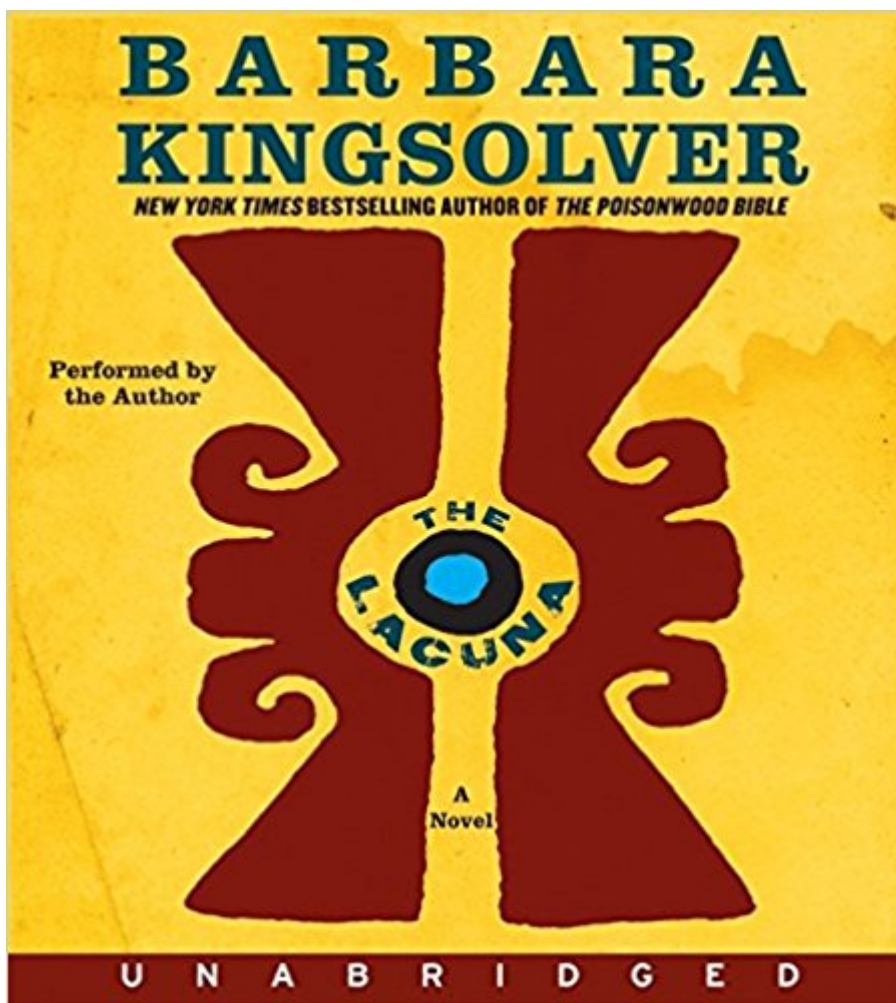




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# The Lacuna CD: A Novel



## 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 worlds—•an unforgettable protagonist whose search for identity will take readers to the heart of the twentieth century’s most tumultuous events.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Kingsolver’s ambitious new novel, her first in nine years (after the *The Poisonwood Bible*), focuses on Harrison William Shepherd, the product of a divorced American father and a Mexican mother. After getting kicked out of his American military academy, Harrison spends his formative years in Mexico in the 1930s in the household of Diego Rivera; his wife, Frida Kahlo; and their houseguest, Leon Trotsky, who is hiding from Soviet assassins. After Trotsky is assassinated, Harrison returns to the U.S., settling down in Asheville, N.C., where he becomes an author of historical potboilers (e.g., *Vassals of Majesty*) and is later investigated as a possible subversive. Narrated in the form of letters, diary entries and newspaper clippings, the novel takes a while to get going, but once it does, it achieves a rare dramatic power that reaches its emotional peak when Harrison wittily and eloquently defends himself before the House Un-American Activities Committee (on the panel is a young Dick Nixon). Employed by the American imagination, is how one character describes Harrison, a term that could apply equally to Kingsolver as she masterfully resurrects a dark period in American history with the assured hand of a true literary artist. (Nov.) Copyright ©

