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Barbara Kingsolver
1955-

American novelist, short story writer, essayist, nonfiction writer, and poet.

The following entry presents an overview of Kingsolver’s career through 2004. For further information on her life and works, see *CLC*; volumes 55, 81, and 130.

INTRODUCTION

A celebrated and popular novelist, Kingsolver is widely recognized for crafting strong, working-class female protagonists concerned with such social and political issues as poverty, environmental causes, and human rights violations. Her characters find strength in numbers, growing to learn they possess more power united than apart. Kingsolver is best known for the novels *The Bean Trees* (1988), *Animal Dreams* (1990), *Pigs in Heaven* (1993), *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), and *Prodigal Summer* (2000). Kingsolver’s fiction provides a detailed picture of contemporary America along with many of its attendant ills. As Elaine Ognibene has noted, “In her fiction, Kingsolver grapples with clashing cultural values, social justice issues, ecological awareness, and the intersection of private and public concerns.”



BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Kingsolver was born in Annapolis, Maryland, to Wendell and Virginia Lee Kingsolver on April 8, 1955. She grew up in Carlisle, Kentucky, a tobacco-growing region of Appalachia, the middle child of three. Her father was a country physician with a family practice in which her mother also worked. In 1963, when Kingsolver was seven years old, her family moved to the Belgian Congo for a year. The family also lived in St. Lucia in 1967, where her father served as a physician in a convent hospital. Kingsolver was a tall and skinny adolescent who did not fit in well with her peers. A pianist, she won a music scholarship to DePauw University in Indiana, but later changed her major to biology when she realized that there were few jobs for pianists. She graduated *magna cum laude* in 1977 and immediately went to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Arizona. She began doctoral studies in biology but left to take a job as a scientific writer for the Office of Arid Land Studies at the University of Arizona. Kingsolver was an activist in the Sanctuary movement for refugees in Central America and in the ecological and humanitarian movements. Most of her journalism has focused on these subjects. In 1985 Kingsolver married Joseph Hoffman, a chemist. While pregnant with her first child and working full-time as a journalist, Kingsolver endured a serious bout of insomnia for which her doctor prescribed scrubbing the bathroom tile. Instead, she began to write *The Bean Trees*. Within twenty-four hours of the birth of her child, Kingsolver had secured a publishing deal for the book. *The Bean Trees* won the 1988 American Library Association Award and this success encouraged Kingsolver to write *Animal Dreams* (1990) and *Pigs in Heaven* (1993). *Prodigal Summer* (2000) won the 1999 American Library Association Award. In 1989 Kingsolver published a collection of short fiction titled *Short Stories*. The following year she published *Holding the Line* (1989)—a work actually published in 1989. *Holding the Line* also won the 1989 American Library Association Award. In 1989 Kingsolver earned a Masters of Science degree in ecology and evolutionary biology from the University of Arizona. She began doctoral studies in biology but left to take a job as a scientific writer for the Office of Arid Land Studies at the University of Arizona. Kingsolver was an activist in the Sanctuary movement for refugees in Central America and in the ecological and humanitarian movements. Most of her journalism has focused on these subjects. In 1985 Kingsolver married Joseph Hoffman, a chemist. While pregnant with her first child and working full-time as a journalist, Kingsolver endured a serious bout of insomnia for which her doctor prescribed scrubbing the bathroom tile. Instead, she began to write *The Bean Trees*. Within twenty-four hours of the birth of her child, Kingsolver had secured a publishing deal for the book. *The Bean Trees* won the 1988 American Library Association Award and this success encouraged Kingsolver to write *Animal Dreams* (1990) and *Pigs in Heaven* (1993). *Prodigal Summer* (2000) won the 1999 American Library Association Award. In 1989 Kingsolver earned a Masters of Science degree in ecology and evolutionary biology from the University of Arizona. She began doctoral studies in biology but left to take a job as a scientific writer for the Office of Arid Land Studies at the University of Arizona.



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