* (1989), the novels *Animal Dreams* (1990), and *Pigs in Heaven* (1993), and the bestselling *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now and Never* (1995). Kingsolver has also published a collection of poetry, *Another America: Otra America* (Seal Press, 1992, 1998), and a nonfiction book, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983* (ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 1989, 1996). Her most recent work is *The Poisonwood Bible*, a story of the wife and four daughters of a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. A tale of one family's tragic undoing and remarkable reconstruction, over the course of three decades in post-colonial Africa, *The Poisonwood Bible* is set against one of history's most dramatic political parables. It is a compelling exploration of religion, conscience, imperialist arrogance and the many paths to redemption and Barbara Kingsolver's most ambitious work ever.

Barbara Kingsolver presently lives outside of Tucson with her husband Steven Hopp, and her two daughters, Camille from a previous marriage, and Lily, who was born in 1996. When not writing or spending time with her family, Barbara gardens, cooks, hikes, and works as an environmental activist and human-rights advocate.

Given that Barbara Kingsolver's work covers the psychic and geographical territories that she knows firsthand, readers often assume that her work is autobiographical. "There are little things that people who know me might recognize in my novels," she acknowledges. "But my work is not about me. I don't ever write about real people. That would be stealing, first of all. And second of all, art is supposed to be better than that. If you want a slice of life, look out the window. An artist has to look out that window, isolate one

or two suggestive things, and embroider them together with poetry and fabrication, to create a revelation. If we can't, as artists, improve on real life, we should put down our pencils and go bake bread."

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