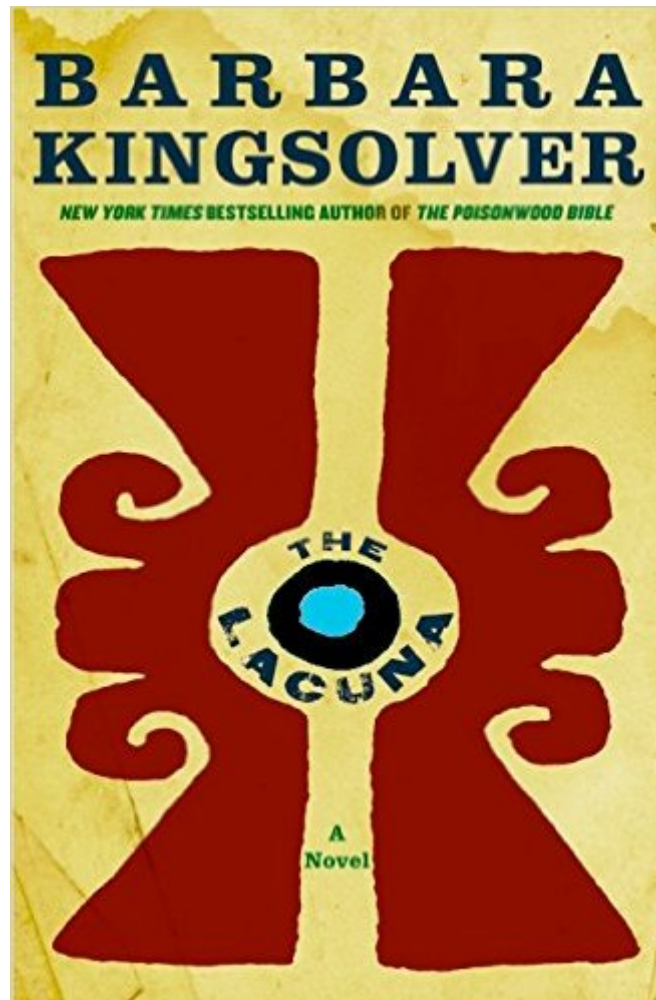


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The Lacuna: A Novel



Synopsis

In *The Lacuna*, her first novel in nine years, Barbara Kingsolver, the acclaimed New York Times bestselling author of *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, tells the story of Harrison William Shepherd, a man caught between two worldsâan unforgettable protagonist whose search for identity will take readers to the heart of the twentieth centuryâs most tumultuous events.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 starsÂÂ See all reviewsÂ (877 customer reviews)

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Plot Summary: In a story told entirely through diary entries and letters, we meet Harrison William Shepherd, a half-Mexican, half-American boy who grows up with his mother in Mexico. He has no education, but his love of reading and writing nurtures his own inner dialog that leads to his success as a writer. But that's getting ahead of the story. First he passes his adolescence working for some of Mexico's most infamous residents in the 1930s - Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and Lev Trotsky. His break with Mexico is abrupt, and Shepherd moves to America where he embarks on a writing career with the assistance of his invaluable stenographer, Mrs. Violet Brown. I've spent the past two days in close communion with this novel, and it has moved me deeply. It's not often that I abandon popular literature for the big fish, but Barbara Kingsolver is one of the few authors whose writing entertains me in all forms - novels, essays and non-fiction. I suppose I'm like a book groupie, following her whether she's spinning yarns in the Southwest, or matter of factly walking me through slaughter day when her chicken's days are numbered. Make no mistake, her latest effort is Literature with a capital L, and the story is so poignant it could make a stone weep in sympathy. And weep I did.

Frequently. When a novel covers a person's life, from the beginning to the end, it takes on an epic flavor by default. Harrison Shepherd's life could be considered epic even if it was condensed down to a three paragraph obituary. It's an extraordinary tale told during haunting times in both Mexico and the U.S. I regret that I don't know as much as I should about the history before, during, and after World War II, but I will use this novel as a crutch for my shoddy memory.

It is quite possible that "The Lacuna", Barbara Kingsolver's newest novel, surpasses her masterpiece "The Poisonwood Bible" and that is no small feat. Or perhaps surpass isn't the correct word for an author of Kingsolver's talent who can make the unlikeliest of stories and characters come to life. "The Lacuna" manages to weave together some of the early twentieth century's most pivotal events without demeaning them, offering fresh insight into some of the darkest moments of American history through the eyes of a genuine and likeable misfit. "The Lacuna" is the memoir-of-sorts of Harrison William Shepherd, an author caught between two very different worlds. As a young boy, his Mexican mother drags him back to her native country as she pursues any wealthy man who is willing to take her on as a mistress. Years later, he is sent to live with his father, a man he does not even know, before returning to Mexico where he finds himself in the employ of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. His association with these two famous artists brings him in contact with Trotsky, on exile from Stalinist Russia, who continues Shepherd's odd education in the school of life experiences. When events turn sour in Mexico, Shepherd returns to the United States, fulfilling his dream of becoming a beloved author, only to have to confront his past and the words he has never said during the Red Scare of the 1950s. His story is told in his own words, his diary entries and letters, some too private to lay bare, and by the words of his secretary who takes it upon herself to compile his life's narrative. The sheer amount of history that Kingsolver is able to plausibly mix into Shepherd's story is incredible, and all of it believable.

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