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The Lacuna contains two very distinct parts. One features a vibrant Mexican landscape with the equally colorful personalities of Rivera, Kahlo, and Trotsky. The other centers more on Harrison's reclusive existence in small-town America and his battle with the House Un-American Activities Committee. Despite the prodigious research that both parts exhibit, critics clearly preferred the former, marveling at Kingsolver's lyrical passages and her expert recreation of 1930s Mexico. A few reviewers also noted instances of sermonizing and inaccurate history. However, the novel's compelling, engrossing story certainly outweighed these minor complaints, and in the end, Kingsolver has created a convincing "tableau vivant of epochs and people that time has transformed almost past recognition" (New York Times Book Review). --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Barbara Kingslover's ability to take the voices of witnesses to history is remarkable. In *The Lacuna*, she takes the voice of the assistant to a character, Harrison Shepherd, who is himself the assistant, typist, cook, and witness to some giants of the Twentieth century as well as observer and victim of the greatness and shallowness of key historic events and tide shifts in the nation's soul. She takes the historic and blends it with the everyday reality of living to tell the stories that were not told truthfully at the time such as the scourge of the anti-communism panic and American pogroms of the late 1940's and 50's. While the novel's central figure is fictitious, many other people present as well as periodical citations are directly from the actual publications such as *Time* and *Life*. This NOVEL moved me as few ever do. The truth of the story and what can happen to good people who refuse to surrender their truth to the convenient or popular is one that all should learn again. 's. Kingslover's does not spare the popular press and media from her fact checking and truth telling. In this way she reminded me why published books including and especially fiction are so vital in this media dominated and plagued age of ours. To miss reading this book would be a great loss to thoughtful readers.

I am a huge Barbara Kingsolving fan and *The Lacuna* reminded me why I love her writing. It's an intriguing story that resonates in today's political climate even though the story is placed in the 1940s and 50s. If you enjoy mixing a little history into your fiction through the appearance of notable people (Trotsky in this case), then you're bound to love this book. The paranoia of the McCarthy era becomes personalized as a writer's career is destroyed through the ineptitude of government

agencies like the FBI trying to do the bidding of the infamous House UnAmerican Activities Committee. Since we have entered a new age of mindless political reactionaries in control of our nation, *The Lacuna* feels current and important. The main character's dual loyalties to the US and Mexico provide additional links to today's xenophobic political atmosphere.

I just finished this book, and I loved it. I am still reeling from its incredible force. Why, then, did I only give it four stars? As has been indicated by many other reviewers here, reading it - until our hero, Harrison Shephard, comes to Asheville about halfway in - was a terrible chore. I make it a point to finish every book I read, but in this case, it was tough. The writing style Ms. Kingsolver adopts throughout HWS's childhood and adolescence is almost unbearable. A story of journal entries, letters, and newspaper clippings, the former half of the book is told from the point of view of a young boy whose sense of self is so weak that he can't even acknowledge his existence in his own journal. For example, he might not say "I brought the cake to the table", but instead "The cake was placed on the table." This goes on for almost 300 pages. It's so clumsy and distracting. I kept getting lost and re-reading pages. I truly almost gave up on this one. But. Having powered through (to the other side of the *Lacuna*, as it were), I see now that it was, more or less, necessary. That said - so much of it? I don't particularly think so. Now for the good stuff. The second half of the book is magical. Shephard comes into his own here, and he finds a confident (if not a little apologetic) voice in which to tell his tale. And then there's Mrs. Brown. Violet Brown may be one of my favorite literary characters of all time, and the dynamic that the two share is a thing to be treasured, right up to the last page. To the weary readers who, like me, want to put the book down and move on: wait until you meet Violet. That's when it gets so good. It's a story about beauty and loneliness, in the landscape of political upheaval in Russia, World War II, and misguided patriotism in the United States. Even as a victim of fanatical Americanism, Mr. Shephard, up to a point, maintains a position of elevated tolerance of it all, which he occasionally seems to mistake for naivete. In this way, it's a timely story: a cautionary tale. Let's not allow fear for the safety of our country become a hindrance to common human decency. But it's not a political book, really; Shephard isn't a political character. Just a man with a heart-breakingly beautiful story to tell.

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